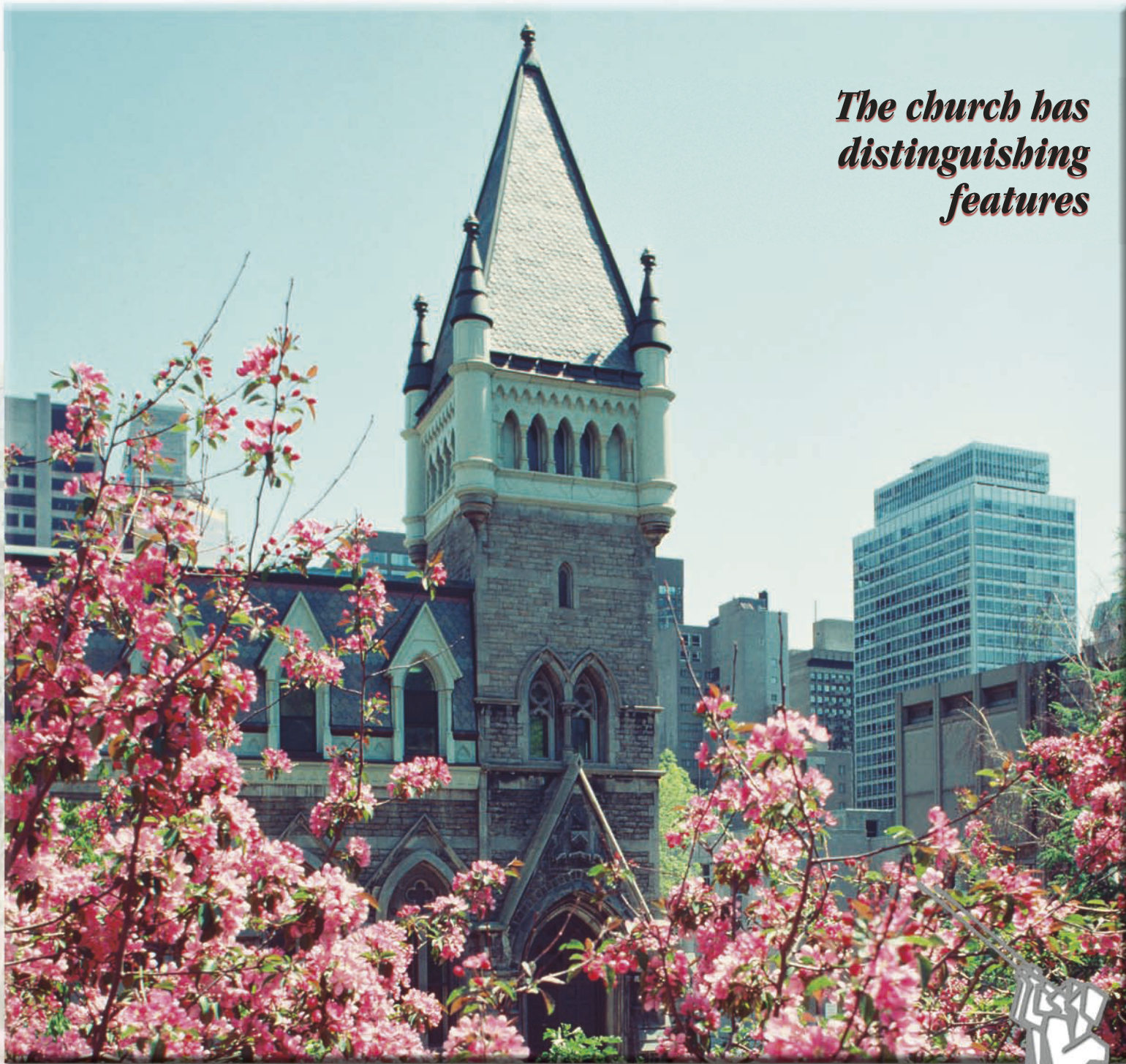


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*The church has
distinguishing
features*



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- Why Worship Twice?





Cl. Stam

Marks

It's very easy to become fixated on one aspect of a matter

More and more people like to wear a tattoo, a supremely distinguishing mark. Some of these are very elaborate and make the body look like a twisted piece of canvas, while others are very small and have a special significance for the bearer. I heard a fellow say: a tattoo makes a statement, about who you are and what you want in life. Though I love "statements," I dislike tattoos. Enough, already.

Now my purpose is not to get all worked up over some cheap Miami ink. However, we might note that the Bible does say in Leviticus 19:28, "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord." Marking oneself was usually done by pagan priests and their heathen followers. It's a declaration that you belong to the gang.

The marks of the church

The church has no tattoos. The communion of saints is quite different from a gang of thugs. But the church does have distinguishing features. We call them "marks," because they identify the church of Christ in society. In my last editorial – long since forgotten – I wrote about those marks.

Breaking with the true church is indeed sin

The marks are confessed in accordance with Scripture in the Belgic Confession, Article 29. There is, first of all, the true preaching of the gospel. Then there is the pure administration of the sacraments. Finally, there is the exercising of church discipline for correction and punishing sins. To make things simpler, we speak about preaching, sacraments, and discipline.

Perhaps most churches that exist have these marks in some way and to some degree. Hence their members react with some irritation when these marks are mentioned against them. Why be so critical? Nobody is perfect. Have the Canrefferers not sat in

judgment long enough over other churches with different backgrounds and practices? Are we not often people with a true church *obsession*?

This may be the case sometimes. It's very easy to become fixated on one aspect of a matter. But these marks are not a side-bar, for they indicate the norms that the Bible applies to a church that really lives up to its name.

Notice the adjectives used in Article 29. It speaks about the *pure* preaching of the gospel and the *pure* administration of the sacraments. Because the Word of God is pure, our preaching, sacraments, and exercising of discipline must also be pure. *Pure* means here very simply "according to the pure Word of God." Pure means that it's the real thing. Nothing added, nothing removed.

The marks of Christians

Someone tried to tell me once that the marks of the *Christians* are more important than the marks of the church. On the great day God will not ask you, I was told, of what church you were a member, but He will ask if you showed forth the marks of the Christians.

Now I don't have the inside scoop on what God might or might not ask on that day. But if we were knowingly members of a false church, why would God not ask us about such a key life decision? We could be in for a shocking surprise when the Judge opens his books. Breaking with the true church, as outlined in our confession, is indeed sin, and needs to be called by its proper name.

We should not play the marks of the church off against the marks of Christians. Perhaps we do not sport a tattoo, but we are to show by the marks of the Christians that we truly belong to God's faithful church. Actually, the marks of the church are meant to teach us and help us to show forth the marks of Christians.

People around us have to see these marks. Our joyful and thankful displaying of the marks of the Christians truly shows everyone that we bear marks that are deeply spiritual and not superficially



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physical. The real difference between a tattoo and a mark is that the tattoo is engraved on your skin, but the mark is implanted into your heart.

We sometimes read about the missionary character of the church. We are to be outreach-oriented. This is true. It's also a bit of a buzz-word. Our Heidelberg Catechism explains, however, that the first form of outreach is that "by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbour for Christ." While understanding that nothing in this life is perfect, we need to talk the talk and walk the walk. People around us really notice that walk and talk are in sync. It is a powerful combination.

Marks of the church and the Christians

There is very little or no difference between the marks of the church and the marks of a Christian. They are inextricably connected. The church preaches the pure gospel; the Christians believe in Jesus Christ. The church administers sacraments; the believers appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ. The church exercises discipline; the believers crucify their flesh and its works. It all works together.

The true church leads on strongly. The true believers follow obediently. The marks of the church and those of the believers may be distinguished but should never be separated.

Paint is for pagans

I do not know how many of our young people (or older ones) actually wear a tattoo. I hope the number is small. Not because I am scared of a little bit of paint. But paint is for pagans. We do not need outward beautification but inward regeneration.

Did you ever see pictures of the old medicine man or shaman, witch doctors of many stripes and plumes? They used scary masks, weird rattles, and all kind of visual effects. They were heavily painted and elaborately tattooed or cut. It showed their strong devotion to their idols. Actually, it is more slavish subjection than true devotion.

The Lord said: I don't want this. You don't belong to them and therefore don't act like them. Their worship is false and superficial, but I have a better way. He poured out his Spirit over us. This Spirit leads us in the liturgy of our lives.

The Holy Spirit works from the inside and the effect of that becomes visible to the outside. Don't paint a saint. Don't adorn a believer. See in his whole life the blossoming splendour of the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Submitted 09/02/2008



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MATTHEW 13:52

Holy Ground

“By the breath of Gd, frost is given”

(Job 37:10, KJV)

*“He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.
He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes.
He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast?
He sends his word and melts them; He stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.”*
(Psalm 147:15-18)

“When you send your Spirit. . . you renew the face of the earth.”
(Psalm 104:30)

Sometimes it takes children to show us where God is. One frosty morning many years ago, I stepped out of our home to do some errands. Christopher, who was five or so at the time, was with me. On my way to the car I was going to walk across the corner of my lawn. There was hoarfrost on the grass. My son shouted, “No! Don’t do that. Stop!” I stopped dead in my tracks, wondering, “Why? What’s wrong?” He implored me, “Don’t step on the grass, Daddy, that’s frost. That’s the breath of God!” God was in that place. God’s breath was there on the grass and on the trees all around us, and my young son was filled with awe. He saw God’s presence there, upon the grass, before our eyes. As we drove away that morning, I, too, saw in the hoarfrost the beauty and the holiness of God.

With his breath and his Spirit, God often brings weather that lets us feel his presence. Ten years ago, a great ice storm struck eastern Canada. For several days, freezing rain blanketed our village and the surrounding countryside. I remember how, when the storm had passed and the sun came out,



Photo by Chris van Popta (December 2007)

there was a profound beauty all around us. Ice encased everything and the world glistened as if it were a crystal palace. It was fantastically beautiful.

Yet, we were astonished by the destructive power of the ice. “Who can withstand his icy blast?” the psalmist asks. Trees were shattered. Power lines were pulled down, their wooden poles splintered and their steel towers buckled. The slightest breeze caused the power lines that had not fallen to creak and groan as the

encasing ice cracked and shattered. Trees in the forests bent low, their boughs growling against each other when they moved. Willow trees along the streams bent low, not now weeping, but mourning as if in deep sorrow. Branches broke with sounds like gunshots. It was as if all creation were groaning.

This was the work of the very breath of the Almighty: “By the breath of God, frost is given.” The almighty God Himself was there! As my children and I walked

through the village, we were filled with awe. The beauty reminded us of John's description of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven: "It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." In this beauty we saw, as the psalmist did, God's Word and Spirit active all around us.

Those moments with my children cause me to reflect, even now years later, on the holiness of God. He reveals his holiness by his breath, his Spirit, his wind. When I recall the beautiful destruction that God brought on us in the ice storm, I revere his majesty, his power, his

judgment. Wrapped up in that beauty, there was judgment. In ice, God reveals his power; in frost, his holiness; in snow, his purity. But then his warming Word comes, the psalm says, and melts the ice and snow. The frost is replaced by dew on the morning grass. Spring comes again and the ice melts. There is new life. God renews the face of the ground by that very same Word and Spirit. Our lawns and gardens grow and blossom, revealing the marvelous beauty of new life. The Spirit blows upon the flowerbeds and transforms them into places of rebirth.

Every winter and every spring God reveals these things to us. The

whole of creation groans under the burden of man's sin. Yet God comes to us with his Word. It comes to us and reveals to us its beauty, like ice upon a willow tree, or frost upon the grass. It is a Word, clear as crystal, reflecting and refracting the glory of God to us. We only need the eyes to see it. It is the Word and Spirit that transform ordinary places into places where God reveals Himself.

If it had not been so cold that frosty morning so many years ago, my young son gazing at our front lawn might have said to me, "Take off your shoes, Daddy, this is holy ground!"

Book Review

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518, **Gerhard O. Forde**

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
Additional Information: Paperback,
121 pages, \$11.95.

When referring to various teachings about salvation which involve man cooperating with God (synergism), we often use the term "Arminianism." If we're a little more sophisticated, we might use terms like Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism. This book re-introduces an old distinction formulated by Martin Luther: a theology of glory versus a theology of the cross. All the various synergistic ideas of salvation can be placed under the heading of a "theology of glory." This book may persuade you that these old categories of Luther are more helpful than the ones we often use

today. Moreover, it may surprise you how often we ourselves are drawn to a "theology of glory" which "calls evil good and good evil."

The author, Gerhard Forde (1927-2005), was professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota until his retirement in 1998. The book is his commentary on a set of theses that Martin Luther presented to the German Congregation of the Augustinian order in Heidelberg in 1518. Even though the Ninety-five Theses of 1517 caused a bigger stir politically and ecclesiastically, the twenty-eight theses presented at Heidelberg have been more theologically influential.

This is an amazing little book and reading it may well turn your thinking upside down. The theology of the cross is, of course, concerned with the cross of Jesus Christ, which Forde reminds us is "shorthand for the entire narrative

of the crucified and risen Jesus" (p 1). It also includes the Old Testament preparation for that narrative. But this is not abstract theology – what is brilliantly laid out here is the gospel whereby God alone saves sinners through Christ alone: "Grace says 'believe it' and everything – EVERYTHING! – is already done" (p 110). Perhaps not surprisingly, there are numerous similarities between the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 and the Catechism that was produced in Heidelberg in 1563.

Every now and then you come across a book that delivers theology in a devotional format – you read it and it propels you further on the journey of spiritual growth. This is one of those books. Read it and see what happens! I have but one complaint and it is the image of Christ on the cross on the cover. However, a post-it note with some tape quickly deals with that problem. Aside from that, this book is highly recommended.

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A Guide to Reformed Worship (Part 10) – Why Worship Twice?

As we come to the end of this series, we've covered a lot of ground. There are many issues that I've not discussed – space limitations demand selectivity. However, there is one more thing that really needs our attention. As with many of the other things we've looked at, this is not something new. People have been discussing it for centuries. "It" is the reason why we have two worship services in our Reformed churches.

There are those in many, if not all, of our churches who do not seem to see the importance or rationale for attending the worship services regularly. During the morning services, the pews are often full. Things sometimes look thinner in the second service. Sometimes there are legitimate reasons why people can only attend once. We're not concerned about that here. Rather, we're concerned about those who are perfectly healthy, who have no little children or others dependent on them, who have no "works of necessity" to perform, and yet they make a conscious choice to only go to church once. They *could* be going twice, but yet they make a deliberate decision to do so only once.

In some cases, this may be done simply out of innocent ignorance. No one has told the person in

question that they belong in church twice. Somehow I suspect that such people are a rare breed, if they exist at all. In most cases, I think the persons involved simply have not been convinced that this is a biblical practice and they feel they have the freedom to decide what they want to do with their Sundays. In other cases, the people involved just don't care.

In this article, I want to appeal to those who are not convinced that this is a biblical practice. There's nothing I can do about those who don't care – I suspect that they would never read this anyway. But perhaps there are some readers who fit into the first category and I want to make an effort to convince them that regular attendance at both services should be a priority for all Reformed believers. So, I'll give five reasons here why we should make it a priority to worship as often as we're able.

Five reasons

First, when we make a choice to only attend once, this is self-destructive. The preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments are means of grace in the lives of believers. The Spirit works through these God-appointed means to bring about transformation and sanctification

in our lives. We're also missing out on opportunities to encourage and be encouraged by our brothers and sisters before, during, and after the worship services. Don't we believe and confess that the sixth commandment includes that "I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself" (HC, Q/A 105)? So, why would we want to harm ourselves spiritually by staying away from the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments? Such a choice is self-destructive.

Not only are we hurting ourselves by attending only once, we also do harm to our families. That is the second reason. What is the message we're sending to our children and grandchildren? Perhaps we're saying that we've arrived. We've already heard it all; we already know it all. We don't need to be reminded of anything (though 2 Peter 1:12 says different!). We don't need the Holy Spirit to work on us through the preaching. We don't need to be strengthened through the sacraments. We don't need our brothers and sisters in the church to encourage us and they don't need us to encourage them. So, perhaps we're teaching pride to our children and grandchildren. We're telling them that you can decide for yourself the way you want to worship God and you can

forget everybody else. You make up your mind for yourself when you want to go to church, regardless of what the consistory says. This way of thinking will ultimately not only destroy your children spiritually, it will also destroy the church. Though our culture says otherwise, pride is never healthy for anybody. Over and over again the Bible warns about the dangers of pride (e.g. 1 Peter 5:5).

The third reason: when we make a conscious habit of attending only once, we are doing damage to the church and its unity. We confess that we are the body of Christ. So, why is this particular part of the body going off and doing his or her own thing when the rest are assembled for worship? "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' and the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you'" (1 Cor 12:21). "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor 12:26). And by extension we could say, "If one part is worshipping, every part should be worshipping with it." Since we are the body of Christ, we do things *together* and that includes gathering for corporate public worship.

The fourth reason has to do with the fifth commandment. We confess in Lord's Day 39 that we are to show "all honour, love, and faithfulness" to all those in authority over us. We are to submit ourselves with due obedience to their good instruction and discipline. It is God's will to govern us by their hand. When we do public profession of faith we promise that we believe all this. Among those in authority over us are the office bearers of the church. The *consistory* calls the congregation to worship twice each Sunday. It is not optional. Of course, as I

mentioned earlier, there can be legitimate reasons why you cannot come. But if a person makes a willful choice to do something else, to be somewhere else, when they're called to be in church, that's a sin against the fifth commandment. Now somebody might say that the Bible doesn't directly tell us to worship twice, so we don't have to listen to what the consistory says about this. But let me ask: does this requirement go against what Scripture teaches? Is the consistory forcing you to disobey Scripture by calling us to worship twice?

The consistory calls the congregation to worship twice each Sunday

Let me parse this out further with an analogy. The Bible tells us to obey the government. Say the local government puts a speed limit of 60 km/h on some street. Well, we could reason, the Bible doesn't tell us that we should drive 60 km/h on that street, so we don't have to listen to the government. Try and tell that to the police office who's going to give you a ticket! No, we still have to obey, so long as we're not commanded to do anything contrary to what Scripture teaches (Rom 13:1-7; Acts 5:29). In this case, there are very good scriptural reasons why the consistory calls us to worship twice. It's for your well-being and for the well-being of your children – but most importantly of all, it is a big part of our giving glory to God with our lives.

Finally, the last reason has to do with your pastor. I remember once talking to an older pastor who became very frustrated. He was

very conscientious and spent a lot of time preparing his sermons. You should know that the average minister spends up to fifteen or even twenty hours on a sermon. During the week, this minister would encounter situations in the congregation. He knew what needed to be addressed in the preaching. But Sunday afternoon would come around and he'd get up on the pulpit and the very people who needed to hear the message he was going to bring weren't there. They were at the lake, at home, or at the football game, or wherever else. He'd spent all that time carefully studying and crafting that sermon...and then this. For a pastor, that's frustrating.

We should remember what the Word says in 1 Thessalonians 5:12:13, "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord, and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work." When we make a conscious choice to be a "oncer," are we really respecting the pastors who devote much of their time each week to prepare for the preaching of the Word?

Conclusion

When we ignore or avoid the worship services, we are ignoring or avoiding the preaching of the Word, one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Of course, that preaching of the Word cuts two ways, whether you hear it or decide to avoid it. For some people, it will give them life and more abundantly. For others, it will be death. 1 Corinthians 1:18 is an appropriate verse with which to conclude: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."





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Unity efforts between the Canadian and United Reformed Churches: Progress to Date (Part 1 of 2)

This article is an edited version of a speech delivered to the League Day of the Canadian Reformed Men's Societies in Ontario, on November 24, 2007.

Introduction

As we reflect on the relationship between the Canadian and United Reformed Churches, we can say, to borrow a phrase, "We've come a long way, brothers." Some fifteen years ago, the only other ministers we would welcome on Canadian Reformed pulpits were those from church federations abroad rooted in what is called The Liberation of 1944. The same was true for issuing and receiving attestations and accepting people as guests at the Lord's Table. Today, however, in many congregations we welcome ministers and members from the federation of United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Furthermore, the last three Synods have been very busy with the matter of coming to full federative unity with the URCNA.

Indeed, we have come a long way. However, it has taken considerable time to get this far, approximately fifteen years. This may not be a long time within the scope of history, but it long enough that many of those involved in

leadership in the churches today were too young to remember how it all started. For that reason, it will be helpful to give a brief review of developments, summing up the progress to date. That progress report, however, will bring to the fore various issues that invite giving a prognosis of the situation for the future. We will begin with a factual, historical section, to set the stage for the second, which will by its very nature be a speculative section.

Beginnings

A review of the progress to date requires that we begin by thinking ourselves back to the early 1990s. At that time, there was a considerable exodus out of the Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) as a response to that federation's drift away from the Scriptures. One of the key issues that showed this drift and served as catalyst was the matter of women in office in the church. Those who separated from the CRC initially organized themselves into independent Reformed congregations, wishing to be truly Reformed in doctrine and polity.

Members of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), who

had always followed developments in the CRC, took note of these developments with great interest. It did not take long for contacts to develop between those who seceded from the CRC and members of the CanRC. It is probably no understatement to say that there was a high level of excitement in the air about these developments. It brought back memories of developments in The Netherlands in the late nineteenth century when in the year 1892 there was a union of the vast majority of the churches rooted in the Secession of 1834 and the churches rooted in the Doleantie of 1886.

One can sense this excitement when reading the speeches presented at a series of three meetings held in October of 1992 at Redeemer College in Ancaster. These meetings included not only representatives of what would become the URCNA, but also representatives of the Free Reformed Churches of North America, rooted in the churches in The Netherlands that did not join the Union of 1892, and the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, which had left the CRC in the early 1980s.

It is understandable that urged on by the cloud of witnesses of 1892, these evenings paid attention to what could be learned from the Union of 1892. That Union was not only an incentive but also a model. Everyone would do well to get a copy of the book that has the copies of those speeches and the answers to questions raised and read it to get a sense of the issues as well as the excitement. The book is titled *"The Challenge of Church Union,"* edited by Dr. C. Van Dam. Most interesting for our purpose today are some of the suggestions made as to what should be done to help the process along.

Early suggestions

For starters, there were the suggestions made by Dr. C.P. Venema, currently a professor at Mid America Reformed Seminary. He spoke as representative of the churches that had left the CRC. He pressed upon the Canadian Reformed people the need to take the initiative because in the first place the former CRCs were still in an uncertain condition and the CanRC was far more stable. In the second place, this was necessary because there was a strong perception among the former CRCs that the CanRC was not open to unity. At the same time, he argued against a premature formation of new federation(s) of former CRCs, stating that if this was done "it becomes extremely difficult to pursue further contacts with a view to organic union" (*The Challenge of Church Union*, pp 140, 141). The prophetic nature of that warning will become apparent later.

Speaking as representative from the CanRC, the late Dr. J. Faber deemed it prudent for the independent churches to come together in provisional classes and

synods. He did not think that this was the time to experiment with Reformed church polity. He also urged the independent churches to be modest in their goals. This was in connection with the plan to have a meeting in the following year to discuss the possible merger of various Reformed and Presbyterian churches into one federation. At this point, he felt this was a bridge too far. Furthermore, he also felt that it would be advisable to work towards separate federations in Canada and the USA, recognizing the distinct cultures and governments of the two nations with their implications (Ibid. pp 148, 149, 154).

Beginning of official contacts

While Dr. Venema urged us to take the initiative in his speech in October of 1992, it is obvious that this matter was already living in the CanRC. The general synod that met in Lincoln in November of that year had overtures from Classis Ontario North and the Church at Vernon to appoint some sort of committee to deal with these developments on behalf of the federation. Synod appointed deputies to the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU), with the mandate:

1. To make their presence known for the purpose of information and consultation;
2. To represent the churches, whenever invited, at assemblies or meetings held for the purpose of coming to ecclesiastical unity (*Acts Synod Lincoln*, Art 36).

At the same time, the churches that had seceded from the CRC felt the need for some sort of association in their time of transition. This took place via an organization called "The Alliance of Reformed

Churches."¹ Via this organization the churches discussed whether they should join existing federations or form a new federation (1993). They entertained, in some detail, the idea of forming a federation with all faithful Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

While the seceded churches were working through these issues, the CanRC continued to show interest and tried to be of help especially via the committee appointed for that purpose. This is evident from the Report to Synod Abbotsford, 1995. In that same year, a number of churches associated with the Alliance of Reformed Churches began to federate. Initially, they used the name "Fellowship of Uniting Reformed Churches,"² a name which highlighted that they were a federation in process. It seems to have been a reflection of attaining that broader Reformed and Presbyterian unity. On October 1, 1996, this fellowship officially became known as the Federation of United Reformed Churches in North America.

Aiming for federative unity

The CanRC committee kept a close eye on these developments. Synod Fergus 1998 instructed the Committee "to pursue continued fraternal dialogue with the URCNA with a view towards establishing federative unity" and "to discuss and develop a proposal as to how to proceed in encouraging federative unity" (*Acts Synod Neerlandia*, Art 73). This was the first time a CanRC synod explicitly expressed this desire and goal.

The same desire for unity, though perhaps meant not only for unity with the CanRC but also with other federations, was found in the

URCNA. The mandate given by the URCNA synod of 1999 to its Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) indicated that its work was to be conducted "with a view toward complete unity." That same synod also adopted a three phase process to achieve this goal.

The synods in 2001, which should have been a step on the road to the climax, seem to have become itself the climax

From the reports submitted to both the CanRC and the URCNA synods of 2001, it is obvious that the respective committees had much fruitful contact. The CanRC synod was held in May of that year and officially recognized the URCNA as a faithful church. Not only that, it entered into what is called a "Phase Two" relationship, which has as goal full federative unity. It appointed a number of committees to work out particular details. The specific areas singled out for attention were a common church order, a common song book for the new federation, and the matter of theological training. The URCNA synod, meeting a month or so later, followed suit.

Mixed signals

When one reviews the decisions made by the respective synods in 2001, it would seem that the optimism that surrounded the meetings in 1992 was about to bear very concrete fruit. It may not have been possible to imitate the Union of 1892 exactly one hundred years later, but perhaps it could be the miracle of the first years of the twenty-first century.

Those same synods, however, which so thankfully and boldly entered Phase Two, also did certain things that in retrospect were an indication that with all the talk about federative unity, there was not the necessary will and wholehearted dedication to the cause. It showed up in one major decision, as well as a number of apparently unrelated decisions. The result was that the synods in 2001, which should have been a step on the road to the climax, seem to have become itself the climax. The reason for saying this is that the synods that were so bold and progressive also were the synods where the respective federations were not willing to commit themselves to specific date. While the CPEU had urged Synod Neerlandia to aim for unity by the year 2004, the synod followed the approach suggested by the URCNA committee to Synod Escondido not to fix a date. Synod decided that was rushing things too much, not giving enough time for the committees to do their work and all the churches to come on stream.

As for the apparently unrelated but in reality related things, those synods, while officially committing to federal unity, also continued to act as if the two federations would always remain separate federations. This is shown in the way, for example, Synod Neerlandia continued to tinker with the Church Order, trying to fill loopholes (*Acts Synod Neerlandia*, Art 81). It also continued to give various committees mandates pertaining to relations of ecclesiastical fellowship. Further, the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*, while mandated to work with the URCNA committee on a common song book, also had an agenda that pointed to continued independent existence, such as updating the language of the confessions to reflect the fact

the churches had adopted the NIV as the recommended Bible translation for use in the churches.

Treading water

As for the committees, they can only be commended for the way they tackled their work valiantly. At the same time, after 2001 they appeared to get bogged down and at times it appeared they were trying to reinvent the wheel. Synod 2004 received an extensive report, but everything was a work in process. With no deadline, the drive seemed to be dying down.

Each federation has continued to act as if it will remain on its own indefinitely

It took the church order committee six years to produce a draft church order, while both churches had workable church orders based on the principles of the Dort Church Order. The song book committee, in terms of presenting things to the synods, had not gotten beyond discussing principles. The theological education committee has gotten nowhere in six years of discussion except to reach a stalemate because the CanRC is strong on a federation-controlled seminary while the URCNA seem to favour the free enterprise model for theological education. In short, we seemed to be treading water.

Furthermore, each federation has continued to act as if it will remain on its own indefinitely. For example, the synod of the CanRC held in Smithers in May of this year continued to tinker with the Church Order (*Acts Synod Smithers*, Art 63). Further, the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* is working on

additional hymns as well as updated versions of the rhymed Psalms. From the URCNA side, their last held synod mandated their song book committee to come up with a Psalter for use within the URCNA. With respect to ecclesiastical relationship, the last URCNA synod redefined the phases of working towards unity, changing the language in Phase Two from "in preparation for and commitment to" eventual integrated federative church unity to "acknowledging the desirability" of such unity. The type of commitments and preparations our federations have been involved in since 2001 are now seen as the first component of a two-part Phase Three. Thankfully, Synod Schererville did not downgrade the relationship but considers the CanRC in Phase Three. Besides this, each federation continues to be busy with its own list of churches with which they are pursuing various levels of ecclesiastical fellowship. For the committees appointed by the Synod, it must be frustrating as they appear to expend much energy on a key issue but which is treated ultimately by the broader assemblies as a side issue either by their explicit or implicit decisions.

Critical voices from within the URCNA

That the unity train is giving evidence of stalling is recognized by some of the brothers in the URCNA, who write about this openly. They acknowledge that the stalling efforts are coming more from the URC side. They see conflicting opinions about the whole matter of unity in the URCNA, with those hesitant about it gaining the upper hand. Doug Barnes, writing in *Christian Renewal*, remarked, "I've become more and more convinced that the division stems from a vision that

failed to spread uniformly from the federation's original leaders to the hearts of those who came later." He feels that for the early leaders, "Creating a new federation was largely a means of supporting one another so we could seek unity together with the other faithful groups of churches." He goes on to say, "But congregations entering the URCNA in subsequent years often have not shared that vision. Regarding the URC as the new 'home' for which they were seeking, they have bristled at ecumenical efforts that could alter the character of the federation as a whole. In short, some believe the URC was the goal, while others believe it is the means to a greater goal. As churches, we need to get on the same page. Specifically, we must grow passionate about our unity in Christ with other like-minded believers. . . ."³

Discomfort within the CanRC

At the same time, with the passage of time, there are developments in the URCNA that give uncomfortable feelings to Canadian Reformed people. Not the least of these developments is the apparent opposition in URC circles to a federation-controlled seminary. They have had bad experiences with a federation-controlled seminary while in the CRC. In the CanRC there is nothing but gratitude for what the school of the churches has meant for the churches ever since it was founded.

The other issue that gives uncomfortable feelings is the matter of extra-confessional statements. Not only is there discomfort over the fact that such statements are made but also what some of those statements seem to say. Of particular concern is the statement made by the last URCNA synod held in Schererville regarding the "Federal Vision."

Church News

Called by the Free Reformed Church of Australia at West Albany, WA:

Rev. S. 't Hart

working in Papua New Guinea as missionary for the church of Toronto, Ontario.

Declined the call to Abbotsford, British Columbia:

Rev. R. Aasman

of Edmonton (Providence) Alberta.

Remarkably, this is not an issue within the URCNA, as it came to the synod not in terms of an appeal or overture dealing with the teachings of one of its members but as an issue out there in the broader Reformed world by which some in the URCNA feel threatened. Nevertheless, in opposing this Federal Vision, the last synod adopted a statement that said that those are in error "who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone" (#6). It is true that this statement was made in a context totally unrelated to the CanRC, in reaction to statements that give the impression of conditional election.⁴ Yet, to Canadian Reformed ears this has the aroma of external/internal covenant distinctions that played a role in the events leading up to the Liberation of 1944. It is one thing if people want to work with those distinctions, it is another to declare in error all that think and speak about the covenant differently.

Statements may have been made in a certain context, but they tend to take on a life of their own. Whether the last URCNA synod realized it or not, both the action of such a statement as well as the content of the statement bring to mind events leading up to the Liberation of 1944 in The Netherlands and gives an uneasy feeling.

Making haste slowly

From this it is apparent that long gone are the days of heady optimism for federative unity as found in the early 1990s and as found in the reports to the synods of the respective federations held in 2001. It seems that the unwillingness to commit to the

date of 2004, for good and noble sounding reasons, along with each federation going on with an attitude of "business as usual" has led to the process beginning to stall. We came to Phase Two with great speed, only then to decide to proceed slowly. Or, to quote an old saying, it seems we have decided to make haste slowly (*festina lente*). The second part of this article will discuss the prognosis for the future.

¹ For the following information, I am indebted to the article by Rev. Dick Wynia, "The Ecumenical Efforts of the United Reformed Churches in North America," found in *Christian Renewal* March 16, 2007, pp 16,18,19.

² See website <http://www.urchna.info/page.php?5>. Wynia uses the term "federation" instead of "fellowship."

³ See *Christian Renewal*, August 22, 2007 (25#20) p 14ff. Cf. also Bill DeJong "In Conversation," September 12, 2007 (26#1) p 11. One subheading reads, "Born to die."

⁴ This comes out in the preceding statement, "Who teach that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness (CD IV)."

Letters to the Editor

When we came to Canada as new immigrants in 1952, we became Canadian citizens five years later. The fact that the Dutch government treated us like one who joined the French Foreign Legion by taking your Dutch citizenship away from us did not matter too much. After all, we came here to stay.

Not all immigrants, in particular the later arrivals, became Canadians, mainly because they did not want to lose the nationality of the motherland. To some extent, understandable.

It may not be known to all our readers that the Dutch government, mainly because of the large flow of immigrants into Holland from Middle-East countries, has changed the rules. Most of these new Dutch nationals kept their citizenship from the country they came from. This also resulted in an agreement between The Netherlands and Canada, where dual citizenship is now possible in both countries.

I discovered on a Dutch government website a brochure containing the requirements and conditions for any former Dutch citizen, to get the Dutch nationality back again and still remain a Canadian.

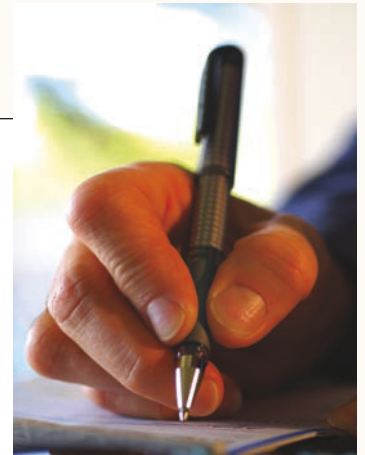
If you e-mail me I will send you the brochure. This saves you a long search on the web.

It is known to me that in our own church community there is some hesitance among new ministers and also faculty members of our Theological College to become Canadians. I assume that they may not be aware of the possibility of dual citizenship. However, for our Theological College to function legally, all members of the Board of Governors must have Canadian citizenship, and this also includes the Principal of the College.

Hopefully this information will help.

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Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.

J. Moesker

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Because I'm still able to read Dutch fairly well, I sometimes read Dutch newspapers on the Internet to keep up to date on what's going on in the country in which I was born, but where I haven't lived since I was two. The one thing which stands out for me when I read those newspapers is the steady secularization of Dutch society. I define secularization as the decline in the extent of religious observance within a particular society. Two items from the November 28, 2007 issue of the left-wing newspaper *De Telegraaf* display that secularization quite clearly and are worth some reflection. The first news spot is entitled: "Santa Isn't A Person From the Bible."

More than eleven per cent of Netherlanders think that Santa Claus is a person from the Bible. Almost two per cent believe that (Dutch) rival Sinterklaas finds his origin in the Bible. This according to press bureau Novum, based on research by Vergelijk.nl. More than half of the approximately 2700 people questioned believed that Santa Claus was originally based on (the Dutch) Sinterklaas. A quarter have no idea where Santa Claus originated, and the rest are of the opinion that he was invented by Coca Cola.



Secularization

Apparently Santa Claus does find his origin in Sinterklaas, who Dutch colonists took along to North America in the seventeenth century. Santa's appearance was mostly decided by the American soft drink manufacturer Coca Cola. Sad to see that so many know so little about the gospel of Jesus Christ in the Bible that they even think Santa Claus is a biblical figure! I wonder if the figures would be that much different in North America, though. As child of immigrants from The Netherlands, we had "Sinterklaas" on December 5 over the first years in Canada. That wasn't only a cultural matter. It was also a matter of faith. My parents felt it was better to have the exchange of gifts earlier in December and to reserve Christmas itself for the celebration of Christ's birth. However, now that we are a generation further from our Dutch roots, it seems that the figure of Sinterklaas has faded and Santa Claus has entered into the picture more and more. Christmas has become more and more a matter of Santa Claus and gifts than remembrance of the birth of our Saviour. And it seems to me that more and more Reformed kids look forward to Santa at Christmas.

I wonder if that's possibly not also a sign of secularization creeping in among us. . . .

Another item from *De Telegraaf* which displays what I believe is encroaching secularization is entitled: "Professor Says Pop Music Appropriate in Church."

Saying no in advance to pop music in church at events such as funerals doesn't fit with the times, states Martin Hoondert, special professor of Music and Christianity, in his inaugural speech at the University of Tilburg. When (young) people die, the wishes of the relatives and church regulations are often in conflict with each other. More and more often people come with a stack of CDs, and pastors and other leaders deal with that in various ways. This is why, four years ago, the diocese of Den Bosch published a brochure about this. The diocese declared that profane (worldly) music via loudspeakers isn't one of the options at funerals.

Hoondert is of the opinion that the use of pop music and

CDs cannot be stopped. He believes that how people experience the music is what should decide. According to him, pop music contains values important to young people. If the music says something about the deceased and comforts the next of kin, says the special professor, then it's appropriate at a funeral.

Interesting to read how the Roman Catholic Church in The Netherlands is trying to deal with the matter of other (often pop and secular) music at funerals and, I

assume, also weddings. Of course, for the Church of Rome, such occasions are sacramental and therefore ecclesiastical, whereas in Reformed churches weddings (usually) and funerals are family occasions (see Articles 63 and 65 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches). That means that we aren't specifically bound to music from the *Book of Praise* on such occasions. More and more families seem to wish to have other songs sung at weddings and funerals, songs which speak to them in some way. But one

wonders, if the wishes and feelings of the families are the measure of which songs are played and sung at such occasions, what kind of music will we ultimately end up with at those occasions? I sense a movement among Reformed people toward songs which aren't normally sung in worship at weddings and funerals, and even some which are hardly biblical or almost secular. I wonder if that's maybe also a sign of secularization creeping in among us. . . .



Sonya Post

The Forty-Sixth Annual League Day of the Women's Societies in Ontario

On a cloudy and overcast, yet beautiful fall day on Wednesday, October 17, 440 women found their way to Chandelier place for the Forty-Sixth Annual League Day of the Canadian Reformed Women's Societies in Ontario. Driving from all sorts of places we could all witness the beautiful fall colors and the changing of the seasons. We met at Chandelier place, hosted by the Flamborough Women's Bible Study Societies, and entered a nice sized room to see magnificent chandeliers hanging from the ceilings which made the room look beautiful. On the tables we could find a nice potted flower to give the room a final touch.

The League Vice-President, Mary DeBoer, began the meeting by asking us all to sing Psalm 8:3-5 about the greatness of the Lord in his creation. Mary then led us all in a word of prayer followed by the reading of Romans 8:28-39. The day was opened with a word of welcome by Mary. Having 440 people attend this League Day was, as far as Mary knew, the highest attendance for a League Day held in Ontario. What a blessing it is that so many people came together to study the word of God and wanted to praise and glorify Him.

Before moving on to the main speech of the day a few minor

business items needed to be completed. One of those was introducing the new Board President, Jane Oosterhoff. Also, the new Managing Editor for *Horizon* was mentioned, Willa Dale Smid. We thanked both ladies for being willing to take on their tasks. Thanks was expressed to Sister Vanderven who has immigrated to Australia and has therefore completed her task as President of the League Board. Lyn Vandelden was also thanked for completing her task as Managing Editor of *Horizon*.

Roll call was then taken by members from each congregation standing when Mary called their

name. We had members from many different local churches in the Canadian Reformed federation but also a few from the United Reformed churches. We can't forget to mention that there was someone there from out west, some even from The Netherlands. How wonderful to see so many people attending the League Day. Following the introduction, we sang the traditional League Song, "Sing God's Glory."

Rev. DeGelder was then introduced as our speaker for the morning. He would be speaking on the topic of Angels and Demons. To get us on the right track for the speech we first read from Psalm 103 and then Belgic Confession, Article 12. It was followed by the singing of Psalm 103:1 and 8.

Morning speech

We hope that Rev. DeGelder's informative speech about the roles of angels and demons will later be published in *Clarion*. Rev. DeGelder stressed that the only way to find out about angels is to turn to God's Holy Word. He went



over the different types of angels and how there seems to be some sort of organization in the world of angels. We heard as well how angels have two tasks, one of which is permanent and the other which is temporary. We were comforted with the fact that angels are always around and are God's messengers who faithfully do their task. It is quite the opposite with demons, who are trying to destroy the work of the Lord. We must be warned to be on guard, but be assured that they too have an end – destruction.

Rev. DeGelder was thanked for this very informative speech and we sang from Psalm 91:1, 3, and 4. After round table discussion and a general discussion, Rev. DeGelder was thanked again and we sang from Psalm 20:4 while a collection was held for Anchor. Anita Hulzebosch then led in prayer to end the morning session and ask for a blessing over lunch.

Afternoon session

To begin our afternoon session, after a time of fellowship and great food, we sang *O Canada* and Connie Hofsink opened with a word of prayer. We then played a rather loud game involving animal noises. Everyone had their name tags on and on each name tag was a sticker of an animal. You had to make the sound of that animal and find others who had the same sticker. So off went a bunch of ladies, barking like dogs, meowing like cats, mooing like cows, and laughing like hyenas. What a sight to see and sounds to hear!

To settle us down after that noisy game we made a joyful sound, pleasing to the Lord, by singing Hymn 20:4, 5, and 6. We then were led in the Bible reading





Hordyk was thanked for her time in accompanying us with her talented piano skills and Mary DeBoer was thanked for her well done job of leading the meeting. The next League Day organizers were also mentioned and the task of organizing the Forty-Seventh Annual Women's League Day falls into the hands of Glanbrook ladies. We then sang Hymn 47:3 followed by prayer.

of Ephesians 6:10-20, which would be the focus of our afternoon speech. Our speaker, Mrs. Henriette Vanhof, was introduced and she then began her speech on The Armour of God.

In the afternoon speech we learned how important it is to be ready to fight the battle. We need to be established in the Word of God so that we will know the truth. We need to know that we are righteous before God and can no longer be condemned. We have peace! Yes, even though we will walk through difficult times we can always have peace, for Christ is with us. We also have faith and our faith has content. On our own we are very vulnerable; together we can stand firm. We have the promise of salvation to give us comfort and we have the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God! There is nothing more powerful than clinging to God's Word and the more we use it the sharper the sword gets.

Henriette VanHof was thanked for her speech. We then sang Hymn

41:1-3 followed by ten minutes of round table discussion followed by a brief general discussion.

Announcements

A few general announcements were made. The amount collected for Anchor was \$1,870.90. The ladies from Flamborough were thanked for a job well done in organizing the league day. Joanne

Conclusion

How wonderful it is that although the devil is working so hard we are still able to meet as women of the Lord and learn more on how to fight against the evil one, knowing as well that we have the angels protecting us! The devil will not win the battle. Praise be to the Lord!





Chasing Reckless Abandon, I Am a God

Jocelin VanDoornik

I am invincible. The guy sitting next to me believes the same thing and that goes for everyone else in the room, except maybe the one person who was hit hard. That person's invincibility has been broken. Probably at one time he too believed that nothing that bad could ever happen to him. It only happens to those other people, right? Most people do not want to believe that it is possible for anything "bad" to happen to them. They are in denial of their own human frailty – God or no God.

The teenager picks up a beer and then five more, getting completely smashed. He does not think anything of his actions, getting behind the wheel of his car in a euphoric state of invincibility. He can drive no problem right? He is not one of them.

A young girl has fallen in love with a boy. It was not planned, it kind of just happened. They had sex. It is okay though and they will

do it again. No, they are not married. They do not have to be, after all, she will not get pregnant, and no one has to know. That only happens to those other girls.

He smokes. Sometimes it is a pack or two a day, but other times it is just a few lights the entire week. He will not get lung cancer and die. He does not even think about that. In fact, it is the farthest thing from his mind. It will not happen, not to him, anyway.

You are invincible too, right? Just like all the rest of them?

I am invincible

I wish you would not think that. Look what it is doing to you! You walk around so carelessly, you take it all for granted, and you assume it will always be that way. It is as if you think you deserve it. Have you ever taken a second to stop and think about who created you? God created you perfectly, moulded you with his own hands. In the

beginning, "the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). He performed a miraculous wonder in creating human life, yet your attitude shows that you do not care about this. "Is this the way you repay the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?" (Deut 32:6). Do you realize that He loves you? Do you know how much it hurts Him to see you this way? Your recklessness and self-harm are far from the thanks you owe Him.

Do you want to know what happened next? The drunken teenager was hauled out of his car before he had a chance to leave. A friend took his keys and made sure he lived until the next day. One of their other friends left, thinking that despite his drunkenness he was okay to drive.

All he cared about was making it home before curfew and slipping quietly to his room so his parents would not find out what he had been up to. He never made it.

The young girl became pregnant. Her boyfriend left her. She was left wondering what a normal teenage life was supposed to be like, as she became engulfed in the world of adulthood and responsibility that she was not ready for.

The smoker married a beautiful young woman and they lived happily together. But, one day his wife was diagnosed with lung cancer due to second hand smoke. He watched as the cancer that he gave her slowly consumed her body until she died.

But, that's them, right? And these are just made up stories anyway. It is not really going to happen, at least not to you. You still believe you are invincible.

Actually, there is a lot wrong if you think that. Each of those stories is true. Those are real people and real events. And, most importantly, you are not invincible. What are you going to do about it? Nothing. Right? I think I am beginning to understand you. You still believe you are invincible. Then I would like you to consider the following.

Only God is invincible

Only God knows everything, sees everything, and is absolutely perfect. God created you beautifully. Yes, you are beautiful exactly the way God created you because He created you in his image. But, being made in God's image is very different from being a god. Your "invincible" ways are very much chasing reckless abandon,

proclaiming that you believe you are some sort of god. You are not a god. You are not invincible.

God loves you. It is time to turn to Him and love Him back. As you grow in your love for God, you will trust Him more, seek to obey his ways, and aim to live your life for Him. When you consciously begin to do so, you will more and more desire to get rid of your invincible self, and trust the one and only invincible God.

What does this mean? You will want to use what God has given you to his glory. Strive to put off your careless deeds, your reckless actions, and instead take care of what He has given you to the best of your ability, because as an image of Himself, He has blessed you so richly and in complete, perfect measure. Your life is a *gift* from God and in this realization you will see that it is a gift to be treasured, to be thankful for, and not taken for granted or used irresponsibly. You may think that you are young, or that the things you do in secret are kept that way. But know this: He watches your every action and knows those things that you do in secret. If you consider that and believe it with all your heart then you will desire to take care of yourself as a bearer of his image. And not only are you his image, but He is also within

you as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:19-20, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body." And as his image and his temple, go out and let your light shine in a way that reflects the amazing gift of love that He has given you, so that you may be worthy of such an honour.

For further study:

- 1) Read Psalm 139:13-16 and reflect on God's hand in the span of life from conception to death.
- 2) Take a look at the Third Part of the Heidelberg Catechism, "Our Thankfulness" (Lord's Day 32-52). Thinking about what you just read in this article:
 - a) Why is this thankfulness so important?
 - b) How do the Ten Commandments fit into thankfulness?
 - c) Why is prayer included in this section?
- 3) Find some texts that speak about God's expectations for your life. (Hint: topics to look up may include those you noticed in answer to #2.) Does your life reflect this?

