

all must be in subjection to the Pope of Rome in order to be saved). The reason for this lies in God's jealousy for His own holy name and the absolute supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ, for all God's people are "bound" to Him by the Holy Spirit.

From the church's geographical catholicity, we move to, what we may call, its *anthropological* catholicity. That is, God has, in His infinite wisdom, willed to elect and call a church that partakes of, and reflects, the various characteristics of mankind to the glory of His name (Eph. 3:9-11).

Many aspects of the church's anthropological catholicity flow from or are closely related to its geographical catholicity. Christ's church includes people of all nationalities and tribes; people of various tongues or languages; people of different skin colour, height, etc. Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, slave and free, male and female, young and old, more educated and less educated—all are represented in God's catholic church.

This is a point that Scripture makes emphatically. Regarding the catholic church militant, we read, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28); "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

In the book of Revelation, we have these moving descriptions of the catholic church triumphant: "I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (7:9); "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (5:9). We belong to Jesus Christ and His church, and this is our song too!

Besides geographical and anthropological catholicity, we may also speak of *historical* catholicity, catholicity through time. Today, probably no individual saint knows even 0.1% of God's people for they are scattered all around the planet. In the future, we would expect even greater catholicity, with people from more nations, tribes and languages being included in the body of Christ. The 2,000 years of the New Testament church have included many people who were or are very unlike us in earthly respects.

If we go even further back, the people of God even includes the largely Jewish church of the Old Testament era. Between Abraham and Christ's first coming, the church consisted mostly of Jews or physical descendants of Abraham. In the New Testament period, most of God's people are Gentiles, though the church always has included and will include some ethnic Jews, as Romans 11 teaches.

*Rev. Stewart*

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# *Covenant Reformed News*

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## **Geographical, Anthropological and Historical Catholicity**

In the last issue of the *News*, we introduced the beautiful truth of the catholicity of the church and began to explore what we referred to as the church's *geographical* catholicity.

Unlike other religions, biblical Christianity does not, and will never, have an earthly centre or headquarters, such as Rome (Roman Catholicism), Jerusalem (Judaism, premillennialism and dispensationalism), Mecca/Medina (Islam) or Salt Lake City (Mormonism). All notions of an earthly centre or headquarters represent a retrograde (and false) religious step.

The elect, redeemed and regenerate people of God have their headquarters (as it were) in heaven, where the risen Christ lives, the sole king and head of the church. The "Jerusalem which is above ... is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26), "For our conversation [or citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). The church's (geographical) catholicity not only includes the horizontal aspect, the church militant in the various continents and countries of the earth, but also the vertical dimension, the church triumphant in heaven.

The location of the church's headquarters in heaven—not any earthly city or land—fits perfectly with the last millennia of world history. Generally speaking, the pagan religions have their centre and are strongest or, at least, are very strong in their places of origin. Regarding Islam, one thinks of Saudi Arabia, the Middle East and the countries radiating outwards. Judaism's base is in Israel; Shintoism's in Japan. The Indian religions (Sikhism, Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism) are most influential in India and/or Southeast Asia.

With the New Testament church of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is very different. At its beginning, its members were found in Jerusalem and Israel. In the next few centuries, it was located mainly in the Roman Empire. From the Reformation onwards for many decades, the kingdom of God was most evident in His people and churches in Northwest Europe. This is no longer the case in our day.

Thus, unlike the pagan religions, the faith of Jesus Christ does not dominate in its place of origin (Jerusalem, Israel, the Middle East). Befitting its nature as catholic, Christ's church is the most widely spread of the religions. The white horse of the gospel must ride through all the earth (Rev. 6:1-2) converting the elect and hardening the reprobate, for "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).

*Belgic Confession 27* rightly states that Christ's catholic "church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place *or to certain persons*." This includes any Islamic caliph (as claimed by the Islamic State) or the Roman Pontiff (*Unam Sanctum* [1302] declared that

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## Polygamy

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A reader asks, “Why did God allow polygamy in the Old Testament?” There are those who use a supposed tolerance of polygamy (and divorce) in the Old Testament to undermine the New Testament’s clear teaching on marriage between one man and one woman for life. There are even cases where missionaries have allowed polygamy in societies where it already was practised, i.e., they permitted those who already had more than one wife when converted to continue to keep multiple wives.

One man says, “In the Scriptures, the ideal for marriage is one man married to one woman for life. Polygamy was tolerated but it almost always had less than desirable consequences. Divorce is abhorrent to God and allowed only in the most restricted circumstances. Thus those who have come to faith as polygamists should remain married and be accepted (with their wives and children) into the church. They should not be made leaders, however, and the ideal of monogamous marriage should be taught, so that future generations might follow the ‘better way.’”

To say that God allowed polygamy in the Old Testament is not really correct, and marriage between one man and one woman for life is not just a “better way.” “One man and one woman for life” is God’s law for marriage. That rule goes back to the creation of man and Genesis 2:24, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

Jesus makes reference to this in Matthew 19:4-6, though in connection with divorce and remarriage: “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

The New Testament clearly forbids polygamy. An elder or deacon is to be the “husband of *one* wife” (I Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6), and that as an example to the other members of the church (I Tim. 4:12). The New Testament always speaks of one husband and one wife (e.g., Mark 10:2-12; Rom. 7:2-3; I Cor. 7; Eph. 5:22-33; I Pet. 3:1-7).

Even more important is the relationship between Christ and His church, the great pattern for marriage (Eph. 5:32). In that eternal pattern, there is only one bridegroom and one bride. Christ is not a polygamist and neither may we be who believe in Him.

As far as the Old Testament is concerned, it is interesting that the first man in Scripture to marry more than one wife was depraved Lamech (Gen. 4:19-24). Believers in the Old Testament were following his example, not what God determined for marriage, when they had more than one wife. In the history of the church, it has only been cults and sects, such as the radical Anabaptists, who have permitted plural marriage. Even now in Western countries, where the biblical principles concerning marriage are almost forgotten, it is only strange cults like Mormonism that have promoted polygamy.

One blot on the record of the Reformation churches is the consent that Luther and other German theologians gave to the bigamous marriage of Philip, Landgrave of Hesse.

Luther himself was weak on the matter and, though generally in favour of “one man, one woman,” did allow for additional marriages in extreme cases. Luther, however, was wrong, and the case of Philip of Hesse became a scandal and it is still a scandal today.

That many of the leaders of Israel married more than one wife does not make the practice right. Solomon had 300 wives and 700 concubines. Abraham, Jacob, David, Gideon, Elkanah and David also offended in this matter. In the case of the leaders of Israel, the Word of God explicitly forbade the kings of Israel, who were the principle offenders, to marry many wives: “Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold” (Deut. 17:17). This occurs immediately before the requirement that the king be thoroughly versed in the Word of God (18-20). There is no question that Solomon and David sinned in marrying other wives; Solomon also by marrying *heathen* wives. Indeed, Solomon’s many wives turned his heart away from God (I Kings 11:1-4)

Further evidence of God’s displeasure against this practice is seen in the consequences that those who practised polygamy suffered. Our righteous Lord is not mocked by sin and, though the Old Testament does not explicitly condemn the practice, the family troubles experienced by Abraham, Jacob, Gideon, Elkanah and David should have given pause to anyone contemplating taking another wife.

Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away because of fighting between the two wives and their children. Jacob’s family was torn apart by the hatred of Leah’s children for Rachel’s Joseph. Gideon’s son by a concubine murdered his 70 brothers. Elkanah’s family was not peaceful (I Sam. 1). David’s children by different wives fought among themselves for preeminence, and there was one rape and several unnatural deaths among his sons.

That there are rules in the Old Testament for those in polygamous marriages (Ex. 21:10-11; Deut. 21:15-17) does not imply that polygamy was right even in those days. The same thing may be said about such regulations as Jesus stated regarding divorce and remarriage: “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Matt. 19:8) Christ goes on, as we know, to condemn and forbid divorce and remarriage, and the same condemnation applies to polygamy: it is a violation of what God commanded in the beginning.

Just as it can be argued that remarriage after divorce is adultery not marriage, so it can be argued that additional polygamous marriages are not even marriages at all in God’s sight. That solves the difficulty faced by missionaries who are bringing the gospel to polygamous societies. Under no circumstances ought polygamy to be tolerated.

Thus the Old Testament’s lack of explicit condemnation of polygamy can be explained by (1) the teaching of Genesis 2 and (2) the clearer revelation of the New Testament. Further word from God ought not to have been needed in light of Genesis 2:24 but explicit condemnation of polygamy did not come until the New Testament. The beautiful relationship between Christ and His bride, the church, is such a wonderful picture of marriage that violation of God’s rule can no longer be tolerated at all. Clearer revelation brings greater responsibility (cf. Luke 12:48).

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