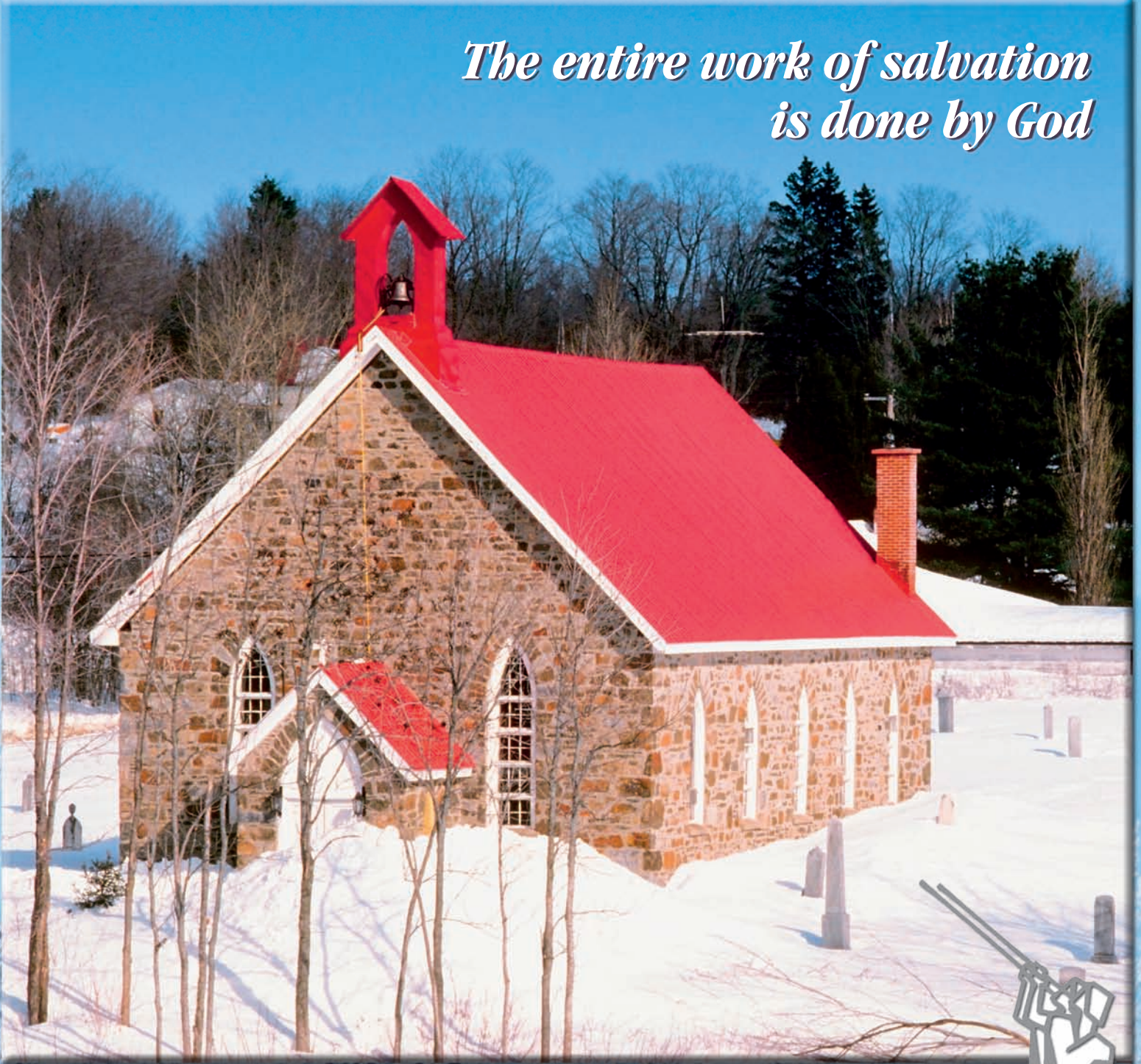


Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 58, No. 4 ■ February 13, 2009

*The entire work of salvation
is done by God*



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Cl. Stam

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Easy?

The Reformed faith is simply amazing

There was this lady who remarked that those Canadian Reformed people have it so easy. They believe they're all in the covenant and are saved regardless of what they do. Salvation is automatic. In the CanRC you are *baptized as an infant* and it is believed that nothing can go wrong. You are home-free and safe, just as in baseball.

Well, I know from personal experience that things can easily go wrong, even if you are baptized as an infant. More about that later. Right now I want to state that it is easy to make a caricature of someone else's beliefs and then piously attack the caricature. Accuse us of automatism and then wax indignant over such a heresy. One ought to do justice to others' views. It is not easy, I know, but we should try. Doing justice is proof of true rebirth. Otherwise it isn't worth a solitary dime.

The biblical doctrine of salvation is rather clear. One is saved by faith in Christ. This faith is worked in us by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel. This faith regenerates us (present tense = ongoing regeneration and sanctification). The source of this salvation is God's grace. The Reformed doctrine is God-oriented, Christ-centred, faith-based, Bible-founded, and Spirit-filled. In all this also the teaching about God's covenant has its place. But it's not as easy as some would have us believe.

My favourite passage

Someone said to me once that Christians shouldn't have favourite texts. Gives you tunnel vision. We have to abide by *all* the Scriptures and not a few favourites. *Tota Scriptura*, he said, with pursed lips. I agree with that, but I still have a favourite passage. I am a bit naughty, but I can't resist.

I love to read and meditate on Ephesians 2:1-10. You should read it for a moment and then revisit it regularly. It tells us how we come *from death to life*. Surely that has piqued your interest. If you follow the line in that passage, you find roughly the following:

- a) We were dead in transgressions and sins – fall
- b) We were by nature objects of wrath – curse
- c) God who is rich in mercy loved us – love
- d) God made us alive with Christ – faith
- e) God raised us up with Christ – justification
- f) We have been saved by grace – grace
- g) We are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms – ascension
- h) We are not saved by works so that no one can boast – praise
- i) We do good works, prepared in advance by God – new life

I'd like to see more enthusiasm for the Reformed faith among office bearers, teachers, parents, and young people

Notice that from beginning to end, *the entire work of salvation* is done by God in Jesus Christ. We are dead objects of wrath made into living people of grace who excel in good works because God wants us to be holy. Does this sound easy? It's quite a process and involves a life-long commitment and struggle. There is nothing automatic here. There is something ecstatic and outstanding here: my salvation rests not in myself but in Christ! Still, I am fully involved in that



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202



Subscriptions: clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

Advertisements: clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

Website: www.premierpublishing.ca

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Subscription Rates for 2009

	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$49.00*	\$ 81.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$62.00	\$ 80.00
International	\$90.00	\$135.00

*Including 5% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$16.00 per column inch

Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, Canada through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

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work of salvation from start to finish, from A – Z.

The Reformed faith is simply amazing.

It would be easier if we ourselves could do part of the process. God can do all the initial ground-breaking stuff, but activated by the Spirit we will take care of the regeneration and the sanctification. We will not boast, but always affirm that we have been saved by grace. Meanwhile, back at the ranch. . . we will diligently tend to our works as evidence of regeneration. Sometimes we might stand back for a moment and admire the result that came through much effort. Better than the CanRC's easy and glib idea of Wal-Mart salvation.

When things go wrong

Sometimes things do go wrong in a Christian's life. I have another favourite Bible passage (I am almost ashamed to admit it, tunnel vision, remember?) and it is found in Romans 7. I'll focus on verse 18 for now, "I know that nothing good lives within me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."

It's not as easy as it sometimes seems. It can take a lifetime of struggle and triumph to overcome one weakness. Some weaknesses we carry with us into the grave, to leave them there with the body of death. This does not mean that the weaknesses are okay, but that they are very hard to overcome. When the Apostle Paul speaks about a war raging inside, I understand what he means. When things do go wrong and I again fall into a sin of which I know it is a sin, I am comforted in Christ and I do affirm my delight for God's law. I hate myself, but I love my Saviour.

Salvation is not easy. But our Lord Jesus Christ is a sympathetic high priest, who was tempted in every way we are, yet without sin. (See Hebrews 2, another one of my favour. . .). When we fall, He lifts us up. He knows how to lead his sheep. Sometimes He carries me in his arms, because I cannot go anymore on my own. The *Can. Refers* have it easy? Not this one. Not anyone I know.

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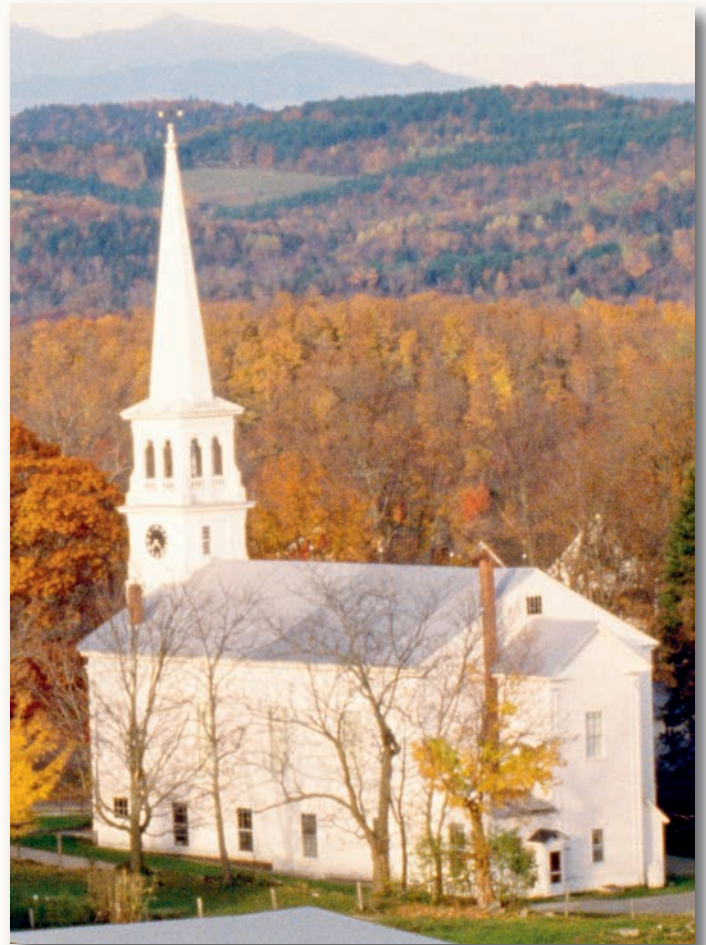
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Almost forgot about the covenant

I am developing tunnel vision. I almost forgot to write something about the function of the covenant. Does the covenant make things easy? Is the covenant an assurance of automatic salvation? What utter nonsense!

Ask Abraham how easy it was – a promise of children and a barren wife. Have some tea with Isaac and Jacob. Read the history of their lives, so carefully recorded for us in Scripture. See how the Nazirite Samson loses his hair and his head. Envision David standing on the rooftop lusting after a bathing Bathsheba. Check out John the Baptist in his prison cell when he began to wonder if Jesus was truly the Man. Read Hebrews 11. What more can I say? Stand in faith at the old rugged cross and hear the words, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Easy?

All these were in the covenant – circumcised just as we are baptized. And they knew that it is not easy to live as a covenant child. Some fell deeply and wept greatly. The covenant is not a free pass to eternity. The covenant is a working relationship that God has established with us and our children, with believers and their seed, people who know that salvation is not easy, but possible, yes, guaranteed in Christ. So, get to work.

Re-baptism

When God establishes a relationship, He means it. He means every word that He ever said to us, regardless of age, gender, or status. I discovered that in the course of their lives some people mistakenly come so far that they seek *re-baptism*. Nowhere does the Bible speak of this. It is not a biblical requirement but a human invention.

We do read that Apollos only knew of the baptism of John and the way had to be explained to him more adequately (Acts 18:25). We do not read about any re-baptism. If it happened, it was not important enough to mention.

In Ephesus there were a number of disciples who had never heard of the Holy Spirit and they had received only the baptism of John. Of these people it is said that they were baptized into the name of the Lord

Jesus. It is not called *re-baptism* because there was in their case really no prior proper baptism. Other than this, the Bible is silent about re-baptisms.

This denial of infant baptism is symptomatic of a deeper shift. It is a denial of the doctrine of grace. See my favourite passages. Why can God not claim children of believers as his own and give them the sign of his covenant? God is gracious, even to infants, conceived and born in sin.

I have also discovered that some develop “itching ears” syndrome (2 Timothy 4:3-5). They seek out preachers who tell them what they want to hear. Ask someone who is church-hopping why they left where they were and began attending elsewhere and you may get the answer, “We were not hearing what we wanted to hear, so we left.” Well, how can you argue with that?

It is not easy being “Reformed” today. As churches we need to stand together and encourage one another. We need to seek sister churches who also love the Reformed faith. Generally, I’d like to see *more enthusiasm for the Reformed faith* among office bearers, teachers, parents, and young people. A lot of good initiatives are developing. Cool.

Our churches have never taken the easy way out. We should not start now.



J. Witteveen



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No Shame



MATTHEW 13:52

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

Romans 1:16

Romans 1:16 is a verse that has long been cherished by Christians, and for good reason. While it's a beautiful statement about the gospel, this is much more than a beloved Christian slogan. Paul has already explained that he's eager to preach in Rome and now he provides the reason for this eagerness.

He begins by saying, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” When someone says he's not ashamed of something, that means there is good cause for why he might actually be ashamed of it. In Paul's time, non-Christians had every reason to try to shame believers. In 1 Corinthians 1:23 Paul had written, “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”

The Gentile world saw the gospel as foolishness, because in essence the gospel message is this: there was this carpenter's son, born in a barn. He grew up in the little village of Nazareth, in a backwater place in the Roman Empire. This man was executed by his own countrymen for being a heretic and a blasphemer. But this man, this failure, was actually the Son of God, God in human flesh. This man rose from the dead, He ascended into heaven, He poured out his Spirit on his people, and He now sits at the right hand of God. This man is to be worshipped and adored and He offers eternal life to everyone who puts his trust in Him.

How is this foolishness to the Greeks? A better question would be: how is this *not* foolishness to the

Greeks? First, the idea of God becoming human was absurd to the Greek mind. God would never lower Himself by entering the physical world. Secondly, why would God choose this backwards part of the Roman Empire to do his work? If God were actually to act in this way, wouldn't He do it in Rome, or in Athens, in one of the great world centres? This small-time preacher and miracle worker dying on the eastern borders of the Empire had nothing on the glory and might of Caesar and Rome!

And not only was the gospel foolishness to the Greeks, it was also a stumbling block to the Jews. Deuteronomy 21:23 says it clearly: anyone hung on a tree faced God's curse. The Messiah surely couldn't be someone cursed by hanging! The Messiah was supposed to be the mighty king who would deliver his people in power and glory. Where was the power? Where was the glory?

If ever anyone had good reason to shut his mouth to avoid facing hatred and ridicule, it was Paul. His gospel message contradicted everything that the world understood to be right and true and good. And more often than not, Paul was rejected, scorned, and despised for the message that he proclaimed.

But Paul proudly says that he is not ashamed of this gospel. Why? Because this gospel message is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile! Paul attributes a tremendous power to the preaching of the good news of

Jesus Christ. This is a message that carries within itself a great power, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today we live in an era that isn't much different from that of the Apostle. Things haven't changed: the message of the cross is still foolishness. And no amount of trying to avoid the difficult issues is going to change that. Nothing we do is going to make this message palatable to people who refuse to believe. No changes to our message to make it sound nicer are going to move people from hating Jesus to loving Him. Only one thing has transformed us from being God-haters to being God-fearers and that is the true, unadulterated message of Christ. Marketing and church growth techniques will not change a person's heart; only the true gospel can accomplish this miracle. Because this gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes!

In Mark 8:38, our Lord told his disciples that if anyone was ashamed of Him and his words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man would be ashamed of him when He came in his Father's glory with the holy angels. So while there may be many ways in which our society tries to shame us for holding to this gospel, let us, like Paul, glory in the gospel. Let us not be ashamed of our Lord and his words, because our Lord's message is the powerful message of the great and righteous God, and nothing less.



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With Pack and Planet Guides

So you have decided to head off overseas, following the call of so many other young people, the “big OE,” i.e. “overseas experience” for those not in the know. Or maybe you are “long in the tooth” and going for a few months travel overseas on an extended holiday in your retirement. You have been faithfully attending church at home, with your friends and family, and the thought of how to stay true to Christ and your faith while overseas never even enters your mind. After all, why should it? You have not had any problems to date. You attended Sunday school and catechism classes since you were knee high to a grasshopper, you may have done Profession of Faith, and so what is the big deal; you are a child of the covenant, a committed Christian.

And yet. . . . When you decided to head off overseas for an extended working holiday or vacation, you probably checked out the Internet, talked to others about job prospects – say in London, locum agencies, you probably bought the Lonely Planet guide to wherever, checked out exchange rates, places to stay, sights to see, the best clothes to bring, footwear etc, the list is endless. But where on your list was how to take care of your soul?

Oh yeah, you brought your Bible (maybe even got a smaller one to travel lighter), and thought, “There,

covered that aspect” because that is all you kind of needed at home anyway. You may have heard about so and so who went overseas and came back having left the faith and thought, “Nah, that won’t happen to me.” Well, it is time to put on top of your checklist – preserving my Christian lifestyle with the “God’s Planet guide book.” Why, you ask? Isn’t it enough to throw the Bible in the pack? What more could I possibly need or do?

Because when you leave the safety and security of your home church fellowship (there’s safety in numbers), you walk straight into the Devil’s playground. You are now on his turf and you must arm yourself because he will tease and tempt you and try everything within his power to win you away from Christ. You will be on your own, no extended circle of family and friends to support and encourage you, the security of a routine, every Sunday in church.

It is so much easier to be faithful at home in the church; it is a routine, don’t have to think about what church, where it is, can I get there, what time does it start, who will notice if I don’t go and so on. No, you will be very lonely, even if you are with one or two of your friends, and if you don’t take the necessary precautions, you will have a very tough time. It is important to put as much effort into

preparing yourself spiritually as it is getting visas and the best sleeping bag/pack etc.

The first thing that will be a hassle will be finding a church. Sure, there are heaps of churches out there; but which one will be a true church, sound in doctrine, and will I have the time to go to different churches every week trying them out for size? How do I keep my spiritual life alive when all around me is lost – the glittering lights, transport problems, hostel / flatmates who think Sunday is a day for leisure and shopping? What about when I am in foreign countries that don’t speak English? I am beset on all sides, with choices and freedom.

Well, I have been travelling on and off around this globe to many weird and wonderful places now for several decades, and I have had to learn the hard way. And over the years I have discovered that it requires a real effort and through many years of travail I have come up with a few pointers to share and make your expedition a little less hazardous.

So here is my version of “**God’s Planet guide to travelling – 10 recommendations to survival**”:

1. **Keep membership with your home church** until you return or are settled and resident in another church. Then transfer your membership. If you have a

travelling membership, it is a license to avoid committing oneself while travelling. Keeping your membership current at home, means that you will still be in the prayers of your home church, and you will have an ongoing relationship still with a church of God who knows you.

2. **Access the Internet for church sites;** look at web sites that will give you information about where you want to travel to and Reformed churches there. It makes it so much simpler than going through dozens of churches or hoping to just come across a good one. I was in a cheap flea-ridden hotel in Bangkok one Sunday morning when through the window I heard the sound of hymns being sung. I followed the sound to a church that was just down the end of the street, to find it full of expatriate English-speaking Baptists. What a joy it was to meet fellow Christians in a faraway place. Luckily in the twenty-first century we have better ways of finding churches, so I have attached a list of websites that may help you. Not all are strictly Reformed, but these will have some form of affiliation with Reformed beliefs.
3. **Receive sermons via email;** If you are travelling and you are on hotmail / yahoo etc, get sermons sent to you via email. I am fortunate to travel always with my laptop and I download these every week. I use them whenever I am in a country that doesn't have English speaking / Reformed churches, such as

Russia / Argentina. You can access email anywhere now and you can print it out at an Internet cafe. You can get sermons through the New Zealand Reformed church website (www.rcnz.org.nz).

4. **Take a good Christian book with you** as well as Lonely Planet and your Bible. Lonely Planet guides always tend to be a bit out of date in my experience but the Bible never is. Your Lonely Planet tells you about the country you are in, your God's Planet guide will tell you how to live there. And a good way of keeping your faith fresh and new is to take a Christian book as well – one that will challenge and stimulate you and one that you can read again and again. I would recommend one of J. I. Packer's or something similar, for example *Knowing God* or C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*. I had a book years ago that my mother gave to me when I left to go backpacking on my own through SE Asia. It had chapters with selected verses for those difficult times, "when you are lonely, when you are afraid, etc." I found it enormously useful for finding the appropriate verses when distressed or whatever. Once, I arrived late in Penang, Malaysia and all the cheap hotels were full as it was Chinese New Year. My bedjak (bicycle taxi) driver then took me to a place which had a room but it was four times the price that I usually paid as it was a double and in demand. That night I was worried about how my money would last (I

was on a very tight budget!) and found the verses to comfort me under the heading "When you are worried and anxious." I then prayed and put it in the Lord's hands. The next morning I went downstairs to find the taxi driver standing there, saying that he had just found a single room for me at a quarter of the price and had asked the hotel to hold it for me if I was interested. Fantastic! God can answer in ways better than we expect.

5. **Keep Sundays different;** make a real effort – try and get to church and spend the day reading that book you bought with (see it does come in handy!). Find a nice park somewhere, take a walk, avoid sightseeing and other tourist activities, however tempting, because the minute you give in once, it becomes so much easier the next time round. The "I didn't get struck by lightning" logic means I can do it again next Sunday. But do try and get into a routine for the Sunday. This is the hardest bit of all. Because when you are on a working holiday overseas, those little devils whisper in your ear; "Who will ever know?", "It's just once," "It's not such a big deal," "What else is there to do?", "You won't be here again, take the opportunity, God won't mind" and so on. I have some bad news for you; He does mind, very much so.
6. **Take a couple CDs of church music** to help you on Sundays. I travel with my favourite church music and that way I can have my own little "church

service" in the remoter parts of the planet. Don't just have contemporary Christian music but include one of hymns/psalms. The sound of familiar hymns is a remarkable way of feeling "normal" in a non-normal setting on a Sunday. Keep to the familiar ones, tunes and words you know. Some people hate mood setting music but I disagree. It is important to put yourself into the right frame of mind for worship and church music can help put your mind ready to read a sermon or go to church.

7. **Don't forget your tithes and offerings** – you can arrange for this to be done at home if you are sending money home, but it is too easy to fall into the trap

of not giving anything to God because of your itinerant lifestyle. The "why should I give to this church when I am not really a member and I am only here sometimes" concept. So don't stop just because you are overseas. You are only giving back to God what is his anyhow and you can't take it with you! There are other options too such as supporting mission work etc. Don't stop just because you are not in a regular job or at home.

8. **Be sensible about where you go;** don't deliberately put yourself into dangerous places full of temptation or personal danger. Don't put God to the test. If you find yourself in such circumstances beyond your

control, that is a different matter. Then remember that God will never leave you nor forsake you. He is always there.

I once found myself with several travelling companions surrounded by several dozen armed men in the wilds of Pakistan near the Afghanistan border. As it was they had heard about this blond female doctor and her companions from some visitors we had, and wanted to offer us their protection, as there were many bandits about. So we took it and stayed the night in their fortress compound in northern Pakistan. It transpired that the leader was the Chief of the tribe in that area responsible for manufacturing and selling

Church Websites for Overseas Travellers

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand have sister church relationship with several other churches overseas and contact with several more with which we have strong affiliation. We are also members of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, which is a group of churches who hold similar confessional beliefs. I have also included Reformed Baptists, who may provide a useful alternative for church attendance in some areas that don't have a church with whom we have an official relationship. So I have included their websites, particularly for the UK.

This is not an exhaustive list and as I have not attended all these churches I cannot vouch for them with any degree of certainty. My experience has been that sometimes you get a very good church and other times you wonder how they got on the website. If you mention the word Reformed, this does not always register, even in those who are reasonably orthodox. This list is merely to assist you in narrowing down your choices when faced with thousands in your travels. The only real test is the acid test – attend and

find out. Do not expect that it will be the same as "home." NZ churches have evolved into a unique kiwi flavour; a porridge of English and Dutch Reformed liturgies. Have fun!

A. Europe and the United Kingdom:

1. De Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt) in Nederland (Liberated); (contact church -close to NZ style, member ICRC) www.gkv.nl
2. De Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland; (sister church, member ICRC) www.cgk.nl
3. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales; (member ICRC) www.epcew.org.uk (Not many congregations though)
4. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland; (member ICRC) www.epc.org.uk
5. Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland; (member ICRC) www.rpc.org
6. The Free Church of Scotland; (member ICRC) www.freechurch.org (includes links to other Free Churches in the UK, North and South America, South Africa, India, and Australia).

arms to the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan. The thought of a blonde female doctor adept with weapons so appealed to him that he “adopted” me along with my companions. (I noted that their favourite video was Rambo 2!) We were feted and taken on a tour of the arms manufacturing factories (they made AK47s – Russian automatic rifles, to order). The incidence of travellers being robbed and murdered in this region is pretty high, but it was an area that had to be traversed and I recalled Psalm 23 and its promise of help even in the valley of death. God was very good to us.

But it is not just the wild places that can be dangerous.

Those bright city lights, pubs, and nightclubs that can persuade you away from Christ – be sensible about your leisure time, however exciting it may seem, and how strong in your faith you think you are. No one is immune from temptation.

9. **Get into a flat with other Christians**, if you can. It is so much easier than having to deal with drunken flatmates, blasphemy, a non-Christian lifestyle, and Sunday observance that is not religious. When you are on your own in a foreign country, you tend to make friends with those you live with and hence you do things together. It becomes very difficult to keep

a Christian perspective when you are desperate for friendship. If getting into a Christian flat doesn't work out for whatever reason (e.g. your contract puts you into a work hostel), then you have it a bit tougher but it is not insurmountable. Just go to church as per normal on Sunday; it is no big deal, and most flatmates will respect that as long as it doesn't impact on them. You just have to rely heavily on God to withstand the temptation, but remember; God won't lead you into any temptation greater than you can stand without leaving a way of escape (and that might be “find another flat”).

7. General listings:

- a) GraceNet UK; lists Reformed Evangelical Churches in the United Kingdom, mostly Evangelical and Reformed Baptist and Evangelical Presbyterian, also includes Free Churches. www.grace.org.uk (Has links to other similar churches in Europe – Belgium, France, Malta, and Switzerland – the Pacific, and North America).
- b) www.evangelical-times.org Evangelical Times (ET) is a monthly newspaper published in England. The paper's main constituency is among Reformed churches. Its readership is wide and composed mostly of people who hold to reformed theology and the doctrines of grace – Presbyterians and Baptists make up a large proportion of the readers.
- c) www.reform.org.uk Reform is a network of churches and individuals within the Church of England, committed to the reform of ourselves, our congregation, and our world by the gospel.

- d) www.spindleworks.com a world-wide resource for sermons and other Reformed literature

B. North America:

1. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church; (sister church, member ICRC) www.opc.org
2. The Canadian and American Reformed Churches; (sister church, member ICRC) www.canrc.org
3. The United Reformed Churches in North America; (church we have contact with, member ICRC) www.urcna.org
4. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America; (member ICRC) www.reformedpresbyterian.org
5. The Reformed Church in the United States; (member ICRC) www.rcus.org
6. The Free Reformed Churches of North America; (member ICRC) www.frcna.org
7. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church; (member ICRC) www.arsynod.org

10. **Don't forget your daily devotions;** just a few minutes per day to take time with God in prayer. Read your Bible so you become familiar with it, or have a devotional guide or an inspirational booklet to remind yourself. There are plenty good ones to choose.

These are just a few pointers that I have found through the years through trial and error (a lot of error!) to have helped me. Hopefully, they may help some of you avoid the trial and error approach. You will find that you have lots of motivation when you start out from home, but be warned; it often wears off through constant battle and attractive bright lights. Like any soldier, you will need to be

encouraged and refreshed, and this is where your friends and family can help at home plus those who are travelling with you. You must encourage each other. Don't be afraid to challenge each other's behaviour and actions, in a loving manner of course. It is so essential that you look out for each other, whether you are in the same house, or thousands of miles away. Ask about church attendance, encourage each other to read the Bible, attend local Bible study groups etc, get involved in your local church, and support each other. But above all, remember that you are never alone, it does not matter where in the world you are, He will never forsake you.

God's grace is awesome, and it is a constant source of amazement to me, that however little I deserve it, God continues to pour out his grace on me. One of the nicest things about travelling is meeting so many Christians from many different walks of life and being a part of the universal church of all ages, that body of believers who belong heart and soul to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful experience.

Happy travels.

This article is an online resource that can be found on the Reformed Churches of New Zealand website www.rcnz.org.nz

8. Free Churches access through www.freechurch.org
9. Reformed Baptist Church Directory www.farese.com. Includes USA, Canada, and abroad (Pacific; Australia, NZ, Singapore, Malaysia. Europe; France, Germany, Italy, Malta, North Ireland, UK, Spain, Yugoslavia. Africa: South Africa, Zambia. Caribbean; Dominican Rep, Puerto Rico, West Indies. Others; Hong Kong, India, Israel, Mexico, Philippines.).
10. ReformedNet; a general listing of Reformed type churches in North America, some of whom are members of the ICRC and many are not. www.reformed.net

C. Asia and the Pacific

1. Singapore: Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore; (no official relationship), www.antioch.com. This website has links to other churches throughout the region not necessarily Reformed (Thailand, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Hong Kong).
2. Australia:
 - a) Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (sister church) www.crca.org.au
 - b) The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (sister church, member ICRC) www.pcea.org.au

- c) Reformed Baptist access through www.farese.com
3. New Zealand:
 - a) The Reformed Churches of New Zealand; www.rcnz.org.nz
 - b) Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand (church with whom we have contact) www.gpcnz.org.nz

D. Africa

1. South Africa: The Reformed Church in South Africa; (sister church, member ICRC) www.gksa.org.za

E. International Conference of Reformed Churches: also includes these (no web sites found).

1. The Free Church in South Africa (probably access through www.freechurch.org)
2. The Free Church of Central India (probably access through www.freechurch.org)
3. The Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin)
4. Gereja Gereja Reformasi Musyafir N.T.T. (Indonesia)
5. Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia
6. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India

Father Ordains Son



Father and son

Ordination

"Candidate Rolf den Hollander has accepted the call extended to him." With this joyous announcement the Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg was again reminded that our Heavenly Father does not forget his people, but continues to guide, protect and preserve his church. What a blessing it was, that after a vacancy of twenty months, the congregation could look forward to the spiritual guidance and leadership of its seventh pastor and teacher. Indeed, our God is an awesome God!

On Sunday, October 5, 2008 the morning worship service was conducted by the Rev. W. den

Hollander, father of Candidate R.J. den Hollander. He chose as text 2 Timothy 4:1-5 and proclaimed the Word of God under the theme: "The urgent apostolic charge: Preach the Word." The Word is paramount and Rev. den Hollander focused on its proclamation, its motivation and its implementation. On a personal note, Rev. den Hollander mentioned that for a father to see his son follow in his footsteps is both humbling and gratifying. What manifold reasons there are for rejoicing this day!

Rev. K. Jonker, minister emeritus of the Grace church and the Rev. J. Van Rietschoten, minister emeritus of the church at Chatham (currently residing in Carman, MB) participated in the laying on of hands, a beautiful practice that is moving to witness.

Br. Wayne Versteeg encouraged the now Reverend R. den Hollander in his new calling and charged the congregation to wholeheartedly accept their new minister. Rev. Jonker, also on behalf of his wife Helene, was gracious in his words of welcome and support. Several other welcomes were made from CanRC and URC churches as well as Classis Manitoba.

In his afternoon inaugural sermon Rev. den Hollander preached the Word based on 1 Corinthians 3:9ab. "Be God-centred in your view of the ministry for

(1) We are God's fellow workers and (2) You are God's field."

It is interesting to note that both the den Hollander ministers, father and son, were ordained in the Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg twenty-four years apart almost to the day. Rev. W. den Hollander was ordained on October 7, 1984 by Rev. Van Rietschoten, who used as text 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2. The inaugural sermon that afternoon was on 1 Corinthians 3:9. The family lived in the manse beside the church.



Laying on of hands



Student choir

Rev. R. J. den Hollander was ordained on October 5, 2008 by Rev. W. den Hollander who used as text 2 Timothy 4:1-5. The inaugural sermon was based on 1 Corinthians 3:9ab. The family lives in the manse beside the church.

Welcome evening

On the evening of Saturday, October 18 the congregation gathered in the gymnasium of the Immanuel Christian School to officially welcome Rev. Rolf den Hollander and his wife Liz to Winnipeg and the Grace church. The get together was of a somewhat casual nature with dinner, consisting of various delicious soups and buns, served during the course of the evening. Br. Bob Leach, punster extraordinaire, ably led the evening's festivities as master of ceremonies. He opened the celebration by reading Hebrews 13:15-21 and led in prayer. After some opening remarks the two Women's Societies were given the opportunity to introduce the members of the congregation to the den Hollanders. These introductions served double duty as, in a unique way, they also

formed the order of being served supper. While making their way to the serving tables each and every member was asked to visit the den Hollander table and personally express words of welcome. There was much laughter and shaking of hands. At the same time an excellent slide show produced by Br. Fernand Jonker illustrating some of the history and activities of the Winnipeg church was shown. Although Rev. and Mrs. den Hollander were rightly bestowed the honour of being served first, it was inevitable that quite some time elapsed before they could finally enjoy their cold soup.

A choir of children (Kindergarten – Grade 6), conducted by Sr. Julia Toet, performed several songs. A presentation by the Boy's and Girl's Club was followed by a presentation from the Young Peoples Society. A Men's Quartet performed an adaptation of "This Town is Your Town." After forming a quintet with the addition of a wary Rev. den Hollander they then sang a moving rendition of "Honey" directly to Sr. Liz den Hollander who was held captivated (or captive?) on a chair in the centre of the stage. The



Male Quartet



Rev. R.J. and Mrs. Liz den Hollander

Grace senior choir then performed two selections to a hushed audience. Sr. Janet Vandenberg narrated a skit entitled "Old Shep" in which unsuspecting members of the audience were called to play the various parts.

Throughout the course of the evening Rev. and Mrs. Den Hollander were frequently called to the stage to open gifts offered by the congregation, Immanuel Christian School and the Men's Society. They were also presented with a photo directory of the membership, a major project completed shortly before their arrival.

At the end of the evening Rev. den Hollander, together with his wife Liz, took the stage and expressed their gratitude for a wonderful, festive, and informative time of becoming acquainted. Our new minister then led us in a closing prayer of thankfulness.

Thank you to all the organizers and participants. The warm relaxed atmosphere and the many talents displayed made for a memorable evening of fellowship. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.



Liz DeWit

Liz DeWit teaches English, Reformed Studies, and Fine Arts at Dufferin Christian High School in Carman, MB

CRTA-West Convention Report



On October 9 and 10, 2008, over eighty administrators, teachers, and support staff from our schools in Manitoba and Alberta gathered together at the Dallas Valley Ranch at Lumsden, Saskatchewan, to attend the Educators' Convention "Looking Back to Move Forward." In an intensive two-day series of dynamic lectures and workshops, the guest speaker, Tara Barthel, flooded us with a tremendous amount of information pertaining to conflict resolution and the biblical principles behind peacemaking.

In his introduction, Mr. Len Lodder pointed out that conflict and discontent come from many sources: lovelessness, dullness, emptiness, loneliness, evil, fatherlessness, powerlessness, hopelessness, and aimlessness. Though the world offers various "solutions" to overcome these sources of conflict and discontent, Jesus Christ offers one real solution: Himself. Worldly

solutions suggest one must climb out of the depths of the human condition by one's own strength. Jesus' teaching is different. When Christ was confronted by the two men and their hopelessness on the way to Emmaus: "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). He went back in his story to show them the way forward.

Guest speaker

When Tara Barthel began, she reminded us of 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, where we read that Paul, and all disciples of Jesus Christ, are called to be ambassadors of the King, reconciling the world to God in Christ Jesus. When we are reconciled to God through the work and life of Jesus Christ, we will seek to be reconciled to one another. When we bring to remembrance what Christ has

done for us, a historical act of grace and compassion, which reconciled each of us to God and each of us to one another, we may and must move forward in love and compassion for others. If we are at fault in any conflict, we have an avenue of forgiveness open to us; if we are hurt by conflict coming at us, we have an avenue of forgiving open to us. To God be the praise!

Conflict can make life very awkward. It often catches us off guard and leads us to say or do things we later regret. With dynamic illustrations from everyday life, Tara Barthel demonstrated that we often react without thinking first and soon we are caught in a situation where nothing works, where relationships are destroyed, and where people are seriously hurt. We can break free from conflict by renouncing sinful selfish demands and asking God to help us find all of our security, joy, and fulfillment in Jesus Christ alone.

How can we glorify God in our relationships, especially when troubles arise in those relationships? We learned that the first step was to recognize our own sinfulness and ask forgiveness for it. From the Bible, we learn the seven A's of confession: Address everyone involved, Avoid the words "if, but, and maybe," Admit specifically, Acknowledge the hurt,



Accept the consequences, Alter your behaviour, and Ask for forgiveness.

Tara Barthel described the act of forgiving and being forgiven as "breathing the air of grace." Barthel's intention was for us to understand that if we are not receiving grace, we cannot be passing it on to others. We breathe in grace from God, and as we do so, he is teaching and training us to live Godly lives. When we breathe grace in, we cannot help but breathe it out to those around us, much like we cannot help but breathe out air after we've breathed it in. We confront because we are compelled by love. Biblical confrontation is not confronting someone to build ourselves up or tear another down; it's not to get back at a person either. The one and only reason we should confront someone is because we love the person.

The speaker taught us the PAUSE principle of negotiating, which helps us to avoid escalation and find solutions. The acronym PAUSE reminds us to Prepare, Affirm relationships, Understand interests, Search for creative solutions, and Evaluate options objectively and reasonably. As well, since God has forgiven our sins so fully and completely, we must share this abundance of grace. To help us in this process, Tara taught us the following four G's:

1. Glorify God: How can I please and honour God in this situation? In responding to a conflict, trust and obey the Lord; grow to be like Christ. Do not focus on your own desires, but subject your will to God's that his Name may be glorified.
2. Get the log out of your eye. How can I show Jesus' work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict?
3. Gently restore. How can I lovingly serve others by helping

them to take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict? Talk personally and graciously to those involved in the conflict, seeking to restore them.

4. Go and be reconciled. How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict? When we forgive others we need to promise not to dwell on the grievance anymore, nor should we talk to others about it. Additionally, it should not hinder our relationship in the future, and lastly, we must be committed not to bring up this conflict again and use it against the other.

Peacemaker Ministries

So, why was a speaker from Peacemaker Ministries brought in to speak to educators? Teaching is a profession built on a host of relationships. There are relationships with students, parents, colleagues, administration, and with the janitorial staff. Where there are relationships, there is the potential for conflict. In Tara Barthel's words, conflict is a matter of when, not if. In this situation, Tara's

presentation equipped the participants to appreciate the practicality of our Bible as it reveals to us how we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. We now have a set of biblical tools that we can begin to practice to use, not only in the teaching profession, but in all of our relationships. We pray that our service will be to the praise of God's Name and a witness to those around us.

Since we returned home, we found ourselves contemplating and discussing facets of the convention. It was a fantastic learning experience on many levels; we grew academically and spiritually, within a context of Christian collegiality. Tara's passion and energy on the topic of peacemaking was infectious, quickly bringing case studies and conversations pertaining to the topic to life. The conference was an enjoyable experience; sharing and participating with those involved in the same task was memorable and upbuilding.

In order to learn more, check out <http://www.tarabarthel.com>, <http://ccef.org>, <http://www.peacemaker.net>, or read *Peacemaking Principles*, published by Peacemaker Ministries, Billings, MT.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms

“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.’ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.”
Lamentations 3:22-26

When the sun shines it is such a glorious day! Our hearts are filled with happiness and we have a joy which can shine forth from us. Yes, it is the joy that our heavenly Father gives to us through the creation around us which our eyes are opened to. To this we are also given an inner joy which surpasses any earthly happiness, namely being a child of the Lord. Indeed, what a rich blessing that He came to love us and redeem us to be his. May we also show this love in our lives through thoughtful care and helping hands. This is not something that we do out of our own goodness; rather, it is the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. May we shine as living children of God.

Below is a poem which was written by Connie VanAmerongen, who resides in Anchor Home; sharing how the sun’s ray can mean so much. May we all be beacons of light! All praise and thanks to our heavenly Father who so caringly guides and moulds our lives.

Rays of Sunshine!

God’s rays of sunshine;
All ‘round you and I.
“Happy Birthday to you!”
May you have an enjoyable day!
Your Anniversary, today?
May our Lord richly bless you,
In the year which is to come.
Loving family, caring friends,
A gentle touch, a friendly smile,
Brings rays of sunshine,
For many a long weary mile.
Rays of sunshine, all around,
God’s mercies are new –
Every morning!
Thanks for coming to visit,
It means so much,
Even if it’s only for a little bit.
May not always show it, BUT. . .
Believe me, we really do appreciate it,
Rays of sunshine all around;

T’is our Lord and Saviour,
Showing to us his unfailing love,
His un-matchless grace!

Connie E. VanAmerongen
(Composed on 12-31-08)

*All praise the Lord, O sons of light!
Extol Him in the highest height.
Praise Him, His angels; from your post
Praise God with all the heavenly host.
You sun and moon, for seasons given,
You shining stars aglow in heaven,
You highest heights and cloudy sky,
All praise the Name of God Most High.*

Psalm 148:1

Birthdays in March:

- 3 **Trevor Hofsink will be 31**
C106 8920 165th Street, Edmonton, AB T5R 2R9
- 10 **James Boone will be 13**
1020 Abbeydale Drive, NE, Calgary, AB T2A 6H5
- 12 **Gerry Eelhart will be 47**
c/o Mr. & Mrs. Peter Eelhart
305, 10041-149 Street, Summit Village
Edmonton, AB T5P 4V7
- 14 **Lisa Alkema will be 28**
6528 1st Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4
- 15 **Jim VanderHeiden will be 50**
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 18 **Roselyn Kuik will be 35**
68 Lynn Lake Drive, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4N7

Congratulations to you all celebrating a birthday this month. We hope you all have an enjoyable day together with family and friends. May our Heavenly Father bless you in this new year and be near to you all.

Best wishes, and till next month;

C. Gelms and P. Gelms

548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
Phone: 905.563.0380, email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca

Further Discussion

Science teacher at Guido de
Brès Christian High School,
Hamilton

In the September issue of *Clarion* (Vol. 57, No. 20) Dr. Oosterhoff discusses a book by Timothy Keller, *The Reason of God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* in part 2 of "Defending the Faith Today." I appreciate Dr. Oosterhoff's efforts to highlight some positive contributions that Keller has made to defend the faith, including the role of human reasoning in that defence. However, Keller's positive contributions are rendered completely counter-productive when Keller reveals himself as a so-called theistic evolutionist who thinks that God has "guided some kind of natural selection." Although Dr. Oosterhoff questions Keller's conclusion, she does not rebut his statement; instead, she concludes by suggesting that "when we are evangelizing, the question of origins should remain on the back burner." New converts should be introduced to "the various options regarding the meaning of Genesis 1" after knowing the basics of the gospel.

I am convinced that when we are defending the faith, we must stand strong in our rebuttal of any evolutionary thinking. The Bible teaches that we ought to wage war with weapons that have divine power in order to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the

knowledge of God. . ." (2 Cor 10:4, 5). Evolutionary thinking is a hellish argument that sets itself up against God. Every attempt to somehow reconcile it with Genesis 1 will fail.¹ Why? It requires God to incorporate death as part of his good creation, whereas the Bible states that death came into the world because of sin. It requires plants to reproduce without animals during that eons-long day. It requires Adam not to be the first man from whom humankind sprang and render the genealogy of Genesis 5 pointless. It requires reading Genesis 1 as something different than straightforward history. It requires that all Israelites and all believers until the nineteenth century never really understood the Bible's first chapter. Despite fervent attempts at reconciliation, the evolutionary theory stands directly opposed to the truth of the Scriptures.

But is it such a big issue? Let me point out two problems. First, when evangelizing you can't avoid talking about creation. Christ's redemption can only be explained when a potential new convert realizes that everything is made by God and that He has authority to rule over us and judge us. New converts soon enough realize that our creation story is diametrically opposed to today's scientific "wisdom" and that any attempt to

reconcile the two doesn't work; it makes the Bible seem unreliable and out of touch. David Catchpoole quotes a reader in *Creation* magazine, who relates that "the apparent contradiction between the real world and the Bible had been a real barrier to my believing in the whole Bible as truth. . . . The believers who say that the debate is unimportant to them ignore the fact that it may not be about them. . . . We have a responsibility to make every effort to understand this debate for the benefit of others, many of whom are enslaved by humanistic philosophy and atheism."²

In the second place, the Scriptures are not interpreted by us, but they interpret themselves. Other parts of Scripture could perhaps cause us to change our understanding of Genesis 1, but a theory sprouted from unbelief has no business affecting how we read the Bible, especially when this chapter involves a detailed description of how God made the heavens and the earth. Changing that account is at a completely different level than changing our understanding of certain expressions in the Bible (e.g. we now know that when the sun stood still in Joshua's days, the earth probably stopped rotating; however, this understanding has no effect on the account itself).

So, how then do we defend the faith against evolutionary thinking? If we are to demolish arguments that set themselves up against God, then we need to study evolutionary theory and expose it for what it is: a big deception and trap set up by the devil to undermine the clear teachings of the Bible. We have to show, as Keller would agree, that atheists are motivated by belief. Having studied Biology and trying to keep up with the latest scientific developments, I see evolutionary scientists desperately clinging to a theory despite evidence to the contrary. For instance, even though on a regular basis dinosaur bones are being found containing soft tissue, evolutionary geologists try to convince biologists that soft tissue is able to stay intact for 65,000,000 years instead of 80,000 years as previously thought.³ Geologists are puzzled by the many megafloods and megavolcanoes that have disturbed the earth's surface. Already they are admitting that in the past many natural disasters of immense proportions have taken place. They are getting a bit closer to the truth it seems.

But how can so many scientists be wrong? The old world myth perpetuates itself by "intellectual

inertia." As Dr. Russell Humphreys explains, "I remember having similar attitudes when I was a grad student in physics, while I was still an evolutionist. I was wondering about a seeming inconsistency in biological evolutionism. But, I told myself, surely the experts know the answer, and I've got my dissertation research to do. I had no idea that (a) the experts had no answer for it, and (b) the implications were extremely important, affecting my entire worldview. Before I became a Christian, I resisted the evidence for a recent creation because of its spiritual implications."⁴

In conclusion, I am pleading for a serious look at the work of a growing number of creation scientists who have been busy exposing the fallacies and inconsistencies of geological research, of radiometric and other dating techniques which are fraught with assumptions, adjustments, and selective analysis. In the past their ability to confront evolutionary science was limited for financial and human reasons. Their in-depth studies are becoming more and more professional. I am pleading for using their work in a course on apologetics in as far as it exposes

Church News

Called and declined the call by the church of Hamilton (Providence), ON:
Rev. D.M. Deboer
of Dunnville/Wainfleet, Ontario.

On January 4th, 2009 the Canadian Reformed Church of Ottawa celebrated its 50th Jubilee anniversary. With thankfulness to the Lord and in acknowledgment of His goodness and care over His congregation "Jubilee" was added to the name of the church: "Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church of Ottawa."

the evolution theory as a piece of Swiss cheese.

¹ Vern Poythress in his book *Redeeming Science* discusses a number of different theories that attempt to reconcile Science with Genesis 1. None of them are successful. He eventually opts for the Analogical Day Theory, which suggests that those creation days were days from God's point of view but not days as we know it. Poythress, V. *Redeeming Science. A God-centered Approach*. Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 2006.

² Catchpoole, D., "The Importance of Evidence." *Creation* 30 (3):6, June-Aug. 2008.

³ Doyle, S. "The Real 'Jurassic Park'?" *Creation* 30 (3):12-15, June-Aug. 2008.

⁴ Humphreys, R., "Why Most Scientists Believe the World is Old," *Creation Ministries International Newsletter*, Dec. 2008.

From time to time Clarion will publish longer responses to articles received. The decision as to which responses to publish will rest with the Editor.



**Press Release of Classis
Alberta, December 9, 2008,
St. Albert**

On behalf of the convening church at St. Albert, Rev. R. Bredenhof called the meeting to order and welcomed all the delegates. Several items were remembered concerning the life of the churches since the last classis. He then read from Psalm 48, requested the brothers to sing from the same psalm, the first and third stanzas, and led in prayer.

The credentials were examined. All the churches were duly represented. Classis was then constituted. The following officers took their positions: as chairman, Rev. R. Aasman, vice-chairman, Rev. J. D. Louwerse, and clerk, Rev. E. J. Tiggelaar. Rev. R. Aasman thanked the church at St. Albert for the preparations involved in the convening of Classis. The proposed agenda was adopted after one addition.

Reports:

- a. Report of the classis treasurer. The report of the classis treasurer is received with thanksgiving. The treasurer Br. John Buitenbos will be acknowledged for his continued diligence in this task.
- b. Report of the church for the inspection of the books of the treasurer. The church of St. Albert inspected the books of the treasurer and found them to be in good order. The report is received with thanksgiving.
- c. Reports of church visitors. In closed session, reports on visitations to the churches at

Taber, Coaldale, Calgary, Neerlandia, and Barrhead are read. These reports are received with thankfulness.

Instructions from the churches: The church of Barrhead requested advice on a matter of discipline. Advice was given.

Greetings from the URCNA: Rev. D. Kok from URCNA of Leduc was given the opportunity to address Classis. Rev. J. Louwerse responded with some appropriate words.

Question Period according to Article 44 of the Church Order was held.

Appointments:

- a. The convening church for next classis is the Canadian Reformed Church at Taber. Suggested executive officers for the next classis: Rev. R. Bredenhof, Chairman, Rev. R. Aasman, Vice-Chairman, Rev. J. Louwerse Clerk. Date: March 10, 2009, 9:00 AM. Alternate date: June 9, 2009.
- b. Standing committees/classical deputies/church visitors.
 - i. Treasurer: Br. John Buitenbos
 - ii. Church for auditing the books of the Treasurer: St. Albert
 - iii. Church for taking care of the Archives: Edmonton Providence
 - iv. Church to inspect the Archives: Edmonton Immanuel
 - v. Church visitors: Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. M. Jagt, Rev. J.P. Kalkman, Rev. J. Louwerse, Rev. D. Poppe, Rev. W.B. Slomp, Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar (coordinator)

vi. Committee for Examination: Rev. R. Aasman and Rev. W.B. Slomp

vii. Examiners:

1. Exegesis O.T.: Rev. Aasman
2. Exegesis N.T.: Rev. Louwerse
3. Knowledge of Contents of Holy Scripture: Rev. Bredenhof
4. Doctrine and Creeds: Rev. Slomp
5. Church History: Rev. Tiggelaar
6. Ethics: Rev. Poppe
7. Church Polity: Rev. Rev. Kalkman
8. Diaconiology: Rev. Jagt

viii. Committee for Financial

Aid to Students for the ministry: Brs. John Moedt (Taber), Mike Tams (Taber), and Andy Leffers (Coaldale)

ix. Deputy for Contact with the Provincial Government: Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar

x. Contact Person to RCUS: Rev. R. Aasman, Delegate to RCUS classis: Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar, alternate: Rev. D. Poppe

xi. The convening church will be responsible to invite local URCNA churches to send observers. Delegate to URCNA classis: Rev. R. Bredenhof, alternate, W.B. Slomp

Personal question period was not made use of. The chairman judged that Christian censure according to article 34 C.O. was not necessary. The Acts of Classis and press release were read and adopted. The chairman requested the singing of Hymn 12:1, 4, 5, after which he led in prayer and closed the meeting.

*For Classis Alberta,
Rev. J. Louwerse,
vice-chairman at the time*