

# THE *May 1, 2004* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

## *In This Issue:*

- ♦ The Golden Rule 338
- ♦ Faith Is Assurance: The Reformation Gospel 340
- ♦ Editorship of the Standard Bearer 342
- ♦ Letters 343
- ♦ Faithfully Afflicted 344
- ♦ All Around Us 346
- ♦ Marrow Men (4) 348
- ♦ Islam (1) 351
- ♦ Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (9) 354
- ♦ On the Day of His Birth 356
- ♦ News From Our Churches 358

Volume 80 ♦ Number 15



# The Golden Rule

*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*

Matthew 7:12

**T**his instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ has aptly been called the Golden Rule.

It certainly is a rule for life. In all your dealings with others, do unto them as you would have them do unto you.

This rule is certainly golden. It is one of those rules that serve as sure guides in every situation. We often wonder what is the best course in dealing with others. Following this rule, we will never err.

All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

How different life would be, were we all to follow this rule!



To gain a proper understanding of this golden rule, we must

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

bear in mind that Jesus is addressing us as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. This rule appears in the Sermon on the Mount. The theme of this sermon is the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness. Jesus begins His sermon with the Beatitudes, in which He describes the spiritual characteristics of the citizens of the kingdom. They are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, those that hunger after righteousness, etc. They are not this naturally but by reason of the new birth in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus gives us this golden rule for living, He gives it to us as born again citizens of this kingdom. That is important to bear in mind so that we may have a clear understanding of what it is that we want others to do to us. That's different for a citizen of the kingdom than it is for the natural man.

The natural man, fallen in Adam, is corrupt and depraved. His goals in life are completely earthly, selfish, and sinful. He wants material wealth, prestige, power, and the life of ease that comes with it. He also wants the pleasures of sin. And what does

he want others to do to him? He wants others to do those things that will enable him to attain his earthly, selfish, and sinful goals. He wants others to assist him in accumulating wealth. He wants others to help him in his quest for power. He wants others to join him in sin. And when he gets into trouble because of his sinful life-style, he wants others to cover up for him.

All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

This certainly is not what Jesus had in mind with this golden rule.

Now let's consider the citizen of the kingdom, born of grace. The goals of his life are entirely different. When his life is controlled by grace, he seeks neither the things of this earth, nor the pleasures of sin. He seeks rather the kingdom of God and His righteousness. It is true that this is given as an admonition later on in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:33). Nevertheless, Jesus gives this command to strengthen the resolve that is already in the citizen of the kingdom. What the citizen of the kingdom wants others to do unto him is all

*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. David J. Engelsma  
4949 Ivanrest  
Grandville, MI 49418  
(e-mail: engelsma@prca.org)

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
Don Doezema  
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: benjwig@juno.com)

#### NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

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

#### UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney  
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.  
Ballymena, Co. Antrim  
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland  
(e-mail: sean67@cprfbokstore.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 RPPA: [www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)  
Website for PRC: [www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)

that enables him to enter the kingdom and enjoy its righteousness and life. He wants others to help him find the forgiveness of his sins in Jesus Christ. He wants others to assist him in resisting temptation and meeting his obligations to the kingdom in a godly walk. And, yes, he wants his daily bread. That too is important for seeking the kingdom during this life.

All these we should want that men do to us.

These desires are present by reason of the new birth. They must be cultivated by the Word and by prayer.



All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

Many abandon this rule and follow rules of their own making. One such rule is to do unto others as they have done unto you. According to this rule, you do good to those that do good to you, and you return evil for the evil others have shown you. Another rule is to do unto others before they can do it unto you. You suspect that someone is about to do evil to you, so you protect yourself by doing that evil to him first.

But the rule of the kingdom is, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

The meaning is quite simple. In your dealings with others, consider what you would want them to do to you. How would you like to be treated in this situation? Do the same to others.

Notice that Jesus adds, "in all things." This means that we must apply this rule to every neighbor. We must behave this way not just to our friends, but also to strangers and even to our enemies. We must follow this rule no matter what it costs us in terms of money, time, energy, or reputation.

Jesus emphasizes one more thing that is not reflected in our English translation. We must con-

tinually do all things whatsoever we would that men should do to us. In following this rule we find that some do not appreciate what we do, nor do they respond in the way we desire. Our efforts sometimes do not seem to help. Never mind. Continue to do all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you.



For this is the law and the prophets.

The law and the prophets were the Old Testament Scriptures, the sum total of Scriptures that had been given, up until this point in history.

The law was not just the ten commandments but also the whole Mosaic law that governed Israel's religious and civil life. It was a law that proclaimed the gospel to Israel. There were the ceremonial laws that governed Israel's worship around the temple with the altar, the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the feast days. When these laws were followed, Israel had a beautiful picture of the salvation that was to come in the promised Christ. The civil laws organized Israel into a nation, giving them a picture of the future kingdom of heaven. And the ten commandments not only showed Israel the need for the Savior, but also served as a rule for gratitude.

The prophets did all their work in the context of that law. The Mosaic law dominated all of Israel's life in the Old Testament, including the revelation of God given later through the prophets. The word through the prophets merely developed the gospel of grace revealed in the law to a richer, fuller measure.

Since the time that Jesus gave this instruction, God has also given us the New Testament Scriptures. These follow in the great tradition of the law and prophets. They reveal how the promises of the law and prophets are all fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The golden rule must govern our behavior because of the law and the prophets.

This means, first, that the golden rule is the practical application of what the law and the prophets require of us in our relationship to the neighbor. The law and the prophets require that we love God with all our being and love our neighbor as ourselves. These are the two great commandments of the law. This golden rule is a practical application of the command to love the neighbor as ourselves. Certainly this great commandment of the law means that we are to love ourselves. We are to love ourselves as the workmanship of God. If we truly love ourselves, we will seek our eternal welfare in the kingdom of heaven. This is also what we should want others to do unto us. And if we love the neighbor in the same way, we will also do the same to him.

But there is more.

The law and the prophets empower us to follow this golden rule.

Of ourselves we cannot and will not keep this rule. By nature we are so corrupt that we hate God and the neighbor. Consequently, we always fall short of this rule. We tend to do unto others as they have done unto us. We may even keep this rule some of the time, with some people, under certain circumstances. But we will never do it out of the deep spiritual principle of love that Jesus sets before us.

But the law and the prophets (today we would say the whole of Scripture) change all that. The law and the prophets proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ from the depravity and power of sin. Not only do they proclaim salvation, they are also the power of God to bring us that salvation. The result of that salvation is that we do love our neighbor as ourselves, and in that love we do follow this golden rule with him. By calling our attention to the law and the prophets, Jesus is simply calling us to live the salvation He has given us.





Therefore!

This golden rule is the conclusion to what Jesus has just taught about prayer.


Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. What man is there of you, who, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him

a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven.

Therefore!

In this golden rule Jesus draws a conclusion. If God so loves us that He will look to our welfare with His good gifts, so must we also love our neighbor by looking to his welfare. And this is accom-

plished by doing unto him as we would have him do to us.

As we deal with one another, let us pray fervently for God's good gifts of love. You cannot follow this golden rule without such prayer. For only when you have received in prayer the goodness of God's love will you be motivated to love the neighbor as yourself and to follow in that love this golden rule. 

## Editorials

# Faith Is Assurance: The Reformation Gospel

**T** rue faith is assurance of personal salvation.

Assurance is not the fruit of faith for a few old people after many years of doubt. Assurance is not the "well-being" of faith (for the few believers who are "God's best and dearest friends") in distinction from the "being" of faith.

Assurance is what faith essentially is. Personal assurance of one's own salvation by the grace of God in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ is the very being, or nature, of faith. Faith knows and trusts Jesus Christ as the Savior of the one who believes. Weak faith is certain of salvation, as well as strong faith. Faith is certain of salvation at the very beginning of the believing life, for example, in a covenant child, as well as faith at the very end of the way, for example, in a dying, old saint.

Faith is assurance.

Denial that faith is assurance was the fundamental cause of the deep, widespread, continuing doubt of salvation that characterized the congregations of the Puritans. It is the fundamental cause of the same doubt in Reformed and

Presbyterian congregations today languishing under typically Puritan preaching. There are other causes of doubt as well: unsound emphasis on introspection; dependence on spiritual experiences; the deadly notion of "preparatory grace"; and the conditionality of the covenant and its salvation.

But the fundamental error is denial that faith is assurance. This error fills churches with doubters—comfortless, terrified doubters.

The previous editorial on assurance (*Standard Bearer*, March 15, 2004) showed that Scripture teaches faith as assurance.

Recovering the gospel of Scripture, the sixteenth century Reformation of the church taught that faith is assurance of salvation. With one accord, all the Reformers taught that assurance is the very nature of faith.

### "Does Not Waver, Wobble, Shake, Tremble, or Doubt"

In his 1535 "Theses concerning Faith and Law," Martin Luther distinguished true faith from false faith this way: "True faith says, 'I certainly believe that the Son of

God suffered and arose, but he did this all for me, for my sins, of that I am certain.'" Luther went on: "True faith with arms outstretched joyfully embraces the Son of God given for it and says, 'He is my beloved and I am his.'" According to Luther, it is exactly "that 'for me' or 'for us'" that "distinguishes it [true faith] from all other faith, which merely hears the things done."

Luther defined faith as "the firm and sure thought or trust that through Christ God is propitious and that through Christ His thoughts concerning us are thoughts of peace, not of affliction or wrath" (commentary on Gen. 15:6).

Late in his life, in 1543, Luther exulted in faith's essential certainty:

Faith is and, indeed, must be a steadfastness of the heart, which does not waver, wobble, shake, tremble, or doubt, but stands firm and is sure of its case.... When this Word enters the heart by true faith, it makes the heart as firm, sure, and certain as it is itself, so that the heart is unmoved, stub-

born, and hard in the face of every temptation, the devil, death, and anything whatever, boldly and proudly despising and mocking everything that spells doubt, fear, evil, and wrath. For it knows that God's Word cannot lie. Such a person is . . . made certain, as the Word of the Lord is certain. So Paul says: "I know . . . and am persuaded (II Tim. 1:12)" (commentary on II Sam. 23:1).

Richard Marius is correct, in his recent, fine study of Luther, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death*, in stating that for Luther faith was assurance.

Faith is the only way to God, and as Luther presented it, faith seems always to have a warmhearted, existential content. It involves a personal, emotional binding with Christ. True faith is not merely to believe that the stories recounted in the Gospels are true; such belief "is no help, for all sinners and even the damned believe that." True faith, that faith filled with grace, is to know "that Christ was born for you, that his birth was for you, that it was all for your good."

Although Luther struggled all his believing life with hellish temptations to doubt the goodness and grace of God, he always affirmed that faith is assurance. All his life, despite his struggles against doubt, his own faith was assurance. By this confident faith, he constantly battled and overcame his temptation to doubt, and lived in the assurance of his own salvation.

Martin Bucer defined faith as "an undoubted persuasion of the mercy and fatherly good will of God towards us, made through the Holy Spirit and founded on the propitiation of Christ" (commentary on Romans).

### The "Minutest Particle of Faith"

John Calvin's entire, lengthy treatment of faith in the *Institutes*—chapter two of book three—is a sustained argument that assurance is of the very being, or nature, of

faith. "We shall now have a full definition of faith if we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit."

Contrasting true believers with those who "are harassed by miserable anxiety while they doubt whether God will be merciful to them," Calvin declares that "our faith is not true unless it enables us to appear calmly in the presence of God. Such boldness springs only from confidence in the divine favor and salvation. So true is this, that the term *faith* is often used as equivalent to *confidence*."

Calvin expressly repudiates the later, Puritan notion that faith must grow into assurance over a long period of time, so that new, or young, believers cannot expect to enjoy assurance: "As soon as the minutest particle of faith is instilled into our minds, we begin to behold the face of God placid, serene, and propitious." The reason why even the believer with the smallest, least developed faith—the "minutest particle of faith"—has assurance of salvation is that the "clear knowledge of the divine favor . . . holds the first and principal part in faith."

Although Calvin is well aware that "believers have a perpetual struggle with their own distrust," he insists that "he only is a true believer who, firmly persuaded that God is reconciled, and is a kind Father to him, hopes everything from his kindness, who, trusting to the promises of the divine favor, with undoubting confidence anticipates salvation."

Calvin demolishes the Puritan notion that one can be a believer, indeed, can be a believer for years, but lack assurance of salvation, and that, in fact, this is the case with most believers. "No man, I say, is a believer but he who, trusting to the security of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death." In support of this conten-

tion, Calvin appeals to the glorious words of assurance that the Holy Spirit puts in the heart and on the lips of every one who believes the gospel of grace, in Romans 8:38, 39: "I am persuaded that [nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Lack of assurance is unbelief. One who lives persistently in doubt, perhaps under the sickly preaching that assures him that doubt is normal for most believers, is an unbeliever.

That faith is assurance is for Calvin a matter of the greatest importance. He does not simply teach this. But he emphasizes this at every opportunity. In his *Sermons on Melchizedek & Abraham*, preaching to his congregation on Genesis 15:6, Calvin asks, "What then is Belief?" His answer is: "It is to receive whatsoever is spoken unto us from the mouth of God, with such reverence, as that we hold it to be certain and sure." But this is "not enough." This is not enough to constitute "Belief." Belief, or faith, regards the Word of God as "such a sure and certain word unto us as may make us approach near unto God, and make us partakers of his bounty and goodness: and not to doubt but that he will be our Father and Savior, and so thereupon may be bold to call upon him, and hold ourselves for his children, and fly unto him for succor and aid."

Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, likewise taught assurance as faith's very nature. In his handbook of Reformed theology, *The Christian Faith*, under the heading, "How faith is necessary, and what faith is," Beza gave this description of faith:

The faith of which we speak does not consist only in believing that God is God, and that the contents of His Word are true:—for the devils indeed have this faith, and it only makes them tremble (James 2:19)—But we call "faith" a certain knowledge which, by His grace and goodness alone, the



Holy Spirit engraves more and more in the hearts of the elect of God (I Cor. 2:6-8). *By this knowledge, each of them, being assured in his heart of his election, appropriates to himself and applies to himself the promise of his salvation in Jesus Christ.... Whosoever truly believes trusts in Him alone and is assured of his salvation to the point of no longer doubting it (Eph 3:12) [emphasis added].*

### A Lame Defense of Apostasy

From the teaching of the Reformation that faith is assurance, the Puritan doctrine of assurance is a radical departure. Advocates of the Puritan doctrine have noticed this, of course, and have offered what must certainly rank as one of the lamest defenses of apostasy from Reformation orthodoxy in all the history of doctrine. The Presbyterian theologian William Cunningham acknowledged that the Reformers spoke "very strongly of the importance and necessity of men being personally assured about their own salvation." But the Reformers were mistaken in their doctrine of assurance. Their views on assurance were "extreme and exaggerated." The later Puritans and Presbyterians were right in denying that assurance is of the essence of faith and in denying assurance to most believers. According to Cunningham, the reason for the Reformers' "high views" of assurance was that they themselves received a special dispensation of grace: "God seems to have given to them the grace of assurance

more fully and more generally than He does to believers in ordinary circumstances."

Apart now from his explanation of the Reformers' doctrine of assurance, Cunningham made significant admissions. He admitted that the later Puritan denial that assurance belongs to the essence of faith conflicts with the teaching of the Reformation. He also admitted that this deviation from the Reformation tends towards Roman Catholicism. "It is no doubt true that in so far as there has been a deviation from the views [on assurance] generally held by the Reformers, it has proceeded in a direction which tends to diminish the differences between Protestants and papists" (see William Cunningham, "The Reformers and the Doctrine of Assurance," in *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*).

In the language of the warning of the Canons of Dordt, by the Puritan doctrine of assurance, particularly the denial that assurance belongs to the essence of faith, "the doubts of the papist are again introduced into the church" (Canons, V, Rejection of Errors/5).

Cunningham's explanation of the Reformer's doctrine of assurance is mistaken. The Reformers' doctrine of assurance had nothing to do with their own, allegedly special experience and certainly nothing to do with a special dispensation of grace in the sixteenth century. One could as well explain away their doctrine of justification by arguing that the Reformers were

justified in a special way at a special time in the history of salvation.

The Reformers taught that faith is assurance *for all believers, in all times*, because this is what the Bible teaches about faith.

The Reformers taught that faith is assurance for all believers, because the Reformers saw that faith has respect to God's work of sovereign grace in Jesus Christ. Looking to grace, in dependence upon a sure promise, faith is certain. Assurance is the blessed fruit of the gospel of grace.

The Puritan teaching on assurance, therefore, is serious error. It is radical deviation from the teaching of the Reformation. It is false doctrine about faith. It robs many of the only comfort in life and death. And it betrays a grievous departure from the gospel of grace. The Puritans and those who followed them shifted the center of faith's attention away from the work of God in Jesus Christ, including the work of God in Jesus Christ within the elect sinner, to the sinner's *experience* of salvation. Puritanism did this deliberately. It was bold to proclaim itself a "second reformation." Thus Puritanism, with no little arrogance, judged the sixteenth century Reformation inadequate and heralded itself as accomplishing the vital thing left undone by the "first" Reformation. The vital thing consisted of concentrating on the sinner and his experience.

The result was fatal.

Doubt.

— DJE 

## Editorship of the Standard Bearer

**T**he Editorial Committee hereby informs the readers of the *Standard Bearer* of a significant development as regards the position of editor of the *Standard Bearer*. In the October 1, 2003

issue, Prof. Engelsma informed the readers of the *Standard Bearer* of a change forthcoming ("New Editor Sought"). He had notified the magazine staff (that is, the department editors) that he would not be

available for reappointment as editor for the next volume year (i.e., volume 81, beginning October 1, 2004), citing his age and the number of years that he had borne the load of this work. With much re-



gret, the staff accepted his decision and appointed a committee (consisting of Professors Hanko and Dykstra, and Managing Editor Don Doezema) to search for a new editor-in-chief.

The search committee knew at the outset that finding a new editor for the *Standard Bearer* would be no easy task. After much discussion of the nature and duties of the work of editor, as well as the necessary qualifications of the editor, the committee approached various men who, in the judgment of the committee, were suited to the task. However, none of the men believed that he would be able to handle the position of editor and do justice to his work, be it in the seminary or in the pastorate. The search committee reported to the staff these findings as follows:

We were convinced of the validity of the concerns, and decided therefore to explore possibilities of a kind of shared editorship on a temporary basis. We understand well that it is in the best interests of the magazine that there be *one* man writing editorials. We should in fact commit ourselves to the goal of making such an appointment as soon as feasible. But we also believe that, in an interim

period when it is *not* feasible, a shared editorship can be made to work, not just tolerably, but well.

The committee, accordingly, came with a proposal for a joint editorship. They wrote to the staff:

What we propose is that the editorials be shared by a small number of seasoned pastors who can conveniently meet — both to map out a strategy for dividing the labor and to monitor progress in fulfilling it. The idea here is that every effort will be made to assure that editorials continue effectively to treat current, critical issues — in well worked out series of editorials. We do not want 21 separate, randomly selected, sometimes overlapping editorials, with all sense of order or continuity lost because they come from various writers, each doing his own thing.

We suggest that, to facilitate the kind of close cooperation necessary to achieve that goal, four men in the Grand Rapids area be appointed to a shared, temporary, interim editorship. And, again, in an effort to be as helpful as possible to the staff, we did take it upon ourselves to ask four men if they would be willing to accept such an appointment. Prof. Dykstra, Prof. Gritters, Rev. Koole,

and Rev. Terpstra have said yes. The four have agreed that five editorials per year from each would be a manageable task.

A special meeting of the *Standard Bearer* staff was held in February of this year to discuss the proposals recommended by the search committee. The staff likewise was of the mind that one man as editor-in-chief is much to be preferred. In the end, they agreed that a shared editorship would work as an interim measure, and therefore approved the concept and appointed the four men recommended by the committee. At the recommendation of the search committee, the staff also decided that Prof. Dykstra should handle the immediate decisions necessary for the week-to-week operations of the *Standard Bearer*.

Thus it is that, the Lord willing, the *Standard Bearer* will enter into a new phase in the coming volume year. We heartily commend these newly appointed editors to the grace of God with the confidence that the *Standard Bearer* will not waver in the task of setting forth the Reformed faith boldly and clearly.

The Editorial Committee 

## Letters

### Irreverent Modern Versions

I read with interest Mr. VanderWoude's contribution in favor of vernacular language or common speech (*Standard Bearer*, April 1, 2004). I disagree with the arguments in favor of it. The common people in the time of the Reformation did not even have the Bible to read for themselves personally. This was the "high" and "reverent" responsibility of Romish bishops and priests to the wee, simple folk, said Rome. This is quite different from just mere language problems. You do not have a language problem if you do not even have the Bible to read from

in the first place! That was a gift of Christ to His church by men like Wycliffe, Tyndale, Luther, and Calvin, not to mention the countless other saints involved in this work to the honor and glory of their heavenly Father. They put the Bible in the hands of the common, everyday people. At the same time, they gave the people the Bible in their own language.

Second, to be sure, one can use Elizabethan language in a sinful way. Is that the truth of the King James Bible, or the Psalter, or our "Three Forms of Unity"? There is uniformity in this, not irreverence. What is true in the history of the

Reformed churches in the past one hundred years is that voting to use a more "modern" Bible translation has led to irreverence, not only in addressing a sovereign God, but also in doctrine. That is true. Some of us have dealt personally with this issue, and we see the fruits of it as well.

Third, Mr. VanderWoude laments that as time goes on we will be alienated from those who do not use the language of the King James Version. The King James Bible, he says, is a barrier to Scripture comprehension, prayer-life development, and evangelistic efforts. To be blunt, the language of today —




what passes for English — in some instances does not have a lot to be desired. Mr. VanderWoude's concerns are irrelevant. Our little children are taught the King James Bible just as we were when we were young ones. If there were any "dumbing down" of language, it would be today's modern English. God's Word does not return to Him void.

Rev. S. Houck's "The King James Version of the Bible," Prof.

D. Engelsma's "Modern Bible Versions," Rev. R. Cammenga's "KJV-NIV," Prof. H. Hanko's "The Battle For the Bible," Prof. D. Engelsma's "The English Translation of Holy Scripture," and Rev. R. C. Harbach's "The Infallibility of Holy Scripture" are all pamphlets and articles written by faithful saints with respect to the Bible. They are not hard to grasp and understand. They are available for saints in the pew and saints on the mission field. The writers are not popes and bish-

ops. They are faithful servants of God called to admonish and preach the truth of God's Word and warn against error and false doctrine. Why would they take the time to write these articles, if there was no apparent danger? They do not wish to take the Word of God out of our hands and spell it out for such simple, wee folk as us. They warn of that danger.

Ray Kikkert  
Wingham, Ontario  
Canada 

*In His Fear*

*Rev. Daniel Kleyn*

## Faithfully Afflicted

**E**very child of God experiences afflictions. Not just a little, but usually much of it. The amount does indeed vary from time to time. The severity also varies. But if one adds up all the afflictions experienced in a lifetime, there are many. As David said in Psalm 34, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous."

The believer confesses that these afflictions come from the hand of God. Jehovah sends them. They do not happen by chance. Nor do they come from the devil. They come from God. His hand is behind them. He is the One who eternally ordained them, and who sends them. It is unbiblical and it is unbelief to say God sends the good things, but has little or no control over the evil things. God is sovereign over all, including the evils and troubles that befall us. "Shall there be evil in the city, and the LORD hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6).

However, the believer also confesses that God sends these afflic-

tions in faithfulness. We say with David (Ps. 119:75): "I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."

This is quite a startling confession to make. Quite often we are inclined to say that troubles demonstrate that God is being unfaithful. When things do not go well we feel that God has forgotten to be kind. But the opposite is actually the case. Afflictions are themselves evidence of God's faithfulness. They demonstrate that God loves us. If God did not afflict us, He would be unfaithful and unloving. But when He afflicts, that very affliction is proof of His steadfast and unfailing love for us in Christ.

That is true of afflictions because of who God is. He is Jehovah. He is the unchangeable God in Himself. He cannot and does not change.

God is therefore unchanging in His attitude toward His elect children. That attitude is always love. He loves them when He sends them good things in life — He also loves them when He sends evil things. He loves them when He

gives them joys — He also loves them when He sends sorrows. He loves them when He makes their way easy — He also loves them when He makes their lives difficult. Because we are His in Christ, never is God's attitude that of hatred. Not even when we sin. Always He loves us. And afflictions are always a proof of that love.

Afflictions demonstrate God's love because He uses them for our good. The believer confesses this when he says (Ps. 119:71), "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Or as we sing in Psalter number 329, "Affliction has been for my profit." Afflictions do not harm us. It may seem to us that they do. At times, due to our limited, earthly perspective and understanding of things, we feel that the troubles God sends are not doing us any good at all. They overwhelm us and lead us to despair. At times they seem to drive us away from God. They appear to make our faith weaker. That is because afflictions are also trials, and quite often we initially fail the test. But ultimately God works even in these things for our salvation and uses the afflictions for

---

*Rev. Kleyn is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota.*



our spiritual benefit. He has promised to save and to glorify His people. He will certainly do that. He will do it and is doing it through absolutely everything that occurs in the world and in our lives. He is carrying out a glorious work in us. All afflictions are for the good of our souls.

Why is affliction good? Why is it proof of God's love? How is affliction for our profit? Because affliction is also chastisement. God uses it to correct His people and to turn them from sin. Whom Jehovah loves He chastens.

God is not like Eli. Eli was a permissive parent. He knew that his sons were sinning seriously in their office as priests, but he did nothing about it. It is true that he spoke to them. But his speech was weak. It could hardly be called admonition or rebuke. God is not like that. God is not a Father whose so-called love allows His children to continue in sin without correction. His love is so great that He corrects us. That is true love. For what kind of love is it that allows someone to continue on the road that leads to eternal destruction?

God sees our sins. He sees every one of them, including the sins within — our sinful thoughts, lusts, desires. God also sees that we are by nature blind to our sins and need to be shown them. So He afflicts. He sends troubles in our lives in order to stop us in our tracks. He humbles us. He brings us low. He does so in order that we might see how much we are in need of Him and His grace. He afflicts us in order to lead us to Christ, through whom we receive pardon and peace and joy.

Afflictions are therefore messengers of God. God speaks to us through them. He uses them to show us our sins and to turn us from those sins.

Remember, though, that afflictions are not God's way of punishing us for our sins, in the sense that they are payment for our sins. That is never the case. We have to distin-

guish between punishment and chastisement. God punishes the wicked for their sins. But God never punishes the righteous, the elect. All of the punishment and payment for their sins was taken care of by Christ. Therefore afflictions are chastisements. They are sent in love, with the purpose of correction.

It is also important to note that if you are suffering many afflictions, that does not mean you have committed many more sins than most other people of God. An individual believer may think this way because it seems to him that his afflictions are much more in number and much more severe than those of other saints. But that is not necessarily so. All of God's people have afflictions. Many are the afflictions of the righteous — that is, of every one of them. Some of those afflictions are obvious and easily seen. But other saints suffer silently. All God's people suffer. And that they do is proof of God's love for them. If you are suffering many afflictions, then remember this — it demonstrates the greatness of God's love for you.

Since afflictions are God's messengers to us, we must ask the question, "What is God showing me? What sins and weaknesses does He purpose that I see?"

The sins might not be such terrible or gross sins as David committed and was for a time blind to, namely the sins of adultery and murder. But each of us still has plenty of them.

Perhaps it is worldliness. Perhaps you place too much trust in earthly riches and pleasures. And so God makes you sick in order to wean you away from the things of this life. He reminds you that all is vanity without Him. He makes you see again that earthly things cannot satisfy the soul.

Perhaps it is pride. Perhaps you consider yourself self-sufficient. You are inclined to trust in yourself. And so God places troubles in your life to make you realize how weak and frail you are.

He leads you to acknowledge that without Him you can do nothing. You see clearly how dependent you are on your heavenly Father.


Perhaps you have forgotten God. You have failed to read the Scriptures. You have not prayed. You have neglected the means of grace. Your spiritual life is shallow. That's often how we can be when all is going well in our lives. Quite often we drift away from God and the things of His kingdom. And so God must send heavy burdens and adversities in order to turn us back to Him — so that we think of Him, pray to Him, and place our trust in Him once again.

In all these ways our faithful covenant God is doing His glorious work of sanctifying and saving us. We might not see right away that He is doing so, or how He is doing so. Often when the afflictions first come we are greatly troubled by them. We do not immediately see the benefit and good of the affliction.

But later, we realize that God did use it for good. We needed that affliction. We needed it spiritually. Our hearts needed humbling so that we would sincerely seek Christ and His mercy. We look back and see that the times in our lives when we were afflicted were the times when our faith was strongest. We were closer to God then. We were much more spiritual. Our prayers were much more meaningful. Yes, we know from experience that afflictions are indeed for our good.

God is faithful. In faithfulness He afflicts us. It is good and necessary for us that He does. Let us remember that in all the troubles He sends us in this valley of tears. May our faithful Father use those afflictions to draw us nearer to Himself.

"In my affliction this I found,  
That human help deceived,  
But ever faithful was the Lord  
In Whom my soul believed."

(Psalter # 312, stanza 6) 



■ **Gibson's 'Passion' —  
Romish to the Core  
(And Therefore,  
It Is As It Was NOT)**

**S**eldom has there been such a hullabaloo over a film as there has been over "The Passion of the Christ." A regular firestorm of controversy, some might say.

The disturbances the film has caused have been worldwide. This writer was in Singapore late February, and even there the film was becoming a matter of public debate. Should it be allowed into the country at all, or should it be banned? According to the Singaporean news media the government at that time was leaning towards banning it. The fear was that that film would be viewed as Christian propaganda and lead to unrest in the Muslim community.

Closer to home, criticism came from the Jewish sector, namely, that the film would incite anti-Semitism. Meantime, various Christian organizations have given it highest accolades and praise. Protestantism itself has been almost universal in its approval. A film that moved viewers spiritually as they were never moved before! One will never view the cross and Christ's suffering in quite the same way as before! A must see!

However, criticism from within Protestantism, be it a few lonely (wilderness) voices, has not been unknown. This magazine has been one of those voices. Amongst its criticism of and objections to the film has been the assertion that this film, in addition to its being bold blasphemy, is propaganda, Roman Catholic propaganda, written with the express purpose of promoting

Romish doctrines and errors. To say that not all have appreciated this line of criticism is an understatement, to say the least.

Be that as it may, this assertion is truth. That this is truth has been demonstrated irrefutably by no less an authority than a certain Romish theologian, Dr. Mark Miravalle, Professor of Theology and Mariology (sic!— kk) at the Franciscan University of Steubenville. In an article entitled "Gibson's Passion and Mary 'Co-redemptrix,'" Dr. Miravalle lays out the doctrine of Mariolatry in simplest, one might say crassest, terms and then points out how the theology of Mary, Co-redeemer, is central to the whole theme and message of the film. Read on as the veil is lifted and the true message of the film is laid bare.

What does the Co-redemptrix title mean? From the Catholic perspective, it refers to Mary's unique human participation with Jesus (and entirely subordinate to her divine son) in the historic work of saving humanity from sin. Jesus is the only Redeemer, in the sense that he alone as the one divine mediator between God and man could redeem or "buy back" the human family from the bonds of Satan and sin. But God willed that the Mother of Jesus participate in this redemptive process like no other creature.

In light of her immaculate Conception in which she was conceived without original sin through the foreseen merits of her Son, Mary is the sinless virgin Mother in total "enmity" or opposition with Satan, who becomes the ideal human partner with Jesus in the salvation of the human race. Early Christian writers called her the "New Eve," who together with Jesus, the "new Adam," accomplished the work of salvation for all the fallen children of the original Adam and Eve.

Thus far the doctrine of Mariolatry for beginners, which Mariolatry, under the present Pope especially, has become the heart and soul of the Romish religion. According to Rome it is through Mother Mary that Christianity expresses its real nurturing warmth and has true contact with suffering humanity. Now note what Dr. Miravalle says next.

Mel Gibson has given the world its most powerful cinematic portrayal of the Mother of Jesus precisely as the Co-redemptrix in his blockbuster film, *The Passion of the Christ*.

From early in the film it is clear that Mary alone has a special participation in Jesus' saving mission. As the soldiers of the Sanhedrin bring Jesus in to stand trial before Caiaphas, Jesus looks at Mary from across the courtyard and Mary says softly, "It has begun, Lord...so be it." The Mother knows that the mission of human redemption has begun. She offers her sorrowful "so be it" to this mission to accompany her joyful "so be it" at the announcement of the angel Gabriel which first brought the Redeemer into the world.

Throughout the film, it is only Jesus and Mary who see their mutual adversary Satan, in his androgenized (human-appearing — kk) form....

Earlier, Satan appears during the scourging of Jesus carrying a demonic child, which conveys the Old Testament Genesis prophecy of the battle between the 'woman' and her 'seed' (Jesus Christ), and the serpent (Satan) and his 'seed' or offspring of evil. After the scourging, Mary is inspired to soak up the blood of the Savior, splattered throughout the area of the pillar, with linens. She alone knows that each drop of this divine blood is supernaturally redemptive.

Many times during the saving process of the passion (for ex-

*Rev. Koole is pastor of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.*



ample, at the scourging, during the way of the cross, at Calvary), it is the glance of his Mother that gives Jesus the human support that strengthens him to proceed to the next stage of suffering. After one fall on the Via Dolorosa, Mary crawls next to her mutilated son and re-assures him: "I'm here." Jesus regains some focus and replies to her concerning the mission: "See Mother, I make all things new."

It is not Jesus alone, but all the disciples (Peter, John, the Magdalene), who call Mary, "Mother" (that is, in the film they do this. The gospel accounts scrupulously avoid such a unique designation, calling Jesus' mother, "Mary," throughout. But good Romish theologians have never been known to allow the scriptural record to interfere with their fanciful imaginations and doctrines — kk). On Calvary, Mary receives from Jesus her designation as universal Mother.

As Jesus, who is affixed to the cross, is being raised up from the ground, Mary, whose hands clutched the rocky ground as her sons' hands were nailed to the cross, rises from her kneeling position in proportion to her son's being raised on the cross. She then stands upright as her son is now upright on the gibbet.

After some time, Mary approaches the cross with John, the beloved disciple. She kisses Jesus' bloodied foot, and pleads for permission to die with him at this climactic moment of redemption: "Flesh of my flesh, Heart of my heart, my Son. Let me die with you!" Jesus responds to his mother and to John: "Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother."

As the fruit of her sufferings with Jesus, Mary becomes the spiritual mother of all beloved disciples, and of all humanity redeemed at Calvary.

Now, pay special note to Miravalle's concluding paragraphs!

In *The Passion of the Christ*, Gibson has accomplished a Marian feat no pastor or theologian could

achieve in the same way. He has given the world through its most popular visual medium a portrayal of a real human mother, whose heart is inseparably united to her son's heart. This mother's heart is pierced to its very depths as she spiritually shares in the brutal immolation of her innocent son. Hers is an immaculate heart which silently endures and offers this suffering with her son for the same heavenly purpose: to buy back the human race from sin.

Mary Co-redemptrix has been given her first international film debut in a supporting role, and it's a hit.

A hit! With whom? Protestants, no less! Why do you think this Roman Catholic theologian is so ecstatic? Protestants, no less, hail this production that obviously plays fast and loose with the scriptural accounts, as gospel truth, hailing it as a wonderful evangelistic tool. Protestants of every stripe, without criticism, have seen Rome's elevation of Mary to nearly divine status in a most powerful way, and instead of being offended, "Lo, to their (our?) eyes, too, she was very good, and a thing to be desired!" What next but to worship together once the lights go back on?

Those within Protestant circles, our own included, best pay close attention to what this Roman Catholic theologian and film critic has to say about this film before we naively drink it in and call it "a great evangelistic tool" and "food for men's souls."

Talk about Satan's presence at the scene! It is not just disciples of the first century A.D. being tempted to deny their One Only Redeemer and Lord!

## ■ Massachusetts' Marriage Amendment (Portent of Things to Come)

When Pontius Pilates govern and legislate you can be sure

that, in the end, the perverse will rule the land. Rule by expediency and trying to satisfy all parties, all the while trying to preserve one's own political career, is never the recipe for rule by laws of righteousness and truth. So it has proved in Massachusetts again.

Give the conservative caucus in Massachusetts credit, they succeeded in introducing into their state's legislature an amendment declaring same-sex "marriages" unconstitutional. What became of the amendment once the legislatures were confronted by the amendment is another matter. Through maneuverings and counter-maneuverings the politicians, governed in the end by ex-

pediency and the "best possible proposal under the circumstances," have crafted a proposed amendment that will reserve the word "marriage" for heterosexual couples, but grant homosexuals the right to enter into

"civil unions," and then grant to these civil unions all the rights and privileges and benefits previously restricted to marriage. And the difference is...??? As R. Albert Mohler Jr. points out in an article entitled "Latest Turns in the Marriage Debate," "The proposal will disappoint defenders of traditional marriage."

The Massachusetts' vote came after weeks of wrangling and turmoil, and the actual amendment adopted by the special constitutional convention may satisfy no one in the end. As finally adopted, the proposed amendment is worded to protect the term "marriage," but grants to civil unions all the legal rights previously restricted to marriage.

In its final wording, the proposed amendment states: "It being the public policy of this commonwealth to protect the unique relationship of marriage, only the union of one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized in the commonwealth."

*What next but to worship together once the lights go back on?*



So far, so good. But too good to be true. The proposal continues:

Two persons of the same sex shall have the right to form a civil union if they otherwise meet the requirements set forth by law for marriage. Civil unions for same sex persons are established by this Article and shall provide entirely the same benefits, protections, rights, privileges and obligations that are afforded to persons married under the law of the commonwealth.

Is this the shape of the future? The battle in Massachusetts portends a pattern in which "marriage" may be legally restricted to heterosexual couples, but civil unions will be granted full marital rights. The Massachusetts compromise means that homosexuals walk away with civil unions as the legal equivalent of marriage. Will this really matter in the end?

The Massachusetts amendment is, both sides claimed, the best that could be negotiated by


the legislators. Supporters of traditional marriage object that the proposed amendment concedes far too much and in mandating civil unions it effectively undercuts the definition of marriage itself. "This amendment stinks," Rep. James H. Fagan told *The New York Times*. "But at least it gives the people a chance to vote for something. It's a lousy amendment."

Gov. Mitt Romney agreed with Fagan and was reported by lawmakers to have told them, "It was the only one on the table and therefore should be supported." Rep. Viriato Manuel deMacedo accused his fellow legislators of duplicity in claiming to defend marriage while establishing civil unions. "Is that honest? You know it's not."...

The Massachusetts proposal points to the quandary faced by cultural conservatives who are determined to defend marriage as a union of a man and a woman. In state after state, supporters of homosexual "marriage" have used

the concept of civil unions to force conservatives to face a difficult choice — accept civil unions or give up hope for an amendment outlawing same-sex "marriage."

As Mohler points out "...get ready for the future — it's likely to include a whole series of similar battles [to the one in Massachusetts]." He reports that, according to a recent Gallup poll, 54 percent of those polled favored civil unions, a significant increase in just a few months time. A similar battle is being waged in Kentucky, apparently with similar results to Massachusetts. And this in a state that passed a "Defense of Marriage Act" just a few years ago.

You know the phrase, "The handwriting is on the wall!" There are not many Daniels out there these days, just a lot of Pontius Pilates and Belshazzers. And so the perverse more and more rule the land. 

*Marking the Bulwarks of Zion*

*Prof. Herman Hanko*

## The Marrow Men (4)

### Introduction

**T**he doctrinal issues in the Marrow Controversy are still issues in the church today. They revolved around the question of the preaching of the gospel and the extent of the atonement of Christ. The Marrow Men wanted an offer of the gospel to all upon condition of faith and based

on a universal atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Marrow Men were Arminian, and they corrupted the gospel of grace.

The concern of the Marrow Men was rooted in what they perceived as being an insufficient interest in the salvation of souls on the part of many within the church. They detected a false sense of security in church members, and a certain spiritual carelessness, which indicated that many, even though members in good standing, were unconverted.

There may have been something to this. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland was the national church, and many within it

were indeed unconverted, while worldliness was rampant. This is an inevitable consequence of a national church.

It was concern for these unconverted that drove the Marrow Men. They wanted a gospel that would press home as strongly as possible the demands of the gospel and leave people without an excuse to avoid what the gospel required. Briefly, this position was that the gospel was an offer.

### An Implied View of Preaching

In making the gospel a well-meant offer, the Marrow Men were basing their view on a particular view of preaching. And

---

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

*The preceding article in this series can be found in the April 15, 2004 issue, page 329.*



this view of preaching was in turn rooted in a particular view of the church.

This view of the church was, of course, that of a national church. In a national church all the citizens of the nation belonged technically to the church, and the church was responsible for the spiritual welfare of the entire populace. This is still the position of Rome, and the pope to this day claims that he is the spiritual father of everyone on earth. In a national church, the government promoted this one denomination as the one to whom all the citizens ought to belong, and everyone was as a rule baptized and married in and by the church, and was buried out of the church in a church graveyard.

But the question was more difficult. It was apparent that many, if not most, in the church were unconverted. And the Marrow Men, correctly, insisted that not mere membership in the church would guarantee salvation, but that conversion was necessary for a man to be saved. Conversion was the one point that ministers were called to press home on people. This was their concern.

However, even apart from the idea of a national church, an idea the Marrow Men were willing to give up if necessary, they did not consider the church as the gathering of God's covenant people, but thought of it in terms of people who, for the most part, were unconverted.

This conception of matters within the church of Scotland had an effect on the preaching of the gospel. We already noticed that the Marrow Men considered the preaching as giving men a warrant to believe and to close with Christ. But there were other ideas that we need now to notice.

The Marrow Men held to a view of the law and the gospel that separated the two. The preaching of the law with its demands of obedience had as its purpose to bring people under the conviction of sin.

The preaching of the gospel had as its purpose to show men the way of salvation.

This distinction led to other errors in the preaching. The Marrow Men (and their successors) held to the notion that the preaching of the law could be in the service of the gospel, because the effect of preaching the law was a conviction of sin necessary to see Christ as the way of salvation. The difficulty was that this conviction of sin could be present in the unconverted, that is, in the unregenerated. Some even spoke of a grace that came to all who heard the gospel, which grace prepared them for the gospel by convicting them of sin.

Such people could be so under the conviction of sin that they bewailed their sins, cried out in anguish over them, longed to escape from the chains of sin, and dreaded with a great dread the horrors of hell that were about to come upon them. But such conviction of sin did not guarantee that they would "close with Christ." They might be under such conviction for a long time, only, finally, to reject Christ and turn away from the Christ presented to them in the gospel.

These people were called "seekers," and the effect of the preaching of the law was a preparatory work to the preaching of the gospel. To these people the gospel offer had to be presented. It had to be pressed on them in the anguish of their sin by gentle entreaties, earnest pleas, and a passion for souls, which urged the sinner to "close with Christ" and find his escape in the arms of the Savior. To make these pleas and entreaties as forceful as possible, the sinner had to be told that he had a "warrant" of salvation, that God loved him, that Christ was dead for him, and that there was absolutely no obstacle to his clinging in trust to Christ.

Hence the well-meant offer of the gospel.

## The Wrong of It

The wrong of such a view was, first of all, the wrong idea of the church that the Marrow Men had, and, in close connection with this, the wrong idea of the church as the covenant people of God. We cannot go into that in detail, for that would carry us far away from the purpose of these articles. But it is of sufficient importance to clarify what the Reformed view of the church as God's covenant people is.

The church of Christ as manifested on this earth is the gathering of believers and their seed. That means that the church is the assembly of the covenant people of God. This church is not composed of some believing adults while the majority, and especially the young people and children, are unconverted. The church is the gathering of believers and their seed, who are also children of the covenant. God saves believers and their seed. He saves the seed of believers as children — indeed, as infants. The assembly of the church is the gathering of the converted people of God. The children of believers are, therefore, born into the church. They do not become members by joining the church or by baptism. They are born into the church by virtue of God's covenant.

This does not mean that everyone in the congregation is converted. Unbelievers come into the church, though under false pretenses. Not all the children of believers are elect, and God saves only the elect. But the church, organically considered, is the gathering of elect believers, be they adults or young people or children. That is the truth of God's covenant.

The minister must address the congregation as a gathering of elect believers. He is not to start the service with an address such as "Esteemed audience," or "Honorable listeners." He is to address them as "Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ." That address em-



braces adults, young people, and children. They are the beloved people of God, His covenant people.

This does not mean that the minister knows who are elect. That is known to God alone. But it does not alter the fact that the preacher addresses the congregation as God's church, God's beloved, Christ's body, the number of the redeemed. He does this even as a farmer speaks of his wheat field as a field of grain — even though it may have many weeds in it. A farmer speaks of his field from the viewpoint of his purpose in doing all the work the crop requires. God speaks of His church from the viewpoint of His purpose in establishing it.

This does not mean that the minister never comes with the demands of the Scriptures that those in the audience be converted. Those who are the wicked in the congregation must be confronted with the command to repent of sin and turn to Christ. But more importantly, God's people must hear the call to conversion all the time. Is that because they are unbelievers, unconverted? No. But God's people must be called to be converted every day anew, for conversion means to turn from sin, flee to Christ, and walk in obedience before God. This God's people must do in all their life.

Does this mean that the minister need never warn the congregation of the severe judgment of God upon the unrepentant? No. God uses warnings too to summon His people from their sinful ways and repent of their sins.

Nor does this mean that no admonitions of the gospel need be preached, because the congregation is composed of elect. God's people are sinful saints and yet walk in every sin that arises in their sinful flesh. The admonitions of the gospel summon the ungodly to repentance in order that they may be without excuse, and call the people of God to become what God has

made them — His own covenant people.

Does preaching in the congregation mean that the minister is cold and indifferent towards the struggling saints — with a coldness that finds no room for entreaties and earnest pleas rooted in his desire to see them walk in faithfulness? He cannot be a shepherd if this is the case. He loves his sheep and earnestly seeks their welfare in all his ministry.

Does his preaching ignore the law? No, he preaches the law. He does so knowing that by the law is the knowledge of sin. But that same law is a rule of gratitude by the keeping of which the believer shows his thankfulness to God for so great a salvation as he has received. The law is gospel. If anyone doubts it, let him read Psalm 19 and Psalm 119. Let him hear the words with which the law begins: "I am the Lord *thy* God, which hath *brought thee* out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." God comes with His law to His people whom He has saved.

The minister may not attempt to devise ways and means to make the gospel more effective. If he does he is an unfaithful shepherd. He preaches in the humble awareness that all the fruit of the gospel belongs to God, for only God can make the gospel the power unto salvation that Paul claims it is (Rom. 1:16). God will use the foolishness of preaching to save His elect. But He will also use it to harden the impenitent and leave them without excuse.

The minister must not preach in the congregation as if he is on a mission field, for he most emphatically is not. If he wants to preach to the unconverted, then let him pray God to send him to a foreign field where the gospel has never been preached. Even there, however, he preaches not an offer of the gospel rooted in a universal atonement and expressing God's love for all, but the sovereign grace

of God in salvation and the promise of eternal life to all who believe. And that preaching is accompanied with the command to turn from sin and flee to Christ in whom alone is found salvation, and the warning of judgment upon all those who continue in their sins.

The Marrow Men had a wrong conception of these things because they had no correct view of God's covenant and of God's church as the gathering of God's covenant people. Those who make of the preaching a well-meant offer have followed in the erroneous paths marked out by the Marrow Men.

## Conclusion

While the Marrow Controversy was going on in Scotland, the *Nadere Reformatie* (Further Reformation) was going on in the Netherlands. This movement was a protest against the evils in the State Church, also a national church, and an effort on the part of the godly to find food for their souls. Many, in addition to attending what were increasingly apostate churches, met with like-minded saints in homes where the Scriptures were read and discussed and prayers were made to God. To make such edification greater, and because there were few if any faithful shepherds, these troubled saints read from other writers who could build them up in the faith. Because the ties between Scotland and the Netherlands were so close, many of these writers were of the Marrow Men. I myself remember seeing in my father's library Dutch translations of Thomas Boston and Ebenezer Erskine. A chronicler of the *Nadere Reformatie* wrote: "The *Nadere Reformatie* is in fact the Dutch counterpart to English Puritanism.... The link between these movements is strong, historically and especially theologically."

It is this close association that brought the well-meant offer of the gospel into the stream of Dutch theology. ❀



# Islam (1)

## A Little History: Jihad Without End

*"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

### "Death to the Great Satan!"

Strange isn't it, that the "Christian" West should be identified by Islam as the "Great Satan"? However, there may be more truth than fiction to that Islamic judgment of the West. When one considers its moral decline in the last half-century, the West appears to have all the characteristics of Satan's playground. Gene Edward Veith substantiates this:

The radical Islamic hatred of the West is motivated partly by their revulsion at the moral decadence of the West. The cultural influence of America overseas is no longer democratic ideals, political freedom, and economic prosperity as it was formerly, but rather sexual permissiveness, pornographic entertainment, legalized abortion, and an anti-cultural hedonism.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, Paul Marshall, general editor of the first global report on religious persecution, claims, "They (Muslims, c.k.) attack the West because it's Christian. They don't attack Christians because they're in the West."<sup>2</sup>

Charles Colson agrees. He believes we are in the throes of a struggle of worldviews between extreme Islam and the Christian West. He describes this clash as follows:

Islam's worldview sees God as remote, utterly transcendent. Christians worship a God who became flesh and intimately knowable and personal through the incarnation. Muslims believe that humans are born good but are corrupted by non-Islamic cultures. Christians believe we are fallen and thus in need of salvation.

This leads to profound differences. For Islamists, the best hope of salvation is to eliminate non-Muslim influences and to advance Islam (by force if necessary, for which there are heavenly rewards, as the terrorists believed). The Muslim faces an uncertain outcome on Judgment Day based on his works. Christians are confident of a full pardon because of Christ's work.

Because they do not believe in original sin, fundamentalist Muslim leaders are utopian; they seek the perfect society by strictly enforcing Islamic law. But this utopian worldview has already brought tyranny and disaster, just as communist utopianism led to the tragic

deaths of tens of millions in the former Soviet Union.

While Islamists want to enforce a theocracy, most Christians live peaceably with competing value systems. Christians believe in winning people through love, not conquest. Although most Muslims are peace-loving, the Qur'an does speak of jihads.<sup>3</sup>

So just how is modern-day Issachar to understand Islam? Is it peaceful or war-like? Why does Islam hate the West? Is it because the West is Christian, or because the West is decadent? In a series of articles we will attempt, the Lord willing, to answer these questions and at the same time become a little better acquainted with the Islamic worldview, its impact on the West, and its God-ordained role in the twenty-first century. First, a little history.

### Beginnings

The beginnings of Islam have everything to do with Muhammad. The following brief history of his life will lay the foundation for understanding the Islamic worldview that began a mere 1,400 years ago

1. Gene Edward Veith, "Praise the Lord, pass the ammo," *World* 25 October, 2003:10.

2. Matt VandeBunte, "Analyst links 9/11 to religious war," *The Grand Rapids Press* 4 October, 2003:B2.

3. Charles Colson, "Drawing the Battle Lines," *Christianity Today* 7 January, 2002:80.

---

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



with a single person and rapidly expanded to its present number of over one billion adherents:

Muhammad was born in Mecca about 570 A. D., into the prominent Quaraysh tribe. Muhammad was orphaned at six. His grandfather, formerly the custodian of the Kaaba (a pagan holy shrine, c.k.) and one-time head of the Meccan commonwealth, took charge of his upbringing. When the grandfather died, his uncle was ... entrusted with Muhammad's care.

In his youth he worked as a shepherd, and later rode with the camel caravans that carried frankincense and silk through Mecca to Syria. These travels undoubtedly brought Muhammad into contact with the Jewish and Christian beliefs of the tribes with whom he traded. (This explains some of the similarities between Islam and Judaism and Christianity, c.k.) Although uneducated, he gained respect as a businessman. At the age of 25, he married Khadija, a wealthy widow fifteen years older than he. This marriage gave him prestige and respect in Mecca, provided opportunities for participation in the civil councils, and leisure for contemplation. He frequently climbed to a small cave among the rocks of Mount Hira, just north of Mecca, to spend days in fasting and meditation.

In 610, at the age of forty, Muhammad received the first of many visions on Mount Hara. The vision reputedly called Muhammad to be a prophet of the one true God, known in Arabic as Allah, a word closely related to the Hebrew word Elohim used for God in the Old Testament. The first declaration of his call was to his wife who became his first convert. He soon gathered a small but loyal group of followers to whom he recited the messages received in later visions. (These messages would be collected after Muhammad's death and used to formulate the Qur'an, c.k.)

Muhammad's preaching began to undermine Mecca's posi-

tion as the center for an annual pilgrimage held in conjunction with a profitable trade fair. By condemning their deities, he offended not only the consciences of the Meccan leaders, but also their pocketbooks. The movement he was leading aroused strong persecution; yet, Muhammad persistently challenged the moral and social values governing Mecca under the powerful leadership of the Qurayshite oligarchy.

In the year 622, Muhammad and a trusted group of followers slipped away from Mecca and fled to the city of Medina. This flight, or Hegira, marks the year one of the Muslim era. Muslim years are counted A.H., or After the Hegira.

At Medina, as his movement grew rapidly, he became not only the spiritual leader, but also a legislator and a military leader. In Medina there were five tribes, two Arab and three Jewish. Muhammad united these tribes into a community of followers. (It is interesting to note that, early on, Muhammad was willing to tolerate the Jews and even seek their help to establish political power, c.k.) He continued to have a deep resentment toward the people of Mecca and used his position of power in Medina to raid the trade caravans heading to and from Mecca. Finally in 630, Muhammad led a force of 10,000 in taking control of Mecca.

Once in Mecca, Muhammad destroyed the idols of the Kaaba, and the pagan shrine of the Arabs. He retained the Black Stone as the most sacred relic of Islam and established the renewed Kaaba as the center of Islamic worship. (According to Muslim tradition, the Kaaba was originally built by Abraham and Ishmael, and the Black Stone was given to Abraham by the angel Gabriel, c.k.) With the destruction of the idols Muhammad destroyed the symbol of wealth and power of pagan Arabia. He established Islam as the sole religion of Mecca and himself as its only prophet. By the following year, 631, Islam had spread throughout Arabia and Muhammad was its undisputed leader.

By the time of his death in

632, Muhammad had seen the proclamation of his message spread from his immediate family through all the Arabian peninsula. Pagan idols had been destroyed and replaced with a belief in a single God. A land that had been torn by intertribal warfare was united by ties that made every Arab a brother in submission to the one God and His prophet Muhammad. Muhammad has rightly been judged the most influential Arab, and second to Jesus Christ as the most influential person in the history of the world.<sup>4</sup>

Much is made today of Muhammad's initial tolerance of the "People of the Book" (Jews, Christians, and Muslims). However, once he gained power in Mecca and Medina, this changed. The three tribes of Jews, who had assisted Muhammad in establishing a power base in Medina, would be the first to *feel* this change. Initially some individual Jews were murdered, then two of the tribes were forced to leave while the third tribe was slaughtered. "Muhammad offered the men conversion to Islam as an alternative to death; upon their refusal, up to 900 were decapitated at the ditch, in front of their women and children."<sup>5</sup> Jihad (holy war) had begun! No fewer than 82 battles and skirmishes were fought in the name of Allah during the lifetime of Muhammad. Later the Qur'an would record in word what he had practiced in deed: "O ye who believe! Fight the Unbelievers who gird you about, and let them find firmness in you: and know that Allah is with those who fear Him" (Surah [chapter] 9 verse 123).

### Expansion

During the three decades following the death of Muhammad, there was considerable expansion of Islam at the expense of the Eastern Christian Empire. Christianity would lose some of its great cen-

ters of influence such as Jerusalem and Damascus. These losses and other Islamic conquests from the 600s to the 1200s would set the stage for a military response from Christendom.

Both Eastern and Western Christianity were threatened by the advancing armies of Islam. Not only had the Eastern Church lost Jerusalem, Damascus, and Egypt, on several occasions Islamic dynasties even threatened Constantinople itself, the loss of which would expose all of Europe to Islamic hordes. In the West the situation was, if anything, even worse. After rapidly advancing west across North Africa, by the early 700s they had even crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, and in the year 719 all of the Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal) was under Islamic control. Not even the Pyrenees Mountains hindered their advance; and it looked as if France would be Islam's next victim. However, in Charles Martel the West would find a deliverer. As a result of his great victory at Tours in central France in 732, Europe in the providence of God would be preserved for Western Christianity.

Muslim armies were never to reach this point again. But their seeming invincibility resulting from decades of success had shattered the confidence of both Western and Eastern Christians. As a result, the Byzantines adopted essentially defensive strategies rather than engaging in frequent offensive campaigns, as was the case with the Muslim forces. These ongoing conflicts had sown destructive seeds, ensuring that further conflict was to come.<sup>6</sup>

During these years of Islamic conquest, non-Muslims living in

Muslim-conquered lands would be on the receiving end of various forms of discrimination. Sometimes this would mean something as silly as requiring Jewish and Christian women to wear two shoes of different colors, at other times it might require the payment of the jizya poll tax, which reduced some Jewish and Christian communities to extreme poverty. No matter the burden, and sometimes this could even mean forms of physical persecution, always the pattern of jihad set by Mohammad as expressed in Qur'anic verses such as Surah 9:29 was followed:

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day,  
Nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger;  
Nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth,  
From among the People of the Book,  
Until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission,  
And feel themselves subdued.

Although many Islamic sympathizers today like to present Islam as a religion of tolerance, the Qur'an and history record a different picture. This can be seen from the three options that Muslim

Although many Islamic sympathizers today like to present Islam as a religion of tolerance, the Qur'an and history record a different picture.

armies gave their opponents before battle: convert to Islam, agree to accept Islamic law and dominion, or be killed. Further, "It was accepted practice that Muslims had a right to the property of non-Muslims, and that


Muslims could kidnap the wives of unbelievers and make them concubines. Enslaving Jews and Christians was considered a merciful alternative to execution."<sup>7</sup>

If this were not reason enough for a Christian reaction, the rise of the Saljuq (sometimes spelled

Seljuk) Turks in the middle of the eleventh century would insure a Christian response. The Saljuq migration across Central Asia brought them into conflict with many Christian communities. The massacre of the Christian population of Armenia is a case in point. But this was not all. The Saljuqs trudged on and took control of Jerusalem from their fellow Muslims. Their occupation of the Holy Land compromised the safety of pious, Christian pilgrims desiring to make pilgrimages there in response to Rome's teachings of works righteousness. The two Peters (Riddell & Cotterell) conclude:

Thus Eastern Christianity, after centuries of setbacks and losses, had seen virtually all its territorial domains in Asia and the Middle east lost to successive Islamic empires: the Umayyads, the Abbasids, and the Seljuqs. Above all, we need to remind ourselves that this was the age of Muslim imperialism. Though empires came and went, from the perspective of Christian Europe the Muslim empires had been the principal factor in the erosion of vast domains that had previously belonged to Christendom. A Christian counter-reaction was inevitable.<sup>8</sup>

Muhammad's jihad was about to meet its match!

... to be continued. 

4. Daniel Schmeling, "The Foundation of Islam, *Christian News* 15 October, 2001:16.

5. Serge Trifkovic, *The Sword of the Prophet* (Boston, MA: Regina Orthodox Press, Inc., 2002) 44.

6. Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell, *Islam in Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003) 86.

7. Brett M. Decker, "Islam: A Religion of Conquest," *Human Events* 22 September, 2003:22.

8. Riddell & Cotterell 94.



# Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (9)

## The Second Prophecy (cont.)

3. *Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?*

**G**od is reminding the people in this verse of the poverty of the temple they were building. He was doing that because Christ was coming soon. His coming was only a little while away, less than 500 years away. To help these Old Testament believers look for His coming, God began to take away the pictures and types, in some cases by removing them altogether, as with the ark, and in other cases by taking away their glory and beauty, as with the temple building. That was necessary because the pictures and types were very beautiful and the Jews sometimes became enamored of them. At the time of Jesus' death, for example, they were so enamored of the types and shadows that they could eat the Passover lamb the night before Jesus was crucified and never recognize Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. They continued to bring their sacrifices without seeing that they pointed to the sacrifice of Christ. They continued to worship in the temple without seeing that He was the true temple.

Perhaps God is doing the same today. Perhaps He is taking away whatever external glory the New Testament church once had, making her smaller and more insignificant in the world in order to prepare us for the second coming of Christ. That would not be at all surprising in light of the fact that this prophecy speaks of the lesser glory of God's house in the latter days. It would seem on the basis of this prophecy that we have no reason to expect that in the last days the church will become the dominant force in human society, controlling politics, education, and the other areas of human life. Before Christ comes again, the New Testament church will be reduced to nothing. Jesus Himself prophesies that when He asks: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

The wonderful thing is, though, that when the glory of the church is reduced to nothing, as it shall be in the latter days that are coming, then we have every reason to hope that Christ will soon appear. As Jesus says: "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke. 21:28).

The lesser glory of God's house in these latter days, though no excuse for sloth and indifference, is a sign that our final redemption is near.

4. *Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work:*

*for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts:*

5. *According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.*

In these verses God is promising His people that He will reveal His presence and glory in the temple they were building, even though the building itself did not compare to the temple of Solomon. That promise is bound up in the words "I am with you," words that are at the heart of God's covenant with His people, the covenant that was symbolized and typically realized in the Old Testament temple.

God's covenant is, above all, a relationship between God and His people that flows from and is part of the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. That relationship is consistently summarized in Scripture by the promise, "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people," words that become a kind of formula for the covenant in Scripture. That promise comes in various forms, among them the promise of God to be with His people or to dwell among them.

That relationship between God and His people was symbolized by the temple as the house of God. It was in that house, through the ministry of the priests as mediators, that God lived with and was with His people, revealing Himself as their Father and taking them under His fatherly care and counting them as His children.

That God has this covenant in mind is clear from the triple use of the name Jehovah in verse 4. That

*Rev. Hanko is pastor in the Protestant Reformed Church of Lynden, Washington.*

*The preceding article in this series can be found in the March 15, 2004 issue, page 273.*



name is preeminently His covenant name, for it speaks of His unchangeable faithfulness to His people. It was also the name that He first revealed when He brought them out of Egypt, an event referred to here and an event that proved that He was their God and they His people. That He in one case calls Himself the Lord of hosts does not change this, but simply reminds them that, as always, He rules all things — they are His hosts — for their sakes.

The reference to God's covenant is further confirmed by the fact that God says literally here that He "cut" His word with His people when they came out of Egypt, language that is ordinarily used of the covenant in the Scriptures. The Hebrew for making a covenant is almost always, literally, "cutting" a covenant, in reference to the solemn ceremony of cutting animals in pieces as part of covenant making.

God, in fact, speaks of His covenant in verse 5, when He describes the promise of Exodus 29:45, 46 as a word He had "covenanted" with them. That promise reads:

And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.

Not only does that promise include all the elements of the covenant, God promising to be the God of His people and to dwell among them, but it was given in connection with the setting up of the tabernacle and the promise of God that He would meet with the children of Israel there and speak with them (Ex. 29:42-44). That promise was all that the people of Judah needed as an answer to their discouragement. They had to understand, and did understand if they were at all spiritually minded, that the size and glory of the building they were working on were of

little account. What mattered was God's presence.

That promise, even today, remains the hope and blessedness of the church. If God is not present in the church, then nothing else matters — not the number of members, not the many programs and ministries that are carried on in the church, not the approval of the membership, not the fact that the church is growing. If God is not present, then the worship of the church is a sham, its preaching in vain, membership in it of no more account than membership in any other worldly organization. Nothing matters so much as the presence of God, the covenant God of His people.

That presence of God is proved in the New Testament church by the pure preaching of the gospel, biblical worship and sacraments, and the carrying out of Christian discipline, what are sometimes called the marks of the true church. Really, though, they are not marks of the church, but of God's presence in the church through Jesus Christ. That is the reason, too, why membership in the visible church is so important. It is a matter not just of loyalty to one or another group of Christians, but a matter of seeking God and finding God Himself and of following Christ.

That promise is not only the promise of Christ, of which we will have much more to say in connection with the following verses, but is also a promise of the Spirit. Just as it is only through Christ that God is the God of His people and dwells with them, so is it only by the Holy Spirit that the promise is realized. When God, therefore, speaks of His Spirit in verse 5, He is speaking of the Holy Spirit as the one through whom and by whom He dwells in His church and of the coming of the Spirit to the

New Testament church at the time of Christ's ascension into heaven.

That does not mean, of course, that the Spirit was not present in the church of the Old Testament. God makes it clear here that His Spirit always was and always would be among them. He would "remain" among them. Nevertheless, it is only in the New Testament, through the outpouring of the Spirit as the Spirit of the risen Christ, the one who testifies of Christ crucified and risen, that the promise is fully realized.

The promise of the Spirit here brings us closer to the New Testament, however, for in the New Testament it is through the Spirit and not through types and shadows that God dwells among His people. The Word of God reminds us of this in Ephesians

2:22, where the church is described as an habitation of God through the Spirit. Now in Haggai's time, after the return, the types and shadows through which God was present with His people begin to vanish and He promises to dwell among them by His Spirit, just as in the New Testament.

That promise of the Spirit parallels the promise of Jesus at the last Passover. The presence of the Spirit was so important, He said then, that it was expedient for Him to go away so that the Spirit might come (John. 16:7). The Spirit, after all, is the one who works in our hearts, giving us what Christ earned for us on the cross and applying to us the words that He speaks to us. It is by the Spirit that our hearts are stirred up and we fear God. It is by the Spirit that we obey God's commands, and by the same Spirit that we labor in God's house as builders.

So God tells Judah not to fear enemies or other discouragements,

*If God is not present, then the worship of the church is a sham, its preaching in vain, membership in it of no more account than membership in any other worldly organization.*



but rather to be strong — strong in faith — and to continue with the work He had given them to do. We must understand, though, that God does not just say this, but by this word He gives them the hope and faith and strength they needed. His word is always His own power unto salvation and gives what it requires. His word is for us also.


6. *For thus saith the Lord of hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;*  
7. *And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.*

This passage is the key to the whole prophecy, not only because it speaks of Christ, but because it reveals the future history of God's house all the way to the end of the world, and declares that through

Christ that house will become ever more glorious until its glory entirely eclipses the glory of Solomon's temple in the new heavens and earth. There are two main parts to the passage, the prophecy concerning the shaking of all things, which is quoted in Hebrews 12:25-29, and the prophecy concerning the coming of the Desire of all nations. These two are related, the coming of the Desire of all nations being the cause of the shaking of all things, and the shaking of all things not only accompanying the coming of the Desire of all nations, but being the means by which God's house receives its greater glory in the latter days.

This shaking refers not only to earthquakes, including the great earthquake that will destroy this present creation, but also to political and social disturbances that

God uses to shake the nations and the hearts of men. The destruction of Gog in Ezekiel 38:14-23 is described as a shaking, as is the destruction of Egypt in Psalm 68:7ff. Isaiah, too, describes the overthrow of Babylon and the return of Israel to Canaan as a shaking (Is. 13:1-22).

Once again God speaks as the Lord of hosts, His principal name in the books of Haggai and Zechariah. The word "hosts" in this name refers to all created things (Dan. 4:35) in heaven and on earth, and to the fact that they are all God's great army, which serves Him willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or unknowingly, and through which He accomplishes His own sovereign purpose. In this case those "hosts" include the heavens, the earth, the sea, the dry land, and the nations, as well as the wealth of the creation. 

*When Thou Sittest In Thine House*

*Abraham Kuyper*

## *On the Day of His Birth*

### **Our Birthdays**

**O**f only two "birthdays" Holy Scripture makes mention. In Genesis of a birthday festival prepared in honor of Pharaoh, and in the Gospels of the wild festal day in Herod's palace, so gruesomely stained with the blood of the Baptist.

And when alongside of this memory of what the Pharaohs and

Herods celebrated on their birthday, you put the dreadful words wherewith first a Job, and presently a Jeremiah, curse the day "on which they were born," can you ignore how, from this striking combination, there goes out a voice of seriousness and of warning with respect to our birthdays?

In a sumptuously celebrated birthday there lurks a danger that is not so visionary, for our hearts are so open to temptation.

We then are feasted; in the estimation of everyone, the home-life and the life of the circle of our friends moves itself all that day long around us as a center; we do not hide ourselves, but naturally

stand in the foreground; our friends approach us with words of congratulations, even with verses in rhyme; the post brings good wishes from far and near; he who never receives a telegram, receives one on that day; everything is astir in our behalf; for us are those flowers; for us all this commotion; and also the presents, which we exhibit with a certain pride, enrich our treasure.

And where that day of our personal glory so comes and goes, would you think that that day could pass without having the heart throb with a somewhat higher tension, and making us feel somewhat more strongly than at

---

*Reprinted from When Thou Sittest In Thine House, by Abraham Kuyper, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.*



other times our already so sensitive *self*?

Prudence in early training sounded a warning therefore already from of old against too elaborate a keeping of the birthdays of our dear little ones.

Especially with those little ones, who do not yet understand their birth, who cannot yet make their only just beginning lives a subject of thought, and have not yet undergone the impression of God's faithful Father-care, a too sumptuously celebrated birthday rarely did anything else than hurt the tender flower of simplicity and waken vain sensations in the still thoughtless heart.



If on the anniversary of our birth, things were right with us, together with warm thankfulness and deep shamefacedness, little else than quiet seriousness should possess our soul.

In our *past*, from the hour of our birth, that forces itself upon our memory: it is our *present* that demands candid and thoughtful valuation of our condition, as well before God as in the world; and questions with respect to the future, call for serious resolution.

On a day of this sort, if it shall be well spent, our whole existence should to our self-perception concentrate itself as in one point of time.

But measure, after this not too high a claim, what most birthdays come to, and are you not disappointed?

Think of the birthdays of others, which you have helped celebrate in the domestic circle or in the circle of your friends. Think of your own birthdays. Ask yourself how many years you are of age. By this you will know how often you yourself have left such a day behind you. And then ask yourself what fruits these high days in your life, taken as a whole, have brought with respect to the forming of your character, to the direc-

tion and course of your life, to the enrichment of your soul, and to the hidden walk with God.

And confess, is there then not all too much remembrance of busy, excited days, which scarcely left you any time for turning in upon yourself?

Remembrances of almost nervous excitement, of overwrought expression of face, of sumptuous feasting, and of a weary retiring, to pay the following day the toll of jaded and dull feeling to the over stimulation of the festal day?



With followers of the Lord this self-complacency and high tension of spirits undoubtedly undergoes some slight moderation.

He who lives by the Word and links the course of days with his morning and evening prayer will also on the day that commemorates his birth seek that Word, and find no rest until he has finished the soliloquy on his knees before the face of his God.

He who is so rich that, while he himself seeks after God, lives in a family that is interested in the same high ideal, will in the midst of festal joy undergo the hallowing grace, that at the morning meal and at the banquet the Word comes to lift up the soul, and in prayer and praise honor is brought unto God.

Oh, by the grace of God there is in a family that honors God's Testimony still so strong a preponderance to put bit and bridle on what inclines to excess.

But though we readily acknowledge this, and give thanks for it, should not in our Christian families, more than in the circles of the world, the self-accusation be overheard, that in so many a day of birth-commemoration by far the

greater part was stolen from God and set apart for adulation of our own self?

Have you never known the painful struggle, when on such a day, at the hearing of the Word, the soul *would* listen, but *could* not, and *tried* to pray, but was *distracted* by reason of the fullness of heart and head of all sorts of things that diverted and overstrained to the point of confusion?

Or, since the other side of this medal is not lacking, did you not observe how, on such a day that was anticipated with so much interest, disappointment made the heart shrink, and in bitterness strained the eye, when you saw

how little notice was taken of you, and you were nettled that less was done for you than for another, whom you counted on a line with yourself, yea, when even the birthday gift pained you, when it showed how the question of what

would conventionally do had far more governed choice and purchase, than that other, how you might be made glad?



What constitutes joy in the home, at the return of a birthday?

Is it the gladness of heart that we possess one another, and still possess, and in this possession are so aboundingly rich? Or rather sometimes that a day of relaxation dawned, an uncommon day, which brings a change in the routine of life, a day on which something more than on other days comes to all the members of the family to be enjoyed?

Who then has an open eye to the reality that it sees time and again, and handles as with hands, that the feeling of richness in the possession of one another in, oh, so many families has scarcely any

*If on the anniversary  
of our birth,  
things were right with us,  
together with  
warm thankfulness and  
deep shamefacedness,  
little else than  
quiet seriousness  
should possess our soul.*



part, and how, when in the morning congratulations and good wishes have been extended, the heart and head of all goes out almost exclusively to the things that have been planned?

Sometimes even such days of splendid glory end in sin. When more money was wasted than circumstances justified. Lightsomeness gave the keynote to conversation and at the festal board. And at that board itself wantonness overcame reason.

Though in Christian families, thank God, instances of this sort are extremely rare, that reformation with respect to birthday celebrations ought to be seriously taken in hand by many a family may be denied by him who has no pleasure in seriousness, but to this all who fear God will heartily consent.



Above all, on such a day our place is *at the altar*, and on that altar of worship more than on other days *love and praise* must be mingled as an offering unto God.

For does not the commemoration of our birth point back directly to that birth itself, and therewith to Him upon whom our mother in her travail cast us, and who by His wondrous counsel and wondrous power of creation formed us and called us into being, after having thought of us already from eternity, before He opened our eye to the light of day?

The days and years that since went by, are they not the exhibition of the goodnesses of our God, who where so many thousands

were cut off early, spared us, permitted us to live, and all the days of our life fed and watered, clothed and covered, protected and cherished us in His love?

Should not on such a day the remembrance of all this sound as with one mighty voice in the ear of our soul, as the call of our God, wherewith He never ceases to entice and draw us into His blessed fellowship?

Must not our existence and our life, our character, our strength of life, our calling in the service of the Lord, the question whether your foot stands in the gate of the heavenly Jerusalem, be thought upon on such a day with doubling of seriousness?

Yea, shall not he who lives not miles apart from his heart, but close by his soul, on such a day of deep seriousness also think of his sins? In face of the question what God was to him, shall he not relive what he has been to His God? And shall self-ashamedness, which thereby comes upon the heart on the day that reminds us of having been born in sin, not drive us to the Fountain that has been opened to the house of Israel for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1)?



Not that therefore this day of gladness must be turned into a day of sombernesses. What is enjoyable in life, God gives us to enjoy. And the abundant joy of our birthdays is a means in God's hand to strengthen the tie of blood and make a silver lining to glisten around our home-life.

Also here the *use* alone must be sanctified, that the *abuse*, which so readily enters, may be resisted.

In better days one did well, on such a day, to remember the poor or to contribute means for the maintenance of the holy cause of our God.

Sometimes even one's own joy inspired him to heighten joy in poorer families, where frequently the birthday was devoid of all extra delight.

Here, too, is inequality, which may not be susceptible to radical improvement, but from which love should inspire us to remove the all too sharp antithesis.


In many ways, what is spent and wasted in higher circles on birthdays is *superfluous*, while, on the other hand, in lower circles such days frequently pass *without joy*.

So it is human sympathy when they who confess Jesus on their own birthdays refrain from superfluity, and take pleasure to pour light upon this day of commemoration in the circles of our poorer brothers and sisters.

Much is done for children of the poor at Christmas, and in this we rejoice. Something is done for them when they are sick, and that is splendid. But he who knows the children of our poor at close range, may well plan on their birthdays to surprise them.

They do not ask for much.

The hand of a child is soon filled.

And especially when that childhood is poor, and is with oh so little made rich. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Minister Activities

**O**n Sunday morning, March 28, the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI

*Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*

extended a call to Rev. A. Brummel, pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC, to become their next pastor.

That same Sunday morning, the congregation of the Hudsonville, MI PRC extended a call to

Rev. G. Eriks to come over and help them as their next pastor.

The Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada extended a call to Rev. C. Haak to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. R. VanOverloop, pastor of



the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, has accepted the call he received to become the next under-shepherd of the Byron Center, MI PRC.

### Congregation Activities

**S**tudents arriving for Monday afternoon catechism classes at the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI on March 22 discovered that their meeting place, a house north of their church, which Southeast purchased for use for catechism, evangelism, and society meetings, had been extensively vandalized. That same week two juveniles were apprehended by the police and charged with the crime. Nothing was stolen, but over \$24,000 in damage was done, and the house was rendered unusable for catechism classes and evangelism meetings until it is repaired.

Members of the congregations in and around Grand Rapids, MI were invited to attend an inspiring evening of praise to God at the spring concert of Faith Choral Society Sunday evening, March 28.

PR congregations around the Chicago, IL area were invited to attend an evening of song and fellowship at Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN, Sunday, March 21, following their evening service. The theme for the evening was, "Speak to One Another," from Ephesians 5:16. Visitors were able to participate in audience singing and enjoy a performance by the new male chorus consisting of men from the three area PR congregations.

The Men's Society of the Doon, IA PRC hosted this year's Combined Men's Society meeting on Monday, March 29, in Doon. Matthew 5:13-16 was chosen for Bible discussion, and the men of First PRC in Edgerton, MN introduced the after-recess discussion on the movie "The Passion of the Christ."

### Evangelism Activities

**T**he Evangelism Committee of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI hosted a public lecture on Friday, March 26, in their church. Rev. R. Kleyn, their pastor, spoke on "Jesus Christ in the Movies." As you might imagine, this lecture dealt with our proper response to the movie "The Passion of the Christ." Let me say personally that this was a very informative lecture. Rev. Kleyn did an outstanding job of addressing the subject from a Reformed and biblical perspective. If you are interested, recordings of the lecture are available by contacting Mr. Chuck Ensink at 616-669-2412 or [chensink@iserv.net](mailto:chensink@iserv.net).

On the morning of Saturday, March 27, the Evangelism Committee of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI canvassed their church neighborhood to invite people to their Resurrection Day services.

### School Activities

**T**he students of the Northwest Iowa PR School gave their All-School Program on Thursday, April 1. Parents, grandparents, extended family, and supporters of the school joined the students as they presented "The Gold Chain of Salvation."

Eastside Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI welcomed everyone to their All-School program at First PRC on Friday, March 26. The program was based on Eastside's theme for this school year, the "Fruit of the Spirit." The evening featured vocal and instrumental numbers, speeches, and student artwork.


### Mission Activities

**R**ev. M. Dick and Elder D. Moelker, as our churches' representatives from the Domestic Mission Committee, were scheduled to visit the PR Fellowship in Fayetteville, NC on April 2-4. The purpose of the meeting was twofold: first, to hold a conference on the Reformed faith, and secondly,

to preach on the Lord's Day. The topic of the conference was "Victory in Jesus: Victory Now and in the Future."

Rev. A. Stewart, our missionary to Northern Ireland, along with his wife, Mary, and Mr. and Mrs. Ivan Reid, members of the Covenant PR Fellowship, were in Porthcawl, South Wales on Friday, March 26 for a visit with interested saints there and to give a lecture Friday evening on the subject, "What is True Faith?"

### Young Adult's Activities

**T**he week of March 15-18, the Young Adults of the Loveland, CO PRC once again served as host society for what has become their annual Spring Retreat. This year's retreat was held at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, a perfect place for a retreat if there ever was one. This year 60-plus young adults from various of our churches gathered together for a week of fun, fellowship, and worship around a theme of "Knowing God's Will." Rev. G. Eriks, pastor at Loveland, spoke Tuesday evening on "How do you know God's will for you?" and Wednesday evening Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, spoke on "How do you live contentedly with God's will for you?" The young adults also enjoyed two discussions centered on the questions of dressing modestly, and laboring not for the meat that perisheth, or "What do you work for?" Besides the speeches and discussion groups, the young adults also found time to play a little volley ball, swim, ski, snowshoe, and climb a mountain or two. Having seen pictures from the retreat, we certainly would find it hard not to agree with everyone there that you couldn't find a better location for a spring retreat. Thanks to Loveland for continuing to provide a place for much needed fellowship for our churches' young adults. 



## Announcements

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of the First PRC of Holland expresses heartfelt Christian sympathy to Terry and Sandy Elzinga and family in the sudden passing of Sandy's brother,

**NICOLAS SANTORA.**

May their comfort be found in Psalm 23:4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Allen Elzinga, President  
Wilma Kamstra, Secretary

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hudsonville PRC express their Christian sympathy to fellow member Erv Kortering and family in the death of Erv's sister,

**LAFERN KORTERING.**

May their comfort be found in God's Word, Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Jim Jansma, Vice-all

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Doon PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to the members of the VanDenTop families in the death of their father and brother,

**ALBERT VAN DEN TOP.**

May they be comforted by God's Word in their sorrow. "In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God" (Psalm 62:7).

Rev. Richard Smit, President  
Grace VanDenTop, Secretary

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Elder Don Hoksbergen and his wife Bonnie in the death of her father,

**EVERETT VOGEL.**

Our sympathies are also extended to the Craig and Heather Hoksbergen family, Kent and Sandee Hoksbergen, and Andy and Amanda Moss in the loss of their grandfather and great-grandfather. May their comfort come from God's Word in Isaiah 40:31, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Rev. Steven Key, President  
Brian Kroese, Assistant Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Byron Center PRC express their sympathy to members Marilyn Drew, Cal Hassevoort family, Aaron Gunnink family, and Grace Buquet in the death of their husband, father, and grandfather,

**DAVID DREW.**

"The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Sid Miedema, Vice President  
Leroy DeVries, Clerk

### CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2003 appointed Hull Protestant Reformed Church, Hull, Iowa the calling church for the 2004 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2004 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 8, 2004 at 9:00 A.M. in the Hull Protestant Reformed Church, Hull, Iowa.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 7, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. R. VanOverloop, president of the 2003 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Alvin Bylsma, 3280 310th St., Hull, IA. Phone: (712) 439-2569.

Consistory of  
Hull Protestant Reformed Church  
Alvin Bylsma, Clerk.

### NOTICE!!!

Each issue of the *Standard Bearer* is available on cassette tape for those who are blind, or who for some other reason would like to be able to listen to a reading of the *SB*. This is an excellent ministry of the Evangelism Society of the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. The reader is Ken Rietema of Southeast Church. Anyone desiring this service regularly should write:

Southeast PRC  
1535 Cambridge Ave. S.E.  
Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

## Reformed Witness Hour

### Topics for May

Date	Topic	Text
May 2	"Prayer: God's Answer for Anxiety"	Philippians 4:6, 7
May 9	"A Joyful Mother of Children"	Psalm 113:9
May 16	"A Profitable Departure"	John 16:5-7
May 23	"Stay Your Mind Upon Jehovah"	Isaiah 26:3, 4
May 30	"Take Not Thy Holy Spirit From Me!"	Psalm 51:11, 12