

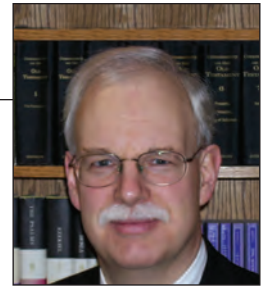


# Clarion

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**PARENTS HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO TRAIN  
THEIR CHILDREN TO BE FAITHFUL STEWARDS**



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# The Grown Up Church

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***We accept only what is proper to preserve  
 and promote harmony and unity  
 and to keep all in obedience to God.***

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## **Life stages**

The life of each person follows a common pattern where one moves from childhood to being grown up. When you are grown up, you have, in a sense, reached your goal. Legally one reaches the stage of being grown up at age eighteen. Emotionally and spiritually, however, someone may show a grown up attitude earlier. Some show it later. Sad to say, some never show it at all.

One of the main differences between these two stages of life is that the childhood years are filled with many rules. For example, parents set rules about bedtimes and mealtimes, how much time can be spent on the computer, and what clothes to wear. With increase in age, parents will slowly begin to pull back some of the rules of childhood to prepare their sons and daughters to stand on their own two feet. It can be an anxious time for parents as they loosen the parental reigns and see their children test the waters of freedom. There will be thankfulness when their children show that they have truly grown up and are living as sincere mature young Christians.

## **Church life stages**

We can also see this type of process in the life of the church. It is in keeping with the Scriptures to speak of the church as a body, as a community, even though it is made up of many members. We only need to think of how God established his covenant with Israel. The Psalms have frequent reference to the church in its collective sense as they refer to Jerusalem, Jacob, or Zion. In New Testament terms, we can think of the church described as the bride. The Lord Jesus came to save his people from their sins. The individual is contained within the community.

When we look at the relationship between the LORD and his people throughout history, we can say that there was a time of childhood and a time when the church reached

the stage of being the grown up church. We can actually pinpoint the day that the church came of age and could be considered all grown up. That moment for the church was the day of Pentecost. From Pentecost onward, we can speak of the “Grown Up Church.”

## **Evidence from Scripture**

That we can speak this way is evident in a number of passages. First of all, we can think of Peter’s explanation of the dramatic event on the day of Pentecost. He said that this was the fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet Joel, In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy (Acts 2:17, 18).

This was a dramatic development. In the age of childhood, prophecy and visions had been limited to special servants of God. The way Peter explained it, we get the impression that the speaking in tongues was something done by all the believers gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit obviously now had come in a fuller measure. By giving a fuller presence of the Spirit, it was clear that the church had come of age, it had grown up.

For a second example, we can think of Paul’s words in Galatians 4. He wrote that in the time of childhood, children are under careful supervision. God’s people Israel had lived as children for many centuries under the supervision of the law as revealed through Moses. We read in Galatians 4:3, “So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.” He then explained that through Christ believers have received the full rights of sons. We read in verse 6, “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out ‘Abba, Father.’”

The whole Old Testament period was the period of childhood for God's people. In keeping with the nature of childhood, the LORD had given many rules and regulations through Moses about sacrifices and ceremonies. What Israel had considered as a sign of maturity, that is, all the laws given through Moses, was actually a sign of immaturity. All these were fulfilled in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of all the external rules needed in the phase of childhood, the Lord Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to guide the church in all the truth. The Spirit would write the law upon their hearts.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

In this issue both our editorial from Rev. Eric Kampen and our Treasures New and Old meditation from Rev. Bill DeJong focus on Pentecost. Rev. DeJong asks, "What is new about the Spirit's activity post-Pentecost?" And Rev. Kampen writes about the church post-Pentecost being "The Grown Up Church." In addition, we also have a Pentecost canticle from Rev. George van Popta.

Issue 10 begins a three-part series by Prof. Bruce P. Baugus, "An Orientation to China's Reforming Churches." This series is reprinted with permission from the blog *Reformation 21*, and our first installment describes the context of the reformation in China.

From Mr. Bill Dehaas on the topic of Christians and finance, we have an article dealing with teaching children about tithing, giving, saving, and budgeting.

This issue also includes a letter to the editor, a book review, a press release, and a Mission News insert.

*Laura Veenendaal*

- 250 EDITORIAL**  
**The Grown Up Church**
- 253 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**  
**Pentecost as the Outpouring of Christ's Spirit**
- 254 An Orientation of China's Reforming Churches (1)**
- 257 Children (Or is Tithing Only for Adults?)**
- 258 Canticle**
- 259 LETTER TO THE EDITOR**
- 260 BOOK REVIEW**
- 262 PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Longing for childhood**

When we look at the early New Testament church, we come across some examples where people went too far with the freedom that comes with being grown up. This is evident in reading the first letter to the Corinthians. The bigger problem, however, was hesitation in living the grown up life. There was the thought that the Gentile Christians had to keep all the rules and regulations of childhood. This was the issue discussed in the meeting in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 15. It is a major topic in many of Paul's letters (e.g. Romans, Galatians, and Colossians). At the end of Colossians 2 he wrote, "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

All this should not be taken to mean that the grown up church did not have to bother with the moral law anymore. One only has to read Romans 6,8,12, Galatians 5-6, Ephesians 4-6, and Colossians 3-4 to realize the moral standards of the grown up church are just as high, if not higher. The point is that grown up behaviour is not a matter external rules but of the work of the Spirit working in the heart. The grown up church is motivated by love.

## **Principles rather than many rules**

When it comes to the way the church as a body conducts itself in terms of its worship and government, both strictly regulated in the age of childhood, the grown up church works more with principles rather than strict rules and regulations. We see this, for example, in the way Paul listed qualifications for elders and deacons but never strictly prescribed the task of elders, or how exactly the church should be governed. He warned about excesses and inappropriate behaviour in worship but he never precisely prescribed an order of worship.

All this is tied in with the way the Lord Jesus commissioned his disciples to make disciples of all nations. This task was not to be bogged down with childhood practices. All the laws of Moses had been a great burden for Israel. Missionaries could travel light and be very flexible. The gospel proved adjustable to many different cultural settings. Worship did not require extensive paraphernalia but could take place anywhere, in homes or at river sides. The two sacraments could use readily water, bread, and wine. Worship in the grown up church is simple as it is focused on the gospel of the risen Christ.

## **Reformation: going back to being grown up**

If we look through history, we see that living the grown up life has proven quite challenging. By the age of

the Reformation, the church had become burdened again with many rules and regulations pertaining to worship and life. It looked like the church had again put on all the clothes of childhood. We can see a rejection of this in Article 32 of the Belgic Confession where it states:

Although it is useful and good for those who govern the church to establish a certain order to maintain the body of the church, they must at all times watch that they do not deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded. Therefore we reject all human inventions and laws, introduced into the worship of God which bind and compel the consciences in any way. We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God.

The renewed emphasis on being grown up and led by the Spirit also is evident in the Reformed Church Order. One of its remarkable features is its brevity. It does not seek to spell out every last detail but lays down the scriptural principles to guide the church in the many situations that will come up. This impresses on us that the grown up church is not a church without rules. God is a God of peace. The church should conduct its life in a fitting and orderly way (1 Cor 14:33; 40). The grown up church, however, should not be overly regulated.

## **Staying grown up**

The pull towards childhood with its many rules and regulations remains strong. The grown up church still needs some rules but we do well to live by the words of Article 32, "We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God." That is in keeping with the presence of the Spirit. The challenge of being grown up is to apply unchanging principles to ever changing situations. It is interesting that the Church Order acknowledges this principle in its final article as it states that "these articles. . . have been adopted with common accord." In other words, they are not absolutes, written in stone. It adds that "if the interest of the churches demand such, they may and ought to be changed, augmented, or dismissed." The same can be said for many rules adopted for local church life. An overly regulated church is prone to dead orthodoxy rather than being a living body.

The gift of the Spirit at Pentecost indicates that the New Testament church is the grown up church. It should act as a grown up. This means it does not need everything strictly written down as in the age of childhood because the Spirit has written the law upon the hearts to guide the church in the truth.





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# Pentecost as the Outpouring of Christ's Spirit

**"For the Spirit was not yet."** (John 7:39; *author's translation*)

The event of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit is poured out on the church, occasions a notorious question: what exactly is new about the Spirit's activity post-Pentecost? In response to this query theologians often rightly indicate that the Spirit now works, in the first place, on a wider terrain than he did before, no longer restricting himself largely to the land of Israel but moving also throughout Gentile realms; and secondly, he works with greater power. The music produced by the Spirit remains the same in the new covenant, one pastor explained, but now the volume is cranked. Perhaps you're like me and you find that answer correct, but insufficient.

What John says about the Spirit in chapter 7, though initially perplexing, is instructive for this inquiry. "Up to that time the Spirit had not been given," John writes, "since Jesus had not yet been glorified." The Greek text is even more striking: "For the Spirit was not yet, since Jesus had not been glorified."

In what sense was the Spirit "not yet"? He was already active in the life of Jesus as the one by whom Jesus was conceived, who descended on him like a dove at his baptism and then drove him – like the scapegoat in Leviticus, now dirtied by the sin-polluted waters of the Jordan – into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and later gave him unction to preach in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Even earlier in redemptive history, in time of the old covenant, the Spirit was active: enabling the craftsmen of the tabernacle, empowering

the judges, equipping Israel's leaders, inspiring the prophets, converting sinners, and resurrecting the spiritually dead. We find him busy already in the first chapter of the Bible, hovering over the face of the waters.

In what sense does John mean "the Spirit was not yet"? The context in John 7 is highly illuminating:

On the last and the greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up that time the Spirit had not yet been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified (vv. 37–39).

Jesus introduces himself as the source of living water, the fulfilment both of the wilderness rock smitten by Moses, from which living water flowed, and of the new temple of God envisaged in Ezekiel 47, from which waters emerged. Jesus will dispense the waters of the Spirit, but not before his glorification: "For the Spirit was not yet, since Jesus had not been glorified."

The glorification of Jesus occurs, especially for John, at the cross, even prior to his resurrection and ascension. The hour for the Son of Man to be glorified is the hour of his death, the hour of his cross (12:23). When Jesus dies, blood and water flow from his side: the blood of forgiveness (as the sacrifice for sins), and the water of new life (in the Spirit).

"The Spirit was not yet" means for John that "the Spirit of the crucified Jesus was not yet given." At the ascension the Spirit becomes the possession, the personal property, of the crucified and now risen Saviour. The Spirit is placed at Christ's disposal as the reward for his ministry, to be deployed for the purposes of his kingdom (Acts 2:33). The Holy Spirit therefore assumes a new identity in the new covenant and becomes, by the blessing of the Father, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Jesus. In this sense, Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 15:45, Christ has become "a life-giving Spirit."

What is new about the Spirit's activity post-Pentecost? The Spirit poured out at Pentecost is specifically the Spirit of Christ. The very same Spirit – who was present and active at Christ's conception, by whom he was anointed at baptism, who guided him throughout his temptations, empowered him in his miracles, energized him in his sacrifice, and vindicated him in his resurrection – now indwells believers. To have the Spirit, in other words, is to have the incarnate, obedient, crucified, resurrected, and exalted Christ indwelling you.

The Holy Spirit, through his union with the incarnate Son of God, accumulated resources which he now brings to bear upon the lives of believers, reproducing in them the holiness of Christ. As Jesus himself says of the Spirit in John 16:14, "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."



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# An Orientation to China's Reforming Churches The Chinese Context (Part 1 of 3)

*This three-part series is reprinted with permission from the blog Reformation 21. Reformation Heritage Books plans to release a lengthier publication of this topic, set for Spring 2014.*

“[M]ore people go to church on Sunday in China than in the whole of Europe.”<sup>1</sup> China is now home to more evangelical believers than any other nation, and the church continues to grow and make inroads in every level of Chinese society. Today, tens of millions of Chinese profess faith in Jesus Christ. Such dramatic growth, against the backdrop of modern China, has produced profound and urgent church development needs. As faithful Chinese ministers strive to meet these needs an increasing number are discovering the rich biblical and theological resources of the Reformed tradition and Presbyterian polity.

The turn toward Reformed theology and church polity is geographically widespread but far from enveloping the majority of congregations. Arising out of the practical demands of pastoral ministry and the church's mission, this movement is as vibrant and vigorous as it is young and tender. Critically, it is an actual reformation of the church.<sup>2</sup> We are not talking about a pocket of evangelicals who have just discovered Reformed soteriology, as good as that sort of thing is. What is happening in China is of a different order, embodying a clear ecclesiastical form with concrete confessional and institutional dimensions – and this, in turn, is reshaping the nature and scope of the Reformed and Presbyterian mission to China and likely to have deep and long-lasting influence on Chinese and, in time, global Christianity.

Perhaps some orientation to this nascent reformation will prove helpful.

## **A fast-changing cultural context**

China's population, now roughly 1.35 billion people despite numerous enormous setbacks since 1839 and the current one-child policy, has impressed Western observ-

ers for centuries.<sup>3</sup> Recently, observers have been even more impressed by the spectacular rate of cultural change taking place: China is arguably changing faster than any national culture in history not at war. Cities are bulging, skylines are soaring, industry is booming, money is flowing, demand is growing, and her global influence is rapidly rising. China is already the world's second largest economy and predicted to overtake the United States in a decade or two. The standard of living in Shanghai has surpassed some EU capitals, and the masters of this growth continue to invest heavily in domestic and international infrastructure, export-driven manufacturing sectors, military modernization, and in securing and developing the world's natural resources. Though tens of millions of her citizens still lack basic modern conveniences and live on less than \$1.25 a day (the international poverty line), World Bank figures indicate that China's economic boom accounts for most of the reduction in global poverty levels over the past three decades.

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## ***Which condition will define China's future?***

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Any predictions about China's future, however, may soon appear naïve. But predictions disclose present perceptions which, though far from self-fulfilling prophecies, are forceful realities in their own right. Consider, for example, the dynamic language commentators consistently employ: China has “already” or “will soon;” China has “awoken” and is “on the move,” “rising fast,” and “overtaking.” Whatever the future may be, it's coming fast – that, at least, is the perception. And this is not just a remote view of the situation, either, but the word on the streets of China's great cities, a refrain among a mostly sober-minded people far from naïve about the profound problems plaguing their society. “Things are changing so fast,” they say, “and China is opening up so much.”

## **Living with contradiction**

The post-Mao opening up of China accelerated rapidly under Deng Xiaoping's influence. That Deng is a hero of China's transformation and the tyrant of Tiananmen is just the sort of contradiction that is modern China. As one commentator recently mused:

For those who have never visited China, the country offers much more freedom than you are probably imagining. For those who've visited for quick trips, China is likely far more restrictive than what you've experienced. For most people in China, the lack of freedom only occasionally asserts itself as the veneer of "reform and opening up" gives way, exposing the fact that in many ways, China is still a police state.<sup>4</sup>

The contradiction is not just between rhetoric and reality but between two kinds of realities or conditions of practical life that collide daily.<sup>5</sup> The conflict between them has many faces, and is the object of perhaps the central political debate among China's intellectuals: is today's party line of reform and opening up substantive or just a ruse?<sup>6</sup> Or, to ask the same question, which condition will define China's future?

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***Non-conforming congregations and church leaders, while ordinarily highly respectful of civil authorities, refuse to compromise the gospel and their conscience by acknowledging another head of the body who denies the reality of the risen Lord and attempts to usurp his authority over his church***

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While surprisingly open today, China remains a single-party police state that continues to fall far short of a rule-of-law society (though, like the air pollution, foreign visitors are not supposed to notice). The primary contribution China's citizens are expected to make to a harmonious and prosperous society is to live quietly under party rule. Many of the new freedoms they enjoy daily are not codified or protected, but exist only as cur-

rent and frequently unofficial administrative policies. So, although the unmistakable if uneven trend has been toward greater openness, officials retain the legal right to crack down upon whomever they want whenever they choose. The selective, arbitrary enforcement of laws and regulations generally ignored – and the ability of officials to go beyond what the law permits with little to no accountability – leaves a wide opening for the sort of predatory political corruption for which China is notorious. Party leaders have persistently and publicly pointed to this kind of corruption as among the greatest threats to their hold on power, yet they have so far failed to correct a system that creates an environment of uncertainty, fear, and frustration punctuated by real and at times unspeakable human rights violations.<sup>7</sup>

## **Conforming and non-conforming churches**

This contradiction creates uncertain conditions for the work of the ministry, too, and divides the mainland Christian community in multiple ways. Most notably, a deep and long-standing division exists between the congregations of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the vast number and great diversity of "house churches." The TSPM is an umbrella organization for officially recognized—that is, registered – Protestant congregations. It answers to the Communist Party's United Front Work Department and functions as an arm of the government's State Administration for Religious Affairs. Not surprisingly, this is an unacceptable arrangement for most Chinese Christians. Still, there are signs of independence and spiritual vitality among congregations throughout this network as believing pastors and members within the TSPM system take advantage of a less intrusive, or at least less domineering party to pursue biblical ministry.

The majority of Protestants, however, practice their faith outside the TSPM apparatus and make up China's house churches (also called underground or unregistered churches by some). To be clear, many of these congregations do not meet in households or operate as clandestine bodies. Although most maintain a low profile out of respect for civil authorities and a desire to live peaceful lives, it would be a mistake to think of these congregations as impoverished and isolated cell groups. Large numbers of house churches are finding some room to

transform loose, informal networks into better-ordered ecclesiastic connections, and a few congregations have even petitioned the government for the right to register as non-TSPM churches.

So far, party and state officials continue to insist on membership in the TSPM in order to be officially recognized or legally tolerated. By doing so they continue to assert a right to control Christ's church in China and unnecessarily place millions of her citizens in a difficult situation. This hardline party position is the fundamental issue dividing Protestantism between conforming TSPM congregations and non-conforming house churches. The issue is, at bottom, theological – and a familiar one to those acquainted with church history. Non-conforming congregations and church leaders, while ordinarily highly respectful of civil authorities, refuse to compromise the gospel and their conscience by acknowledging another head of the body who denies the reality of the risen Lord and attempts to usurp his authority over his church.<sup>8</sup>

### What's to come?

This is a rough sketch of the context within which a real and surprising reformation of the church is beginning to unfold in our day. In the next installment we will consider how the church in China has arrived at this moment, and in the final installment we will consider the moment itself.

<sup>1</sup> Tim Gardam, "Christians in China: Is the Country in Spiritual Crisis?," *BBC News Magazine*, Sept 11, 2011: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-14838749> (accessed on May 26, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> As I will note in part three below, there is another significant driver of interest in Reformed theology in some quarters that is less churchly in its concerns and objectives.

<sup>3</sup> For perspective, the United States, the world's third most populous nation, fits comfortably within the .35 part of that figure. China has hundreds of millions more people than any continent but its own – more people, for that matter, than North America, Europe, and Australia combined; or than the entire Western Hemisphere. As early as 1865, in "China's Spiritual Need and Claims," Hudson Taylor reported a population of 400 million and asked "What mind can grasp it?" Many others have also argued that China's population renders this nation not just the world's largest market but a uniquely strategic mission field. See, for example, Kurt D. Selles, *A New Way of Belonging: Covenant Theology, China, and the Christian Reformed Church, 1921-1951* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 33-41, which also discloses the sometimes strong racial dimensions of mission discussions of the time.

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who is currently serving in Recife, Brazil, as missionary of the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church of Surrey B.C.

### CHURCH NEWS

<sup>4</sup> Tom, "China Is Still a Police State(?)," *Seeing Red in China*, March 26, 2012: <http://seeingredinchina.com/2012/03/26/china-is-still-a-police-state/> (accessed March 30, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> For an insightful exploration of this complicated and conflicted culture and how these contradictions shape vernacular life in China, see Rob Gifford, *China Road: A Journey into the Future of a Rising Power* (New York: Random House, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Hu Ping's response to Yu Jie: "Does Wen Jiabao Really Wish to Redress June 4th?," *Seeing Red in China*, March 28, 2012: [http://seeingredinchina.com/2012/03/28/hu-ping-does-wen-jiabao-really-wish-to-redress-june-4th/'s](http://seeingredinchina.com/2012/03/28/hu-ping-does-wen-jiabao-really-wish-to-redress-june-4th/) (accessed November 23, 2012). Yu Jie dismissed a suggestion in the *Financial Times* on March 20, 2012, that (now former) premier Wen Jiabao might finally be prepared to speak to the brutal suppression of unarmed Tiananmen Square demonstrators on June 4, 1989. Conventional wisdom maintains that in post-Tiananmen China party leaders trade economic freedoms for political stability. But Ezra F. Vogel reminds readers that the reform and opening-up trajectory was well-established before the protests in the spring of 1989 (in the wake of the reformist Hu Yaobang's death). Although Tiananmen Square protestors may not have started a revolution, they did expose deep divisions extending to the highest levels of a conflicted party and their actions haunt party discourse and policy to the present.

<sup>7</sup> While still in office, former premier Wen Jiabao, for example, was quoted by the official Xinhua news outlet as saying, "Corruption is the most crucial threat to the ruling party," explaining that if this problem is not addressed adequately it has the potential to undermine the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the people (reported March 27, 2012). This has been a steady theme throughout the recent, once-per-decade transition in power at the 18<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress. An insightful analysis of predatory corruption is offered by Andrew Wedeman, *Double Paradox: Rapid Growth and Rising Corruption in China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), who primarily deals with the political corruption involved in the privatization of state property.

<sup>8</sup> For this reason, drawing on categories more commonly associated with English church history, Wang Zhiyong refers to the non-TSPM churches as "nonconforming" churches. **C**



# Children (Or is Tithing Only for Adults?)

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*“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (Prov 22:6)*

## Modeling

Children watch parents and their attitudes toward many things; stewardship of finances and tithing is no different. If parents aren't tithing and showing leadership, how are the children expected to do so? And that goes the same for grandparents; just because your children have all moved out of the house doesn't mean that your job is done. You still have a responsibility to continue teaching your children and helping teach their children.

Luke 6:40 says, “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” Scripture is very clear that whatever the teacher teaches, the student will do the same. It is the responsibility of parents to teach their children how to handle their financial matters, as well stewardship and tithing.

Parents must be good models in the area of tithing and spending habits; if they are, the children will most likely do the same. If the parents are always buying the latest and greatest and biggest? Guess what? The child will follow (typically, not always) in the examples the parents have shown.

## When to start

As soon as a child starts to earn any type of income, they must be taught that this money is from the Lord, and that a small portion is all he is asking for. The child must be also taught how to budget and spend the money that they've earned.

## Budgeting

You can start by using a simple system; make three boxes, one marked “Give,” the second “Save,” and the third “Spend.” Help them and explain, as they put the various amounts in, where their money is going. Even for a six-year-old, this shouldn't be too hard to visualize

and understand. As the child gets older, you can show them how to use things like savings and chequing accounts, even debit and credit cards (wisely!). During this budget training, teach them shopping skills, the ability to distinguish between needs and wants, and the art of waiting on the Lord to provide.

Warn them about the powerful influence of advertising and the dangers of impulse buying, which is so rampant and prevalent today.

## Giving

Children must be taught at a young age that they are also a part of the communion of saints, and that part of this membership means tithing. This can be done through a variety of different means; a good tool might be something visual like contributing to a project such as church expansion or a local food bank. In the teen years it can be volunteering and giving towards a mission trip (like Dulce Refugio or WWCS or Haiti relief). Direct exposure to abject poverty can initiate a lifetime of giving to the poor.

## Saving and Investing

The habit of saving should be established at the same time as earning an income. Children should be taught to open a savings account. In later years they should also be exposed to investments, real estate, and RRSPs. Teach them the benefits of compound interest; if they grasp the concept and become faithful savers, they will enjoy financial stability as adults.

## In summary

Society says that parents need not require their children to establish the discipline of managing money or of working hard. But Scripture clearly tells us that parents have the obligation to train a child to be a faithful steward and a wise money manager. Are you training your children and grandchildren?





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# Canticle

## O Come Now, Holy Spirit

1. O come now, Ho - ly Spir - it, send forth Your heav'n - ly light,  
2. You are the great Con - sol - er, sweet Guest of hurt - ing souls,  
3. O bless - ed Light from heav - en, our dark - ened hearts now fill  
4. Wash all that is cor - rupt - ed, drench eve - ry - thing scorched dry,  
5. You are the sev'n - fold Spir - it on whom we do re - ly

re - splen - dent, with - out lim - it, in all its ra - diance, bright.  
the gra - cious In - ter - cess - or, whose com - fort we ex - tol.  
with eve - ry grace that's giv - en to make us do God's will.  
heal all those who are wound - ed, with grace do them sup - ply.  
to bless us with the mer - it of Christ our Lord on high.

Come, Help - er of the need - y who gives to us His gifts.  
Give rest when we are tired, re - strain us when we stray,  
With - out Your in - ter - ven - tion in us there is no health  
Bend that which is un - bend - ing, warm all that has grown cold,  
Give com - fort to Your peo - ple, and save us at the end.

Fill us with shin - ing glo - ry as You our hearts up - lift.  
con - dole us when we're mired in this life's tear - ful way.  
for vile is the in - ten - tion of eve - ry - one on earth.  
cor - rect all who are err - ing, do not Your love with - hold.  
Grant us the joy e - ter - nal when we to heaven as - cend.

## **Re: Catch and Keep, Rev. Holtvlüwer, Clarion Vol. 62, No. 7**

Thank you to Rev. Holtvlüwer's thorough and timely article on evangelism. I have seen an increased desire to reach out to our neighbour in my congregation and there is much praise to be given to God for this. It has been my experience that the frustration that many face with our church's weakness in evangelism stems from the feeling that we haven't cultivated a love for the lost and compassion for those whose life is not built on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ. If we are so consumed by our own "stuff" (be it very worthy or not) that we can't be a light in our own town or city, then there is a problem.

It isn't a matter of introducing new church programs or events but a desire to come alongside people to share the good news that should make us desire to get involved in the community in which we live. Yes, we come from a culture that isn't always very comfortable sharing their faith and it may take some time to get comfortable with it, but let's not excuse ourselves and think we're doing fine when a good hard look at our lives and priorities might reveal some things that are not in good order. Let's not close our *Clarion* and think "we're doing ok" when we should instead be examining ourselves and our local body of Christ to see where we are lacking. If there is guilt, perhaps it is good guilt that God is placing on our hearts to move us forward. I'm not suggesting that young moms need to hit the soup kitchens weekly, but if we do really have a heart for the lost then we will desire to put ourselves in situations where we have the opportunity to share our faith. When our children see us doing this then we will be teaching them something very powerful indeed. We might be able to schedule in an afternoon

to work at a local mission or look for opportunities to engage our neighbours in meaningful conversations. Instead of seeking out fellow Christians or people we're comfortable with at our kid's soccer or hockey games, we can look for those who are on the outskirts and who may not know Christ. We can be very thankful that our churches seem to have the ability to keep its members and that, in many cases, one generation to the next is faithful, but let's not ignore the fact that we generally do not have more than a handful of members or new converts that join our church unless they have entered into a dating relationship with someone. Our lack of external growth is telling.

Rev. Holtvlüwer is concerned that there seems to be "a push to make evangelism our number one focus while brushing aside concern to keep what we've got." This is a false dilemma. We need to do both and different seasons in our lives will impact how our time is being spent. It's not "all about outreach," but about examining who I am before Christ and what he wants of me as his child. Having the privilege of raising children and ministering to the body of Christ must go hand in hand with the desire to reach the lost and spread the good news of the gospel. If there is a feeling amongst us that we have been failing somewhat in this area then let's embrace this and see it as an opportunity to lay this before the Lord so that he may show us where we need to change and yes, maybe even, repent.



*Yours in Christ, Sara Schenkel  
Flamborough, Ontario*

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

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***Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault,*  
Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb,  
Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2011**

**Additional Information: Softcover, 268 pages,  
\$16.99**

This is not a fun book to read. It's not an enjoyable topic to think about. I have read far too many books on this subject and have encountered far too many people impacted by it. I pray it would go away. The first article I had published in *Clarion* dealt with sexual abuse. That was over twenty years ago. I want to believe that things have changed since then. I want to believe that sexual abuse no longer happens much and, in the rare case that it does, we deal with it in a biblical way – with compassion and grace. I want to believe that people who have been sexually abused get the help they need from the church in order to find healing and peace. But does wanting to believe something make it true? This lingering question is why I decided to read one more book on this horrible subject.

Some readers may be familiar with Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Seattle, Washington. The authors, husband and wife, work with Driscoll at Mars Hill. Justin Holcomb is a pastor at the church and his wife Lindsey is a deacon. Justin also teaches theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. As part of her work at Mars Hill, Lindsey provides counselling services to victims of sexual assault. Both authors are therefore well-qualified to address this difficult topic.

Definitions are crucially important here. The Holcombs are not interested only in addressing past or present childhood sexual abuse. They also address rape, spousal sexual assault, and other forms of sexual violence. Their definition of sexual assault: "Any type of sexual behavior or contact where consent is not freely given or obtained and is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, coercion, manipulation, threat, deception, or abuse of authority" (28). The definition is



comprehensive and the authors expand on each element.

The book has three parts. The first speaks of the disgrace of sexual assault. The authors define it and speak about its effects. The second part goes into how grace can be applied to deal with the pain and trauma of sexual assault in the areas of denial, distorted self-image, shame, guilt, anger, and despair. A personal story from a survivor of sexual assault is included

between each of the chapters in this section. The last part is entitled "Grace Accomplished." Here the authors trace themes of sin, violence, sexual assault, and grace through the pages of the Bible.

There are many commendable elements to *Rid of My Disgrace*. The authors believe that the biblical gospel of grace is essential for healing. They have a biblical understanding of the dynamics of human sinfulness. Throughout the book, survivors of sexual assault are directed to the cross of Christ. Their approach to forgiveness is sound. They give a helpful analysis of why churches sometimes have a tendency to blame the victim, why we shoot our wounded. While the authors often use the results of scientific research and observations, their foundation is the infallible and inerrant Word of God. Moreover, the theological orientation of the authors is generally on the right track. The authors that a book cites are often revealing and *Rid of My Disgrace* prominently features John Calvin, Martin Luther, R.C. Sproul, and even the Heidelberg Catechism.

Good Christian books about this topic are hard to find. Many of them have more psychology than scriptural theology. That's not a problem with this book at all. This is, in fact, one of the best Christian books available on sexual abuse. However, very reluctantly I have to point out one problem in the theology of the book. I do it reluctantly because I don't want this problem to prevent people from reading it. On the other hand, I do want people to read it with discernment.

The problem has to do with their understanding of the cross. The Holcombs speak of God understanding abuse and assault, because Jesus was abused and assaulted. Taken by itself that statement could be taken charitably to mean that Jesus (the God-man) understands abuse and assault. However, the authors say far more. For example, on page 113 they say that when Jesus laid down his life as our substitute, “God is submitting to God’s own wrath for the sake of forgiving sinners.” This kind of language, often appearing with citations from less than orthodox theologians, appears especially in chapters 6 and 7. In Question and Answer 17 of the Heidelberg Catechism, we confess that Christ bore in his human nature the burden of God’s wrath. To state that God suffered on the cross may sound pastorally helpful and appealing, but it is theologically problematic. This kind of talk is usually heard from theologians who reject the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement, i.e. that Christ, as our substitute, took the penalty of God’s wrath on the cross. In their *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, Van Genderen and Velema comment on this:

The Mediator is both God and man. However, we may not infer from this that God suffered when Jesus suf-

fered, let alone that God gave himself up when Jesus gave himself up. Theologians such as Barth and Moltmann do not hesitate to express it this way, but Scripture does not lead us in this direction. It was the Mediator who suffered and died. (481)

It is far better to keep the attention on Christ as our High Priest and Mediator. Our Saviour Jesus understands abuse and assault – therefore, we can be comforted in our afflictions. We have a sympathetic High Priest to whom we can go with our burdens.

We should not underestimate the hurt that this sin has caused, also in terms of one’s relationship with God. The historic proliferation of this sin in some of our Canadian Reformed communities has damaged the faith life of many, both women and men. It has produced depression, mistrust, shame, hypocrisy, anger, broken marriages and families, and much more. Because it’s so damaging, we need to continue talking about it. Sin is like fungus: it grows best in the dark – it’s no different with the sin of sexual assault. Books such as this are helpful to shine the light and bring gospel hope and healing to those broken by this evil. C



## **Press Release of Classis Manitoba held on March 22, 2013 in the Carman West Canadian Reformed Church**

### **Opening**

On behalf of the convening church of Carman West, Dr. A.J. Pol opened the meeting by welcoming all present, particularly the fraternal delegates. He read from Psalm 34, lead in prayer, offered a few words of meditation on the Bible passage, and requested the singing of Psalm 34:3, 4.

As memorabilia it is mentioned that Rev. K. Jonker and his wife have departed to serve the Free Reformed Church at Bunbury Western Australia. Since the last classis, Rev. R.J. den Hollander received and declined a call to the Canadian Reformed Church at Barrhead in October 2012. In February 2013 Rev. R.J. den Hollander and his wife were blessed with the birth of a second son, Micah Brant. On October 6, 2012, Rev. R.J. Kampen and sister Esther Weidenhammer were united in marriage.

### **Examination of credentials and constitution of Classis**

The credentials were examined by the convening church and found to be in good order. It is noted that all the *primi* delegates are present. Upon the examination of the credentials, Classis was declared constituted.

### **Appointment of executive officers**

The suggested officer from Classis Manitoba September, 2012, Dr. A.J. Pol as president, was received and he was duly appointed. Nominated and appointed to serve as vice-president was Rev. R.J. den Hollander and as clerk Rev. R.J. Kampen.

### **Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted as received at Classis.

### **Seating of fraternal delegates**

Brs. Bernie Bakker and Peter Wassenaar from the Providence Reformed Church at Winnipeg were welcomed again and seated as fraternal delegates. The president also welcomed as Deputy for Contact with Neighbouring Classes/Presbyteries Br. Art Poppe and Br. Nick Gunnink as observer delegate.

### **Reports**

The treasurer for Classis Manitoba, Br. Henry Veldman from the church at Carman East, submitted his report. The recommendation to keep the assessment at \$10 per communicant member was approved. Travel reimbursement is

set at 75% of CAA standards which is 50 cents/km. Gratitude was expressed for the report received.

The church appointed for inspecting the books of the treasurer, Carman West, reported that two brothers examined the books and found them to be in good order. Report received with gratitude.

The church appointed for inspecting the Classis archives, Winnipeg Redeemer, reported that two brothers examined the archives and found them to be in excellent order. Report received with gratitude.

The Deputies for Contact with the Manitoba Provincial Government reported that over the past year, Dr. J. Vischer, emeritus pastor of the Langley Canadian Reformed Church, received authorization to solemnize a marriage in the province.

In closed session, church visitation reports were given of visits held at the Canadian Reformed Churches at Carman East, Carman West, Winnipeg Grace, and Winnipeg Redeemer. It was noted with gratitude that all reports could conclude with thankfulness that things are being done according to the Word of God, that the office-bearers are fulfilling the duties of their office and calling faithfully, and that the Church Order is being observed. Each church was brought before the Lord in prayer following their report.

### **Question period (Art. 44 CO)**

The chairman asked the questions according to Article 44 of the Church Order. Each of the churches indicated that the ministry of the office-bearers was being continued, and the decisions of the major assemblies were being honoured. The churches at Carman West, Denver, and Winnipeg Redeemer requested advice in matters of discipline. The church at Carman West also requested advice regarding an initiative by a group in the St. Claude area to investigate the possibility of establishing a preaching point. Since there was an observer delegate to listen in to the discussion regarding the St. Claude initiative, this matter was dealt with first in open session. After some discussion to gain clarification on this matter, Classis offered advice for further consideration. This matter was brought before the Lord in prayer.

Classis then entered closed session to deal with the requests for advice on matters of discipline. Concurring advice was given to each to proceed to further announcements.

The remaining two churches did not request the judgement and help of Classis for the proper government of their church.

### **Address by Fraternal Delegate**

A letter of greeting from Classis Central U.S. of the United Reformed Churches was received. As stated clerk, on behalf of that classis, Rev. Talman Wagenmaker expressed their regret that they could not be in attendance. Nevertheless, they sent their assurance that they are encouraged by our stand for the truth and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and expressed the desire to encourage us in that stand. This letter was received with thankfulness.

Br. Bernie Bakker, elder in the Providence Reformed Church of the URCNA, addressed the delegates. He brought greetings from their home congregation. He offered words of encouragement for the labours of the office-bearers, thinking in particular of the challenge of discipline. He also brought the brothers up to date on the situation in Regina URC. The very life of the congregation is in question as all that remains in the consistory are the minister and one elder, who recently accepted a new work position in Georgia. The future remains uncertain. Prayers are requested for this congregation.

Rev. R.J. den Hollander brought these churches before the Lord in intercessory prayer.

### **Correspondence**

A letter of greetings was received from Rev. Archibald Allison, stated clerk for the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches. They included an invitation to send a delegate to their upcoming meetings to be convened, D.V., on April 2-3, 2013 and on September 24-25, 2013. The invitation will be passed on to the Dep-

uties for Contact with Neighbouring Classes/Presbyteries. Rev. R.J. Kampen brought this before the Lord prayer.

### **Appointments**

The church of Denver will serve as the convening church for the next classis, to be hosted by Winnipeg Grace. It will be convened, D.V., on June 28, 2013 (or if deemed not necessary then, September 27, 2013). The suggested president for next classis is Rev. J. Poppe.

### **Personal question period**

Rev. R.J. den Hollander, as coordinator of the classical exchange roster, requested an expression of interest in a proposal to extend invitations to the United Reformed Churches at Regina and Thunder Bay to participate twice annually in the month-end exchanges. A formal proposal will be sent to the local consistories.

### **Brotherly censure (Art. 34 CO)**

With gratitude it was deemed not necessary.

### **Adoption of the Acts and approval of the Press Release**

The Acts were read and adopted and the Press Release approved for publication.

### **Closing**

The president closed the meeting by leading in prayer.

*For Classis Manitoba,  
R.J. den Hollander, vice-president at that time*

