

Clarion

**Physician assisted
what?**

CHURCH SNAPSHOT

CLARION KIDS

YOU ASKED



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Physician Assisted Dying

*A society that has no absolutes
is a society without safeguards*

You may be wondering about the heading above this editorial. What is this? What does it refer to? Is there not a contradiction in these words? Before I get into that let me clarify that on January 30, 2016, I went to an event called “Physician Assisted Dying Public Meeting.” It was sponsored by two of our local Members of Parliament (John Aldag of the Liberal Party and Mark Warawa of the Conservative Party). It had to do with the fact that they were seeking feedback from the public on a highly sensitive issue.

For those of you who are somewhat familiar with Canadian politics you may already have guessed the issue. It has to do with euthanasia, sometimes called “mercy killing.” It also has to do with the fact that in 2015 the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the existing laws forbidding doctor assisted dying. Thereafter it proceeded to give the Parliament of Canada a six month period to come up with new and, supposedly, better laws on the subject.

In order to fall in line with the Supreme Court, the Government of Canada did two things: it asked for an extension seeing that an election had disrupted the schedule and it appointed an all-party parliamentary committee to travel the country and find out from the citizenry how it thought assisted dying should be and could be properly regulated. With regard to an extension, the Court granted one of four months. With regard to the committee, it took wings and spread out all over the country seeking public opinion. It was this then that brought the two members of Parliament home to the Surrey-Langley area and to the hosting of this meeting.

The meeting

So how did the meeting go? In spite of the fact that it was called on short notice, it was well attended with almost two hundred people present. It also managed to attract a good cross section of the public: doctors, nurses, other health care professionals, lawyers, representative from various organizations, citizens from all walks

of life, and a rather sizable number of senior citizens. As for the proceedings, they went well. Quite a number of people spoke and many of them spoke very well. It was an articulate and respectful crowd.

Unhappiness and fear

This is not to say, however, that it was a happy crowd. Beneath the many fine sounding words one could sense the presence of anger, outrage, frustration, bitterness, disagreement, and fear. Many speakers questioned, either directly or indirectly, the right of the Supreme Court to “dictate” to Parliament as to what should or should not be the law of the land. The doctors who spoke indicated that they were severely conflicted, for while it remains their task to save life, they will now be involved with ending life too. The nurses who came forward felt that it was unfair to turn hospitals into places of death and some argued for all assisted dying to be done in an entirely separate facility. The palliative care people said that it was misguided to speak about helping people die when there is such a shortage of spaces for the sick to get real end of life care. The elderly who held forth often cited Belgium and The Netherlands as dark places where they, the handicapped, the depressed, and the terminally ill are now afraid of hospitals and what will happen to them there. There were Christians too who spoke and cited the Holy Bible as condemning euthanasia and all who seek to take matters of life and death into their own hands.

The overall impression that I came away with is that this issue of assisted dying is a quagmire or swamp of deep proportions and bitter consequences. It is a road that as a nation we do best not to build, and not to travel on.

Not a blessed road

The reasons why I say this are many and the first is that this is not a road that will be blessed by God. The Scriptures are clear, as a number of speakers said, that this

is not the God-ordained way forward. It is the Lord who gives life to everything (1 Tim 6). It is the Lord who numbers our days (Ps 90). It is the Lord who regulates times of living and dying (Eccl 3). It is the Lord who calls on man to avoid bloodshed and killing (Gen 9). Indeed, the Lord God is sovereign over matters of life and death. The laws of the land need to reflect this sovereignty and the governments of the day need to enforce it.

Alas, that is not happening! Already for some time Canada and many other nations have opened the door of death by allowing the killing of the unborn. Arbitrarily nations have decided that life in the womb is not real human life at all. What it is the secularists are not willing to say. They cannot say what it is so they opt to say what it is

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Our issue begins with Dr. James Visscher's editorial, "Physician Assisted Dying." Our country's supreme court has struck down laws concerning euthanasia. New laws must be made. This editorial is a call for prayer and action on the political front.

The second half of Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's article on multiculturalism is in this issue, looking at how biblical principles can be applied to our current cultural context.

We have a report on the CRTS Conference held this January, "Preaching the Whole Gospel to the Whole Person."

Issue 6 also brings you columns Treasures New and Old, Church Snapshot, Clarion Kids, and You Asked. There is a canticle, and a Mission News insert.

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not. In the meantime the slaughter of the unborn continues. Thousands upon thousands of lives are terminated on the altar of a woman's right to choose.

In such a climate it should not surprise us that euthanasia is now on the national agenda. If you can get rid of life at the one end of the age spectrum, why not at the other? If parents can abort a child because they do not like its sex, why can citizens not do away with the lives of those who are handicapped and elderly? If a mother can end her pregnancy because the timing or the circumstances are just not right, why can a government not allow others to give its weaker, sicker, and frailer members a helping hand in dying sooner? After all, they are costing the health care system a whole big pile of money.

God as reference point

The point is that if God and his will is not your reference point in life, you have none and before long you are simply deciding matters on the basis of human opinion. A society that has no absolutes is a society without safeguards. It is doomed to live its life by the outcome of its latest opinion polls and by the ever fickle sentiments of its most noisy citizens.

The Supreme Court of Canada

Which brings me to the Supreme Court of Canada. I have always had a great deal of respect for the men and women who occupy the bench in the highest court of the land. On the whole they have done a commendable job over the years and have served the nation of Canada well. Nevertheless, there have been mistakes and there will continue to be mistakes.

Specifically I am referring to the Carter decision in which the Court struck down the long standing law that it is a crime to assist people who want to end their life. Previously it was an indictable offense to counsel someone to commit suicide or to assist them in any way to commit such an act (cf. Section 241 of the Criminal Code). The Carter decision has thrown much, if not all of that, into doubt. It ruled that a person can help someone else to die. It especially identified doctors as being in a unique position to do so. It based much of its reasoning on section 7 and 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Now what is especially interesting is that in considering the Charter, the Court did not adequately interact with the opening line of the Charter, namely "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law." I would ask, "Where in the Carter decision is credence given to 'the supremacy of God'?"

Of course, someone may ask, "God? Which God?" However, a brief examination of Canadian history can only lead to the conclusion that here reference is being

made to the God of the Bible and to the God of the Christian faith. Still, none of that matters. None of that plays a role in the reasoning of the judges. Despite God's so-called "supremacy," he is absent in the discussion. It is as if he has nothing whatsoever to say on this matter. Might one then not reasonably conclude that the preamble of the Charter is nothing more than pious window dressing?

The Parliament of Canada

Still, one may ask, "What is the role of the Parliament of Canada in all of this?" At the Langley meeting speaker after speaker chided the Parliament of Canada for letting the Supreme Court call the shots. The tail was perceived as wagging the dog.

Whether or not these perceptions are correct is a debate for another day. The fact remains that the time has come for the Parliament of Canada to make clear that it controls the legislative agenda of the land. If that means using "the notwithstanding clause" of the Constitution and over-ruling the Supreme Court, so be it. The laws of Canada as a nation are the prerogative of Parliament. The interpretation of the law is the calling of the courts. So let the rulers rule, and rule well, and let the judges weigh, and weigh well. Let the latter not be allowed to infringe on the prerogatives of the former.

Let no one be deceived, the issue before us is an issue of fundamental importance. It will shape our nation for years to come. If Canada adds the right to euthanasia to the right to have an abortion, then we will have become a society of death. Death will then be reigning at both ends of the age spectrum. Imagine if in one and the same place we kill the unborn and put to death the sick. Can we still call those places "hospitals" or "places of healing"?

Physician assisted – what?

Oh, and getting back to the title of my editorial, can you see now how contradictory it is? Throughout history physicians have always been charged with the calling to heal people and to help them to live on well even in the midst of pain and discomfort. For a doctor to help someone to die strikes at the very core of being a doctor. It rips the heart out of a most honoured calling. Whether the justices realize this or not, Carter does this. It destroys both a noble profession and a great nation.

Readers, pray for our country, its lawmakers, and courts! Pray for its doctors, nurses, and hospitals! Let your elected representatives know where you stand. Do not allow anyone or anything to still your tongues. Do all that you humanely-speaking can do to promote Canada as a country that honours and protects the life that only God can give and take away.





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The Risen Christ as the Epicentre of a Blessed Life

Romans 10:6

For the Jews of Paul's day, the law was the epicentre of life. Though some were mistakenly convinced that scrupulous obedience to this law would merit God's approval, many others more correctly believed it mediated God's undeserving grace, not least through the sacrifices of atonement and the rituals of cleansing.

Either way, Paul's burden in Romans 10 is to demonstrate that the law wasn't an end in itself, but a pointer to something else. When you throw a stick for a dog to retrieve, the dog sometimes loses sight of the stick, and when you point to its location, the dog sometimes fixates on your finger and not the spot to which you point. The Jews were fixating on the law, and Paul's burden is to demonstrate that the law itself points to Christ. Christ, and not the law, should be the epicentre of our lives.

In Deuteronomy 30, Moses writes about the law as an instance of God's grace. To locate this grace, you don't need to accomplish impossible feats like ascending into heaven, descending into the abyss, or crossing the sea.

Through the law, God has brought the word of grace so close one can recite it with one's mouth and house it in one's heart.

The words of Deuteronomy 30, Paul insists, point ultimately to Christ, and specifically to his incarnation and resurrection. You don't need to ascend into heaven to access God because Christ has come to earth. You don't need to descend into the abyss to unlock the power of death because Christ has risen from the dead.

The resurrection of Christ secures blessings too numerous to count and too wonderful to comprehend. Not only does it demonstrate that God has accepted the messianic sacrifice of his Son, it accomplishes the greatest feat in God's amazing program to rescue and restore humanity. When Jesus rose from the dead the power of death to imprison people in tombs, to instill fear and remove hope, was forever broken.

Moreover, through Christ's resurrection, God guarantees our bodily resurrections. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, sees the resurrection of believing humanity as a great harvest,

and the resurrection of Christ as its firstfruits. Relatedly, through Christ's resurrection, the often-prophesied and long-awaited new creation, cosmic in scope, has officially been launched.

Lastly, as Paul indicates in Romans 10, Christ's resurrection means that God has given him lordship over the world, having exalted him to the degree that he now rules over the whole cosmos for the glory of his Father and for the sake of his church.

A blessed life in which we experience forgiveness and spiritual renewal and expect bodily resurrection and cosmic renovation is available to you and me! How can we access these blessings? We don't have to ascend into heaven: Christ has descended to us in his incarnation. We don't have to descend into the abyss: Christ has ascended for us in his resurrection. We don't have to cross the sea: these blessings are as near as the gospel proclaimed. Believe this gospel and confess it! With the risen Christ at the epicentre of your life, the resident of your heart, and the affirmation of your mouth, you will be saved! **C**

For Further Study

1. How do we shortchange the rich message of Christ's resurrection?
2. If the resurrection of Christ's body is the prototype of the renovation of the cosmos, what does this imply about continuity between this earth and the renewed earth?
3. How is Christianity radically different from other world religions for grounding hope in Christ's incarnation and resurrection?
4. How is accepting the claims of the risen Christ both difficult and easy?

Inter-Religious Relations and the Challenge of Multiculturalism (Part 2 of 2)



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Applying biblical principles

The previous article considered the presuppositions of multiculturalism, the significance of being a nation, and the principles God gave to multicultural Israel in dealing with “outsiders.” We now need to consider how the biblical principles can be applied to our current context. To that end we will first consider the importance of a national identity and then seek to apply the key principles that guided Israel in its multi-cultural challenges. Finally we will briefly consider how to move forward in the current difficulties of inter-religious relations and multiculturalism.

The importance of a national identity

The influx of large numbers of immigrants into western countries and the emphasis on multiculturalism has resulted in an eroding or downplaying of a country’s national identity.¹ This is problematic for the unity and cohesion of a nation. Since nationhood is a biblical notion, government has the obligation to protect the distinctiveness and unity of its nation and not let it be fragmented into many diverse groups, each with its own culture, identity, language, and aspirations. There has to be something for people coming to their new country to be part of. Having a national identity as a nation which a country is prepared to defend is honourable.

One way to achieve this is to teach each generation the story and aspirations of the nation’s past. Such an educational goal would follow an important biblical principle. Israel as a nation had to remember their communal past and pass it on to the next generation. In this way they would safeguard their identity as a nation in covenant with God (e.g., Ps 78; 105). The need to remember one’s history and heritage, one’s story as a nation is vital to re-

taining one’s national identity. Government today must see to it that their heritage rooted in western Christian civilization is taught in a constructive way, remembered, and safeguarded. This legacy needs to be entrusted to the next generation so that it understands and appreciates the institutions and values of their country. Then they will be prepared to defend them. Our current liberties and laws based on Judeo-Christian values cannot be taken for granted. This treasured heritage also needs to be taught to immigrants. This is particularly important for those coming from non-Western countries with forms of government and traditions that clash with historic Western institutions and values. Such immigrants need to agree with the host country’s values. Otherwise the unity of a nation is eventually at risk.

Now one could object and say that it is not the task of government to pass on values associated with a certain religious heritage, in this case the Judeo-Christian one. It is indeed true that government or the state does not have the duty or authority to impose or dictate a religion on its population.² However, three things should be noted. First, it is impossible for society to function without values and norms and depending on how government leads a nation, certain values will be passed on or encouraged. A simple example can illustrate this truth. A government which practices thrift, is careful with its finances, and delivers balanced budgets will encourage by its example for citizens to do likewise. A second point to note is that the Bible teaches that, whether secular rulers today realize it or not, those in power are servants of God and responsible to him (Rom 13:4). In practical terms this means that government should try to rule in accordance with biblical norms and principles whenever that is possible. Christians in Western democracies have the calling to remind their respective governments of this

fact. Thirdly, in practical terms, the rich Judeo-Christian heritage which Western governments have inherited is not a hindrance but a huge blessing. It has served the Western world extremely well, so much so that even some of China's communist leaders now seem to recognize Christianity as a great source of strength for the West. Indeed, a scholar from the Chinese Academy of the Social Sciences credits Christianity as the reason for the West's pre-eminence in the world. And he is not alone.³

There is thus every reason for a Western government to do what it can to honour and pass on the Judeo-Christian heritage of their country and the role it played in establishing a national identity. Unfortunately this is often not happening but there will be a price to pay.

The need to welcome and integrate immigrants

At the same time there is the need to honour the divine command to love our neighbour. Western nations should show welcoming hospitality to refugees and immigrants as much as possible. The involvement of churches and charitable organizations should be strongly encouraged in showing this love to the neighbour, but government would need to set the rules for admitting the newcomers. In this connection one should remember that true love is also honest and the state should strongly encourage integration in the immigration process. Note, in view is not assimilation in which cultural distinctives completely disappear, but integration where certain cultural differences can be maintained and even protected. Ideally, a nation should only admit those who wish to integrate. After all, a nation has to be able to retain its own distinctive identity. However, we do not live in an ideal world. Prosperous Western countries have a responsibility to help those who come knocking on their doors as religious or economic refugees. However, there should be a continuing quest to achieve a justifiable balance between helping the needy and protecting one's own identity.

Non-western immigrants should therefore know that they are expected to integrate. This expectation means that immigrants adopt the language of their new homeland as their own so that they can interact meaningfully with its culture and work towards making their first loyalty to the country which has welcomed and helped them. Since many immigrants come from countries where freedom of religion and the rule of law are either

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non-existent or leave much to be desired, their integration must include adopting as their basic values the rule of law, democratic institutions, and freedom of religion. For example, Muslim immigrants should acknowledge the justice system of our land, rather than the supremacy of Sharia law, and disown and reject Muslim institutions that are at odds with western norms and culture, such as polygamy, honour killing, female circumcision, and other practices that demean the position of women. This would mean that only liberal or nominal Muslims would qualify as immigrants and they would have less difficulty integrating into Western society.

Genuine refugees and other immigrants from non-Western backgrounds should be asked at the point of entering the country whether they wish to integrate (and therefore, in the case of Muslims, disown Muslim cultural practices that are repugnant to traditional Western culture) or whether they wish to remain in the host country as foreigners who do not wish to integrate. Their choice would affect their status as residents and have practical implications, with economic and social incentives being given to those wishing to integrate. Those not open to integration, but only wanting to benefit from being in the host country, should not be given the right to become citizens and have a say in the land. Indeed, they really do not belong and should feel free to leave if they do not like institutions of the host nation. Such policy would be in accord with biblical principles. When immigrants are admitted on other than compassionate grounds, the interests of the country should come first and it may be necessary to refuse entry to those not wishing to integrate into our society. Multiculturalism should not be allowed to become a Trojan horse that will eventually destroy the historic fabric and heritage of a Western nation.

Government, at whatever level would be most effective, should inform those who wish to integrate what their responsibilities are and give them a suggested timetable for learning the language and becoming familiar with our institutions and values. Follow-up should be organized within the relevant cultural community with those best able to help the process along.

***The rich Judeo-Christian heritage
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Government can provide assistance to those looking for work. Indeed, it would be in accord with biblical principles to encourage new and needy immigrants to work for their needs rather than to rely on free handouts. The immigrant in ancient Israel had access to charity in the form of working for his own harvest by gleaning left over grain, olives, and grapes (Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-22). The dignity of labour, rather than free handouts, gives an enhanced sense of worth to immigrants. This is love for the neighbour in action. There is something drastically wrong when, for example, in Denmark, it was reported at the time of writing that the Muslim immigrant population (which is five percent of the total) is allowed to consume up to forty percent of the welfare budget. Love for the neighbour would ensure that needy immigrants are put to work. Finding work would also reinforce the need to learn the language of their new homeland. Government should also assist those with professional training to find employment in their field. This could involve ensuring their credentials match those of their new homeland or assisting them in upgrading their qualifications if necessary.

Also, as mentioned earlier, in order to encourage integration and to protect its heritage, government also needs to act positively to preserve the collective memory of the nation, especially through education and so cultivate and encourage the allegiance of newcomers.

While government has the duty to safeguard the heritage and identity of the nation, it also has the obligation to protect the individual rights of immigrants coming

from different cultural and religious backgrounds. While cultural integration should be promoted wherever possible, the state is obliged to combat unfair treatment of immigrants and to protect the individual liberties of those whom it has admitted into the country. This includes freedom of religion. However, where the demands of a foreign religion transgress the norms of Western society as influenced by Christianity, limits need to be set firmly in place. This is especially true for radical Islam. There are therefore tensions. On the one hand immigrants need to integrate but as much as possible they should be allowed to express their cultures freely. On the other hand, the host country needs to protect and retain its historic identity as a nation.

In summary, immigrants who wish to integrate should be treated as much as possible as those who are citizens. But those foreigners who are not inclined to show allegiance or who do not intend to settle and make the host nation their own can be refused entry or, if already admitted, can be treated less generously.

At this point one could say, yes, this is all well and good, but it sounds idealistic. After all, we already have millions of adherents to the Muslim faith living as full citizens in Western nations. Finding solutions for living peaceably together is not easy.



Inter-religious relations and mutual understanding

In view of the difficulties or lack of integration, widespread support for multiculturalism as a paradigm for society and as a framework for immigration appears to be collapsing, judging from statements made by political leaders like Germany's Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and British Prime Minister David Cameron. With current significant resistance to multiculturalism, there is an urgent need for honest inter-religious dialog.

First, we need to recognize publicly that immigrant cultures are sometimes at cross purposes with those of the host nation. This is most obvious with Muslim newcomers. To mention but two examples. The West enjoys freedom of religion. This has been a hard-fought freedom and is consistent with the biblical teaching of Christianity (cf. Matt 13:24-30, 36-42). Christians do have the mission to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth and to try to convince people of salvation in Christ alone (Matt 28:19-20). But Christians are not to use force to do so. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Eph 6:17). Whenever Christians have sought to subjugate others by force to the Christian faith, they have not acted in accord with Christ's teachings (cf. John 18:36). Freedom of religion therefore means, for example, that Muslims are free to build mosques and practice their faith in western nations.

Traditional Islamic thought, however, has no interest in such a freedom except when they are a minority and utilize western freedoms to their advantage. Wherever Muslims are the majority of the population, the worldwide trend is that they place obstacles to the spread of Christianity and impose Islam wherever possible. Islam is a religio-political system. "Church and state" are so to speak one. Christians are persecuted in many Muslim countries. Indeed, there are very few Islamic countries where religious oppression does not take place. Such persecution is apparently in accordance with the Qur'an.⁴

Immigrants who are faithful to the fundamentals of Islam therefore understandably want to see Sharia law promoted and established in their new homeland. They are on the whole making progress to that goal in the secularized West which, due to political correctness, is often unwilling or reluctant to confront Muslims with the law of the land. Such hesitation and indecision can lead to social unrest and this possibility forms a second reason for the

need to have inter-religious dialog. Society needs to find a *modus vivendi* or middle way so that different cultures can function side by side without unnecessary strife.

In reflecting on the dialog that needs to take place, several things should be kept in mind. First, there is much that Western and other cultures have in common. Since God has made man in his image, the entire human race has historically valued certain moral principles that their conscience speaks to. One can think of the importance of marriage, sanctity of life, a day of rest, and protecting the environment. Indeed, one could argue that the ethical principles enunciated in Genesis 1-9 are applicable to the whole human race. This means, for example, that also Muslim immigrants must adhere to monogamous marriage and disown polygamy. But, it also obliges the West to be flexible in granting Muslims their day of prayer on Friday. So we should build on what we have in common in inter-religious dialogue and where possible accommodate each other.

***There should be a continuing quest
to achieve a justifiable balance between
helping the needy and
protecting one's own identity***

Second, and related to the first point, is that we need to insist on a cultural minimum that those of other cultures currently residing in the West and coming to Western nations need to agree on. In this context dialogue with moderate adherents of Islam is necessary. Muslims themselves need to solve the problem of extremists and counter, for example, honour killing and subversive activities. Western governments cannot resolve tensions between moderates and extremists within Islam. That is not their task. But all inhabitants of the land need to respect the rule of law or face the consequences. A major difficulty in combatting extremism is that as soon as an element of the Muslim faith is criticized by a non-Muslim, one has a good chance of being accused of Islamophobia. We need to protect freedom of speech for all, move beyond stifling political correctness, and honestly address the issues that are there. That includes encouraging moderate Muslim leaders to discuss these matters with their fellow believers and with leaders from their host country.

Third, Sharia law should not be officially recognized. It would ultimately fragment the nation. Giving legal recognition to Sharia law would introduce a double legal standard in what should be one country and encourage the development of a Muslim “nation” with its own legal and perhaps also its own political aspirations within a secular nation. The principles underlying Sharia law are antithetical to Western understanding of human rights, due process of law, and the use of the death penalty. Western law has been significantly influenced by its Judeo-Christian heritage and one must make the choice of either accepting the one (Sharia law) or the other (Western law). Although Western society may be secular, one cannot expunge the basic religious influences that have informed such a society. At the same time, religious differences that can be tolerated within the framework of secular Western society with its Christian heritage can and should be accommodated also in law. It is clear from the above that at the end of the day, only liberal or nominal Muslims will be willing to live and work within the existing Western culture. There is really no room in a Western nation for fundamentalist Islam, and citizenship should be denied to such people.

Fourth, the rights of all immigrants, irrespective of their background, need to be safeguarded, acknowledged, and protected. All citizens must have the same rights. This concerns minorities and especially women from cultures that discourage their education and development as equal citizens with their husbands. Also it should, for example, be illegal for a woman to be forced to enter into a marriage arranged against her will. Furthermore, citizens should have the right to change one's religion without fear for their lives.

Multiculturalism should not be allowed to become a Trojan horse that will eventually destroy the historic fabric and heritage of a Western nation

Fifth, newcomers from other religions, such as Islam, should be encouraged to participate in the public square and contribute to the well-being of the nation with their perspectives and proposals, alongside secularists, Christians, and those of other faiths. It is in public discussion and debate that a democracy can move ahead and find common ground and work out practical solutions for the multicultural reality now functioning in the Western world. By participating in the affairs of the nation, im-

migrants of minority religions can begin to have a sense of belonging and identify more and more with their host country where they are now citizens and look beyond the confines of their faith community and seek the common good of all (cf. Jer 29:7). In this way cultural understanding and tolerance can be forged.

Concluding thoughts

Western nations can defend their identity, history, and cultural heritage. The biblical demand for compassion and love for one's neighbour means however that the doors should be open for refugees and others who wish to enter their country. There is no biblical demand that nations be ethnically homogeneous. But, the principles of Old Testament legislation concerned with resident aliens and foreigners living in ancient Israel do suggest that integration of outsiders into the host nation is highly desirable and should be promoted. Since historic religious influences inform much of current Western law and culture, it is imperative that inter-religious dialog take place for the benefit of those with a non-Western background who are already in the country so that a cultural minimum can be agreed upon and inter-cultural strife be countered or prevented. With respect to future immigrants, they should be asked what their expectations are and to what degree they wish to integrate. Their answers will determine whether it is in their best interest to be admitted and if admitted what privileges they have and to what degree the state will assist them in their desire to integrate.

¹ This trend has been documented for America in Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).

² For a discussion on this issue, see, e.g., Cornelis Van Dam, *God and Government: Biblical Principles for Today* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 47–77.

³ See further Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 286–88. Also see, e.g., Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005).

⁴ For a Qur'anic justification to persecute Christians, see Surah 9:29, 73. 'Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book, until they pay the *Jizyah* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. . . . O Prophet! strive hard against the Unbelievers and the Hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell – an evil refuge indeed.' All quotations from the Qur'an are taken from 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, rev. translation, commentary and newly compiled comprehensive index, 11th ed (Beltsville, Maryland: Amana, 2006). For an overview, see Mark Durie, *The Third Choice: Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom*, foreword by Bat Ye'or (N.p.: Deror, 2010).



CRTS Conference: “Preaching the Whole Gospel to the Whole Person”

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Photo credit Ewout DeGelder
(Open Photography)

No two people will observe the same event in the same way. So it's no surprise that no three hundred people will hear the same sermon in the same way. When a preacher opens holy Scripture on a Sunday morning, he's delivering a message of divine weight and eternal truth not just to bodies, but to souls. To complete people, hundreds of them, all listening in their own way. This is why a heart-wrenching sermon isn't enough. It's why a thought-provoking sermon isn't enough. It's why a motivational sermon isn't enough. Each person in those pews has his own needs, and they don't all need their hearts wrenched or their thoughts provoked or their wills motivated.

What each person needs, however, is to hear the whole gospel addressed to their whole person. Jesus Christ took on our human nature to redeem our human nature – the whole mess of it. As a result, his gospel has nothing less than a total claim on our being, on our emotions, our thoughts, and our wills. It was this conviction that lay behind the theme of this year's CRTS conference: “Preaching the Whole Gospel to the Whole Person.”

Redemptive-historical

Rev. Eric Watkins, pastor of Covenant OPC in St. Augustine, Florida, opened the conference with a public talk on Thursday evening. His talk was titled, “The Relevance of Redemptive-Historical Preaching in a Postmodern Context: An Optimistic Proposal.” Rev. Watkins became a believer as an adult, and only encountered redemptive-historical preaching well after his conversion. So the fact that he was speaking about such preaching to a crowd of people raised in that tradition led him to remark, “I feel like a lion in a den full of Daniels.”

He began the talk asking whether redemptive-historical preaching has gone out with the cultural tide. After all, postmodern thinking holds that we can't truly know

what has happened in history, nor can we truly know what a dead author meant by his writing. Thus we cannot rely on the history in Scripture, and we cannot even know what Scripture means. To a person who believes these things, redemptive-historical preaching can have little significance.

But it isn't the case, Rev. Watkins argued, that redemptive-historical preaching has been made irrelevant by postmodernism. On the contrary, such preaching can actually have much value in a culture like ours. For one, the central element in redemptive history is God's story – and these days everyone loves talking about stories. What redemptive-historical preaching provides is the grand story of the meaning of our lives, the story of what we are and where we're going. This shows Scripture to be what it is, not “dulled by two thousand years of history,” as some have put it, but ever fresh, ever inviting. Good redemptive-historical preaching tells the story of Christ, and then shows us our place in it. This is just the kind of thing many people today are seeking.

The manner of preaching

Friday morning began with a lecture by Dr. Lawrence Bilkes, “Spiritual Guidance in Preaching: The Manner of Preaching the Word of God.” This talk focussed not on the content of preaching, but on the way the content is presented. He spoke first about the manner of the preacher and second about the manner of preaching itself. A preacher ought to be concerned above all with the response of his hearers to the gospel. This means being winsome, and it means preaching from the same sacrificial love showed to us by Christ. To that end, there are four things that should characterize the manner of his preaching. First, he must address the mind. The mind is key, for it is right understanding that leads to right



living. Second, he must address the conscience. A sermon has to expose the motives behind our actions, and call them to account. Third, he must address the heart. It pleased God to attribute emotions to himself in Scripture. So a preacher too has to feel with his flock whatever they are feeling, and this should come out in his preaching. And fourth, he must address the will. We have been created to act, and a sermon must call us to live lives of light in the midst of spiritual darkness. The preacher himself should exemplify this calling.

God's work in the world

The second talk of the morning session was another by Rev. Watkins. This one was called, "Imitating the Saints in Hebrews 11: Revisiting the Questions of Christocentricity and Application." Redemptive-historical preaching has long stood opposed to the method of preaching that equates the people in Scripture with the people in the pew. The method that says that because David slew his Goliath, with enough faith you can slay your Goliaths, too. But Rev. Watkins argued that Hebrews 11 shows that a stark opposition is simply unbiblical. That chapter sets before us examples of how Christ's work has unfolded in real human lives. The saints we read of in Hebrews 11 received the revelation of Christ, just as we have. But not only did they receive revelation, God worked through their lives to reveal himself, as well. This, too, applies to us. We don't simply possess the revelation of God; our lives go on to manifest that revelation to the world around us. Those of us who are alive today are the cur-

rent "theatre," as Rev. Watkins called it, of God's work in the world. Redemptive-historical preaching, then, does not stop at showing us God's work in Scripture; but it teaches us that such work continues very much in our own lives.

Preaching Leviticus

After the lunch break Dr. James Visscher walked us through the challenge of preaching on the book of Leviticus. Because the book delves into various unpopular subjects like pus, incest, and bloody animal parts, it suffers from a lack of fondness on the part of preachers. But, Dr. Visscher argued, this shouldn't be – for it's an important book. In fact, it was one of the first books that Jewish children had to study in-depth. Its central theme is the holiness of God, and all of its uncomfortable subject matter drives home that profound reality. God is holy, and clean, and pure; and his people are not. And this is how Leviticus sets squarely before us our deep need for Christ. The only way that humanity could reach the impossible holiness of God was for God to take on our unholy humanity. All of the skin diseases, bodily discharges, and sexual sins that depict our pollution before God were washed away by the blood of the one, spotless, and perfectly pleasing sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Leviticus drives us straight to the gospel.

Schilder's preaching

The afternoon closed with a provocatively-titled speech by Dr. de Visser: "Would Schilder Pass Classis?" Schilder drew much praise for his preaching, so that even if his hearers did not understand everything that was said, they at least understood that it was profound. The kinds of things that shaped his preaching were derived from his strongly held theological beliefs. Schilder was a major force behind reading Scripture redemptive-historically, and his sermons could be grandiose in the connections they teased out from Scripture. And since all the lines of Scripture converge on Christ, Christ was the centrepiece of Schilder's preaching. But these strengths could also be weaknesses. In his effort to draw so many connections across Scripture, Schilder would sometimes ignore the immediate context of the passage he was preaching. This would fail a sermon proposal at classis today. And sometimes his lines to Christ were more fanciful and speculative than they needed to be. This, too, is bad news at classis. His application often amounted to

Dr. A.J. de Visser



little more than a call to faith when he could have done so much more, but classis tends to go easier on that, as young preachers are expected to grow in that wisdom as they minister. That being said, “If Klaas came to classis, would he pass?” Dr. de Visser asked. “I’m fairly confident he would scrape through.”

Preaching Jonah

The conference closed with a public speech from Dr. Bilkes, “Preaching the Whole Counsel of God.” As you can imagine, that’s a big topic. So to focus his talk, Dr. Bilkes outlined the ministry of Jonah. It was Jonah who took the counsel of God to the nations, and Christ proclaimed that one greater than Jonah had come. Dr. Bilkes highlighted four features of Jonah’s message. The first was that its origin was in God. Jonah had to bring the message of repentance that God commanded him to bring, and so today’s preachers must first of all bring God’s Word. The highest duty for a preacher is not that his preaching is attractive; it’s that it is faithful.

The second feature was the uniqueness of Jonah’s message. It was not a message the people of Nineveh could have expected to hear from anyone else, for it’s a message that no one wants to hear. It was a message of judgment and destruction: repent or you will be overthrown. This unique message, explained Dr. Bilkes, has not lost any of its relevance. God has overthrown churches and nations in the past, and he will certainly do so today. We all must either repent or perish. The third feature was how comprehensive the message was. All of humanity

has sinned against God, so a preacher must preach about the fullness of God’s holiness and about the extent of humanity’s sin. Because of this a preacher must preach about the fullness of Christ’s redemption, for this is the all-encompassing solution. And fourth, Jonah’s message was one of requirement. It did nothing for Jonah’s own status, but laid a hold on its hearers. Preachers, too, ought not to preach to be admired, but to convict their hearers of the requirements of God’s Word.

The subject of preaching the whole counsel of God was a fitting end to the conference. “The whole counsel of God” is just so vast – those few words seem utterly useless to the task. That counsel cannot be contained in a single sermon, or in a lifetime of sermons. It cannot be contained in two thousand years of sermons, nor could it be contained in two thousand more. We are speaking of Christ, in whom, as the KJV puts it, “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). We would hardly dare to utter such words were they not found in Scripture; but in Scripture they are. And so preachers must utter them and deliver them in all their majesty, however ineffective human words may seem. The dwelling of God with man is just the point of the whole gospel, and so this gospel outfits every part of our being to be worthy for God’s presence. How beautiful indeed are the feet of those who prepare our heart, soul, mind, and strength for that holy place!



Dr. Lawrence Bilkes



Neerlandia Canadian Reformed Church

Have you ever travelled to a specific destination and as you were on your way you knew that if you got distracted at the wrong time, you stood the chance of missing it? Well, apparently our town is just that type of place: “blink and you miss it altogether.”

Neerlandia, despite what the name suggests, is really not near anywhere. And if you have ever, between blinks, managed to arrive and stay in our tiny hamlet with a total population of about 120, you would be among those who wonder, “Where do all these people come from?”

You see, rush hour begins at 9:30 Sunday morning when not only 600 Canadian Reformed members show up, a similar number are also gathering in the neighbouring Christian Reformed Church, our URC brothers and sisters arriving later to use our worship space.

Ours remains a unique setting dating back to 1912, when our great grandparents settled here to farm, build a community, and raise their families. We fondly reflect, celebrate, and gratefully acknowledge the Lord’s blessing in preserving his church here. Even after the sad separation from the existing Christian Reformed Church in 1945, our community has largely remained one of faith and family. Our communion of saints is still intricate-



Third church

ly woven into the broader community life. Thankfully, along with the blessing of tremendous growth in numbers, we have also welcomed diversification, progression, and development which have become a blessing to congregational life as well.

While we are still located “on the edge of the earth,” as some will quip, somehow the city of Edmonton has become more easily accessible, making it possible for our students and even some of our married men to commute to take courses and follow apprenticeships, etc. Though we are a rustic country congregation, our members do strive to keep up with the progressive advancement in all the fields of employment. In years past, most of our members were involved in agriculture, but now you will also find all forms of construction from cabinets to grain bins, to houses and barns. Other occupations include trucking ventures which at times become quite the adventures. We also have mechanics, welders, and manufacturers owning and operating in many of the main-line dealerships. We still have our stay-at-home moms but also our teachers, nurses, therapists, and secretaries. Recently one of our members was elected MP of our area!



Second church

There are agents of real estate and insurance, masons and a book publisher, butchers, computer technicians and photographers, plumbers, janitors, and electricians all living, working, and worshipping in our community.

Some of our long standing memories of milestones and important situations would be those of our very early beginnings in 1950, the joyful opening of our Reformed School in 1977, moving into our new church building in 1987, correspondence and active involvement with the URC in the 90s, the General Synod here in 2004, and along with the blessed growth we have had many baptisms, some withdrawals and excommunications, as well as readmissions and some very difficult deaths and losses of dear members. These aspects of church life draw us ever closer to one another and cause us to look forward to the day of the return of our Lord.

We consider ourselves a lively congregation with abounding opportunity to truly *live* the communion of saints. We love a good time and find many ways to fellowship together. Even though less than thirty of our 600 members are over sixty-five, our ladies take care that these senior members enjoy time together hosting monthly coffee-lunch socials around someone's kitchen



August 2015
Church Picnic



2016 New Years Lunch

table. Our YPS group continues to initiate and host bi-annual study weekends, often having a lot of fun with their “red neck” themes and activities. A long tradition of summer church picnics followed by a car rally has been maintained. New Year’s Day brings many of us to the school gym where, over soup bowls and buns, we take the opportunity to greet one another with New Year’s hugs and handshakes. Many fund raisers and just fun occasions include dinners with a theme like Dutch, Valentine, Remembrance, or Harvest. We have a vibrant growing congregation with many young families and over a third of our membership under the age of twelve, which involves many different study societies including the Youth Group, Young Peoples, and a number of men’s and women’s societies.

And as you may have gathered (appreciate the pun) we have outgrown our worship place. We still love our church building, we love our fellow brothers and sisters, but we do not fit in our pews anymore. We stand at the point of decision concerning the future of our congregation. We will wait and see what further blessings the Lord has in store for us in Neerlandia.



Clarion Kids

The Fall into Sin

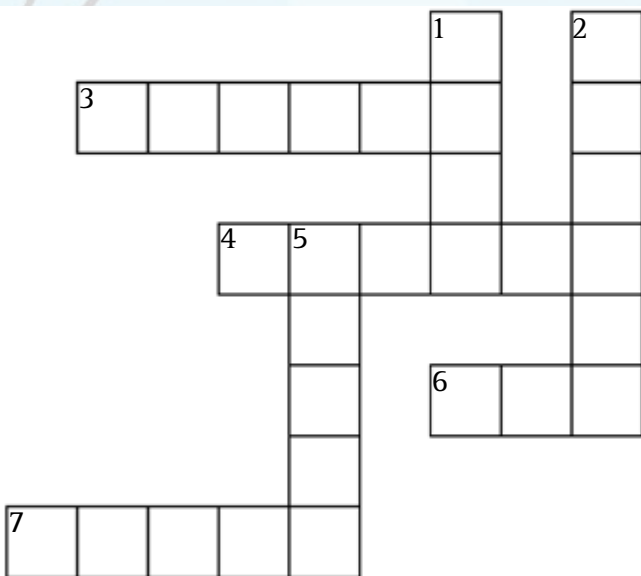
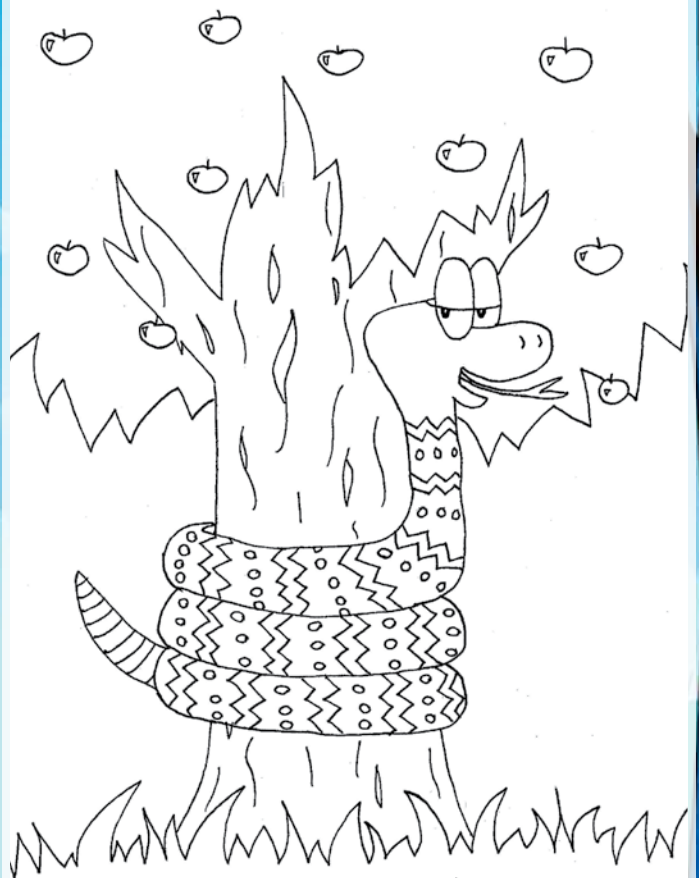
Genesis 3

In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam and Eve they could eat from every tree except for one. One day, a sneaky snake tricked Eve into eating from it. He told her it would make her like God. Adam also ate some of the fruit.

Adam and Eve became afraid of God and hid, but he knew what they had done. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the sneaky snake. God promised he would one day send his Son to defeat the snake.

Adam and Eve had to leave the garden because of their sin. They could never go back again.

Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this sneaky snake!



Down:

1. Eve gave some fruit to _____, her husband.
2. Adam and Eve lived in the _____ of Eden.
5. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve had to _____ the Garden of Eden.

Across:

3. When Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit they were _____ of God.
4. When God found Adam and Eve they both _____ someone else for their sin.
6. God promised that he would send his ____ to defeat the snake.
7. A _____ tricked Eve into eating from a tree that was forbidden.

Emily Nijenhuis



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Q

The covenant(s) God established or confirmed are often referred to as everlasting. How does this fit with Hebrews 8:13 where it says that the old covenant has been made obsolete?

The covenant with Abraham and the one with Isaac are both everlasting. When God established his covenant with Isaac it doesn't say that the covenant made with Abraham has become obsolete. Possibly the covenant with Isaac was the same covenant but confirmed and maybe added to. However, in Hebrews it says that he made the old covenant obsolete.

A

This question pertains to Hebrews 8:13 specifically; about this text, in answer to a previous question, I explained the general context and meaning of Hebrews 8 (*Clarion*, Vol. 63, No. 17). Indeed, Scripture speaks about the covenant God established

with us as an everlasting covenant. From Paradise till Christ's return there is but *one* covenant of God with us; some, who divide this time into six periods or dispensations, consider the time after Christ's return as the seventh or eternal dispensation, i.e. the eternal Sabbath. There may be different dispensations in which the appearance of the covenantal life differs, yet the covenant *per se* remains the same: the promise of life in the present and future (1 Tim 4:8; 1 John 2:25). Even though Paul, in Romans 9:4 and Ephesians 2:12, writes about "covenants" (plural) and there may be distinctions in the functioning of the covenant in the respective periods (e.g. in Noah's time, Abraham's days, and after the events at Sinai), yet throughout the history of the covenant its essence remained the same: the promise of life in present and future, the demand of faith and repentance, and the sanctions in case of unbelief.

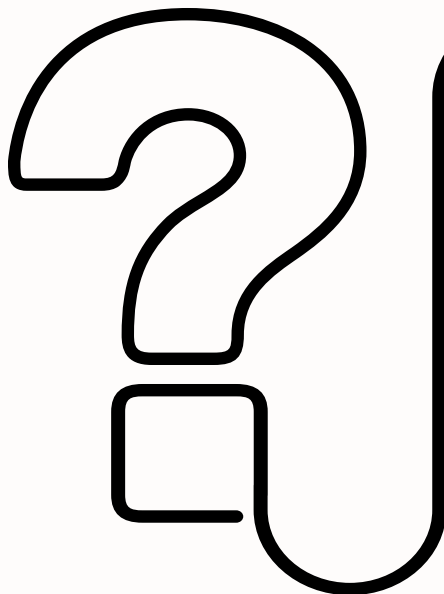
The author of the epistle to the Hebrews, then, is writing about the "old" and the "new" covenant; that is about the

relationship between the time before and after Christ. The expression of the "old" covenant pertains to the covenant of the Sinai, while the "new" covenant speaks about the time of Christ till the day of his return. Although the author follows Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6; 3:14, showing the clear distinction between the old and new covenant, with his quotation of Jeremiah 31:33 we note that the first thing he mentions as belonging to the new covenant is *the laws*! God's covenant demand in the old laws will function differently in purpose in the new covenant. This is in line with the Lord Jesus' saying: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Matt 5:17). The Lord Jesus, too, says that he has not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; i.e. I have not come to abolish the laws of the old covenant (that is, to do them away) but to fulfil them (to bring them to completion). It does not remain in its old form, for the old covenant has been *fulfilled* by Jesus Christ in whom all things are being made new. Hence, the becoming obsolete (Heb 8:13) and vanishing away of the old covenant takes place in the process of fulfilment and not in the act of abolishing.

The more specific focus of the author in Hebrews 8, however, is on the ministry in the *sanctuary* (vs. 7, 13; cf. 9:1, 15, 18). He compares the sprinkling with blood in the covenant established with Moses as the *inferior*, the

obsolete, and the aging and disappearing ministry, with the coming of the ministry of Christ in the new covenant. Then he concludes that the new covenant is better, superior, to the old one (v. 6), since it is founded upon *better promises*, of which the blessings and benefits of salvation and eternal life are rooted in Christ's sacrifice (9:15); Jesus' blood is the blood of the covenant. Yet, as in the old covenant, the forgiveness of sins and life eternal are still the promise! They are now rooted and grounded in the sacrifice and blood of Christ, which makes the functioning of the promises in the new covenant better, superior, or more powerful (as the Greek denotes). The functioning of the demand of the covenant, too, has changed, as the laws are now written in the hearts of the believers and no longer just on the stone tablets of their first submission. This covenant, again, is called an eternal covenant, in which Christ is the Mediator, who established peace with God (13:20) "through the blood of the eternal covenant!"

Hebrews 8 is speaking about two covenant dispensations (periods) in which we see the covenant continue in essence yet enriched; it's going from good to better, from the lesser of the old covenant to the more of the new. Already in the old dispensation we see this progression from less to more when we compare the situation after the fall with the time of Noah, the days of Abraham, and the period from Moses to Christ. The essence of the substance of the covenant is the same, yet we see a growing clarity, revelation, and fulfilment of God's work, and now especially in the covenant in Jesus Christ! We see this progress also in the position of the believers from the old to the new covenant: from the immature children in the old covenant to the mature members of the church in the new (Gal 4:1f.). In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul also speaks about a greater glory in the new covenant, thanks to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit! C



**Is there something
you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for?**

Ask us a question!

**Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander
denhollanderw@gmail.com**

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O LORD, Rebuke me not in Your Anger

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Psalm 38

1. O LORD, re-buke me not in your ang - er nor chas - ten me in
2. My wounds grow filth - y, they stink and fes - ter due to my sins and
3. All of my long - ing, Lord, is be - fore you. And all my sigh - ing,
4. O LORD, re-buke me not in your ang - er nor chas - ten me in

your ho - ly wrath. Your ar - rows pierced me; your hand has crushed me.
my fool - ish - ness. I am bent o - ver, bowed down and guilt - y.
you hear, O Lord. My heart is throb - bing; my strength is fail - ing.
your ho - ly wrath. Do not for - sake me, O LORD, my Sav - iour.

There is no sound - ness with - in my flesh. Your in - dig - na - tion
Gone is my vig - our. I have no health. All day I'm mourn - ing,
My eyes are dark - ened, I can - not see. I do con - fess my
Make haste to help me, O grac - ious God. Be not far from me,

press - es me down - ward. My guilt is heav - y, too much too bear.
fee - ble and shat - tered. I groan be - cause my heart is up - set.
sins and cor - rup - tion. I plead up - on your mer - cy, O God.
Christ, my Re - deem - er! For - give my sins by your pre - cious blood.

Text: Psalm 38; vers. George van Popta © 2015
Tune: Ludwig van Beethoven, 1812, alt.

10 9 10 9 10 9
7th Symphony 2nd mvt theme

