

# The Cities of Refuge

The LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying,

Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses:

That the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood....

Joshua 20

**U**nder Joshua the children of Israel had taken possession of the land of Canaan.

The land had been divided by lot to the twelve tribes, each one receiving its inheritance.

Now was the time for the appointment of the cities of refuge. The Lord had given detailed instructions concerning this through Moses. These details are recorded in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19. Under Joshua these cities are now appointed.

In general we may say that these cities of refuge were havens of safety for those who accidentally killed a neighbor.

These cities served as types or pictures of a greater refuge, Jesus Christ, in whom both Old Testament Israel and the church of all ages find a refuge from all sin.

That this is true is evident from Hebrews 6:18, which speaks of the consolation of those "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Notice, the New Testament saints flee for refuge. This is an obvious reference to the Old Testament cities of refuge. The New Testament saints flee for refuge, even as the Old Testament saints fled for refuge in the cities of refuge. They do this by fleeing to Jesus Christ, in whom they find the hope that is set before them. This makes the Old Testament cities of refuge a type or picture of the refuge we have in Jesus Christ.

To this refuge we must flee, as did the Old Testament saints when they fled to the cities of refuge.



Key to understanding the cities of refuge is the avenger of blood mentioned twice in this chapter.

The word "avenger" has the primary meaning of doing the part of a kinsman or relative. This was to redeem his near relative from difficulty

or danger. The word is most often translated "redeemer." An example of a person's acting as a redeemer is the repurchasing of a field that a close relative had to sell in time of great need. Another example is the redeeming (or buying out of slavery) of a relative who sold himself into bondage in a time of poverty. It was the calling of everyone in Israel to be such a redeemer, should the opportunity arise.

In connection with the cities of refuge, we are talking about a redeemer who was a redeemer of blood. His work of redemption was to avenge the murder of a close relative.

Immediately after the flood, God informed Noah, "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. 9:6). This establishes the principle of capital punishment. One who takes the life of another must forfeit his own life.

In Israel the responsibility of slaying the murderer fell to the next of kin of the one slain. When a murder took place, a price had to be paid. The price was the life of the murderer. This price was to be exacted by the next of kin. In this way he acted as redeemer, not now to pay a price to help a close relative

*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., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.  
**Postmaster:** Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

#### 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. Russell J. Dykstra  
 4949 Ivanrest  
 Grandville, MI 49418  
 (e-mail: dykstra@prca.org)

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
 Mr. Timothy Pipe  
 P.O. Box 603  
 Grandville, MI  
 49468-0603  
 PH: (616) 531-1490  
 (616) 538-1778  
 FAX: (616) 531-3033  
 (e-mail: doezema@prca.org)

#### CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger  
 6597 40th Ave.  
 Hudsonville, MI 49426  
 (e-mail: benwig@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

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 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. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RFPA: [www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)  
 Website for PRC: [www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)

but to exact the price of the life of the one who murdered his relative.

As the term “avenger of blood” suggests, this was an act of vengeance. It was not, however, to be an act of personal revenge. This is repeatedly forbidden by the Lord in Scripture. Romans 12:19, for example, warns us, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” From this we conclude that the next of kin who shed the blood of the murderer was acting on behalf of God. He was executing the vengeance of God. Today God avenges the act of murder through the state. In Bible times He did this through the next of kin.

God also regulated how His vengeance was to be executed. He did this with the cities of refuge.

The cities of refuge were designed to protect those who had killed a neighbor unawares and unwittingly. The Lord made a distinction in Numbers 35 between the one who in hatred lay in wait to kill another, whether with a stone, a piece of iron, or a club, and the one who accidentally took the life of another whom he did not hate and whom he did not seek to harm. The latter were afforded refuge and safety in these cities of refuge. The former were not.

The Lord through Moses specified that, upon entering Canaan, the people must pick six cities of refuge. Before entering Canaan, those who accidentally killed a neighbor could find refuge at the altar of the tabernacle (Ex. 21:12-14). However, once the people of Israel were in Canaan, distance would render successful flight difficult for many. Therefore God specified that six cities of refuge be established in Canaan, three on each side of the Jordan River. Under Joshua Israel appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho

eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh (Josh. 20:7, 8).

The regulations that the Lord laid down for refuge in these cities were simple. One who fled to one of the cities of refuge was to receive temporary asylum until he could appear before the congregation to substantiate that he was innocent of premeditated murder. If found guilty of such murder, he was given over to the avenger of blood to be slain. If the congregation determined that he had killed another by accident, the fugitive was received into the city. He was to stay there until the death of the high priest. Were the avenger of blood to encounter the fugitive outside the city, he could legally kill him. After the death of the high priest the fugitive could return home a “free” man. He could not be redeemed by payment to the family whose member he had accidentally killed. Only the death of the high priest could redeem him.



All this points to a greater refuge in Jesus Christ.

To understand Jesus as our great refuge, we must bear in mind that God is the Avenger of blood. Through Moses God said of Himself, “I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me” (Deut. 32:41). Now, normally, the vengeance of God is spoken of in Scripture in the context of God’s taking revenge on the wicked for what they have done to His beloved people. But we may not forget that, by nature, the elect church is also the enemy of God. She forms the heart of the human race that fell in Adam. The original sin of man corrupted her as well, so that she is depraved and defiled with sin. In her natural state she is no different than the world. She is the enemy of God, filled with hate, able only to break every com-

mandment of God. By her sin she dishonors and offends the living God. She also does great injury to her fellow man.

God is a just God, who must and will take vengeance on the sin of His church. Let’s not overlook this. God is the God of all goodness and perfection. He is the light, and in Him is no darkness at all. To maintain Himself as such, God must show His complete disapproval against sin, all sin, even the sin of His beloved church. He does this by punishing their sin to the extreme. For God to do anything less than this would be to deny Himself and His goodness. Consequently, God is the Avenger of blood against all those who fall into sin. He takes vengeance on all those who through sin dishonor Him and injure their neighbor.

But God has provided a refuge for His people in Jesus Christ.

In addition to being the Avenger of blood, God is the Redeemer of the church.

He is this because He is the next of kin. God has eternally chosen the church as His own. He has even ordained the church to be His family, his sons and daughters. This makes Him their next of kin. As the next of kin, the Lord obligates Himself to redeem His people from the vengeance of His own justice.

In this case redemption requires the payment of a price. The price is not silver and gold. That would be an easy thing for the Lord to pay, since all the silver and gold are His. No, He must find someone who will stand in the place of His beloved church, stand before Him with the guilt of His people and bear all the vengeance of His wrath against their sin. There is only one who can do this — His only begotten Son in our flesh. And so, in His great love and mercy for His church, God sent His only begotten Son into our flesh. Upon His Son He poured out the vials of His wrath and vengeance. All His life long, but especially at the cross, the Son en-

duced this wrath until it was all gone. There is now no more vengeance of wrath left for the church. She is free from all vengeance.

This saving, redeeming work of Christ on the cross was typified in the Old Testament by the death of the high priest. Only when the high priest died was the manslayer in the Old Testament finally free from the avenger of blood. This looked ahead to the death of a greater High Priest, whose death would forever free the church from the great Avenger.

In keeping with the nature of Old Testament types, what the church has in Christ is much greater than what she had in the Old Testament cities of refuge. With the cities of refuge it was only

the person not guilty of premeditated murder who found refuge. In Christ one can find refuge from the Avenger for murder and sin of every kind.



To find safety from the avenger of blood in the Old Testament, one had to flee to the nearest city of refuge. If the avenger of blood could catch him, he could rightfully kill the manslayer before he was able to reach a city of refuge. And should the manslayer stray outside the city after receiving refuge, he could legally be slain by the avenger of blood. It was only the foolhardy who failed to flee to the city of refuge or who left it before the death of the high priest.

In like manner must we flee to the refuge God has given the church in Jesus Christ.

We flee to this great refuge by faith. True faith leads one to a godly sorrow over sin, to a proper confession of sin, and then to cling to the cross to lay hold of Christ's payment for sin. This is how we flee to the refuge of God.

Let us flee to God's refuge daily.

Those who are foolish enough not to flee to this refuge will be pursued by the great Avenger of blood and be destroyed.

Those who flee to this refuge in the wisdom of faith will find safety and the hope of eternal life.



Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole

## Marriage and the Culture of Divorce (2)

# The Church Infected Due to Ignoring Christ's Teaching

Last issue we considered the factors contributing so heavily to the increased number of divorces plaguing society in general, and, sad to say, the Christian church to the same degree. We stated that there were three main factors: first, the adoption of lenient (no-fault) divorce laws by our society; second, the number of women, and in particular mothers and wives, out in the workforce rather than being 'keepers at home' (Tit. 2:5); and third (but not least), television, with its pernicious and pervasive influence in the home.

We turn now to the central reason why the state of marriage of

professing Christians is essentially no different today than that of unbelieving society. It is not difficult to discover. It is the twenty-first century church's willful ignoring of Christ's clear words concerning divorce and remarriage.

One would think that, whatever the law (the legal allowance) of the land, be it no-fault divorce, making divorce easy to obtain, it ought have little effect on Christian marriage. After all, Christians are governed by a higher law, the law of Christ Jesus, the great bridegroom, and His Word. This should be the great restraint for Christians against the temptation of imitating the world and seeking to 'solve their marital problems' by filing for divorce.

So one would think!

But this is not the case. The one great dyke needed to stop the present-day flood of divorce from drowning the church's life and witness, needed to separate and protect marriages of professing Christians from the violent storms wreaking havoc on worldlings' marriages, has been leveled and ignored.

The present situation in Christendom is this: her church pews are filled not only with those who are divorced, but also with many divorcees who are remarried. Those who have abandoned their families and spouses and proceeded to marry the new love of their life remain as members.

All admit that this is not ideal. So, what to do? Today, churches content themselves with a 'confes-

*Previous article in this series: February 15, 2005, p. 220.*

sion.' "Yes, looking back I can see that I was guilty of sin in my dealings with my other spouse(s). I now humbly admit that. As a sinner I am sorry. (But let him who is without sin cast the first stone!)"

That having been said, absolution is granted, and life within the church goes on. (Everybody is called to be 'so forgiving' you know. Even that young mother with three young school-age children sitting three rows behind her 'ex' with the new 'love of his life.')

The reality is this, churches do not believe and teach that marriage is for life. "Till death us do part" is, they acknowledge, the biblical ideal. But it is only an ideal! In real life it is different. Believers cannot be held to the ideal, not if one judges that he or she needs to start all over again. So, common practice has become this: one has freedom of conscience within the church to determine his own need for a divorce (Judge not!), and whatever remarried person desires yet to have communion within the church, perhaps having confessed "I am a sinful man, O Lord!" is received into fellowship again.

The problem with such a 'confession' is that it is not a repentance. If the new relationship is the result of sin and is itself, according to God's Word, an adulterous one, one does not put things right by continuing in that forbidden relationship. One is called to leave it. That is repentance. Not saying, "I admit what I have done was sin, so now I can continue this way." But such is 'repentance' these days.

What it comes down to today is this: whatever is allowed by the state, the church recognizes as valid and as having the approval of God. The argument is that the church is compelled to recognize all these divorces and remarriages. After all, we live in a divorce-prone society. Allowances must be made.

Christ's teaching on divorce and remarriage is markedly different. He did not, for expediency, adopt the prevailing practice and

'legal allowances' of His day. He went directly against its current.

Christ's view of marriage and divorce is quite simple. #1 — Marriage is for life, a permanent bond as long as both still live. #2 — There are not many grounds and God-approved reasons for divorce, but one and one only, namely, adultery (the unfaithfulness of one's spouse). And #3 — Divorce does not dissolve the marriage bond, not even if granted for the biblical reason of adultery. One's God-given spouse remains one's spouse, though living as divorced, that is, in separated fashion. The divorced Christian must continue to live singly, or be reconciled to that spouse. God alone has the power to terminate one's marriage, namely, through death. Men's laws and pronouncements cannot undo and unravel what God has put together.

To put it as succinctly as possible — Did you make a lawful vow to another in marriage? God will hold you to it until one of you has died.

This, we are convinced, is Scripture's teaching for the New Testament believer. To be sure, it is high, it is demanding, but it is what the Lord of the church plainly requires, and what the apostles taught as well.

It is also completely out of step with almost everything that is taking place in the arena of divorce and remarriage in Christendom today. Or, more accurately, everything taught and allowed today is out of step with the Lord's teaching on this matter. As out of step as the Jewish nation was (including Christ's own disciples at first) when Christ first uttered these words back then. "It hath been said...., but I say unto you...."

There are four main passages in the gospel accounts that record Christ's own teaching on the matter of divorce and remarriage. The first is found in Matthew 5:31, 32 (in the well-known Sermon on the Mount). Matthew 5 is where you

have Christ's list of "You have heard that it hath been said in old times...., But I say unto you...." In Matthew 5 Christ sets down the 'new' laws that are to bind His New Testament church and kingdom.

The second is found in Matthew 19:3-12. There are found the significant words, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (v. 6). It is not the law of the state that is to govern New Testament believers in the matter of the bond of marriage, nor yet Moses' law (Old Testament allowances), but God's Word through His Son. This goes back to the original marriage ordinance at the beginning.

The third significant passage is recorded in Mark 10:2-12, which passage, significantly, comes immediately prior to the incident of the Lord Jesus taking the little children into His arms and blessing them. Anyone who does not see the purpose of the gospel writer in putting these two things in closest proximity, namely, Christ's forbidding of divorce with an eye to the right to remarry, and putting His arms around little children in His compassion, is willingly blind.

And the fourth is Luke 16:18. A strange text in some ways. It reads: "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery." This is as straight forward as it comes.

The strangeness is the context. What Christ has been talking about to this point seems to have nothing at all to do with marriage. One is mystified why Christ would insert a word against divorce and remarriage here. Why did He do that?

The explanation has to do with a Lord Christ bristling with anger. He has just charged the Pharisees with serving "mammon" (material wealth) rather than God. They have responded by deriding Him (v. 14). In anger, Christ charges

them with justifying themselves before men, and He speaks of that which is an abomination in the sight of God. In this context He inserts these words against divorce and remarriage. He is indicating an area where they have most angered the God of the covenant. It had to do with the scandal of their marriage teachings and the treatment of their vows as a consequence, to say nothing of their spouses.

Let the church be warned. You want to make your Lord good and angry? Adopt the Jewish view of marriage and ignore Christ's teachings on divorce and remarriage.

What is significant about the above four passages for our day and age is the historical context in which they were stated. They were stated in the context of a nation and a church where divorce and remarriage was common practice, as it is in the church of our own day.

We read in Matthew 19:3 that the Pharisees came to Jesus tempting Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" This was the practice of the church at that time. It amounted to 'no-fault divorce' as far as the husband was concerned. All that was needed was to go to the temple, state your unhappiness with the wife (irreconcilable differences), and secure a bill of divorce. Once signed by the priest, it was all legal and recognized. One was free to marry again. Little different from today.

The Pharisees claimed that this was permitted by Moses, so why should Jesus condemn them?

Without getting into the reasons why God instructed Moses to permit divorce and remarriage in Old Testament times (having to do with the hard-hearted in that nation), this much is indisputable, that Christ Jesus, the new Lawgiver of the New Testament church, was not going to allow this practice to continue in the New Testament kingdom. It was to cease in the church with Christ's coming.

In both Matthew 19 and Mark 10, Christ points out that from the beginning it was not so: "What therefore God hath put together, let not man put asunder."

First, what Christ is saying here is not merely that it is wrong to attempt to loose two from each other (really, trying to loose them from their vows), but that really it is impossible. What God has done, let not man think that he can undo. The word translated "hath put together" means literally "hath yoked together." So, let not man think he has any right or power to undo that yoke. If he presumes to, he sins. The yoke remains until God removes it.

Second, what Christ is saying in these passages is that the church, in her new spiritual maturity, is going to return, now that the great Bridegroom has come, to what God intended from the very beginning. What came with Sinai in this area is abrogated and done. Let it be understood from now on that once you take a vow of marriage before the face of God, you are yoked together for life.

Does that give you pause before you yoke yourself to somebody for life? Good! That's the point. It is not easy in, easy out. After all, we all make mistakes. No, you are committed for life. It is for better or for worse, remember?

What Jesus had to say about the permanency of the marriage bond was so new and sharp and foreign to the disciples' ears that, as we read in Mark 10:10, the disciples asked Him again of the same matter. In other words, "Lord, did we hear you right? Do you really mean what you said?" You did! And I do. At this point He pointedly states, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her." How much plainer can Christ be!

The question is, are we, as twenty-first century Christians, to take Him seriously, at His word, so to speak? Well, the apostles did, that's for sure.

Before ending this article, there

are three points we want to make in connection with Christ's doctrine of divorce.

First, it is plain from the passages referred to, that according to Christ there is but one lawful ground for divorce, namely, adultery. Matthew 5:32 declares that "...whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery." Matthew 19:9 makes the same allowance: "except it be for fornication" (sexual unfaithfulness). Christ explicitly, in direct contrast to the prevailing practice of His time — divorce permitted for every reason — refused to allow any other consideration as a God-approved ground.

This is not saying that one *must* divorce his spouse if he has been unfaithful. Adultery is not the unforgivable sin, not when it is confessed and turned from. But one *may* (has the right to) divorce in the instance of adultery. It is the only God-approved reason.

Nor does this leave a wife with no recourse if a husband is abusive, nor a husband with no recourse if the wife is abusive to the children. In such circumstances one may, for safety purposes, move for temporary separation, for instance, a restraining order. But this is not yet divorce, which allows for a permanent separation due to past misdeeds.

Second, this divine refusal to countenance divorce has everything to do with the character of God. As God stated already in the Old Testament to Malachi, when divorce was becoming common amongst the very priests themselves, "...and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away" (2:15). This, Christ makes plain, has not changed in New Testament times.

And third, as we said previously, divorce does not end the marriage in the sense of dissolving the marriage. If it did, why would Christ say in Matthew 5:32, "...and whosoever shall marry her that is


divorced committeth adultery”? Evidently, though divorced, she still has a husband. If not, the new husband would not be guilty of adultery. (This matter of forbidding remarriage even when properly divorced we intend to address more at length next time.)

In this connection a question still needs to be answered. But what about those who are di-

vorced, who did so for an unbiblical reason, but due to a certain ignorance and with the approval of one’s church? The deed is done. It cannot be undone. What now? Is there no remedy or hope with God?

Yes, there is. The remedy is to make confession of one’s sin to God, informing both one’s church and spouse that it is so, and then

doing what one can to seek reconciliation with one’s spouse. It may be too late for any realistic hope for that to occur. Still, one has tried to put matters right. One may then have a good conscience that one did attempt to undo one’s wrong and honor God’s Word. Such a one may have peace with God and full acceptance by the church of Christ.

...to be continued. 

### ■ The Year That Was

By the time this article is printed in the *Standard Bearer*, a good portion of the New Year will have passed. There is, however, a real need to reflect on the year past—2004. News commentators last year, in their reporting on some terrible “disaster” in the realm of creation, could be heard asking the question, “What’s going on here?” That is a reasonable question. There is something “strange” going on—strange, at least, to the commentator. Rarely, however, does one hear the mention of God in this connection. The closest approach to what the Bible has to say is a reference to a disaster as being of *apocalyptic* proportions—an obvious reference to the testimony of the book of Revelation.

We have been reminded this past year of Scripture’s testimony: “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places” (Matt. 24:7). Revelation 8 presents the blowing of the seven trumpets—an increase of disasters from the average (1/4 of the earth affected) to above average (1/3 of the earth grievously affected). Are we hearing those trumpets? It would seem so.

The Christian observes the great

disasters as an increase of trials and troubles on this earth as foretold in Scripture. Others have called attention to the great increase of disasters in this past year as well. Casey Research, Inc. of Dallas, Texas published an article that chillingly summarizes the catastrophes of the past year. The article speaks of these events and also about those likely to happen in the near future. The Christian can only respond, “The Word of God concerning events immediately preceding Christ’s return are taking place.”

In what might have been exceptional foresight, Japanese priests named 2004 “the year of disaster.” Indeed, it was heralded on December 26, 2003 when a large earthquake in Iran destroyed the city of Bam, killing 30,000 and leaving around 70,000 homeless; to the day one year before the cataclysmic undersea earthquake in Sumatra. Let’s take a look at 2004.

More than 52 tornadoes struck Illinois and other Midwest states, devastating Utica, IL and killing 8 people in the basement of the Millstone Tavern. The NASA Ames Research Center found that bug populations that have multiplied unchecked due to extremely mild winters have devoured huge swathes of forest in western Canada and Alaska since 1995. The damage had gone unnoticed because the region is largely uninhabited and not harvested for timber. An exceptionally strong monsoon flooding in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh left 15 million

homeless. Six hurricanes struck the U.S., drove Floridians out of their homes and left 350,000 people without power for days. Charley was deemed the second costliest hurricane on record. Jeanne delivered a hard blow to already poverty-stricken Haiti, and the Philippines saw the worst storm season in 13 years. Unprecedented numbers of locusts ravaged Africa and made it as far north as Portugal and the Canary Islands. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, one ton of locusts can eat as much as 10 elephants or 2,500 people in one day. The San Andreas Fault ruptured near Parkfield, CA, producing an earthquake of 6.0 on the Richter scale. Mt. St. Helens was spewing huge clouds of steam. A record ten typhoons hit Japan, killing more than 100 people and causing estimated \$6.7 billion damage. Typhoon Tokage, the deadliest to hit Japan in over two decades, produced a wave eight stories high and was followed three days later by the deadliest earthquake in one decade, which destroyed more than 6,000 buildings and caused more than 1,000 landslides.

And, to top it off, on December 26, a 9.0 earthquake shook Sumatra, causing a tsunami that devastated the shore lines of 12 countries in the Indian Ocean and, at last count, had killed over 140,000 people from 37 different nations (and counting).

Are there more such cataclysmic events waiting to happen? Unfortunately, yes. Consider, for instance, a warning that was issued

---

*Rev. VanBaren is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.*

by a group of researchers at University College London in 1999.

There is a strong possibility, the scientists warned, that the Cumbre Vieja volcano on La Palma, one of the Canary islands off the North African coast, could erupt with such force that it would virtually split the island in two. That would cause a tsunami in the Atlantic Ocean of such force that tidal waves up to 160 feet high would strike the North American East Coast, destroying large parts of Boston, New York, and Miami. "Following an eruption in 1949, scientists found a fracture running through the western side of the volcano," states an article in last week's *Republican*. "The land mass — a half trillion tons of rock — appeared to have slipped 13 feet toward the sea during the eruption, but friction apparently stopped the slide."

A new eruption, warns the team from University College London, could cause the entire land mass to slide into the sea, creating the feared mega-tsunami. J. Michael Rhodes, a volcanologist at University of Massachusetts at Amherst, is skeptical. He says there is no way to predict if and when such a landslide will occur — and what effect it would have. "[It] really depends on how big the landslide is and how rapidly it moves. It also depends on whether the land slides all at once or whether it goes in pieces. And there is no way of knowing that," he told the *Republican*.

Then there is America's pending super-volcano in Yellowstone National Park. In 2004, it showed an alarming rise in sulfuric gases and water temperature, killing fish and wildlife and causing park rangers to close some sites to tourism. When (note, we didn't say "if") a mega-eruption happens, say scientists such as Bill McGuire, professor of geohazards at the Benfield Greig Hazard Research Centre at University College London, "the explosion would be the loudest noise heard by man for 75,000 years." Falling ash, lava flows and the sheer blow of the eruption would eradicate all life within a radius of a thousand kilometers, according to McGuire.

Or in the New Madrid zone, for example. This earthquake-prone fault runs through parts of Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee and Arkansas. The three earthquakes—each an estimated 8.0 or higher on the Richter scale—that occurred in 1811 and 1812 near New Madrid, MO are among the Great Earthquakes of known history and affected the topography more than any other earthquake in North America. Large pieces of land sank into the earth, new lakes were formed, the course of the Mississippi river was changed ... so strong were the quakes that they reportedly rung church bells in New England. Casualties were few, however, since at that time, the Mississippi river valley was sparsely settled. A similar earthquake today would cost hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of lives.

Then there is the fault associated with the meeting of the African and European tectonic plates that run through the British island of Gibraltar. Some earth scientists forecast that this is the one most likely to go, triggering a massive tsunami that would devastate the coast of Portugal — as it did in 1755 when an estimated 100,000 people were killed by the disaster.

A recent *NY Times* editorial titled "The Year the Earth Fought Back" compares 2004 to 1906, a year of major earthquakes—including the "Great San Francisco Earthquakes"—volcano eruptions and other natural disasters around the world. "Given these cascades of disasters past and present," wonders author Simon Winchester, "...might there be some kind of butterfly effect, latent and deadly, lying out in the seismic world?" He speculates that "the movement among the world's tectonic plates may be one part of [an] enormous dynamic system, with effects of one plate's shifting more likely than not to spread far, far away, quite possibly clear across the surface of the globe."

What to do? First and probably most important, don't take Mother Nature for granted. No amount of modernity can tame the earth. If you live in an area that has been devastated in the past, or that is at risk, take what steps you can to

be prepared—including keeping a stash of long-lived food and try to secure a source of clean water (or, the water purification materials need to create same). Then go about your business.

There have always been earthquakes throughout the earth's history—often devastating. There have always been tsunamis—often very destructive. But all of these things are occurring in a short period of time, are among the greatest that have devastated the earth, and have affected more people than ever before. The writer of the above article points out that mankind cannot withstand the forces of "nature." What must he do? He should prepare himself for disaster striking in his area. He should have adequate water and food supplies at home for any eventuality.

But there is no recognition of God. There is no recognition of the fulfillment of scriptural signs concerning Christ's return. In fact, some have gone out of the way to mock with the idea that God is at work or that there may be any kind of retribution here. In the *Grand Rapids Press*, January 4, 2005, an article appears by David Brooks of the New York Times News Service. He writes:

Human beings have always told stories to explain deluges such as this.

Most cultures have deep at their core a flood myth in which the great bulk of humanity is destroyed and a few are left to repopulate and repurify the human race. In most of these stories, God is meting out retribution, punishing those who have strayed from his path. The flood starts a new history, which will be on a higher plane than the old.

Nowadays we find these kinds of explanations repugnant. It is repugnant to imply that the people who suffer from natural disasters somehow deserve their fate. And yet for all the callousness of those tales, they did at least put human beings at the center of history.

In those old flood myths, things happened because human beings behaved in certain ways; their morality was tied to their destiny.

Stories of a wrathful God implied that at least there was an active God, who had some plan for the human race. At the end of the tribulations there would be salvation.

If you listen to the discussion of the tsunami this past week, you receive the clear impression that the meaning of this event is that there is no meaning. Humans are not the universe's main concern.


We're just gnats on the crust of the earth. The earth shrugs and 140,000 gnats die, victims of forces far larger and more permanent than themselves....

The writer ends thus:

This is a moment to feel deeply bad, for the dead and for those of us who have no explanation.

But what a hopeless and heartless philosophy! No explanation? No hope? There is only despair.

There is even the dreaded thought that the vast wealth of the United States may soon be exhausted if these sorts of disasters continue to come—and perhaps with devastating force against this country too.

It is wise to be prepared for certain disasters, no doubt. Scripture, however, speaks of another sort of preparation. When all these things occur, then look up. The time of deliverance is at hand. Then the church cries out, "Even so, come Lord Jesus, quickly." 

## Reflections on That Peculiar Creature: the Editor of the Standard Bearer (2)\*

**T**he content of the *Standard Bearer* is theological, but the theology of the magazine is not simply Reformed doctrine. It is Reformed doctrine as confessed and developed by the Protestant Reformed Churches. The *Standard Bearer* is a Protestant Reformed magazine. This, too, belongs to its nature and purpose, its personality. In fact, as probably everybody here knows, the *Standard Bearer* is not the official church paper of the Protestant Reformed Churches, under the control of synod and paid for through the synodical assessments. This is unusual for a religious paper. Deliberately the founders of the magazine set it up to be free of ecclesiastical control. This is what "Free" in the name of the publisher refers to.

---

*Prof. Engelsma is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*

*\*Originally the text of Prof. Engelsma's speech at the annual meeting of the RFPA on September 23, 2004 in Grandville PRC. Previous article in this two-part series: February 15, 2005, p. 226.*

That the magazine is not the official paper of the Protestant Reformed Churches has two implications as regards editorials. First, the *Standard Bearer* has freedom to speak out against the thinking and practices that may be found within the Protestant Reformed Churches themselves. The *Standard Bearer* is not a tame house organ, parroting the party line. At the time of the recent secession of some from the Christian Reformed Church and their formation of still another Reformed denomination over women in church office, there was some sentiment in the Protestant Reformed Churches that that secession was genuine reformation and that the Protestant Reformed Churches might well have close ecumenical relations with that new church. Editorials in the *Standard Bearer* such as "The Date Is 1924," "Jelle in Wonderland," and others contended that whatever the secession of the United Reformed Churches may have been, it was not reformation of the Christian Reformed Church regarding that church's departure from the Re-

formed faith of sovereign, particular grace, and that the Protestant Reformed Churches have the very same controversy with the United Reformed Churches that they have always had and continue to have with the Christian Reformed Church. I regard those editorials as the most significant of my editorship.

A second implication of the fact that the *Standard Bearer* is free of church control is that the *Standard Bearer* publishes letters and articles that sharply oppose the truths set forth in the magazine — indeed, letters and articles that sharply oppose what the Protestant Reformed Churches stand for. No religious magazine I know of regularly runs letters, long letters, often exceeding the stated limit of letters, and even full articles attacking propositions and positions expressed in the *Standard Bearer*. No other magazine publishes letters contradicting what is found in those magazines, as does the *Standard Bearer* in its columns. Now this makes for an interesting magazine. Some of my own children, unwarily, have let drop that



the first thing they turn to when the *Standard Bearer* comes is the letters column. I assure you I did not train them that way — editorials first! Nevertheless, the letters column is an interesting column and makes for an interesting magazine. What is more important, these letters opposing what the *Standard Bearer* proposes and teaches serve to clarify and establish the truth. Publishing these letters, and even articles, is possible because the *Standard Bearer* is not the church paper of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Nevertheless, all the articles, particularly the editorials, declare, defend, and develop the Reformed faith as held in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The magazine chiefly instructs the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. And the magazine warns the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches first of all against the dangers that threaten them. For this reason the *Standard Bearer* is widely known as the voice and witness of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

This is cause for the new editors and every writer to take up their pen or sit before their keyboards with fear and trembling. What you write will represent the faith of the Protestant Reformed Churches worldwide.

The *Standard Bearer* must give distinctive witness to the truth that is held by the Protestant Reformed Churches. This is the purpose of the magazine in its constitution. I remind you, “the maintenance, development, and promulgation of our distinctively Reformed principles.” These principles, mainly, are sovereign particular grace and the unconditional covenant of God with His elect in Christ, or the sovereignty of God in His gracious salvation in Jesus Christ.

The magazine is not, and the magazine may not be, loosely Christian or generically Reformed.

The editor of the *Standard Bearer*, therefore, must not only be a Protestant Reformed minister, wholeheartedly committed to and convinced of

the distinctive doctrines of the Protestant Reformed Churches, he must also in his writing promote, defend, and develop these doctrines. As he does, he must demonstrate that these truths are not some oddities of the Protestant Reformed Churches but the genuine Reformed faith in its historical development, indeed, pure Christianity. For doing this, he will uncharitably and unjustly be criticized as bigoted and narrow-minded.

But recent developments in the church-world are proving that the alternative to sovereign particular grace as held in the Protestant Reformed Churches is sheer Arminianism, if not universalism. The alternative to the unconditional covenant as held by the Protestant Reformed Churches is the Roman Catholic heresy of justification by faith and works. Never before in the history of the church of Christ has it become so clear that the great doctrines for which the Protestant Reformed Churches, and the Protestant Reformed Churches virtually alone, contend are essential to the Reformed faith and life.

Likewise, it becomes increasingly plain that the stand, I would say, the *heroic* stand, of the Protestant Reformed Churches, that marriage is an unbreakable bond for life is both right and necessary. Our doctrine of marriage is the implication of our doctrine of the covenant. Individuals and concerned groups outside the Protestant Reformed Churches today all over the world are seeing the necessity of the position of the Protestant Reformed Churches regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In the recent past, in fact in the past year, a group of deeply concerned Reformed people in the Netherlands have been reading, translating into Dutch, and distributing in the Netherlands articles by Protestant Reformed men on marriage. At present, a major Dutch publishing house is translating into Dutch and publishing a Protestant Reformed book on marriage. The reason, of course, is the dreadful de-

struction of marriage in virtually all of the churches, which destruction of marriage now includes approval of homosexual unions. The witness of the *Standard Bearer* has been one of the main means, if not the main means, by which the Protestant Reformed doctrine of marriage has spread to these people and groups — in part, I might note, through the Internet. Now is no time for the *Standard Bearer* to pull in its horns regarding the distinctive Protestant Reformed witness. Never has the time been more opportune for our witness.

In defending the doctrines confessed by the Protestant Reformed Churches, the editor must be a polemical man. It belongs to the nature and purpose of the *Standard Bearer* that it is polemical. Polemical means “fighting.” The *Standard Bearer* is a fighting magazine. It was a fighting magazine at its birth. Like old Jacob, the *Standard Bearer* came out of the womb wrestling for the covenant of God and declaring the sovereignty of God in election and reprobation. The *Standard Bearer* fought a fierce warfare in middle age against the false doctrine of a conditional covenant and salvation dependent upon man. In its older age it is fighting still against the old errors in new dress and against all attack on and departures from the Reformed faith.

The *Standard Bearer* fights fairly. The *Standard Bearer* fights honorably. It fights with the Word of God and with the confessions. But it fights vigorously. The sword of the *Standard Bearer* is sharp. In its controversy with doctrinal and ethical evil, it is uncompromising. The *Standard Bearer* is not a slick, friendly, positive, harmless magazine. It is not a magazine that tries to please everybody and tries equally hard to offend nobody. There are many such religious periodicals. There are many such Reformed religious periodicals. But the *Standard Bearer* is not one of them.

The editor of the *Standard Bearer* must be polemical. He must

be a fighter, regardless whether that is naturally his character. For this he is most severely criticized, even hated. Nor is the criticism limited to those outside the Protestant Reformed Churches. He must bear reproach — “negative,” “unloving,” “harsh,” even “hateful.” And some will assure him that he is standing in the way of Christian ecumenicity.

A few years after I became editor, I received an anonymous postcard from the city of Kalamazoo, which I read before I realized that the signature at the end of the postcard was not the writer’s real name but a pseudonym. The writer, whoever he is — God knows — is a coward. But this is what he said on his postcard: “Your rhetoric in recent *Standard Bearers* demonstrates at least one thing: you are a true-blue successor to your editorial predecessors — a bad spirit. All your nit picking doesn’t change one thing. You and your clan are still dead wrong, especially on common grace and related matters. And to discuss it with you guys in any way shape or form is an exercise in futility.” I confess that that wounded me. A bad spirit? Almost immediately after receiving that postcard, feeling wounded, I was talking with one of my brothers. I was looking for some sympathy, although I did not tell him that. I read him this postcard. His response, rather unfeeling I thought at the time, was, “What did you expect when you took the job?” Upon reflection, to be called a “true-blue successor to your predecessors” is not all bad.

One of the most powerful influences on my ministry, including my writing in the *Standard Bearer*, has been Martin Luther, a vehement, even violent fighter against all attacks on the gospel of grace. It is now in vogue in our evil day, when the love of God and the truth has mainly cooled, to be critical of Luther for his vehement condemnation of false doctrine and false teachers. But Luther was right, and our tolerant

age is wrong. In the strength of his faith, Luther rejected the lie. And in his love for God, he hated idolatry. Our age tolerates the lie because it believes nothing with conviction and passion. It is friendly toward heretics and heresies because there is no fervent love of God in the heart of our age. When Luther was criticized for the vehemence of his condemnation of error, he often responded by quoting Jeremiah 48:10 according to another possible translation than that in the King James Bible. The King James translation is “cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord *deceitfully*, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.” Another possible translation is “cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord *negligently, lackadaisically*, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.”

God called His servants in the Old Testament to fight against God’s enemies — Moab, in that particular case. And God called His servants to fight against God’s enemies vigorously, not negligently or lackadaisically. The work was the work of battle, and in that battle to destroy the enemies of God. So urgent a call was that call by God to His servants to engage in warfare against God’s enemies vigorously, that God pronounces a curse upon anyone who fights in the battle against God’s enemies halfheartedly or negligently.

This Word of God applies today. It applies to the editor of the *Standard Bearer* among many others. Cursed be the editor of a Reformed publication, particularly the *Standard Bearer*, that does the fighting work of the Lord negligently. And cursed be the editor that keeps back his pen, which is mightier than the sword, from blood.


Because of the personality of the magazine, the editor is polemical. Nevertheless, his warfare is on behalf of the church — and not only the Protestant Reformed Churches, but the catholic church of Jesus Christ. The *Standard Bearer* has a heart for the welfare of the

church in all of the world and an interest in developments in all the world as they affect the church.

The magazine is not parochial. Neither does it live in the past, as some religious magazines do. Some religious magazines live in the past. Much of their content is dusty old sermons of long dead preachers. The editorials are mostly résumés of the lives and teachings of saintly men in past eras. Those magazines are lifeless magazines. The *Standard Bearer* must never degenerate into such a musty magazine. It is all right, even useful, to have an article now and then by a theologian of the past. But for the most part, the magazine must contain fresh writings by contemporary authors. This makes for a lively, interesting paper. This is a renewed exhortation to all the ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches, especially those who are on the staff of the magazine, to write regularly.

The editor of the magazine must read widely, must keep abreast of developments in churches all over the world, and must stay on top of political and social events in light of Scripture’s evaluation of these events, so that he as editor can instruct and warn and, to whatever extent God wills, give direction to the church as far and wide as the witness of the *Standard Bearer* extends.

All of this makes the editorship of the *Standard Bearer* a responsible position. It makes editorship of the *Standard Bearer* an exciting position. It makes the editorship in the end a rewarding position, with the reward of a sharper, clearer, fuller knowledge of the truth of God.

The editor of the *Standard Bearer* is a peculiar creature because the magazine itself is a unique instrument of God on behalf of His truth and covenant. Thank God that the men who now take over the editorship are such peculiar creatures. Let us pray God that they ever be such peculiar creatures. 

# Our Tsunamis

## Certain Tsunamis...

**T**sunami” is the odd word many folks first learned about a month ago when big tidal waves, tsunamis, struck the shores of many a land fringing the Indian Ocean and beyond. These tsunamis, spawned from an earthquake some six miles below the Indian Ocean in the area of Indonesia, brought great destruction, as you know. Upwards of 250,000 bodies have or will have been counted or counted missing, either swept out to sea by or smashed against the flotsam and jetsam of the killing, resort-mashing, tremendous, and tremendously horrific waves, those tsunamis.

Now maybe you are not into these things, but they fascinate me, these tsunamis, and the earthquakes with the force of a million atom bombs that are their origin. Equally intriguing is how humans, those not buried by them, react to them. Impressive is the fact that we in America, even mid-west, oceanless Michiganders, *know* of the tsunamis that hit on December 26, 2004, and *knew* of them the very day they hit. How information flies! How much reporting has been done, from video footage, satellite images, word of cell phone, word of Internet, and the like. Not too long ago it might have been years before one heard of such a thing, even such a great devastation, so far away. And

then by word of mouth. With this recollection here. And that there. With embellishments. So that we might have thought these things myths.

Impressive also is the response by the entire world to aid those and those people and countries and businesses devastated by the waves. Billions of dollars pledged from around the world. All kinds of folks and organizations and churches holding fund-raisers, taking collections, sharing expertise in order to express the care and concern of the world community when large numbers of its own kind are found out, tossed about by, and are suddenly, and tragically, no longer with us. One blood, we bleed together. It is news. It is more. It is touching. We want to help. And where there is opportunity and need we must. In the name of Christ, we must pray about the opportunity this may be for us to help these twenty-first century needy far-eastern neighbors, and then take the opportunity God may give. And if we are thoughtless about this, even nigh unto inconsiderate, then some other tsunami or ten have already killed our souls. And we, not they, are in need of the Red Cross....

## Others of the sin kind...

But about tsunamis other than those ocean ones we need especially to reflect. One wonders if indeed God Himself, whom we believe is the Sovereign of the waves, has shaken up the world, and sent these waves for just this. For us to think of certain other, spiritual

tsunamis. Not to build our resorts on just a bit higher ground. But for repentance. To cling not to palm trees, but to Christ. To hope not in foreign aid, but to seek Heaven’s help. To live no more according to self and status quo, but according to Scripture and standards of righteousness. To live no more by tooth and claw and hook and ladder but by grace and by faith.

About sin tsunamis, first of all, let us be thinking.

Sin tsunamis are caused by certain earthquakes of the devil-kind. They first came crashing onto the shores of humanity from a quaking long ago in Eden, when the Evil Tempter met a morally perfect and yet fallible man and woman, shook them up to slouch into sin, and set the whole world a-trembling and a-slouching. From this Edenic epicenter other sin-earthquakes have been triggered history-long and increasingly along certain fault-lines and among certain tectonic plates of humanity (Hollywood, Harvard, and the Happy-without-Truth Church, to name a few).

Oh the tidal waves generated by these off-the-Richter-scale quakings! Tidal waves of lies, waves of philosophies starting from man and ending there, and along the way declaring there is no God, there is no one God! Waves of Materialism. Waves of Evolution. Waves of Egalitarianism. The Tolerance wave. Sex waves. Entertainment waves. Waves of Products and Ads crashing into our stores and into our living rooms telling us to get them, tempting us that there is no meaningful life

---

*Rev. Dick is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.*

without them.... Waves of women, waves of men, the great ones, the buxom ones, the fast ones, the dunking ones, the ones who rock 'n roll to raise money for tsunami victims...themselves sweeping into our life and wanting to take us out, far out, to their sea, and to their beliefs, to their lifestyle, and to their Neptune.

You know them. These and many other waves from hell have inundated the world. They have engulfed the universities, the entertainment industries, the churches, the websites, the homes, the schools, the governments, the unions, the revolutions, the malls, the main streets, the high and the low of all the world. There is no coast where these tsunamis have not struck. There is no society not swept away. There is even no high ground that sin has not flooded. No high ground either where men might have thought they were safe, or smart, or even on sacred ground.

See the results of the tidal waves of sin? No possibility for ABC and CNN or the BBC or bloody Arab websites to convey them to us, for they themselves are drowned under the waves. But by wisdom and a horror born of holiness we can see. By wisdom and with holy horror we see the death and destruction, the dissolution and despair, and the deceit of the floods of sin. By wisdom and horror, what Satan's tsunamis have done is known. We see the men, the women, the young people, and the children left dangling from or crushed under the palm trees, or the very towers of learning they thought would be their refuge. We see one, and many even, cured of cancer, having a good time or making good time over here, another of the seven-foot variety with a great future on the court, another under the big lights...but all under the wrath of God and facing yet a final tsunami from heaven itself, a final judgment (of which, ultimately, all the present ones are pre-

liminary!) sweeping sinners into sea depths and crevices into which they are righteously delivered, and into the pit of hell forever!

#### And ours...

All well and good that we have reported and do report those tsunamis, I think you will agree. But there must also be this, dear reader. There must be a reporting that is more, I suppose, "in your face." But it must be. For the problems of Indian Ocean tsunamis may (we might think) be far removed from us. But the sin tsunamis are not. In fact they are *our* tsunamis. Our *sin* tsunamis!

Yes, dear young reader. There are tsunamis that threaten *us*. They might kill our bodies. They would certainly bash and drown our souls. They are either headed our way, and at an alarming rate, or they have already overwhelmed us and are banging us around, pulling us out to sea, killing us. And so we need, for the waves coming, an early warning system of the spiritual kind. And, for the wreckage already done, the Red Cross of the gospel.

You ask: how can it be that there is the danger for us believers, of tidal waves, even, of sin? We are blessed! And has not the inspired Word revealed to us that we have received of the fullness of Jesus Christ? Is not this the life, even, of heaven? Has not our Lord, by saving us, committed Himself to preserving us? Are we not safe in our orthodoxy, our traditions, our homes, our schools, our churches ... and our dating? I mean, Christian, and Reformed, and Protestant Reformed, and three or thirty generations of all this ... is not this *very high ground*? Tsunamis, we believe and are sure, might sweep out the lowlands of humanity. They have, we see, hit hard those places of Christendom that are even below sea level. So we do not marvel when the sin waves sweep out the health-and-wealth gossellers and the churches

of the smile, God-loves-your-homosexuality, variety. But really: What tsunami can ever threaten, or even reach us?

Response:

One, tsunamis from Satan are very powerful, more powerful than we. And, though under God's sovereign government, this world is now *the place* of sin waves. They are all over the place, flooding and threatening the whole of this world in which we live, no matter how high and dry we are or think we are.

Two, we have a nature as low as the sea of humanity. Our flesh is at sea level, and not a foot above. And, according to this nature, and though in principle we be taken up to the mount of heaven, we are, nevertheless, by nature those who love to sip tea with, and cavort with, and resort to things worldlings resort to.

Three, there is evidence that the tsunamis of sin are fast approaching and/or have had their influence among us. Sometimes I wonder if in fact we are not treading, even now, in deep water, even being swept away, in our generations, with the world, out to sea....



Now, about these our sin tsunamis we would like to speak next time, God willing. But, you should know, there are certain other amazing tidal waves of which we must most certainly speak. They are even amazing *grace* waves, dear readers! For of the fullness of our precious Lord Jesus have all we received, *and grace for grace*. Surely our Lord, Lord of waves, and now when terrible tsunamis are overwhelming the world, would have us think of these things!

Till then, think like grace life: of tsunamis of sin and tsunamis of grace.

Some will kill.

Watch out!

Others do save.

Praise God!

*And ride them!*



## Islam (3)

## A Little Politics and Law: Shari'a

*"And the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment."*

I Chronicles 12:32

**W**ith few exceptions those who are part of the Western democracies would agree that religion and politics should not mix. Much is made of the concept of "separation of church and state." However, for much of the Islamic world, to propose the separation of the Islamic religion and the state is to risk being labeled an apostate. They favor what is sometimes called Political Islam.

During the past half century Political Islam has become a powerful movement in some countries of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. To a large extent this came about as Islamic leaders filled the power vacuum left behind following the period of post World War II decolonization by the Western powers. The most significant consequence of this movement is the imposition of strict Islamic law (called Shari'a) in many of these states.

For modern-day Issachar to develop in her understanding of what is currently taking place in these countries (events, by the way, that

are more and more affecting the whole world), it will be necessary to take a closer look at the Shari'a, its consequences, and the struggles currently taking place in Islamic countries with respect to it.

### The Shari'a

Muslims view Shari'a as the path that they must follow. "Since Islam is intended to relate to every part of human behavior, whether individually or corporately, it required the formulation of a law system that could deal with theft, murder, inheritance, marriage, and divorce. All of this gradually emerged through the Law Schools of the eighth and ninth centuries. Although the detailed judgments of the four Law Schools differed in certain respects, there was agreement on the foundation of Shari'a law: Qur'an and Hadith (tradition), Consensus (ijma), and Analogy (qiyas)."<sup>1</sup>

This in part explains why many Muslims so despise Western democracies. They connect the moral decadence of the West to their form of government. After all, they conclude, moral corruption is exactly what one would expect from a society that is subjected "to manmade laws that (are) the product of deliberation by the electorate or the legislature. The laws of Allah (are) not a matter for majority vote."<sup>2</sup>

Sayyid Qutb, sometimes called "the father of modern (Islamic) fundamentalism," put it this way:

...We must free ourselves from the clutches of jahili society [society ordered according to human laws rather than divine ones, ck]. Our aim is first to change ourselves so

that we may later change the society.

A Muslim has no country except that part of the earth where the Shari'a of God is established and human relationships are based on the foundation of relationship with God; a Muslim has no nationality except his belief, which makes him a member of the Muslim community in Dar-ul-Islam [the world of Islam, ck]; a Muslim has no relatives except those who share the belief in God, and thus a bond is established between him and other Believers through their relationship with God.<sup>3</sup>

So strongly do the likes of Sayyid Qutb feel about the implementation of the Shari'a, they go so far as to declare that Muslim governments that refuse to enforce it are illegitimate. For them, Shari'a is simply a matter of being faithful to Allah's rule.

### Life under the Shari'a

In countries such as Iran, the Sudan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan as it was under the Taliban, we have a window through which we can see the pernicious effects of complete government-enforced Shari'a, which Qutb sees as mandatory for Muslims. Following are a few examples:

- If one is born a Muslim, he must remain one until he dies. "Although the Qu'ran states that 'there is no compulsion in religion,' Islamic states often interpret that to mean that 'there is no competition in religion' within their borders."<sup>4</sup> The truth is, under Shari'a apostasy is not permitted and in many states is punishable by death. Those brave souls who

---

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

*Previous article in this series: December 15, 2004, p. 140*

have left Islam have often done so at great personal cost, even the threat of death.

- "Under Islamic law ... the right hand of a thief is cut off at the wrist. Even if the thief makes restitution and pledges never to steal again, his hand is to be cut off."<sup>5</sup> The punishment is justified since in Muslim communities everyone supposedly is provided for adequately through the giving of alms. The thief therefore must be motivated by greed rather than need.

- "Shari'a commands beating as the punishment for immorality: one hundred stripes for man and woman (Sura 24:2)."<sup>6</sup> Sounds fair enough, however, laws concerning marriage are in many ways based on the master-servant relationship. "Men can beat their wives, although apologists say only a light tap is socially correct. Men get four wives and keep the kids if they divorce one...."<sup>7</sup>

- Shari'a also makes it clear that there is no such thing as equality between Muslims and non-Muslims. Only Muslims are allowed full citizenship in an Islamic state. Further, discrimination against non-Muslims abounds. For example in court their testimony carries less weight, and they often receive harsher punishments than Muslims. Consequently blasphemy laws are a constant threat to Christians in Muslim countries since trumped up false charges of blasphemy often stand up in court because of these legal inequities.

In sum, the Shari'a is the primary tool used by Political Islam to control the lives of ordinary Muslims. It prescribes every aspect of both public and private behavior. "(F)rom the amputation of limbs for theft to the stoning of adulterers and killing of apostates ... no detail of daily life, public or private, escapes its attention.... Virtually all activity is preordained; one has but to accept Allah's laws as interpreted by the mullahs and ayatollahs [clerics, ck]."<sup>8</sup>

### Party Strife

However, not all Muslims favor this approach. In fact only part

of the Shari'a is enforced in most Muslim countries today. A significant majority of Muslims favor having secular governments rather than theocratic ones in which the complete Shari'a is imposed. Some "distinguish four major groups in the Islamic world: Fundamentalists, who reject democratic values and contemporary Western culture; Traditionalists, who are suspicious of modernity, innovation and change; Modernists, who want the Islamic world to become part of global modernity; and Secularists, who want the Islamic world to accept a division of religion and state."<sup>9</sup>

Members of these groups make up the two most influential parties within the Muslim world: Shiites and Sunnis. Very briefly, "...in the wider Muslim world Shiites are a decided minority (with the exception of Iran and Iraq). Known as the dissenters, they broke with more traditional Sunni Muslims in the years following the prophet Muhammad's death over how to choose his successor. Sunnis favored choosing by consensus while Shiites demanded a successor from the family line. To this day Shiites favor debate and revolution over consensus politics."<sup>10</sup> Over-simplistically put: the Shiites in general are more anti-West and radical, while the Sunnis tend to be more moderate.

All of which is significant when one considers what is currently happening in Iraq. Saddam Hussein's secular government was able to keep the majority Shiites at bay. However, with Saddam out of the picture and United States' promoted elections on schedule, one wonders what is to keep Iraq's Shiite majority party from gaining a majority in the newly elected government and imposing the Shari'a as the Ayatollahs in Iran did after the fall of the Shah? How ironic it would be if U.S. attempts to initiate democracy in the Islamic world instead resulted in contributing to the establishment of Is-

lamic fundamentalism there! An article from the Detroit Free Press presents the situation as follows:

Top Shiite Muslim leaders, who are expected to wield the most power after next month's parliamentary elections, are locked in a fierce dispute over whether the new Iraq should be a constitution-based democracy or an Iranian-style nation in which clerics reign supreme....

A breakdown was averted when religious parties backed by Iran agreed to expand the number of secularists and religious moderates on the slate....

The debate still simmers and could boil over after the Jan. 30 elections, which will choose a national assembly to draft a new constitution.

Western diplomats are nervous that the Bush administration's goal of making Iraq a model of Middle Eastern democracy will backfire if Shiite clerics take top posts in the newly elected government. Secular and moderate Shiite politicians fear they will be sidelined if a leadership that favors theocracy is swept into office....

At the core of the debate is a concept known in Arabic as *wilayat al-faqih*. Literally, it

---

1. Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell, *Islam in Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003) pp. 51, 52.

2. Robert Spencer, *Onward Muslim Soldiers* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003) p. 224.

3. Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, The Mother Mosque Foundation, undated, p. 7.

4. Marvin Olasky, "A Cold War for the 21st century," *World* November/December, 2001: p. 19.

5. Olasky, p. 20.

6. Riddell, p. 54.

7. Olasky, p. 20.

8. Roy Brown, "Opposing Political Islam," *Free Inquiry* Dec. 2003/Jan. 2004: p. 49.

9. Robert Spencer, "Here's to the State of Mississippi," *Human Events* 26 April, 2004: p. 16.

10. Mindy Belz, "Iran's Iraq War," *World* 1 May, 2004: p. 29.


means “custodianship of the jurist.” Practically, it means absolute rule by clerics.

Observers point out that Iran, which strictly follows wilayat al-faqih, would like to export the model to Iraq in hopes of preventing a secular Shiite-run democracy from emboldening reformers in the Islamic republic next door.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, history just may be repeating itself! By undermining the power of the Shah of Iran in the 1970s, the United States contributed to the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini and the establishment of Political Islam there. It could be happening again, this time in Iraq.

More interesting still, for Issachar at least, is how this un-

holy alliance of religion and politics (church and state) is present not only in Islamic countries, but also in the West.

... to be concluded. 

---

11. Hannah Allam, “Debate simmers over Iraq direction,” *Detroit Free Press* Wednesday, 29 Dec.: A6 & 10.

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

# Charles Darwin and Evolutionism (3)

## Introduction

**T**heistic evolutionists have fatally compromised the biblical doctrine of creation and sold out to unbelieving science. To accomplish this, and because they must still appear to be Bible-believing Christians, they have reinterpreted and misinterpreted Scripture, specially in Genesis 1-3. Realizing that Genesis 1-3 is not the only part of Scripture that needs reinterpreting to defend their viewpoint, they have also come to reinterpret Genesis 1-11, not to speak of other parts of Scripture where creation in six days is clearly taught.

We must briefly examine the wrongness of the approach of theistic evolutionists.

## A Wrong View of Faith

Before making more specific criticisms of the position of the theistic evolutionists, I call your attention to the fact that there is one

grave error that is made, not only by theistic evolutionists, but by many creationists as well. This error is described in Del Ratzsch’s book *Battle of Beginnings: Why Neither Side Is Winning the Creation-Evolution Debate*. Ratzsch himself does not, apparently, dispute the point that is made, although it is as wrong as wrong can be and leads to all sorts of confusion.

After explaining both the creationist “model” of origins and the evolutionist “model” of origins, Ratzsch writes:

Both models, creationists claim, are beyond the reach of human proof — and consequently are not parts of *real* (inductive) science. (Gish, though, sometimes appears to subsume both theories under “faiths,” then claims that there is overwhelming evidence both for creationist and against evolutionist faith).

Gish goes on to say, according to Ratzsch, that since indirect, circumstantial evidence does not either constitute proof for or measure up to creationist definitions of science, *the acceptance of either will constitute only belief*.

There is an important point

here, not widely understood, but a serious point that we have to get straight.

The argument of many, also in creationist circles, is that neither the basic assumptions of the evolutionists, nor the basic assumptions of the creationist, can be proved. Both rest on faith, that is, both rest on unprovable assumptions that have to be accepted by faith.

I remember being told this very thing in the days of my schooling. The moral of the story was usually: You need not be ashamed of your faith; even the evolutionist rests his case on faith.

Now this sort of argumentation is not only dead wrong, but it is pernicious as well. If both the theory of evolution and the doctrine of Scripture rest on faith, then faith is nothing else but the blind acceptance of unproved and unprovable assumptions. But then the argument is reduced to a debate over who has the best line of argumentation and can summon the best proof for his position. We will acknowledge that both start with faith; now let’s evaluate the lines of proof and see who has the better of the debate.

---

*Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*

*Previous article in this series: February 1, 2005, p. 210.*

God forbid that our defense of creationism should ever come down to that!

The fact of the matter is that we who believe in creation have an ironclad case that is unassailable. We have absolute proof for creation, proof than which there is no stronger. That proof is that God Himself tells us how He made the world. If that isn't proof, then I do not know what is.

I have sometimes used this illustration. A group of men travel to a castle on the Rhine River in Germany to learn how that castle was constructed. Upon crossing the drawbridge over the moat and entering the castle they discover a book lying on the table, written by the architect and builder of the castle, explaining exactly how he accomplished this task. But this learned group of Ph.Ds, upon examining the book, decide that the author described his work in symbolic ways and that the book is of no use in their quest to learn how the castle was built. So they proceed through the castle, picking up a bag of dust here (to analyze in the laboratory), pulling out a stone in another place, examining under a magnifying glass various pits in the rocks, various parts of broken walls, various ruins made almost meaningless by the erosion of time. They collect all their data and decide, after ponderous discussion, that the castle came into existence by itself, although some superintendent, 10,000 miles away, may have attempted from time to time to offer some guidance.

We will never agree with the definition of faith that it is the blind acceptance of unproved assumptions.

What is faith? Faith is the bond that unites the elect child of God in a living connection with Jesus Christ. Faith is a complete change of the darkened mind into one able to think properly and correctly. Faith is a change of a stubborn will into one that makes a believer a

humble servant of Jesus Christ. Faith gives a knowledge that no one without faith can possibly possess. Faith sees Scripture and Scripture's claim to be the Word of God — and believes it. And faith is such a power that, when believing the Scriptures, it brings one face to face with Christ Himself, to know Him in a rich, blessed, wonderful, and saving way.

Del Ratzsch, in his book mentioned above, points us to various weaknesses in the arguments of both creationists and evolutionists. But then he finally comes to the one major point: What role does Scripture play in all this? And he is silent.

Creationists, however, typically advance one further type of objection, and that is that theistic evolution cannot be reconciled with many of the details taught by the early chapters of Genesis.... Underlying this type of objection are two presuppositions: first, that a faithful and responsible reading of Genesis requires that it be understood literally, and second, that understood literally, early Genesis actually teaches what creationists think it does. I will not address those issues here.

In other words, the one point that is more important than any other will not be discussed.

### Why Faith?

Scripture tells us that "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3). This passage teaches, among other things, that faith is the *only* way in which one can understand creation.

Why is that?

In our articles on Descartes and rationalism, I pointed out that man cannot know the truth even in the creation, because the curse is on the creation and because the curse is on man himself, making him incapable of knowing truth. It takes a

non-biblical theory like common grace to give to man the ability to know the truth — even in the creation. The fact of the matter is that, though man can understand some things about the creation with respect to the earthly relationships in which various creatures stand to each other, he cannot see all things in their relation to God. Hence, he cannot really know the truth.

That kind of knowledge, which is the only true knowledge, is by faith.

And faith has as its object the Scriptures. There we learn all the truth of this creation in its relation to God. Unbelief abandons the Scriptures, and becomes mired down in unbelieving science. Worse yet, unbelief may piously acknowledge the Scriptures, but it sets an impossible science above the Scriptures and, of necessity, twists the Scriptures to make them fit unbelieving science.

The battle between evolutionists and creationists is not a battle between two different "faiths," the strength of each to be determined on the basis of scientific evidence. The battle between evolutionism and the truth of creation is between faith and unbelief. That puts the battle where it rightly belongs: not in the science classroom where evidence for both can be examined, but in the forefront of the battle of faith waged in defense of the truth of God against all unbelief.

### Errors of Theistic Evolutionism

Theistic evolution is wrong right down the line.

All evolutionism is based on the theory of uniformitarianism. Darwin did not come to his evolutionism until he had read Charles Lyell's development of uniformitarianism. Uniformitarianism teaches that the "natural laws" according to which the creation operates and develops have been the same since time began. Theistic evolution accepts that law as truth.

Because it accepts that law as



truth, theistic evolution believes (and must believe, to maintain its position) that there was death before the fall. How can one have a fossil record that is millions, if not billions, of years old unless death was present in the creation before man appeared on the scene and sinned, bringing down on him and the creation the curse of death?

Uniformitarianism is refuted in Scripture in II Peter 3, in which chapter Peter puts the theory in the mouths of scoffers who deny Christ's coming: "All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (v. 4). All things do not continue as they were, for the fall brought drastic and radical changes on the creation when death, as the punishment of God against sin, came upon the world. All things do not continue as they were, for the flood, as Peter points out, brought great changes on the creation so that the pre-deluvian world is different from the creation as we know it today. But then, theistic evolutionists, aware of this, deny also that the flood was universal.

That death came into the world through the fall is taught by Paul in Romans 5:12-14: "For as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin...." Perhaps we cannot imagine a world in which there was no death. No matter. "By *faith* we understand that the worlds were framed...."

Theistic evolutionists, as we pointed out, must deny the literal meaning of Genesis 1-11. This is difficult to do. It is, in fact, so difficult that we get a new interpretation of these chapters about every ten years or so. I pointed this out earlier and need not belabor the point here. Let us, however, be aware of the fact that, if Genesis 1-11 can be interpreted in a way that is not literal, then any historical narrative, including the virgin birth, atoning sacrifice, and bodily

resurrection of Christ, can also be interpreted symbolically, doxologically, or whatever. And indeed, the force of logic compels those who will not take Genesis 1-11 literally to reject many other parts of sacred Scripture.

Theistic evolutionists deny providence. In his defense of the Framework Hypothesis as an interpretation of Genesis 1, Lee Irons speaks of creation taking place by "ordinary providence," rather than "special providence." By ordinary providence, Irons means the laws of nature. That is a denial of providence altogether. Providence teaches, not that the creation operates by natural law, but that God, who created all by the Word of His mouth, continues to speak that same Word so that the creature continues to exist. Providence teaches that God, who upholds the beetle and mosquito as well as the planet Jupiter by His almighty Word, directs each creature in all its existence in the pre-ordained way that He has determined. This includes man — and his unbelief. God moves every drop of blood in my veins, and guides the ant across the sidewalk at my feet. God brings rain to water the earth, and water from the rock at Rephidim. God causes the deer to bring forth their young (Ps. 29) and brings about the conception of a new child in the womb of its mother. Theistic evolution denies providence.

Theistic evolution denies Christ. That is a bold statement, but true. Already when I was taught the period theory in college, the class was told that it did not make any essential difference whether one was a creationist or an evolutionist, because neither had anything to do with our faith. We could believe in the period theory and in Jesus Christ as our Savior. Genesis 1 had nothing to do with the gospel.


This is a ploy to deceive the unwary.

Christ has everything to do

with creation. Proverbs 8 claims for Christ, the Wisdom of God, "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.... When he prepared the heavens, I was there...., rejoicing in the inhabitable part of the earth" (vv. 23, 27, 31). John 1 boldly says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (vv. 1-3). Paul sings a doxology of praise to God in Christ "who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible...: all things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:15-17). And Hebrews 1 introduces the whole book with the words: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (vv. 1, 2).

When God pronounced His creation "good," He meant by that word that everything that He had made was perfectly adapted to the purpose for which He had created it. That purpose is the full revelation of His own glory in Jesus Christ, His eternal Son, through whom is the redemption of an elect church and the whole of the new heavens and the new earth. The original creation was perfectly formed to be the stage on which, over 6000 years, would be enacted the drama of salvation from sin and death in Christ.

To deny creation is to deny salvation in Christ.

To believe in creation is to be saved by Christ. 

# The Marks of the True Church

**A**rticle 29 of the Belgic Confession begins this way:

We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the church. But we speak here not of hypocrites, who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church, though externally in it; but we say that the body and communion of the true church must be distinguished from all sects who call themselves the church.

The marks by which the true church is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church. Hereby the true church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.

The marks of the church is a subject that found little development among theologians until the time of the Reformation. There was little need, after all, to talk about the marks of the true church so long as the church was one. But as the church departed farther and farther from the truth of Scripture, and fell under the influence of various heresies, as well as many pagan practices and traditions of men, it was necessary to point out certain char-

acteristics that mark the true manifestation of God's church in the world. This necessity had particularly to be addressed at the time of the Reformation, and it has continued to be a pressing necessity ever since.

While we confess by faith the existence of "an holy, catholic church," we are called to unite with that church as it is instituted in the world. And today the church institute is fragmented into literally thousands of different churches. The compelling question, therefore, is this: Where must I belong?

The Belgic Confession gives helpful instruction in answer to that question. Article 29 was written to assist and to instruct the serious-minded so that they might locate this true church. It points us to our duty to find that church, to come to a conviction about it, and in that conviction to join and unite ourselves with it.

## Our Chief Means of Evaluation

While we generally speak of three distinct marks that distinguish the true church from the false, there is a primary mark that summarizes the three — purity of doctrine, i.e., the doctrine of the pure Word of God. God's Word alone is the standard by which we must measure any church that we might join. Ephesians 2 reveals that the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." And Paul writes to Timothy (I Tim. 3:15) that the church of the living God is "the pillar and ground of the truth."

Purity of doctrine is the chief mark because Christ Himself is the Head of the church. And His presence in the church is a presence as

the *Word* become flesh. He is the One in whom God reveals Himself as the God of truth. Christ is always present in truth, and never in the lie!

But so many churches today claim to have the truth! How are we to evaluate whether or not a church has purity of doctrine?

We would certainly lose our way, unless by prayer and diligent searching we make a careful study of *all* God's Word, maintaining the fundamental principle of all faithful Bible interpretation, Scripture interprets Scripture. I emphasize *all* God's Word, or what is sometimes referred to as "the whole counsel of God," because all those who depart from the truth do so by taking only *part* of God's Word, at the expense of or in conflict with the rest of God's Word. And if we will make our judgment of where a given church stands up against that standard of the whole counsel of God, there is no better way to put it to the test than to place its teachings next to our Reformed confessions, where we have the careful summary of the whole counsel of God.

But to make it a little easier to evaluate whether or not a church is bound by the pure Word of God, we may look more carefully at three distinct areas where the truth becomes manifest in a faithful church.

## The Pure Preaching of the Gospel

When we speak of these three distinct areas where the truth becomes manifest, or three marks of the true church, we must begin with a careful examination of preaching.

Purity of doctrine comes to first expression in faithful preaching. That is evident in II Timothy 3:16-17, which is given as the basis for

the charge to preach the Word, which Paul gives to Timothy in the opening verses of the next chapter.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

Christ's presence in His church is evident where His Word is faithfully preached. His is a commanding presence. After all, where His Word is faithfully preached, there *He* speaks, fulfilling His promise in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

On the contrary, where His Word is not faithfully preached, there must be repentance and a return to the truth, or Christ withdraws Himself. For this reason, as the Belgic Confession tells us later in Article 29, the true church is easily known and distinguished from the false. Where the Word is, there is Christ, and there must you and I be.

When we evaluate the church by the three marks, the mark of faithful preaching is first. On the one hand, it is most easily discernible. But on the other hand, the other two marks — the pure administration of the sacraments and the faithful exercise of Christian discipline — depend upon and safeguard the preaching.

### **The Proper Administration of the Sacraments**

While we will give more careful attention in subsequent articles to the sacraments, it is noteworthy that the Belgic Confession considers a mark of the true church "the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ."

The importance of the sacraments is evident from the fact that Christ Himself is present in the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper. For that reason we are cautioned against approaching either the sacrament of baptism or the sacrament of the Lord's Supper out of custom or superstition.

In addition, the abuse of the sacraments involves the church in corporate guilt, and in effect defiles the preaching of the gospel. The sacraments, after all, are seals upon the preaching. Strong is the warning of the apostle in I Corinthians 10:21-22: "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" Indeed, Paul gives the better part of two chapters to instructing the church at Corinth as to the importance of the proper administration of the Lord's Supper.

We might add that most forms of corrupting the sacraments are ways in which the true doctrine of the gospel is corrupted. And those forms of such corruption are many! Let us recognize the importance of "the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ."

### **The Biblical Exercise of Christian Discipline**

The third mark of the true church is that of Christian discipline. We can easily forget, but discipline is simply an extension of faithful gospel preaching. Preaching itself is the chief means of discipline, that which constantly calls us to repentance and faith. But it is evident that the welfare of the church depends upon the exercise

of Christian discipline.

This mark, as the other two, deserves more extensive treatment in subsequent articles. But no church can stand in the truth without the loving exercise of Christian discipline. For one thing, without Christian discipline, the sacraments are profaned — as was evident in the church at Corinth. But as the apostle also makes clear in I Corinthians 5, without discipline "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." That is, sin permeates the entire body, if not kept in check by the exercise of Christian discipline. And if sin goes unchecked within the congregation, sooner or later the preaching itself will succumb to the stifling pressures of ungodliness, failing any longer to confront sin with the bold call to repentance.

It was not without reason that Paul warned Timothy that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears."

That discipline is a characteristic that must mark a true church is evident from the words of Christ to the seven churches of Asia Minor, Revelation 2 and 3, where on more than one occasion He warned of the consequence of undisciplined sin, even His own withdrawal.

### **The Application of the Marks**

The marks of the true church are not set before us in the Belgic Confession in order to make a theoretical or categorical judgment of other churches. The approach of the Confession is, "Where am I called to be?"


We recognize that the question is not a matter of one church being true with all others being false. We recognize as well that the "true church" does not mean that there is a church in this world that has reached perfection or purity. The "true church" refers to the *manifestation* of the holy, catholic church in the midst of the world. Where does she become manifest in a given institution?

You and I stand before the calling to do everything in our power to unite ourselves to the purest manifestation of that true church, the church where the marks most clearly manifest the presence of Christ. That is our calling for God's sake. That is God-honoring — which must always be our focus. That is also the way of our blessedness.

Nor may we leave such a

church for any reason. Our calling is to contribute to the development and strengthening of the true church. To depart is to apostatize. And apostasy is the tool of Antichrist in building his kingdom of darkness. When a church departs from the truth, and as the marks enter into decline, that church sets itself on a course to becoming part of the false church. And especially as the mark of Christian discipline

is lost, there is no reversal possible. The call must go forth with urgency, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate!" For one to join or to remain in a false church or a church in the process of becoming a false church is to contribute to the development of Antichrist.

May God give us faithfulness in maintaining and embracing the marks of the true church! 

Contribution

Rev. William Langerak

## For the Want of a Dollar...?

**C**ovenant members must take heed to many important details in the kingdom of heaven. One of them is that prospective teachers and preachers receive adequate financial resources to complete their education. This is not merely the responsibility of the students themselves, but it is a covenant obligation. It is an important covenant obligation. If neglected, it could result in a dearth of preachers and teachers, which would be devastating to the cause of Christ's kingdom in the community of Protestant Reformed Churches and our Christian schools.

An old proverb warns that entire kingdoms can be lost for want of a simple nail. It comes from something the American sage Ben Franklin once wrote: "For the want of a nail, the shoe was lost; for the want of a shoe the horse was lost; and for the want of a horse the rider was lost, being overtaken and slain by the enemy, all for the want of care about a horseshoe nail." His point was rather simple: a little neglect creates far-reaching and

devastating consequences.

Like many other earthly proverbs, the point of this one holds true also for the spiritual realm. The reason is not that rascals like Franklin had deep insight into the heavenly kingdom. It is due to the fact that God created the physical as a picture of the spiritual; that the horses of Rome needed shoeing illustrates that a myriad of details require attention in the kingdom of Christ. These details are significant and necessary. They bring to perfection that glorious kingdom, and unless they are attended to, the kingdom would be lost. This is precisely why God takes heed to them all and warns His covenant people, likewise, to take heed.

How numerous and significant are the details that require attention in the kingdom of heaven! The Father must send His beloved Son into the world to be crucified, raised from the dead, and given all power in heaven and earth. The children of His kingdom must be born, regenerated, called, justified, and sanctified by the power of His grace. By that same grace, they must be preserved, and, after this life, raised to glory in a new heavens and earth. And our Father ne-

glects not one detail.

Then there are the host of spiritual nails and horses concerning which the Father makes us take heed. Long before *Poor Richard's Almanac*, God commanded us to take heed to ourselves (Luke 21:34), pay attention to wisdom (Prov. 4:1), be careful to maintain good works (Tit. 3:8), watch unto prayer (I Pet. 4:7), give attendance to doctrine (I Tim. 4:13), take heed to give alms (Matt. 6:1), and beware of false doctrine (Matt. 16:12). We are even told to remember our feet when strapping on spiritual armor (Eph. 6:13-17). How important it must be, then, that none of these details be neglected!

Surely also the dollars used to fund the work of the kingdom comprise one of the nails concerning which the members of the covenant must take heed. It may not be the most significant nail that is driven into the shoes of the white gospel horse (Rev. 6:2), but a nail nonetheless. Consider only the money required in the cause of the kingdom among the Protestant Reformed Churches. Each year, Jesus Christ provides, then collects and distributes millions of dollars from this little band to support a sound seminary, lively domestic and foreign

---

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

mission programs, 28 robust congregations, 40 active and retired ministers, 14 flourishing Christian schools, and some 120 dedicated teachers for those schools. And God takes heed to it all. By His grace, the people of the PRC take heed.

Included in such monetary necessities is the support of prospective school teachers and preachers. That need is great. Consider only the substantial sum of money required to become a pastor. Increasingly, men are entering seminary older, married, and with children. There may be benefits to this trend, but the downside is that they have more expenses. They must buy food, clothing, and supplies for an entire family, keep a vehicle running, and pay for utility bills, rent or mortgage, Christian school tuition, church budget, doctors, dentists, and the occasional emergency room visit. Most students have no health insurance, so the cost of medicines, surgery, or the arrival of a baby can be burdensome. As far as income is concerned, most students are limited to lower-scale, part-time work. Federal loans do not exist for religious training. Bank loans are usually denied. So, students must rely upon the generosity of the covenant community to bridge the gap between income and expense. If obligations are not met, the student has one recourse: pack up the books, get full-time work, and be content that the Lord has made it clear he was never called to be a pastor or teacher.

Thanks be to our attentive Father, the Protestant Reformed community indeed heeds this little nail. Parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and siblings often give generously, provide furnishings, cars, or personal loans. Home churches may conduct grocery showers at Christmas. A few congregations take collections, which they distribute directly to students. Individual brothers and sisters in Christ also play a considerable role. I well remember that, more than once while I was pondering how to buy gro-

ceries or fill the gas tank that week, some lovely saint—often someone whom I did not even know very well—would send a substantial check with which to pay the bills. Other times, widows or others, who themselves were probably financially strapped, would slip “a little something” into my coat pocket at church, or have me pick up “some extra food they had lying around”—although I sometimes suspected this was also an opportunity for them to enjoy some fellowship over a cup of hot tea.

The covenant community has also taken heed to this responsibility through two organizations. One is the Student Aid Committee of our synod. Early on in our history, this committee was formed to carry out the mandate of the Church Order, Art. 19, which recognizes that the need for ministers is related to their financial maintenance. The article states: “The churches shall exert themselves, as far as necessary, that there may be students supported by them to be trained for the ministry of the Word.” Applicants must be enrolled in the seminary, pledge their intention to become ministers in the churches, and submit, annually, documents to demonstrate financial need. Funds come directly from the synodical budget (assessments). This year, \$44,000 was budgeted for the five seminary students, which works out to be \$25 for every Protestant Reformed family.

The other organization engaged in this work is the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People (F.P.R.Y.P). Long ago, they also recognized the necessity of supporting students financially. So, in 1960 they established the Scholarship Fund on this simple premise: “There is a need for Protestant Reformed ministers and teachers.” Since then, they have actively sought donations and asked the churches for collections. Through the F.P.R.Y.P. Scholarship Fund, monies are granted to any college student who is studying to be a Protestant Reformed minister

or teacher, and who meets certain qualifications, including scholastic ability and financial need. In the past four years, the F.P.R.Y.P Scholarship Fund distributed over \$100,000 to prospective preachers and teachers. And last year alone, over 22 young men and women received much-needed assistance.

Although the Protestant Reformed community indeed heeds the financial support of future pastors and teachers, each of us should take a personal interest in this cause. There are only two avenues of organized support for seminary students (one for teachers), and these organizations have limits to what they can give. Funds from the Seminary Student Aid Committee are currently limited by synod to \$10,000 per student. Grants from the F.P.R.Y.P Scholarship Fund are limited by the amount donated to the organization and the number of applicants. Despite this generous assistance, the students still often come up well short of what they need to continue their studies. Therefore, they must rely on private assistance from us. But the problem is that the student has no avenue of making his or her need known to the community.


Therefore, do not assume someone else is taking care of these students, but be informed. Know what collections are taken in your own church for this cause. If collections are taken only for the F.P.R.Y.P Scholarship Fund, consider asking your consistory to take collections for seminary students—several churches already do this—but such funds must be distributed directly to the students. When conversing with a student, do not limit your inquiries to his grades and health, but every now and then ask if he has enough money; offer to help. Students do not bring up the subject themselves. Nor should they. On the one hand, they must learn to wait on the Lord. But on the other hand, we should know their situation and be ready to help in the Lord’s name.

Although the support of future ministers and teachers should be the concern of everyone in the churches, especially those who are young adults should take heed to this matter. Many of these students are your peers. Many of you have the means to help; you live with your parents, are single, hold down good jobs, and have few financial burdens. You may have determined that you are not called to be a teacher or minister. That is fine. But at least consider those who are working hard on your behalf, and upon whom you and your own children will someday depend. Then, give generously to this cause.

Finally, everyone should consider an immediate donation to the F.P.R.Y.P. Scholarship Fund. It is the only existing means to make in-cognito, tax-deductible donations to both future ministers and teach-

ers; it is the only fund that supports prospective teachers; and the need is urgent. The Scholarship Fund is currently depleted, and unless some \$30-40,000 is raised soon, few scholarships will be granted this year. That would be devastating. Check your deaconate collection schedule to see when the next collection will be taken for this fund. When the plate passes (or *bags* in Canada), empty your wallet. Donations can also be sent directly to the Scholarship Fund, c/o Mr. Trevor Kalsbeek, 954 Colrain St. SW, Wyoming MI, 49509.

I cannot speak to the immediate need for future teachers, but some 1,500 people in our vacant churches can testify to the urgent need for ministers. There may be many reasons for any such lack precisely because there are many

details that require attention in order to receive them. There are the details about which we can do nothing: God must give us future ministers or teachers, make their place in the world and His kingdom, call them to their work, and endow them with intellect, spirituality, and a host of other gifts. Then there are the details in which God engages us: We must pray for them; loving mothers must raise them; dedicated fathers must instruct them and lay before them this calling; schools and seminary must hone their skills; once received, they must be paid, encouraged, utilized, and honored; and, if we are to have them, they must be supported liberally during their schooling. There may be many reasons why we might lack teachers or preachers. Please, let it not be for want of a dollar! 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

**O**ur Seminary has an internship program in which a student is placed in a congregation for six months to engage in the work of the ministry under the supervision of the consistory and pastor. This provides the senior seminary students practical experience in the work of the ministry. This year the faculty of our seminary has asked the consistories of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI and the Byron Center, MI PRC to allow Seminarians Andrew Lanning and Clay Spronk to do their internships in their respective congregations beginning July 1. The consistories have enthusiastically approved this request.

### Minister Calls & Trios

**T**he Hudsonville, MI PRC has extended a call to Professor D. Engelsma (Prot. Ref. Seminary) to be their next pastor. The Hudson-

ville consistory acknowledges that Prof. Engelsma has obligations to our seminary and is willing to work with him regarding those obligations, should he accept their call.

Rev. A. denHartog (minister-on-loan in Singapore) has accepted the call to serve as the next pastor of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI.

Rev. A. denHartog's acceptance of the call to Southwest also, of course, means that he has declined the two other calls extended to him, one from Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL and the other from First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada.

Rev. Doug Kuiper, pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, has declined the call extended to him to serve as the next pastor of the Doon, Iowa PRC.

That decline resulted in the council of Doon presenting a new trio to their congregation, from which they were to call on February 7. That trio consisted of Rev. A. denHartog, Rev. D. Overway, and Rev. M. VanderWal.

First PRC of Holland, MI was to call a pastor from a trio consisting of Rev. G. Eriks, Rev. S. Key, and Rev. J. Slopsema.

### Congregation Activities

**W**e give thanks to our heavenly Father with Rev. and Mrs. R. Smit and family, serving in the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada, who were blessed with the birth of a son and brother, Seth Richard, born Friday night, January 7, in Lacombe. Due to complications with Seth's breathing, both mother and child were transferred to Red Deer Hospital the next day, where he received treatment at their Special Care Nursery. Seth came home Tuesday, the 18<sup>th</sup> of January, and as of this writing was yet receiving a small amount of oxygen continuously until the doctors permit him to be weaned off from it. May the Smits find comfort in knowing that Jehovah holds even the smallest of His children in the palm of His hand.

---

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

There was a note from the Building Committee of the Lynden, WA PRC in a recent bulletin thanking their membership for their help with painting and cleaning done at Lynden over the past six months. The latest painting project was planned for January 25 and called for the congregation to paint their church narthex. Due to a great turnout for this "paint party," the work was done in three hours. In the past six months Lynden's basement, nursery, four bathrooms, and stairwell have all been completed. Plans are now being made to paint the kitchen and council room on a future date. With that kind of success, why not!

### Mission Activities

A delegation of Mr. Warren Boon, on behalf of Doon, Iowa PRC, the calling church, and Mr. Andrew Brummel, on behalf of the Foreign Mission Committee, left for a two-week stay in the Philippines on January 25. They were planning to oversee our denominational mission work, to meet with our mis-

sionary, Rev. A. Spriensma and his family, and to visit families of the Berean Church of God (Reformed) in Manila. In the first weekend of their visit they planned also on traveling to Bacolod City to visit with some of the contacts there.

The past couple of months all our church bulletins have seen a request for Reformed books for the Philippines. This request was to continue until the end of January. Since then our bulletins have also seen a thank-you for donated books. Because of a generous outpouring from all the churches, there have been hundreds and hundreds of books given for the Philippines' library. These books were to be shipped out in February, D.V.

Rev. A. Stewart, missionary pastor to the saints of the Covenant PR Fellowship in Ballymena, NI, spoke January 21 in South Wales at the Rest Convalescent Home in Porthcawl on the subject, "The 1000 Years of Revelation 20." The following week, January 28, he spoke on the subject "Problems with Revivals" at the

Ballymena Protestant Hall in Ballymena, NI. At that same meeting, Mr. Lindsay Williams gave a short slide presentation on the Welsh Revivals.


### Young People's Activities

On a recent Sunday, the Young People's Society of the Doon, Iowa PRC met for their weekly Bible study. In addition to the study of God's Word, they also considered the important question, "How to React When People Swear."

### School Activities

On January 27, the PTA of Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI met. Rev. C. Haak led with a timely meditation entitled, "Ready to Learn."

### Young Adult Activities

Post High Young Adults in and around Grand Rapids, MI were invited to Faith PRC in Jenison, MI Sunday evening, January 30, to hear Rev. W. Bekkering speak and answer questions about our mission work in Ghana. 

## Announcements

### NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2005, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Don Doezema  
4949 Ivanrest Ave.  
Grandville, MI 49418

### NOTICE:

The Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee is offering scholarship awards to prospective Protestant Reformed teachers and ministers. If you are interested in receiving a packet, please contact Brenda Dykstra at (616) 662-2187 or e-mail [brendadj@juno.com](mailto:brendadj@juno.com) by April 1, 2005.

### PLEASE NOTE: New e-mail addresses

for Grace PRC bulletin clerk:  
[lisshuiz@altelco.net](mailto:lisshuiz@altelco.net)  
for Hope PRC (Redlands):  
[bulletin@hopeprc.org](mailto:bulletin@hopeprc.org)  
and for Hope PRC (Walker):  
[jdykstra@altelco.net](mailto:jdykstra@altelco.net)

### NOTICE:

RFPA Special Offer  
**When I Survey...A Lenten Anthology**  
Herman Hoeksema  
Go to [www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org) for details

### NOTICE:

Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School, Loveland, CO, is seeking applicants for a middle room teacher (grades 4-6). Those applying should be members of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America. Send applications and a resume to Mr. Larry Abel at LPRCS, 705 E. 57th St., Loveland, CO 80538; phone: 970-667-9289; e-mail: [lprcs@juno.com](mailto:lprcs@juno.com). Or, phone Glen Griess at 970-669-2589.

### Reformed Witness Hour

#### Topics for March

Date	Topic	Text
March 6	"Blessed Are the Merciful"	Matthew 5:7
March 13	"Blessed Are the Pure in Heart"	Matthew 5:8
March 20	"The Renting of the Veil"	Mark 15:38
March 27	"Not Faithless, But Believing"	John 20:24-29