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Children?

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# Clarion

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**CAN THE STATE RESTRICT RELIGIOUS PRACTICE?**



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# Who Gets to Educate our Children?

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## *The freedom of Reformed schools to teach according to biblical principles and worldview is at risk*

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Christian schools are one of the great blessings we enjoy. They educate our children in accordance with the Reformed faith taught in the homes and in church. In this way, parents assert their God-given right to educate their children in the fear of his name. Yes, this is a God-given right and obligation that no one can take away from them. Parents are to impress God's will and ways upon their children. "Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut 6:7; also, e.g., 4:9-10). Parents are to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). After all, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7). This comprehensive claim means that all subjects of inquiry should be taught from a biblical worldview. Only then is true knowledge possible. To that end, parents use Christian schools. It is their God-given right.

One would think that such a basic right would be readily understood as natural and fair. The children belong to the parents and not to the state. However, at the moment the prerogative of parents to educate their children as they wish is under judicial threat in Canada with possible far-reaching consequences also for Christian schools.

### **The Loyola case – some background**

Back in 2008 the Quebec Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport mandated that beginning with the 2008-2009 academic year all students in the province must take a course called "Ethics and Religious Culture." This program runs from grade one to the end of high school and deals in a supposedly neutral way with world religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, aboriginal spirituality, and even atheism. According to legal provisions in place, Loyola High School in Montreal applied for an exemption from this course and requested that the school

be allowed to teach all the competencies, content, and goals of the program using a structure and methodology that was more in keeping with its Jesuit and Roman Catholic identity. Many of these educational exemptions are granted each year. The Minister however refused this request and informed Loyola that the program could not be taught from a confessional (Roman Catholic) perspective.

As a result Loyola took the matter to Quebec Superior Court which sided with the school. This court concluded on June 18, 2010 that the decision to refuse Loyola's request was invalid because it assumed that a confessional program could not achieve the goals proposed by the Ministry program. Loyola was free to teach its own version of the course. However, the Quebec government appealed and the Quebec Court of Appeal overturned the Superior Court's ruling in a judgment issued on December 4, 2012. On February 1, 2013, Loyola then turned to the Supreme Court of Canada seeking permission to appeal this latest ruling. On June 13, 2013, this court granted the school this permission and it will hear this case on April 24, 2014.

### **The issues at stake**

This is an extremely important case. Loyola, a privately funded Roman Catholic school, rightly contends that their religious freedom was violated when the Quebec ministry imposed on the school a pedagogy, a manner of teaching this course, that was against its principles. The Quebec Attorney General has gone on public record saying that religious institutions such as Loyola do not even enjoy freedom of religion. Only individuals have this freedom. Therefore, in the view of the Attorney General, the state can restrict the religious practice and belief of such institutions as much as it wishes.

It is obvious that if this type of thinking receives official legal standing in Canada then also the freedom of Reformed schools to teach according to biblical principles and worldview is at risk. André Schutten, the legal counsel of the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA), has noted that

With this ruling, the Court set a precedent whereby the government can compel any school (including unfunded Reformed schools!) to set aside its religious beliefs and values in order to teach certain subjects. Can you imagine our Christian teachers having to teach covenant children that the Islamic, Buddhist, or Wiccan worldviews are as acceptable as the Christian worldview? Or can you imagine our teachers discussing ethics and morals (not just ethics in business or politics, but in social and legal issues as well, such as abortion or homosexuality) from a position that is “religiously neutral”? Perhaps this is too strange to imagine, but that is what this case stands for. . . for now.<sup>2</sup>

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Who gets to educate our children? Dr. Cornelis Van Dam asks in his editorial. The prerogative of parents to educate their children as they wish is under attack in our country, as this has far-reaching consequences.

In “Reformation – Then and Now,” Rev. W. Robert Godfrey writes an overview of the fundamental convictions of the Reformers and how these convictions continue to be important for the life of God’s people today. This article is re-printed with permission from *New Horizons* magazine. Also on the topic of Reformation Day we bring readers a Treasures New and Old meditation from Rev. Clarence VanderVelde.

Issue 21 includes a report of the trip made by Rev. Ralph Pontier and Rev. Dick Moes (URCNA) for the RITE seminary in the Ukraine. We also have a Press Release for the International Conference of Reformed Churches 2013. In addition, we have the Education Matters column and a book review.

*Laura Veenendaal*

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
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## **Homeschoolers will also be affected.**

Because so much is at stake, ARPA has set plans in motion to lead an intervention at the Supreme Court to argue for the principle that governments must recognize the paramount role of parents in the education of their children, especially in subjects such as religion, ethics, and sexuality. ARPA is working with Christian schools in this intervention. As a Reformed community we need to stand up for our God-given right and responsibility to educate our children according to his will and in the fear of his name. Please make this a matter of prayer that ARPA may be allowed to intervene at the Supreme Court and that this court will uphold parental rights in education and will protect our freedom of religion from the increasingly long grasp of the state that wants more and more power. Also, if you have not already done so, consider contributing to ARPA by getting involved locally or by contributing financially. Their excellent website will help you get going!

The events in Quebec show that we cannot take our current freedoms for granted when it comes to educating our children. We must be very vigilant against any government that is eager to take over the parental task. Recent news out of Germany shows what could happen.

## **A German nightmare**

Early Thursday morning, August 29, 2013, A team of 20 social workers, police officers, and special agents stormed a homeschooling family's residence near Darmstadt, Germany, forcibly removing all four of the family's children (ages 7-14). The sole grounds for removal were that the parents, Dirk and Petra Wunderlich, continued to homeschool their children in defiance of a German ban on home education.

The primary place of the parents to determine what education to give to their children is even recognized in section 7 of the United Nations (UN) "Declaration of the Rights of the Child" (1959) which states: "The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents." Parents should therefore decide which school to send their children to. Consistent with this position, the UN human rights committee declared in November 1999 that Ontario's policy of fully funding Roman Catholic schools, while denying full funding to other religious schools, is discriminatory (as reported by CBC news on November 5, 1999). Ontario ignored the UN ruling.

This report from the Home School Legal Defense Association website also tells us that the children were taken to unknown locations. Officials ominously promised the parents that they would not be seeing their children "anytime soon."

The legal basis for this action is a law from the time of Hitler who introduced criminal penalties for failing to send children to school. He wanted to claim the children and so mould and indoctrinate them according to his Nazi designs. According to legal counsel Daniel Blomberg, this law is now being enforced "to forcibly conform German children into government-approved cookie-cutter citizens, regardless of their religious heritage, and in fact precisely to destroy their religious heritage."<sup>3</sup> Who would have thought that this flagrant abuse of state power was possible in Western Europe? And yet it is happening today.

But this statism is also found closer to home. Just south of the border, the Obama administration refuses to grant asylum to the homeschooling Romeike family with their five children. (They have six now.) They had fled persecution from their homeland, Germany, in order to have the freedom to educate their children according to their Christian convictions. But the current American administration wants them deported. Should that happen, they will then face the horrors that the Wunderlich family have gone through.

## **In conclusion**

The tendency in our days is for the state to assert more and more control over its citizens in all areas of life. This is particularly troublesome in education when the government directs how certain courses are to be taught in all schools, whether publicly or privately funded, even if Christian parents find the mandated so-called neutral approach objectionable and against their cherished beliefs. The events in Quebec show that also in our country there are government circles that are determined to mould children after their preferred image and in this way to shape the future population of the province. Christians especially should resist with all the resources available to them the grasping of the state for this type of totalitarian control and social engineering. The children belong to the parents and not the state. May the work of ARPA and others who are active in this area be blessed. May our country be spared the current German horror.

<sup>1</sup> The information about this case has been taken from the press release issued by the school on June 13, 2013 and can be found at <http://www.loyola.ca>.

<sup>2</sup> "Christian School Case Going to the Supreme Court" accessed at <http://arpacanada.ca>. Other information also comes from this website.

<sup>3</sup> As reported in the *Christian Post*, June 27, 2013 on their website: <http://www.christianpost.com>.





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# No Other Gospel!

**" But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."**

(Galatians 1:8-9)

It's strong language, isn't it? In no uncertain terms, Paul comes to the defence of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone. It is the gospel that Paul had repeatedly preached everywhere, and it is the gospel that the Christian church still preaches today. The Christian church should not settle for anything different. Paul even pronounces a curse upon those who preach differently.

Yet this gospel which Paul defends throughout his letter to the Galatians was at stake during the Great Reformation of the sixteenth century. As in the days of Paul, the issue was whether we are saved by Christ plus something else. Is it Christ plus works? The Reformation responded by saying that it is *solo Christo* (only through Christ), *sola gratia* (only by grace), and *sola fide* (only through faith). In keeping with this, our Heidelberg Catechism, whose 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary we celebrate this year, says that our good works cannot even be a part of our righteousness before God, let alone our whole righteousness (LD 24, Q&A 62).

But have we Reformed believers learned the lesson of the Great Reformation? We work hard as Christians in the service of the LORD, contributing time, effort, and money to the causes of God's kingdom, and we sometimes think that all this will somehow put us in good standing with God. It's our natural impulse to think this way.

We are inclined to forget that works are not about our deliverance (LD 24, Q&A 62), but about our thankfulness (LD 32, Q&A 86). We get confused about the fact that we don't serve God in order to be saved, but we are saved in order to serve God. Paul reminds us to keep it straight.

Have you ever considered the irony of church history in this respect? Listen to a member of a mainline Protestant church speaking and it may seem as if he thinks that he will be saved by being a good person. Go to a funeral in a mainline Protestant church and chances are that you will hear much about how good a person she was and that she lived a clean life. Is it salvation by works after all? What is being preached there? The irony of church history is that much of mainline Protestantism has surrendered the central truth of the Great Reformation regarding salvation by grace through faith alone, apart from works.

But Paul is emphatic. The divine revelation is that salvation is by grace through faith alone, apart from works. Paul stresses that the gospel he proclaimed did not come from man but from God (1:11-12). The author of this gospel is none other than God himself, and for that reason Paul can say so emphatically that if anyone is preaching another gospel, let him be accursed.

Paul proclaimed this gospel with apostolic authority, sent out by Christ

himself (1:1). Therefore Paul makes the exaggerated statement that even if he or an angel would proclaim differently, let him be accursed. The church must abide by the apostolic Word.

This is the apostolic Word which was rediscovered by the Reformers of the sixteenth century. At the time of the Great Reformation, another gospel was being proclaimed: a gospel about righteousness partly by works, which really is no gospel at all (1:7). There really is no good news in a message like that. If our salvation is even partly dependent on us, we have no hope. Our works will never measure up. But the reformers rediscovered the gospel of grace and the only comfort in life and death. People regained the hope of eternal life and the joy of salvation.

Since it is salvation by Christ alone, everything is at stake. Paul says, "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (5:4). Since the church is to be the messenger and guardian of the truth of salvation, Paul issues such a strong condemnation of anyone proclaiming another message. The LORD wants us to walk in the freedom that Christ has obtained for us (5:1).

Let us guard the heritage of the Great Reformation. Salvation is by grace through faith alone, apart from works. No other gospel!



# Reformation – Then and Now

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president of Westminster  
Seminary California.

*This article is reprinted from New Horizons, October 2006.*

“It may be safe to say that the greatest event for Christendom in the last 1500 years was the Protestant Reformation.” Professor John Murray spoke these words in his class lectures on justification in the mid-1960s.

At that time, forty years ago, it would have been hard to imagine anyone in a Reformed or evangelical church finding much that was exceptional about Murray’s words. But today, in a world that would amaze him, the central doctrines of the Reformation are under attack, not only in liberal and ecumenical circles, but in the heart of evangelical and Reformed churches.

Contemporary criticisms of Reformation doctrine, it seems to me (a historian of the Reformation), usually arise from those who are not well acquainted with the theology of the Reformers, the concerns that motivated them, or the biblical foundations for their teaching. In this brief article, we cannot survey or answer all the critics. But we can take a quick overview of the fundamental convictions of the Reformers and see their continuing importance for the life of God’s people and of our churches.

John Calvin’s reflections on the Reformation are a good place to begin. In the course of his life, he wrote three important treatises defending and explaining the need for reform in the church. The first was a quite personal statement defending the reformation in Geneva, usually called “The Reply to Sadoletto” (1539). The second, “The Necessity of Reforming the Church” (1543), was written at the request of Martin Bucer for presentation to Emperor Charles V at a meeting of the imperial Diet. The third treatise, “The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom and Reforming the Church” (1548), was written in response to the imperial victories over the Protestant princes and the imposition of the Augsburg Interim requiring Protestant conformity to certain Roman Catholic practices.

While there are differences among these treatises, reflecting the different occasions on which they were

written, they really speak with one voice, giving us Calvin’s understanding of the basic concerns of the Reformation. These treatises show that for him the Reformation had five key concerns (not the traditional five points of Calvinism!). The first was that the Bible alone is the authority in the church for religious matters. The second was that the church must worship God purely, according to the Bible. The third was that justification is by grace alone through faith alone in the righteousness of Christ alone. The fourth was that the church must have a proper understanding of the two (and only two) sacraments instituted by Christ, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The fifth was that the true pastoral, teaching office must be restored in the church.

## **The Bible**

The authority of the Bible as an utterly reliable and accessible source of all religious truth is foundational to Protestantism. The Reformation took its stand against the pretensions of Rome to make tradition an authority in addition to the Bible and to make the pope the only ultimate arbiter of the meaning of the Bible and tradition. Calvin wrote, “Ours [is] the obedience which, while it disposes us to listen to our elders and superiors, tests all obedience by the Word of God; in fine, ours [is] the Church whose supreme care it is humbly and religiously to venerate the Word of God, and submit to its authority” (“Reply to Sadoletto” in *A Reformation Debate*). The Bible was not only a formal authority for Calvin. It was the vital and necessary authority in the life of God’s people. In his Genevan Catechism, Calvin taught the way in which the Bible should be used:

If we lay hold on it with complete heartfelt conviction as nothing less than certain truth come down from heaven; if we show ourselves docile to it; if we subdue our wills and minds to his obedience; if we love it heartily; if having it once engraved on our hearts and its roots fixed there, so that it bring forth fruit in our life; if finally we be formed to its rule—

then it will turn to our salvation as intended (“The Catechism of the Church of Geneva” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*).

Today the Reformation doctrine of Scripture is being undermined in some quarters by college and seminary professors and in other quarters by uneducated demagogues. Some professors contend that unless one possesses arcane knowledge of antiquity, one cannot understand the basic message of the Bible. At the other extreme, some arrogant demagogues contend that they alone, without education, really understand the Bible. Whether these claims rest on appeals to scholarship or appeals to the Spirit, they deny the authority of the Bible. The church still needs to study and believe the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, understandable to careful, grammatical-historical interpretation. The church needs to love and study that Word, confident that it directs us in the truth that we must believe and live.

## **Worship**

Calvin believed that one of the most serious deformations of the church in the medieval period was the corruption of worship. Worship had become idolatrous, with human inventions and creations replacing divine institutions. Worship had become man-centred, focusing on human actions and reactions. Against this corruption, Calvin insisted that worship must be directed by the Word of God alone:

I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, seated as it were in their very bones and marrow, is that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honour of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to his worship, if at variance with his command, what do we gain by a contrary course? (“The Necessity of Reforming the Church” in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*).

Protestant worship in our day has become a factory of musical, dramatic, and artistic invention. Singing the Word, praying the Word, and reading and preaching the Word are often viewed as inadequate to produce the experience of God that so many are seeking. Serious worship as the meeting of the covenant people with their God through his Word seems in retreat far and wide. Human wisdom in worship is replacing divine truth, just as it did in the Middle Ages. Those who love the Word need to restore worship according to the Word.

## **Justification**

Murray, immediately after the words which began this article, stated:

What was the spark that lit the flame of evangelical passion? It was, by the grace of God, the discovery on the part of Luther, stricken with a sense of his estrangement from God and feeling in his inmost soul the stings of his wrath and the remorse of a terrified conscience, of the true and only way whereby a man can be just with God. To him the truth of justification by free grace through faith lifted him from the depths of the forebodings of hell to the ecstasy of peace with God and the hope of glory. If there is one thing the Church needs today it is the republication with faith and passion of the presuppositions of the doctrine of justification and the reapplication of this, the article of a standing or falling Church.

Murray here testifies that the doctrine of justification stands at the centre of our Christian faith and life. He stands with Luther on this matter. Murray sees that the centrality of justification springs from a proper apprehension of how great our sin is and how dire our spiritual condition is outside of Christ. Murray, like Calvin and Paul, knew that only the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness would enable sinners to stand before a perfectly holy God. Calvin wrote:

We maintain, that of what description soever any man’s works may be, he is regarded as righteous before God, simply on the footing of gratuitous mercy; because God, without any respect to works, freely adopts him in Christ, by imputing the righteousness of Christ to him, as if it were his own (“The Necessity of Reforming the Church” in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*).

The Protestant doctrine of justification has been replaced in many modern evangelical circles with vague talk about loving Jesus and being converted. Ecumenical statements express ambiguous sentiments that do not clearly uphold the gospel. Even Reformed scholars who have subscribed to Reformed confessions seem not to understand the doctrine. As Murray rightly said, without the biblical, Reformed truth of justification, the church will fall. He was not talking about the collapse of an institution, but the collapse of the true church as the bulwark of the truth.

## **Sacraments**

In the medieval church, sacraments had multiplied and become the centre of worship and Christian experience.

The art and ritual of the church supported that excess, which the Reformers properly labeled idolatrous. The Reformation returned to the two sacraments instituted by Jesus and sought to understand them in their biblical meaning. Calvin wrote:

Christ instituted the Sacraments to be not only symbols of the true religion, which might distinguish the children of God from the profane, but also evidences, and therefore pledges of the divine favour toward us. In Baptism, both forgiveness of sins and the spirit of regeneration are offered us; in the Holy Supper we are invited to enjoy the life of Christ along with all his benefits (“The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom and Reforming the Church” in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*).

In many evangelical churches today, the biblical sacraments are maintained but marginalized. Instead of looking to the visible and tangible signs that God has given us to confirm and strengthen his grace, churches have sought other visible helps for the Christian life—again following the pattern of medieval Christianity. In some places, the sacraments have been removed from the Lord’s Day, joined to other occasions of worship or even made a family matter at home.

The church must again recapture the scriptural teaching about the meaning and value of the sacraments for her faithfulness and well-being. The sacraments, like the faithful preaching of the Word, are the church’s means of grace.

### **The church**

For Calvin, the Roman church had become a tyrannical institution, binding the consciences of members by doctrines and practices of human invention: “As it was, therefore, our duty to deliver the consciences of the faithful from the undue bondage in which they were held, so we have taught that they are free and unfettered by human laws, and that this freedom, which was purchased by the blood of Christ, cannot be infringed” (*The Necessity of Reforming the Church*). Calvin not only opposed church tyranny, but also sought to restore the office of the minister or pastor in its biblical character. The opening of the Word of God was at the heart of this office. Calvin wrote: “No man is a true pastor of the church who does not perform the office of teaching.”

But today many churches are led by men who see the pastoral office in terms of administration, pop psychology, and entertainment. Seminaries are under great pressure to train “leaders,” rather than to educate preachers

and teachers of the Word of God. If preaching is a means of grace – indeed, the central means of grace – then the Reformation was right that pastors must be faithful, effective preachers, carefully educated to understand, believe, and communicate God’s Word.

The preaching of the Reformation built churches with millions of members which endured over centuries. The pragmatists among us should note that as churches in America, following the advice of church-growth experts, have moved away from faithful worship and preaching, the church in America is smaller and less influential than it was forty years ago. We still need pastors who will preach the law and the gospel.

### **Conclusion**

We should not be unduly surprised by the varied assaults on the biblical truth that was recovered by the Reformation. So it has always been, and so it always will be until the return of our Lord. But we must not minimize the seriousness of Reformed churches failing to preach Reformation truth with clarity and enthusiasm. We should ponder the sobering yet inspiring words of John Owen, written in 1682, only thirty-five years after the completion of the Westminster standards:

Let us take heed in ourselves of any inclination to *novel opinions*, especially in, or about, or against such points of faith as those wherein they who are gone before us and are fallen asleep found life, comfort, and power. Who would have thought that we should have come to an indifferency as to the doctrine of justification, and quarrel and dispute about the interest of works in justification, about general redemption, which takes off the efficacy of the redeeming work of Christ; and about the perseverance of the saints; when these were the soul and life of them who are gone before us, who found the power and comfort of them? We shall not maintain these truths, unless we find the same comfort in them as they did. . . . But now it is grown an indifferent thing; and the horrible corruptions we suffer to be introduced in the doctrine of justification have weakened all the vitals of religion. Let us, for the remainder of our days, “buy the truth, and sell it not;” and let us be zealous and watchful over any thing that should arise in our congregations (“The Duty of a Pastor,” in *Works*).

We still need pastors who will preach the law and the gospel.





# Unity in Christ Transcends All Cultural Barriers

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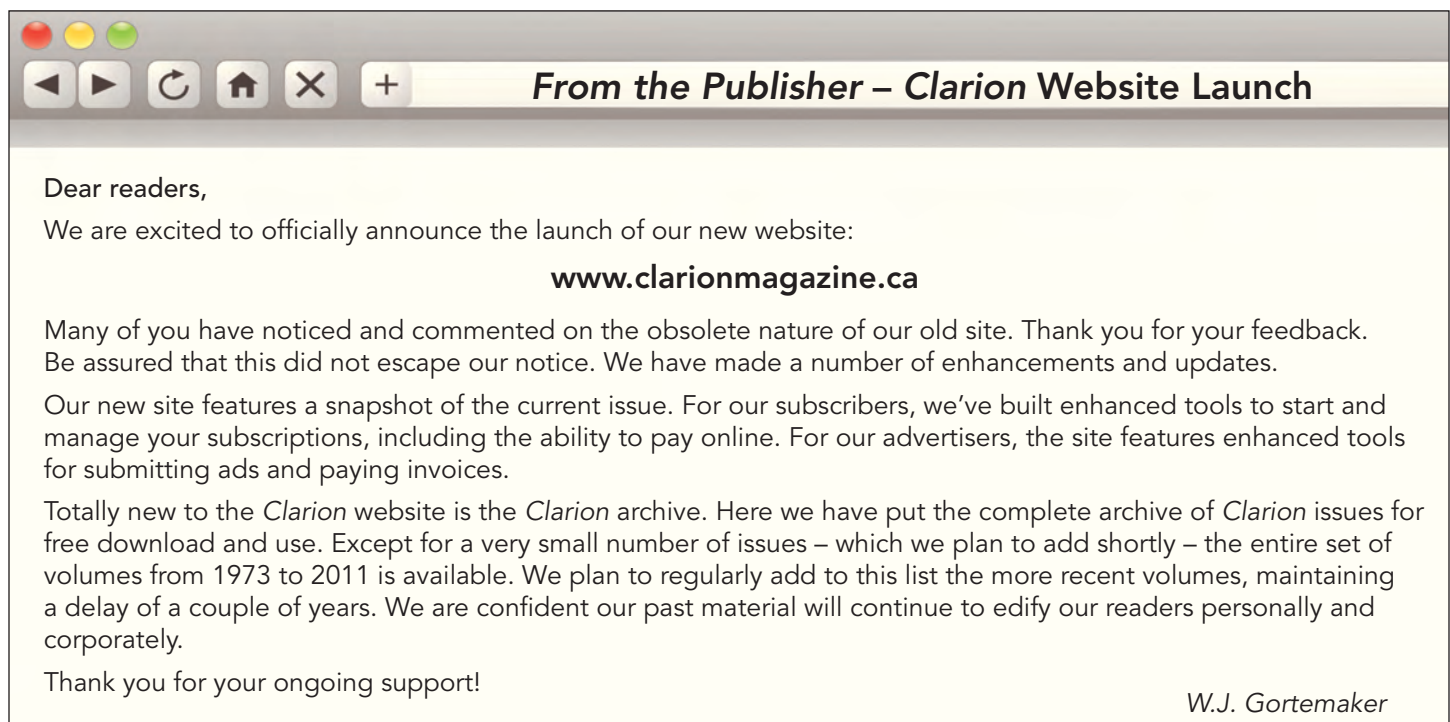
On Thursday, May 2 at 7:00 a.m., I began a journey from Neerlandia, Alberta that would take me to Donetsk, Ukraine by late Saturday night. After one flight, I met up with my teaching partner, Rev. Dick Moes, in Toronto where we experienced a flight cancellation that delayed our planned arrival on Friday night, by a day for me and by two days for Rev. Moes. An unexpected night in a Toronto motel actually made the trip a little easier, although a missed flight on another airline added considerable expense for us both.

## The seminary

The two weeks of teaching at the RITE seminary went quickly. We stayed in a small, second floor, two bedroom apartment with all the necessary items includ-

ing Wi-Fi, by which we could keep in touch with home. I soon established a daily routine of getting up early for personal Bible reading and a run along the river before making my own breakfast, after which we were picked up at 8:15 a.m. for the twenty minute ride to the seminary. Rev. Moes taught all the students in the morning in four forty-five minute classes with five or ten minute breaks between each class. After a hot noon meal prepared for all the students and staff by a seminarian's wife, I taught all afternoon, also in four forty-five minute classes.

Although I began the adventure with some fear and trembling, I now look back upon it with a profound sense of gratitude for the opportunity, and for the grace of God that equipped and sustained me in answer to many prayers. I am especially grateful to my brother, Rev. Moes, chairman of RITE Canada, for the invitation to accompany him on



The image shows a screenshot of a web browser window. The title bar reads "From the Publisher – Clarion Website Launch". The page content is as follows:

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Thank you for your ongoing support!

W.J. Gortemaker

this teaching trip and for the encouragement and companionship we enjoyed while together. Rev. Moes was there for the third time and is working his way through Calvin's *Institutes*, covering Book Three on this trip. I covered two subjects, Eschatology beginning with the Olivet Discourse and the book of Deuteronomy as a commentary on the Ten Commandments.

It is hard to imagine that in only nine days of actual teaching I could have developed close bonds of fellowship with people of a different language and culture; yet that is what happened with both the students and translators. Parting was with some sorrow even though I was anxious to return home. Our unity in Christ truly transcends all cultural boundaries and binds us together as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

### **Students and translators**

A few of the students are ordained pastors, but most are young men desirous of sound biblical teaching and who are considering some form of ministry. We had fifteen students. There were two women students, one the wife of another student and one who came with her pastor. Some of the students travel quite a distance to be there, most by public transportation. They come for two weeks every month except July and December, and stay in dorm rooms upstairs in the seminary building, going home on the weekend. They were attentive and took extensive notes. They expressed gratitude for the instruction we gave, and we benefited from questions that required us

to dig deeper into the material we were presenting. The students come from a variety of backgrounds including Pentecostal, Baptist, and Arminian, but they are willing to consider the Reformed faith and several have embraced it or are in a process of transition in their thinking. We also spent time in individual conversations dealing with their personal struggles or questions. Four of the students were able to converse in English and one understood English well enough to translate for me for a short time when one of our translators was called away by an important phone call.

We worked with two excellent translators, Natasha, who is also the local administrator of the seminary, and Anya, a young woman who is engaged to be married to a man in Texas. She will be sorely missed when she moves to the US.

### **The seminary building**

The seminary building is still under construction. The next major project is a much-needed kitchen and dining area. Currently all the food is prepared off site and eaten in a room planned as a second classroom. On our last day, the power went off for a few hours in the morning and the food for the noon meal that would have been reheated in a microwave was served cold. The room for the kitchen and dining area is now used for storage of construction equipment. After we returned home, we learned that the money needed to finish the kitchen had been raised so hopefully the construction work will get underway soon.

Video recordings were made of our lectures. Some of the students use them for review or show them to members of their congregations. It is hoped that in the future the videos will be available at the RITE website where anyone could access them. The students were introduced to a web based, institutional program to teach English so that they can have access to more theological works. While there we also learned that Logos, an expensive and scholarly Bible computer program, is seeking translators in many different languages, including Russian, to broaden its usefulness. It is possible that a few of the students could assist in that effort and gain access to the program that would otherwise be beyond their means. Some of Rev. Moes' lecture notes were translated into Russian using the Google translation website. Although the syntax of the translation was sometimes so bad that the students could barely understand it, when they heard the oral presentation, the translated notes became intelligible and a good help for them.

#### **Purpose and Mission of RITE Canada**

To educate and nationals in Reformed theology and pastoral ministry by:

1. Providing Reformed theological education containing an emphasis on practical theology;
2. Provide ongoing assistance, counsel, and training for their ministries;
3. Encourage the establishing of Reformed churches in South-Eastern Ukraine. These goals will be accomplished as we begin;
4. Establishing a theological school in the Donetsk Region;
5. Recruiting qualified professors committed to Reformed theology and its principles; and
6. Developing a curriculum balanced between doctrinal and practical theology.

For more, visit our website at [www.ritecanada.ca](http://www.ritecanada.ca)

## **The city of Donetsk**

In addition to the work at the seminary, I had opportunity to gain some knowledge and experience of Donetsk and its surrounding area. In many ways, the city is very beautiful. There are impressive public buildings, large plazas with statuary, pedestrian walk ways, green spaces, streets lined with flowering trees, traffic circles with intricately designed flower beds, a new soccer stadium (host to the 2012 UEFA European Football Championship), and fascinating open air markets. But there is also a great deal of poverty and the standard of living for most is quite below Western standards. Alcoholism, gambling, lotteries, homelessness, and an entitlement mentality are major problems. The adverse effects of a century of communism, socialism, and state-enforced atheism (under the former Soviet Union) will not be overcome easily or quickly, and perhaps not without a reformation through the transforming power of the gospel.

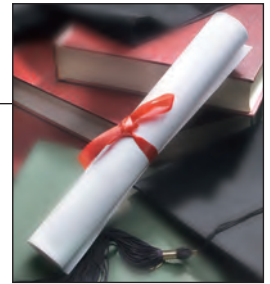
## **A visit to a church plant**

On the middle weekend, I was taken two hours out into the country to preach in a small church in a little village. The poverty there was profound but the people were warm-hearted and hospitable. To get to the church

in the countryside, a member of the congregation made a four hour round trip by car in the morning to pick up me and my translator. The church planned for us to take a bus back to Donetsk at the end of the day, but when they went to buy our tickets at the ticket office, they discovered that the seats on the bus were all sold out. However, that did not prevent the bus driver from taking money from our host and allowing us and about twenty others to stand in the aisle for the two and a half hour bus ride home. The bus was stopped by the police on the way back, we think because there were people standing in the aisle, which is against the law there, but it was settled very quickly, as if it were a routine matter. I was told that most roadside stops by police are settled with a bribe and that corruption is a problem at every level of government.

The trip home was the hardest part of the whole adventure. I went thirty-two hours without sleep, including four flights and the almost two hour drive home from the Edmonton airport. I experienced no jet lag going to Donetsk, but for a week after arriving back in Canada, I was ready for a nap at any time of the day. However, the hardships of travel would not deter me from going again or recommending the trip to others if God in his providence gives opportunity. C





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# Provoking Reflection on the Christian and Sports (Part 2)

## More questions

### *What does glorifying God look like in sports?*

This question is too big for an article. It is the kind of question one could write a book about. I will, however, make a small start. There are lots of aspects to consider since this question applies to the spectator, the player, the coach, the parent, the community and even the country.

The place to start has to be the greatest commandment. So how do you apply that? How does this impact you as a spectator? Do you cheer as loudly as possible for “your” team or for all good plays regardless of the team that did them? Do you worry about calls and scorekeeping errors to the point that they bother you and change your attitude towards the game and the officials? As players, do you celebrate errors by the other team, for instance, an ace in volleyball? How do you interact as a player while in the game? What is an appropriate “game face”? A friendly open face or the intense “get out of my way or I’ll crush you” face? Can you have a smile or at least a pleasant look on your face and play your hardest? The New Zealand All Blacks haka (if you are not familiar with this, *YouTube* has plenty of videos of it) may be the most obvious example of aggressive game face in sports, but very few players have a game face that is consistent with the great commandment to love. This game face tends to get more and more aggressive as you move up the levels in sports.

Often so much of our self is tied up in the game even for the fans. Parents make the news for outrageous behaviour; riots and fights happen. We don’t like being bested by the other team; we get angry because the other team taunts us, plays dirty, or cheats. If we are losing, we imagine that the other team is not making honest calls or that the referee is clearly favouring the other team. As in other areas of life, we are not prepared to admit that

we are the problem; that our desire for winning is making us sin instead of showing love. We talk negatively about the other team or referees, or we try to harm them physically. To justify our behaviour, we come up with all sorts of reasons, none of which are consistent with God’s Word. The best test of our Christianity will come in the most difficult games against the most unpleasant teams or individuals. That is when the rubber hits the road – the rest is just warm-up.

### *How have we conformed to the ways of the world in sports instead of been transformed by the Word of God? Do we accept, allow, and promote a double standard in our lives when it comes to sports?*

The short answer is absolutely. We say that religion is important and that sport is just a game, but how often do we show the same zeal for God that we do for sports? Do we stay up late to study the Bible, to discuss issues of faith with our kids? Annually we commit hours of our week especially during the Stanley Cup playoffs, World Cup, Super Bowl, and Grey Cup, but how often do we take that amount of time, discussion intensity, sports memorabilia such as shirts, mugs, etc., and encyclopaedic knowledge of players and teams and apply those behaviours to family devotions? Do we arrange our schedule and skip meetings for church or family matters as easily as we do for a “key” game? We might make special trips to sports matches, but how often do we set aside that time, money, and commitment to specifically serve God somewhere? My point is not that it is wrong to watch the playoffs or to travel to a sport match, but that our words and deeds often have a double standard and that our children are learning from us.

We easily show a double standard when we play or cheer for a team. With most sports matches, there is often some little drama about how this player or that team is

dirty, unfair, etc. Beards are grown, certain clothes worn. Some players on a team decide that it is their job to teach a lesson to a particular player or take him out. Tempers flare, the sixth and ninth commandments get flung aside, but somehow people don't see anything wrong with it; or if they do, they try to justify it. Behaviour that they wouldn't think appropriate at the jobsite, in the community, or somewhere else is for some reason fine in the game. The passion of the game defeats the passion to surrender ourselves to God and to holiness. Sadly some of our "church" hockey or soccer leagues and tournaments have been known for this behaviour. At this point, I think of

Matthew 5:29-30, where we are told to cut off our hand or gouge out our eye if they are leading us into sin. This passage is in a section about adultery, but I think it can be applied to any part of our life. Put to death your sin and remove that which causes you to stumble, and then you can begin to enjoy sports in a God-pleasing way. If you can't, then maybe sports has to go from your earthly life so that you can enjoy it as it was meant to be in the new life on the new earth.

### *How can parents make the best use of sports to cultivate their children's lives of faith?*

Here is the place to reinforce that sport is not inherently evil; it has positive aspects to it. Just as it is the love of money that is *a root of all kinds* of evil rather than money itself, so it would be for sports. For sports, the equivalent saying might be that the *love of winning* in sports is *a root of all kinds* of evil. This may be an overstatement, but try and see the point.

So, to develop our children's lives of faith means that parents should ensure that they encourage their children to enjoy the game, to put their best effort into every moment of their time playing it and practising it, and to emphasize loving your neighbour as yourself—which means good team play and being open and friendly with the other teams. It means to exercise self-discipline when errors are made or when wrongs are done by others, to apologize when they themselves do wrong, and to play without an eye on the scoreboard or without criticism for the refereeing. It means to cheer when the other team makes a great play and to do your utmost to make a lot of great plays in return so that they can be challenged in their skill development as well. It means to be at practice each time and to work at motivating and encouraging the rest of the team; it means to show and develop leadership on the team, to be receptive to direction from the coaches, to speak up when you should and to do so appropriately. It means to recognize how you can best contribute to the team rather than to seek your own glory. World Cup soccer has imprinted in my mind an image of a player scoring a goal and then running towards the crowd madly ripping his shirt off, arms waving the crowd on in cheering and avoiding his own team-mates who are rushing to celebrate with him. The player appears to



want to personally stay in the limelight as long as he can before “sharing it” with the team. What a difference if, as soon as he had scored, he had turned to his team and celebrated with them, disappearing into them, thanking them for making it possible, instead of seeking personal attention and glory.

Sport can be a positive and effective method to develop the fruit of the Spirit. Like everything else, it must also be kept in balance. Throughout it all, the child must know that it is only sport and that there are much more important things in life.

*Can a player or a team be competitive without viewing the other team as “the enemy” or without portraying ourselves as the ones who will crush them?*

The answer is of course, yes. As discussed in answer to the previous questions, a “yes” answer is possible when sports is approached from the perspective of the greatest commandment (Matt 22:37-40) and doing your best.

We may view those opposed to God as the enemy, but even then Jesus tells us to love our enemy and do good to them, so I think it is quite clear that we must view our competitors with a spirit of love, especially since one cannot equate them with the enemy Jesus is referring to. I do recognize that the meaning of enemy can be different. There are mortal enemies and there are temporary enemies; however, in most cases casting your opponents as the enemy calls up the wrong state of heart.

To apply the great commandment means to control yourself in play and to not sin when getting angry in the game (due to some true injustice). If the other player makes a dirty hit, can we hit him back? Can we target the aggravating poor sport, the dirty player on the other team, and try to make him pay? Can we cheer when an obnoxious player gets nailed or commits a dumb move? The other team should feel the love of Christ as they play against Christians. What is the goal of routines like the All Blacks haka?

What sports season or tournament has gone by without all sorts of gossip and energy spent on that other team that is. . . ? It seems like in sports there always has to be a team or event that creates conflict or a negative



Photo credit: Ralph Smeding

rivalry. Some of those rivalries are legendary and not all are negative. How should we respond to the negative when guided by the command to love your neighbour as yourself?

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*The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma [akingma@echs.ca](mailto:akingma@echs.ca)*



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**Wesley C. Finegan, *Being a Cancer Patient's Carer: A guide*, (Radcliffe Publishing Ltd, 2005).**

**Additional Information: 189 pages, \$29.95**

Receiving a cancer diagnosis can be devastating. It is probably one of the things you dread most to ever hear from a doctor. You have heard so many stories of other people with cancer, and know so many families who have been touched by this horrible disease.

I pray that one day we will find a cure and that I won't have to work with patients and families touched by this disease anymore. But I know that, in this world damaged by the effects of sin, this diagnosis will continue to hurt many people before things get better. Perhaps it won't get better before Jesus returns. And this means that we need to continue to get better at helping people deal with the terrible symptoms and repercussions of this illness (or any other life threatening illness for that matter).

As Christians we are not exempt from physical suffering. And this means that cancer affects us as well. It is easy to think that our role as a church family is to be a spiritual support to our fellow brothers and sisters who are struggling with cancer. But our role actually extends much further than this. We also need to physically support a patient or family and need to know how to do this well. Many of us have never personally been confronted with a life threatening illness or with death. This means that we have absolutely no idea of what it is like for our brother or sister. If we have no idea, it is hard to know how to help. And this means that other people suffer unnecessarily, because we aren't sure how to help.

Thankfully there are many resources around that can help us in this. One book that I recently came across is called *Being a Cancer Patient's Carer: A guide*. It is specifically directed toward someone who is a direct caregiver for a cancer patient; perhaps a husband or a wife or a daughter. But it is a book filled with information that is helpful for everyone to read at some point in time. Most, if not all of us, at one time or another, will be a caregiver or will be a close friend to or family member of a cancer patient.

This book is written by Dr. Wesley Finegan. He is a palliative consultant physician in England. (As an aside: medical terminology in England is slightly different than in North America and this is why Dr. Finegan speaks of carers in place of caregivers in this book). In the past few decades he has suffered with cancer himself, and soon after, became a caregiver/carer for his wife Alice as she also was diagnosed with cancer. He is also a Christian. And although this book is mostly very practical, he also at times touches on his faith as a support during this difficult time.

The book is split into five sections, dealing with what it means to be a caregiver, how to communicate well with medical professionals, how to deal with practical problems, how to deal with spiritual, psychosocial, and psychological problems, and lastly, some glossaries and helpful tables. I very much appreciated the way the book is set up. In the section on practical problems, many practical and physical issues are dealt with, for example, how to deal with pain, what to do if someone's appetite is poor, what if someone doesn't want to drink, what if they can't get to the bathroom or out of bed any more. These are huge practical issues that can become huge questions or sources of anxiety for caregivers and families. It is good to have a go-to book with helpful information.

Dr. Finegan also speaks briefly about different religions and how they impact someone with a life threatening illness. It may seem strange to us that this is mentioned in this book. And yet I think it is good. It may be that the cancer patient you end up caring for, or visiting with, is your neighbour. As a Christian you can be a wonderful blessing to your neighbour in this situation. As much as you want to share the gospel with them – and I pray that you are given the opportunity to do this – you will also need to respect their beliefs as you enter their home to help or visit. So it is good to have some knowledge about their beliefs and customs.

*Being a Cancer Patient's Carer: A guide* would be an excellent book to include in your church library. It is available via Amazon. It is my prayer that as a church community we will more and more demonstrate the love and compassion of Christ as we care for our brothers and sisters.



## **Press Release of the International Conference of Reformed Churches Meeting in Cardiff, Wales, From August 29 – September 4, 2013**

The eighth meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) was held in Cardiff, Wales, from 29 August to 4 September 2013. A prayer service held at Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Cardiff, preceded the official meeting. The service was led by Rev. Dr Peter Naylor. Rev. Ian Hamilton preached from 2 Corinthians 2:14-17 on the theme, "The Context and Privilege of Gospel Ministry." Several brothers from the UK led in prayer for the conference, the delegates and their respective churches, and the kingdom of God generally. The delegates, together with members of the churches in the area of Cardiff, "lifted the roof" in joyful praise to the Lord singing psalms and hymns.

The conference was held in the conference centre of the University of South Wales, Pontypridd, where most of the delegates were accommodated. A few delegates were accommodated at the Village Hotel about six miles away. Excellent meals were provided by the staff at the Stilts Food Court on the university campus.

All arrangements for the conference were made by the host organising team comprised of members of the nearby Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales. Hearty thanks for their care and excellent organisation were extended to them at the end of the conference.

The conference was opened by the retiring chairman, Rev. Bruce Hoyt, who welcomed the delegates from far and near and then led in a brief meditation on Luke 18:24-34.

At the recommendation of the Interim Committee the following were appointed as the Executive: Rev. Richard Holst (EPCEW) Chairman, Rev. Dick Moes (URCNA) Vice-Chairman, Rev. Dr. Peter Naylor (EPCEW) Recording Secretary, Rev. Dr. James Visscher (CanRC) Corresponding Secretary, and Mr. Kyle Lodder (CanRC) Treasurer. The chairman expressed appreciation to Rev. Cornelius van Spronsen, the retiring Corresponding Secretary, and Mr. Henk Berends, the retiring Treasurer, for their faithful service over many years.

### **Member churches**

When the conference opened there were thirty member churches as follows:

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church         | ARPC  |
| 2. Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia       | CRCI  |
| 3. Canadian and American Reformed Churches        | CanRC |
| 4. Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands | CRCN  |

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| 5. Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales | EPCEW  |
| 6. Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland           | EPCI   |
| 7. Free Church of Scotland                              | FCS    |
| 8. Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)                 | FCSC   |
| 9. Free Church in Southern Africa                       | FCSA   |
| 10. Free Reformed Churches of North America             | FRCNA  |
| 11. Free Reformed Churches of South Africa              | FRCSA  |
| 12. Heritage Reformed Congregations                     | HRC    |
| 13. Independent Reformed Church in Korea                | IRCK   |
| 14. Orthodox Presbyterian Church                        | OPC    |
| 15. Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia            | PCEA   |
| 16. Presbyterian Church Korea (Kosin)                   | PCKK   |
| 17. Presbyterian Free Church of India                   | PFCI   |
| 18. Reformed Churches of Brazil                         | RCB    |
| 19. Reformed Churches in Indonesia                      | RCI    |
| 20. Reformed Churches in the Netherlands                | RCN    |
| 21. Reformed Churches of New Zealand                    | RCNZ   |
| 22. Reformed Churches of Spain                          | RCS    |
| 23. Reformed Churches in South Africa                   | RCSA   |
| 24. Reformed Church in the United States                | RCUS   |
| 25. Reformed Presbyterian Church of India               | RPCInd |
| 26. Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland             | RPCI   |
| 27. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America       | RPCNA  |
| 28. Reformed Presbyterian Church of NE India            | RPCNEI |
| 29. United Reformed Church in Congo                     | URCC   |
| 30. United Reformed Churches in North America           | URCNA  |

### **New member churches**

During the conference the following churches were received as members with joy and thanksgiving:

- |   |      |
|---|------|
| 1. Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church | AEPC |
| 2. Sudanese Reformed Churches             | SRC  |

### **Papers**

The theme of the Conference was "Preach the Word" based upon 2 Timothy 4:2. This theme was covered in three papers. The authors of the papers gave addresses based on their papers in the evening sessions which allowed members of the local churches to hear the addresses. On the morning following each address, the conference divided into four groups for discussion, after which there was a period of questions from the groups directed to the author of the papers.

The first address was given by Rev. Dr. Robert Letham (EPCEW) entitled "The Necessity of Preaching." Dr. Letham noted that preaching involves a proclamation of the Word of God and an appeal to the hearers, which requires the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about change in the



hearts of the hearers. He noted that while the Spirit and the (proclaimed) Word are distinct, they are inseparable and so we can be confident that the preaching of the Word of God will accomplish God's intended purpose.



The second address was given by Rev. Dr. James Visscher (CanRC) entitled "The Nature of Preaching." Dr. Visscher noted that preaching is the faithful proclamation of God's Word; it is a Triune revelation, covenantal in content, Christocentric, progressive, relevant, comprehensive, compelling, and evangelistic. Dr. Visscher pointed out that each of these aspects of the Word has implications for preaching and for the hearer.

The third address was given by Rev. Dr. Jun Ho Jin (KPCK) entitled "The Practice of Preaching in Non-Literary Cultures." Dr. Jin noted that fifty-five percent of the 650 million evangelical Christians are not Caucasian, giving evidence that the centre of Christianity has shifted to Africa and Asia. In these continents literacy rates are low: forty percent in Africa and twenty percent in Asia. Dr. Jin, using Asia and specifically Cambodia as an example, recommended that preaching in non-literate cultures should be easy and simple, should include apologetics designed for the culture, should be expository and applicatory, should rise from a cultural "point of contact," and should address the power encounters common in Asian culture.

### **Introductions**

Five churches applied for membership in the ICRC: the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church (AEPC), the Sudanese Reformed Churches (SRC), the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA), the Universal Reformed Christian Church in Nigeria (URCCN), and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Malawi (EPCM).

These churches each gave an introduction of their church to the Conference. In addition observers/delegates from the Reformed Churches of Korea (RCK) and the Reformed Churches of Brazil (RCB) also gave introductions of their churches.

### **Missions**

The Missions Committee reported on its work in fulfilling its mandate. Two meetings were held, one in the Netherlands and one at Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. The

highlight of those meetings was the time spent with representatives of the missions agencies of some of the member churches. The Missions Committee wants to encourage all member churches to send members of their mission agencies to participate in such meetings for mutual reflection on the mission task of the church and to discuss strategies for building up of the church for the glory of our God.

Mr. Mark Bube prepared another edition of the "Mission Field Survey." He explained the sections of the booklet and how useful it could be to churches that are engaging in mission to relate to one another and help one another. All member churches are urged to send in information for incorporation in a future update of the booklet.

### **Significant actions**

A special committee to review the constitution, regulation, and structures of the ICRC presented its report at this meeting of the Conference. The Conference proposed several amendments to the Constitution. This will be passed along to the major assemblies of the member churches for approval. The Conference also approved substantial revisions to its regulations. It recommended several changes to the structure of the Conference in order to encourage more regional interaction between the member churches and to give a higher priority to their theological education and diaconal ministries. To facilitate this a Coordinating Committee, a Theological Education, a Diaconal Committee, and a Regional Conferences Committee have been appointed in addition to the already existing Missions Committee. Finally, in order to give greater visibility to the ICRC and to improve communication among the member churches and make information about the various ministries of the member churches more easily accessible, a Website Committee was appointed.

### **Budgetary matters**

The Conference adopted a four-year budget for 2014-2017 in the amount of \$155,000 USD, or \$35,000 USD per annum. This is an increase of approximately \$15,000 USD from the previous budget total of \$140,000 USD. Resources for newly formed committees were budgeted.

### **Next meeting of the Conference**

The next meeting of the Conference is scheduled for 2017 in the Hamilton area of Ontario, with the Jordan United Reformed Church (URCNA) to be host church.

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