



Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 54, No. 4 • February 11, 2005

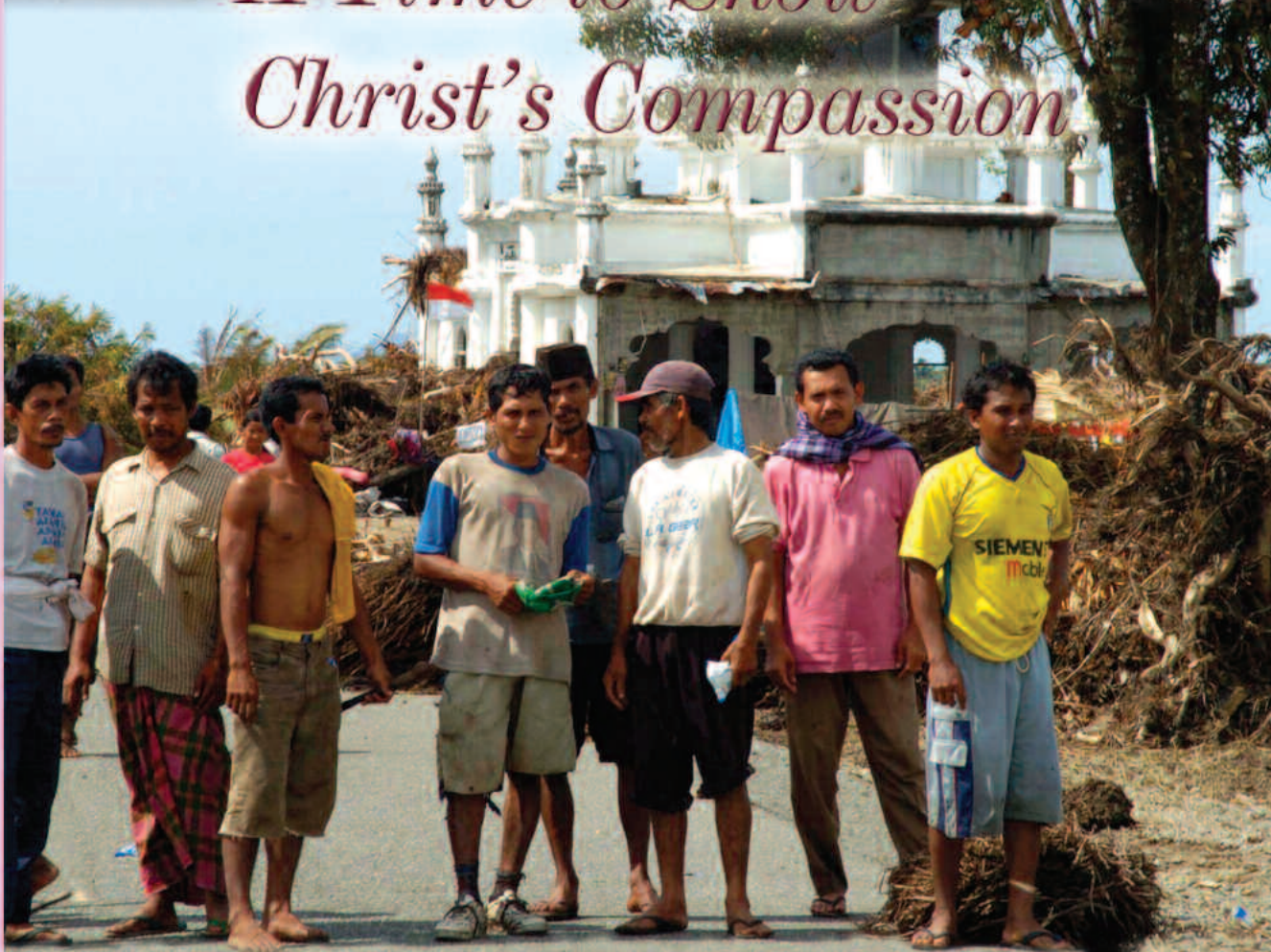
Who is
Controlling the
Weather?

The comfort in
Christ

2004:
A Poor Year for
Religious
Freedom in
Canada



Tsunami Aftermath: A Time to Show Christ's Compassion





R. Aasman

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Who is Controlling the Weather?

Time and again the hostile question is raised: if there is a God and He is in control, then why does He allow earthquakes and floods to happen?

It has been a number of weeks since an earthquake beneath the Indian Ocean created a tsunami which wreaked terrible destruction over a wide area in south-eastern Asia. At the time of writing this (January 12) the toll of the dead and missing was estimated as high as 250,000 people. For most of us who live thousands of miles away from that area, the images of destruction and death are seared in our minds. But for the people who live there and endured the consequences of the earthquake and tsunami, the horror of what happened is almost too much to endure. We read of people who saw their spouse or children or parents dragged out to sea, never to be seen again. Some couldn't talk about it. Some were so traumatized that they could not remember or speak the name of their loved one. Poor, poor people!

Terribly humbling

There is something terribly humbling and frustrating in all of this. Such powerful forces were unleashed in the earthquake and the tsunami that it is clear there is no human technology or construction that can prevent or control such forces. To put it simply: man stands very small before earthquakes and floods. He can try to develop warning systems and maybe build a dam or retaining wall, but who can control an earthquake? Who can control the weather?

At this point, some minds turn to the thought of a higher being. People think of God. Their thoughts are not always kind or generous. Time and again the hostile question is raised: if there is a God and He is in control, then why does He allow earthquakes and floods to happen? Why does He allow such rampant destruction and death? Why doesn't He control the weather and save lives?

A sobering consideration

It is a question we all have to deal with: why does God allow such bad things to happen in our world? How do we

explain to the world that earthquakes, tsunamis, and widespread death and destruction are not a demonstration of God's indifference? We know the answer to this: it is made very clear on the opening pages of Scripture. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, not only did they lose the ability to show themselves as the image of God, but all creation came under the curse of sin and death. The Lord said to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 immediately after the fall into sin:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.

Creation itself is the territory where God's children can live, learn, get married, raise children, fulfill a career, evangelize, travel.

We may also think of the Preacher's description of this world in Ecclesiastes, which he describes as a "vanity of vanities." Similarly, Paul writes in Romans 8, "the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." Our world, complete with its diseases, earthquakes, violence, floods, emergency rooms, jails, graveyards, and death, is the world of man's own making when he fell into sin.

The sobering consideration of the devastating tsunamis in south-eastern Asia is that this is the kind of world in which all mankind lives after the fall into sin. None of us is free from it. We all know about pain, disease, the doctor's office, tears, funerals, loneliness, and so on.



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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**ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:
(subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):**

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
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Email: clarion@premierprinting.ca

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| U.S.A. U.S. Funds   | \$46.50 | \$60.00 |
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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

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Agreement No. 40063293; PAP Registration No. 9907; ISSN 0383-0438

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Jesus calms the storm

Are we left with no hope? Will the pain and misery of our world never end? Will no one control our weather and all the other hurtful things of life? We know differently. In fact, an event in Jesus Christ’s ministry makes this clear to us. He was crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat with his disciples. He went to sleep. Meanwhile a storm arose – the kind that swamps boats and drowns their occupants. In terror the disciples woke the Lord Jesus, expressing their fear that they were perishing. Then we read in Luke 8:24, “He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.” One word from the Lord Jesus and the sea was as smooth as glass. Then we read, “In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.” Why were they in such awe and amazement? Because from their knowledge of the Old Testament there is only one person who can control the weather and that is God! They realized that this person who was in the boat with them, whom they knew as their Lord and Master, was also God! This is God who took upon Himself human flesh. This is Immanuel who controls the wind and the waves, who keeps his people safe.

Victory in the cross

What Jesus Christ did with the storm on the Sea of Galilee was a sign of his great victory on the cross. Jesus Christ died on the cross in order to pay for our sins and to redeem us as the children of God. Now this glorious redemption and newfound liberty of the children of God is something that we can enjoy right here on earth. Creation itself is the territory where God’s children can live, learn, get married, raise children, fulfill a career, evangelize, travel, and so on. Once again the cultural mandate of Paradise is real and tangible. Indeed, creation cannot destroy us. As Paul makes clear in Romans 8, after having given his Son to die for us, God will also give us all things with Him. And there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. What comfort and confidence we have in daily living under the blessing of God! Even the weather must serve his glory and our salvation!

But there are still storms

However, the storms have not all abated. Earthquakes still happen, along with all kinds of terrible things. It makes us wonder sometimes: is Jesus Christ really the King of kings, and does He have all authority in heaven and on earth? We need to realize that even though Jesus Christ has won the decisive victory over Satan, sin, and death, and He controls all things, perfection will not come until He returns on the clouds of

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heaven. On the final day He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death, mourning, and pain will be no more (Rev 21). But meanwhile this world bears the scars of a vale of tears and the valley of the shadow of death. Until the last elect person is brought to faith and gathered in by the Good Shepherd, we will feel the effects of the vanity of vanities.

But the point is, this cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus and it must serve both God's glory and our salvation. We have that comfort.

Comfort in the storm

At first it is hard to see any comfort in the midst of the devastating tsunami. But consider how reckless and indifferent people can become when everything is going well. Peace, prosperity, and health can make people forget God just as they did in the days of Noah. It is in the dark days of the storm and of so much destruction that mankind receives a kind of wakeup call. There is no certainty in technology, in material wealth, in health, in beautiful vacations on tropical beaches. The only peace, comfort, and certainty that there is in this world is in genuinely knowing and experiencing the love of God in Christ Jesus! It is in the forgiveness of sins, the renewal of life, and living a life to the praise and glory of God. It is in knowing that in good times and in bad there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

There is no certainty in technology, in material wealth, in health, in beautiful vacations on tropical beaches.

What happened in south-eastern Asia was a terrible thing. Who of us has not shed a tear and raised up prayers to God? But we have the comfort that this is all in the hands of our Lord and King Jesus Christ. He gives peace in the storms of life. He leads us safely through the valley of the shadow of death. He is the One who promises to wipe away every tear from our eyes. The real storm of being enslaved by Satan and travelling the road to eternal perdition has been stilled in the blood of Jesus Christ!

A day is coming when there will be no more earthquakes, no tsunamis, no disease, no prisons, no graveyards, in short, nothing that shows so much as a vestige of a broken and decaying world that has come under the power of sin. May that be our comfort and hope, and may it also be the comfort and hope for those poor people who have suffered so much in the devastation of south-eastern Asia.



The comfort in Christ



MATTHEW 13:52

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-15

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On more than one occasion the apostle Paul wrote about the resurrection of the dead. He did so to comfort and encourage the believers, also with a view to the future. In this broken world believers are the people of hope! Especially in the context of the Greek culture, this hope with regard to the resurrection of the *body* was unique. For the Greeks the *body* was nothing, only the *soul* was immortal. Even among the Jews there were many who would not hear of the resurrection of the *body*. True Christians, however, are different. They bury their dead in the hope of the resurrection! They do so because of their unity with Christ; because of their faith they have all things in common with Christ!

The comfort and hope of believers who live by faith in the resurrection of the body is needed beyond the day of the funeral. People in the church who are grieving the death of a loved one don’t need this comfort just when they bury their dead. Yes, at that time they need it very much; indeed, to help them look forward, to help them look beyond the grave, to help them focus on the future, to comfort them with the hope of the blessed resurrection of those who die in the Lord.

When times move on the loss is felt sorely, and the empty place is there every day and night. Grief can take over and sorrow can become overwhelming. Continued comfort is needed. Further

encouragement is required! They need to be reminded of the larger picture, of the complete work of Christ in this world, in the history of this world.

It’s for those purposes that the apostle Paul writes the church of Thessalonica. He had left the congregation to pursue his missionary task; yet, he has not forgotten about the grieving of some. He wants them to know that he is thinking of them. He wants the congregation to be aware of them too, those grieving members in their own midst who need this further encouragement! Yes, he wants the entire congregation to keep its focus on the larger picture! That’s why he connects the passing away of their loved ones to the return of Christ. He puts the losses and deaths they’ve experienced in the perspective of the final outcome of Christ’s work: the total removal of all traces of death, the total restoration of the powers of life!

When Paul writes, “We do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep,” he doesn’t write this way to introduce some new teaching. He uses this kind of expression elsewhere (1 Cor 10:1), and he does so to stress: “I want you to know this very well, dear readers! I want you to take this to heart very much! In your grieving, dear Thessalonians, don’t let go of what we believe about the resurrection of the body and of Christ’s return!” He appeals to the words of the Lord Himself, the

way the Old Testament prophets used to do, “Thus says the LORD!” In your grief don’t neglect to remember the facts about Christ’s resurrection, about our sharing in it and about the hope we have in the midst of this hopeless world!

Just as we hear it in our time, people in Paul’s days comforted each other with all sorts of ideas and theories. They spoke about the immortal soul, or about death that can’t be stopped anyway. Today people comfort one another by saying that the deceased continues living in our memories, in their legacy, and all that nonsense. No, says Paul, the only true comfort we find is in Christ’s victory over death! In Jesus’ life all the traces of death have been erased!

We believe that, right? Well, then, this faith unites us with Christ! By faith this resurrection of Christ becomes manifest in our life, through our communion with Him. Just note how Paul repeats this over and over in this passage: God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him (14); and the dead in Christ will rise first (16); we will meet the Lord to be with the Lord forever (17). Unity with Christ is our only comfort, now and forever! That’s why we may share in the way Christ went through death to life! God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him! They will share with Christ in the course of victory!

It’s that course of the victory of life over death that Paul further explains. When you are brought by God with



Jesus, all the misery of death will be conquered. Today death is still bitterness; yet God will take this bitterness away. He won't leave a trace of death in your life. What a great comfort that is! If you consider what tracks death leaves behind in families, in personal pain and suffering; consider what terrible things death does, what joy and beauty it destroys! Can that all

be undone, erased, and removed totally? Yes, Paul says, and he quotes a word of the Lord as if to add to his authoritative writing: in your grief, in your sorrow, in your pain, listen to God! Let Him comfort you in your mourning: "We who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep!" Those who have fallen asleep won't miss

out on anything! To these Thessalonians, to us who are still alive, Paul says: don't think death is doing something irreparable. Right now your loved ones have been taken away and we've been left behind, but afterward there won't be a trace of death left anymore! These Thessalonians, and we, must know for what future the dead are heading with the Lord Jesus Christ!



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 29

Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.



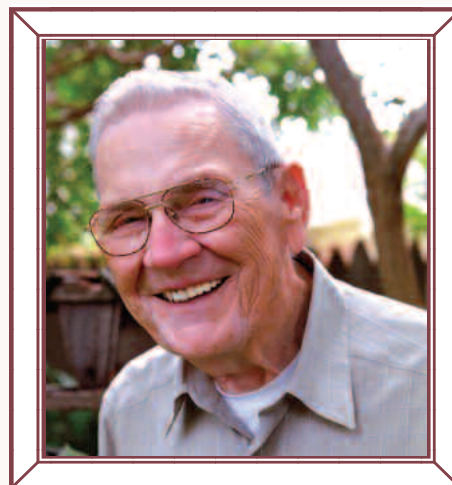
Children's Catechism

You probably have a picture of your grandfather somewhere in your house. Your friend asks who he is. Do you say "This is a piece of photographic paper with the image of my grandfather"? Of course not. You answer, "That's my grandpa!"

We are still speaking about the first time the Lord's Supper was celebrated. At that time, Jesus took bread and said, "This is my body." And when He took the cup He said, "This is my blood." Perhaps you think that what Jesus said was untrue. Bread is just bread. And wine is made from grapes. Now think back to what we said before. The picture you have is not your grandpa, true, but the picture does make you think of him. It is as if you really see him.

It is the same with the bread of the Lord's Supper. The bread is not the body of Christ. But through the piece of bread you think of Christ's body, which was nailed to the cross. It is the same with

the wine. The wine is not the blood of our Saviour. But through the wine you think of his blood, which dropped from the cross to the ground. We deserved to die on the cross, but Christ was willing to take our place and suffer the punishment we deserved.



When you have a meal at home, one little piece of bread will not make you feel full. You would not feel satisfied with a bite of bread and a sip of wine, as they are handed out in church. You need a bowl of cereal and several slices of bread. But in the Lord's Supper, a piece of bread and a sip of wine is enough. How is that possible? The Holy Spirit uses the Lord's Supper to make your faith strong. He does that when we eat a piece of bread and when we drink of the wine. He makes us aware of the suffering of Jesus.

People quickly forget. They can even forget the message of the Lord's Supper. Therefore He told us that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated often.

The Lord takes good care of us! He gives us the ability to listen to his word. He also gives us baptism and the Lord's Supper.



D. Moes

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Part 3: Living the Christian Life – Living God’s Way

In Part One of the *Emmaus* Nurture course, we looked at what Christians believe. In Part Two, we looked at how Christians grow. In Part Three we will look at living the Christian life. Part Three is made up of five lessons: Living God’s way, Serving the Lord, Your money and your life, Learning to love, and Sharing the faith.

The Maker’s instructions

Ask the participants to divide up into small groups. There may be reactions to the last session dealing with celebrating the Lord’s Supper. If so, deal with them. Then ask them to write down (without looking) as many of the Ten Commandments as they know. Of the ones they have named, which three are most often broken today? Have the groups share their findings. Look up the full list of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and run through the list. Explore the reasons behind some of the commandments. Run through the points given on the members’ handout. Emphasize why God gives us guidelines and instructions. Be sure to point out the connection between the preamble to the Ten Commandments and the commandments themselves. Stress that God wants to keep us in the freedom Christ has achieved for us. Highlight the forgiving and enabling grace of God. We live our Christian life in union with Christ. Thus, when we follow Jesus

Christ, He will bring his perfect obedience to expression in our lives.

Loving God and loving others

Take time to introduce the summary of the law. Encourage the participants to learn this summary by heart. Point out that Christians are called to live in the rhythm of worship and mission: loving God and loving our neighbour. Explore together the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate loving your neighbour as yourself. Be sure to give some background about the relationship between Samaritans and Jews. Have the groups think together about who their neighbour is in the place they live, the place they work, and in the context of the whole world.

Fighting the battle

Point out that the Bible describes the Christian life as a battle. Show the participants how the Heidelberg Catechism describes the three fronts of this battle: the devil, the world, and our own flesh. Emphasize that the devil is real, and a determined enemy who never gives up. Have the groups look up 1 Peter 5:8-9 and James 4:7 and share what these passages tell us about the devil’s power and strategy. Ask the groups to offer suggestions for countering the devil. Define what is meant by the world. Ask the groups if they remember what they learned about the seed that fell among

thorns. Have the groups offer suggestions about what the things of the world are and why they have such power in our lives. Remind them that when one becomes a Christian, he does not stop sinning. Read Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:13-24 together. Have the groups talk together about whether this experience of a battle against sin is real to them. If willing, ask them to share which battles they have fought or are fighting right now.

“I repent of my sins . . . I renounce evil”

Point out that Christians are called to oppose injustice and turn their backs on evil. Illustrate how many people who become Christians were once involved with unjust and wrong practices and organizations. Mention that you understand that sometimes it will be easy to let go of these things while other times they may have taken a dangerous grip on people’s lives. Emphasize that in the latter case there is need for prayer and counsel. Remind the groups that the power of Christ is both stronger and deeper than the power of any other force in the universe.

Putting it into practice

Share with the groups that even Christians who are mature do not always find it easy to think through what is right

and wrong in a situation and to put it into practice. The handout describes four situations in which Christians are called to make a decision. In small groups, have the participants take one or two of the situations and discuss what they would do, or what they think the church's response should be. One of the points of the different situations is to draw out a range of possible Christian responses to each situation and also to open up the idea that it is important to learn how to think in a Christian way about a whole range of different situations. It may be that the material covered in this section helps people see more clearly that certain things from their past or present lifestyle need God's forgiveness and healing. When you talk of sin, be sure to stress God's patience and grace. Some

things need spelling out in black and white for new Christians. This is your opportunity to do so. Again, the emphasis should be on *why* certain things are unhealthy or wrong and on the grace of forgiveness and restoration, rather than reading out lists of prohibited practices.

Strength for the Christian life

Point out that perseverance is a vital Christian discipline. Illustrate how a Christian receives strength from the cross of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the whole armour of God.

In the time between this session and the next, ask the participants to reflect on where God is calling them to change their lifestyle at the present time, where they need forgiveness and help, and what strength they need.

If you would like to view the outline for this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. We have added four articles dealing with Postmodernism to our *Emmaus* library. They will prove to be helpful in understanding our current epistemological (the theory of origin, nature, and limits of knowledge) culture. They are "Fighting Truth Decay" (Douglas Groothuis), "A Confessing Theology in Postmodern Times" (Michael Horton), "The Tower of Babel: Modernity built the tower – now postmodernity must face the challenge of condemning the unsafe structure" (Michael Horton), and "Delights and Dangers of Navigating Postmodern Currents" (Stephen Shields). Next time, we hope to introduce "Serving the Lord!"



Herman Faber

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2004: A Poor Year for Religious Freedom in Canada

A review of recent developments affecting religious rights¹

Background

For Canadians concerned about freedom of religion, the year 2004 marks a number of significant legal and political events. In order to be aware of the receding ground given to the free expression of religious views against a rising tide of individual rights, it is helpful to understand the broader context before addressing recent developments.

With the restructuring of the court system which eliminated the House of Lords in England as the final place of appeal, and particularly following the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, the Supreme Court of Canada has become the arbiter of social values and morals in Canada. As judges become more active in this role, we see not only decisions that interpret

the law, but decisions which create new legal standards.

At the same time, our elected parliament is largely content to allow the courts to make such decisions and adopt the outcome as a *fait accompli*. This is illustrated in the 1984 *Morgentaler* decision which resulted in the Criminal Code sanctions against an abortion, which was not approved by a medical

board, being struck down. Even when some of the Supreme Court judges called for parliament to create protection for late-term fetuses, parliament (under successive Conservative and Liberal governments) has preferred not to act, resulting in a legal vacuum. This 'hands-off' attitude by our elected parliamentarians has prevailed, leaving the unelected court to fill the policy vacuum with case-by-case decisions. At the present time, the same approach applies to the gay marriage issue, with parliament awaiting the court's pronouncement. As a result, the judicial branch of government has become supreme in what should be a constitutional balance.

Religious freedom

Against this context, it is instructive to consider how the Supreme Court of Canada has approached the religious freedom of Canadians. Under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the "section 2" freedoms, including the freedom of expression and religious belief, are "fundamental freedoms."² "Section 15" rights, including the right of protection

The Supreme Court of Canada has become the arbiter of social values and morals in Canada.

against discrimination on the basis of sex or religion, are "individual rights,"³ and usually attract the protection of the courts. What happens when a person's section 15 "individual right" conflicts with another person's section 2 "fundamental freedom"? Typically, the court finds ways to avoid this dialectic, but where the court concludes that a "section 15" right

is at stake, it prevails over the "section 2" freedom of religion. In the process, freedom of religion has been redefined on several occasions and these definitions have been applied by lower courts.

This trend is not new. One approach by the court is to empty the issue of religious content. In *Morgentaler*, the public debate involving abortion as a moral decision founded in religious beliefs about the sanctity of divinely created life was transformed by the court into a women's equality issue. By emptying the debate of a moral or spiritual content, the protection of a "section 2" freedom is not an issue, and therefore is more easily discarded by the court. A similar philosophy applies in other cases. When a values issue is redefined as a rights issue, the court is quicker to intervene. Let us be vigilant against such redefinition, as currently being used in the gay marriage debate, which would make marriage into a civil institution, leaving the religious concept of marriage as an incidental feature.

At the same time, the court has begun to hedge in the scope of religious freedom. In *Big M Drug Mart*, the 1985 decision which opened the door to widespread Sunday shopping, the court said that courses of action motivated by religious principles are bounded only by "such limitations as are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others." The last clause of this limitation has opened the door for further curtailment. Even in *Trinity Western*, a case celebrated by the Christian Canadian community as a victory, the court made the following comment about the freedom of religion: "the freedom to hold beliefs is broader than the freedom to act on them." This re-statement potentially places further restriction on religious freedom.

Indeed, the limitation was further redefined in an Ontario case involving a Christian printer who refused to print letterhead and business cards for a homosexual organization. In upholding the fine imposed by the Ontario Human Rights arbitrator against the printer, the court interpreted the *Big M Drug Mart* limitation as "the further the activity is from the core element of the freedom,

For those reformed Christians who hold the view that there is not one aspect of life over which Christ does not claim his lordship, compartmentalization of "core" and "peripheral" beliefs is unacceptable.

the more likely the activity is to impact on others and the less deserving the activity is of protection." For those reformed Christians who hold the view that there is not one aspect of life over which Christ does not claim his lordship, compartmentalization of "core" and "peripheral" beliefs is unacceptable. At the same time, learning the lesson of the Christian printer, we must clearly and explicitly link our activities to our beliefs by way of vision or mission statements in our organizations and even in our business.

Gay marriage

In 2004 the gay marriage debate reached the Supreme Court of Canada. The federal government argued that marriage as such is not a "core belief" issue for Canadians, and therefore there



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is no infringement upon the “section 2” freedom of religion in the wording of the proposed law. Alternatively, it argued that if there is any infringement, this is corrected by the religious exemption clause in the proposed law. The proposed law would redefine marriage to be “for civil purposes. . . the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others” to replace the common-law definition of “one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.” The new law would allow religious freedom in a defined manner: “Nothing in this Act affects the freedom of officials of religious groups to refuse to perform marriages that are not in accordance with their religious beliefs.”

As a result, marriage is a split institution, part civil and part religious, depending on one’s inclination. This redefinition, according to its proponents, provides for more equal treatment than having “civil unions” for those who do not fit the traditional definition. During the debate, the voices of Christian organizations that intervened raised questions about the very right of a court or parliament to consider redefining marriage which has existed since the beginning of western civilization. To this, Justice Binnie compared such questions to that of redefining the authority of a British monarch who used to claim a divine right to rule, but which right eventually became subject to the constitution. This view suggests that nothing in Canadian society is beyond the purview of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Bill C-250

Perhaps the most explicit attack on religious freedom in 2004 is the passage in April of Bill C-250, the amendment to the hate crime law. Under the Criminal Code, members of the public distinguished by sexual orientation are now an “identifiable group.” Against such groups, it is illegal to make public

statements which are likely to incite hatred. The law provides a narrow defence for a person who expressed an opinion based on a religious subject or text, as long as he can prove that the opinion was intended for the public good and held to be true, or was made in good faith to overcome negative perceptions. The burden of proving the defence rests on the accused. The impact of the hate crime law in the context of the gay marriage debate is not yet measurable, but there is an expectation that this will have a stifling effect on any public dissent.

Bill C-250 will doubtlessly spawn further decisions and possible limitations about freedom of religion.

The 2002 Saskatchewan case of Hugh Owens is instructive. Mr. Owens placed an ad in the *Star Phoenix* for bumper stickers which cited Scripture passages condemning homosexuality and was fined by the Human Rights tribunal for promoting hatred. This decision was upheld by the court of Queen’s Bench. Today, Bill C-250 would likely support a conviction in similar cases where the public statement has no broader religious context. Bill C-250 will doubtlessly spawn further decisions and possible limitations about freedom of religion, and we should support those who are charged for upholding Scriptural truths.

In conclusion

As reformed Christians, we assert that the government’s task “includes the protection of the Church and its ministry in order that the kingdom of Christ may come, the Word of the gospel may be preached everywhere, and God may be honoured and served by everyone, as He requires in his Word” (BC, Art 36). This

is a tall order in Canada’s current political and legal climate; let us remain watchful in the coming year and defend the freedoms that we cherish.

¹ This article is an adaptation of a presentation under the title “Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves” by the author at the “Ignite our Culture” annual conference of the ECP Centre, on November 13, 2004 at Burlington, Ontario.

² Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 2 states:

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

- a) freedom of conscience and religion;
- b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
- c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and
- d) freedom of association.

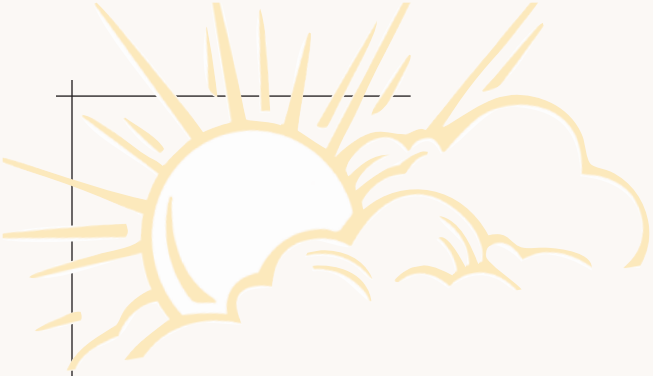
³ Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 15 states:

(1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Affirmative action programs (2)

Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”

Matthew 5:13

Since we have now completed the series on the Beatitudes, it is good to continue with what the Lord Jesus teaches us in the verses following. The Beatitudes have shown us what a Christian character must consist of, and now we will see how we must apply this to our daily living. We are poor in spirit, merciful, meek, hungry, and thirsting after righteousness in order, in a sense, that we may be “the salt of the earth.” Our text is showing us very clearly the relationship of us as Christians to the world. Let us go on to learn more of what Jesus is teaching us here.

As Christians, we are to be unlike the world. The Christian is a man who is essentially different from everybody else. He is as different as the salt is from the meat into which it is being rubbed. The Christian is not only to be different; he is to glory in this difference. He is to be as different from other people as the Lord Jesus Christ was clearly different from the world in which He lived.

By the way we act, we can show others the greatness of our God. In writing to the Colossians, the apostle Paul also stressed to be wise in the way we act toward outsiders. As Paul states, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col 4:6). Just as salt is a preservative and is tasty, so our conversations as Christians should be in good taste. What we say is important, but how we treat others is equally as important. “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (Col 3: 12). Even to the people of the world we have to show that the peace of God rules in our hearts.

There are many ways in which we can be the salt of the earth. If we hear our neighbour blaspheming, we should tell them that they are offending our God. A boss at work may treat us unfairly, and may be wrong in the lies he is spreading about us. Thus as Christians, we have to speak with great wisdom and tell him not in anger, but calmly, that he is wrong. If the

opportunity arises, we might even be able to explain to him what the Lord requires of us through the commandments.

As salt is used to preserve many foods, so a Christian can remain the salt of the earth. By living joyfully in God’s creation and finding great pleasure in everything we do, we can then be a witness to those around us. People around us might find the need to have lots of money to be happy. But this only lasts for a little while, because they are never content. As God’s children we may not have all that the world has to offer but this does not fill us with discontent, for our treasure lies in heaven. We can be the salt of the earth by being joyful in all circumstances. Our joy is living close to our God and giving thanks to Him daily for his many blessings. In our daily walk of life we can be great witnesses that the love of God lives in us.

Christians are to be salt. We are to do our part in keeping God’s Word alive. Let us always strive to bring the message of God’s unfailing grace and love wherever we can. Yet it is only through God’s steadfast love for us that we remain faithful. Through the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives we receive daily guidance in how to be the salt of the earth. In a world so full of sin, the members of Christ’s church are to act as witnesses of God’s glorious grace. Let us never forget to daily thank our God and Father for his many promises given to his people. Although the world has long lost its flavour, we will forever remain the salt of the earth. Praise be to Him alone!

*In Thy rich blessings I delight
As in a lavish feast before me.
In meditation I adore Thee
Throughout the watches of the night.
I cling to Thee, my strong Deliverer,
And in the shadow of Thy wings
My mouth for joy Thy praises sings,
For Thy right hand upholds me ever.*

Psalm 63:3

Birthdays in March:

- 3 TREVOR HOF SINK will be 27**
C106 8920 165th Street, Edmonton, AB T5R 2R9
- 10 JAMES BOONE will turn 9**
22 Aberdare Rd. NE, Calgary, AB T2A 6V9
- 12 GERRY EELHART will be 43**
c/o Mr. & Mrs. Peter Eelhart
#305-10041-149 Street, Summit Village,
Edmonton, AB T5P 4V7
- 15 JIM VANDERHEIDEN will turn 46**
c/o The Beacon, 653 Broad Street West,
Dunnville, Ontario N1A 1T8
- 18 ROSELYN KUIK will be 31**
68 Lynn Lake Drive, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4N7
- 26 COURTNEY POPKEN will be 12**
9445 Windsor Street, Chilliwack, BC V2P 6C5



Congratulations to all of you celebrating a birthday in this month. May you all have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends and above all may the God's love and grace fill your days in this new year.

Till next time,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville ON LOR 1B2
905-563-0380



Press Release

Press Release of Classis Pacific East held on December 2, 2004

The chairman of the convening church of Abbotsford calls the meeting to order. He asks the delegates to sing Hymn 15:3, 4, reads from Isaiah 11 and 12, and leads in prayer. The delegates are welcomed as is Rev. Michael Voytek who is present as a fraternal observer from the Western Classis of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS).

Recent events within the classical area are remembered, including the departure of Rev. C.J. VanderVelde to Rockway, Ontario and the impending departure of Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer to Carman East, Manitoba. Rev. and Mrs. Holtvlüwer are congratulated on the recent birth of their fourth son. The passing on of Dr. J. Faber to heavenly glory is also remembered. His many years of service to the churches of Christ will always be a reason for gratitude.

As officers of Classis, the following are appointed: as chairman, Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer; as vice-chairman, Rev. R. Schouten; as clerk, Rev. M.H. Van Luik. Classis is constituted.

An appeal is received from a brother against the disciplinary measures of his consistory. This appeal is declared inadmissible.

Rev. Voytek is given an opportunity to address Classis. He brings greetings on behalf of the Western Classis of the RCUS and also from his own Providence congregation of Lodi, California. He offers a meditation on Genesis 12 and Psalm 67 at the end of which he exhorts the churches of Classis Pacific East to be faithful in reaching out to those who live in darkness. He also shares information about the church planting works of the RCUS. The Chairman responds with appropriate words and offers prayer on behalf of the RCUS.

A report is received from the classical Committee for Aid to Students for the Ministry. Classis approves the recommendation of this Committee to support a student who requested aid. The assessment will be \$6.75 per communicant member.

Question period according to Article 44 of the Church Order is held. One of the churches indicates that it has not implemented the decision found in

Article 110 of the Acts of General Synod. Instead, this church intends to appeal this decision.

Aldergrove is appointed as the convening church for the next Classis. The date for this Classis will be March 10, 2005, beginning at 9:00 a.m. The alternate date is June 2, 2005. The suggested officers for the next Classis are: as chairman, Rev. R. Schouten; as vice-chairman, Rev. M. H. Van Luik; as clerk, Rev. W.M. Wielenga.

Due to some confusion about the date for the next Regional Synod, Classis decides to send a letter to the convening church for the next Regional Synod requesting that official notice be sent to all the churches in case of a cancellation and that the date for the next Regional Synod be established as soon as possible.

Censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order is deemed unnecessary. The Acts of Classis are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved. The chairman leads in closing devotions. The meeting is closed.

R. Schouten
Clerk

Tsunami Aftermath: A Time to Show Christ's Compassion

Government and relief agencies estimate that over 160,000 people perished in December's Indian Ocean tsunami. Approximately 8 million are homeless. Huge sums have been pledged worldwide to help survivors rebuild their lives.

This tragedy is an opportunity for Reformed people to show Christ's compassion through faithful local churches. Avoiding the huge administrative costs of secular aid efforts, much can be done with limited resources to build up the witness of local churches.

Diaconal aid to local believers may bear spiritual fruit. By the end of December, MERF's Board released reserve funds for indigenous diaconal ministries for Indonesia and Sri Lanka. There is also a possibility of similar assistance to stricken coastal areas of India through a faithful Tamil congregation.

We should be prayerfully burdened by this terrible event, which reflects the disorder and confusion brought upon our planet by man's fall, and at the same time, be comforted by the knowledge that through it the Lord will certainly bring about eternal good to the lives of many victims from Indonesia to Somalia.



A massive December 26 undersea earthquake near northwest Indonesia triggered deadly tidal waves throughout the Indian Ocean's rim including the countries highlighted.

Indonesian outreach bears fruit

North-western Sumatra in Indonesia suffered the most. The death toll there surpassed 100,000 and continues to climb. Many died as a result of the earthquake that triggered the tsunami.

Dr. I.L., an Indonesian physician who works in partnership with MERF, reports that although Aceh, the province most affected by the earthquake and tidal waves, is largely Muslim, quite a number of Indonesian Christians lost loved ones or were injured.

Thousands have become homeless and/or lost their source of income, such as those on the smaller of the two islands in the Aceh province, which was submerged under water.

In 2003, many churches in Aceh's capital, Banda, were burned down or demolished by militant Muslims. Three remaining church buildings are guarded by armed Indonesian police. One is the meeting place of a strong Bible-believing and Reformed congregation. MERF's Indonesian partners, along with other indigenous brethren, are carrying out a



Communities near northwest Sumatra's coast remained flooded days after the tsunami devastated Indonesia's Aceh province.

ministry of mercy through this congregation as well as a daughter church in Nias.

Priority is given to the household of faith. However, the congregation is taking the opportunity to bear witness to Christ among all by extending hospitality to Muslim neighbors and providing them with temporary shelter, food, and clothing. Believing volunteers from other parts of Indonesia are joining in reaching out to the needy in the surrounding villages with food and clothing. Dr. I.L. reports that the tragedy seems to be already reaping some Gospel good among many Muslims who are both shaken by the whole tragedy and moved by the compassion of Christians from throughout the world.

On the last day of 2004, in a radio interview on the Arabic BBC, an Indonesian Muslim scholar chided Arab and Muslim nations for being outdone by Christian organizations in responding to the tsunami tragedy! He pointed out that non-Muslim aid agencies seemed more urgent and zealous in concern for the suffering of Muslim people than Islamic authorities. Apparently, oil rich

Muslim nations were slow to respond to the tragedy.

Aiding Sri Lankan congregations

Through the International Evangelical Church in Larnaca, Cyprus, which includes a sizeable number of Sri Lankan believers, MERF has established contact with several Reformed congregations in the country who now provide a ministry of Word and Deed in several parts of the nation.

Huge tsunami waves killed an estimated 30,000 people in coastal villages and towns of this poor island nation. Sadly, almost half of the victims are children. Entire villages were swept away or submerged. The subsequent heavy rains which continued to soak the

Along Sri Lanka's south-eastern coast, entire villages were swept away, leaving thousands homeless.



island have complicated the already difficult job of caring for the needy.

It is not yet known how many Christians were among the Sri Lankan victims. In one case, a Sri Lankan Christian woman worked as a domestic maid in Cyprus for over four years to save enough money to provide her family with a humble home. The waters of the tsunami washed all her hard work away with the house, yet her youngest child was miraculously saved by neighbours.

We can give thanks for the fact that local Sri Lankan believers have been in the forefront of the relief efforts. Several church buildings on higher ground have built make-shift shelters to provide for thousands of survivors. One Tamil congregation has established a temporary refugee camp for 11,000 homeless people.

In both Sri Lanka and Indonesia the Gospel has advanced significantly in recent years. This has angered Sri Lanka's Buddhist establishment and Indonesia's militant Muslims, triggering violence in the last year against the growing Christian minorities in both nations. The outpouring of love in Christ's name continues to impact the lives of many who live in darkness. It is also contributing to reconciliation between the island's ethnic communities.

Support the weak. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

With warm regards, yours in the Lord's service,

Rev. J. Mulder, chairman,
Mrs. J. VanDam, secretary.

PO Box 40052, Larnaca, 6300 Cyprus • merf@merf.org

Keith Sikkema

Mr. Keith Sikkema is a grade 8 teacher and vice-principal at John Calvin School in Smithville, Ontario.
ksikkema@juno.com

Peregrine Survey



The last Peregrine Survey ended with a question about our ongoing enthusiasm and vigour in supporting Reformed education. How are we doing? Around the country, school boards and principals continue to stimulate involvement in and thinking about ongoing activities and future developments. PTAs organize evenings where topics of interest are addressed. Ladies' auxiliaries and other groups report about fund-raisers for various worthwhile school-related activities: educational trips, enhanced facilities, and savings accounts for future expansions. Things are going well, and we continue to experience the blessings of the Lord in many ways. At the same time, issues continue to pop up.

Things are going well, and we continue to experience the blessings of the Lord in many ways.

ACRES' board, in Attercliffe, notes with thankfulness "the wonderful turnout at the fall membership meeting." The school is now in its tenth year of operation, and had an excellent response to a tuition reduction drive last year. Another board, however, had to reschedule a membership meeting for lack of a 60% quorum. As part of their financial responsibilities, school boards are frequently faced with the question of what to do with members who are "in arrears."

In that context, the board of Dufferin Christian School in Carman proposed to develop a protocol that involves the consistory at some point. It states that it has "at no point considered expelling the children from school as a result of the arrears by the parents." Credo Christian Elementary School in Langley had an Independent Schools Branch External Evaluation, and "all things were in good order, meaning that our Group One funding will continue." With all the inside and outside ways in which funds are raised to support Reformed education, one occasionally encounters particularly succulent morsels: at one bazaar, the list of donated items included a "bull calf" and "an older cow good for hamburger."

Credo Christian High School in Langley has again been nominated for the Fraser Institute's Academic Achievement in Excess of Expectations award. In this context, the board chairman muses, "While it's nice to get recognition from outside of the supporting community, we are very appreciative of the positive comments and ongoing support from you the parents and members. May we all continue to enjoy the blessings of our Heavenly Father." On the other hand, there was also cause to discuss why certain students leave CCHS for other institutions.

The principal of Credo Christian High School makes a habit of reflecting on different aspects of Christian education in the school's regular publication. In a fall issue, he noted how we sometimes need to make quick

decisions, while at other times it is appropriate to give a "more seasoned consideration." He continues, "In school, we're in the business of helping your children make up their mind. But, it runs a whole lot deeper than simply this. It's about developing right thinking and that involves at bottom a fundamental transformation of the mind" (Rom 12).

May the Lord use the work done in our schools to help equip students for a lifetime of gratitude in his service.

Of course, this transformation of the mind is a gift of God that is associated with faith (CD, III/IV 10-14), and that finds expression, among others, by using God's various gifts "as living sacrifices" in the communion of saints. Paul calls the Romans to such works of gratitude in view of God's mercy. The principal points out that as well as emotions and feelings, our rational thinking is affected by the fall into sin. He then describes the role of the Christian school teacher:

The Christian school teacher encourages students to discuss and think matters through rather than to accept the pat answers to every social problem. In Science the Christian school teacher encourages students to consider designing their own experiments and in Biblical



Studies they are encouraged to think through the message for themselves and so take ownership. In Social Studies students can learn to apply Christian principles to contemporary social issues. Throughout the curriculum teachers not only expose students to what has been said and done by others, but they also challenge students to speak and act for themselves. If we don't encourage students to be challenged in school but instead celebrate and reward them for passively and uncritically soaking up information, then they likely won't be able to speak boldly with a Christian voice to the issues of the day after they graduate.

He concludes, "It's really more than *changing their mind*. It's about *challenging, developing, and shaping minds*." May the Lord use the work done in our schools to help equip students for a lifetime of gratitude in his service.

Demographic and other developments are largely beyond the control of school boards and societies. While it was considered prudent in 1987 to split John Calvin Christian School in Burlington and to establish Covenant Christian School in Flamborough, the schools are now seriously considering re-amalgamating. Neerlandia considers future expansion due to increasing enrolment, and "the board would like to do this in a positive, up-building manner.

Expansion should be looked upon as something that is to be thankful for, and not burdensome to the members. Therefore, the board is committed to undertake this project in an atmosphere of fiscal responsibility." The school's staff and administration also consider government-required curriculum changes, including a mandatory French program for all students starting in Grade 4, and a compulsory 30 minutes of daily physical activity.

This is the time of the year when boards and education committees are particularly interested in making arrangements for a full complement of staff for the 2005-2006 school year. As this invariably raises questions for all involved, may the Lord grant us wisdom to proceed in this regard with faith and humility, depending on Him who supplies us with all we need. Meanwhile, may He grant us all that we retain our love and enthusiasm for the task of raising covenant children, whether as parents, as supporting community, or as school staff.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone willing to respond or interact to an article or anyone willing to write an article for us is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman (bouwman@surepost.net).

Dear Editor:

Some time ago a number of articles appeared in *Christian Courier* in which a lawyer cautioned churches against certain practices in connection with rules and laws governing charitable organizations. In his conclusion, he urged churches to not have their minister function as chairman of council since a paid employee of a charity is not permitted to function as an officer or director of that organization. At least two Canadian Reformed churches in Ontario felt that his arguments were persuasive enough to implement this policy. This decision was further based on a letter from a government department that seemed to confirm the above premise regardless whether the church is an incorporated body or not. Other Canadian Reformed churches are now also seriously considering this matter. In implementing this decision, the vice chairman has now become the chairman of council; the minister still chairs the meetings of the consistory.

It is necessary that we take a careful look at this because in my opinion by following these recommendations we have reduced the church of our Lord Jesus Christ to a charitable organization that operates under the equivalent of a board of directors. These churches may have the impression, or at least give the impression, that the church is governed by the council, where the elders (consistory) and deacons operate as sub-committees of council. Also, the position of chairman seemed to be equated to that of the chief executive officer of the church and the clerk becomes the secretary of the organization.

In the circles where these articles originated this is not such a strange idea because most, if not all, Christian Reformed churches are incorporated.

They have by-laws and officers that direct their church's activities. In the Canadian Reformed churches this is different. First of all, we would not incorporate our churches and subject it to corporate or business law, although incorporation is not a factor in the above assumptions. Whether or not we consider ourselves a charitable organization, however, is pertinent. Of course, we would argue, we are not. We are a body of believers gathered locally as the bride of Christ and of which He is the Head. As described in our Church Order, it is necessary for the maintenance of good order in the church that there are offices. The office of minister of the Word, elder, and deacon are recognized (CO, Art 1). These are Scripture based offices and not the equivalent of a board of directors in a secular organization. An important principle is that among and between the offices there is equality. Therefore, when certain functions are assigned it is done only to divide some of the tasks. It does not assign rank. When a minister functions as chairman he does not become the president or CEO of a church. Canada has long recognized this principle and churches do well to make use of trustees as provided for in Canadian law. Trustees hold land titles and assets for the benefit of a church. It is also their names that should be listed on the annual return for charitable organizations, and not the names of minister and elders.

Another consideration is that, as churches, we should not be willing to allow government regulations, for the sake of some financial benefit, to supersede our accepted church order. The Church Order (Art 38) stipulates that, as a rule, the minister of the Word shall preside over the meetings of the consistory. If we follow the above recommendation then the exception becomes the rule. It may be argued that we are dealing only with the minister presiding over council, but that he will still chair consistory meetings. Aside from the comments I already made above, it should also be considered that the term council is only found in the Belgic Confession (Art 30). At the risk of opening a whole debate again on whether deacons belong to the consistory, I believe that a meeting of council is no more than a meeting of the consistory at which the deacons are present. The intent of Article 30 is not to assign roles and ranks, but to point out and confess that Christ rules the church through the service of office-bearers.

Hopefully this letter will stimulate some further reflection on the practice as it has found its way in the churches.

Respectfully,
Gerard J. Nordeman



Our Little Magazine



Dear Busy Beavers:

There have been lots of events going on in the world in the last few months which show the mighty power of God. We have heard of tsunamis, earthquakes, mud slides and snowstorms. The west coast of Canada has received lots of rain and the east coast piles of snow. It may not be fun to shovel all that snow but it sure would be fun to play in. We may be thankful to God that in whatever situation his children find themselves He will always take care of them.

I hope you are all doing well. Are you enjoying the year 2005? Do you have any special plans for this year? Let me know what you are keeping busy with. You may send a letter or an e-mail.

Love,
Aunt Betty

Puzzles

WHAT THEY ATE

Match the following names to what they ate.

1. Esau (Gen 25:34) _____ Bread
2. Elijah (I Kings 17: 6) _____ Vegetables and water
3. Ezekiel (Ezek 3:1) _____ Bread and pottage
4. John the Baptist (Matt 3:4) _____ Milk
5. Jesus (Luke 24: 42) _____ Bread and meat
6. Sisera (Judg 4:19) _____ Locust and wild honey
7. The Israelites (Ex 16: 15) _____ Broiled fish
8. Daniel (Dan 1:12) _____ A scroll

THE TWELVE TRIBES

Can you unscramble the 12 tribes of Israel?

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1. HREAS | 7. HADJU |
| 2. IMBJENNA | 8. ILVE |
| 3. AND | 9. PATANHLI |
| 4. DGA | 10. EERUNB |
| 5. AARCHISS | 11. NMOISE |
| 6. HOPESJ | 12. BUUZNEL |

MEN FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS

Look up the Scripture verses given below. They are all found in the book of Acts.

Find the name mentioned in the verse. Then find it in the puzzle.

Circle the name.

Some letters will be used more than once.

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|-------|
| 11:22 | 18:2 | 13:16 | 1:26 |
| 16:1 | 10:1 | 9:10 | 15:39 |
| 24:3 | 7:59 | 15:13 | 2:14 |
| 15:34 | 17:5 | 19:24 | 8:26 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T | R | K | C | J | A | S | O | N |
| I | F | P | O | Q | M | A | R | K |
| M | B | A | R | N | A | B | A | S |
| O | X | U | N | Z | T | E | N | T |
| T | Z | L | E | F | T | K | A | E |
| H | B | K | L | E | H | Z | N | P |
| E | P | H | I | L | I | P | I | H |
| U | E | N | U | I | A | T | A | E |
| S | T | P | S | X | S | W | S | N |
| D | E | M | E | T | R | I | U | S |
| X | R | Y | A | Q | U | I | L | A |
| J | A | M | E | S | I | L | A | S |

Aunt Betty

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