

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
Volume 63, No. 23 • November 21, 2014

**FORTIETH CONVOCATION OF THE
CANADIAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**



Peter H. Holtvluwer
Minister of the Spring
Creek Canadian Reformed
Church at Tintern, Ontario
holtvluwer@bell.net

Rebuke Me Already!

Who likes to be rebuked?

If there is one word which flies in the face of today's western culture it's got to be the word "rebuke." It means to reprove or correct someone pointedly and directly, even sharply. For example, if you use foul language or, say, fall asleep in church, the way your parents (or spouse!) speak to you will likely be a rebuke. You'll hear firm words which expose your fault and demand correction. Those words hit and sting. They address us and sometimes dress us down for bad behaviour. Who likes to be rebuked?

Not post-modern

Rebuking certainly isn't cool in our post-modern society. The big idea in our time is to be "tolerant," to let everyone have their own opinion and act their own way. Tolerance is demanded for everything from your personal beliefs to your lifestyle choices, just so long as you don't impose your ideas on other people. You can do whatever you want (as long as it's mostly legal) but – and this is key – you *must* let other people do whatever they want too. In our age of tolerance, the only thing not tolerated is intolerance. The only sin is daring to tell people that their ideas or choices are wrong and they need to change. Ironically, there's no tolerance for that kind of talk!

Tolerant church?

Are we letting this idea make headway in the church? It can creep in silently, unawares. For example, when was the last time you felt rebuked from the pulpit? Does your minister feel free to reprove and correct your congregation in the preaching when the text calls for it? Or is that something he is afraid to do because of the backlash he thinks he'll receive? Do we as churches tolerate public rebuke of our lives? This is one of the functions of preaching as Paul tells us plainly, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. . . ." (2 Tim 3:16). Do you

encourage your pastor to include words of correction and rebuke in his preaching?

Rebuking is to be done publicly via the preaching but God also calls ministers and elders to rebuke church members *in person* when they sin: "These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you" (Titus 2:15). Do our office bearers still dare to rebuke us when we sin? Do we welcome such correction? I once had a church member say to me, "You can come for a visit, but don't bring any admonition." What kind of message are we silently (or otherwise!) sending to our elders?

Personal rebuke

If the official ministry of the church is facing pressure to keep quiet about people's choices, is it any easier for individuals to speak up person-to-person about choices friends make which don't square with their confession? Here, I think, is where we feel the greatest burden to keep our mouths shut, even among friends – perhaps especially among friends because we don't want to lose their friendship.

Maybe you've noticed that your friend has a problem with anger or perhaps there's a drinking issue. Suppose you've observed mistreatment in the marriage or maybe he sleeps regularly in church or she does not attend faithfully. Do you feel free to sit your friend down and discuss that concern? If you were this individual, would you welcome your friend to begin such a conversation? Most of us, I think, would prefer to be left alone and as a result, we tend to leave others alone too. We like the pathway of least resistance. Even if we want to truly help our brother or sister out of their sin, the walls they erect are so high and so thick, we can't think of way to scale them *and* keep the friendship – so we leave it be.

Correction a blessing

This is deeply regrettable. As sinners, we don't self-correct very easily or very well. We stray into sin very quickly and need help to break out of it. In his grace, God at times works this correction directly in our lives by shaping our circumstances and experiences

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Our annual convocation issue celebrates the Convocation evening held in September every year. On these pages readers can find reports from the Chairman of the Board of Governors, Rev. Richard Aasman, the Principal of CRTS, Dr. Gerhard Visscher, as well as from Women's Savings Action. Our best wishes to the graduates of the evening: Gerrit Bruintjes, Jeff Poort, and Tyler VanderGaag.

Issue 23 also features the first half of Dr. Ted Van Raalte's speech given at Convocation, entitled "The Reason for Our Hope: Christ in Our Apologetics." Additionally we have an article from Rev. Aasman on the sabbatical system at CRTS.

In his editorial Peter Holtvliwer writes about the role that rebuke plays among Christian brothers and sisters. Do you feel comfortable correcting your brother or sister? Do you invite others to do so when you inevitably fall into sin? Do we know how to rebuke in a wise and loving manner?

This issue also contains Treasures New and Old, the You Asked column, a book review, a letter to the editor, and a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

- 606 EDITORIAL**
Rebuke Me Already!
- 610 TREASURES NEW & OLD**
Boil for Christ
- 611 Fortieth Convocation of the CRTS**
- 613 The Reason for Our Hope:**
Christ in our Apologetics
- 616 Principal's Report 2014**
- 619 Presentation of the Women's Savings Action**
- 620 Sabbaticals at CRTS**
- 622 YOU ASKED**
- 624 BOOK REVIEW**
- 625 LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

Cover photo credit Ewout deGelder

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliwer, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J5
Email: veenendaal@telus.net

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

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

Subscriptions clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca
Advertisements clarionads@premierpublishing.ca
Website www.clarionmagazine.ca

2014 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

			Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada			\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds			\$69.00	\$ 92.00
International			\$98.00	\$154.00

*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra.
GST/HST no. 890967359RT

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

2014 ADVERTISING RATES


Advertisements: \$19.50 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch. We reserve the right to refuse ads.

PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

We acknowledge the financial support of the 
Government of Canada through the Canada
Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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

to teach us lessons. God's hand of discipline can and does hurt but it brings us good:

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son" (Heb 12:5, 6).

In the same way, the Lord's verbal rebuke, found in Scripture, is designed to warn us of the consequences of our disobedience and call us back to the pathway of life. Rebuke and discipline may indeed feel unpleasant at the time but if we listen and respond obediently, they are a great blessing!

Invite rebuke

Part of God's design in placing us together in his church is to provide this kind of help to one another. When we see a brother or sister fall into sin (without repenting), we must not keep our mouths shut. God demanded this of the Israelites already: "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt." To rebuke is an act of love! To say nothing is an act of *self-love* (which amounts to neighbour-hatred) which is more concerned about avoiding difficulty than saving our brother's soul.

Most of us, I think, would prefer to be left alone and as a result, we tend to leave others alone too

The Lord Jesus also commands us to take up matters of sin with the person, to "show him his fault" in order to win him over (see Matthew 18:15ff). Call it admonition, reproof, or correction, it's all part and parcel of godly, healthy rebuke – and it's good for us! The reality is, we all need a course-correction from time to time and we should not just *tolerate* a rebuke but we should *seek it out* and welcome it!

That probably sounds strange, but Scripture teaches us to invite rebuke. Think of the many proverbs that connect wisdom with receiving rebuke: "A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool" (Prov 17:10); "He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will

be at home among the wise" (Prov 15:31); "Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear" (Prov 25:12). Even more clear is Psalm 141:5, "Let a righteous man strike me – it is a kindness; let him rebuke me – it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it."

Scripture directs us to bring our reproofs with wisdom and love

Is that the feeling you have in your heart? Are these the messages we are sending to our fellow church members? What about our spouse or parents or adult children? Do they feel free to approach us regarding our behaviour, decisions, or even ideas we hold? Or do they walk on eggshells around us, fearful to raise certain points of discussion because they know we'll blow up in anger and refuse to talk about the issue? Such tension is a sure sign that we are hiding some sin, that we are quashing all possibility for rebuke – isn't it time to repent of this and open ourselves for a wise person's godly rebuke?

Rebuke wisely

There is a pride in all of us that naturally dislikes anyone telling us what to do. That's the main source for resisting rebuke. But on top of that, we as Christians haven't always rebuked one another very well and that also makes us hesitant, even afraid to open ourselves to correction. Sometimes we have lambasted people publicly, or taken them to task in such a way as to make them feel worthless in their shame. At times, we have come down too hard on people or we've acted as if we are superior to them and have our life all together. That kind of rebuke is wrong and needs to be replaced with a humble word of correction that seeks to bless and not beat down.

Scripture directs us to bring our reproofs with wisdom and love as Paul says in Ephesians 4:15, "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." In our marriages, families, friendships, and in the church fellowship, we must be honest with each other but not in a brutal, unkind way. We have to safe-guard the vulnerability of the other person, to realize that beneath the surface is a child whom God has claimed for Himself and whom we should thus treat with compassion and dignity.

We need to be courageous enough to say what needs to be said, to raise subjects that need raising, but then to do so in a caring manner and because we care for them. In humility, seek first to understand by asking good, honest questions. Listen carefully so that you grasp the situation fully and equitably. The other person should know that you accurately see the whole picture – and then address the sin that is apparent. Yes, the words may need to be sharp at times (Titus 1:13) but only when necessary and only because we love God and our neighbour and have a powerful desire to see our loved one return to the right path and be reconciled to God.

The goal is to win your brother back! If you bring a rebuke with a cold, unfeeling heart or merely out of a sense of duty, you have missed the point and you have gutted your reproof of any power to persuade. Your body language, your tone, and your actions will communicate more loudly than your words – people need to sense and feel that what's driving you is genuine love. If they sense otherwise, they'll only dismiss you as a hypocrite.

Worthy rebuke

Rebuking must be reserved for sins and not simply for actions we feel uncomfortable with. That can be a

fine line at times, but there is among believers a degree of Christian liberty (e.g. Romans 14). Not all things are spelled out in Scripture as being right or wrong. Where they are, we must speak clearly and firmly. Where they are not, we may have brotherly discussions about the wisdom of the idea or action in an effort to sharpen one another and out of a desire to busy our lives with things which truly honour God, build up the church, and strengthen our faith. It's good to ask ourselves, even if something may be permissible, "Is it beneficial?" (1 Cor 10:23). We may express warning or caution about a pathway that is less than beneficial, but we do not call someone to repentance simply for holding an opinion different from our own or acting contrary to our preference.

So, the best way we can bring godly rebuke back into our friendships, families, and the family of God, is to open ourselves up for it. Lead the way by being vulnerable yourself. Tell the people around you: *If you have concerns about the direction of my life, I want you to feel free to discuss them with me. If you think my lifestyle or any view I hold goes against God's Word in any way, please tell me. I promise I won't get angry. I will listen carefully and thank you for your Christian care. I want only to live close to the Lord, so go ahead: rebuke me, already!* **C**



Boil for Christ

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”

(Romans 12:11)

In any relationship indifference is painful and damaging. For instance, a husband who is indifferent to the needs of his wife hurts her and the marriage. In a relationship we need to be attentive, caring, and even passionate about the other person. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says about our relationship with Jesus Christ: “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”

As clear as Paul’s words may seem, it is possible that we struggle with an expression like “never be lacking in zeal.” What is Paul really saying? In the original Greek the language is far richer than anything English can capture. Literally, it goes something like this: “Regarding commitment don’t shrink back.” In other words, don’t be lazy or idle in your commitment to the Lord. Don’t hold back. It is not enough simply to be in a relationship. It is not enough to say: “I attend the worship services; I give my firstfruits to the Lord; I support Christian education.” These are wonderful things. Attending the worship services is critically important to hear the proclamation of God’s Word. But what are you doing with that? Where is your passion? Are you complacent about this relationship with the Lord, or are you using your time and gifts to serve him with all your heart, soul, and mind?

Paul reinforces this when he adds: “But keep your spiritual fervor.” The word Paul uses here literally means

“to boil.” Boil for Christ! It is a figurative way of saying: Be excited about and on fire for Jesus Christ. You cannot tell from the Greek whether Paul is speaking about “spiritual” as in our spirituality, or “the Spirit” as in the Holy Spirit. Ultimately it doesn’t matter. There is only way we can get this spiritual fervour, this boiling, and that is through the work of the Holy Spirit. Only he can get us to boil, because only he can work faith in our hearts to take hold of Jesus Christ as Saviour, and so to be born again to live for him.

We read in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.” Therefore to burn or boil for Jesus Christ is to live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit. And where do we meet the Holy Spirit? In the Bible. During the preaching the Holy Spirit reveals to us our Father who loves us so much, the Son Jesus Christ who died for us on the cross, and the Holy Spirit who has come to dwell and work in our hearts. Meeting God in his Word and embracing the gospel as our own is to feel the temperature rising, ‘till it boils over with love, adoration, and passion for Jesus Christ.

When we are on fire with the Spirit, the result is always that we are “serving the Lord.” True religion is not just about being emotional and bubbling over in enthusiasm for Christ. We read in Romans 12:1, “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living

sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.” We’re in a relationship with our God, and we’re boiling over in joy and thanksgiving. That should lead to real service for the Lord in thought, word, and deed. Instead of living in sin, we need to be transformed through the power of Christ’s Spirit: building up relationships such as marriage and family, being active within the communion of saints with a special eye for the lonely and marginalized, using our education and work to glorify God and edify our neighbour, and sharing the hope we have with the world around us.

The big question is this: How are we going to do it? Find the resources deep in ourselves? Dig deep? Are we kidding? There is nothing there. Our foundation, our strength, our everything is Jesus Christ. Only when we know him and rest on him as the rock of our salvation, finding in his blood and Spirit our salvation, are we empowered to live a life of holiness. We serve Jesus Christ because he first served us and fulfilled everything in our place. He has brought us liberty. He has brought us joy. He has given us passion. He and he alone, through his Spirit, sets us on fire and brings us to the boiling point so that every thought, word, and deed serves him with joy and zeal. Paul writes in Philippians 4:13, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”



Richard Aasman
Minister of the Providence
Canadian Reformed Church at
Edmonton, Alberta
raasman@telusplanet.net

Forty-Fifth Anniversary Meeting and Fortieth Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

September 5, 2014



Richard Aasman
Minister of the Providence
Canadian Reformed Church
at Edmonton, Alberta and
Chairman of the Board of
Governors of the Canadian
Reformed Theological Seminary
raasman@telusplanet.net

The clouds hung ominously, threatening rain, as people arrived at Redeemer University College. It held off long enough for people to enter the building without getting wet. However, during the evening the rain lashed the roof, thunder sounded, lights even flickered, and afterwards as people were leaving, there was a mad dash for vehicles through the pouring rain. Thankfully none of this seemed to detract from an enjoyable evening.



The evening was opened by the chairman of the Board, Rev. Richard Aasman, who read 1 Peter 3:8-22 and led in prayer. The prayer remembered, among other things, the special needs of the widow of the late Dr. K. Deddens, Dr. J. DeJong and his wife Margaret, Prof. J. Geertsema, Dr. N.H. Gootjes and his wife Dinie, and Sr. W. Faber, widow of the late Dr. J. Faber. After prayer, excerpts were read from letters sent by the Free Reformed Churches of Kelmscott, Darling Downs, and West Albany, Australia and the Emmanuel American Reformed Church in Denver, CO.

The principal of the seminary, Dr. Gerhard H. Vischer, presented his principal's report. You can read the entire report elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. Dr. Vischer mentioned that this is the first academic year in which we had five full-time professors at the seminary. It has been a real blessing to have Dr. Theodore G. Van Raalte teaching church history and church polity and thus allowing Dr. A.J. de Visser to focus on subjects such as preaching and pastoral work.

The keynote speaker for the evening was Dr. Th.G. Van Raalte, professor of Ecclesiology. His address was "The Reason for our Hope: Christ in Apologetics." Dr. Van Raalte presented his topic in a lively, clear manner and gave us good understanding into what apologetics means. Ultimately apologetics is not just something theologians engage in, but to use the words of 1 Peter 3:15: "Always

be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” The entire speech can found elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*.

The climax of the evening was the graduation of three students. We witnessed the conferring of the degree of Master of Divinity on Mr. Gerrit Bruintjes, Mr. Jeff Poort, and Mr. Tyler VanderGaag. The Selles Book



Prize was presented to Jeff Poort. A word of thanks was expressed by Tyler VanderGaag on behalf of the graduating class.

The Women’s Savings Action, represented by Mrs. Joanne Van Dam and Mrs. Chris Nienhuis, presented a pledge for \$35,000.00 for the coming year. Mrs. Janet Van Vliet is also on the committee but was not present since the Lord had blessed her and Dr. J. Van Vliet with a baby boy that past week. Much appreciation was expressed for the members in the federation who have con-



tributed throughout the years to this important cause of money for the seminary library.

The collection was for the CRTS Technological Improvements. During the collection the Niagara Voice of Praise choir sang “Hallelujah” by Beethoven and “Psalm 23” by J. Kingma. The evening was much enhanced by music and singing praises to the Lord. The organist for the evening was Mr. Brian Vanderhout.

Rev. Anthon Souman led in closing prayer. As is customary, the assembly concluded with the singing of “O Canada.” After the program everyone had opportunity to congratulate the graduates. It was also a time of good fellowship, and of renewing friendships and acquaintances. You are welcome to view a video version of the College evening at www.canadianreformedseminary.ca. C





Theodore G.
(Ted) Van Raalte
Professor of Ecclesiology at the
Canadian Reformed Theological
Seminary in Hamilton, ON
tvanraalte@crtcs.ca

The Reason for Our Hope: Christ in Our Apologetics

The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary has finally become Canadian. This is not about saying “eh” but it’s close. You are Canadian, so you understand. Here’s the story: One year ago at CRTS we read the online issue of a Harvard study in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. It said that statistics show that superfluous apologies demonstrate empathic concern and increase trust.¹ In so-called layman’s terms: The authors found that people who say, “I’m sorry” about everything are more likely to be perceived as trustworthy and likeable. If you ask a stranger, “Can I borrow your cell phone?” they’ll probably say no. But if you apologize and say, “I’m sorry. May I use your cell phone for a moment?” they’re more likely to let you. Well, we are Canadian, we want our graduates to be likeable, we’re sorry to require this even of our foreign students, but from now on all students must take our course in apologizing.

When you see the word “apologetics,” you instantly notice the word “apology” inside it. But, as it happens, the semantic range of the word “apology” varies from saying, “I’m sorry,” to giving a reasoned explanation and defense of what you believe. It’s of course the latter meaning that we’re about to discuss tonight.

The topic is fitting because from January to May of 2014 the first course in apologetics was crafted and taught at CRTS. We really had a good time together as we considered the biblical basis of apologetics, the varieties of it, the history of it, and special topics such as what kind of common ground there is between believers and unbelievers (for which Herman Bavinck is helpful), and what is the transcendental critique of Cornelius Van Til. After that we developed answers to selected objections raised against the Christian faith. The final exam consisted in a half-hour oral exam for each student in which

they had to counter objections and give explanations for the hope that is in them. In other words, they had to practice apologetics.

This is exactly what our reading from Peter’s first letter calls on us to do. His admonition is our starting point for the course and the topic of my talk tonight. “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet 3:15). When Peter writes that we are to give an answer for our hope, he is saying that our hope, which is secure in Christ, has explanations. We can supply the reason for our hope when someone asks us. The idea is that when we make a defense we can give explanations, validations, accountings, justifications, rationales, or reasons for our hope. Our hope is not irrational, illogical, beyond words, mysterious, inexpressible, or unexplainable. Rather, we can give an accounting and we should always be ready with reasons. Negatively, you can answer objections. Positively, you can argue in favour of your hope. If you have the truth, then by its very nature, it is rational, subject to explanation. The apostle isn’t saying that we can have comprehensive knowledge of every aspect of the faith. Many things go beyond our understanding. Yet we should not be afraid but always be ready to give an answer or defense to anyone who asks us for the explanation of our heart’s hope. That’s the basic message of God’s Word here.

The text has (1) Christ as Lord, (2) our hope, (3) people asking the reason for our hope, and (4) we giving a defense by supplying the reason or explanation.

(1) The opening statement that Christ is Lord is designed to bolster our confidence. When some person threatens us – be he our neighbour or our king – we



know that we have a higher Lord, far more mighty than they. We are in fact so closely joined to him that we can act with clemency (Phil 4:6) and gentleness (1 Pet 3:16), prerogatives of a king. They may persecute us, but in fact the higher power and authority is on our side. He conquers all, either with love or with justice. Set apart in your hearts your Messiah, the Christ, as your Master. None is greater.²

(2) The next thing, our hope, is something very important in Peter's letters. Already in 1:3 he writes how the Father "gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." By your new birth you have come into what we might call the family of living hope. The hope is living because Christ is living. The hope is the thing ahead of us. Christ blazed the trail to the new creation. Hebrews 6:18 says that believers flee to take hold of the hope set before us. Colossians 1:5 speaks of the hope stored up for us in heaven. This hope is not a wish, such as, "I hope it won't rain tonight." It's not just a feeling or something in your head, but a real thing outside of you. This hope already exists in fullness in Jesus Christ. In First Peter 1:4 this hope is parallel to "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for us." This hope is not a mere wish, but a reality. Nothing can assault it. No matter our situation as pilgrims here on earth, the hope is certain and immovable. Faith reaches forward to it.

In fact, even now that hope is ours. The NIV84 text says it is "the hope that you have." The original Greek is stronger, "the hope that is in you." This doesn't just mean an inner feeling. The hope is living because Christ is living. He is in heaven. But by faith he is found alive in us also. Just as we set him apart as Lord "in our hearts" so also this hope – focused in Christ – is within us. Christ is in us by his Spirit. He's our hope.

(3) That hope is so real for us, so strong, that it affects the way we live every day. A life with the foundation of hope gives rise to questions. Christ is in us by his Spirit, he orients us toward the future, and so we live like we belong somewhere else where righteousness, peace, and love rule the day. We submit to authority. We live in marriage in a holy and thus happy way. We love one another and others. We even suffer for our eagerness to do good. We do it for God's glory. All this makes us shine like stars in this dark world, stars who bask in and reflect the wonderful light of the Lord (Phil 2:15; 1 Pet 2:9). In all kinds of situations, whenever someone should ask about the hope that is in you, why you shine this way, you are expected to give an explanation, to defend your Lord and his Word, to show how your way of living makes sense from the perspective of faith in Christ.

Thus far, then, we have Christ as Lord, a secure hope drawn within us, and a new way of life which gives rise to questions. What about our response?

(4) Out of our hope we must give a defense or an answer, an explanation. The Greek word is *apologia*, hence "apologetics." Since it is a living hope that was obtained through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1:3), the centre of our defense will be about his resurrection.

This answer or *apologia* is the word used in Greek for an official defense in court. Peter's fellow apostle Paul made several such defenses (Phil 1:7, 16; 2 Tim 4:16). He appealed to Caesar. This shows that the defense Peter has in mind is convincing and rational. Our faith is not a secret mystery, but is proclaimed from the mountaintops, verifiable in history, and rationally coherent. A defense in court implies all this. Yet Peter applies his exhortation to all occasions and circumstances, whenever our out-of-this-world style of living gives rise to questions. We will explain that we live this way because of Christ our hope.

When we give a defense, we are therefore going to be talking about Christ. The reason for the hope that is in us is the explanation or justification or vindication of the way

we act. We are not irrational to endure persecution; rather, it's all very reasonable, for our lives go way beyond this visible world. We have a power source that is extra-terrestrial. Faith is holding onto such a secure hope that we even have joy in the midst of suffering. Our responses are mind-blowing to unbelievers, but quite justified and reasonable in light of the miraculous work of Christ.

And yet, as reasonable as it is, no one can accept these reasons unless they believe. Faith comes first. When we give a reason for the hope that is in us, and both the hope and the reason for it are in Christ, both are matters of faith.

*Whenever someone should ask
about the hope that is in you,
why you shine this way, you are expected
to give an explanation*

Does this mean that apologetics is limited to preaching the gospel? After all, preaching forms faith, as Peter also reminds us in 1:22–25. This is an important question, for if apologetics is limited to preaching, we have no justification for making it a separate course at CRTS. How does apologetics differ from preaching? Well, Peter imagines it being used in all kinds of situations by all Christians, not just preachers on the pulpit. It is also interactive and filled with reasons. Everyone one of us is expected to be an apologist, for he exhorts us to be ready always. We all should know why we hope in Christ. Our way of life shouldn't just be a meaningless routine, a mere custom, going through the motions. We must understand the gospel. The reason for our hope should be convincing enough to make our opponents ashamed because of their slander, as Peter writes in verse 16.

The question for us then is: Do you know the gospel? Can you defend your faith? Are you equipping yourself to do this? This hope you have, my brothers and sisters, can be probed and studied, known better and enjoyed very much, and therefore also explained and accounted for with other people. Have you ever done that? Is your life radical enough to give rise to their questions? Would there be enough evidence in court to convict you of being a Christian? Those are serious points that we all need to ponder.

We should also ask ourselves how much we really delight in the gospel. Is it really your hope? Is the real stuff of your life your filet mignon with a glass of cabernet sauvignon? Do you live for that yearly holiday cruise? Or is Jesus Christ your hope? Everyone can talk for a long time about what's their passion. So the question for us is whether Christ as Lord really is what we're passionate about. Is he really your hope? Do you live like your real life source is from a different realm, from Christ, and in that sense like you are a stranger here? Do you delight in him like nothing else? If you can say yes then I am certain you can also account for that hope. You can do apologetics. The Holy Spirit will help you, as Jesus promised, especially in times of stress and persecution (Matt 10:19–20). Whoever acknowledges Jesus before men will be acknowledged by Jesus before our Father in heaven, but whoever disowns him will be disowned (Matt 10:32–33). With all the seriousness of the holy calling God has laid upon me, I ask myself and all of you, “Is Jesus Christ your only hope in this world?” “Is there evidence that you have been born again into a living hope?” I pray you will improve upon this point, as must I. And I command you, as did Peter, “Be ready always to give a reason for the hope that you have!”

If God has been gracious to us, we now understand not just the meaning of the text, but also its significance for us.³ Yet there are a few further reflections with respect to apologetics. Next time we'll consider seven of these.

¹ Alison Wood Brooks, Hengchen Dai, and Maurice E. Schweitzer, “I’m Sorry About the Rain!”: Superfluous Apologies Demonstrate Empathic Concern and Increase Trust,” in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 5:4 (May 2014), 467–74 (first published online September 26, 2013).

² There appears to be an Old Testament background for First Peter 3:14–15 in Isaiah 8:12–13. Peter here applies equally to Christ what referred in Isaiah to Yahweh. Isaiah 8:14 was used by Peter also, in First Peter 2:8.

³ For the distinction between meaning (possible for all people) and significance (possible only for the regenerated) as regards Scripture, see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 136–7, 153, 172, 176.





Gerhard H. Visscher
Principal and Academic Dean at
the Canadian Reformed Theological
Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
ghvisscher@crtcs.ca

Young Men Needed!

If we think this evening about what has been unique in the past year, there are actually a few “firsts” for us to highlight.

It was the *first* academic year wherein we actually had five full-time professors at the seminary. It has been truly wonderful to have Dr. Van Raalte in the building paying particular attention to the world of church history and church polity and thus allowing Dr. de Visser to focus even more on his subjects that are so significant for the day to day realities of pastoral life.

Last year was also the *first* time that we were able to have a joint conference with our colleagues from the Theological University in Kampen. While this was cloaked with a certain degree of controversy, it seems to us that if it is the nature of federational relations to have ongoing discussions with sister churches, it is beneficial also to have periodic discussions with sister institutions. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless the brothers in Kampen as they seek to be a Reformed voice in that country still dear to so many of us.

It was the *first* academic year wherein we also enjoyed the benefits of a new sabbatical system. Synod Lincoln in 1992 already agreed that it would be beneficial for the Seminary if professors had periodic sabbaticals for the benefit of their teaching and their research. The process proved somewhat cumbersome, however, because of the need to find replacement instructors, and house them and their families for lengthy periods of time, and the result has been that sabbaticals actually were very few and far between. We have now, however, developed a system wherein sabbaticals are actually built-in to the program. Because we essentially have six rotating semesters in the teaching cycle, and five fulltime professors, it is possible to have most of each professor’s courses occur in five of the six semesters and thus each professor automatically has a reduced teaching load for one semester every three years. We are hopeful that this will give to each professor in turn an appropriate amount of time for rest, research, and publishing for the benefit of the professor, the seminary, the community, and perhaps even the Reformed academic world.

On a more personal note, last year was also the *first* time that my wife and I, as the first beneficiary of the new sabbatical program, had the privilege of visiting Australia. It was delightful to visit churches we had heard so much about, connect with the brothers and sisters there, sit down with former and future students, and represent CRTS in the midst of a federation that is so supportive of our work. It’s really not a luxury for professors to visit there, as it gives us also a better idea of the challenges and pressures our present students may face there as we help them prepare for a life of ministry. It was also a singular privilege to visit colleagues and former students who are now laboring in the mission fields of Papua New Guinea and Indonesia.¹ Who would not return with increased appreciation for the role of missionaries and their families as they bring hope to troubled countries with the message of the King of kings and Lord of lords?



Whereas the two-week mission practicum has been a standard feature of the Pastoral Training Program over the last few years, it is no doubt also a *first* and worthwhile to note that while eight of them did so in the past year, *five* of the eight managed to travel to foreign countries to do so – even as far away as Papua New Guinea. Young men come forth from the seminary with considerable more knowledge about what’s happening through the gospel all over the world.

And lastly, this past week has also been the *first* time that CRTS, with Board, Senate, staff, and even alumni has gone through an intense Strategic Planning session. It is so worthwhile to periodically pause, stand back, and examine the “hows” and “whys” of what it is that we are doing. May the Lord continue to bless us when together we attempt to press on the role of CRTS to greater excellence and higher goals in the service of churches and ultimately in the service of the only Head of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Students

Tonight, we may present you with three students for the M.Div. degree: Mr. Gerrit Brintjes, who has accepted a call to the church at Toronto, Mr. Jeff Poort, who has accepted a call to the church at Kerwood, and Mr. Tyler VanderGaag, who has accepted a call to the church at Taber, AB.

Tonight we may welcome three new students. Darren Feenstra comes to us from Grand Valley, ON, Cody Swaving from Fergus, ON, and Sungwon Yoon comes to us all the way from Korea.

While we are always hopeful for more, we are encouraged by the fact that our Registrar’s office has a long list of students who intend to enroll in future years. It is also encouraging that our present student body consists of a total of eighteen students. Churches do well to be aware of the fact that this spring there could be five students who become eligible for call and eight students who could receive permission to speak an edifying word. Such numbers, of course, might give young men the impression that we have little need for future students. That is clearly not the case. The fact is that in the next twenty years, throughout North America and Australia thirty-eight of our ministers are expected to retire; if you add to that the fact that there are twelve vacancies presently and that in the last twenty years we added thirty new pulpits, this means in the next twenty years we need about eighty new ministers. Thus, whereas in the last twenty years we have ordained forty-

five young men, *the total number of students in the next 20 years really needs to double!* It means: boys, young men, stand up and be counted for the wonderful task of proclaiming the gospel!

Travels

Professors do travel periodically, either to stay abreast of their respective fields by attending conferences, or to teach or speak elsewhere briefly for the benefit of CRTS and the supporting churches. To this end, here’s our annual list of where we’ve been.

Dr. A.J. De Visser

- Spoke at the Deroche College and Careers conference in B.C. in August 2013
- Visited South Africa in May 2014 to attend the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches in S. Africa, preach in various churches, visit the mission field, etc.
- Also visited Malawi to speak at a ministers’ conference and visit churches.

Dr. J. Smith

- Attended Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD in November 2013 where he also presented: “A Commentary on Psalm 26 (27).”
- Lectured at the Reformed Bible College (Abbotsford, BC) from December 11-12, 2013 on Genesis 1 and 2
- Through the Association for Reformed Political Action, spoke to Members of Parliament and Senators on “Restorative Justice: Righting the Relational Wrongs” on May 6, 2014
- Lectured at the Instituto João Calvino (Recife, Brazil), June 9-17, 2014.

Dr. T.G. Van Raalte

- Presented a paper on Antoine de Chandieu at Faith and the University Conference in Montreal, September 26-28, 2013
- Presented a paper to celebrate the work of his promoter, Dr. Richard Muller, in Grand Rapids, MI on October 9, 2013
- Presented a paper for the Junius Institute regarding digitization of books on May 8-9, 2014 in Grand Rapids.

Dr. J. Van Vliet

- Presented “Who’s really in the class?” at the International Conference of Reformed Educators in Orillia, ON, October 7-8, 2013
- Toured the churches in Alberta, visiting both churches and schools, October 22-28, 2013

- Delivered three lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism for the Fall Lectures Series of Mid-America Seminary in Dyer, IN, November 12-13, 2013
- Presented a paper on “The Freed Will: Can Augustine teach us to see Calvin in a New Light?” at the Canadian Society of Renaissance & Reformation Studies in St Catharines, in May 2014.

Dr. G.H. Visscher

- Attended the Evangelical Theological Society meetings in Baltimore, MD, in November 2013
- Attended Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents conference from January 8-11 in Florida
- Visited missionaries and mission churches in Papua New Guinea from April 15-27, 2014, where instruction was also given at the Reformed Bible College in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea from April 23-26, 2014
- Travelled to the Cairns, Tasmania, Perth, and Albany areas of Australia to promote the work of CRTS in April and May 2014
- Taught at the Indonesian Reformed Theological College in Kupang, Indonesia, May 28-30, 2014.


Dr. C. Van Dam, emeritus professor

- Attended the annual meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society and of the Institute for Biblical Research in November 2013 in Baltimore, MD where he presented a paper on “Interpreting Historical Narrative.”

CRTS community

At CRTS, we continue to be grateful to our supporting churches in Canada, USA, and Australia for a level of support that allows us to flourish as a seminary. We continue to enjoy also the labours of three staff members who do their work with dedication: Mrs. Margaret Alkema, Mrs. Leanne Kuizenga, and Ms. Catharine Mechelse.

We thank the Lord for continued health and energy of Dr. C. Van Dam who remains very active in his retirement years. And we are ever so thankful that the Lord has heard all the prayers for Prof. J. Geertsema, who has a clean bill of health again, and resurfaces every now and then with new spring in his step, and new joy for daily blessings. In the life of the CRTS community, it is not only the address on 110th Street in Hamilton that is important. Increasingly an address in Grimsby, Ontario receives our attention as both Dr. Jack de Jong and Dr. Niek Gootjes, as well as Mrs. W. Faber reside there now. On the one hand, it is ever so heart rending to see formerly brilliant minds now so feeble at Shalom Manor; on the other hand, it is a reminder to us all to do our work with daily thankfulness, with a view to the rule of the Head of the church who will return, and in the hope of the resurrection, knowing that it is in him alone that their and our labours are not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).

¹ Readers who did not already do so are still welcome to browse the many paged blog of our travels at <http://whereintheworldisghv.blogspot.ca>. Be sure to click on “Older Posts” at the bottom of each page in order to see all 42 pages of pictures and posts of our journey. 



*Chris Nienhuis,
Joanne Van Dam,
and Janet Van Vliet*

Presentation of the Women's Savings Action at Convocation 2014

Mr. President, Members of the Board and Faculty,
Graduates, Brothers and Sisters

As Women's Savings Action our forty-fifth anniversary
we celebrate.

We would like to reminisce and so God's love demonstrate.
In rhyme we will tell our story,
Giving to God all the praise and glory.

In the year 1969 women of the church did make a decision
To raise money for the Theological College Library with
a savings action.

Soon tins with a blue College label in every congregation
did appear

Into which pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters
would disappear.

Across the country sisters with enthusiasm did collect
and count

Many gave generously and the donations added up to
one big amount.

Over the years not just change, but dollar bills were
collected and cheques written

And this year our first online donation was even given.

Let us give some numbers so the blessings you can
clearly see

More than two thousand collected and five hundred
given in 1970.

"He who gathers money little by little makes it grow."
By 2014 close to a million has been gathered in! See,
Proverbs told us so.

"Where has all the money gone?" You are sure to ask.
At first there were some items to aid the teaching task.
Money to help buy a new seminary facility in 1985,
and in 2000 a new library

But mainly to purchase books and periodicals for our
precious seminary.



In this anniversary year we received a special donation,
A logo representing our work as Women's Savings
Action.

Beside the seminary logo our new logo you can see
Very noticeable is the similarity.

The dark blue of the book is the same as the historic
seminary hue

The reader you notice is in a lighter slate blue.

The flame on both logos the seminary's motto does
portray

The Latin in English "Your Word is my light" does say.

Did you notice in our logo the book is almost in the
shape of a heart?

It symbolizes the labour of love in which we may
take part.

Our logo shows women helping the seminary to
purchase study material

In order to study God's Word, our light, a need very real.
To keep the library up to date is very important,
you will agree,

Our library with all its many resources has become a
wonderful facility.

For forty-five years we could all contribute through
God's grace

By collecting, counting, or giving each in his or her
own place.

We thank you for giving of your time and energy
And we thank you for giving so faithfully.

Above all, we thank the Lord for blessing us every
year again

For without it all our work would be in vain.

With gratitude to the Lord we may announce that a total
of \$31,704.30 was collected. Mr. Principal, it gives us
great pleasure to present you with a pledge of \$35,000 for
the coming year.



Sabbaticals at CRTS



Richard Aasman
Minister of the Providence
Canadian Reformed Church
at Edmonton, Alberta and
Chairman of the Board of
Governors of the Canadian
Reformed Theological Seminary
raasman@telusplanet.net

On September 6, 2012, the Board of Governors at CRTS agreed in principle to adopt a new sabbatical policy. Synod Lincoln 1992 had approved a sabbatical policy that would allow one professor to be on sabbatical every three years. That would mean a professor could receive a sabbatical every twelve years. The granting of a sabbatical was conditioned on the Seminary's ability to find a suitable replacement instructor. However, due to difficulties with finding suitable instructors and the costs of travel and housing, it became clear that a revision in sabbatical policy was necessary. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), which granted accreditation to our Seminary last year, states in its standards: "Schools shall provide structured opportunities for faculty research and intellectual growth, such as regular research leaves and faculty colloquia." Hence, a new, workable sabbatical policy was adopted. The notable benefit of this new system is that it will no longer be necessary to bring in replacement professors at significant travel and housing costs. The lecture schedule has been set up in such a way that professors can fulfill their teaching obligation and still have a six month sabbatical. It might be beneficial both for our professors and the supporting churches to review what it means for a professor to go on sabbatical.

The CRTS Handbook describes the Sabbatical Leave Program as "a paid sabbatical program which will enable faculty to engage in creative, scholarly, or professional activity. Sabbaticals are granted to a faculty member when there is demonstrable benefit to the individual and the Seminary." The Handbook also defines eligibility for this program:

A sabbatical will be granted on the basis of an evaluation of the appropriateness of the planned scholarly activity for the professional development of the faculty member, for the academic program of the Seminary, and for the furtherance of knowledge in general. In order to be eligible for a sabbatical, a fac-

ulty member must give evidence of having done preliminary research or creative activity related to the proposed project.

In order for a professor to qualify for a sabbatical, he must submit an application that will require approval from the Senate, the Academic Committee, and the Board for final approval. The CRTS Handbook states: "The application must include a description of the project, its benefit for the faculty member, the Seminary, and the academic community, a description of the work done in preparation of the sabbatical, a time schedule and, if necessary, a financial budget."

From all of this it is clear that sabbaticals are intended to enable professors to engage in scholarly work. To do this, they need to take a rest or leave from their regular teaching work. Their scholarly work will be for their personal development, the academic excellence of the Seminary as a whole, and for the furtherance of knowledge in general. When articles and books are written during a sabbatical, this benefits other theologians and church members who are interested in digging deeper into theological studies. The Board of Governors has also noted that professors on sabbatical are rested and refreshed as they take a break from a busy teaching schedule.

I have heard from professors from various institutions that their non-academic friends are envious of their sabbaticals, viewing a sabbatical as a six month vacation. Perhaps that impression also lingers in our circles. Professors at our seminary often find that they are expected to preach and give various lectures during their sabbaticals. Often they do that. We see from the Principal's Report in this issue of *Clarion* that Dr. Visscher used some of his sabbatical to visit the churches in Australia who support our seminary, and the mission fields of Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. He delivered a number of speeches in these places. This was much appreciated. But it is important that we as churches do not lose sight

of what the original intent of a sabbatical is. It is to free up time and energy to do some scholarly work. We should not expect our professors to busy themselves too much with preaching and speeches. It is up to a professor to decide whether he would like to do some of those things, but it should not undermine his scholarly pursuit.

The existing formulation of the Statement of Institutional Purpose (SIP) in the CRTS Handbook reads in part: The Seminary is called by the churches to explore in a scholarly way the riches of Holy Scripture in order that these riches may be a blessing for the life of the church into the twenty-first century. The instruction at the Seminary stresses above all the preparation of the students for their practical service as ministers of the Word. The churches are convinced that this preparation should aim at the highest academic standards possible.

The purpose of our seminary is to train students for the ministry of the Word, and to do that in a way that is faithful to God's Word and confessions, and in a scholarly way that aims at the highest academic standards possible.

The Association of Theological Schools encouraged our Seminary to review our SIP. At a recent meeting by board and senate to review the SIP, we put together a proposal that the next Board meeting will have to look at. One line in this proposal reads, "Faithfulness to Scripture and confession, academic excellence, and practical relevance for the ministry are three significant goals." Clearly training for the ministry must be faithful to the Word and confessions and be practical. But it must also strive for academic excellence. It is only in a climate of academic excellence that future ministers learn how to interpret the Scriptures and proclaim God's Word in a meaningful and relevant way to others.

In order for our professors to fulfill the purpose of training ministers of God's Word and to be a blessing to others in the world who have the same goals, they will need to engage in scholarly activity. Sabbaticals are a wonderful opportunity to do this. Under God's blessing, with faithful and capable professors, we hope to move forward in the training for the ministry, training that will be faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Reformed confessions, and will be academically sound.





William den Hollander
Minister emeritus of the
Bethel Canadian Reformed
Church of Toronto, Ontario
denhollanderw@gmail.com

Q

In a group discussion the subject of elections of office bearers came up. The option of casting lots came up and was strongly defended by some. Is this something the church today should be using?

A

The matter of “casting the lot” is mentioned once in a while in letters to the editor, articles, or otherwise in *Clarion*. In connection with the election of office bearers, women voting, and the text of Article 3 C.O., it was suggested as an alternative for our present practice and perhaps as a way out of the division surrounding the discussion on women voting (*Clarion*, Vol. 60, No. 21). Another letter to the editor suggested that we should not be voting for elders and deacons at all, since the church is Christ’s and he should be selecting the shepherds of his flock (*Clarion*, Vol. 60, No. 25). Since these letters to the editor pertained to an article written by the Rev. Karlo Janssen, he interacted with these suggestions and sentiments in that same Year End issue of *Clarion* 2011, p. 620. I can wholeheartedly agree with him when he explains the fact that after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) no mention is made anymore of the casting of the lot even though the election of elders and deacons does happen in the congregations of Christ.

The presence of the Holy Spirit makes “casting lots” unnecessary. It is true that the church is Christ’s and that he in his government of the church gives office bearers to his church (Eph 4:11). Just as in the OT, the calling to the office comes from God (also the calling to the general office of all believers; namely by our sharing with Christ in


the anointing with the Holy Spirit, LD 12). As we confess in Belgic Confession Article 31, however, “[W]e believe that ministers of God’s Word, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen to their offices *by lawful election of the church*, with prayer and *in good order*, as stipulated by the Word of God.” God extends this call to office in the way of, by means of, the council and congregation. God himself makes the office bearers and congregation instrumental in the process toward the call to office! That’s a great honour for the congregation, a confirmation also of the maturity of the NT believers, which the Holy Spirit gives to the church of Christ. The Holy Spirit, thus, activates the believers, using their spiritual gifts, discretion, and discernment in the nomination and election process (cf. Dr. C. Trimp, *Zorgen voor de Gemeente*, p. 23). Those who are chosen, then, acknowledge this God-given calling with the first question for the installation, “Do you feel in your hearts that God himself, *through his congregation*, has called you to these offices.”

In his article, Dr. Trimp also highlights the fact that in the reformation of the sixteenth century the church received it back, this gift of Christ by the Holy Spirit to his congregation. In the background of Article 31 we must see the return to the Word of God regarding the calling to office from the practice of succession and self-continuation among the clergy in the RCC. It was one of those practices of hierarchy against which Luther and Calvin placed the power of the Word, the gift of the Spirit, and the ability of discernment in the NT congregation.

When Article 31 speaks of “lawful election” and “in good order,” it also reacts against the practices among the Anabaptists in those days. The calling to office among them consisted of a so-called “inner calling,” suggesting or pretending to have heard a voice in their heart, claiming thereby a special calling from God. The reformers rejected such subjective “calling” and restored the place of the congregation and the good order in the process toward the calling to office (which then gives the one who is called this conviction *in his heart* that he is called by God).

Although we may thankfully receive, confess, and practise this calling process toward the installation in office of ministers, elders, and deacons, involving and activating the congregation in the orderly manner in which

this has become organized in our churches (with some variation in the procedures locally), this does not mean that the “casting of lots” has been eliminated completely. We do not recommend it nor forbid it, but if necessary it may still be used. Perhaps this is one of those examples in which Belgic Confession Article 25 applies, namely that “the truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ.” The OT principle and truth was God’s *calling* and anointing in office (directly, or by way of a prophet). In the event, therefore, that the voting by ballot results in a tie vote repeatedly, voting procedures of many a congregation include the possibility *still* of “the casting of lots” (with prayer!) to break out of such an impasse (while other congregations use the practice of considering the *older in years* to be elected).



***Is there something you’ve been wanting to know?
An answer you’ve been looking for?***

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander

denhollanderw@gmail.com

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0

Comforting Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Heidelberg Catechism, Starr Meade, Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2013

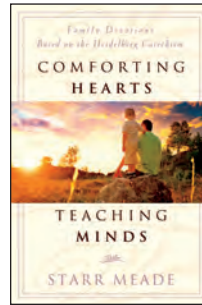
**Additional Information: Paperback, \$16.09,
255 pages**

For many Reformed parents, the catechizing of their children begins and ends with catechism classes taught by the church. This is despite the fact that the third baptismal question is very clear. Parents first of all promise that *they* will instruct their children in the “complete doctrine of salvation” as soon as those children are able to understand. The catechism teaching done by the church is not meant to replace this parental catechism teaching, but to complement or supplement it. But how do we implement parental catechism instruction in the home? That’s where a book like this promises to be very helpful.

The same author wrote a similar book based on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds*. Our family used this book profitably for several years and by the time we were done with it, it was falling apart. Our experiences with the previous volume led me to have high hopes for this one as a replacement. After a few months of using it in our family worship, I can report that, overall, it is a worthwhile tool. However, discernment is needed on some important points.

A week of devotions (Monday-Saturday) is spent on each Lord’s Day of the Catechism. Occasionally a Lord’s Day will be spread over two weeks. Each day features a short devotional that can be read in less than five minutes. The devotionals also include one or more readings from the Bible to show the connection between the Catechism and Scripture. The devotionals are well-written and often include vivid illustrations. Most of the teaching given in these devotionals is faithful to the Reformed faith. While even preschool children can benefit from these devotionals, those benefitting the most will be school age.

Unfortunately, I do have to share two significant criticisms. I share them in the hope that parents who want to use this book will use it with discernment. First, parents should be aware that Meade uses the edition of the Heidelberg Catechism adopted by the Christian Reformed Church. This has a couple of regrettable drawbacks. First, we want our children to learn the Catechism as adopted by our churches. This means that parents should keep the *Book of Praise* at hand and read the Catechism in the Canadian



Wes Bredenhof
Pastor of the Providence Canadian
Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario
wbredenhof@bell.net

Reformed edition, rather than the text as printed in this book. The second drawback is more significant. The CRC edition of the Catechism dropped Question and Answer 80 about the Roman Catholic mass. Meade follows the CRC lead and even states in a footnote, “There has been concern among those who use this catechism that the position of the Roman Catholic Church may not be stated accurately. Therefore, I have chosen to omit Question 80 altogether” (160). If Meade had only done some research, she would have discovered that this “concern” was only among *some* and actually said far more about the CRC than about the Catechism and its portrayal of Rome.¹ This puts Canadian Reformed parents who use this book in the position of having to teach Question and Answer 80 on their own – and they should.

My second criticism has to do with Lord’s Day 27 and infant baptism. According to the author’s website, she and her husband teach a Sunday School class at a Reformed Baptist church in Arizona. I would assume that they are also members at this church. This puts the author in an awkward position when it comes to Lord’s Day 27. This was not an issue in the previous book on the Westminster Shorter Catechism (which also teaches infant baptism). It seems to me that the author may have changed her views on this between the two books. When it comes to *Comforting Hearts, Teaching Minds*, the author is very brief on infant baptism and does not teach it or defend it. All she does is note that there are differences amongst Christians on this question and encourages families to discuss where they and their church stand on it. This is not faithful to the intent of the Catechism. The Catechism was written to teach the Reformed faith and that faith includes the truth that the children of believers belong to God’s covenant and therefore should receive holy baptism. This is the whole point of Question and Answer 74! Unfortunately, Meade’s Baptist bias comes out elsewhere in her treatment of the sacraments as well. For instance, in the Friday devotion on Lord’s Day 25, she writes, “Baptism is a sign used once, when we first come to Christ.” While baptism certainly is a sign to be used only once, there’s no recognition that it’s to be used *when Christ first comes to us* – and that could be

(and often is) as a little covenant baby. Reformed parents who use this book will have to be cautious about this and intentional about filling out the gaps in Meade's approach.

We need more books like this, tools to help us catechize our children as we promised to do. We need books like this written by men and women who share a wholehearted commitment to the Reformed faith – with no res-

ervations about any points of doctrine. While I believe this book could be used with profit (and we certainly are profiting in our home), it should only be seen as a stop-gap measure until something better comes along.

¹ Cf. Cornelis P. Venema, "The Lord's Supper and the 'Popish Mass': An Historical and Theological Analysis of Question and Answer 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism," in *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 24 (2013), 31-72.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Re: Church Boundaries

Dear Editor,

In a letter to the editor (*Clarion* Vol. 63, no. 17, p. 443) Rev. J. van Popta reacted to a previous submission by Br. George Helder in the Reader's Forum on church boundaries. He disagrees with the necessity to maintain boundaries between congregations, and in explaining his view he disputes the reference made to the Union of 1892, "However, after the Union, there were A (1834) churches and B (1886) churches. . . The Union Synod didn't redraw boundaries and say for example, 'Everyone east of this line goes to this Union church, and everyone west of this line goes to that Union church.' No, A and B churches flourished side by side with very different characters in one federation. . . ." Rev. J. van Popta's statement, however, is not accurate. Prof. Dr. F.L. Rutgers in *Kerkelijke Adviezen*, (Ecclesiastical Advice), writes the following,

On scriptural grounds the Reformed churches have always accepted that each church must have its own clearly determined boundaries, so that every member living within those boundaries belongs to that church. With the Union of 1892 an exception was made with respect to members who at that time already belonged to another Reformed church, which already had a certain right to those members. But it was only upon that ground that the exception could be made, and therefore it was also expressly determined that this exception could be permitted only with respect to those members themselves – not even with respect to their children.

This rule must be strictly upheld, in the first place, because it is in accordance with Scripture, but also because in principle all ecclesiastical order would otherwise be relinquished and the door would be opened to arbitrariness and to all kinds of difficulties and disagreements.

The boundaries of a church can certainly be changed. All kinds of local circumstances could lead to that. But that is completely different from permitting a family, which lives within the boundaries of church X, to become a member of church Y; as would happen in the situation that you describe. This may not be permitted. If the house of that family is so nearby that it would be better to belong to the church of X than to the church of Y, let a proposal be brought to change the boundaries of the two churches accordingly. The two consistories can discuss the matter in consultation with the family concerned, and classis will decide, always maintaining everyone's right of appeal to the Particular Synod (Vol. 2, p. 355-56; my translation).

What happened immediately after the Union was an exception, and the exception serves to underline the norm, namely, that churches should have clearly demarcated boundaries for scriptural and practical reasons.

Rev. J. Ludwig



*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.*