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Knowing That My Redeemer Lives

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

Job 19: 25, 26

The first impression of most who read these verses is that the emphasis of the passage is on the hope of the resurrection of the body. While Job definitely had the resurrection of his body in mind, his attention was most emphatically on the knowledge of his redemption by his Redeemer. More than anything else Job needed to know that his Redeemer would live on after his own death, and would redeem him.

Let us consider this passage in order to learn why this was so important to Job. And to us.



Job had been in a position of great honor. The book opens with a description of the man. In the

first three verses of the book we find a description of Job's great holiness, his large family, and his great wealth. Job was held in honor by God (1:8). And we learn from various statements made throughout the book that he was held in high esteem and great respect by all who knew of him.

Then Job suddenly lost everything and became seriously ill. All his wealth was taken away in a few moments, and on the same day all ten of his children were taken from him in death. In addition, he was afflicted with dreadful boils, which covered his entire body. His disease made him a public spectacle of dishonor, an outcast of society (19:13-18). He now lived in a place where the garbage was thrown. His brothers and relatives were estranged from him. Former friends seemed to have forgotten him. Those who had been his servants treated him as a stranger, hurtfully ignoring him and treating him as if he did not even exist. Even his wife cut him off. Young children, who once looked up to him, now had the foolish courage to put into nasty and hurtful words that which everyone else thought but did not

say. He was a public embarrassment—greatly dishonored and shamed.

Everyone was convinced that these bad things happened to Job because he had grievously sinned. They did not understand God's chastisement, but believed that Job was dishonored for committing some despicable sin or sins. His "friends" no longer sought to comfort him. Instead they began to argue heatedly with him, trying to get Job to admit to his sins. Job found it very hard to be patient with them and was getting weary of all their fierce accusations. Repeatedly his three "friends" reproached him and estranged themselves from him (19:3), pointing out Job's reproach (:5).

Even worse to this man of God was the fact that Job was convinced that God Himself was against him (6-12). He cried to God for help, but it was as if he was not heard. He believed that God had overthrown him and caught him as in a net, locking him up in a small place of great darkness. His experience was that God had stripped him of his former honor and destroyed him in every possible way. He lost

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

BUSINESS OFFICE

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

Postmaster:

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

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

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

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

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

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

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

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all hope. He was convinced that God was only angry with him and was treating him as His enemy.



Dishonored by God and shamed by all men, Job now announced something he knew but did not experience. It was something that Job and we often need to know when our experience is one of shame, embarrassment, and dishonor.

Job knew that his Redeemer lives. In spite of everything and everyone being against him (including, it seemed, God), Job knew that there is a Vindicator who will argue his case and cause, and show that Job is not what he appears to be.

A “redeemer” in the old dispensation was someone who took up the cause of a relative who was in dishonor. Often the redeemer was the head of the family. The redeemer was obliged to restore honor to any family member who fell into shame and dishonor. If a family member was forced to sell his property because of debts, then the redeemer was obliged to buy back the property and return it to the family inheritance in the land of Canaan. If someone was forced to sell his children or himself into slavery because of indebtedness, then the near kinsman was obliged to pay the debt in order to save his relative from the dishonor of slavery. The redeemer was obliged to remove the dishonor from a relative who died before he bore children, by marrying the widow in order to provide an heir. The redeemer was also the avenger of blood, removing the dishonor of a murdered relative by avenging his death on the one who caused the death. So the redeemer restored the name, position, and honor of the relative whose cause he took up.

Job was convinced that such a redeemer lives for him. His redeemer will defend his cause and maintain his honor and integrity.

Even if everyone else dishonored him, Job was sure that his divine Kinsman would speak in his favor before God and man.

Job confessed that his Redeemer lives. He believed he was soon to die (17:1) and that he would not see his dishonor removed from his person and name prior to his death. But he was convinced that after his death, yea while the worms were eating his flesh, his Redeemer would be alive to avenge him and remove his dishonor. In fact, Job confesses that his Redeemer is the living One, that is, the source of life, the One who never dies. And this living Redeemer would restore life to Job—real spiritual life in an intimate relationship with God. Job believed that when his own name was covered with the shame of death, there lived One who would raise him to life and restore him to honor.

Every member of God’s family (except the Elder Brother) is in the gross dishonor of sin. In ourselves we all shamefully transgress every commandment of God and are incapable of keeping any of them. We are unprofitable servants who at best only do what is our duty to do, and even that is done only with great weakness and sin. Every single one of us knows only shame and dishonor in ourselves.

But we have a Redeemer. Isaiah spoke of God as Israel’s King and Redeemer (Is. 44:6). Zacharias and Elisabeth, along with Simeon and Anna, saw the nation of Israel to be in great dishonor and shame among the nations of the world; and, worse, they saw the cause of God to be almost lost in the midst of the shameful sins of the religious leaders of their day. They were looking for the promised Messiah to bring redemption to Israel (Luke 1:68; 2:38).

We have a near Kinsman who calls us His “brothers” (Heb. 2:11). God elected in Him, the Firstborn, many brethren (Rom. 8:29). He came to earth to redeem His people by taking their reproach on Him-

self. As our elder Brother He entered into our shame and dishonor, being made to be sin for us (II Cor. 5:21), willingly being obedient unto death, even the shameful and dishonorable death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-8). God put us “in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us ... redemption” (I Cor. 1:30). He “redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13). He even entered into our rotting and stinking graves in order to take us through the dissolution of the body into the joy and honor of fellowship with God Himself in heaven.

Our kinsman Redeemer freely justified us by His grace through redemption, fulfilling all righteousness in His life and death (Rom. 3:24). The redemption He obtained for us is “eternal” (Heb. 9:12). Our redemption means that no one can lay a charge of dishonor and shame against us. No accusation against us will stand. The living Redeemer saves to the uttermost.



Job believed that his vindication would be realized after death, not in his lifetime. He might not receive justice in this world, but a time will come when he will be judged and vindicated. While for some the consideration of the Judgment Day is justly terrible and dreadful, for him it was most desirable and comfortable (Belgic Confession, Article 37).

Job would experience redemption, but not now. He believed that he would die (worms would destroy his body). His faith reaches to the hope of the future resurrection of his body, which immediately precedes the Judgment Day. Job believed that even though he must die and be consumed, he would stand in honor before God with a future immortality.

For the present we know shame and dishonor. As long as we live on earth we will have an old man that will make us cry repeatedly, “O wretched man that I am” (Rom. 7:24). As doers of the Word (and

not deceiving ourselves) we must continue in the shameful knowledge of our “natural face” (James 1:22-25). But at the same time we know our Redeemer lives. We shout, “Thanks be to God for the good news of the gospel that there is redemption in Christ Jesus, in

whom we are completely justified from all our sin.”

We are going to keep sinning until the day of our death, falling into the experience of dishonor and shame. But by faith we are able to know redemption—deliverance from this shame unto the joyful ex-

perience of the position of being more than conquerors. Therefore we await with eagerness the day when our Redeemer will finally realize our redemption perfectly. What a day that will be! Until then, may all of God’s children know that their Redeemer lives! 

Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole

The Emergent Church Movement— A Brief Introduction and Critique

The time has come to say a few things about the Emergent Church movement.

Perhaps to some of our readers the name itself means nothing. To those in the Grand Rapids area, all I would have to mention is the names Mars Hill and Rob Bell, and they would have some notion of what I was referring to. The Mars Hill Bible Church complex is but four blocks from my own church in Grandville, and has become the mega-church with the greatest name recognition in this metropolitan area (though “mega-church” is one of the descriptions its leaders would just as soon avoid). In part, the movement began as a reaction to the slick Madison Ave.-packaged, salesmanship approach adopted by so many mega-churches. Those who began the movement felt that too many of those Willow Creek clones were as phony as the makeup their speakers and professional entertainers put on under the glare of the lights and hype. Their motto is, “Let’s get back to the authentic gospel and to the authentic Christ, who mixed with the common people in the market place, and put Christianity back into contact with mainstream culture and life again.”

Still, Mars Hill’s attendance numbers (they keep no official

membership roles—which is exactly part of its attraction to many) has exploded over the past few years, numbering now in the thousands, qualifying it as a mega-church. And Mars Hill is but one of many springing up around the States and throughout the U.K. as well. Its main spokesmen and preachers, bright, articulate, and personable, are creating quite a stir. They are writing books (such as *Velvet Elvis* by Rob Bell, and *A Generous Orthodoxy* by Brian McLaren, to name just two) that are on the best sellers’ list of religious books. In the Grand Rapids area it seems as if every person disgruntled with what is going on in his own church or denomination is heading to Mars Hill. There is something there that attracts the disfranchised, spiritually-confused, and disenchanted multitudes.

So the questions—what is this movement all about, and how does one assess it in the light of God’s Word? And as well, what is it that so many find attractive about this new church movement?

We are not the only ones asking these questions. Since an article entitled “The Emergent Mystique” appeared in the November 2004 issue of *Christianity Today*, there has been no lack of critiques and analyses offered by men from

a rather wide range of backgrounds, and some very insightful critiques at that. A recent book by D.A. Carson, entitled *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, offers an excellent overview of the movement and has much to commend itself to the interested reader. Just be forewarned that there are some chapters that are filled with philosophical terms and distinctions. This of necessity—since the leaders of the Emergent movement themselves use philosophical language and categories to describe present-day society and those with whom they are trying to interact and whom they desire to influence. According to them, Christianity is faced with a crisis in epistemology, i.e., how people attain and process knowledge, the church going about it one way, while a larger and larger section of society is going about it another. And there goes your ability to communicate.

Why the nomenclature “Emergent,” or “emerging,” is used to describe the movement is indicated in part by the title of a book by the movement’s main spokesman, Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*. Its point is, a Christianity of a new sort is being proposed and, according to its leaders, is in the process of finding and defining itself. It is emerging out

of the stifling structures and restrictions of “institutionalized” churches, as they are viewed, churches that seem to exist only to keep themselves in existence and their members on the roles, and to be financially solvent. The emergent leaders do not mind at all likening their movement to a butterfly emerging out of its cocoon, ready to spread its wings and fly. Freedom from structure and restrictions is their mantra—Christianity coming into its own for twenty-first century, postmodern man (more on that last phrase later—kk). This is a Christianity that is free at last to soar.

Such language is buoyantly optimistic. A larger question must, however, be asked, namely, how true to biblical, apostolic Christianity is the movement? One may speak about freedom all one wishes, but when it comes to true Christianity, freedom cannot be separated from truth—*the truth*, if you will—the truth that Christ said will actually set one free (John 8:32).

The question that must be put to the movement’s spokesmen is, what about the truth? What truth or truths do its spokesmen and teachers acknowledge, confess, and bind themselves to? Which do they deny? In fact, do its preachers and spokesmen even acknowledge that there is such a thing as knowable, definable (shall we say, *creedal*) truth at all?

And it is here that the Emergent Church movement’s wings fall off. What becomes plain upon close inspection of the movement through its writings and practices is that while the Emergent crowd may fancy themselves to be flying free, the reality is they are in flight from truth. And that is not freedom, but bondage and self-delusion.

The sad truth about the movement has become painfully clear—not only are fundamental doctrinal truths being questioned by its preachers, and by implication, de-

nied, but the very fact that truth is knowable and definable is itself being challenged, and by implication, denied. They acknowledge that God as the infinite and eternal One is Truth, and knows what the Truth is. But for finite, sinful creatures made out of mere clay, to say, “We know what the truth is! We hold to the truth!”—that is dismissed as sheer arrogance. About what the truth is, they say, we must enter into conversation and dialogue. In fact, according to statements by their spokesmen, that is all they claim to be involved in at the moment, conversation about biblical and doctrinal things. And from such dialogue, what the truth is, for the twenty-first century church that is called to minister to this post-modern generation of ours, will finally emerge—maybe!

In reading the books by the movement’s leading figures and comments made by its adherents in interviews, it becomes plain that what it really comes down to for many is, who are you to impose your truth, or your interpretation of what’s true, on me and us! The movement is anti-authoritarian, to say nothing of anti-structural, to the core.

Just how deeply this anti-establishment spirit runs in those attracted to the movement was made crystal clear when, early this past summer, a committee composed of some of the movement’s leading figures announced in a news release that it had appointed Tony Jones as the National Director of Emergent (an organization put together to keep the various sections of the Emergent movement in contact with each other). There was an eruption of protest from the movement’s membership, labeling such an appointment as a virtual betrayal of everything the movement stood for. A short week later a memo was sent out seeking to mollify and correct.

Some of you read the last post regarding the recent appointment of

Tony Jones as “National Director.” Before the official press release was sent out the decision was made to instead use the title “National Coordinator.” This felt more in keeping with both the spirit of Emergent and the overall purpose of the role.

Having a Director sounded to many suspiciously like going back to what most had joined the movement to escape from, namely, having someone around in church affairs who might have the authority to intrude into their freedom, that is, their freedom from having anyone tell them what to do. A “coordinator,” on the other hand, was more acceptable. He evidently just responds to what others *tell him* to do.

A seemingly small matter, but symptomatic of the whole.

Mr. Phil Johnson, the same who was mentioned recently in these pages in connection with the Free Offer as one who charges us with a brand of hyper-Calvinism, also happens to be sharply critical of the emerging church movement and has made some worthwhile observations.

In a speech entitled “A Critical Look At the Emerging Church Movement,” he offers the following assessment.

Virtually all the literature, style, and philosophy associated with the emerging subculture are shot through with conspicuous elements of worldliness, man-centered worship, the narcissism of youth, liberal and neo-orthodox theology, and the silly, ages-old campaign to be ‘contemporary’ at all costs.

And I hope you realize that very few of this movement’s most obvious features are truly inventive. The philosophy and even some of the novelties of style are really not that much different from what was happening during my junior high school years in the youth group of the liberal Methodist church I grew up in. We had the candles and contemporary music

and every kind of religious paraphernalia you can imagine—but not the gospel. Methodist church leaders, who had abandoned the gospel years before, desperately sought a way to make the church seem “relevant” to a younger generation in its own language. There has always been some segment of the church or another that is desperate to keep up with the shifting fads of culture and looking for novel ways to adapt Christianity to the spirit of the age. That has been true at least since Victorian times. Spurgeon wrote against it.

Johnson’s point is that, however ‘new’ and ‘unique’ the movement claims to be, when it comes to doctrinal apostasy and innovations in worship, there is really nothing new under the sun. What is going on in the emerging church movement is not really a new Reformation at all, whatever Rob Bell in his book *Velvet Elvis* might argue and claim, but simply a repackaging of old errors and complaints in a new color and disguise, all the while making grandiose claims.

The movement, with its leaders and worship styles, is a diverse group. Criticism about what is going on or taught in one section of

the movement is often rejected by another as not applying to itself. “They (or he) does not speak for us all.” But there are certain basic things that the various sections and leaders hold in common, about which there can be little argument. And chief amongst these basic convictions is that evangelical, as well as Reformed, Christendom is badly out of touch with contemporary society, and therefore simply is unable to relate to this present emerging generation in any soul and gospel-benefiting way.

According to the emergent church’s spokesmen, their coming on the scene has to do with culture, a culture that is involved in such a massive shift in its way of thinking that unless the church and its preachers and members adapt themselves to this shift in the area of language, worship style, and overall approach, Christianity will become little but a footnote to the twenty-first century, irrelevant to the “cultural tsunami” that is sweeping everything in its path.

In fact, this is exactly the title and theme of a book written by a Leonard Sweet, entitled *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in the New Millennium Culture*. In Sweet’s words,

The Dick and Jane world of my ‘50’s’ childhood is over, washed away by a tsunami of change.... While the world is rethinking its entire cultural formation, it is time to find new ways of being the church that are true to our postmodern context. It is time for a Postmodern Reformation. (p. 17, Zondervan, 1999)

And there is that word again—postmodern. In order to understand how the leaders of the emergent church view themselves and their mission, one must understand to what this decidedly philosophical, descriptive term refers. What exactly is it that is supposed to characterize our present society with its culture, which therefore warrants its being labeled postmodern, in distinction from the ‘modern’ age that preceded it?

This we intend to consider next issue.

Admittedly, to this point we have made some broad charges concerning the Emergent Church movement and where it stands with respect to “truth,” but with little evidence to substantiate our claims. This also we intend to address and remedy next issue. 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ “Young, Restless, Reformed”

In *Christianity Today*, September 2006, an interesting article was printed with the above title. It appears, according to the article, that there is growing interest among young people and in some seminaries, both with students and professors, in the Reformed doctrines. These are seeking something more substantial than the fluff offered so often today to please the young. The article claims a growing con-

viction of many that the Reformed doctrine is concerned centrally with the glory of God and not entertainment for man. The writer begins with a brief introduction about John Piper, who authored the book “Desiring God,” which has sold more than 275,000 copies since 1986. He has been having great influence upon the young people. The article states:

Not all of these youth know Piper’s theological particulars. But plenty do, and Piper, more than anyone else, has contributed to a resurgence of Reformed Theology among young people. You can’t miss the trend at some of the leading evangelical seminaries,

like Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, which reports a significant Reformed uptick among students over the past 20 years. Or the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, now the largest Southern Baptist seminary and a Reformed hotbed. Piper, 60, has tinged the movement with the God-exalting intensity of Jonathan Edwards, the 18th-century Puritan pastor-theologian. Not since the decades after his death have evangelicals heaped such attention on Edwards.

Reformed theology often goes by the name Calvinism, after the renowned 16th-century Reformation theologian John Calvin. Yet even Edwards rejected the label, saying he neither depended on

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

Calvin nor always agreed with him. Still, it is Calvin's followers who produced the famous acrostic TULIP to describe the "doctrines of grace" that are the hallmarks of traditional Reformed theology: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints....

Already, this latest surge of Reformed theology has divided Southern Baptist churches and raised questions about the future of missions. Its exuberant young advocates reject generic evangelicalism and tout the benefits of in-depth biblical doctrine. They have once again brought the perennial debate about God's sovereignty and humans' free will to the forefront.

The evidence for the resurgence is partly institutional and partly anecdotal. But it's something that a variety of church leaders observe. While the Emergent "conversation" gets a lot of press for its appeal to the young, the new Reformed movement may be a larger and more pervasive phenomenon. It certainly has a much stronger institutional base. I traveled to some of the movement's leading churches and institutions and talked to theologians, pastors, and parishioners, trying to understand Calvinism's new appeal and how it is changing American churches.

However, some in the Southern Baptist Churches deplore resulting divisions within the SBC:

...Malcolm Yarnell, associate professor of systematic theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, argued that Southern Baptists generally reject any notion that God "arbitrarily chooses individuals to be damned before they are born."

"(T)he greatest tragedy is when adherence to TULIP leads to division in churches and prevents them from cooperation in, and urgency for, a passion toward fulfilling the Great Commission," Yarnell wrote. He concluded, "Southern Baptists are first, last, and always followers of Jesus Christ, not John Calvin."

The most provocative comments in the SBC may belong to Steve Lemke, provost of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. In April 2005, he presented a paper on "The Future of Southern Baptists as Evangelicals." Lemke warned, "I believe that [Calvinism] is potentially the most explosive and divisive issue facing us in the near future. It has already been an issue that has split literally dozens of churches, and it holds the potential to split the entire convention."

At the same time, those now teaching Reformed doctrine want to separate themselves from "Grand Rapids' Calvinism":

"I think the criticism of Reformed Theology is being silenced by the mission and justice and evangelism and worship counseling—the whole range of pastoral life," Piper said. "We're not the kind who are off in a Grand Rapids ghetto crossing our t's and dotting our i's and telling the world to get their act together. We're in the New Orleans slums with groups like Desire Street Ministries, raising up black elders through Reformed theology from 9-year-old boys who had no chance."

The concluding paragraphs appear to express movingly the humble gratitude for sovereign election and the wonder of God's grace:

It's because the young Calvinists value theological systems far less than God and his Word. Whatever the cultural factors, many Calvinist converts respond to hallmark passages like Romans 9 and Ephesians 1. "I really don't like to raise any banner of Calvinism or Reformed theology," said Eric Loneragan, a 23-year-old University of Minnesota graduate. "Those are just terms. I just like to look at the Word and let it speak for itself."

That's the essence of what Joshua Harris calls "humble orthodoxy." He reluctantly debates doctrine, but he passionately stud-

ies Scripture and seeks to apply all its truth.

"If you really understand Reformed theology, we should all just sit around shaking our heads going, 'It's unbelievable. Why would God choose any of us?'" Harris said. "You are so amazed by grace, you're not picking a fight with anyone, you're just crying tears of amazement that should lead to a heart for lost people, that God does indeed save, when he doesn't have to save anybody."

One can be encouraged in hearing of those who are not satisfied with "seeker services" or "contemporary worship services," but desire rather instruction in sound doctrine. One can be encouraged by a professed intent to study carefully the Word of God. Our churches also should use any opportunity given to instruct others in the truths of Reformed (scriptural) doctrine. We must take to heart also the calling to instruct our youth first of all in the glorious truths of Scripture. May we also have that zeal and enthusiasm to study the Word earnestly and profitably.

Yet the article in *Christianity Today* mentions certain things that ought to be of grave concern. The statement (quoted more fully above) is made, "We're not the kind who are off in a Grand Rapids ghetto crossing our t's and dotting our i's and telling the world to get their act together." What does that mean? The article insists that there is a growing interest in the five points of Calvinism. But is Grand Rapids a "ghetto" of Calvinism, where there is the intent to emphasize Calvinism too strictly? One would think a statement like that would require further explanation.

Another paragraph indicates a disjunction between the five points of Calvinism and other (we are convinced) related doctrines.

Perhaps an attraction to serious doctrine brought about 3,000

ministry leaders to Louisville in April for a Together for the Gospel conference. The conference's sponsors included Mohler and Mahaney, and Piper also spoke. Most of the audience were in their 20s and 30s. Each of the seven speakers holds to the five points of TULIP. Yet none of them spoke of Calvinism unless I asked about it. They did express worry about perceived evangelical accommodation to postmodernism and criticized churches for applying business models to ministry. They mostly joked about their many differences on such historically difficult issues as baptism, church government, eschatology, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They drew unity as Calvinist evangelicals from their concerns: with seeker churches, church-growth marketing, and manipulative revival techniques.

If these "historically difficult issues" represent the dotting of i's and crossing of t's, as appears to be the case, that would be sad indeed. Those interested in the truths of God's Word ought to be interested in all the doctrines as

taught in Scripture. These "difficult issues" are hardly a matter about which one jokes. Let those who are truly interested in the truths expressed by the acronym TULIP consider well how these other truths are related to TULIP!

■ So: What's New?

Republican strategists said yesterday that public revulsion over the sexually graphic online conversations between Rep. Mark Foley (R-Fla.) and former House pages could compound the party's problems enough to tip the House to the Democrats in November—and could jeopardize the party's hold on the Senate as well. (*Washington Post*)

News reports as that presented above have dominated the news broadcasts the past week and likely will continue at least until the election in November.

But is it so surprising?

There was a time, and within my lifetime, that a politician caught

in adultery could never remain or be elected to Congress or as President of the United States. But that is no longer true.

There was a time when a politician identified as homosexual could never be elected or remain in a government position. But no more is that true.

So the reports of recent weeks only portray what the direction and ultimate end is of those who would ignore God's laws. What is considered acceptable today was condemned in the past—on the basis of God's law. Today God's law is no longer the standard—but the "majority vote" of the populace is. What is condemned today (rightly so) in the action of Rep. Foley could likely be approved lifestyle in the not-so-distant future. If there is not an absolute standard, then anything acceptable to the majority becomes the standard. The people and country refusing to recognize this descend rapidly into the depths of depravity. Romans 1:19-32 does indeed work out as God has spoken. 

News from Seminary Hill

The Protestant Reformed Seminary began its eighty-third year of instruction of men for the ministry of the word and sacraments on August 28.

Prof. David Engelsma opened the school year for the faculty and students with a chapel-speech on I Samuel 17:38-40 entitled, "Unsuitable Armor."

Seven men are full-time students.

Mr. Nathan Langerak, son of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan, is a fourth-year student. He is married to Carrie. They have two children. Nathan is presently doing his internship at the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan. He will finish his training with courses at the seminary the second semester.

Mr. Heath Bleyenbergh is a third-year student. Heath is a son of the Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota.

Mr. Nathan Dykstra and Mr. Cory Griess are second-year students. Nathan is a son of the

Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. He is married to Brenda. They have two children.

Mr. Cory Griess is a son of the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado. He is married to Lael.

Three men entered the seminary for the first time this fall. Mr. Daniel Holstege is a son of the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Mr. Martyn McGeown is a son of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland.

Dr. David Torlach, a medical doctor, is a son of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. He is married to Ruth. They have five children.

Several young men, presently in college, are taking pre-seminary courses at the seminary—Dutch Theological Reading and Greek Reading.

With the emeritation this summer of Prof. Robert Decker, Prof. Barrett Gritters is teaching the full

complement of courses in the departments of New Testament and Practical Theology.

Prof. Ronald Cammenga is teaching several courses, while also continuing to prepare for teaching the departments of Dogmatics and Old Testament.

The public convocation exercises were held on September 6 at First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Prof. Barrett Gritters spoke from

I Thessalonians 2:7 on "Ministers and (Their) Mothers."

May Christ bless the work of the seminary, giving able, devoted, soundly Reformed pastors and teachers to His church.

For the faculty,
Prof. David J. Engelsma, Rector



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko

The Prophecy of Malachi (11)

Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness

The Third Disputation: Chapter 2:10-16 (continued)

16. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garments, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

The attempts to deny the plain teaching of this verse are legion. One commentator lists four basic interpretations, three of which turn the passage on its head: (1) that it concerns only pagan worship and has nothing to do with divorce; (2) that it permits or even requires divorce; (3) that it prohibits only "aversion" divorce, that is, divorce for no other reason than that the husband hates his wife and no longer loves her; and (4) that it actually does prohibit divorce. There can be little doubt that the fourth interpretation is the only correct interpretation, since the words "putting away" always refer in Scripture to divorce (Matt. 19:3, 8, 9).

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

Previous article in this series: September 15, 2006, p. 495.

That the Jews were given to divorce is evident from the question of the Pharisees in Matthew 19 and from Jesus' response. Many of them believed in putting away "for every cause," and Jesus in answering their questions about this speaks of the hardness of the hearts of the Israelites going all the way back to the time of Moses: "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives." Things are no different now. The same hardness of heart that Jesus condemned allows for, practices, and even blesses divorce today.

The truth is, Malachi says, that God hates divorce. He hates it not only because it is a violation of His original marriage ordinance when He brought together one man and one woman in marriage, but also because it is He Himself who joins them: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Especially, however, He hates it because marriage is both picture and part of His relationship to us. Divorce is a violation not only of the covenant of marriage, but of God's covenant of grace with His people.

It ought to be noted, too, that God is not just condemning what one commentator calls "aversion"

divorce. It is not just putting away out of lack of love that is condemned here, but all putting away, and it is condemned exactly because the very act of putting away is something God never does. As we will learn in chapter 3:6, God never puts away or forsakes, never divorces His people, but is forever faithful to them, even though they are often unfaithful to Him.

Divorce is an act of violence against those who are put away to be sure, but it is also an act of violence against God Himself, an act of violence, however, that is usually covered up with a cloak of hypocrisy and piety: "God wants me to be happy. God cannot expect me to live singly. It is impossible for me to get along with this woman or this man. I no longer love her (or him). If I no longer love her, God Himself does not expect me to maintain a marriage that is only a sham." Or on the part of church leaders: "Your marriage has broken down irretrievably, and therefore I, as your minister and counselor, advise you to get a divorce. You are not able to serve God as you should under the present circumstances, and if you separate and divorce you will be able to do so once again happily and thankfully."

The question needs to be asked in connection with this condemnation of divorce: "What about Deuteronomy 24:1-4? Does not the Word of God there approve of divorce?" Deuteronomy 24:1-4 reads: "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance."

It should be noted that the Deuteronomy passage is not approving of divorce but only laying down certain rules for divorcing in the face of Israel's insistence on divorcing contrary to God's ordinance. This is clear from what Jesus says in Matthew 19:7-9. There He makes it clear that divorce was only "suffered"—because of the hardness of heart that the Jews had shown. They had hard-heartedly insisted on divorcing, even though the Word of God was against it. And so Jesus also makes it clear that God's original ordinance established marriage as a permanent bond between man and woman, a bond that is broken only by death.

Jesus says: "From the beginning it was not so." And then He lays down the law for all time: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (v. 6). Deuteronomy 24, therefore, does not contradict Malachi, but rather confirms it, especially when inter-

preted in light of Jesus' words in Matthew.

Against all this nonsense and hypocrisy, God tells the church both of the Old Testament and of the New and its members: "take heed to your spirit." "Your relationship with God Himself is at issue in all this. Don't deal treacherously with your spouses and don't deal treacherously with Me. What I have joined don't you dare put asunder. The wife (or husband) you have is the wife (or husband) I have given you. Instead of divorcing, take heed to your spirit, repent of your sins, seek My grace and help, for only in that way can you be blessed."

How this needs to be heard today—that divorce is an act of violence and treachery and that putting away is displeasing to God. "He hateth putting away" ought to be written over the door of every church in Christendom today, though it is doubtful that it would be heeded even then, for most will do their own will and fulfill their own lusts no matter what admonishments, warnings, and threatenings God sends.

The Fourth Disputation: Chapter 2:17-3:6

17. Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, where is the God of judgment?

Though this last verse of chapter 2 is not unconnected with what precedes, it really belongs more with what follows. What God through Malachi says about the messenger of the covenant is in answer to Israel's question: "Where is the God of judgment?" The chapter division is not, therefore, very helpful.

Once again Judah and Israel refuse to hear what God says about their sins. The question, "Where-

in..." is not a question that arises from a regenerated heart that knows its own sinfulness, but from the pride and blindness of unbelief. When God speaks of the sins of His people in His Word, those whose hearts are softened by grace and who by grace know their own depravity always say, "It is I that the Word of God is describing." Those who know their sins do not try to excuse them and hide them. They do not see only the sins of others instead of their own, but always acknowledge their sins before God.

Here God accuses the Jews, though in vain, of calling evil good and of saying that God delights in evil. We must understand that very few have ever had the courage to do this in so many words, but it happens all the time nevertheless. In Israel it was happening in various ways.

In relation to the sacrifices, the people were saying such things as: "Since God has not kept His Word to us in blessing us, He has no reason to be dissatisfied with the sacrifices we are bringing." "The priests have approved of what we are doing, so it must be right."

In the whole matter of marriage they were also calling evil good by approving both of mixed marriages and of divorcing, and by practicing these evils. In some cases they called evil good, simply by not condemning evil; in others by saying that a particular sin, such as that of divorcing, was not displeasing to God or a violation of His commands. Or, as so often happens today, they called evil good by actually arguing that a particular sin is demanded by God.

There is a good example of the latter in the interpretation of those who say that Malachi 2:16, instead of forbidding divorce, is actually approving it and even requiring it in certain circumstances. Those who interpret the passage this way translate it: "If he hates, let him divorce!"—an interpretation that fits neither the context nor the

grammar of the passage, but is simply an attempt to call evil good.

That sin of calling evil good is committed today when the church says that homosexuality and women serving in church office are not sin, and especially when she says that these things are pleasing to God—that He loves homosexuals because they “love” one another, and that He loves women in teaching positions and positions of authority in the church because they are doing good work. Others approve of forms of worship that are not commanded in God’s Word and argue that such things are good because they bring in members, please the people, and arouse people’s emotions, even though they are contrary to all that Scripture reveals about God.

More often this sin is committed when sins are not dealt with in

the church, but are overlooked and allowed to prosper—when elders and ministers and members allow even gross sins to remain unrebuked: cursing and swearing and gossip and fornication and theft and Sabbath-breaking and gambling and disobedience to authority and hatred and drunkenness and dabbling in the occult and a thousand other sins. Seldom are such sins disciplined. Rarely are those who commit them admonished, and so by default the church and its members call evil good.

Not only did Israel commit this sin, however, but they also argued that the sins of which they were guilty could not be sins because God, the God of judgment, did not punish them. They said, in other words, “Where is the God of judgment?” They were like the people of whom God speaks in Psalm 50,

first condemning them for adultery, theft, lying, and slander and then adding: “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes” (v. 21).

This sin, too, is not gone in the church. Everyone of us commits it when we go on in sin, thinking that because we prosper in sin and because God keeps silence and does not uncover our sin, we can therefore sin with impunity. We commit it when we think that because sinners are not punished, God is no longer a righteous Judge. We commit it when we put all thoughts of the coming judgment out of our minds and do not live as those who must soon stand before His judgment seat and give an account of every deed and word. 

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

The Diaconal Care of Non-Poor Christians (6)

A Modest Proposal for Protestant Reformed Retirement Facilities

In our last article we examined ways in which Reformed diaconates today can implement, and often are implementing, the care of non-poor Christians, such as the sick, aged, widowed, handicapped, and the like. In this article I particularly address Protestant Reformed diaconates, suggesting another way in which deacons can busy themselves in their work.

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

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The suggestion regards establishing a group of small retirement homes that are intended primarily for the benefit of Protestant Reformed people, and are overseen by Protestant Reformed diaconates. Whether these homes are only for the aged, or include convalescent care for the sick, does not matter as far as this writer is concerned. What follows can apply to either instance.



Let me first explain the rationale for such a project.

First, it is the church’s duty to care for the aged, sick, and wid-

ows (for the sake of brevity, let us understand that in this article widows includes widowers). This point has been sufficiently demonstrated in previous articles.

Deacons usually implement this duty by caring for the various needy in their congregation on an individual basis. One committee of deacons is assigned to this person, another to that person; and, because the aged and sick have access to other homes and care programs, the primary task of the deacons is to ensure that the aged and sick are able to pay for their care. This way of implementing the duty of caring for the aged, widows, and

sick is not wrong. Practically speaking, it is probably the easiest way to care for such.

Yet, the first instance of diaconal work in the New Testament is an instance of communal care—that is, of the care of the needy as a whole body. The practice of the church in Jerusalem was to care for the widows in a daily ministrations—as a body the widows gathered, in order that their needs be supplied. Also in Geneva, as we have noticed, the deacons cared for the needy as a body, through the General Hospital. When the church has a large number of needy, the care of the needy as a body is possibly the more efficient way to care for such, even though it requires more organization and probably more personnel. By caring for the needy as a body, I do not mean to suggest that the deacons no longer need to take a personal interest in the individual child of God who is needy. I mean simply that some common provision be made for all the widows, all the aged, all the sick, etc.—as is done in a retirement and convalescent home.

Second, the establishment of such homes by the PRC would follow from our understanding of the covenant. The doctrine of the covenant relates to this proposed venture in at least two ways. First, we emphasize the duty of the members of the covenant to care for each other. Such homes would be means by which we who share the same faith could together care for those of our number who are needy. Second, they would be means by which our own widows, aged, and needy could enjoy fellowship with others of like faith and practice.

This argument for establishing retirement homes is similar to the argument we make, based on the covenant, for establishing our own Protestant Reformed schools. In one respect, the argument for establishing our schools on the basis of our covenant view is greater

than the argument for establishing retirement homes. We know that God's promise to continue His covenant with us and our children is fulfilled in the way of our teaching our children the truths of Scripture as we confess them. This we consider to be so important because of the ungodly methods and philosophies of the state's instruction today. Our aged have of course already received this instruction and are grounded in the truth. Our first concern toward them need not be that of teaching.

Yet, consider how an argument for establishing retirement homes on the basis of our understanding of the covenant is similar to our argument for establishing our own schools. We desire that our children be cared for, in respect of their instruction, by fellow saints and believing adults. And we desire that they learn to have fellowship with like-minded children. Why not show the same concern to our aged? Why not give them caretakers with whom they are one in the faith? Why not give them the opportunity to have fellowship one with another, as members of the same body of Christ?

It is for this reason that other denominations or groups of Christians have already instituted Christian homes and institutions of mercy. As we grow in numbers and in wealth, we should consider doing the same thing.

Some might argue that we do not need our own retirement homes exactly *because* other Christian homes already exist. My response is that, while these other Christian homes serve a good purpose, and while many of our own people enjoy living in them, these other homes do not demonstrate the care of the PRC as a body for her own needy. They also do not allow our aged to enjoy fellowship as easily with others who share the same convictions regarding doctrine and life. Granted, our aged in such homes often find fellow saints, members

of other denominations, with whom they can experience true fellowship. But this will become less and less likely as the mainline Reformed denominations depart ever more from the faith of our fathers. Finally, we do not argue that our own Protestant Reformed schools are unnecessary because of the existence of other Christian schools in the area; so why argue that with regard to homes for the aged?

Third, the establishment of such homes by the PRC would follow from our understanding of the antithesis.

Lest any misunderstand me here, I am not promoting a world-flight mentality. Our idea of the antithesis is not that we become geographically separate from the world. Our elderly saints in retirement homes are called to live the life of the antithesis spiritually, by confession and walk—and I trust that by God's grace they are striving to do that.

Rather, we understand the antithesis, the spiritual separation between the church and the world, to require us to believe the truth over against the lie, and to live in obedience to God's law as opposed to a life of service to the lusts of the flesh. Our own retirement homes would be a means whereby we would help our aged live this life. They could participate with good conscience in all the programs, the daily activities, the outings, the Bible studies, the informal worship services, the devotions at meal times.

Driving home to me the importance of this argument was the testimony of a widowed and elderly saint who is a member of one of our churches, and who lives in a retirement home at which, periodically, a movie was shown for the entertainment of the residents. Our sister made known to other residents that she did not attend such, and would not be attending such. But one day she was physically dragged by other residents, despite

her protests and struggles, toward the room where this movie was shown.

This incident reminds me of the words of Paul to Timothy, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (II Tim. 3:12). Persecution we cannot escape. Surrounded by others who do not believe and live as we do, and manifesting our own godliness, we will be persecuted. But would it not be good to provide our aged with an environment in which this persecution will not arise from staff and fellow residents?



Regarding the implementation of this idea, let me state at the outset that I am not envisioning one large and centrally located home to serve the whole denomination. This answers the concern of those who have already thought, “Oh, of course, and it would be in Grand Rapids.... So we in Iowa and Alberta and other remote congregations would not benefit from it.” Such is not my thinking.

Rather, I envision several smaller homes scattered throughout the country—perhaps two or three in West Michigan, and others to serve the aged of the churches in Classis West. One home for five elderly saints is not too small a project, as far as I am concerned. In this way the aged could live near their families and congregations, and the benefits could be enjoyed by many of our congregations.

While this would require nursing staff and support personnel in various places around the country, it would not require each home to be individually operated by its own separate board. Perhaps individual government would be best; but it is also possible that all of the smaller homes be part of one broader organization, with one governing body.

The question arises, of course, whether the project is feasible. Can the PRC financially afford

such? Are we not already strained enough by our commitments to missions, a seminary, and Christian education? My response is that such does not appear to me to be the case. True enough, some of our families do struggle financially. But as a whole, we are not poor. And our past history, both in establishing churches and schools, has demonstrated that when we see a need and begin to address it prayerfully, the Lord supplies the means for us to go forward.

And is such a project feasible from the viewpoint of the laws of the state that regulate the establishing and maintaining of such homes? Could we work through all the red tape? Could we be free to establish such homes, subject to civil laws, and still be able to set our own guidelines regarding who may be residents and who may be employees, as we do with our schools? I do not have the answer to these questions. But we have the means to find them out!

To my mind, the most important question regarding implementation is the question of which body within the PRC could properly undertake the project. As I see it, two options exist. One is that the deacons undertake this project as part of the work of their office. To facilitate this the deacons might establish one or two diaconal conferences, similar to our broader assemblies, to oversee this project. If one conference, it would include delegates from every diaconate in the denomination; if two conferences, they would be comprised of delegates from every diaconate in the Classis. Thus the work, which is properly the work of deacons, but is too great an undertaking for any one diaconate, can still be carried out by the deacons.

The other option is that interested members of our congregations form a society for the purpose of undertaking this project, just as we do for Christian education. The society then elects a

board, which is responsible for the oversight of the project.

Either option is potentially feasible. Personally, I prefer the former option, for two reasons. First, such a project can properly be considered part of the work of the deacons. In this respect such a project is distinct from Christian education. While the church as institute is called to teach her youth in the fear of Jehovah, the church rightly fulfills this obligation not by establishing parochial schools, but by catechizing her youth. Comprehensive Christian education of children is the duty of parents. If the children do not have parents, such education becomes the duty of the children’s legal guardians, not of the church institute. However, the care of the aged and sick is the duty of the church institute. It is true that, first of all, the care of such is the responsibility of their families. But the deacons have the responsibility of caring for the aged when the families cannot, or when the aged have no families.

Second, if the deacons oversaw such a project, it would then be centrally organized. It seems to me that if the project were centrally organized, it could be administered and operated more efficiently.



The foregoing remarks regarding the implementing of this idea are not meant to be the real burden of the article. I have set them forth in order that the readers might understand better what I have in mind. If members of the PRC think that some other way of implementing the idea is preferred, that is fine with me, so long as it is legal and proper.

The real burden of this article is to suggest the timeliness and propriety of our establishing such a home, or group of homes.

Diacons, talk it over. 

Azusa Street Revival and Pentecostalism (1)

Introduction

Although the modern Pentecostal movement is of fairly recent origin, the heresy that the movement promotes has ancient precedents. Solomon uses as his theme in Ecclesiastes the saying, "There is nothing new under the sun." This truth applies also to Pentecostalism.

In the early church the error of Montanism arose, which, while not in all respects like today's error, was nonetheless a predecessor of Pentecostalism. The Montanists were followed by mystical sects of all sorts that appeared throughout the entire Middle Ages, when the church was enslaved by Roman Catholicism. Even the Reformers were not free from the bothersome error of the Anabaptists who, in their theology, resembled the Pentecostals in so many ways.

Yet none of these various sects were quite like modern Pentecostalism. Perhaps one of the chief distinguishing characteristics of today's Pentecostalism is its ecumenical nature. Almost always, whether tolerated in the church (as were the mystical sects of the Middle Ages) or declared by the church to be sectarian and heretical (as was true of the Montanists and Anabaptists), these groups were separate from the church. To-

day the movement is more like an amorphous spirit that has entered into the religion of many people. The movement is not organized into ecclesiastical bodies but has permeated almost every denomination. And it is to the shame of these denominations, some of whom claim to be Reformed, that they shelter in their midst and give tacit, if not official, approval to a deadly error.

Pentecostalism is a grave threat to the church and will be the death of the church unless it is eradicated.

The History of Pentecostalism

After the Civil War (1861-1865) the churches in America emerged from this gigantic struggle in quite a different form than in the days of "frontier religion." The difference was chiefly in more organization, more ecclesiastical control of the life of the church, more formal religion, more intellectual orientation. Prior to the Civil War, frontier religion was free, loose from any organizational restraints, emotional rather than intellectual, and without a definite creedal basis. After the war, this changed. And it was in response to what many called the dead and cold life of these post-war churches that the "Holiness Movement" arose, which put its emphasis on inner experience of religion, sanctification, and closeness to God.

In the early part of 1900, Charles Fox Parham, a teacher in Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, became increasingly dissat-

isfied with the coldness and formality of the churches in the area. Pondering the matter, Parham came to the conclusion that the problem lay in the fact that the churches had drifted away from the simplicity and religious fervor of the early church in Jerusalem. As a consequence, he began to teach people and ministers to pray for a return of the Spirit and a renewal of the Pentecostal blessing.

A woman by the name of Agnes N. Ozman, a student of Parham, claimed that on 1/1/01 (January 1, 1901) she received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues.

Parham and his disciples, encouraged by this evident answer to their prayers, began, in 1905, to preach their new discovery throughout the Southwest of the United States. They soon gained a rather large following and began to form groups of like-minded people to pray for divine renewal.

In the heart of the industrial district of Los Angeles, California stood a small clapboard church in which Methodists had once held services. It was located on 312 Azusa St. and was called the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission. It was led by a one-eyed Negro man by the name of William Seymour. He was a former Holiness preacher who had been influenced by Parham. At a public meeting in 1906, Pentecostalism as a national and even international religion began. The group worshiping on Azusa St. experienced an outpouring of the Spirit that was a repeti-

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

tion, so it was claimed, of Pentecost. The people upon whom the Spirit came began speaking in tongues.

The church ministered to all classes and races of people and soon became a mecca for people from all over the country. These people, sharing in the special outpouring of the Spirit in the Azusa St. meeting house, went to their homes spreading the word that another Pentecost had finally come. The movement spread like wildfire and grew by leaps and bounds. It was the beginning of Pentecostalism.

Its Character

Pentecostalism is not a denomination or an organized group of churches with a common confession and administration. It has always been and is now a movement.

This does not mean that there are not churches that have become thoroughly Pentecostal in their church doctrine and life. The most well-known denominations are the following: the Church of God, with its emphasis on holiness, and which is probably the only church that practices foot-washing; the Assemblies of God; the Church of God in Christ; the Pentecostal Holiness Church; the Pentecostal Church of God of America; the United Pentecostal Church; and the International Church of the Four-square Gospel, of which Aimee Semple McPherson was the founder.

But Pentecostalism resembles more a movement with some common characteristics, though in practice wide differences exist between different groups. In other words, it is a movement that has infiltrated many denominations, and while these denominations differ radically among themselves in their doctrine, history, worship, and church government, they are, almost without exception, open to the presence of Pentecostalism in their midst. From Roman Catholics to Reformed and Presbyterian

denominations, the churches of the Reformation have viewed this movement favorably.

It appears as if the one most powerful force driving ecumenicity and the union of all churches into one super church is the Pentecostal movement.

The movement is known by different names. Some of the better known are: the Azusa St. Movement; the Charismatic Movement (taken from the fact that the gifts of the Spirit mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians 12 are called *charismata*); the Second Blessing Movement; and the Baptism of the Spirit Movement.

Pentecostalism is extremely appealing to today's churchgoers. Its appeal is also its deceptiveness. When the church as it is manifested in the world loses the power of the lively preaching of the Word, it incurs a debt that has somehow to be paid. The debt is incurred by the loss of a living faith in the members and by worship services that are formal, cold, lifeless, and unsatisfying. There is a vacuum created in the lives of people, into which almost anything that is appealing can come rushing as a mighty wind. The vacuum left by dull and lifeless preaching was filled by the stormy winds of the Pentecostal Movement. The debt was paid by Charismatics.

Put with this the reality of life in twentieth-century America in which people began to emphasize more and more the necessity of feeling good. Under the leadership of powerful preachers who talked about positive self-images, feeling good about oneself, the power of positive thinking, etc., a feel-good gospel was more and more attractive to people who found it too hard to do a little thinking and who were too intellectually lazy to try to master even the rudiments of the Christian faith.

... to be concluded. 

Apples of Gold

Precious Drops

*Wrought of water's face
O'er by Spirit moved
Hung in early space
Precious drops of
Dew
In a mist descend
Mingled with the sweat
Adam's brow portends
'Til the garden's
Wet
With the latter mist
Kissed upon free slaves
Sign of sins dismissed
Midst the Red Sea
Waves
Rolling as the Flood
Wrenching from His brow
Voluntary blood
Messiah's work is
Now
Cleansing hearts corrupt
Seen in dew-soft rain
Drop by drop by drop
Sprinkled in His name*

—Connie L. Meyer

Rebuke Before All

Discipline

Wrong must be rebuked, but in that rebuke itself new wrong, even sin, is possible when it is administered from an unholy motive or in an unrighteous, unpsychological way.

With a judge at court this is not so evident, because he is bound by penal law, must take in consideration all sorts of forms, and passes verdict mostly long after the wrong has been committed.

But at home with wife and children and servants, and in the shop or office with those who draw wages, the danger of rebuking a fault in a wrong way is far from imaginary.

Think of the fathers and mothers who, with all sorts of misdemeanors of their child, let everything pass, and sometimes even take pleasure in his misconduct, and so far forget themselves at times as to encourage the wrong. But woe betide that selfsame child when he does something that personally crosses father or annoys mother by disarrangement in household order. Then not infrequently father or mother instantly loses all patience, speaks angrily to the child by reason of a far *less* significant wrong, and rebukes him in a way that goes beyond all bounds.

Of course, he who rebukes so capriciously and arbitrarily does not rebuke for the sake of God's

will, neither for the maintenance of His ordinances, rebukes not even to improve the child, but merely to show that he is master and from personal resentment and anger.

With all such rebuke he in turn lays himself open to rebuke, for in most cases the sin in his uncontrolled temper is worse than the wrong for which he corrected the child.

Between mistress and maid, master and manservant, one frequently witnesses the same thing.

One lets all sorts of things pass that really ought to be reprovved and rebuked; and then all at once, by reason of a relative trifle, there are high words because one is irritated and cannot control his temper.

This manner of rebuke is not merely injudicious and shows lack of knowledge of human nature, but what is worse, it opposes the ordinances of God, because of himself no one has ever the right to rebuke, no one possesses this right, save by the authority of God, and therefore no one should ever rebuke another save for the sake of God, and this renders every rebuke from ill-temper and in anger *sin*.



In another way also all sorts of wrong steals in with rebuke.

As with the question whether you should rebuke before others or in private.

For with respect to this, you are offended again and again at the wrongfulness of the manner of rebuke. At one time, because there was rebuked publicly what you felt should have been done privately. And at another time, because on

the quiet, without anyone knowing anything about it, a rebuke was administered that in all justice should have been done before all.

In this too the Word of God mingles itself, for the holy apostle writes to Timothy: "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

This is different language from what now we hear whispered abroad.

For in the circles in which the spirit of the age strikes the keynote, it has almost become the fixed rule that all rebuke must be administered in private, and opposition is more and more pronounced against all public rebuke.

So it is said that by doing this on the quiet, you spare the *feeling* of the offender, that you inflict less pain upon his sense of honor, that you do not humiliate him in the eyes of others, that you gain his confidence thereby, and, in brief, have a better chance to influence him for good.

In private the offender will be more ready to acknowledge his guilt, he will be more openhearted, more honest, while in the presence of others he will try to justify himself and easily incline to brutal falsehood.

The presence of others readily stimulates resistance and invites defiance.

And the result of it is that rebuke before others leads to seeming subjection, but fosters anger in the heart.

So one speaks in a fairly general way, and undoubtedly there is truth in this.

Only it cannot go on *always*, for the Scripture speaks very definitely

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of cases to which the rule applies: "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (I Tim. 5:20).



That in this connection the holy apostle Paul merely refers to ministers of the Word and elders who erred has nothing to do here.

The rule here put is of *general* tendency, and that rule tells you that rebuke before all can be duty divinely laid upon us.

So in the home this means that you rebuke when all the members of the family are present at the table, or after the meal with the reading of God's Word.

And now the emphasis naturally falls upon that *sinning*. "To sin" is a stronger expression than to be naughty. Sin bears a more serious character. "Sin" refers to a wrong in which violation of God's ordinances took place.

To lie, deceive, steal, meanness, brutality, with taunts to irritate, to mock what is holy, etc., all these are evil phenomena that fall under "sin."

When, for instance, a child or servant rises at half past six instead of six o'clock, if told to rise at that hour, this tardiness is wrong and bad, but no sin, and only comes to be "sin" when this child or this servant despises authority, purposely disregards the given command, and on being corrected assumes an attitude as though he were free to obey or disobey.

Generally, however, people turn this rule about. Such not doing what one is told to do is considered a great wrong, while the despal of authority is scarcely noticed. They are angry when *their own commandment* is not kept, but transgression of *God's commandment* leaves them indifferent.



To this is added that the "sin" here referred to by the apostle assumes that the other members of the household *know about it*.

When a child or servant has done something wrong, but of which the other members of the household know nothing, then according to Matthew 18:15, all rebuke before others is excluded—at least when in private the guilty one comes to acknowledgment and contrition.

But when sin is become public, at least public in the household, so that the members of the household all know about it, and if the offense bears the serious character that lies in "sin," then, says the holy apostle, you may not end the matter in private, but must *rebuke before all*.

Then it is not a question whether the guilty one would like it otherwise, whether he will find it disagreeable, or whether you would rather do it in private, neither whether perchance it might irritate the guilty one and perhaps harden him, but you must rebuke before all the others because God's Word demands it.

Even the objection that this is impossible with grown-up sons and daughters will not do.

For what St. Paul says, he says even with respect to officebearers who went wrong. And for the sufficient reason that when an elder, or an older brother or sister in the family, disturbs the domestic order of God's ordinances, he weakens moral perception in a far worse sense than one younger and less thoughtful can do.



For upon the impression and upon the results of such a sin upon the other members of the household, the holy apostle founds his rule of discipline. For he adds: "That others also may fear."

Every sin that becomes known in the family, be it falsehood, deception, opposition to authority, brutality or what not, threatens to weaken the moral elasticity of all the others.

Evil examples draw so strongly. A bad child so readily

corrupts the moral character of all his little brothers and sisters. A bad element among the servants so frequently poisons the whole kitchen. One bad farmhand almost regularly infects the whole estate.

He in the household who "sins" does not merely render himself personally wrong and guilty, but attacks at the same time the moral power of reverence and regard for God's law on which every virtuous household must remain afloat.

And therefore such sin cannot be dealt with in private. What has touched all, and menaces to work evil upon all, must also be rebuked before all, so that the *moral order* in living together may be restored again in the sight of all.

God's authority over the family is in part put aside by such sin, and therefore in the presence of all and in the hearing of all the authority of God must regain its right of say in the domestic circle.

At the same time, the good of this is that one does not mete out punishment at the moment. He first becomes calm, puts aside all feeling of personal resentment, shows nothing but *holy wrath*, and now with the majesty of parental authority which God has laid upon us, so rebukes that both the conscience of the guilty and the conscience of all others may be touched.

This does not say, of course, that one may not deal beforehand with the guilty one in private to bring him to confession and contrition. It may sometimes even be advisable, by admonition and prayer, to prepare him for the rebuke before all.

This public rebuke also must be avoided when the matter is not known abroad or is of too trivial a character.

But when in the home, in the office, in the shop, or wherever else, real sin has been committed, and in such a way that *all know about it*, rebuke must be administered before all.

God's Word binds us. 

Worship in His Fear (4)

Congregational Singing

The element of worship that we now consider in this series of articles is congregational singing.

The Scriptures make plain that this is a required part of worship. Especially two New Testament texts point this out. The first is Ephesians 5:19, which admonishes the church as follows: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." The other text is Colossians 3:16, which says much the same thing. Singing is not an element of worship that we may include or exclude as we please. God commands us to sing. All who gather in worship, including the children and youth, should therefore participate in worshipping God by means of singing.

It is interesting to note that singing is the one part of our worship that we will continue to do in heaven. The other elements of worship will not be present in glory in the same way that we have them now, for they will no longer be necessary. But the glorified church will still sing. We will sing "as it were a new song before the throne" (Rev. 14:3). We will "sing the song of Moses... and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. 15:3). The church in heaven will

forever sing praises to God. That being the case, it certainly underscores the importance and blessedness of singing in the church's worship here on earth.



We must understand clearly that singing is worship. An understanding of this is important so that our singing is done "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

That singing is worship means, first of all, that the purpose of congregational singing is that God be praised. The main focus in singing is not the worshipers. The important thing is not that we are moved and that we feel good through singing a certain song. Not man, but God must be the focus. Not our feelings, but the praise of God is what matters. It is this that we must have before our minds when we sing. Our focus must be on God.

That singing is worship means, in the second place, that all our music and words must be appropriate for the worship of God. We may not have music and words simply because we like them or are moved by them. Some take that approach in choosing their songs for worship. As a result, churches today have singing that does not belong in the worship of God. We must see to it that our choice of music and words is God-centered and God-honoring, so that God is glorified and praised.

It is for this reason that we should use and be committed to using the Psalms in worship, and not hymns.

That does not mean that all

hymns are to be condemned. There are good ones. They are good, not because of the melody or because they have been around for a long time, but because they are biblical. They are good because they are God-centered, and not (as many tend to be) man-centered. While it is not wrong for the people of God to sing such hymns, in our public worship of God we ought to sing only the Psalms.

One of the reasons why the Psalms should be used in our public worship of God is that God has given them to us for that very purpose. God included them in the Scriptures so that the church could use them to worship Him. The Old Testament church used the Psalms in this way—so ought we. God has given us a song book of 150 Psalms. Those Psalms cover all of the Christian experiences, as well as all aspects of the work of Christ. In our Protestant Reformed Churches we have over 400 versifications of the Psalms in the *Psalter* we use. There is no need, therefore, to look for and use other songs.

A more important reason for using the Psalms in public worship is that they are inspired. That is not true of hymns, for they are written by men. That is why many hymns are man-centered, focusing on man's experiences, man's works, man's feelings, man's importance, and so on. And because they are written by men, it is also possible for them to contain errors. In fact, many of them do. As a result, many hymns have been instrumental, in the history of the church, in bringing (singing) heresy into the church.

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2006, p. 471.

The Psalms, however, are part of the inspired Scriptures. They were written by the same Author who wrote the rest of the Bible, namely, the Holy Spirit. They are God-centered in their content, emphasizing the sovereignty of God in all things, especially in His work of saving His church in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

By singing the Psalms we heed the regulative principle of worship. This principle is set forth in the second commandment of God's law. It is the rule that we are to worship God only as He prescribes in His Word. Just as we preach His Word and pray His Word, so also are we to sing His Word. When we sing the Psalms, we are singing the Word of God.

Some raise an objection to this on the basis of the texts we quoted earlier (Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16). They claim that these texts give approval for singing man-made hymns and songs in worship. They interpret them in that way, stating that "psalms" refers to the 150 Psalms in the Bible, "hymns" refers to uninspired songs, and "songs" refers to versifications of other texts of Scripture.

The proper way to understand these texts, however, is that all three words refer to the 150 Psalms. It is obvious and undisputed that "psalms" does so. But the same is true of "hymns" and "songs." The word "hymn" means "song of praise to God." "Hymns" refers explicitly, therefore, to the Psalms among the 150 that focus upon praising God, such as Psalms 95-100, 113-118, and 145-150. The word "songs" refers to those Psalms that describe the history and the experiences of the people of God. This is demonstrated by the fact that this word is used in the title of various Psalms (e.g., Psalms 67, 68, 75, 76, 83). In addition to this, the word "songs" is preceded by the adjective "spiritual," pointing out that these are songs "of the Spirit." They are songs that are inspired by the Holy

Spirit, and therefore songs that are found in the Scriptures.

Colossians 3:16 also states that the "word of Christ" must dwell in the church. The Psalms are this Word of Christ, for they are part of the inspired Scriptures. They are the Word spoken by Christ, inspired by Him through His Spirit. They are also the Word spoken about Christ, for they are Messianic. In them Christ speaks about Himself.

Clearly these texts are to be understood as teaching the church to sing the 150 Psalms in worship.



An important point with regard to singing in worship is that it must be "congregational" singing. Every member of the church should participate in the singing in worship. One does not participate in this part of worship simply by listening to others sing. Each member should be actively involved in speaking to God through congregational singing.

Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 make this clear. First of all, these letters are addressed to the congregations in Ephesus and Colosse as a whole. In addition to this, the words "you" and "your" are plural, thus referring to all the members as they make up the congregation. The whole church was admonished to sing, and not just part of it. Also, the admonitions specify that we are to sing "to the Lord." This precludes some in the congregation being up front and singing to fellow church members rather than to the Lord.

In many churches today, the worshipers are becoming mere spectators. There is perhaps a little singing in which all participate, but quite often special music is on the foreground. Instead of singing, the congregation is called upon to listen to soloists, singing groups, and choirs. Congregational singing is replaced by musical performances by a few.

This is a serious error in wor-

ship. It denies the priesthood of all believers – that all are filled with the Spirit, that all are prophets, priests, and kings, and that all are able to sing to God. Believers are being robbed of an important part of worship. As a result, the worship of God is impoverished.

May we be warned in this regard. May it be impressed upon our minds that singing in worship must be the singing of the whole church, and not just of a part of it. There may be other opportunities to hear choirs and other musical presentations, but these do not belong in worship. In worship, God's people are not simply spectators, but active participants in singing. They sing as a body. The congregation unitedly lifts up its voice in praise to God. "Sing to the Lord, sing His praise, all ye peoples" (Psalm 96, Psalter #259). "With all His people I will raise my voice and of His glory sing" (Psalm 111, Psalter #304).



Crucially important with regard to congregational singing is that we sing from the heart.

We can so easily sing just the words, especially if we know the Psalter number and the tune by heart. Another danger is to pay attention to the tune to the exclusion of the words, doing so because we enjoy the tune or our particular part of it. Or we can be tempted to sing simply in order to be heard by others—hoping that those sitting in front of or around us notice our "beautiful" voices.

Only singing from the heart is pleasing to our God. God is angered by a people that draw near to Him with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him (Matt. 15:7, 8). God requires heart-worship, also when we sing.

A congregation should sing well. It is good that they do. It is good that when they sing they do so harmoniously. But that is not the main thing. The most important thing is that we sing to God

from our hearts. Then God is praised by and pleased with our singing.

And in the way of our singing from the heart, God will also bless

us through our singing. Through the work of the Spirit the words that we sing will mean something to us. Our singing will serve, not

only to praise our God, but also to comfort and bless our souls. May God grant this when, as a worshiping church, we sincerely sing His praises. 

Islam (8) concluded

Issachar's Response to Islam

"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

The One Power that Will Conquer Islam

Regardless of the outcome of the present conflict between Islam and the West, even the death of the West would not result in the death of Christianity. However, the West's decadence and decline does pose a serious problem for those who would seek to bring the gospel to Muslims. Thanks to modern transportation and communication, believers in Islam know firsthand the decadence of the West, and they equate Christianity with Western culture. As Madany concludes:

The credibility of the Christian's missionary endeavors,

at home within a pluralistic society, and overseas, depends on their distancing themselves from the norms and the lifestyles of the secular societies that surround them. Unless Christians lead lives which are concretely different from the lifestyles of the secularized citizenry, no Muslim will consider seriously what Christianity has to offer. We have so much to learn from the history of the first three hundred years of the Christian era when to be a Christian meant both a marked separation from the corrupt heathen environment and, at the same time, engaging it with bold Christian word-and-life testimony: *Jesus is Lord*.¹ (Madany's emphasis)

This matter of distancing oneself from the decadent society of which he is a part will also be necessary for those who come into contact with Muslims on a daily basis. Numerous authorities consulted confirm this, including the former Muslim interviewed in an earlier article for the *Standard Bearer* (September 1, 2006).

But how must we approach a Muslim with the gospel? Our former interviewee and others, including Bassam Madany, stress the importance of doing so uncompromisingly. They emphasize the necessity of going forward in the power of the Holy Spirit. Madany presents the following observations

concerning how to present the gospel to a Muslim:

1. No Christian who goes to the Muslims with the aim of converting them to the Christian faith may entertain any doubts about the reliability or infallibility of the Bible. We have noticed more than once that Muslims charge us with having corrupted the Bible. They claim that what we have is not the authentic Scriptures. The conviction that the Bible is the Word of God with final authority in all areas of life comes from the Holy Spirit. It is a faith commitment (Belgic Confession, Article 5).
2. No Christian may go to the Muslims unprepared or half-prepared in his knowledge of the Scriptures. This implies the necessity of an adequate acquaintance with the Bible, its background and most importantly, its rightful interpretation.
3. By rightful interpretation I mean specifically the use of the Bible in order to preach Jesus the Messiah. In other words, I am referring to the necessity of a Christ-centered Bible exposition. We must be on our guard, especially when dealing with the Old Testament books, lest we approach them as if they can be understood without taking the person and work of Christ into consideration. Christ is our Savior, Redeemer, Liberator and Emancipator from the awful power of sin and evil. This is our testimony. We must

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

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never be ashamed of this good news. But we must be equally aware that, according to the Biblical testimony, *the proclaimed Word of God*—the preaching of Christ as Savior and Lord, this word of faith—is *God's instrument of Salvation*....

4. In our work of missions among Muslims, as in any other work, we are never on our own. The Holy Spirit blesses the faithful testimony based on His word and uses it to bring about the radical change in the heart of the Muslim. We must have faith in the Holy Spirit as the primary agent in missions. This gives us courage and patience, as well as a proper understanding of our own role in missions.

5. Finally, we must realize that God has been, is and shall always be, more concerned about Muslims and others than any one of us can ever be. Christian missions belong to God, not to us. It is our privilege to be involved in them. Our great concern should therefore be our faithfulness to the message ... and our willingness to lovingly and patiently present it to the Muslims of today.²

The Reverend Samuel Zwemer, the great missionary to the Muslim world for more than fifty years, called mission work among Muslims "the glory of the impossible." He called it that because Muhammad vetoed the heart of the Christian message in the Qur'an. Therefore "Muslims still veto the cross, even though the rest of mankind, regardless of their religious commitment, acknowledges the historicity of that event!"³

Yet all things are possible with God. And though the nominal church world of our day has swallowed the Devil's multicultural lie that erases (or at least blurs) religious differences and in the process rejects the need for mission work among those of other religious faiths, we must repudiate these pluralistic theologies. The Lord's parting command continues to echo throughout the ages: "Thus it is written, and thus it behaved

Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are my witnesses of these things (Luke 24: 46-48)."

Madany's Recommendations

Some specific recommendations concerning how, and how not to fulfill Christ's commission in our approach to Muslims are presented by Dr. Madany in his book *The Bible and Islam: Sharing God's Word with a Muslim*. An extensive quote from chapter six of that book follows:

How am I going to relate the Gospel to a people who have been formed by a thoroughly anti-Christian theology? There are several possibilities that are available to us. Since we are not pioneering the Christian mission to Islam, we can simply go back to the past, and especially to the last two hundred years, and seek to re-use and up-date the approaches and methods of the pioneers.

For example, we may begin with an attempt to prove the authenticity, veracity, and reliability of the Christian Scriptures. We believe, of course, that history is on our side and that a Muslim will have a very hard time proving that we no longer possess the authentic Bible. Nevertheless, this approach has serious shortcomings, for while the Christian holds to the above-mentioned qualities of the Bible, he cannot "prove" them to a Muslim. The latter has been conditioned to think differently about the subject. No amount of historical evidence will convince him. Furthermore, if he has received a Western education, he has most likely become aware of the devastating types of Biblical criticism that have emerged among liberal Western Christians. The educated Muslim does not hesitate to make full use of higher criticism in his own critique of the Bible....

How are we to proclaim the gospel to the Muslim of today? If

we cannot successfully engage in apologetics and in polemics with respect to the Bible, should we shift the ground to the doctrine of God? Or, should we rather concentrate on the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ? Here again, we go back to the Bible and read it according to the authentic Christian tradition: the tradition of the early ecumenical creeds and the Reformation confessions of faith and catechisms. We proclaim a Trinitarian God and we preach a Divine-human Messiah. The Muslims' retort is immediate. They tell us that we have committed the worst sin: the sin of "shirk." We have become polytheists. Unless we adopt Islam, we are on the way to hell.

By asking these questions, I am not trying to say that we have to reduce the gospel to some bare minimum of bland theism in order to make it acceptable to the Muslims today. The gospel is not negotiable. *There is only one gospel: the gospel of God, the gospel of Christ, the gospel of the Bible*.... The whole Gospel must be proclaimed to the Muslims otherwise we have not brought it to them. We cannot keep anything back. Everything that is part and parcel of the Christian faith must be brought to the followers of Islam.

The reason behind these questions is that we must come to understand not so much the content of the preaching of the Christian message to Muslims, (for we have already concluded that the whole Gospel must be presented) *but the method of proclamation*. By method, I do not mean the actual technique, be it conventional missionary ways or in radio and literature missions. My questions do not relate to techniques but to the approach that must underlie any technique or method.

The right answer resides in the word "today." I have been emphasizing "today" throughout this chapter because Muslims no

1. Bassam Michael Madany, *The Bible and Islam: Sharing God's Word with a Muslim*, <http://www.levant.info/BAI-O.html> (online book), chapter 8.

2. Madany, chapter 4.

3. Madany, chapter 2.

longer live in an isolated or insulated world. Slowly but steadily, they are coming under the impact of Western secularism. As this anti-theistic worldview works within the Muslim world, individuals find themselves challenged to the very root of their existence. How do they react to the propagandists of neo-paganism?

The believing Muslim is very offended by any work that challenges the basis of his faith. He responds by re-stating the case for Islam along traditional lines. However, he fails to realize that the process of Westernization, through the educational systems that had been left by the colonial powers, has exposed a certain section of the population to the anti-Islamic teachings. Then, about a quarter of a century later, Salman Rushdie, a secularized Muslim from Bombay, India, wrote "*The Satanic Verses*." His implied criticisms of the family of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, earned him a *fatwa* from Ayatollah Khomeini that shocked people all over the world. That legal decision of the father of the Islamic Republic of Iran authorized any Muslim to kill a renegade author who dared to write such a negative book about a subject considered as very sacred in Islam.

So, when we come to consider our present-day opportunities to bring the Gospel to Muslims, we must be fully aware of what is going on in their lands. How should we address them with a message that is utterly important for them in this life, and for the hereafter?

In presenting the claims of the Christian faith to the Muslims of our world, we should sympathetically and irenically point to one of the most glaring short-comings of Islam: *the doctrine of man*. In Islam, the doctrine of man lacks the realism of the Christian doctrine of man....

Islam has an optimistic view of man. This faulty anthropology precludes the necessity of redemption and fortifies the Muslim against the biblical teaching of redemption through the work of the Messiah on the cross of Golgotha....

In other words, the Muslim

view of man and the Muslim understanding of the nature of the fall do not leave any room for a Divine Savior. Such a Savior is not needed, since man needs only to know in order to do the will of Allah.

Islam has never recognized realistically the consequences of man's rebellion against God. While admitting the fall of Adam as an historical event, Islam lacks that Biblical realism that makes us acknowledge the seriousness of man's sinfulness as well as the necessity of the redemption from without. Islam readily admits the sins and shortcomings of man, but does not admit the sinfulness, i.e., the indwelling nature of sin....

Today Islam is tremendously vulnerable in its doctrine of man. For the present mood in world literature, philosophy, and the arts, does not lend itself to that shallow optimism of the Islamic doctrine of man. The modern secular prophet tells us that man is dead. He sees no hope for mankind. How can he entertain any optimistic views of man after all that happened in our world during the past century? And if the Muslim's answer is that these terrible things took place within Christendom, can he really maintain that human nature is any different in Africa and Asia? Such questions are not meant to embarrass any Muslim, nor are they intended to show that the West is less sinful than the East. The point is that modern history does not support any optimistic view of man or of his so-called native goodness. So much has taken place during the last fourteen hundred years within the Household of Islam that points to the fact that man is desperately wicked, and that man's depravity is general or total. Nevertheless, throughout all of these years, Islam has not yet learned the lesson that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none that does good, no not one."

...(W)e must always remember this: The Muslim not only rejects the historicity of Good Friday's main event—the crucifixion of Christ—but his theology denies the necessity of redemption.

According to Islam's teachings, man does not need to be redeemed by a Divine act. In Islam, perfection or salvation is achieved by doing what one learns from God's revelation! So, it is only after a Muslim has acknowledged the necessity of Divine redemption due to the radical nature of sin, that he is ready to consider the claims of Jesus Christ, the Savior.⁴

Much more valuable stuff could be quoted from Madany's writing concerning the work of bringing the Gospel to Muslims. Apparently he knows whereof he speaks. In the conclusion to the sixth chapter of his book he presents his credentials: "These lines are not the fruit of an abstract reflection of the Christian missions to Islam. Rather, they are the result of a pioneering ministry of radio and literature missions in the Arabic-speaking world. It was my privilege to be involved in this work from mid-1958 to mid-1994. I processed around 150,000 letters from Arabs in every part of their vast world, more than half of which were from Muslims. Based on these long years of work, and having kept in touch with a field that stretches from the Gulf to the Atlantic, I testify that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is tremendously needed."

Not only is the Gospel needed by Muslims in Muslim countries, it is needed by Muslims in the West. Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in the United States. Modern-day Issachar ought to consider the unfolding of God's plan in the present clash between Islam and the West, and ask, "How is Christ's dominion being exercised in these events and to what end?" Of this we can be sure, all serve to the gathering of His church! And this includes those gathered out of the darkness of Islam. 

4. Madany, chapter 6.

Congregation Activities

Once again this fall the men of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL were given the opportunity to be part of a Men's Book Reading Group. Their agenda for the year called for quarterly meetings at Bethel, usually on a Saturday morning. For their October meeting, the men planned to discuss the first 123 pages of *The Christian in Complete Armour*, by William Gurnal, where the reader is warned of the reality of Satan and the saints' call to arms.

Starting October 4, Rev. J. Mahtani, pastor of Bethel PRC, began leading a Bible Teaching Class at Emerald Village, a nearby retirement home where one of Bethel's elderly members lives. Rev. Mahtani hoped, the Lord willing, to conduct one class each month, on the Reformation in October, on Thanksgiving in November, etc.

Rev. J. Kortering met with the council of Grace PRC in Standale, MI in September and gave a presentation on details of the work in India of which he had spoken earlier that month at Grace. A special collection was taken September 24 for the work there. In addition, in the coming weeks and months the council of Grace will be assessing just how their congregation might be more involved with this work, and especially with a man named Paul Raj and a fellowship of believers with whom he is laboring. The council also asked for the congregation's prayers as they consider whether or not this is an "open door" for Grace to minister to fellow saints on the other side of the world.

The congregation of the

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

Wingham, Ontario, PRC was invited to play softball at Riverside Park in Wingham on Saturday, September 30.

The annual Inspirational Meeting to mark the beginning of the society season at First PRC in Holland, MI was held September 27. Rev. D. Kleyn was the speaker.

Mission Activities

On September 27 the Lord sent a severe tropical storm (typhoon) directly through Manila and nearby areas of the Philippines. According to the Philippine news media, there was damage throughout the city. The Spriensmas reported that they were safe and were not hurt, but were without electricity. There were also no reports regarding the welfare of the other saints from the mission. We pray for their safety and thank God that He spared the Spriensmas any harm.

With the approval of the councils of our two churches in Iowa (Doon and Hull) and the council of the Edgerton, MN PRC, several families and individuals who have been attending the Bible Study in Sioux Falls are in the process of sending a letter to the Domestic Mission Committee asking for help in establishing a church plant/mision work in Sioux Falls.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Grandville, MI PRC hosted a lecture on "Personal Evangelism: The Believer's Calling to Share the Gospel," given by Rev. J. Kortering on Friday evening, September 22, at their church.

Friday, September 29, the members of Peace PRC in Lansing, IL sponsored a lecture entitled, "Bringing Forth Children in an Age of Selfishness." The lecture was given by Rev. Allen Brummel of the South Holland, IL PRC.

School Activities

Though schools are now a good two months into their academic year, it's not too late to mention that all our Christian schools begin each year with a chapel service. Loveland Christian School in Loveland, CO scheduled their first chapel of the school year for September 22. Rev. R. Miersma, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, spoke on the "Fruits of the Spirit" from Galatians 5. The students of Northwest Iowa Christian School in Doon, Iowa, along with the students of the Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN, held a combined chapel on October 5. Rev. D. Overway, pastor of the Doon PRC, was the speaker.

At a special meeting of the Midwest PR Secondary Education Society held September 25, the Society approved the proposal to move forward using their existing parcel of real estate as a building site. The Society also approved a proposal to conduct a drive to collect \$500,000 in cash and pledges toward the high school project.

Young People's Activities

For those of you who like to plan activities in advance, we remind you that next year's PR Young People's Convention will be hosted by the congregation and young people of the Grandville, MI PRC. Next year's convention will be held, the Lord willing, at Beulah Beach Christian Camp in Vermilion, Ohio, August 13-17. So please make a note of these dates on your 2007 calendar and look for additional information here or in your church bulletin as it becomes available.

As you might expect, the entire congregation at Grandville has been busy, really even before this year's convention, with plans for next year's gathering in Ohio. At this point in time many of those



plans revolve around raising the necessary funds to pay for the convention. One such event took place Saturday, September 23, with a 3-D archery tournament at the West Walker Sportsman Club. This event not only raised money for

next year's convention, but it also gave participants a much needed opportunity to sharpen archery skills before the upcoming deer archery season, which opened October 1 in Michigan.

Denomination Activities

The annual Reformed Free Publishing Association meeting was held September 21 at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. Prof. R. Dykstra was the featured speaker.



Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Covenant Ladies' Circle of First PRC in Edmonton express their Christian sympathy to George Barendregt and children, Jordan, Austin, Logan, Colson, Jasmynn, and Brooklynn in the death of their beloved wife and mother,

PEGGY BARENDREGT,

who was taken home to glory to be with her Savior. May they be comforted by God's Word in Psalm 40:16, "Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee; let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified."

Helen Tolsma, President
Heidi Klaassens, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of First PRC of Edmonton express their Christian sympathy to George Barendregt and his children Jordan, Austin, Logan, Colson, Jasmynn, and Brooklynn in the passing away of his wife and their mother,

MRS. PEGGY BARENDREGT.

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:2-4).

Rev. John Marcus, President
Art Tolsma, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Jane Dykstra in the death of Jane's brother,

MR. RAY SCHIPPER.

May she find her comfort in God's word in Matthew 5:4: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

Rev. William Langerak, President
Ron Kooienga, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Sr. Mr. & Mrs. Society of Hope PRC (Walker) expresses Christian sympathy to Mike and Grace Lotterman in the death of their father and father-in-law,

MR. DONALD LOTTERMAN,

whom the Lord called home on September 25. May the bereaved be comforted by the words of Isaiah, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 66:13).

Ron Koole, President

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of Doon PRC expresses Christian sympathy to the Aardema family in the passing of their wife and mother,

MRS. MARY ANN AARDEMA.

May they find comfort in God's word in Deuteronomy 31:6: "For the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."

Rev. David Overway, President
Grace VanDenTop, Sec'y.

Principles and Practices of Reformed Education Seminar

Sponsored by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools

led by Mr. Jon Huisken.

Classes will be held alternating Wednesdays January through May of 2007. For information or to register, contact:

Mrs. Deb Kuiper (616) 531-6785.

Reformed Witness Hour

November 2006

Date	Topic	Text
November 5	"Protestants! Recover the Biblical Gospel!"	Romans 1:16
November 12	"The Kingdom of Heaven Is the Treasure"	Matthew 13:44
November 19	"The Great Thanksgiving"	Ephesians 1:3
November 26	"Assured That All Things Work for My Good"	Romans 8:28