

Clarion



THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
Year-End 2013 • December 13, 2013





To all our readers:

*Best Wishes and the
Lord's blessings
in the year 2014*

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Christmas Preaching



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I'm going to tell you a little secret: Christmas isn't always the most wonderful time of the year for ministers. It may have something to do with having to write two extra sermons (in combination with New Year's Eve) while your house is full of family. Or people asking you, "So, are you enjoying the holiday? What are you doing with your time off?" (*Yeah. . . right*). These things are seasonal irritants but what really wears on preachers is the pressure of what to preach on Christmas Day. And that may have something to do with you, dear reader.

Sermon expectations

Consider for a moment: what text do you want your minister to preach on this Christmas? What are your expectations? If he doesn't preach on the birth narrative found in the gospels, will you be disappointed? Will you complain, "That wasn't a Christmas sermon! He hardly spoke of Jesus' birth and never mentioned Mary or Joseph!"? If he selects a text from one of Paul's letters or dares to preach out of the Old Testament, will you be offended and resentful?

These feelings run strong in certain folks and the message gets through to the minister. Grumbling and discontent has a way of foaming up to the surface – through the comments at home visits or perhaps directly to the minister. The end result is that the pastor becomes dismayed as Advent approaches and Christmas Day in particular. Once bitten, twice shy. I know ministers who've tried to preach from a "non-traditional" Christmas text and have been so burned by criticism that they have made it a standard practice to always end up in Luke 2 on Christmas Day!

Pressure-cooker

It's remarkable that this same sort of pressure does not occur (at least, I have not heard of it) for the other

special days on which we commemorate the saving work of Christ. On Good Friday and Easter, everyone expects to hear a sermon about these salvation events but the preacher feels free to choose from a variety of texts. Approaching those topics either from the expectation setting of the Old Testament or the fulfillment context of the New Testament are both acceptable and appreciated. Preachers can breathe easy on these occasions: no one waiting to speak to you after church and no stinging texts on your cell phone (*whew!*).

Same goes for Ascension Day and Pentecost Sunday. Most church members don't care where in Scripture the text is chosen from so long as there is a rich exposition and application of those particular works of God. But on Christmas Day, if the preacher is not busy in one of the four gospels, then look-out! Stony stares, corrosive comments, and testy tweets to follow. As the kids say: what a fail!

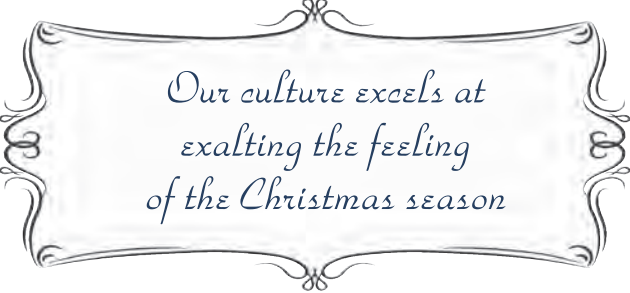
Sentimentality

Where does this pressure come from? I think it comes from the general spirit of sentimentality that exists throughout our society at Christmas-time. Sentimentality means to emphasize emotion and concentrate on how things make you *feel* over above anything else – like logic, reason, or even God's revelation. Your feelings become the most important. You want to feel good, be on an emotional high. And our culture excels at exalting the feeling of the "Christmas season."

It does this in many ways. The day after Halloween, every department store redecorates with Santa-flavoured themes. Shortly afterward begins the endless Christmas ditties on the overhead speakers. By December, the radio stations, even the rock and pop stations, will haul out the "Christmas classics" of years gone by – *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas*; *It's Christmas, Baby, Please Come Home*.

You can even hear Bruce Springsteen belting out, *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*.

This is all just a warm-up. In the final two or three weeks leading up to December 25, all the Christmas movies will get played – you can watch one every night of the week, it seems! Towns and cities decorate with lights and tinsel and Christmas trees. There is Christmas baking, eggnog, and a hankering to be with loved ones. You'll even still see nativity scenes – especially in front of churches. The message of being kind and loving, extraordinarily nice even to strangers is promoted everywhere. People talk about the “miracle of Christmas time.” Everything is orchestrated to produce a special *feeling*.



*Our culture excels at
exalting the feeling
of the Christmas season*

The Baby Jesus is granted a place in all of this. Christmas is acknowledged to be his “birthday” and the goodness of God in giving Mary a healthy baby in such poor circumstances is acknowledged. The presence of angels, shepherds, and animals looking on the scene in the stable is *touching*. And that's just the point: our culture focuses on the feeling that Jesus' birth brings but leaves aside any reference as to the purpose of his coming! Man's sin and rebellion is left aside. Justice, holy wrath, punishment, and hell are forbidden concepts on December 25. In the world's Christmas, Baby Jesus shows up in the manger every year to warm your heart but he never makes it to the cross to save your soul!

Other Christian days

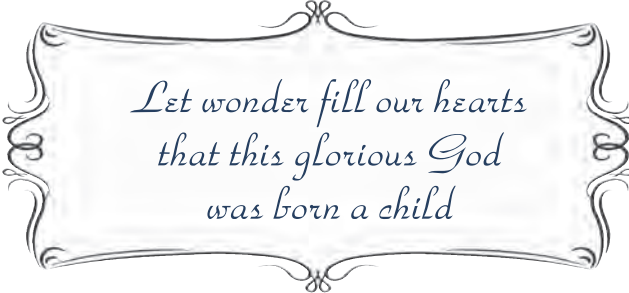
Compare this to the way our western society handles the other major saving works of Christ. It ignores his Ascension and Pentecost entirely. You can hardly find a calendar which marks these days. The world turns Easter into a hunt for coloured eggs and eating silly chocolate bunnies. Good Friday for most is just a good excuse to have a day off with little cultural baggage attached. The way our culture handles these events is so far removed

from scriptural teaching and Christian belief that we don't get them mixed up (usually). Hence, there is little pressure from outside to make these events all about the good emotions we can get out of them. For that alone, we can thank God.

Sweet emotions

Now, before I get accused of having no heart and no feeling at all, let me hasten to say that Christmas (like the other feast days) should bring out a great deal of emotion within us Christians! I like Christmas baking, enjoy eggnog, and treasure time with loved ones – these are good gifts from our heavenly Father. I don't even object to tasteful, true-to-the-Bible nativity scenes which stir our hearts. But our hearts should be stirred and our emotions should be produced in us *by the gospel of Jesus Christ*, not by an invented, artificial and nebulous “spirit of the season!” Our great appreciation for Christmas should not find its source in the trappings and peripheral events but in the Christ who was born!

We should be deeply humbled by the news that the Son of God took upon himself weak human flesh to become a human being. Let wonder fill our hearts that this glorious God was born a child, like any other child (though still God), and let himself be raised in obscurity by sinful parents! We ought to break forth in joyful song that Jesus Christ did this in order to stand in our place as the Last Adam! It should overwhelm us that our Saviour took upon himself every moment of his earthly life our curse, our punishment due to our sin! We should be intensely impressed that Christmas leads directly to the cross – it is why he came!



*Let wonder fill our hearts
that this glorious God
was born a child*

Naturally, this news evokes emotions within believers, true and sweet emotion, but then this gospel should be our focus throughout the time of Advent and on Christmas Day.

What's Inside

At *Clarion* we are thankful to be able to bring our readers the 2013 year end issue. What a blessing to have all we need for twenty-five installments of the magazine again this year! We take this opportunity to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, look back on the year 2013, and also look forward to the coming year.

Our editorial and Treasures New and Old meditation are written especially for the Christmas season. In addition, five ministers in our federation graciously put together a five-part "Christmas in the Pentateuch" series. Thank you to all of them! As Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer writes in his editorial, the truths of the Christmas message have "many different facets, like a priceless diamond, and are taught throughout Scripture in many different contexts."

2013 was another busy year in our churches as various reports will show! Readers can read of Synod Carman, several graduations, and a league day. Our Editor, Dr. James Visscher, also gives us his annual review of the year in the Canadian (American) Reformed Churches. Issue 25 also brings you a Canticle, Ray of Sunshine, letters to the editor, a press release, and a book review.

It is a real pleasure to bring these pages to you, our readers. May your Christmas be a blessed one, and God bless you and keep you in the coming year as well.

Laura Veenendaal

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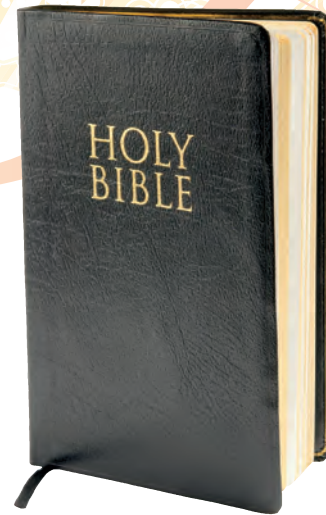
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A Bible full

And if it is, then let your minister preach freely from any text in the Bible that speaks to the gospel of Christmas. It is simply not true that the Christmas message is limited to the four gospels or that only Luke 2 and Matthew 2 are worthy of Christmas Day sermons. Christmas Day is a celebration of the incarnation of the Son of God and that event has many, many angles to it! Why did he come? What specific task(s) did he come to perform? What roles or offices was he born to fulfill? How is it that by taking on human nature the Son of God was actually working to save us from sin and damnation? These truths have many different facets, like a priceless diamond, and are taught throughout Scripture in many different contexts.

*Glimpses, flashes, shadows,
expectations are laid out in many
Old Testament passages*

You can even find Christmas themes in the Pentateuch! Genesis through Deuteronomy may seem far-removed from Jesus' birth in Bethlehem but the message of his future birth and work is found there. It comes in different forms – like promises or prophecies, figures or events which foreshadow the birth of Christ and his work, or laws and ceremonies which outline the need for and expectation of a Messiah. To show some examples of this, for this issue of *Clarion* we asked five ministers to each write one Christmas meditation on a passage in one of the five Books of Moses – and each was able to (and we think they did a fine job too, but see for yourself!). They could just as well have been asked to choose five different texts from the Psalms or the Prophets or even the more historical books. The point now is: a lot can be learned about the incarnation of God's Son from non-traditional Christmas texts from all over Scripture!



A rich gospel

If your minister has the feeling from his congregation that he must preach out of gospels on Christmas Day each year and every year, both he and you are missing out. The good news of the incarnation is a miraculous event that God has carefully and painstakingly, over the course of hundreds of years, revealed many things about in the Old Testament. Glimpses, flashes, shadows, expectations are laid out in many Old Testament passages and with the light we now have from the New Testament, we can look back and perceive these silhouettes of Christ with much greater clarity and precision! This adds to our Christmas wonder and sweet gospel emotion!

On top of this, the Holy Spirit has inspired much reflection on Christ's birth by the apostles and other New Testament writers. Think of well-known passages like Philippians 2:5-11 or Hebrews 2 which speak explicitly and quite movingly of Christ's coming into the world. But there are other, lesser-known passages which give insight into the meaning of Christmas. Check out, for example, John 18:3 (in the middle of Christ's trial!); Romans 1:3; Galatians 4:4ff; 1 Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 9:11; 10:5; 1 John 5:6; and Revelation 12:4-5 to name a few. Because the gospel is so rich, so multi-layered and variegated, wouldn't we all benefit if, over the course of the years, our ministers worked with the whole revelation of Christ's incarnation and didn't limit themselves to re-runs of traditional texts?

This Christmas, give your minister a gift: freedom to preach on the first Advent of Christ from anywhere in the Bible. That's a gift that will keep on giving.

Treasures, New & Old

MATTHEW 13:52

God's Timetable

"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world."

Luke 2:1



Clarence VanderVelde

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Are the opening words of Luke's Christmas narrative – "In those days..." – little more than a stylistic opening? And if they are more than a stylistic opening, do they indicate coincidence? Quite the contrary! The answer to those questions gives us a wonderful perspective on the event of Christmas long ago, as well as on the changeover from one year to another which we will soon mark.

So the question is: What days? With the opening words "In those days..." Luke is referring to what he has narrated in chapter 1. It refers back to Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah about the birth of John the Baptist and the subsequent birth of John. It also refers back to Gabriel's announcement to the virgin Mary about the birth of the Christ child. In other words, it refers to the fact that God was busy working out his plan of redemption, and that the time had now come for the promised Saviour to be born. This makes us think of what Paul writes: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of woman. . ." (Gal 4:4).

Think about that deeply: Luke is telling us that the decree of Caesar Augustus for a census was subservient to God's plan and work of redemption! The Roman Empire had supreme control of the world of that time. Caesar Augustus – whose title "Augustus" means "exalted" – was hailed as a god. Yet what Caesar did was in God's hands and according to God's timetable. As Proverbs tells us, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases" (21:1). God put the idea of a census in Caesar's mind so that it would serve God's purpose of salvation. God was bringing the lines of history together in the church and in the world. Caesar Augustus was revered as a god, but the one only true God controlled him.

Caesar's decree was subservient to the coming of Christ. Because of that decree, Joseph and Mary would travel to Bethlehem. There the Saviour would be born in fulfillment of Micah's words, "But you, Bethlehem

Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (5:2). Because of Caesar's decree, the Saviour would be born in the city of David.

What a wonderful perspective on Christmas those opening words offer us! The decree of Caesar took place according to God's timetable, and Luke dates it according to God's timetable. That is revealed to us for our comfort.

Is it any different today? Also today God continues to work out his plan of redemption, and what may appear unconnected in our estimation is actually connected to God's plan of redemption. The timing of everything in this world's history is subservient to God's goal. God sets the time for all events so that they serve his eternal purpose. Everything today occurs according to God's timetable. This knowledge is tremendously comforting for us.

We know that after Christ accomplished the redeeming work for which he came to this earth, Christ ascended into heaven to rule the nations from the throne in heaven. Christ is guiding all things to his second coming. As everything was subservient to the first coming of Christ, so everything is subservient to the second coming of Christ.

We are sometimes inclined to think that church history is marginal in comparison with world history. The Christmas narrative shows us how wrong that thinking is! Church history is central to world history. Even more: world history is church history. Throughout the ages, God is working out his plan of redemption.

Let's remember this as we are about to enter a new year. The years go by and history goes on, but God is still working out his plan of redemption. Nothing happens by coincidence; everything is timed according to God's timetable. That is true for our personal lives, as well as for the world as a whole. That may be our perspective and comfort in the new year.

Christmas in Genesis

The Lion King



Jim Witteveen

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*“You are a lion’s cub, O Judah. . .
The scepter will not depart from Judah. . .
until he comes to whom it belongs and the
obedience of the nations is his.”*

Genesis 49:9-10

A short and difficult life

The conclusion of the book of Genesis finds the patriarch Jacob on his deathbed in Egypt. Jacob had reached what we would consider to be the “ripe old age” of 147 years old. He, however, saw the situation a little differently; he had described the years of his life as being “few and difficult” (Gen 47:9). They hadn’t lived up to the example of his fathers, either in number or in quality. As an old man nearing death, Jacob was well aware of the nature of his life. He described it as a “pilgrimage,” a journey to a final destination, a sojourning. But for Jacob, “the few and difficult” years of his life were not his ultimate concern; he was concerned with what was yet to come.

Blessings

So as he lay dying, Jacob followed in the footsteps of his fathers, passing on the blessings of the covenant to his children. Having blessed the sons of Joseph, he moved on to his own sons, the men who would be the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Some of these “blessings” hardly seem to us to be blessings at all – they may even appear to be more like curses. But Genesis 49:28 tells us the nature of Jacob’s final words to his sons; they were “what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him.”

Three disappointments

By virtue of his status as the first-born, Reuben should have received the greatest blessing. But Reuben

had committed adultery with Jacob’s concubine, Bilhah. So the first-born of Israel would father neither judges nor prophets, and no kings would rise up from among his descendants. Reuben, “turbulent as the waters,” would fade away over time.

Next, Jacob addressed Simeon and Levi together, and like Reuben, they were left disappointed. When their sister Dinah had been raped by Shechem many years before, they had used trickery and violence to take their revenge. And so neither Simeon nor Levi would receive their own portion of the Promised Land; they would be scattered among their brothers.

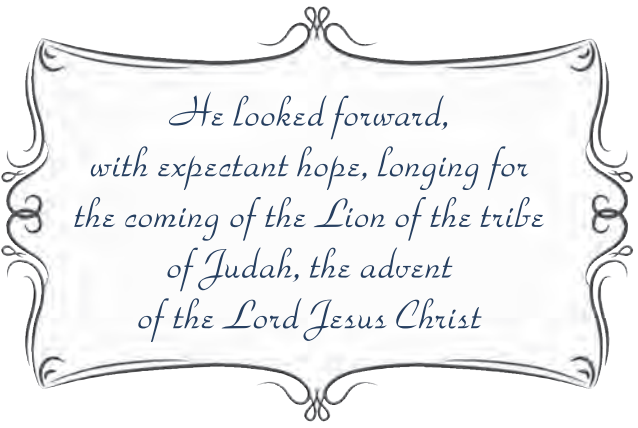
The climax: Judah

Perhaps by now even Judah was worried. Fourth in line, Judah had not lived an exemplary life either; like his older brothers, he was a sinner, and all too often he had allowed his sinful nature to control him. But Judah had been changed, and that had been proven by his offering himself as a substitute for his youngest brother, Benjamin (Gen 44:33ff), a selfless act that foreshadowed Jesus’ offering of himself as a substitute for his brothers.

Judah would not come away from Jacob’s deathbed disappointed. He would dominate his brothers, and their enemies. He would be a lion, the king of beasts, striking fear into the hearts of those who he would encounter. He would be the ruler; the ruler’s staff, the king’s sceptre, would not depart from Judah, “until he comes to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his.”

Echoes of Abraham

The promises that the LORD had made to Abraham were being directed through the line of Judah. When the rightful holder of the ruler's staff, the greatest of Judah's descendants, would come, blessings would overflow to all nations. In Revelation 5:5, he would be called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." And his first miracle, the transformation of water to wine at the wedding in Cana, would make the nature of his kingdom clear, reminding us of the final words that Jacob spoke about this great Son of Judah. His reign would be a time of such abundance that precious grape vines would be used as tethering places for donkeys; wine would be as plentiful as water. His coming would bring great joy. He would be the greatest king, and his kingdom would have a magnificence beyond human imagine.



*He looked forward,
with expectant hope, longing for
the coming of the Lion of the tribe
of Judah, the advent
of the Lord Jesus Christ*

An injection of hope

As for Judah's younger brothers, nothing so great awaited them. Jacob's blessings for Zebulun, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin could never reach the majesty of the prophecy he had made about their older brother. But in the midst of those final words to the younger brothers, mixed blessings at best, blessings that revealed the constant stain of sin that would remain, Jacob makes a sudden, surprising interjection: "I look for

your deliverance, O LORD!" In the midst speaking of the turbulence that awaited the remainder of his descendants, Jacob is led to make one final, passionate interjection: "I wait, with great eagerness, for your salvation!"

Jacob's sojourning had come to an end. But still he looked forward, with expectant hope, longing for the coming of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. The future of his sons would be impacted by sin, marked by conflict, stained with suffering. With that knowledge, Jacob cries out in confidence, in a confession of faith, that something greater than merely earthly blessings would surely be brought forth by the LORD.

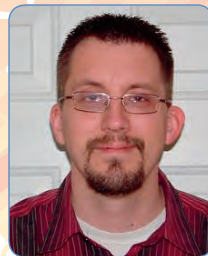
Waiting: 2000 years later

Two millennia later, the faithful remnant that remained among the descendants of Jacob was still looking expectantly forward to the Lord's deliverance. In Luke 2:25, we're told of a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, a righteous and devout man who "was waiting for the consolation of Israel." The words of hopeful expectation that had been spoken by Jacob two thousand years earlier were still on the lips of his descendants. They trusted that the LORD would fulfil his promises. And filled with the Holy Spirit, Simeon would be led to understand that the time had finally come. He could depart in peace. Because when he saw the child Jesus and took him in his arms, he knew: with his own eyes, he had seen the salvation of the Lord.

Jacob had looked forward with eager expectation to the Lord's salvation. And now, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, that salvation had finally arrived. His coming marked the fulfilment of the hope of Israel, a hope that was kept alive from generation to generation by the Holy Spirit. And as we reflect on the first coming of the hope of Israel, we look forward to his second coming. With Simeon we can say that we have seen his salvation; and with Jacob we can exclaim, with expectant longing, "I look for your deliverance, O LORD!"

Christmas in Exodus

A Great Deliverer is Coming



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"She saw that he was a fine child. . . ."

Exodus 2:2

Moses and Jesus

The Bible draws many parallels between Moses and Jesus. Moses led the deliverance of God's people from slavery. He gave the people a revelation from God on Mount Sinai. He interceded for the people on numerous occasions to save them from the anger and wrath of God. God made Moses a pattern that would help us to see Jesus as the Saviour. Moses said that Jesus would be a prophet like himself (Deut 18:15). Like Moses, Jesus was a deliverer and a mediator. He saves us from bondage, reconciles us to God, and teaches us to know God's will. He is like Moses and surpasses him.

A fine child

The parallels between Moses and Jesus begin at Moses' birth. Moses was born after Pharaoh had decreed the death of all male Israelite children. Moses' parents were determined to save their child Moses. His mother Jochabed hid Moses for three months (Exod 2:2) because she saw that he was a "fine child." It would be normal for any parents to conclude that their son or daughter is a "fine child."

Other texts of Scripture suggest that something more was at work here. Stephen tells us that Moses' parents saw that he was "no ordinary child" (Acts 7:20). The same is repeated in Hebrews 11:23. Is it true that the house was filled with radiant light when Moses was born as the Jews believed? Or was this a prophetic prompting of the Holy Spirit, so that Moses' parents would recognize that God had special plans for their newborn son? Either way, Jochabed's recognition of Moses as a "fine child" was not mere parental bliss. This was a signal from God that

Moses had been set aside for a special task, a task so great and marvellous that it would serve as a picture of the deliverance we have in Jesus.

Angels and shepherds

The birth of the "fine child" Moses foreshadowed the incarnation of the Son of God. Like Moses, Jesus was marked for a great task from the moment of his birth. Before his conception, an angel visited Zechariah and Elizabeth to foretell the birth of John, who would serve as a forerunner to Jesus. Then the angel also visited Mary to explain how she would become the mother of a boy child. When, in due course, this boy child Jesus was born, great signs accompanied his birth. Shepherds reported the appearance of a great choir of angels in the night sky, singing songs of joy and praise. Later in the temple, Simeon and Anna spoke prophetically of how Jesus would be the Saviour of God's people. Even Magi from the east came searching for Jesus, prompted by signs in the heavens. Clearly Jesus was "no ordinary child." These signs marked him not only as a deliverer in the mode of Moses but also especially identified him as the Son of God made flesh. This child Jesus would be a Saviour to save God's people from their sins (Matt 1:21).

Sign language

Sadly, the enemies of the church were more attentive to the signs of deliverance than the church herself. Legend says that Pharaoh was alerted to the birth of Moses by his astronomers, who foretold that Moses would be a great deliverer for Israel. This is what prompted Pharaoh's program to kill the male Israelite children. Whether or not

this is true, the murder of the Israelite boy children was an attack on God's redemptive plan. Much the same thing happened when Herod was alerted by the Magi to the birth of Jesus. Attentive to the sign of the star, Herod took steps to kill the children of Bethlehem in the hope that he would remove Jesus from the scene.

*These signs show us that
Jesus is our deliverer
as Moses was the deliverer of
God's people from Egypt*

On the other hand, none of the Israelites recognized Moses as their deliverer or assisted Jochabed to protect her "fine" child Moses. God provided extraordinary protection for baby Moses through the daughter of Pharaoh. But the blindness of the people continued when Moses first tried to help his people and they still refused to recognize him (Acts 7:25). Neither did the people recognize the signs when Jesus was born; of all people, it was Herod who saw the signs and reacted to them first! Pharaoh and Herod saw the signs, while God's own people did not see.

See the signs

Do you and I see the signs and their meaning? God intentionally left us with a record of the signs that accompanied the births of Moses and Jesus. These signs show us that Jesus is our deliverer as Moses was the deliverer of God's people from Egypt. The salvation we have in Jesus is just as real, and even more powerful, than the Exodus of Israel. Through faith we believe that Jesus was "no ordinary child" but was the Son of God sent to save us. The signs help us to see and believe.

When Jesus completed his ministry and ascended into heaven, he told his disciples that he would come a second time, so that he might complete our deliverance forever. For this second coming he has also given us signs. There will be earthquakes, famines, wars, and rumours of war. We should not be caught unawares, as God's people were when he sent Moses and later Jesus. We should see the signs and know that deliverance is nearing its completion. A great deliverer came when Moses was born; a greater Deliverer came when Jesus was born; this great Deliverer is coming again.



*"She will bear a son,
and you shall
call his name Jesus,
for he will save his
people from their sins."*

Matthew 1:21

The Purification of Baby Jesus

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“When the time came for their purification . . .”

Luke 2:22a (ESV)

At the end of Luke’s account of Jesus Christ’s birth, he writes about Joseph and Mary presenting Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22-40). What most of us remember about this is the prophecy of Simeon and the praise of Anna, two faithful Jews waiting for the consolation of Israel. We do not, however, focus on *why* Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the Temple. In verse 22, we find, “When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses” is what prompted the trip to Jerusalem. Verse 24 even details the sacrifice that they made. What is all this about?

Purification laws

It is rooted in the law of Leviticus 12. When a woman gives birth to a boy, she is impure or unclean for forty days and when she gives birth to a girl, she is unclean for eighty days. Now, the difference between the two is not that boys are only half as bad as girls, nor is it that somehow the Israelite culture did not properly value women. No, boys are circumcised on the eighth day and this shedding of blood shortens the period of uncleanness.

What is Israel supposed to learn from this ritual? First, remember the point of the laws about cleanness. These laws are not about hygiene, nor are they moral laws; they are symbolic, ritual laws about drawing near to God. All these laws come about because of the building of the tabernacle. That is the problem at the end of Exodus. The tabernacle has been built and filled with Yahweh’s glory, but no one can enter. The book of Leviticus answers the question: how can unrighteous men come before a righteous God? Yahweh now dwells in the midst of Israel and when Yahweh comes near, he judges sin. Being unclean is symbolically to be under the curse, or the effects

of the curse. Uncleanness means symbolic, ritual death. The laws of Leviticus show how that uncleanness can be removed in God’s eyes.

The impurity of childbirth

Second, the laws of uncleanness “track” the judgments for sin passed by God in Genesis 3. Leviticus 12, then, is rooted in Genesis 3:16, the curse of emotional distress and physical pain in childbearing. Giving birth is now accompanied by blood. Blood and distress show Yahweh’s judgment against original sin, and so it makes the woman unclean. She cannot come before Yahweh without cleansing. Both the blood and the baby born in blood come from the innermost parts.

All this is symbolic of the mother’s inner depravity and the fact that the child is born dead in trespasses and sins. Through the sacrifices and the washings, God symbolically makes both the mother and the child alive again. Childbirth is so defiling that it requires both a whole burnt offering to atone for sin – God’s blood sacrifice covers the blood of birth – and a purification offering, since each birth also defiles the tabernacle, Yahweh’s dwelling with his people.

Was Baby Jesus impure?

This is the reason they come to Jerusalem. Yet this raises some questions. Through the ritual of Leviticus 12, the mother, who is a sinner, and the child, who is born covenantally dead, are restored to the congregation of Israel. This comes through a washing with water and with blood sacrifice. By blood and water, they are incorporated into the covenant people. (If you think about it, Leviticus 12 proves that every infant in Israel was baptized, which

is pretty strong evidence for the continuation of infant baptism in the new covenant!)

But how can this be? Jesus is not just Mary's son. He is the Son of the Most High. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and he is sinless. This means that as an infant, he is not born covenantally dead. He was not conceived and born in sin. Why does he go through this rite?

Born under the law

A clue is found in Luke 2:22. Luke speaks of "their purification." Leviticus, however, speaks only of the mother's purification. The child is, of course, unclean and in need of cleansing, but it is an uncleanness derived from his mother. Why then speak of "their" purification? Because Jesus already ritually shares in Mary's judgment, already suffers under the curse for sin. We can go further: Jesus is born in blood and from Mary's innermost parts.

*Sin, uncleanness, and sacrifice
surround Jesus' birth*

Thus, though in himself he has no sin, merely his birth makes both his mother and himself unclean, and his birth requires the blood of sacrifice and washing with water. This leaves no doubt that he is true man, that he took our sin-cursed nature to himself. This leaves no doubt that he is subject to the Law – "born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal 4:4).

Jesus is part of God's people Israel through his mother in the womb. He is born estranged from that people and from the covenant. That's part of what Leviticus 12 shows. Yet, this is not because of any sin in him, but because of the incompleteness of the old covenant. We do not often think of it, but Jesus Christ would have brought

sacrifices throughout his life. Born under the law, he had to bring certain sacrifices. He lived in the midst of death, sin, and uncleanness, and he was obligated to bring sacrifices. He comes to the temple for the first time and receives the blood and water of the covenant. And it is the sacrifice for the poor: two clean birds. From the outset, Jesus is identified with the poor who wait on God to save. Sin, uncleanness, and sacrifice surround Jesus' birth.

Christ purifies us

Jesus Christ begins where we begin: in the womb. Even in his birth, he is the One who bears the judgment and curse of God against sin. He is the true Son of Adam, who takes our sin-cursed human nature. He comes by water and blood before the Father. Ultimately, he is fully cut off in the flesh. He receives the full covenant curse signified and sealed in his obedience to Leviticus 12. The shadow of his cursed death must fall across the account of his birth. By nature, we all start off dead and then God in Christ makes us alive. And he redeems us fully.

*"But when the
fullness of time had
come, God sent forth
his Son. . ."*

Galatians 4:4

Christmas and the Cup of Curses



John VanWoudenberg

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“He shall have the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and this water will enter her and cause bitter suffering.”

Numbers 5:24

Why did Christ come into this world? That question can be answered in many different ways. He came to assume our human nature; he came to dwell among us; he came to rescue his people; he came to fulfill the promises; etc. Each answer enriches. The (in)famous passage of Numbers 5:11-31 contributes to this enriching: he came to drink the cup!

Poor wife!

What horror! A woman finds herself suspected of adultery – by her own husband. If she is guilty, that would be one thing. But what if she is not?! What if her husband has it wrong?! Yet she cannot convince him of her innocence. He’s not only slightly suspicious, but “feelings of jealousy” wash over him. He has no concrete evidence that she has committed adultery, but these “feelings of jealousy” eat away at him. Deep down he just “knows” that she has indeed been unfaithful. Horrible!

Horrible ceremony

Though her life is not in immediate danger as it would be in most surrounding nations, she now has to go through quite the ceremony. Her husband has to take her to the priest who in turn has to “have her stand before the LORD,” likely at the altar of burnt offering – a very public place. The priest then has to fill a clay jar with holy water, adding some dust from the tabernacle floor to it. Then he has to loosen the woman’s hair – her crown of glory!

Next, the priest places her under oath before the LORD: If no other man has slept with you and you have not gone astray and become impure while married to your

husband, may this bitter water that brings a curse not harm you. But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and you have defiled yourself by sleeping with a man other than your husband – here the priest is to put the woman under this curse of the oath – “may the Lord cause your people to curse and denounce you when he causes your thigh to waste away and your abdomen to swell. May this water that brings a curse enter your body so that your abdomen swells and your thigh wastes away.” (Num 5:19-22).

To this the woman then must respond, “Amen, Amen!” The priest would then write the words of the curse on a scroll and wash them into the water – and give that water to the woman to drink. Horrible ceremony!

The husband and wife could then return home. No, the water did not work magically. But God’s Word would prove true. If she was guilty she would no longer be able to hide it: it would come out.

True, there is a silver lining here. If the woman was innocent she would receive children (Num 5:28) and thereby be enabled to build up God’s special nation in this world. Was that not the hope and desire of God-fearing women?! Think of Hannah. But even then: what a ceremony! Horrible! How she, even years later, would look back upon that dark page in her history and shudder.

Poor husband!

Now to the husband. We might be tempted to say, “What a miserable, suspicious guy! Who would want him for a husband anyway?!” Even if his wife is proven innocent he appears to get off Scot-free.

Without going into all the details, however, such an understanding is too simplistic. Those “feelings of jealousy” were not minor. They consumed him (cf. Prov 6:34) – much in the same ways as zeal for God’s house later on consumed our Lord (John 2:17). Such feelings do not normally overpower a person – unless adultery indeed has been committed. After all, especially when the marriage has been good, hiding adultery is virtually impossible: the spouse typically detects right away that something is drastically wrong. The man just “knows” deep down that adultery has happened – and yet his wife denies it – and he simply does not have any hard evidence. Poor husband!

Holy God

But there is more to it. He is living in the camp of Israel – and holy God is living in that camp as well. After God rescued his people out of Egypt, and after the LORD established his covenant with them at Mt. Sinai, then the LORD said to Moses, “Build me a tabernacle so that I too can move in with my people.” That was wonderful news! Egyptians, Philistines, Moabites, Canaanites, watch out. “If God is on our side, against us shall be none!” People of Jericho, watch out: your walls will now come tumbling down!



At the same time, holy God cannot stand sin. When he came into the camp, those with infectious skin diseases or discharges had to be sent outside the camp (Num 5:1-4). Those who defrauded their neighbours had to make full restitution (Num 5:5-10): such was now imperative! Otherwise, God’s wrath would burn. How shocked the people must have been very recently when Nadab and Abihu were struck down by the LORD when they offered an offering with unauthorized fire (Num 3:4).

Poor husband! He knew that there was no way that holy God would be unmoved by the adultery of his wife – and that before his face. He realized that they lived “*coram deo*.” If holy God could not have ceremonial uncleanness in his presence, how much less *actual* uncleanness – especially that of adultery.

Holy seed

There is still more to the story. With adultery, the “seed” of God’s special people was being tampered with. Think of how God later on says via Malachi, “Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly *offspring*. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth” (Mal 2:15).

Poor husband! How could he dare stay in the camp? How could he keep his family in the camp? Their lives were at stake; the well-being of the whole camp was at stake.

But he had no proof – and indeed it was possible that he had it wrong! Yet those feelings of jealousy consumed him.

Indeed serious!

Poor wife! Poor husband! Indeed, the situation was most serious. Was not their marriage relationship designed from the very start already to be a reflection of that very special relationship between God and his people (cf. Eph 5:32)? Had God not just established that relationship with the nation of Israel? Was God not very zealous for that relationship? Was not the functioning of that relationship so key to their children learning about God’s relationship with his people? Was not this relationship key to the future of the nation?

No, it is not as if the husband just happened to be very suspicious of everything that happens, always assuming the worst. Rather, he feared holy God! He longed for godly offspring.

But what could be done? The wife could not convince her husband – and there simply was no proof. Just imagine the tension!

Mercy

True, the ceremony itself is horrible, but in instituting this ceremony the LORD showed mercy. The husband is right: this situation just cannot be tolerated in the camp of Israel. God therefore allows his people in such situations to come to him and thus to call upon him, “Who alone knows the heart, to bear witness to the truth, and to punish me if I swear falsely” (LD 37). He will bring the resolution needed. Assuming innocence, he will set the stage for the husband and wife to truly embrace one another again in full confidence – and

thus restore their marriage so that their marriage could function to build up the nation of Israel as it pressed forward looking for the arrival of the great Messiah.

Holy jealousy

As already mentioned, the reality of the marriage relationship is key here. Keeping in mind that this relationship is a reflection of the relationship between God and his people, what do we see reflected or pictured or illustrated in the husband as the “feelings of jealousy” wash over him? That’s a reflection of what happens to the LORD when his bride, his people, prove unfaithful to him!

Of course he never gets it wrong when those feelings of jealousy wash over him. They are rooted in reality – and he has all the proof. Even the mountains and the hills can testify (cf. Mic 6:1-2). Consider the history of his people: it is a history of adultery (cf. Hosea)!

Christ’s cup of curses

Now consider how Christ, when walking on earth, again and again pointed out to his disciples that he had come in order to suffer. Listen to him as he comes into the Garden of Gethsemane. He cries out in agony – and he speaks of a “cup.” “My Father, if it is possible, may *this cup* be taken from me.” In the Garden his Father is



CALL ACCEPTED AND DECLINED

Accepted the call to the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church of Fergus, Ontario and declined the call to the Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Kerwood, Ontario:

Candidate Theo Wierenga

Accepted the call to Barrhead, Alberta Canadian Reformed Church and declined the call to the Winnipeg-Redeemer (to serve as a missionary) and to the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church of Guelph, Ontario:

Candidate Calvin Vanderlinde

DECLINED

Declined the call to serve as co-pastor of the Langley, BC Canadian Reformed Church:

Rev. J. Folkerts

of Faith URC of Telkwa, BC

Declined the call to the Free Reformed Church of Launceston, Tasmania:

Rev. R. Vermeulen

of Glanbrook, Ontario

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Regional Synod East and Classis Niagara Treasurer

Mr. Dave Van Amerongen

275 Main Street East, Apt. 408, Grimsby, ON L3M 5N8

CHURCH NEWS

giving him a cup to drink – that cup of curses – that cup of wrath – that cup foreshadowed in Numbers 5. No, he does not want to drink it. Why not? True, it is not a nice ceremony, but if he is innocent, won’t he be cleared of guilt?

He knows, however, that though he is innocent, the curses will yet enter into him causing his thigh to waste away and his abdomen to swell, as it were. Indeed, he will die childless! In the words of Isaiah 53:8, “By oppression and judgment he was taken away. *And who can speak of his descendants?*” Why? Because he came to drink the cup in our place!

Our cup of blessing

And why did he do that? So that we, in spite of our spiritual adultery, may receive from his hand the cup of blessing! The gospel of Christmas is marvellous. Christmas leads to the cross where the cup of curses was drained to the dregs once for all by Christ. And now each one of us, as a child of his, may lift up the cup of salvation and say: surely, my cup overflows (Ps 116 and 23)! Glory to God in the Highest!

Christmas in Deuteronomy

The Servant King

“ . . . be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses.”

Deuteronomy 17:15a



Ryan deJonge

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The Royal One

The gospel writers leave us with only one possible conclusion: when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, a king came into the world. Luke's record of the angel's announcement to Mary is itself sufficient to establish this claim: "The Lord God will give him the *throne* of his father *David*, and he will *reign* over the house of Jacob forever; his *kingdom* will never end" (Luke 1:33, emphasis added).

The royal pain

The title "King" would have meant different things to different people at the time of Jesus' birth. The preeminent King throughout the Roman world and including Judea was the foreign Emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus. Closer to home, Herod the Great held royal title over the regions of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, serving as a sort of vice-regent for the distant Augustus. But in the mind of the Jewish person there was another King who loomed large. In fact, it was the knowledge of this King that drove the jealous and insecure Herod to order the infanticide that was carried out in Bethlehem.

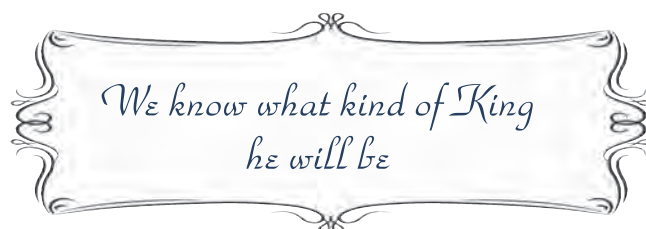
What could have possibly driven Herod to such use such extreme measures? Matthew references the prophecy of Micah 5:2, which speaks of a great ruler being born in Bethlehem. But the source of this prophecy itself can be traced back to the famous promise of God to David in 2 Samuel 7, where God promises that from David's line will come a King whose throne will last forever (2 Sam 7:13). Herod feared, all too rightly, that this Davidic King had now come.

The royal law

Surprisingly, however, it is not the narratives concerning David or even Saul that are the first to speak about a great King in Israel. Already in Deuteronomy, the fifth book of

the Torah, long before Israel received their first king, God through Moses laid down his law regarding a king.

These laws, given in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, covered three main criteria for the would-be king. First, the laws stipulated who the king must be. He must be the one that God chooses. Although the process was not laid out here, the people of God could expect that God would make his selection known, as he does, for example, in the cases of Saul and David. As well, the king is to be a native Israelite. Since Israel was the nation that God had called out from under the tyrannical rule of Pharaoh in Egypt, the people are not to choose a foreigner to rule over them.



Second, these laws covered what the King is not to do. The King is not to give free reign to his martial ambitions by acquiring horses for war or in any way depending on Egypt (a famous source for high quality steeds) for military security. He is to do the same with his marital ambitions. He is not to take many wives – as was the custom for rich and powerful men in that time and place – lest his heart be led astray. In addition, the King is to limit his monetary ambitions and avoid the temptations brought on by large accumulations of gold and silver.

Third, the King is to devote himself to the study of God's Word. He is to be a scholar-King, one who not only hears but also obeys all that God's Word commands. God's law will teach him the wisdom and humility necessary for such a task as his.

The message that emerges from these laws is that Israel's king is to be different than other kings. He is to be a servant-king, one who will lead his people in their service of the Lord. The Lord after all was the One who had rescued them from Egypt, protected them from their enemies, and delivered them to the Promised Land. He was by rights their true King. Israel's kings were vice-regents and subordinates whose primary role was to reinforce that God, the Lord, is King.

The royal farce

Long before royalty came to his people, the Lord revealed what true royalty looks like. In laying down these kingship laws, God gave them a standard. When David came, they could judge him to be a good king, though not a perfect one. By the end of Solomon's rule, it was clear where he had erred. Through successive generations, they could measure the depths to which the monarchy had sunk. At the time the angel comes to speak to Mary, it was clear that nothing of Israel's rulership resembled what God

laid down in his Word. The law of Deuteronomy 17:14-20 was an indictment against the royal farce that kingship had become in Israel.

The royal hope

But at the same time, this Word of the Lord also formed into the hearts of the faithful a picture of what true kingship looks like. It burned in them a desire for righteous leadership. It built in them a longing for the true servant-King, one who would lead the hearts of the people back to the Lord, one whose kingdom would never end.

When we hear the angel announcing the birth of a royal son to Mary, we know what kind of King he will be. He will be a true Israelite, like his brothers in every respect. He will cast off martial, marital, and monetary means of establishing his rule. He will embrace the way of obedience and devotion to God. He will be a servant-King. And his Kingship will last forever; not even death will overcome it. At long last, the true and righteous King is coming into the world!



*I will raise up your offspring after you,
who shall come from your body, and I will establish
his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name,
and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.
I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.*

2 Samuel 7:12-14

Graduation at Emmanuel Christian High School

On the evening of October 4, 2013, students, staff, family, and friends gathered at Lakeside Community Church in Guelph, ON, to witness and celebrate the graduation of the seventh, and largest ever, graduating class of the Emmanuel Christian High School.

Following the processional of the forty-four graduates, the Chairman of the Board, Mr. Andrew Wildeboer, opened the evening. After the singing of Psalm 108:1, 2, three passages of Scripture were read in preparation for the upcoming Graduation Address by Rev. D.G.J. Agema. These included Joshua 4:19-24, Colossians 2:6-8 and Hebrews 2:10-13. After giving thanks in prayer and asking for the Lord's blessing over the evening, Mr. Wildeboer officially welcomed all those present and, on behalf of the Board, extended his congratulations to all of the graduates.

Rev. Agema then took the stage to present his Graduation Address, entitled "Tradition?!" Rev. Agema challenged the students to do two things. First, based on the question mark following the title of "Tradition," he encouraged the students to question the traditions passed down to them from the previous generations, in order to find their own way. Second, based on the exclamation mark, he pointed out that by asking the question "why?" they will find what they want to maintain from the traditions passed down.

After the singing of Psalm 1:2, Mr. H. Nobel was given the opportunity to deliver his Principal's Address. He based his address on Psalm 104, where the psalmist speaks of God's marvellous creation and in his great joy in all he has made. He warned the students that they would have to face the prevailing idea in the broader world of education that there is no God or Creator. They might



Rev. Agema giving his keynote address

also encounter a second idea that God is a killjoy, wanting to ruin all that is pleasurable in their lives. He pointed out that God is actually the creator of happiness. God stretched out the heavens and created all the wonders of the world. Mr. Nobel encouraged the students to marvel at creation and not to take it for granted. And they should not to stop there, but move from marvelling at creation to glorifying the Creator. He concluded his address by quoting from one of the final verses of Psalm 104, "I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live."

Mr. Wildeboer and Mr. Nobel then presented the diplomas to the Graduates, after which Psalm 84:1, 6 was sung.



44 graduates!

Mr. A. Kingma and Mr. T. Hopman then did the Presentation of Awards. One of the new awards this year was the L. Martin Toet Memorial Athletic Scholarship presented by Mrs. Erica Toet and the Toet family in memory of the late Mr. Marty Toet who had been with the Emmanuel Christian School since the beginning, until he was taken home by the Lord on April 6, 2013.

Mr. Toet was also remembered on behalf of the students by Miss Sophia Vandersluis in her Valedictorian Address, where she stated that he had graduated to heavenly glory. She also recounted memorable events among the students throughout the years, including their experiences with teachers, courses, special events, sports, and friendships. She thanked the principal, Mr. Nobel, for instilling them with Godly wisdom. She concluded by referring to Romans 12:2, where we read, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will."

We then sang from Hymn 85:2, 3 and Rev. Agema closed the evening in prayer, asking for God's blessing over the Graduates and giving thanks for the many blessings received. Opportunity was then given for family and friends to enjoy refreshments and to extend their personal congratulations to the graduates.

Emmanuel Award List



Honours Achievement Award:

Hannah Agema, Colin Bos, Leah Flach, Esther Hoeksema, Christina Hutten, Hannah Jongsma, Joe Jonker, Megan Jonker, Benieta Kruizenga, Elana Landman, Sarah Medemblik, Sarah Nienhuis, Riley Nijenhuis, Deanne Vanderloo, Sophia Vandersluis, Morgan VanLeeuwen, Samantha VanVeen, Levi VanWeerden, Matthew Westrik

Post Farm Structures Award

John Nobel

Royal LePage RCR Realty Business Excellence Award

Esther Hoeksema

L. Martin Toet Memorial Athletics Scholarship:

Danielle Sikkema

Governor General's Academic Medal:

Elana Landman

Jordan Hutchinson Memorial Academic Proficiency Award:

Elana Landman

Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award:

Esther Hoeksema

Eagle's Emblem Award:

Colin Bos, Sarah Medemblik, Sarah Nienhuis, John Nobel, Danielle Sikkema

Citizenship Award:

Kayla Kottelenberg

Stewardship Award:

Jocelyn Vanderwoerd and Elana Landman

Keynote Address

Tradition?!



Douwe Agema

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Printed below is a revision of the keynote address that Rev. Agema delivered to the Grade 12 Graduates of Emmanuel Christian high School on October 5, 2013

Dear Graduands,

Traditions! What comes to mind when you hear the word? Does it remind you of boring, stuffy old things or valuable meaningful practices? Whatever you think of them, many things you do are formed by tradition. Traditions may determine things you do at home, at school, or at work. Take, for example, an evening like this one, it is filled with many traditions. Why do you wear those gowns?

The word *tradition* has as its root the idea that something is handed over. As in a relay race where you hand over the baton to the next runner, so in tradition certain things are handed over from one generation to the next. The word is therefore closely related to teaching. Traditions tell us that we are not the first ones to do something. Others have done it before us.

I have placed a question mark and an exclamation mark behind the word *tradition*. Some people love to put a question mark behind every tradition: we should have, they say, the freedom to make our own decisions; only then are we authentic. Others put an exclamation mark behind traditions. You cannot change them! Traditions give them a sense of security. Do I seek a middle road by having both, a question mark and an exclamation mark? No. I use the question mark to indicate that it is indeed good to ask, "Why?" but I added the exclamation mark to show that the lesson we learn from asking this question makes the tradition valuable.

No, I am not talking about the traditions of this ceremony. I use the word *tradition* as referring to the teaching you have received. What has been handed over to you? You have received Reformed education. You have

been trained in the Reformed tradition. Why? Why did your parents send you to a Canadian Reformed high school? After all, it was and is a choice that had many consequences for them (just think of the financial aspect) and for you (every day you had to travel farther). Why this choice? And will you do it as well when, the Lord willing, you have children? Will you continue the tradition?

I ask this because you and I have arrived at a milestone in our lives when it comes to Reformed education. You have completed all these years of training and now you move on. Is it clear to you why this "baton" was given to you and will you pass it on? I also ask the question because I too have arrived at a milestone. This is the last time I can deliver a graduation speech as a parent. Our youngest is graduating. Many years we have been involved in and benefited from Reformed education.

Why did we do this? As I ask the question I look back in my family. My grandfather was a principal of what was then called a School with the Bible. This was soon after the Reformed people in The Netherlands had finally received the freedom to have their own schools. He went through the nineteen thirties! Those were not easy times. My father was a principal as well. That was after the Liberation of 1944. The question he was faced with was: "What impact did the events in the church have on Reformed education?"

I grew up in the Reformed tradition. Not only do I look back two generations, but I also look ahead. As our youngest daughter is graduating, our oldest grandson has started Kindergarten in the Maranatha School of Fergus. Five generations involved in Reformed education. Tradition? Yes, it has been handed over to us by previous generations, and we hand it over now too, but we need to be willing to think about this tradition and be able to answer the question "Why?" so that together we can also put an exclamation mark behind it.

In order to place that exclamation mark, I want to look at three texts. They show that the tradition of Reformed education has to be 1. Living, 2. Christian, 3. Communal.

Living

The first text is Joshua 4:20-24. The people of Israel are instructed to make a monument of stones; a tradition is started there. Stones will outlast human beings, so generations to come will have reason to talk about these stones. "Father, why are they there?" The answer is clear: "Because this is the place where Israel went through the Jordan." However, note that in the explanation by the father, the child is made a part of what happened in the past. "The LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over." You? This discussion between father and child may be 200 years later, but it is still: you crossed over. This father has to make the child a part of the tradition. It is a living tradition, and has to be kept alive. It is the work of your God.

Reformed traditions are important, but we have to explain what their meanings are. Each generation has to make them their own again and has to understand why we do these things. It has to be a living tradition; otherwise, we end up in *traditionalism*. Otherwise, you preserve the outward shell, but the inside is hollow. You were taught at a Canadian Reformed school, a most wonderful tradition, but it has to be a living tradition. I urge you to keep thinking about it. I challenge you to make the tradition your own, so that you will be able to explain it to your children. Gradually, you know why this tradition is to be living? Because the LORD your God is the living God. He made you his own, not through the water of the Jordan, but by his blood. That is why we can keep this tradition alive.

Christian

This brings us to text number 2, Colossians 2:6-8. Paul writes: "Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him." This is followed by a warning not to be taken captive through hollow and deceptive wisdom. That addition shows the importance of this text for teaching. Reformed teaching aims to help you discern lest you be taken captive by hollow and deceptive thinking. "Just as

you received Christ Jesus." How did the Colossians receive Jesus Christ? As Lord. What does that mean? Everything is governed by him. In him all things hold together (see Col 1:17). In order to teach discerning wisdom, Christ has to be in the centre. Every subject area is to be subject to the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is yet another element. The Lord, whom you have to obey in all areas of life, is the Lord you know as your Head in the church (see Col 1:18). When you were baptized, not only did the LORD say, "You are mine;" your parents also pledged to train you in the doctrine of Christ, in the Christian faith, as it is summarized by the church. Thus we have Canadian Reformed schools, tying home, school, and church together, so that you can continue in the Christian tradition, and be equipped to fulfil your task as prophet, priest, and king. If we lose this living connection with Christ, who as the Lord of the church rules over everything (Eph 1:22), Reformed education has lost its meaning.

Communal

Text number 3 is from Hebrews 2:13b. I chose that text because I want to stress that covenantal education is part of the covenant community. I believe that this is an aspect we need to be reminded of in our situation.

But isn't covenantal education about parents and children? Sure, that is indeed an important part of covenantal education, but there is more to it. For baptism is not only a sign and seal which shows that you are part of the covenant, that you belong to Christ, it also shows that you were incorporated into the church. When the Heidelberg Catechism asks in Lord's Day 27, "Should infants too be baptized?" Then the answer is, "Yes, they as well as adults belong to God's covenant and congregation." Note the connection between God's covenant and congregation. You with your parents belong to God's covenant community. It is in that community that you received the sign of the covenant.

I could have chosen many texts which show this communal aspect but I chose Hebrews 2 because of an address by Dr. Jelle Faber at the opening of Guido de Bres High School in 1975. Let's start with Hebrews 2: 13b. We read there: "And again he says, Here am I and the children

God has given me.” Who is the “I”? That is Christ. Christ is not ashamed to call sinful humans; he is not ashamed to call you and me his brothers and sisters. The letter to the Hebrews, however, quotes from Isaiah 8. There we read: “Here am I, and the children the LORD has given me.” Isaiah had two sons, both had very strange names. It is even possible that the word “children” refers here to Isaiah’s students (see 8:16). Whatever the case, the point is this: Christ takes over the words of Isaiah. That means Christ puts his arms around these children or students of Isaiah and says: “Here am I and the children God has given me.” He claims these children as his. Christ puts his arms around you, and all our children and says: “Father, here am I and the children you have given me.” Because Christ does this, we should do so as well.

The children born in the God’s covenant belong to the congregation. And for this reason covenantal education takes place within this community, is supported by the community, and is aimed at helping you function in this community. It involves us all: parents, single members, empty nesters, seniors, childless couples. Together we give it our support. If we lose this communal aspect, we endanger the vitality of Reformed education.

Tradition? Graduates, do not be afraid to ask “Why?” See the wonderful answer we receive. Place the exclamation mark. Make it your own and in due time, hand over the baton. Yes, let’s together place an exclamation mark, not because of what you or we have done or can do. It is an exclamation mark that is based on the immeasurable covenant faithfulness of our God and Father.

Thank you.



From the Publisher

But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built!

2 Chronicles 6:18

When Solomon prayed for God's presence in the temple, he acknowledged that God remained sovereign and infinite over his creation, and that a mere temple could not contain him.

It becomes more and more apparent that our Western culture nevertheless seeks to contain God. His presence is increasingly considered an inconvenience or threat. Our society desires to relegate God and his Word to the margins of life, to private personal beliefs that do not impose on others. As a result Christians see our freedom to serve him and witness of him in the home, church, school, and in the public square eroded and sometimes even directly attacked. Yet God cannot be contained or controlled. Rather, he is in control of all things for his glory and the benefit of his chosen people. What comfort it is to know that our God is infinite in power and glory.

Yet, he also brought himself near his people. He did indeed dwell with man on the earth, answering Solomon's prayer with fire from heaven, and filling the temple with his glory.

He dwelt with man on earth in the person of Jesus Christ when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Now he dwells with us in the person of the Holy Spirit, making our bodies his temple. May his personal presence also be cause for much comfort and joy.

Thank You

We may look back on another volume of *Clarion* in which we have been reminded of God's nearness. Our editor and co-editors – Dr. J. Visscher, Rev. P. H. Holtvliuwer, Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. K. Stam, and Dr. C. Van Dam – have supplied a rich variety of articles for our edification and enjoyment. Our copy manager, Mrs. Laura Veenendaal, has been busy behind the scenes to co-ordinate content on a regular and punctual basis. It is a pleasure to work with you all. Thank you!

We are grateful to Rev. R. Bredenhof, Mr. Arthur Kingma, and Mrs. Corrine Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms, coordinators of the *Treasures New and Old*, *Education Matters*, and *Ray of Sunshine* columns, and to the writers of these features. Thank you also to regular contributors Rev. W. Bredenhof, Dr. A. de Visser, and Dr. G. Van Popta.

All our faithful subscribers and advertisers make it possible to continue to publish *Clarion*. We thank you heartily, and pray that also in this way the Word of God continues to be central in our families and churches.

Greetings

In closing, we send you our greetings and best wishes for the coming year. Let us give thanks for the nearness of our God, and look forward with eager longing to the new heaven and the new earth, he will fulfill this promise: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev. 21:3).

W.J. Gortemaker

Guido De Bres Christian High School, Hamilton, Ontario

We were blessed with another beautiful fall day on September 28, 2013, the day the graduating class of 2013 celebrated the completion of a chapter in their lives. The graduates began their commencement day at the Guido gymnasium. The gym was filled with students eager to catch up with one another and greet their teachers after a summer gone by. Students, teachers, and parents enjoyed a delicious lunch and the presentations of the sports awards from the 2012-2013 year. Then the grads and their families made their way over to Hamilton Place for the official ceremony.

The audience of family and friends rose as the 104 graduands entered the Great Hall while Mr. Tim Nijenhuis played the processional, *An Important Event*. The audience joined the graduates in singing Psalm 68, extolling our God's power and glory.

Mr. J. VanderHoeven, on behalf of the board, opened the ceremony by exhorting the graduands to continue to be image-bearers of our Lord Jesus in their new situation.

Our principal, Mr. Roger Vanoostveen, spoke to the audience about running a race. He reminded us of the words of Hebrews 12:1-2, "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us," and encouraged the graduands to press on in their journey, for their work is not done. Mr. Vanoostveen left the graduates with this question, "What are you going to do with the training you have received?" He also introduced Rev. Bill DeJong, who gave his message after a beautiful rendition of *Amazing Love* by Guido students past and present.

Pastor Bill's message, entitled "A Person to Die For," taught us that adolescents are searching for someone or something to die for; and to be passionate about. He

asked us the question, "Who is to die for?" and reminded us that Jesus answered it, "You are." Rev. DeJong encouraged the graduates and the audience to surrender their lives to Christ by responding that He is the One to die for. We must die to our sinful nature, and in so doing, deny ourselves and follow Christ. He ended with an exhortation, "Embrace the Saviour who died for you, and embrace the summons to die for Him." The audience responded to this message by singing Psalm 119: *How blest are those who with determination, wholeheartedly seek him by night and day, and look to him for guidance and salvation.*

Main speaker,
Pastor Bill DeJong





After this song the graduates filed up on stage to receive their Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Once assembled on stage and after a rousing ovation, the same Guido students led us in a beautiful medley of *10,000 Reasons* (Matt Redman) and *Psalm 104*. Once seated many of the grads were called up again on stage to receive scholarships, participation awards, volunteer awards, the Governor General's bronze medallion, and Student of the Year.

After those various awards were presented the valedictory address was given by Nathan Hutten. He began with stating how incredibly blessed the class of 2013 is to be able to graduate from Guido. He reminisced about funny moments and memories made. He described how everything they learned was put into a Christian context, so that these graduates have a solid foundation on which to move forward.

Then the audience was treated to another musical selection, the *Hymn of St. Patrick*. We also sang *In Christ Alone* together. Mr. VanAndel, a parent of one of the grads came forward to close the ceremony in prayer. The audience rose after the prayer for the singing of our National Anthem, followed by the recessional *Pomp and Circumstance* by Edward Elgar. Congratulations graduating class of 2013!



2013 Award List

The Harry Aasman and George DeBoer Memorial Scholarships

Reuben Douma
Alexander Eikelboom
Hannah Ludwig
Sean Stel
Rebecca Vis



The Guido de Brès Proficiency Scholarships

Heidi Breukelman	Jacob Sloots
Arjaan de Visser	Colin VanDam
Maria Kampen	Jennifer VanDyk
Evan Kieft	Denise VanSydenborgh
Stefanie Kieft	Reuben Vermeulen
Celine Knol	Mallory Walters
Spencer Revill	

The Governor General's Bronze Medal

Sean Stel

The Guido de Brès Participation Award

Calvin DeJong
Rachelle DeJong
Celine Knol
Megan Schuurman
Justin Tenhage

The Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award for Students

Andrew Kelly

The Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award

Arjaan de Visser

Ontario Secondary School Diplomas



Jessalyn Hildy Alkema
Denise Nadine Bartels
Shane William Bethlehem
Jamien Boer
Miranda Grace Bontekoe
Julia Theresa Bos
Steven Leendart Bos
Kaela Renee Bosch
Janita Theresa Bouwman
Heidi Elizabeth Breukelman
Justin Jan Breukelman
Todd Christopher Breukelman
Tyler Henry Breukelman
Heather Ashley Buist
Michael William Buist
Jonathan Maynard Dallinga
Crystal Ann DeBoer
Stacey Lynn DeBoer
Stephanie Joanne DeBoer
Mark William DeHaan
Brendan James DeJong
Calvin Albert DeJong
Rachelle Anna DeJong
Adriaan Jonathan de Visser
Emily Larissa Dokter
Reuben Aaron Douma
Alexander Eikelboom
Leah Anne Elgersma
Bradley Keith Elzinga
Kaleb Edward Feenstra
Miranda Lynn Feenstra
Anna Rae Groenwold
Nadia Lynn Groenwold
Tyler Kevin John Haining
Jordan Alexander Harink

Harmony Natasha Heemskerk
Kristina Marie Heemskerk
Sydney Justine Heeringa
Kayley Diane Hoeksema
Kelvin John Hofsink
Carrie Bailey Hordyk
Simon David Hordyk
Nathan Timothy Hutten
Stephen Benjamin Jager
Vanessa Leanne Jansema
Bradley Peter Joosse
Maria Laurelle Kampen
Andrew Kenneth Kelly
Evan Albert Kieft
Stefanie Margret Kieft
Peter John Knecht
Celine Angelique Knol
Amanda Yvonne Krikke
Spencer Douglas Krikke
Mitchell Albert Ligtenberg
Hannah Nicole Ludwig
Tyler John Mans
Anthony Kameel Mansour
Dawn Elise Muis
Luke William Nordeman
Nicole Alexandra Nordeman
Kristen Nicole Oosterhoff
Tianna Sara Ostermeier
Samuel Wesley Plantinga
Tyler John Franklin Post
Joshua Garret Ravensbergen
James Dennis Leendert Redwood
Connor Mitchell Reinink
Spencer Daniel Revill
Bailey Dane Riesebosch

Cassandra Evelyn Rose Riley
Austin John Milton Schulenberg
Scott Daniel Schulenberg
James Thomas Schutten
Megan Ashley Schuurman
Fraser Mitchell Slaa
Harm Jacob Sloots
Davis Daniel Robert Spoelstra
Sean Albert Stel
Justin Myles Tenhage
Kaileigh Diana VanAmerongen
Ryan Cornelius VanAndel
Colin Matthew VanDam
Bryan Matthew VanDasselaar
Allison Danielle Vandenbos
Kimberly Ruth Vandenbos
Nicole Joanna Vandenbos
Nicole Chantelle VanderBruggen
Nathan Phillip VanderLaan
Laurissa Rachelle VanderVelde
Jennifer Karen VanDyk
Andries Anton VanEs
Daniel VanEs
Jean Patricia Helen VanHuisstede
Denise Eva VanSydenborgh
Zackary Christopher VanVeen
Reuben Christopher Vermeulen
David Matthew Vis
Rebecca Danielle Vis
Mallory Elizabeth Walters
Daniel Mark Wanders
Rachel Melissa Werkman
Luke Kenneth Wieske
Aaron Abraham Williams
AnneMarie Diamond Yeboah

League Day 2013

Following Christ

Dianne Westrik

On a beautiful, sunny autumn day in October, 356 sisters from Ontario and beyond gathered together for the fifty-second Women's League Day. The meeting took place at the Grand Olympia in Stoney Creek. The impressive hall soon filled with the bustle of many women finding a place to sit, settling in, and getting in line to have a coffee and some breakfast fare, all the while chatting with others sharing the line. League President, Jane Oosterhoff opened the meeting at 10 am with singing and prayer. She read from Mark 8:27-38.

Welcomes, introductions, and announcements were made. The Board was introduced, and the newly elected President of the League board was announced: Mrs. Wendy Koster from Fergus North. The board of the *New Horizon* magazine were asked to stand, and it was noted that the magazine is now an electronic publication. Though experiencing some delays and initial struggles, the magazine hopes to become more regularly distributed, with the cooperation of all. It helps a great deal to have current contact information from each society (horizon@gmail.com). A report from ILPB (www.ilpb.ca) was received, and it was noted that ILPB had books available for sale at the book table. We rose to sing the League theme song. Again we opened the Word, and read 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1. Our president then introduced our guest, Dr. Arjan de Visser, and welcomed him to present the beautiful topic, one that is often neglected in our times, "Following Christ."

Using a handout to guide us through his presentation, Dr. de Visser demonstrated how fully biblical it is to follow Christ. He directed our attention to Ephesians 5:1, as well as many other scripture texts. We are called to be imitators of the Son of God. This puts an important perspective on our Christian life.

Dr. de Visser presented three foundational beliefs and then four ways to follow Christ. Foundationally, we must have a spirit of sonship (Rom 8:15-17), we must have union with Christ (John 14:20 and John 15:5), and we must become more Christ like (Rom 8:29 and 2 Cor 3:18).

The four ways to follow Christ were then explored under Scripture's directive. Deny yourself and bear your cross (Mark 8:34) – which means to leave behind self-centred ambitions and seek the glory of Christ. Let go of the worldly urge to max out this life, and instead focus on Christ. The world tells us we have the right to enjoy the indulgences and luxuries of life. Following Christ, on the other hand, is costly. It calls for much sacrifice and serving God instead of our own interests.

The next is to imitate Christ (1 Cor 11:1). Do not cause others to stumble, but rather become an example as you follow the example of Christ. 1 Peter 2:21 tells slaves to submit to their masters, whether they are kind or harsh.



**League President,
Jane Oosterhoff**



**Jessica
VanSydenborgh**



**Dr.
Arjan
de Visser**

If you suffer for doing good, to this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. John 13 sees Jesus washing his disciples' feet, an example that we should do likewise. Jesus came to serve, help the poor and needy, show compassion. If we want to know how to follow Christ, we must study the life of Christ, to know and imitate him.

We must also follow godly examples and serve as a godly example to others. Paul says in Philippians 3:17 "Join with others in following my example." Take note of those who live according to the pattern Christ gave and follow them. Seek out those who have Christlikeness. Make it your aim to be a godly example for someone else (1 Thess 1:6, 7 and 1 Tim 4). Older women (Titus 2) and all women, make it your goal to serve as godly examples for your children, church friends, younger women; and encourage younger women to follow Christ.

Finally, look forward to being with Christ and sharing in his glory (John 12:23-26). The Father will honour the one who serves the Son. If we are children then we are heirs (Rom 8:17). There is so much to enjoy in our affluent world, but it is not to be compared to the inheritance that is coming. Even the good things here cannot compare to the glorious future we await. Have we become too superficial, too focused on this life? Have we forgotten about following Christ? Do we worry about missing out on something? We won't miss out on anything. Just follow Christ, and you will receive his rich, incomparable inheritance (1 Cor 2 and Eph 2). It is the most important destination we have before us.

Time was left for discussions at the individual tables, and then Dr. de Visser addressed some of the questions brought forward. Our guest speaker was thanked for his insights and willingness to share time with the ladies on the topic of following Christ.

A delicious hot buffet lunch was next on the agenda. There was a reminder to sign the cards for the missionaries' wives. A collection for CRWRF (\$2,193.60) took place. Time for socializing allowed sisters to get reacquainted, to meet for the first time, and to scan the ILPB table for good study material.

The afternoon session began with the singing of O Canada together. We were then entertained by the "Musical Housewives" orchestra, under the capable leadership of Sharon VanSydenborgh. The Grassie ladies treated us to a familiar rendition of Movement Number 5, entitled "Hooked on Tchaikovsky" – a medley of music used in "The Nutcracker." After rousing applause, and the shouts of "encore," we were graced with a repeat performance.

The final session of the day held the theme, "Contentment in Christ: My Soul finds Rest in God Alone," presented by Grassie member, Jessica VanSydenborgh. Looking first at Psalm 62, the beautiful, simple confession "He alone is my rock and salvation, set the tone for the topic of contentment," Jessica took us through the scene in Paradise, then looked at the tenth commandment, and finally the antidote for discontentment. Pour out your heart before the Lord, and lay before him what is on your heart, and he will give you rest. He has freed us, so do not become a slave to cravings. We have a strong and loving God and we know that he is sovereign, so we are able to give our whole life, including our possessions, over to him. We have everything in Christ.

Again, discussions took place at each table, this time on the topic of contentment, also addressing discontentment. Since the hosting society scattered us by table numbers, our seating was rearranged and there were different groups at each table. This gave an opportunity to meet other sisters and gain new insights.

The president expressed thanks to all involved in organizing League Day: the Grassie ladies, the speakers, and the servers.

Mrs. Jane Oosterhoff was then thanked for her six years as League president and the day was closed with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Inside the Acts of Synod Carman



Peter H. Holtvluwer

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A funny thing happened to me while I was at General Synod Carman this past May. The good Lord saw fit to have me chosen as the clerk! Imagine my surprise! For those who may not know, the clerk is responsible to record all the decisions of the synod and, following synod, to see that they are published. As you can guess, this involves many pain-staking hours of reviewing the *Acts* for typographical errors, ensuring they are properly formatted, collecting the appendices, setting up an index and a table of contents. If you ask me, we should hire a secretary for this task and not detain a minister whose calling is to preach, teach and visit his flock – but alas, I digress. We'll save that discussion for another time, DV!

Needless to say, by the end of the process (October, 2013!), I became intimately acquainted with those synod decisions. And so it was that my fellow co-editors at *Clarion* assigned me the task (don't you just love democracy?) of giving you, our readers, a short introduction to the *Acts*, to whet your appetite.

As I recently wrote, I hope that all communicant members will read the *Acts* (see *Clarion*, Vol. 62, No. 22 for reasons why). They are available electronically at www.canrc.org or you may obtain a hard copy from your local consistory. Let's remember that general synod is a meeting of the churches through their chosen delegates (and not, as some might imagine, a bunch of power-brokers who make decisions which are imposed on the churches). These are decisions of the churches collectively – and they need to be evaluated by the churches in light of Scripture, Confession, and the Church Order. This evaluation begins with you, with each individual confessing member. My purpose now is to interest you in doing this and help you navigate the issues of greatest relevance to local church life.

Bible translation

Every Sunday most of us have been hearing the NIV (1984 version) from the pulpits – that is likely to change in many congregations. It has been the “recommended” translation since 1995 while the RSV, NKJV, NASB and, since 2007, the ESV were permitted for use as “approved” translations. Synod Carman was faced with the reality that the NIV84 is no longer commercially available and its rights could not be purchased. It has been replaced with the NIV2011 which our Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) flagged for doctrinal concerns. Instead, the CBT's recommendation was to select the ESV as the new “recommended” translation while still permitting the use of the NIV84 (i.e. while supplies last). Synod adopted this recommendation (and did not approve the use of NIV2011 in the churches). Thus, your congregation may well be considering a switch to the ESV. To read the arguments for and against the NIV2011 as well as the ESV, plus the rest of the story, see Article 97.

Book of Praise

Very soon we will be receiving a new, finalized, revised *Book of Praise*. Yes, that means you will need to purchase another *Book of Praise* only three years after the current one in use (the Authorized Provisional Version of 2010) but this one should be around a good, long while. After much work done by the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* (SCBP), and much input from the churches, three major things were accomplished by Synod Carman in this area: 1) The psalm lyrics/rhymings were fine-tuned and finished; 2) The hymn selection and notations were revised and concluded; 3) The prose section will use the ESV whenever Scripture is quoted. All in all, the percentage change from the APV will not be great (compared to that from the 1984 *Book of Praise* to the APV), but to be singing and reading in

step with the congregation, you'll definitely need to acquire the new version.

If these changes or their frequency have been a source of concern for you, you may be relieved to know that Synod also decided to adopt a different way of considering and deciding upon any such changes in the future. The SCBP no longer has the mandate to receive or make proposals of that nature. Instead, whether it's adding new hymns (or deleting existing ones), changes to Psalm lyrics (or tunes), alterations to the confessions, liturgical forms, or the Church Order, individuals must approach their consistory with suggestions and consistory, if it agrees, must approach the neighbouring churches at classis. Classis, if it believes the changes to be valid, beneficial, and timely, will then overture regional synod and, if it agrees, the same will overture the following general synod. Synod Carman decided that the decision to add/change songs is a matter of wisdom and not a matter of principle (as in: God does not demand that new songs be added on a regular basis but nor does he prohibit it). Thus, there will be a process of consensus-building in and among the churches before new changes are undertaken in future. To explore the details, see Article 173 for starters and especially Article 125 for the new mandate itself.

Women's voting

Some of us and our councils may be facing a very delicate and awkward situation if our local church decided after Synod Burlington 2010 to allow the communicant sisters to vote for office bearers. Synod Carman overturned Synod Burlington's decision (i.e. to leave it in the freedom of the local church) and decided, "That the churches should return to the voting practice as it officially was before 2010, namely, male communicant members only voting" (*Acts*, Art. 110). This is no easy issue. Nor can it be ignored. Every church has agreed (by adopting the Church Order) to "honour" and accept the decisions of the broader assemblies as settled and binding unless they are proved to be in conflict with Scripture or the Church Order (Art. 31, CO; see also Art. 44). Thus, a local church must either abide by the decision or appeal it to the next general synod. The arguments for both positions are presented at length in the *Acts of Synod Burlington 2010* (Art. 175 and 176) with some further points in the *Acts of Synod Carman 2013*, Article 110. It will be good not only to become informed on this issue but to pray the Lord to grant wisdom and peace among the churches on this sensitive matter.

CRTS and CNSF

A very happy and harmonious decision of Synod 2013 which is received as a blessing from God was to approve the recommendation of the Board of Governors of our Seminary to appoint a fifth full-time professor. This is not only a first for our Seminary, but a welcome expansion of the teaching staff with the goal of giving our students of theology even better and more concentrated training in those areas that once were handled by one man. Who is this prof? What will he teach? Read about it in Articles 11 and 13.

Related to the Seminary is the Committee for Needy Students Fund which was centralized by Synod Burlington 2010 (*Acts*, Art. 91). This Committee, being relatively new, is understandably still on a sharp learning curve on how to help the students who seek financial aid (as per Article 20, Church Order). Synod Carman made it abundantly clear that while the churches wish the students to act responsibly in seeking assistance, the Committee is not to use a system of loans to enforce this. The particulars can be found in Article 90.

NAPARC

Some of our members and consistories have wondered what exactly our relationship is with the other churches in NAPARC. As a federation, we have been members of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council since 2008. There are, at the moment, twelve other member churches – are we automatically in ecclesiastical fellowship with them? Can one of our members ask for and receive an attestation to another NAPARC church just as we do when moving and joining a local URCNA or a sister church in Australia (for example)? By joining NAPARC, have we automatically concluded that all the member churches are true and faithful? The answers of Synod Carman may surprise you – check them out in Article 77.

Dutch sister churches

One of the saddest things Synod Carman had to deal with was the report on our Dutch sister churches, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (RCN). As a federation, we have our roots in these churches and many of us still have relatives there. For years already, our synods have raised red flags of concern over various doctrinal and practical matters coming to light in the RCN. Synod Carman took up the concerns of

our specially-appointed sub-committee which carefully investigated particular issues as mandated by Synod Burlington 2010. In the end, our synod had the somber but Christian duty to write an official letter admonishing our Dutch sister churches and calling them to turn back to the pathway of obedience to the Lord.

Synod decided to maintain “at this time” a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship but the writing is on the wall: if there is no substantive change back to the Reformed way by the time of Synod Dunnville 2016, we may have no other choice than to terminate our relationship with the RCN. This is a weighty matter for us as churches and for many of us personally. Even if we have no personal connection with Holland, their evident deformation should be a wake-up call to us: what are the dangers here? Are we Canadian Reformed believers at similar risk? How can we keep ourselves faithful and not fall into these traps? To begin considering such important questions and for all the issues at stake, see Article 148 and for the letter of admonition see Article 165. Please remember to pray for our Dutch brothers and sisters.

URCNA and RPCNA

Most of the rest of our ecumenical relationships stayed the same, which is reason for thankfulness on the whole. Things with the URCNA have not progressed as we had once hoped but nor have they fallen off altogether – there is still some life in the process. To see where things are at, begin with Article 129.

A relationship and discussion that should have the attention of all of us is that of the RPCNA. The RPCNA has extended the offer to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship but one of the stumbling blocks has been their acceptance of the practice of ordaining women to the office of deacon. They wrote a letter to Synod Carman accompanied by a detailed explanation out of Scripture defending their view (see the CCCNA Report to Synod 2013 at www.canrc.org under the tab, “Assemblies” [click on the appropriate synod]; Appendices 1-3, p.27-58) to which our Committee has been mandated to give a reply. The issue of women in ecclesiastical office is a pressure-point in our times which we are bound to feel sooner or later in our own churches (recall the CRC’s acceptance of it and now the RCN is considering the same).

There are big questions here: is the office of deacon one of authority? Is ordination to a public office in the church open to the sisters even if the deacons do not participate

in the government of the church? How does our own confession in Article 30 of the Belgic Confession fit into the discussion? Let’s read-up and become alert (see *Acts*, Article 76), also to the way in which our CCCNA will answer this letter. May the Lord give them wisdom.

Synod electronified

In a world of tweets and posts, emails and texts, it was only a matter of time before our broadest assembly joined the trend toward electronic communication. Synod Carman decided that submissions to general synod should no longer come in the form of thirty paper copies but instead, “in digital format, and five paper copies.” This should make it easier and, hopefully, less expensive, for everyone corresponding with the next synod. In particular, the next convening church should find it more convenient to organize and mail out the material to the delegates. The church at Dunnville will be the guinea pig but I suspect they will appreciate not having to deal with thirty piles of paper-work and mailing out reams of sheets and binders! Delegates to the last two synods received the equivalent of two three-inch binders full of material – plus the reports to synod! For the rest of the changes to synod guidelines, see Article 176 and Appendix 22.

Would you like to research the decisions of past synods? Interested in reports on particular issues to synods of the past but can’t find a copy? Have issues like women’s voting or women deacons or new hymns or Bible translation come up in the past? In the near future you will be able to research all the Acts of past synods plus all the reports to those synods! Our Committee for the Official Website has been mandated to place all these older documents into electronic format and place them on our federation website (see Art. 92). It may take until 2016 to complete this project (hopefully sooner though), but already now there are a good number of Acts plus reports on the site – check it out!

Conclusion

Well, there you have it – a primer to the decisions of our most recent synod. Take a hot-chocolate, find a comfy chair, and make the *Acts of Synod Carman* part of your winter-reading. It’s more interesting than you might think – and will give you more things to pray about, both in thanksgiving and in intercession.

David's Prayer before the Congregation

David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly



George van Popta

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is minister of the
Jubilee Canadian
Reformed Church at
Ottawa, Ontario
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1. Praise be to you, O LORD, our God and King,
2. To you, O LORD, be - longs the vic - to - ry,
3. Hon - our and rich - es come from you a - lone
4. You, LORD, hold strength and pow - er in your hand

for you cre - at - ed all and eve - ry thing.
the might and glo - ry, and the maj - es - ty.
for you are seat - ed on the heav'n - ly throne.
and you ex - alt the peo - ple of the land.

You are the God of fa - ther Is - ra - el.
Our shout of praise from earth to heav - en soars
Yours is the king - dom; you are o - ver all.
Now, God, we thank and praise your glo - rious name

For - ev - er - more will we your prais - es tell.
for eve - ry - thing in heav'n and earth is yours.
We are your sub - jects who be - fore you fall.
for it is splen - did, age to age the same.

Text: I Chronicles 29: 10-13; vers. George Ph. van Popta, © 2012
Tune: Edward John Hopkins, 1869

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Walton's World



John Smith

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John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011)

**Additional Information: 214 pages
ISBN-13: 978-1-57506-216-7**

John Walton is a professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College in Illinois and a well-known biblical scholar. He is the author and editor of a number of commentaries and monographs on various Old Testament subjects. He has paid particular attention to the thought world, or “cognitive environment” as he calls it, of the Ancient Near East. He is also a member of the BioLogos Forum and lectures widely on the topic of origins. This book is a follow-up to a more popular work that he published in 2009, called *The Lost World of Genesis One*.

Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology is the product of more than twenty years of teaching that culminated in one eureka moment: in one of his classes Walton asked the students, “Why did God call the light ‘Day’? Why not simply call it ‘Light’?” The answer, he realized, was that God did not create light in the sense that he called it into being, but in the sense that he created the function of time (vii). That is to say, “Let there be light” means “Let there be a regular period of time when it’s light out.” To create does not mean to bring *matter* into existence but to initiate and organize the *functions* of the cosmos. In other words, Genesis 1 does not present a material, but a functional, cosmology, which in turn makes the biblical account much more similar to other creation accounts of the Ancient Near East than scholars had previously thought. It used to be assumed, writes Walton, that in other accounts the gods were “merely organizing and ordering creation, while in Genesis 1 God was actually making something – true creation as it were. This no longer appeared to be a valid distinction” (vii–viii). Rather, questions of material origins reflect a modern

concern that is best set aside if one wants to understand Genesis 1 in its original setting. In short, Walton defends the following twofold thesis:

I contend that Genesis 1 never was an account of material origins but that, as in the rest of the ancient world, the focus of the creation accounts was to order the cosmos by initiating functions. I further contend that the cosmology of Genesis 1 is founded on the premise that the cosmos should be understood in temple terms (ix).

By the latter thesis Walton means that the world of Genesis 1 is portrayed as a temple construction. To be clear, Walton does not argue that Genesis 1 is no different from other ancient creation stories: “Far from being a borrowed text, Genesis 1 offers a unique theology, even while it speaks from the platform of its contemporary cognitive environment” (ix).

What follows is a book of five chapters. In the first three, Walton works out the concept of functional cosmology. He interacts with recent scholarship on the topic and provides an overview of the various creation accounts of the Ancient Near East to illustrate their functional view of the world and their portrayal of the cosmos as a temple structure. In the last three chapters he provides a fresh study of Genesis 1 and draws conclusions on the elements which Genesis 1 shares with the cosmology of various ancient cultures as well as its unique features. The book ends with a detailed bibliography and several helpful indexes of authors, Scripture passages, and ancient sources.

Approach to the biblical text

The first chapter sets out Walton’s approach to the biblical text. For a long time the Western world believed that Genesis 1 served as “the foundation of cosmology,” but this belief has crumbled due to challenges from Enlightenment philosophy, evolutionary biology, and

archaeological discoveries of alternate creation stories from the Ancient Near East. Some still try to read Genesis 1 as modern cosmology, writes Walton, but he himself treats it as “an exemplar of ancient cosmology.” In the past, scholars have argued that Genesis borrowed from the *texts* of other creation accounts, but that has proven too difficult to demonstrate, so Walton opts for an easier approach, namely to show that the biblical account reflects the *thinking* of the Ancient Near East.

He identifies a number of features typical of Ancient Near Eastern thought. The ancients had a decidedly less material view of existence; something exists not because it is composed of matter but because it has a function. They focused more on order and control over the functions of the cosmos than on its material origins. They viewed the universe was more like a kingdom and less like a machine than people today do. They regarded their gods as part of the cosmic system rather than having sovereignty over it. They did not clearly distinguish between material objects and the gods that made these objects work (e.g. the sun and the sun-god). Their stories describe creation as the result of a conflict among the gods. They depict creation as a temple in which their gods find rest.

Not all of these features are reflected in the biblical account in equal measure, says Walton – some are completely ignored (e.g. the idea of a conflict among the gods), others are modified, while a few are, at least subconsciously, shared (e.g. the idea of God coming to rest in his temple) – but they do show that Israel’s view of the world was informed by that of the cultures that surrounded it. Walton wants to navigate between those on the one extreme who, because they “consider the biblical text to be the very words of God in the narrowest sense,” are “most inclined to isolate it from its cognitive environment and cultural context, believing that the pure character of the text would be sullied and its authority compromised by any dependency on extrabiblical literature or cultural influence,” and those on the other extreme who regard the Bible “as nothing more than northwest Semitic texts” and thus are not sensitive enough to the differences between the biblical account and the ideas of surrounding cultures (14). Walton urges scholars of all stripes to move beyond labeling each other as “fundamentalists” or “liberals” and rather sharpen their hermeneutics.

While I applaud this sentiment as far as it goes, I wonder whether his “extremes” are caricatures: there are many who consider the Bible to contain “the very words of God in the narrowest sense” and yet are fully aware that it was written by and for people living in the Ancient Near

East. What is at issue is whether regarding it as “the very words of God” compels one to accept the Bible’s cosmology as one’s own, and conversely, whether (or perhaps how) one can regard its cosmology as that of a bygone age without compromising its authority. Important as it is to recognize that the Bible was written in another time and place, I wonder whether merely sharpening one’s hermeneutics will really help to close the divide.

Creation accounts

In a very brief second chapter, Walton assembles a wealth of data from the surviving creation accounts in a handy table, comparing no fewer than twenty-six Sumerian, Akkadian, and Egyptian sources, to illustrate not only their commonalities but also the differences among them. Walton checks each source against the following eighteen criteria: (1) Does it describe the precreation condition? (2) Does it separate heaven and earth? (3) Is theogony (the origin of the gods) mixed with cosmogony (the origin of the world)? (4) Do naming or (5) separating constitute acts of creation? (6) Does it recount the creation of people? (7) Is there a connection to the temple? (8) Does it include divine rest? (9) Does it feature gods, (10) heaven and earth, (11) sky, (12) waters, (13) dry land, (14) plants and fecundity, (15) birds and fish, (16) animals, (17) society or civilization, and (18) celestial bodies?

A functional view of the world

In chapter 3, Walton assimilates the data mentioned above to describe what he considers to be the Ancient Near Eastern view of the cosmos. He describes their ontology as functional – “that is, everything exists by virtue of its having been assigned a function and given a role in the ordered cosmos” (24). Creation, then, does not involve the transformation from non-existing to existing matter, but the transition from the primordial undifferentiated condition to the diversity of the finished world. Put differently, a functional view of the world does not deny creation from nothing but redefines what “nothing” means.

For all the convenience that labels afford, I wonder whether “functional” and “material” adequately distinguish the differing ontologies of the Ancient Near Eastern and the modern western world. While Walton may be right to observe that “[i]n material ontology, there is great interest in investigating and understanding the physical nature of reality, especially in terms of its building blocks, from the smallest constituents, including molecules, atoms, cells, quarks, and so on (the constituent parts), to the largest agglomerations of constituents, including planets, solar

systems, and galaxies" (23), surely moderns (and post-moderns for that matter) are just as interested in how things work as in what they're made of. One cannot help but wonder whether the same is more true of the ancients than Walton would have us believe.

Along similar lines one wonders whether he overplays the contrast between the causation of the ancients (in which divine activity moves objects) and that of the moderns (in which material objects act in accordance with natural laws) (37). A modern Christian, for example, might well hold to a hybrid of the two, believing that divine providence moves objects in accordance with natural laws. These criticisms are not intended to suggest that ancient and modern cosmologies are the same – Walton presents ample evidence that such is not the case – but merely to caution that the differences not be exaggerated.

Very interesting, though not new, is Walton's treatment of the king as image of the deity (78-86): the biblical notion of man as both son and image of God finds parallels in ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian literature, though the details cannot detain us here. More important is what Walton calls cosmic geography. While moderns regard the earth as a sphere that revolves around the sun, which in turn is only one star in one galaxy out of many, the ancients had a three-tiered cosmos with a heaven on top where the gods lived, suspended above a disc-shaped earth supported by pillars extending down into a netherworld through which the sun passed by night before it rose again in the sky. The moon regulated their calendar, and the movements of stars and planets were the sources of omens (88-93). Modern science has provided a vantage point for viewing the cosmos that was not available to the people of the Ancient Near East, and some of their descriptive language has become foreign to our ears.

On the other hand, it is hardly true to say that our cosmic geography is informed only by the knowledge acquired through scientific discoveries. Moderns remain earthbound and continue to use such phenomenological expressions as sunrise and sunset, advances in astronomy notwithstanding. Modern Christian farmers, for example, who pray to God to grant favourable weather for their crops, and whose daily activities are determined by the movement of the clouds across the sky, the ebb and flow of the seasons, and the rising and setting of the sun (what really matters is not whether the earth revolves around the sun but whether the sun dries the hay!), for all their considerable knowledge of modern science, may well find the cosmic geography of the ancients of more practical value than that of the moderns, and one could scarcely regard them as out of touch for doing so.

The last part of chapter three touches on the cosmos as a temple. Here Walton is suitably careful, admitting that Ancient Near Eastern texts fall short of suggesting that the cosmos is a temple but only *imply* that it is so conceived by following the pattern of temple-building texts (109-110). In some texts it takes seven days to build the temple; in others it takes seven days to dedicate it. Once the temple had been dedicated the god could take up residence in it. "Only then is the temple functional; only then is it real; only then is it a temple" (117). While it would be hazardous to assume that the seven-day creation account of Genesis 1 mimicked such texts, it would be equally hazardous to assume that the biblical authors were unaware of them.

Walton's exposition of Genesis 1

Chapter four then presents Walton's own exposition of Genesis 1 against the cognitive context outlined above. Interestingly, he defends the traditional translation of verse 1 (not "When God began to create," but "In the beginning God created"), though not because it supports the idea that God created matter from nothing. For Walton verse 1 refers to the whole seven-day period described in the rest of the chapter, which he calls "a preliminary period of time" (127). He offers the following translation: "In the initial period, God brought cosmic functions into existence" (133). Again, "the text is making no comment on material origins. It is more interested in how God set up the cosmos to function for human beings in his image. These functions define the idea of existence; the ancients had little interest in the material" (139).

One might well ask, however, whether it is possible to conceive of the functions without the material. If the point is that the material received a function, then either the material already existed before creation but did not yet function, or it did not yet exist. Walton sidesteps the issue rather neatly by arguing that to the ancients there was no existence without function. As it turns out, however, something was already there.

For Walton, the pre-creation condition of the world is that which is described in verse 2 as *tohu* and *bohu* or unproductive and functionless, which raises a question of logic: is it possible for something not to exist but at the same time to be there, albeit in a functionless state? Conversely, if there is an earth that is waiting to be created (i.e. to receive function), then surely the ontology of the ancients included its pre-functional condition, in which case ontology cannot be defined as strictly functional but must to some extent be material as well.

Rather than to present the material and the functional as mutually exclusive cosmologies, Walton might better have presented them as alternatives on a spectrum, the one more concerned with the functional and less with the material, and the other more with the material and less with the functional. His *non sequitur* confirms a recurring suspicion of mine, that Walton is too determined to exclude material origins from Genesis 1.

Nevertheless there is much to fascinate the reader in Walton's exposition: for example, his observation that the first three days established the functions of time, weather, and food-production, which in Egypt and Mesopotamia were assigned to different gods, while in the biblical account all three are subject to the authority of the one God who stands outside of the cosmos as the "creator and ruler of all governing principles, controlling functions, and functionaries" (168). Walton further claims that his functional focus solves the "age-old question about how light could exist during Day 1 when the sun was not created until Day 4. After all, it's not about the material origin of light. Rather, the function of light is introduced before "the mere functionaries" (171). One wonders, however, whether the sun and moon can be treated so lightly. If they "rule over" the day and the night, do they not govern time, and if so, how could time function already on Day 1 without functionaries to govern them? As it turns out, a functional perspective does not solve the dilemma any better than a material one might.

After a brief treatment of the fifth and sixth days, Walton turns to the intriguing question whether temple imagery can be found in the Genesis account. He admits that "there is no explicit mention of the temple per se," but notes the presence of two items that are connected to temples in the Ancient Near East: one is God's rest on the seventh day, and the other is the Garden of Eden. He offers the suggestion that Genesis 1 is modeled after a temple-inauguration account: the seven days represent the preparation of God's temple, culminating with the creation of God's human representatives, after which God enters his temple and it begins to function.

But from where does Walton derive the idea that God enters his temple? From the description of the Garden: it is a place where the Lord walks to and fro; its entrance is on the east; it has water, a tree, cherubim, and gold, all of which later appear in the temple in Jerusalem. Palaces and temples of the Ancient Near East often had gardens. This one, then, was designed as a dwelling place for God. With such a reading, Day 7 is not merely an appendix but the climax of the creation account (190). Yet, as Walton himself admits, the evidence is suggestive rather than conclusive.

Conclusions

Chapter 5 provides an overview and conclusions. Walton outlines which elements of Genesis 1 reflect a cognitive environment shared with the broader Ancient Near Eastern world, which features are shared only with Egypt and only with Mesopotamia, and which are unique to the biblical account. He concludes that the most important result of his study is "the realization that the Genesis account pertains to functional origins rather than material origins and that temple ideology underlies the Genesis cosmology" (198-199).

In the closing paragraph of the book Walton claims that his conclusions "have significant ramifications for the public discussions and controversies of our time, including those concerning the age of the earth, the relationship between Genesis and science, the interpretation of the biblical text in relation to evolution and Intelligent Design, and the shape of public science education" (199). One dearly wishes he had written another chapter or at least a paragraph to tell us what those ramifications are. Walton does not bridge the gap between the functional world of the ancients and the material one of the modern age – perhaps the gap he creates is too wide to allow the attempt.

*Are the days of Genesis 1 also my days,
or are they merely a literary device?*

But all debate about functional and material ontology aside, one needs to grapple with the fact that the heavens and the earth of Genesis 1 are my world, and the God who created them is my God. Are the days of Genesis 1 also my days, or are they merely a literary device? As much as Genesis 1 is a document from the Ancient Near East, one cannot leave it there. On page 1 Walton disagrees with the concordist approach of scientists who attempt to read the creation account through modern glasses, but by the last page he still has not told the scientist what he or she *should* do. If the only answer is that the scientist should not be constrained by the cosmology of Genesis 1 because its functional perspective is a thing of the past, then I fear that Walton has done the scientific community a disservice.

His book illustrates that as a writing from the Ancient Near East there are certain modern questions to which Genesis 1 does not give answers; it is not a modern science textbook. What needs urgent discussion, however, are the questions for which it *does* give answers. It is, after all, also the inspired Word of God.

Ray of Sunshine

Corinne Gelms and
Patricia Gelms

Birthdays in November

- 3 WILMA VAN DRONGELEN turned 56**
32025 Balfour Drive
Abbotsford, BC V2T 5C1

Birthdays in December

- 1 SANDY SPYKSMA will be 32**
Peace Haven Homes
6 Oneida Drive, Brantford, ON N3S 7X8
- 10 JAMES KAMMINGA will be 29**
Box 1125
Carman, MB ROG OJO
- 15 FRANK ZEGERS will be 55**
6528 1st Line, RR 3
Fergus, ON N1M 2W4
- 16 JULIE KAMMINGA will be 25**
Box 1125
Carman, MB ROG OJO

Birthdays in January

- 2 LIZ KONING will be 53**
9905 152nd Street
Edmonton, AB T5P 1X4
- 7 CHRISTINE BREUKELMAN will be 42**
2225-19th Street
Coadale, AB T1M 1G4

Birthdays in January

- 14 STEPHEN DYKSTRA will be 31**
Box 3573
Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0
- 17 HENRY DRIEGEN will be 58**
#19-31450 Spur Ave.
Abbotsford, BC V2T 5M3
- 17 GRACE HOMAN will be 58**
c/o Anchor Home, 361 Thirty Road S.
RR 2 Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
- 19 EDWIN SCHUTTE**
844 Bowman Road
Abbotsford, BC V3G 1S9
- 19 JANINE SMID will be 44**
141 Kittridge Ave. E.
Strathroy, ON N7G 2A9
- 26 KATHERINE NIJENHUIS will be 48**
8301 Range 1 Road
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
- 30 TYLER HOEKSEMA will be 25**
6755 Lorne Dr.
Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of, please let us know as soon as possible.

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms

8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

Phone: 905-957-0380, email: jcgelms@porchlight.ca

Welcome Evening in Aldergrove

The celebration started on Sunday morning, September 29, when the Ministers of the Word, Brothers Vanspronsen and Wieske were installed to continue with their mission work in Brazil, with Aldergrove as their sending church. The congregation had an opportunity to collectively say “we do” to committing to supporting and sustaining our brothers in the intense, exciting sowing of seeds that is currently happening in Brazil. Rev. Schouten preached on Mark 4, the parable of the seeds, explaining that though the harvest is not always seen, the seeds are being sown and we can be thankful for that.

Casey VanVliet opened the welcome evening with reading from John 17:20-26 and Psalm 24:1, 3, 4 was sung. The congregation was able to see brothers in Brazil sing Psalm 1 in Portuguese via a video clip.

The missionary families were then introduced: Rev. Ken Wieske and his wife Tamara along with their six children: Chaim, Kyrie, Natalia, Micah, Isaiah, and Zoe, and Rev. Julius Vanspronsen and his wife Karen along with their six children Melissa, Elena, Titus, Joel, Hannah, and Amaryn.

The choir then had an opportunity to share two beautiful songs with the audience.

Will Faber from Maranatha Church provided a summary of the mission work that has been going on in Brazil and pointed out that in order to understand today, we need to search yesterday. In April of 1951, at the second synod, the question of how to fulfill the call of mission work was discussed and at the time it was determined that funds would be sent to Holland to support mission efforts there. In July of 1953, an appointed committee began to research how Canada could take on their own mission project. Three criteria were to be followed: 1. Direct preaching to a southern state, 2. Search for a willing minister, and 3. Present to the consistory what is needed in order to get the mission project up and running. The Mission Board was established in 1970, and there have been various pastors committed to spreading the gospel to the people in Brazil. Rev. Wieske and his family have been



serving in Brazil since 1999 and Rev. Vanspronsen and his family since 2007.

Following Will's summary of the timeline and history of the Mission work in Brazil, Bert Vane spoke to the passing of the torch and that immense task that now lies in front of the Aldergrove congregation. He spoke to how the Aldergrove congregation pledged to support and sustain the missionaries in their work, far away from their extended families and support systems. Bert provided five concrete ways for the congregation to support the missionaries and their families in their work. 1. Be aware of what's going on – join the Maranatha Mission group on Facebook and continue to be informed of the work being done in Brazil. 2. Be involved by sending cards to the missionary families and write letters of encouragement. 3. Start a mission youth group. 4. Go to Brazil to see firsthand the work being done. 5. Most important: pray for the missionaries and their families diligently.

Two young sisters of the congregation then challenged Rev. Vanspronsen and his family to a series of trivia questions specific to the youth and children of the congregation, giving them an opportunity to get to know the demographics of Aldergrove church.

The children of Aldergrove church lifted praise by singing *The Trees of the Field* and *Join Hands to Lift up*



Jesus, with lyrics written specifically for the missionary families and the work that they are doing in Brazil.

Rev. Vanspronsen then had the opportunity to reflect on the importance of the day. He reflected on the transition that was occurring for both himself and his family and Rev. Wieske and family, but also for the transition for the congregations of Surrey and Aldergrove. He reflected on the fact that it is an emotional time and thanked Surrey for their efforts over the past forty-five years. Rev. Vanspronsen explained the importance of being sent out by a church; that God calls the missionaries through the church. What gives joy to the missionaries is to know that God sends them through the church – and the Aldergrove congregation is now that church. Rev. Vanspronsen asked for patience from the Aldergrove congregation as well, stating that it takes time to deeply understand the

work being done in Brazil. He noted that it's very encouraging when the sending church remembers details and expressed excitement about the seeds that are being sown in Brazil. Rev. Vanspronsen read 1 Thessalonians 1 and spoke to the fact that the content of mission is what has to drive the missionaries in their work. Why do mission? Because Christ wants the church to be compassionate, and

there are millions in Brazil who do not know that there is One who rescues us. It's a love for the gospel, and a strong desire to share that love as we wait for Christ's return that drives the missionaries to continue doing the vital work that they do.

Rev. Schouten then closed the evening, saying farewell to the Wieske family who returned to Brazil during the coming week. Rev. Schouten thanked those who shared their talents throughout the evening, and wished the Vanspronsen family a refreshing time during their furlough. Rev. Schouten also presented a challenge to the audience – to learn the local language spoken in Brazil, Portuguese, in order to send a team there and be able to relate to and build relationships with the community in Brazil. The evening was ended with the singing of Hymn 81. Following the program there were opportunities to meet and welcome the missionaries to the Aldergrove congregation. ❄️



Photo credit Karin Louwerse

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor

The Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg hosted a conference entitled “Promoting a Biblical Sexual Morality” on Friday evening and Saturday morning, October 18 and 19, 2013. The conference speaker was Reverend Sam Powell, a minister of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), a church body with whom we share ecclesiastical fellowship. More than 100 participants either gathered in the church building or viewed the conference live via the Internet.

The conference came about because of a document presented to the 2012 annual synod of the RCUS by a committee that had been mandated to prepare a report that encompassed three goals:

- to teach the biblical support and blessings of godly sexual morality;
- to set biblical morality over against the abominations of homosexuality, adultery, and a man-centred view of sexuality; and
- to provide biblical requirements for the use of human sexuality in the midst of, and for improvement of culture.

This report, as well as a series of declarations on Scripture’s teachings about a godly sexual morality and opposing society’s perspectives on homosexuality, was adopted by that RCUS synod. A more detailed review of this topic can be found in the report to General Synod Carman 2013 by the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA). Since then, the RCUS report has become a booklet entitled “Promoting a Biblical Sexual Morality” available for purchase at amazon.com.

Rev. Powell, who was the main author of the report, confined his conference session topics to the issue of obedience. The second part of the booklet provides biblical arguments against those who attempt to use the Bible to justify gay and lesbian activity, that God’s love is not limited by traditional moral boundaries, that gays and lesbians ought to be included in the fellowship of the church and that their relationships ought to be accepted as a natural part of their creation.

To quote Rev. J. Poppe,

During the conference Reverend Powell gave four

presentations. He dealt with a lot more than a biblical perspective on sexuality. In essence Rev. Powell gave us a renewed perspective on who God is, who we are, and what the Bible is and how we are to use it. Dealing with the first three chapters of Genesis during his first two presentations, he laid a foundation for the whole of Christian life. His application about how we are to live before God in holiness and thankfulness could be applied far beyond the area of marriage and sexuality. I would highly recommend that those who did not attend the conference view his presentations online.

I would encourage other churches to consider hosting such a conference on this timely topic. Reverend Sam Powell may be reached via reformedyubacity.org.

Henry van Delden, Winnipeg



Dear Editor

Having read the three part series on “Provoking Reflection on the Christian and Sports” I think Derek Stoffels can be applauded for the thought provokers. He brings attention to what our attitudes should be, and since his articles are designed to provoke reflections, I will comply.

I readily agree that winning at all costs or the attitude “I play to win” is not an attitude that should be fostered by any Christian minded athlete. The Christian mind should foster an attitude of playing to improve both the opponent’s skills as well as his own. “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Prov 27:17). Although this does not come naturally, especially in sports, this applies to all areas of life.

I would agree that we need to be humble in victory and gracious in defeat. We do not need to glorify sports, but do we really need to downplay cheering while we would not hesitate to celebrate an “A” on the report card? Awards, encouragements, and recognizing achievements have been around for a long time and have served us well. The ABCs are designed to measure

levels of students' achievements against their peers and are meant to measure and encourage the individual to reach their potential, not to have "mistakes rubbed in anyone's face." We should not base our responses on the negativity which inevitably plagues all areas of our life. Sin is inherent in all we do, but does that mean we need to do away with "cheerleading" and achievement awards? If winning becomes too intoxicating then, yes, one should think about other venues for spending time, just as a recovering alcoholic would refrain from consuming alcoholic beverages while affording others the opportunity to enjoy them.

To say that "celebrating an ace... is not fitting in the context of Christian living" is a bit of a stretch. Focusing attention on the negative, the ace being a result of an error, rather than celebrating a well hit, well placed ball is simply being hyper-sensitive towards the opposing team. Do we celebrate a goal in a soccer match or a hockey game or should we refrain from celebrating because we feel the opposing goalie made a mistake?

We would do well to avoid extremes and exercise self-control in all areas of life to the honor and glory of our Creator who uses both winning and losing to build us up.

Aubrey Vandergaag, Aldergrove, BC

*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.*



Press Release

ILPB Inter League Publication Board

November 7, 2013
Waterdown, ON

On November 7, 2013, the Board and Committee of Administration met to discuss the affairs of the ILPB. Dick Nijenhuis, Henrietta Lodder, Cathy Jonker, Michelle Helder, Marsha Hoeksema, and Paul DeBoer were in attendance. The meeting was opened with reading and prayer.

From the committee, several books are being worked on and several are scheduled for being printed this year. We are thankful that sufficient funds are available to make this happen.

Marketing – We have a "new marketing rep," Ingrid VanderGaag, now in Alberta, whom we can welcome back to the committee. Ingrid also maintains the website.

The treasurer presented the Financial Statement for the 2012/2013 year. The information had also been reviewed by an accountant who provided some recommendations for improvement. This information was well received by our "new" treasurer.

Sales are going well. Pro-ecclesia had sent in a major order in July for a large amount which is normally done every two to three years. Our new sales person has had books transferred to her location and has moved into her new position well. For those ordering books, Marsha Hoeksema is the new sales contact for the ILPB.

The board mentioned eight books are being pursued with ministers hopefully to be published over the next several years. They also presented one book to the committee for publishing.

Jovial, friendly discussions, fine tuning, mutual edification, and improving our work was communicated in the ongoing work of the ILPB: promoting the study of God's Word.

Press release read and approved.



Year in Review 2013



James Visscher

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When it comes to the passage of time the book of Ecclesiastes has long been a favourite of many. No doubt much of that popularity comes from those famous words of chapter 3 - "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh. . ." (Eccl 3:1-8).

Still, these are not the only good words on time found in this book. There are more. Yes, and among them are also the words of chapter 11:9 - "Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment."

Unexpected advice

Here the Preacher is urging his readers to enjoy life. He is telling them to give free reign to the desires of their hearts and to the sights that their eyes behold.

In other words, if your heart tugs you in a certain direction, let it. If you desire to meet this particular someone or participate in this exciting activity or long to develop this special talent, go for it! Do not hold back! Do not deny yourself! Do not be deterred by the obstacles in your way. Follow your heart!

And the same goes for your eyes. If your eyes catch a glimpse of something attractive, focus in on it. If your eyes happen upon a scene of marvellous beauty - rejoice! Your eyes are made to take in many things, many people, and many sights. Open them wide and let the light flood in.

Enjoy

Oh, I know, I know, that some of you will be thinking already as you read this, "Be careful! Watch out! Danger lurks here!"

To which I would respond with two comments. The first is that as believers we are meant to live in step with our hearts and to put our eyes to good use. We are

supposed to enjoy, to soak up, to revel in our feelings and our experiences. For a believer the opening salvo when it comes to the world of feelings and sights is not, "Watch out!" but rather, "Embrace!" After all, we are children of the heavenly Father and we live in our Father's world. He made it for us to soak up and to enjoy.

Enjoy but. . .

My second comment is that enjoyment is never without responsibility. The Preacher adds, "But know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment." In other words, go ahead and give in to the ways of your heart and look at all that your eyes see, but do it in all in the awareness that judgment is coming. One day your heavenly Father will ask you what you did with that heart he gave you. He will inquire about how you made use of those eyes he created. Heart tugs are not neutral. Looking is not innocent. God gifts are meant to be embraced, but then embraced always with a view to accountability.

Needless to say all of this has a bearing on the year gone by and the year to come. Where did your heart lead you in 2013 and where will it lead you in 2014? What did your eyes take in these twelve months past and what will they gaze at in the months to come? Reader, by all means follow your hearts and see with your eyes, but remember there is judgment. The great Son of the great Father is coming to judge and his judgment will be right, true, just, and holy.

Turning to the highlights of the year of our Lord 2013, there is a lot to report.

Churches and calls

We launch out once more with a tour of the churches. Last year we traveled from the West to the East, so this time we will reverse the direction.

Pennsylvania

No doubt many of you will think that this is an unexpected place to begin; however, if I look at a map of North America than I see that the church at Blue Bell is the furthest east. It beats out Ottawa by a hair.

The reason why this church is in the news is that with the departure of the Rev. K. Kok in 2012 it became vacant, and since then it has experienced a further reduction in numbers. The result is that the church at Blue Bell is now a “house congregation” and has been placed under the spiritual care of the church at Dunnville, Ontario.

Naturally, we hope that this is a temporary measure and that in the coming year or years the church at Blue Bell will experience new growth and become a self-governing church again. Perhaps Blue Bell, with the help of classis, will be able to call someone who will act as its new minister-evangelist.

Ontario

As the most populated province in Canada and the site of most of our churches, there is always something going on in Ontario.

The first month of 2013 was a special month for the church at Dunnville as it was blessed with the arrival of its new minister, the Rev. John VanWoudenberg. Thankfully their time of vacancy was short. To the north the church at Smithville continues to enjoy its new building, but it now also faces new challenges as its number continue to grow. No doubt the church council is working on something to ensure that Rev. Clarence Bouwman does not become overburdened. Meanwhile, the churches at Lincoln and Glanbrook are relieved that their ministers did not accept the calls extended to them and are staying put.

The same cannot be said for the church at Grassie which remains vacant and has yet to receive a positive outcome to its calling work. Not too far away the Cornerstone church of Hamilton also continues to search for a minister to work alongside the Rev. Bill DeJong.

Moving along the QEW to Toronto, the situation does not get much better. 2013 saw two retirements in the Burlington area with the result that the churches of Ebenezer-Burlington and Flamborough now find themselves looking for new pastors. Further north the church at Toronto finds itself in the same predicament. Thus far its calling work has not been crowned with success.

In addition, the churches at Fergus North, Guelph, and Kerwood are all dealing with ministerial vacancy.

What this means is that as this is being written (in late November 2013) there are at least eight vacancies in Ontario. Seeing that there are a total of twenty-eight churches in Ontario, this represents a sizeable number.

Still, all is not without hope. One of the graduates from our Seminary has accepted the call to Fergus-Maranatha and hopes to be ordained in 2014. In addition, any number of students at the Seminary are moving closer to graduation.

Manitoba

At the moment all of the churches in the province of Manitoba have ministers; however, there remains a vacancy as the Redeemer Church at Winnipeg has decided, in co-operation with the other churches in the area, to call a home missionary. The aim is to start a church plant in southern Manitoba.

Alberta

Since the retirement of their minister in 2011, the church at Barrhead has been vacant and busy calling. Well, finally towards the end of 2013 their efforts were crowned with success. Candidate Calvin Vanderlinde accepted the call extended to him and the hope is that he will be ordained in the new year. Much further in the southern part of Alberta, the church at Coaldale received the news that it will soon join the ranks of the vacant churches, as the Rev. Dirk Poppe accepted a call to a church in Australia.

All in all, however, the Alberta churches may consider themselves blessed as there will be only one vacancy among eight churches.

British Columbia

Much the same can be said about the churches in British Columbia. At the moment the only vacancy that exists is in the church at Langley. There had been a vacancy in the Maranatha Church at Surrey but that changed with the arrival and ordination of Candidate Ben Schoof in the month of November. At the moment BC is blessed with the presence of twelve ministers and one home missionary.

For those who are into statistics, there are at present fifty-four Canadian (American) Reformed Churches. This represents a reduction of one due to the changed status of Blue Bell. In addition, the total number of churches without ministers stands at eleven which means that the vacancy rate continues to hover around twenty percent.

Ministerial retirements

In the first part of the year 2014 this rate will move slightly higher as the Rev. Bill Slomp, who is currently serving the Immanuel church at Edmonton, is slated to retire. It should also be noted that 2013 saw the retirement of the Rev. Jan de Gelder and the Rev. Bert Nederveen. The former could have taken the step a year earlier; however, he decided to wait. The latter decided to time his retirement with the anniversary of his twenty-second year of service in the Ebenezer church at Burlington.

On the whole, it now appears that the retirement rate will soon begin to decline. Two ministers hope to reach the “magic age” in 2015 but after that there will be years of single retirements. Of course, that is assumption based on continued good health and thus we need to add “if the Lord so wills.” Also, there is another factor that needs to be considered and this has to do with the government raising the age of retirement. How this will impact the ministerial ranks remains to be seen, but you can be sure that in due time it will factor into the equation.

One thing, however, that a rising retirement age will not affect is the fact that even in retirement many ministers continue to serve in a variety of ways. At the moment the Rev. Klaas Jonker is busy serving the Free Reformed Church of Bunbury, Western Australia. Rev. Pim den Hollander continues to promote the ties between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches, especially in the United States. Rev. Jan de Gelder will continue to be involved in the work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF). Other retirees spend their time preaching, teaching, writing, and counselling. In short, the beaches of Florida and the golf courses of southern California have not experienced an influx of Canadian Reformed ministers.

Ministerial health, sickness, and death

Among the ranks of the retired, the most noteworthy event was the fact that the Lord called home the Rev.



W.W.J. VanOene. After many years of faithful service Lord decided that on September 23, 2013 it was time to promote his servant to glory (see issue number 22 for more information on his life and work). Our prayers and thoughts go out to his wife, who has since moved to Manoah Manor, and the difficult adjustment that she will now have to make. May the Lord be with her and her family.

Sickness also continues to alter the lives of ministers, professors, and their wives. Rev. J. Mulder's health declined to the point that he needed more care and thus he has moved into the care side of Shalom Manor in Grimsby. The same was also the case with Prof. N. Gootjes, who is now a resident of the same facility. Both of these brothers have been joined by Sr. Faber, the widow of the late Dr. J. Faber. Word has reached me that Sr. Kingma, the wife of the late Rev. P. Kingma, may also be there, but whether that is short term or long term, I do not know. Finally, many of you know that Dr. J. DeJong continues to be a resident there as well.

It goes almost without saying that you are urged to keep these faithful servants and their spouses/widows in your prayers. May the Lord graciously sustain and support them all. At the same time there is continued thankfulness for the excellent care given by the nurses and staff of Shalom Manor.

Buildings

No news reached me in 2013 about new church buildings being constructed, although there are a number of churches that are discussing their options and some

are making plans. At present the church at Neerlandia is in the discussion phase and the congregation is being asked to respond to various options, one of them being a bigger building. The church at Barrhead also needs more space and is making plans. In Ontario the church at Fergus-North is hoping to build and other churches are overflowing and will need to do something. In the church at Langley overcrowding has already resulted in renovation and additional seats in the worship space.

At the same time there are also some churches that are experiencing a decline in membership and thus a surplus of space. In most cases this decline has to do with changing demographics as different ethnic groups move in or with escalating property values.

The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

2013 was a noteworthy year for our seminary too.

Accreditation

First, CRTS finally arrived at the end of a long and arduous accreditation process and was formally and fully accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). An added bonus was that this status was granted for a maximum period of seven years. As such this step will have a number of benefits. It affirms the high academic quality of the education given. It grants greater recognition to the degrees that are conferred and allows for speedier access to graduate programs elsewhere. It reassures the members that the policies and practices followed by the Seminary are of the highest standard. An unexpected benefit is that it will make it easier for foreign students to gain entry into Canada and be admitted to CRTS.

A fifth professor

In addition to accreditation, there was a second special development in 2013. It had to do with General Synod Carman instructing the Board of Governors to appoint the Rev. Dr. Ted Van Raalte as the Professor of Ecclesiology.

As some of you may know there is a lot of background to this decision. When CRTS opened its doors in 1969 it did so with three full-time professors and two part-time lecturers. Over time it was decided to replace the two lecturers with a fourth full-time professor. The only problem was that this professor had to shoulder the weight of two very large and diverse departments. (His subjects included church history, church polity, philosophy,

homiletics, catechetics, liturgics, poimenics, evangelistics, missions, and so forth.)

But how to deal with the problem? After much discussion and a number of different proposals, it was decided that the best course of action would be for these two departments to be separated and for an additional man to be appointed. The result is that Dr. Arjan de Visser will now teach all of the courses associated with Diaconology (or Pastoral Theology or Practical Theology) and Dr. Van Raalte will now be teaching all the courses dealing with church history and polity, as well as some added material, for example, apologetics.

Students

A third special development at CRTS in 2013 was the graduation of three students. Br. Ben Schoof was called by the Maranatha church at Surrey and has since accepted and been examined and ordained. Br. Calvin Vanderlinde accepted the call of the church at Barrhead and will be examined in December and then, if all goes well, ordained in due time. The same applies to Br. Theo Wierenga who accepted the call to the church at Fergus-Maranatha.

As three students were departing, two new students were accepted, namely Br. James Zekveld and Br. John Boeke, both members of area United Reformed Churches. This means that at this moment there are a total of nineteen men studying at the Seminary. Such numbers augur well for the future and should over time drive the vacancy rate downward.



Other events

Mention should also be made of the fact that in 2013 the Seminary hosted a very successful Conference dealing with the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism. In addition a new website was launched as well and promises to become a most useful tool in the spread of the Reformed faith.

This year was, at least in part, a sabbatical year for Dr. de Visser. It was a year of travel for the professors as they taught and spoke in different places in Brazil, Germany, the United States, and throughout Canada. It was also a special year for Sr. Margaret Vandervelde, the Librarian, as she tied the knot and became Mrs. Alkema. Congratulations, to a fine lady and an excellent librarian!

General Synod Carman 2013

If 2013 was a memorable year for CRTS, it was also a memorable year for the churches as it was a synod year. Such years only come around every three years, and once again several local churches stepped up to the plate and hosted the event. This time the synod was held in the church building of Carman West; however, the excellent hospitality was spread over both the churches of Carman West and Carman East.

By and large the items on the agenda are predictable: appeals, inter-church relations, *Book of Praise*, and Seminary matters. Synod 2013 was no exception.

Inter-church relations

On the inter-church relations front, ecclesiastical fellowship was continued with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Free Reformed Churches in Australia, the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), The Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin), the Reformed Churches in New Zealand, the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI), the Reformed Church in the United States, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Churches in Quebec.

The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands

Relations with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands were also continued, however, a special letter was drafted, discussed, adopted, and sent to these churches expressing concerns about a number of developments relating to hermeneutics, women in office, and relations with the Netherlands Reformed Churches.

The special committee dealing with these churches in The Netherlands was given a new mandate and is expected to report to the next synod.

It may be mentioned that in January of 2014 a special conference will be held in Hamilton hosted by CRTS dealing with biblical hermeneutics (or principles of interpretation). At this Conference a good number of professors from The Netherlands will present papers and respond to papers. Also the professors at CRTS and Prof. Cornel Venema from Mid-America will speak. It is hoped that this Conference will lead to a meeting of the minds when it comes to the interpretation of Holy Scripture and to the alleviation of the concerns that have grown over the years in the Canadian Reformed Churches, as well as in many sister churches, about developments at the Theological University in particular and the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands in general. As such this Conference may well prove to be a watershed moment in the history of our respective churches.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

For some time already a discussion has taken place on whether or not to accept the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) as a church in ecclesiastical fellowship. There are many positive things to say about a relationship with this church; however, in the end Synod instructed its committee to do a further investigation and evaluation of this church, especially with respect to the admission of women to the office of deacon and with respect to a document called the Testimony.

The United Reformed Churches of North America

Synod Burlington 2010 decided to re-appoint all of the subcommittees dealing with merger talks with the URCNA, even though the URCNA did not do likewise. As a result when Synod 2013 came along these subcommittees had nothing to report. Still, Synod decided to re-appoint its coordinators for church unity and instructed them to keep the merger talks alive.

Now, one can admire the commitment to church unity expressed by the synod, but the impression is growing in the pew that this merger at the moment is a bridge too far. There is also a growing conviction that if these merger talks were being held between representatives of the Canadian Reformed Churches and representatives of

the United Reformed Churches in Canada, this would be a done deal. Across Canada there are many indications that our respective churches are steadily growing together.

The problem and the challenge, however, exists south of the 49th Parallel. The American arm of the URCNA by and large knows little about the CanRC, and what it does know (or thinks it knows) is not always accurate or complimentary. There is a lot of work to be done here, and we wish Rev. Pim den Hollander, and the other members of the committee, well.

Ecumenical bodies

Synod Carman dealt not just with relations with other churches, it also addressed the matter of our involvement in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) and the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). It was decided that as Canadian Reformed Churches we would continue to be members of both ecumenical bodies (the one North American and the other International) and participate fully in their affairs.

Women's voting

Perhaps one of the most controversial matters that Synod Carman had to deal with related to the matter of women voting for office bearers. Synod Burlington 2010 decided to leave that matter where the Church Order puts matters of voting, namely in the domain of the local church. The result was that a number of churches re-examined the matter and decided to allow the female communicant members to participate in the election of office bearers. A number of other churches, however, did not agree and so decided to appeal the decision of Synod Burlington.

In the end Synod Carman sided with the appellants and told the churches that this matter could not be left to the domain and freedom of the local church and that they should return to the voting practice as it was before 2010, i.e., voting by male communicants only.

Will this now settle the matter once and for all? That is extremely doubtful. There is little doubt that those churches who see this as a local matter and an infringement on their local "rights" will appeal this decision to the next synod. And so a debate that has been going on in our churches since the 1970s will continue with no resolution in sight.

Bible translations

Another issue of controversy, although lacking in the same degree of intensity as the former, had to do with the



matter of Bible translations. Synod decided that it could not recommend the NIV 2011 for use in the churches. It then left it free for the churches to use the ESV, the NKJV, NASB, and NIV84. At the same time it instructed the Committee to do further work with the ESV.

Now, I am open to correction, but I am led to wonder as to whether or not Synod did not make a subtle but important change here? Historically the matter of Bible translations has always been in the freedom of the churches, but has Synod Carman now restricted that freedom by limiting it to these four approved translations only? In the past if a local church wanted to continue to use the old KJV, it could do so. Is that no longer an option? In the past a Synod could recommend a particular Bible translation to the churches, but the local churches made the final decision. Is that now forbidden?

Book of Praise

Synods in the past have spent a considerable amount of time (and money) on the *Book of Praise*, and Synod Carman was no different. The difference this time was that Synod Carman brought that work to completion. What this means is that soon in the new year the final edition of the *Book of Praise* will appear.

Of course, you understand that when it comes to these things "final" is never really "final." Language is alive and it is always changing. So this edition will be "final" only for some time. Let us hope at least that it will be "final" enough for members to get used to it and for churches to start ordering it. I strongly suspect that any number of churches, who have made a sizeable investment already, will not buy the new edition of the *Book of Praise* until the old ones that are in the pews wear out.

Another reason why “final” is not “final” is that the call to alter so-called “difficult” tunes of some Psalms will not stop (are they really difficult or just unknown?) and the desire for more hymns (either old famous ones or new quality modern ones) will not disappear.

Still, in spite of these questions and its imperfections, there is reason for thankfulness. There are not many churches today that can take the pre-eminent song book of the OT and still sing it with gusto.

In the end, the members of Synod are to be thanked for their hard work. Many good decisions were made and will edify the churches. At the same time a few other decisions will generate new Scripture digging, additional confessional and church political study, pointed debate, and, no doubt, a few articles in future issues of *Clarion*, as well as no few letters to the Editor. And that’s alright, as long as it is all done in a spirit of true brotherly and sisterly love.

Home mission

Home mission or evangelistic outreach continues to be a growing priority in many of our churches.

Ontario projects

Streetlight Christian Centre continues to operate in downtown Hamilton, Ontario, under the pastoral care and supervision of the Rev. Paul Aasman. Seeing that this is inner city work, it has its own peculiar challenges and demands. As in most of Canada’s cities, the core is often home to many who are poor, marginalized, lacking in literacy, addicted, and abused. In terms of geography the inner city and the suburbs are not so far apart, but in terms of attitudes and aspirations, they are often worlds apart. It takes a special kind of determination and steadfastness to work in these areas and to sow seeds in them. We wish our brother and his band of volunteers and helpers from neighbouring churches every strength and blessing in this work.

In Brampton, Ontario, we have another mission effort, only it is of a vastly different kind. It is called *Word & Spirit Ministries* and it tries to impact lives and neighbourhoods through teaching and offering regular courses to church members and visitors alike on subjects that are pertinent to daily life and living.

In Toronto, there is a mission of yet another kind that has the support and prayers of any number of our members. It has to do with the work being done, especially among the Portuguese community and it is

called *Reformed Portuguese Mission*. Rev. Jorge Barros is the missionary and he is supported in his efforts by the Church at Toronto and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Home Missions Committee.

Prairie efforts

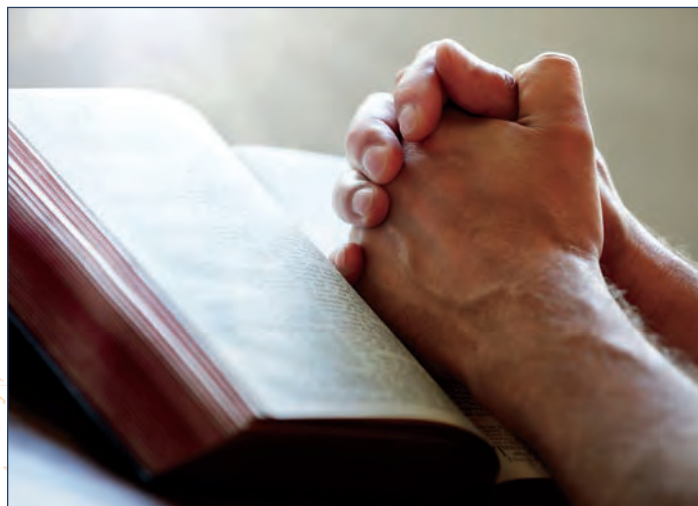
In southern Manitoba the Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church continues to spearhead efforts to bring a greater awareness of the Reformed faith to many. Recently another call was extended for this work, this time to Candidate Calvin Vanderlinde, but he declined. So the search goes on and the work of reaching out continues to receive attention.

In southern Alberta efforts are also continuing to bring the gospel. In particular contacts have been made at the University of Lethbridge and on the Research Station situated just outside the city. The result has been that a number of Asian families have joined the church in Coaldale.

BC works

In northern BC the Rev. Jim Witteveen, working in Prince George under the auspices of the church at Smithers, continues to do everything that he can to build the church. A good start has been made and a firm foundation has been laid and now it is a matter of building and adding to its number. And that calls for hard work. It requires much prayer, steadfast preaching, enormous patience, and a dogged spirit.

In the city of Burnaby, BC, attempts are also being made to reach out. Every Sunday afternoon a group of both local and not so local people come together for prayer,



Bible study, and worship. The church at Willoughby Height (Langley) through its pastor, the Rev. Anthon Souman, is organizing these efforts.

Also, in that same part of the country but covering a larger area the Chinese Reformed Church meeting in the Cloverdale Church (Surrey) continues to make contacts among members of one of the province's largest ethnic communities. The result is that this church is growing slowly but steadily. In the month of December five people will profess their faith and two children will be baptized. The office bearers are receiving additional training and increasing in confidence. The members are active and supportive of one another.

Still, the work at home and abroad makes heavy demands on the Rev. Frank Dong and his wife, Jen-hu. In addition, Rev. Dong's experienced a number of health setbacks in the first half of the year and this led to a medical leave for the second half. Thankfully, he is doing much better and hopes to be back full-time in the new year.

Other efforts

In addition to all of these special efforts, there are also all kinds of other local activities. Some churches, such as Abbotsford and Langley, are making use of an outreach course called *Christianity Explored* and using it as a vehicle for introducing new people to the church, as well as to draw former members back into the church. Churches are also busy using booths at local fairs, visiting nursing homes, distributing literature, taking out newspaper ads, hosting coffee house Bible studies, and so forth.

In these efforts they often use a resource called the *Soul* (formerly *Evangel*), a quarterly evangelistic magazine now edited by the Rev. Marc Jagt of Taber, Alberta (Rev. Dick Moes retired from this position some time ago). As well, a number of churches make use of the course *A Gift from Heaven*, or sponsor *The Voice of the Church* radio broadcasts. In summary, the work of letting our light shine in our neighbourhoods is alive and seeking new opportunities.

Foreign mission

This work also continues elsewhere and much further afield. 2013 was another year filled with advances on the mission front.

Brazil

In Brazil the Revs. Bram de Graaf, Julius VanSpronsen, and Ken Wieske are all hard at work. Rev. de Graaf is busy examining his options seeing that church at Maceio has recently been instituted and called a new minister. What

his future role and place of residence will be remains to be decided; however, one thing that he appears likely to do more of is to participate in the training of Brazilian pastors in Recife.

This also takes a considerable amount of the time in the life of the Rev. Julius VanSpronsen as he is the main organizer and teacher at the Seminary. Thankfully, he is not alone and he is also able to call on the efforts of others from overseas. This past year the Rev. George van Popta, Prof. Jason Van Vliet, and the Rev. Wes Bredenhof have all gone south and lent a helping hand.

Meanwhile, Rev. Ken Wieske continues to assist the federation of Reformed Churches in Brazil, as well he is kept busy with all the new contacts being made. Both churches and pastors from different parts of the country are frequently asking for assistance in one form or another. The result is that travel has become a major component of missionary work in Brazil.

Locally the Reformed Reading Room in Recife remains a great blessing and a place that constantly attracts new faces asking about the Reformed faith. Clearly the Lord keeps on opening new doors in Brazil and the hunger for the gospel remains great.

It should also be mentioned that the Maranatha church at Surrey is no longer the sending church for this work but that this responsibility has been passed along to the church at Aldergrove. Maranatha is to be thanked for its many years of fine leadership and Aldergrove is to be wished every blessing for the future.

China

The same can also be said for China. Several of our churches have teamed up with a couple of our sister churches in Australia, and they are doing great work in China. The result is that a particular Canadian Reformed missionary often goes overseas. He is frequently accompanied by other pastors and professors. He also has a great helper in a brother in Australia who has been set aside for this work. The result is that more than 1800 house church leaders have received instruction, teaching stations have been set up in any number of cities, countless churches are busy reforming, and a large group of college and seminary organizers are being trained on a regular basis.

Due to the ever increasing demand an online Bible College was set up and now has seventeen students. The number would be considerably higher if there were more men who could speak and read Mandarin and who had received a thorough Reformed theological training.

The newest development on this front is that the work of federation building has begun. As the end of the year approached a milestone was reached. Eight office bearers were ordained in three churches in three different cities. It is hoped that they will form the start and nucleus for a future federation of Reformed Churches in China.

Papua New Guinea

The Bethel church at Toronto is the sending church for the mission work being done in Papua New Guinea. This work in turn is supported by the churches in Classis Northern Ontario and Classis Central Ontario. The Revs. Cornelis Kleyn and Henry Versteeg are the sending missionaries.

Together these brothers spend a great deal of their time teaching and instructing would be pastors for the Reformed churches in PNG. They also do a lot of preaching in local churches. They are often called on to give advice to churches and church leaders.

The aim in all of this is to strengthen a young and fledgling church federation and to prepare it for the day when it can function on its own. In some cases that day comes sooner rather than later; however, in those places of the world where there is a lot of poverty, little education, and a more recent exposure to the gospel, time and patience are needed in abundance. We wish these brothers, as well as the brothers labouring on other mission fields around the world, much wisdom and strength from above.

West Timor, Indonesia

To the west of PNG lies the vast archipelago of Indonesia with its multitude of islands. One of these islands is called Timor and there in the western part one will find the Rev. Edwer Dethan hard at work. His work is also centred mostly around teaching as he is responsible for the operation of a college and seminary. In addition to doing a lot of the administrative work, he also teaches quite a few courses. If you add preaching and consulting to the list, it makes for a very busy life.

Still, our brother is faithful in his labours and all of the reports indicate that he is doing good work in that part of the world. Young men are being trained both for service in the church and in the world. Some become pastors and others opt for trades and professions that are needed in the local society.

The reports indicate that Rev. Dethan's wife Femmie is also very involved and spends a great deal of time and energy dealing with relief work among the poor and orphaned.

Mexico and the Philippines

While neither Mexico nor the Philippines have been officially adopted by any of our churches as a site for future Reformed mission work, this does not mean that nothing is happening. The church at Langley continues to have two families in Mexico who are working on either administering or building orphanages. Br. Jeremy VanBeelen and his wife Ana are at work on the administrative side. Br. Duane Visscher and his wife Meribel are busy on the construction side of things. Both couples are doing valuable work in northern Mexico.

In addition, teams of volunteers head south on a regular basis. Some of these teams are made up of skilled craftsmen and help in the various ongoing building projects. Other teams are composed of younger people who work more directly with the orphans.

Still, a strong case can be made for the fact that more should be done. Seeing the proximity of Mexico to both the United States and Canada, this part of the world should receive more attention. There is nothing wrong with going to the ends of the earth, but that policy should be re-evaluated if there is a mission field right next door and within driving distance.

Over the last number of years there has also been increasing contact with believers in the Philippines. Pastor Wes Bredenhof of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton has been there and done some teaching. Ways are currently being sought to strengthen the bonds and increase the help that is needed.

I might add that the Free Reformed Church at Baldviss, Western Australia, is also active in the Philippines, as are some United Reformed churches. It would be beneficial if all of these churches would contact one another and co-ordinate their efforts.

Mission Aid Work

The mission work being done in Brazil is supported by the efforts of Mission Aid Brazil. This committee composed of members living in the Fraser Valley of BC has hired Br. Chris Boersema as its mission aid worker. Having been raised in Brazil and thus speaking the language, he is a great addition to the team. While he leaves the mission work proper to the missionaries, he is very valuable to them as he takes all sorts of jobs out of their hands. He does a lot of work to keep the seminary running. He is also involved in organizing and overseeing many different relief efforts.

In Timor too mission aid work is a reality as Sr. Femie Dethan and many volunteers are into orphanage work. These efforts are supported by the sending church of Smithville and its supporting churches.

The Children of Light organization, which also works in Timor and has recently decided to come under the umbrella of Word & Deed, continues to be active in the area of education. Through its efforts many young people are given the tools they need to get out of poverty and live productive lives.

International relief work

At times members may be forgiven for forgetting that there is such an organization as the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (CRWRF); however, whenever there is a disaster such as Typhoon Haijan in the Philippines we are reminded about its existence and its need. Still, the CRWRF is into much more than emergency disaster relief, it also supports any number of projects around the world on a daily basis.

The same can also be said for Word & Deed which is doing similar work. As a matter of fact, some members are wondering why these two organizations do not join forces. And that may happen one day; however, there are some differences. One is that while CRWRF operates on a purely volunteer basis, W&D operates with a paid staff. The other is that while CRWRF has its support base in the Canadian Reformed community, W&D has its support base in the Free Reformed, Heritage Reformed, and Netherlands Reformed communities. The result is that many long standing projects and people supported by CRWRF are unknown to the supporters of W&D, and vice versa.

In any case, both organizations are doing good work and are to be commended for their efforts.

Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA)

Some years ago this organization was created to assist sending churches and mission workers. The first years were not without some confusion and controversy, but it would appear that now, to borrow the words of the NASA space announcer, "We have lift off!"

In September the CRMA hosted another members meeting, as well as a series of speeches by Mr. Frank van Dalen, the Executive Director of Missions for the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. The meeting went well and the speeches proved to be highly stimulating and informative.

With regard to the membership of the CRMA, it may be reported that all of the churches that are involved in foreign mission work, as well as all of the mission relief organizations, have now joined. Several other organizations committed to youth work, radio broadcasting, local church planting and other endeavours are either members or regularly send observers.

Such overwhelming participation is a good thing as it means that all of the stakeholders from our churches are now sitting around one and the same table sharing information, discussing projects, passing along advice and expertise. The next step will be to get into long range planning. In other words, "This is where we are now by God's grace, but where does the Lord want us to be in the future?" An interesting challenge, indeed!

Christian education

If there is a lot going on in our churches, the same can be said for our schools. Across the continent covenant children are being educated by capable and well-trained teachers at pre-school, elementary, and high school levels. At the Covenant Reformed Teachers College (CCRTCA) in Hamilton and at different colleges and universities in Canada our young people are being trained as teachers. Every year hundreds of students graduate, continue their education, or enter the workforce. The skills they have learned follow them through life, into the church, and out into the world. As a community we have reason for much thankfulness.

Of course this comes at a cost. In some places where governments are friendly, the costs are manageable. In other places where governments are indifferent, the costs are onerous. Still, the Lord somehow supplies what is needed, and the work goes on.

I am not aware of any new schools starting-up. As for new buildings, in Vernon the school is now operating out of a brand new portable. I have also learned that some schools are under demographic pressure. In Ontario Credo Christian in Woodbridge and John Calvin are seeing smaller classes as younger families move to areas where the housing costs are lower. At the same time schools in the Niagara area, as well as other places, are experiencing an influx. In the Lower Mainland region of BC an attempt was recently made to re-organize the local schools but it was recently defeated. The proposal was to close William of Orange and to build a new school between Abbotsford and Aldergrove.

Because the proposal failed, Credo Christian in Langley has decided to expand its building by adding four more classrooms. John Calvin School in Yarrow will no doubt also be examining its options.

On a different but related front, our teachers continue to spend time attending conferences in order to learn new technics and sharpen their skills. This year it was Canada's turn to host the international Reformed principal's conference. The result was that men and women came from such faraway places as Australia, Brazil, and The Netherlands. From the report that you can read elsewhere in this magazine, it appears that a profitable time was had by one and all.

Special homes

From all accounts such seniors care homes as Mount Nemo, Shalom, Trinity Towers, Emmanuel, Elim, and Manoah continue to provide excellent care. At the same time some of these places also have residential suits where members can live independently or semi-independently.

In Burlington there are big plans to expand Maranatha Homes, adding bigger and better suites, as well as adding a nursing care facility. Studies indicate that Burlington has a large population of Reformed seniors who do not want to move to homes in either Brampton or Grimsby. The same is true north of Toronto where members of the Bethel church, along with members from other Reformed churches in the area, are trying to get a new senior's residence off the ground.

In addition to special homes, a number of churches also have committees that host regular events for seniors. A meal, a speaker, and an outing are often on the agenda.

Still, seniors are not the only ones receiving special care. Also those with special needs and handicaps are being assisted. Care homes called Bethesda, Rehoboth, and Anchor are sprinkled throughout the land and are great places for our special members to live.

Political efforts

As Reformed believers we honour the government, pay our taxes, pray for our politicians, and hold our elected officials accountable when it comes to justice, honesty, and mercy. Especially when it comes to the last area we are in need of assistance. Left to ourselves not much will come of this matter of holding our elected official accountable. Thankfully then there is ARPA (The Association for Reformed Political Action). There is a board that is very

active and it has hired two very capable young men: Br. Mark Penninga and Br. Andre Schutten. Together these men are doing a mountain of work: running a website, drafting pamphlets, researching issues, writing position papers, meeting with politicians, hosting public gatherings. They are helping the community at large speak out on such issues as abortion, euthanasia, prostitution, human rights tribunals, and ill-conceived laws.

In these efforts, they are assisted by another organization called *WeNeedLaw* and by its director, Br. Mike Schouten. Their aim is to have the Canadian government pass a law that will restrict the current free access to abortion.

What also gladdens the heart when it comes to both organizations is the fact that young people are becoming more and more involved. As Christians our future home may be called "The New Jerusalem" but our present home is called "Canada" and there is a great need today to defend it against the encroaching forces of secularism and materialism.

Conclusion

It is time to wrap up another long tale. As always, my apologies if I have missed something important.

May the Lord, who has blessed our churches so abundantly in 2013, continue to shower his grace, love, and mercy upon us in 2014.





Season's Greetings

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