

# Clarion

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IS WHAT DIVIDED US IN THE PAST,  
STILL WHAT ENCUMBERS US IN THE PRESENT?





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# Unity with the United Reformed Churches?

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*Perhaps this opposition differs from place to place,  
but it is there, clouding and encumbering  
the process of federation*

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In *Christian Renewal* (Volume 33 #3, November 5, 2014) I read that the URC Classis Pacific Northwest adopted important overtures to the upcoming Synod of the URC in 2015. These overtures have to do with fraternal relations, especially with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Specifically the overtures touched on two related matters. I will list them in point form.

1. the first overture (from Ripon URC CA) asks that Synod declare that the synod will “discontinue all further action, advancement, processes, efforts or steps toward unification with the Canadian Reformed Churches.”
2. The second (related) overture asks that Synod declare that “the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) is *unusable* for the purpose of prospective union of the URCNA with the CanRC.”

Before I delve into some specifics let me first generally express my deep sadness and disappointment at this development. I was chairman of the CanRC Synod of Neerlandia (2001) which reached out to the URCNA for the purpose of federative union. Some committees were appointed that were to smooth the way for federation. The committees would deal with the Theological Seminary, the *Book of Praise*, and the Church Order. Talks on the training of prospective ministers did not really get off the ground. The *Book of Praise* committee was blindsided when the URCNA decided to go with the OPC hymnal. The Church Order committee came up with an extensive unified draft-proposal, but that is now being rejected by the URCNA overture.

My first reaction is to state that this is only a minor hurdle. I am a positive thinker, I guess. These overtures

have not yet been dealt with by a URCNA synod. Perhaps there is still time and opportunity to achieve our goal. Maybe, if the committees continue to work hard, some progress may result. But my gut reaction is that if these overtures are adopted, the unification talks will cease. Why flog a dead horse? That is not my preference, but, I fear, that is reality. The URCNA overtures suggest that the current Phase 2 ecclesiastical relationship “satisfies Biblical requirements for pursuing Christian unity.” Well, no rush then. It is suggested that “remaining at the Phase 2 level for the foreseeable future will in no way prejudice later initiatives to advance to advance unity.” Bupkes. Once the wind is out of a ship’s sails it drifts aimlessly.

## Resistant to unification

One of the grounds noted for ceasing all efforts to come to unification at this time is that “*two-thirds* of the (URCNA) do not approve of and are resistant to unification with the CanRC.” That is a high number! I have no reason to deny the truth of this number. I am quite shocked by it. That is a huge majority. It means that only a small segment of the URC wants to pursue federative unity at this time. The existing relationship will have to do for now.

I did not read in the classis overture why such a large majority is opposed to unification. It is merely stated, but not demonstrated. But let us accept the accuracy of this number. It means that unification will not take place in the current generation, if at all. My experience is that things put off tend to disappear from the agenda.

I vividly recall how the delegate from the URC addressed Synod Neerlandia. He was happy, of course, with the fact that the course of unity had been chosen. But he warned us not yet to set a time limit on the process of unification but allow for more preparation in a step by step approach. The URC delegate was also very candid in warning us that "the history of alienation that has developed in a number of local settings may constitute some residual opposition to entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship" (*Acts*, Neerlandia 2001, page 130). What divided us in the past (our conflict with the Christian Reformed Church) is still what encumbers us in the present.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 2 begins with Rev. Klaas Stam's editorial, "Unity With the United Reformed Churches?" There is an overture, made to the next URCNA synod, requesting that the process of unification be discontinued. Rev. Stam examines the situation and asks how we should deal with the situation.

A series on "Good News for Women," by Sarah Vandergugten continues. We also have the first half of an article from Dr. Arjan de Visser on musical instruments in the worship service.

Readers may notice that Treasures New and Old will be changing slightly – the meditations will now include suggestions for further study. It is our hope that the column's new section will aid readers in personal devotions. Thank you to Rev. Willem B. Slomp for his meditation and for taking over coordination of the column.

Issue 2 contains the Education Matters and You Asked columns. There is also a book review and a Mission News insert.

*Laura Veenendaal*

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And so there is *residual opposition* to forming one federation. Perhaps this opposition differs from place to place, but it is there, clouding and encumbering the process of federation. After all these years. . . . I think that in the past years the hesitancy of the United Reformed Churches has not abated but in some instances has even grown.

### The Church Order problem

Both church federations had a combined committee to present a draft proposal for a church order which could be used in the new federation. This committee did a lot of work. A URC synod has not yet dealt with that report. But here is already a major hurdle.

We read that the proposed church order is “unusable” because it “vacates a principle (#5) that URCNA churches hold dear and find thoroughly scriptural in its foundation.” What principle is this? The principle is that the only government of the church lies in the hand of the elders, and cannot be transferred to a major assembly, like classis, regional synod, and general synod. These assemblies tend to lord it over the local churches. The URCNA have learned about the possible tyranny of major assemblies. Never again, they say.

I understand that. If any churches know what *synodical tyranny* is like, it is the Canadian Reformed Churches! We got hit by synodical tyranny *twice*, first in The Netherlands in 1944 and then in North America in the 1950s. The one side of the coin is synocracy, dictatorial rule by major assemblies. That is why our churches appealed to Article 31 of the Church Order as a key article. This is the other side of the coin. It says that no decision of a major assembly need be considered settled and binding if it conflicts with the Scripture, the confessions, or the Church Order. The churches have the right, even the duty, to appeal and dismiss whatever goes against Scripture. We were even given the nasty nickname of “thirty-oners.”

After the liberation or schism in 1944, the liberated churches in Holland did not go overboard and throw out the baby with the bathwater. They defended and maintained the place and task of major assemblies. This was done by Dr. K. Schilder and Prof. P. Deddens (*Eerste en Tweede hands Gezag*, 1946) and later by P. Deddens (*The Right to Ratify the Decisions of the Major Assemblies*) and J. Kamphuis (*Kerkelijke Besluitvaardigheid, De Vuurbaak*, Groningen, 1970).

We learned that the problem does not lie in structures but in *people* who abuse the structures. There is another danger. In the case of the URCNA, fear of dictatorship and

hierarchy may lead to *independentism*. I am sure that the combined committee of the URCNA and CanRC commented on the danger of both hierarchy and independentism.

But, okay, I am not one of the members of this committee. I do hope that these members both from the Canadian Reformed and the URCNA churches will together speak out against what is a misconception about Reformed church polity. It is a caricature which we should not accept. The independence of the local church is lawfully maintained in the Church Order of Dort, the one we have always had.

### Alright, what now?

The question now arises what we should do if the overtures of the URCNA Classis Northwest are adopted by the URCNA Synod. It has always been a hallmark of ministry to me that we should not panic under stress. We have made our intentions clear. We'll just have to stay the course. The URCNA Synod has not yet gathered. Who knows what they will decide? Let us pray for an outcome that is beneficial.

If the overtures are accepted, we will have to live and work with that reality. The word “acquiesce” is not alien to our vocabulary. Our striving for unity was and is proper. I do not think that we should entertain any knee-jerk reaction. We should avoid harsh words and quick condemnation. It is true that the URCNA churches have to deal with many matters as a young federation. Let us give them the time they so badly need and desire. Let us try to understand and appreciate the concerns of the URCNA.

Some things may change if the efforts to federate come to an end. I think, for example, that we should no longer call URC ministers. An interim situation is indeed temporary, but the calling and receiving of a minister is of permanent consequence. I have always found that this step was premature. Synod Neerlandia did not include calling ministers in its list of mutual activities. There was a reason for that, but a subsequent Canadian Reformed synod did not clue in.

Some time ago I suggested that federative unity be sought only among *Canadian* churches. I can picture the name, “The United Reformed Churches of Canada.” Churches in other countries are better called *sister churches*. Despite their love for black Friday, Canadians are not Americans. Perhaps the Canadian-only route is a path which still can be followed. URCNA churches in Canada know us better. But that path may also be a dead end. So be it then. We will never throw out our catholic ambition.





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# God's justice and mercy

***"But unless you repent, you too will all perish."***

(Luke 13:3, 5)

There are a lot of unjust things that happen around us all the time. Also today. The most shocking example is the atrocities committed against Christians and many others by Isis or Islamic state in countries such as Iraq and Syria. People are driven out of their homes and are killed just because of their faith. Even little children. And they are killed in a most cruel way. By beheading even.

How should we as Christians respond to that? With anger? With disgust? With desires for revenge? With fear? Well, there's very little we can do about what happens far outside of the borders of Canada. Except to support all the efforts by the government to eliminate or neutralize this terrorist group.

But what if somehow Isis or some similar terrorist group were to invade or take hold in our country? This world is becoming increasingly hostile to Christians. Who knows what is going to happen? Will we begin to suffer the same kind of per-

secutions Christians have suffered over the years, such as during the time of the early Christian church, and during the Reformation?

The Lord Jesus had to address a similar situation during his time. The people were afraid. Something horrible had just happened. They tell him about an atrocity that happened very recently at the hand of the Romans, wherein Pilate, the Roman official, had mingled the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices. In other words, during their most holy activities, while they were sacrificing in the temple, some people were massacred so that their blood mixed with the blood of the sacrificial animals. Isn't that horrible? Indeed.

But how does the Lord Jesus respond? Does he share in their sense of outrage and fear? No. He is concerned about their relationship with their heavenly Father. He is concerned about their souls. He wants them to be humble and to realize their own sinfulness, and their own

mortality. Therefore in his answer he does not even mention the incident, but instead asks the question, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered this way? I tell you, No! But unless you repent you too will all perish."

And then he tells them about another incident where recently eighteen people died when a tower in Siloam fell on them. He adds that incident to show that we can suffer and die at any time of our lives.

Certain things are out of our control. Our lives are not in our own hands. They are in God's hands. And we must trust in him and do what is right. For that reason he adds a parable about a fruit tree that must bear fruit for it to survive. That is how it is for God's covenant children. As long as we bear fruits of thankfulness we do not have to be afraid. God takes care of us in life and in death no matter what happens here on earth or anywhere else.



## For Further Study

Read Luke 13:1-9

How should we as Christians respond to the horrible things that happen in this life?

What is the most important thing we should be concerned about during time of persecution?

In what way does this passage show that we should be ready at any time to meet our Maker?

What kind of disaster could happen to me personally at any time?

What kind of lives ought we to live as we await the second coming of Christ? (See also 2 Peter 3:11, 12)

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# Good News for Women

## Created in God's Image (Part 2)

It is clear from Genesis that God created human beings with the freedom to choose. They can obey God or defy him. The temptation they face through the deception of the serpent is to assert their own autonomy. They choose themselves as the source for determining good and evil, rather than obeying God's directive. The desire for autonomy leads to separation from God and to shattered relationships in all areas of life.

Genesis 1 and 2 shows Adam and Eve in beautiful, pure relationships – with God, with creation, with each other, and even with themselves. They know who they are and whose they are. Genesis 3 confronts us with the tragic consequences of rebellion. Above all, human beings have been created to enjoy an intimate relationship with God, but Adam and Eve's sin causes them to hide from him, to be afraid, to be ashamed and alone. Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent, and in shame they both seek to cover their nakedness. These actions show that sin undermines both the sense of self and the sense of belonging together.<sup>1</sup> All human beings since the fall have the inclination to put themselves at the centre of their own concerns. Such self-centredness wreaks havoc in all relationships.

### Twisted relationships and priorities

God's judgments on Adam and Eve mean that the social and work dimensions of their lives will also be twisted out of shape. Clearly sin has consequences for Adam and Eve, and all who come after them. For Adam his daily work would become much more difficult. What had previously been pure joy would now become a burden. Eve, and all women after her, would endure much pain and grief in bringing children into this world, both with the actual birth and the raising of their offspring.

Eve's relationship with her husband would be altered significantly. The words, "Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you" mark the beginning of the battle of the sexes. As a result of the fall, man no longer rules easily, or well. Sin has corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving leadership of the husband. The rule of love founded in paradise is replaced by struggle, coercion, and domination.<sup>2</sup> The Fall has disturbed the harmonious relationship where the man as leader would treat his wife who stood beside him as his equal. That original position of equality as companion and helper instituted by the Creator remains the ideal relationship, and should certainly be the norm for Christian marriages.<sup>3</sup>

Although Genesis 3 is a somber message about the consequence of sin, it also tells of the messianic promise, that the seed of the woman – through the miracle of a young virgin giving birth to the Son of God – would crush the serpent's head. Adam's name for Eve (mother of all living) professes that hope, pointing toward restoration of all relationships in Jesus Christ. Because God is faithful, that light shines brightly into the darkness from the very early pages of Scripture.

### Family life in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a big book, and it's not possible to go through it all to discover women's role in family and community, but a brief overview with some specific examples will give us a sense of what life for women in God's covenant community was like. Family life in Bible times reflected a culture quite different from our twenty-first century lives. We need to keep that in mind as we turn to Scripture for guidance for family life. We look for principles, rather than copy the specific life-styles it



portrays. We need to understand the difference between descriptive and prescriptive passages. For example, the culture of biblical times allowed a man to have more than one wife, and some men of God did; yet nowhere in Scripture does God approve of this practice. In most instances specific instructions about family life and marriage presume a monogamous marriage relationship. This is true in Genesis, in Proverbs, in the gospels, and in the New Testament letters. The Old Testament prophets used the monogamous marriage to describe the Lord's relationship to Israel (the rare exception being Jeremiah 3). So we can't argue that since Abraham and David had more than one wife, it's OK for us as well. That would be basing norms on examples rather than on specific biblical instruction.

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***The Fall has disturbed the  
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In marriage, a woman took the place of submission to her husband. Her main responsibility centred around home and children, but could extend to the marketplace and other areas that affected the family's welfare. A wife's primary goal was to bear children for her husband. She was given the privilege and responsibility of naming the children. A Jewish family hoped that the wife would become like a fruitful vine, filling the home with many children (Ps 128:3). (A woman's barrenness was one of the main reasons a man would take a second wife.) She nursed each child until the age of two or three. She would spend hours each day preparing food and making clothes, usually from wool. If necessary, the wife helped her husband in the fields planting or harvesting the crops.

### **Wife and mother**

A mother shared the responsibility for training the children. The youngsters would spend their early formative years close to their mothers. Eventually the sons would be old enough to go with their fathers into the field

or some other place of employment. The daughters were taught how to become successful wives and mothers. In large part, a family's success was considered to lie in the woman's hands. If the wife worked hard at her tasks, it greatly benefited her husband, her family, her household, and her community. A brief look at Proverbs 31:10 – 31 makes that clear.

The poem about the wife of noble character is written in the form of an acrostic, meaning that each verse begins with a subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Here's the picture of a noble wife from A to Z, from *aleph* to *taw*. The poem assumes that the husband has founded the home on a sound economic foundation; within that context the wife can flourish and function at maximum capacity. She is fully committed to her husband's well-being; he can do his work with confidence, fully supported by his wife. She has many skills and talents, both practical and economic, which she puts to good use for the benefit of her household, her family, and for the needy. She is intelligent, able to give wise and kind instruction to those who need it. Above all she fears the Lord. Her husband is honoured in the community because of her efforts (31:24), but – and I have seen little mention of this in any commentary – the wife herself is also praised at the city gate (31:31). Here we see a glimpse of paradise restored – husband and wife in a harmonious relationship, each in their particular role, reflecting their creator into family, household, and community.

In the most basic sense, a Hebrew family consisted of a husband, a wife, and their children. Both parents were to receive the same level of respect, which is clear from the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exod 20:12). But, when the husband had more than one wife the family included all the wives and their children.

In Israel's early history as many as four generations lived together. This was a normal part of a semi-nomadic life-style and later the agricultural one. The extended family was ruled by the oldest male in the household – the father, although he might be a grandfather or great-grandfather. As head, he even had power of life and death over his family. We do not know exactly when the extended family of the Old Testament gave way to the more familiar nuclear family structure. Some believe

it died out during the monarchy of David and Solomon (although they both had many wives due to political alliances!). By New Testament times, the extended family had virtually disappeared.

### **Laws about women**

The legal position of a woman in Israel was weaker than that of a man. A husband could divorce his wife, but the wife did not have that option. A woman could be compelled to undergo a test for sexual unfaithfulness; there was no such test for a man (Num 5:11-31). A man could take a religious vow that was binding, but a vow made by a woman could be cancelled by her father or her husband (Num 30). A daughter could be sold to pay a father's debt, without hope of freedom; a son could regain his freedom after six years (Exod 21:7, Lev 25:40).

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### ***The woman's role in Old Testament times reflected a combination of obedience to God's directives and the influence of the cultures that surrounded God's people***

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Some laws denote that men and women were to be treated as equals. Children were to treat both parents with equal reverence (Exod 20:12). A son who disobeyed either parent was to be punished (Deut 21:18-21), and if a man and woman were caught in adultery, both were to die by stoning (Deut 22:22). A man guilty of rape was to be stoned to death (Num 27:8ff). If a man took a second wife, he was to continue caring for his first wife, both by providing food and continuing to have sexual relations with her (Exod 21:10). Usually only men owned property, but when fathers like Zelophehad had no sons, daughters could receive the inheritance, under the stipulation that they would marry within their clan (Num 27:1-11, 36:1-13). The rare exception would be Job's three beautiful daughters, who received a share of their father's inheritance along with their seven brothers (Job 42:15).

Women were considered to be members of the family of faith, and could participate in most areas of worship. The Law directed all men to appear before the Lord three

times per year, no matter where they lived. Women could go with them, but were not required to. Family duties would keep them home. For example, Hannah went to Shiloh with her husband while she was childless. When Samuel was born, she told Elkanah that she would remain home until her son was weaned (1 Sam 1, 2). As head of the family, the husband/father presented offerings on behalf of the entire family (Lev 1:2). The one sacrifice that only women gave to the Lord was offered after the birth of a child (Lev 12:6). On the whole, religious obligations were performed by the men.

So, the woman's role in Old Testament times reflected a combination of obedience to God's directives and the influence of the cultures that surrounded God's people. Monogamous marriage is presented as the ideal, but polygamy was tolerated, and not uncommon. On the whole, women in Israel were treated better than those in the surrounding nations. Wives and mothers were afforded protection and respect. A man was considered richly blessed if he had a wife who exemplified the pattern of Proverbs 31. However, the consequences of the fall as well as the influence of the surrounding nations relegated women to second class status in a strongly patriarchal society.<sup>4</sup>

By the beginning of New Testament times, Jewish women had stopped being active in temple or synagogue worship. There was a special area at the temple known as the Court of Women, but they were not allowed to enter the inner courts. They did not read aloud or even speak in the synagogues, but could sit and listen in a separate women's section. Such were the customs when Jesus began his earthly ministry. The question is, did anything change during that short period that Jesus walked the roads between Galilee and Jerusalem?

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<sup>1</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew, Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2004), p 42-44.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A response to biblical feminism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 68-69.

<sup>3</sup> G.Ch. Aalders, *Genesis* (vol. 1), *Bible Student's Commentary trans.* William Heynen, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981). p 108-109.

<sup>4</sup> Any good Bible handbook is useful here. My main source was J. I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, William White, Jr. *Daily Life in Bible Times* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 1-70.







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# Musical Instruments in the Worship Service (1)

Questions regarding the role of musical instruments in the worship service continue to come up in discussions about church life. As heirs of John Calvin, Reformed believers find themselves in a slightly awkward position. Calvin was opposed to the use of musical instruments in worship. Many of his followers, however, have come to embrace the church organ and various other instruments as welcome additions to congregational worship.

In the Canadian Reformed tradition we see a movement towards allowing a variety of musical instruments in the worship service. In many congregations the piano is used alongside the organ. Some congregations have gone further and allow small ensembles (piano, guitar, flute, etc.) to accompany congregational singing. The Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington took the initiative to organize a conference on this topic (held on October 24-25, 2014). What follows is a revised version of my presentation at the conference.

## The worship service

To begin with, something about terminology: We need to distinguish between worship and worship service. What does it mean to *worship*? A common definition (found at Wikipedia): To worship is to show reverence and adoration for a deity. In our case this would be: To show reverence and adoration to God. It is important to note that worship, strictly speaking, is a one-way movement. It is something that people bring to God. He is the receiving party.

A Christian *worship service*, however, is a two-way movement. It is not just one party bringing or doing something to the other. Both parties are ministering to one another. As much as the congregation brings reverence and adoration to God, God also ministers to his people as they are gathered together. This vice-versa as-

pect is often called the “dialogue” aspect of the worship service. In our Reformed tradition we typically use the word “covenantal.”

Here is a working definition: A worship service is a form of covenantal fellowship by which God ministers to his people and the congregation responds to God.

If you think of the elements of the worship service, it is easy to see how this plays out. God ministers to his people through the reading of the Word, the sermon, the sacraments, the greeting, and the blessings. The congregation responds to God through confession of sin, profession of faith, prayer, singing, and freewill offerings.

It is important to recognize this unique, two-way character of the worship service. It sets a worship service apart from other meetings of Christian believers. For example, compare a worship service with a praise & worship evening or a choir concert. At a P&W evening people get together to sing God’s praises. At a choir concert we listen to the choir performing Christian music. Such events may be wonderful, glorifying to God and edifying to the participants, but there is no proclamation of the Word of God and there are no sacraments.

The worship service is in a different category: the Lord speaks to the congregation through Word and sacraments. The Spirit uses these “means of grace” to work repentance and faith in our hearts (LD 25). The congregation responds in various ways (singing, praying, profession the Christian faith, etc.).

One consequence is that the role of musicians during the worship service is less prominent than during a P&W evening or a choir concert. During the sermon, to mention just one aspect, the accompanist joins the congregation in listening to the proclamation of the Word of God. That is part of the beauty of being a church accompanist: You are in the worship service as someone who needs to hear the gospel proclaimed to you, just like everyone else.

By saying that the worship service is a two-way movement between the Lord and his people, we have not yet fully defined what is going on. There is a secondary aspect that needs to be mentioned. As believers we do not just minister to the Lord, we also minister to one another. We do not just go to church to meet the Lord, we also go there to meet our fellow believers. This comes out in some parts of the liturgy, for example, when we sit around the table for the Lord's Supper, when we profess our faith together, when we exhort one another through some of the Psalms, and when we bring the needs of the congregation before the Lord in prayer.

In sum, we define the worship service first of all as a form of covenantal fellowship between God and his people (the vertical aspect), secondly, as a form of fellowship between God's people as they worship God together (the horizontal aspect).

### **Pitfalls**

This definition will help us to avoid some pitfalls. Let me mention two examples. One pitfall is that the goal of the worship service would be to stir the religious feelings of the worshipers. This view has been quite popular during the last few centuries. It goes back to an influential German theologian with the name of Friedrich Schleiermacher (early nineteenth century) who taught that the essence of religion is intuition and feeling. Along these lines, the goal of a worship service would be that the participants have a religious experience, that they would be touched deep down, emotionally. As a result, liturgical choices are made with this goal in mind: the kind of text the minister will choose for his sermon, the kind of songs that will be sung, the kind of music that will be played before, during, and after the service, etc. It all depends on whether these things will intensify the religious experience.

Do not get me wrong. I'm not saying that there is no place for feelings and emotions during the worship service. On the contrary! But to say that the goal of the worship service is to stir the religious emotions of the believers – there is no biblical basis for this. It is a truncated understanding of the goal of the worship service.

A second pitfall, more common in the Reformed tradition, is the idea that the main part of the service is the sermon. As long as we have a good sermon, it's okay. The rest of the service is not that important. After all, you go



to church in order “to be fed.” Of course, there is a something legitimate to this view. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14 that everything should be done for the edification of the church. Nevertheless, the edification of the believers is not the only goal of the worship service. It is equally important that God's goodness and majesty should be acknowledged. This is the recurring call in the book of Psalms. “Sing to the LORD because he is good. Sing to the LORD a new song for he has done marvelous things” (Ps 98). It is fitting that the congregation should sing God's praises for his works of creation and redemption and sanctification.

### **Temple and synagogue**

So far we have established a basic understanding of the worship service. There is another foundational aspect that we need to discuss: In what phase of redemptive history do we live right now and what kind of worship is fitting in this time? Basically the question is: What is essential to the worship of the Christian church according to the New Testament?

This is an important question because people sometimes use arguments based on OT worship and apply them to NT worship without considering if this is legitimate. For example, you might hear someone argue that King David introduced the use of musical instruments in the temple service. Now, if it was okay to use instruments in temple worship, how could it be wrong to use instruments in the church today? However, someone else might argue that musical instruments were part of temple worship,

and since temple worship has been abolished in the new covenant, it follows that the use of instruments has been abolished as well. In order to get some clarity in these matters, we need to reflect on the question whether music and singing were aspects that are continued or discontinued in the new covenant.

This is not the place to give an overview of the historical development of worship from Genesis to Revelation.<sup>1</sup> But we do need to consider the difference between worship in the old covenant and the new. In Israel, worship centred around the temple in Jerusalem. That is where the LORD dwelled among his people. That is where God's people went to worship him. That is where the ministry of reconciliation was performed by the priests and where the Levites were singing and making music to praise the LORD.

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***A worship service is a form of  
covenantal fellowship  
by which God ministers to his people  
and the congregation responds to God***

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After the return from exile a new phenomenon emerged in Israel: synagogue worship. It was a sober form of worship: a gathering of God's people, with an emphasis on the reading and explanation of the Scriptures and prayer – no sacrifices, no musical instruments. There was some singing in the synagogues but not the exuberant kind of singing that you would encounter in the temple worship. In the synagogues you would hear *chanting*, a subdued form of singing, with a cantor chanting Psalms, prayers, and Scripture passages.

There are various theories as to why there was no instrumental music in the synagogues.<sup>2</sup> It seems clear that the rabbis did not want it, but why? Did they want the people to remember the suffering during the exile in Babylon? Were they afraid that it would lead to musicians carrying their instruments around and thus trespassing the rules regarding rest on the Sabbath day? Did the rabbis want to honour the temple as the main place of worship in Israel and did they, therefore, want synagogue worship to have a more sober character? Did they feel that music and singing should be reserved for the ministry of the sacrifices at the temple? Personally, I find the last two suggestions intriguing but it is hard to be sure about it.

## **The heavenly Jerusalem**

As we move to the New Testament there is both continuation and discontinuation. The Lord still expects his people to gather in sacred assemblies. But, as the Lord Jesus predicted to the Samaritan woman, no longer is there one special place where God is worshipped. True worshipers worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24). No longer is there a sanctuary in Jerusalem where sacrifices are offered by priests. The book of Hebrews teaches us that Christ has entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb 9:12). We now have a high priest who has gone through the heavens. Jesus has ascended into heaven and since he is our mediator we may now approach the throne of grace with confidence (Heb 4:16).

One of the most important Scripture passages for our purposes is Hebrews 12:22-25. This passage tells Christian believers that they have come to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, to thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven, to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

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***To say that the goal of the worship service  
is to stir the religious emotions  
of the believers – there is no  
biblical basis for this***

---

The implication is that the centre of worship is now the heavenly Jerusalem where we have the Lord Jesus as our mediator. There is exuberant worship in heaven with thousands of angels singing the praises of him who sits on the throne and the Lamb of God. It is for this reason that the Reformed worship service often begins with the call: "Lift up your hearts to the Lord" (*sursum corda*). As we begin our worship, we elevate our thoughts to the heavenly Jerusalem and draw near to God with reverence and awe.

In this connection we should also mention the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit facilitates the two-way movement to which we referred earlier. The Spirit carries



the prayers and songs of the believers as they pray and sing to God (Rom 8:26). The Spirit also works the other way round, applying God's Word to our hearts, causing people to be born again, to repent and to have faith in Christ. How does the Spirit do that? With Lord's Day 25 we confess: primarily by the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. The Spirit also provides spiritual gifts to the congregation. When these gifts are used appropriately, it will lead to the congregation being strengthened, encouraged and comforted (1 Cor 14:3). Even the unbeliever who attends the worship service will be brought to fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" (1 Cor 14:25)

### **Musification of worship**

Let's apply these insights to the practice of worship. As we worship in church, we are to lift up our hearts to the Lord in his heavenly sanctuary where Christ is, our Mediator and Intercessor. We should always keep the connection with the centre of worship in heaven. The moment we separate worship from the heavenly sanctuary and make it something that can be experienced here on earth, we are in trouble. In addition, whatever is done in worship should serve to edify, encourage, and comfort those who are present.

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***Whatever is done in worship should  
serve to edify, encourage, and comfort  
those who are present***

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This is why the Reformers had a problem with the Roman Catholic approach to worship. The church had introduced too many rituals to the worship service. The members of the congregation became spectators who were watching the clergy perform their duties. In response to this, the Reformers removed liturgical distractions and pursued a sober style of worship.

This is a lesson to keep in mind when we look at what is happening in some forms of Pentecostal and charismatic worship. The Pentecostal tradition tends to disconnect the work of the Spirit from the reading and the preaching of the Word. Instead, a more direct and tangible influence of the Spirit is desired. In the early days of Pentecostalism,

prayer was often the vehicle for this. As people prayed, they would start speaking in tongues and this would be taken as a sign that the Spirit was at work.

In more recent years it seems like music has taken over this role of facilitating the work of the Spirit. The worship band plays an important role in the whole worship experience. It is as if people believe that somehow music is the vehicle that brings us into the presence of God. In this connection, the Australian theologian Barry Grant has warned against the *musification of worship*.<sup>3</sup> Grant comments that music "has almost become a new means of grace." If music supplants the Word, he says, "it has dangerously exceeded its role." Indeed, if music is believed to be an instrument by which the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts, we are far removed from the Reformed insight that the Holy Spirit works repentance and faith through the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

The other problem with the "musification of worship" is that it tends to reduce the congregation to being an audience who are watching and listening to what the worship band is doing on stage. Instead of the musicians supporting the singing of the congregation, it can easily happen that the worship band is *performing* on stage, with congregation struggling to keep up with the band. This leads to the demise of congregational singing. An article that did the rounds on Facebook a while ago described the problem well: "Why Men Have Stopped Singing in Church."<sup>4</sup>

In the next article we will draw practical conclusions for the role of musical instruments during the worship service.

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<sup>1</sup> For a broader discussion, Dr. C. van Dam's article "Musical Instruments in Public Worship," will be published in an upcoming issue of *Clarion*.

<sup>2</sup> See Bob Williams, "Origins of Christian Worship," at <http://www.biblelessons.com/origins.html> (accessed Oct. 24, 2014)

<sup>3</sup> Barry Grant, "Retuning the church: An exploratory discussion paper presented by Dr Barry Grant at the annual conference of the Association of Pentecostal and Charismatic Bible College of Australasia on Friday 19 May 2000." [http://www.tabor.edu.au/articles/2000/retuning\\_church.html](http://www.tabor.edu.au/articles/2000/retuning_church.html)

<sup>4</sup> David Murrow, "Why Men Have Stopped Singing in Church," <http://churchformen.com/how-were-off-the-mark/why-men-have-stopped-singing-in-church>.





# Reformed Christian Education 2014: Floodlight or Candlelight?

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*This is an abridged version of a presentation given on October 30, 2014 to the Canadian Reformed Teachers Association at its convention at Timothy Christian School, Hamilton, Ontario.*

## Some light from Scripture

To unfold our theme, it may be helpful to ponder briefly the imagery of “light.” Photometers are instruments that measure the strength of light in lumens, which is a term related to words like luminous, illuminate, and luminary. Obviously a floodlight gives more *lumens* than candlelight. And what, then, are some functions of light? Experience teaches us that among the purposes of light are these two: to dispel darkness and to enable work to be done.



There are two Scripture passages relevant to our subject, one that emphasizes the communal aspect of light-shining, the other emphasizing the individual aspect.

In Matthew 5:14-16 we read: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (ESV).

Note two things about these verses. First, because each “you” and “your” in these verses is plural, not singular, the metaphor of light (singular) refers not to the individual believer, but to the Christian community: “You (plural) are the light (singular) of the world.” Together God’s people are the light in the world, whose shining serves to dispel darkness and to enable work to be done. Second, the King James Version correctly renders the adverb (not as a comparison, as most newer translations have it): “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father [who] is in heaven.” That is, the Christian community must live in the world in such a way that its good works (i.e., their obedience) is visible and leads to people giving glorify to God.

The second Scripture passage relevant to our discussion is Philippians 2:14-16: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain” (ESV).

Notice that here, the plural “you” is matched by the plural “lights,” from which we learn that light-shining

has an individual dimension as well. Each of us is a light in this dark world, called to dispel darkness around us and to enable work to be done.

In light of these two passages, we are willing (obligated?) to replace the conjunction “or” in our title with the word “and,” since we don’t want to play off the communal against the individual. In terms of Christian education, then, we wish to shine our communal light, as well as shine individual lights, into this world for the purposes of dispelling the darkness and enabling work to be done.

### **The calling of Reformed Christian education**

What does this mean concretely for the enterprise of Reformed Christian education?

First, we must be clear about the *calling* of Reformed Christian education. Among the alternatives here, some in Christian education emphasize the pursuit of academic and intellectual development. The outcome of this vision, in terms of educational process and goal, is to cultivate the life of the mind. Another alternative vision for Christian education involves the pursuit of technical and vocational development. Here, students will develop skills of applied knowledge. Yet a third alternative is to define the calling of Christian education as the pursuit

of evangelism and piety; the outcome here involves the focus on antithetical relationships between Christianity and culture.

I would propose a fourth understanding of the calling of Reformed Christian education, one that is rooted in Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 21, Q/A 55. This is what we read:

What do you understand by the “communion of saints”?

First, that believers, one and all, as members of the Lord Jesus Christ, are partakers with him in all his treasures and gifts; second, that each one must feel himself bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the advantage and welfare of other members.

How does this relate to Reformed Christian education? The communion of the saints is both a gift and a calling that relates to all of life, including education. Surely there is a communal/individual financial dimension to this expression of identity, but my interest lies in the daily, “boots on the ground” practice of the Christian communal/personal identity within our schools.

Notice the emphasis, in this Catechism answer, on the “one and all” who are the subjects of this communion of the saints. This answer supplies us with a beautiful – and a normative – integration of the communal and the individual!





## Specific goals

Let's describe this alternative vision this way: "Reformed Christian education seeks, through its pedagogy, curriculum, and activities, the personal formation of students for future witness and service as God's new humanity living in God's world." Notice these key phrases, each having to do with the task of Reformed Christian education:

- *Personal formation*: this refers to the formation of the whole person—mind, emotions, will – what Proverbs 4:23 identifies as the "heart"
- *Witness and service*: recall the two purposes of light: to dispel the darkness, and to enable work to be done; this phrase covers those callings
- *God's new humanity*: this is a description of communal identity that reaches back to creation
- *God's world*: this phrase embodies a confession of faith, hope, and love

This vision for Reformed Christian education involves the following goals (among others) for this formation:

- To enable students to trade in rules for principles, to transition from "have to" to "want to" as a philosophy of Christian living.
- To integrate all aspects of human personality, by employing our educational resources for the cultivation of knowing, feeling, and doing (think of Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of learning domains).
- To energize the connection between learning and living, so that all knowledge gets applied, and only applied knowledge is cultivated.

## Some samples

(I want to emphasize that the following examples are merely samples, illustrations that seek to concretize the points made above. None is being recommended, none is viewed as infallible or normative. Each is designed to help us pursue the integration of our faith-confession and our learning.)

If Reformed Christian education is going to function as both floodlight and candlelight, then our schools need to foster a Christian identity that integrates both the communal and the individual. This fostering entails activities suited to goals and objectives consistent with that identity.

Let's consider specific activities relating to service to God, to God's people, and to God's world.

1. *Learn to appreciate the value of religious experience* (service to God). Here, the school would provide space and time for cultivating religious expression, enlisting resource persons such as pastors, church elders, and parents. This requires scheduling exercises of devotional reflection and action (praying, singing, meditating, and discussing).

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## *We must be clear about the calling of Reformed Christian education*

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2. *Learn to value diversity within the Christian community* (service to God's people). Here, the school would provide ways to celebrate diversity of learning abilities, physical abilities, and life circumstances within the school community, addressing ways to replace indifference with attention, bullying with assisting, and competition with cooperation. This may require off-campus activities like visiting rest homes, nursing facilities, or museums featuring foreign cultures and customs.
3. *Learn to approach living in God's world with faith rather than fear* (service to God's world). Here, in an age-appropriate manner, the school would engage (as in: study, interact with) ideas, practices, and values that contradict the truths of Scripture and the Confessions, with a view to (1) equipping students to demonstrate both conviction and compassion, and (2) finding creative and compelling ways to live faithfully and servingly amid people who do not yet bend the knee to King Jesus.

In summary, within the Christian school-as-community, the confession that "each one must feel himself bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the advantage and welfare of other members" must be translated into conduct and practice. Guided by teachers and embraced by their peers, students must learn to give, to serve, and to employ their gifts to meet others' needs. In this way, Reformed Christian education will best honour its calling to be *both* floodlight and candlelight.





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Q

I have a hard time understanding Psalm 137, especially the brutality of verse 9.

It is such a sad and tragic psalm sandwiched between such beautiful (loving) psalms.

I have a difficult time reading it, and particularly reading it to my kids and/or with new Christians. Could you explain it to me?

A

Psalm 137 is a special psalm, unique and powerful. It's not sung in our worship services too often, if at all. That, too, may be due to the difficulty people have with the last verses. It sounds terrible singing about those

"who shall, devoid of pity, dash on the rocks the children of your city." When children become the victims of internal strife and warfare, we hear an international outcry! Yet, such a reaction may well be due to the fact that outsiders don't know what's going on in such a situation. Our difficulty with the reading and singing of Psalm 137, also, may be due to our lack of understanding of what the poet and his fellow covenant people had to experience and endure in Babylon.

Psalm 137 gives us a glimpse into the sad and deplorable circumstances Israel is in. In exile they were far removed from their homes, their city Jerusalem, their temple, their feasts, and all that had made them God's holy nation. Sure, it was due to their years of living a life of disobedience, unfaithfulness, and an unholy lifestyle of world conformity that they had ended up there. Yet, the Babylonians had treated the Israelites in barbaric ways, and the Psalmist still characterizes them as their "tormentors" in Babylon. They were enemies of God who taunted his people, ridiculing them, and pressing them to sing their songs of Zion so they may scorn them for their useless God. Thus they would humiliate the LORD, blaspheme the Name of God! That's what they were like these Babylonians. Yes, that's what the Babylonian spirit is like throughout the Scriptures: Babylon is the epitome

of blasphemy against the LORD and his Anointed One!

The Israelites in the Babylonian captivity could not be pressed into the singing of their songs of Zion. These songs did not belong there but rather in Jerusalem, the thought of which makes them cry, moves them to tears, and makes them homesick. "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. . . ." The poet, in fact, calls the effects of a stroke upon himself which would paralyze him completely, if he would ever forget Zion (i.e. if he would forget the temple, the LORD, and the joy of their communion with him there!). Thinking and speaking about this, the Psalmist and his audience cry out in prayer to the LORD, calling him to remember what the Edomites (descendants of Esau; cf. Obadiah) and Babylonians have done. Then they also recall the prophecies of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, concerning their enemies: "O daughter of Babylon, *doomed to destruction*." Verse 8, actually, is a direct reference to Isaiah 13:1, 19; Jeremiah 25:12, 26; 50:15, prophesying the wrath, the vengeance of the LORD. Indeed, the LORD will repay them, Isaiah prophesies (13:16-18), in the way the Psalmist describes here!

Psalm 137 is a psalm of love, pure love, for the LORD and for his temple communion in Jerusalem. This is the background for verse 9, expressing the prayer of the captives for the fulfilment of the LORD's vengeance over the enemies of his people (cf. Ps 139: 21). Then it may seem gruesome to read how Israel's liberation will be in the way of the execution of God's judgment, yet this is the way warfare was conducted (cf. Nahum 3:10, describing how the Babylonians themselves destroyed and killed!).

Yes, we should realize that this is the terror in every war, today also, when babes and infants are victims of bombings and barbaric treatments. Yet, when the American and Canadian Liberators of the European countries in 1945 marched through the cities, the people welcomed and hailed them, rejoicing in their victory which had been obtained in a *similar way*. Of course, this does not condone or justify the way a war is fought. Yet, this is the reality in this world that's filled with anger, hatred, enmity, and terror, *and* with the persecution of God's children, who cry out for the LORD's vengeance (Rev 6:10).

In fact, as the Scriptures of the NT reveal, in the last days the enemies of the LORD in the Babylon of Revelation 17 will display a similar hatred and be "drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore the testimony to Jesus" (v. 6). Then, too, the LORD God will bring judgment upon Babylon and "pay her back double for what she has done" (18:6). Then Revelation 19 describes

as well how the LORD defeats his enemies, great and small, thus bringing the victory and liberation to his church. Thus he will remove his enemies from the earth to give all the room on the new earth to his Bride, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven. That's the victory we pray for when we say, "Your kingdom come." In the same way Psalm 137 cries for the destruction of God's enemies and the liberation of God's people by our great Saviour and Victor Jesus Christ. Of this we make confession every Lord's Day when we say "from there he will come to judge the living and the dead."

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

### **Ask us a question!**

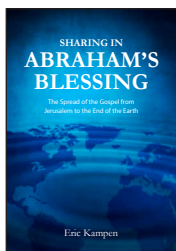
Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander  
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## BOOK REVIEW

### **Sharing in Abraham's Blessing: The Spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the End of the Earth by Eric Kampen (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 2014)**

**Additionally Information: \$18.00**



Looking for a brief but informative book on the history of the Christian church? Would you like to quickly read up on the barbarians, crusades, or the Anglican church? Ever wonder where the Baptists and Mennonites we meet today come from historically? Have you asked: what (if any) are the connections between Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Reformed believers? Then I recommend you pick up Rev. Eric Kampen's recent work, *Sharing in Abraham's Blessing* where you will find these and many other issues covered.

#### **A "forest" book**

Rev. Kampen has had a long-standing interest in church history (here limited simply to the time since

Christ's first coming), having taught it to many an evening adult class over the years of his ministry. Recently, he received a sabbatical from his current congregation (Canadian Reformed Church at Orangeville) which he used to compile those notes, fill them out, and present in this publication a 230-page overview of the last 2000 years – quite a feat in itself!

As the author acknowledges, this is a "forest" book which does not look in-depth at the many individual "trees" but keeps its focus on the big picture. Similar to viewing scenery from a helicopter, this work helps us to see the major events and key figures of Christian history, pausing and "hovering" over the more important ones while moving briskly over the others. In choosing which matters to linger over (e.g. the fourth century, the Reformation, and the nineteenth century), I think Rev. Kampen has chosen well.



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## Abraham's blessing

The author knowingly writes from a Reformed, Christian faith perspective. His purpose is to show how God's covenant promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 has been (and continues to be) fulfilled since Pentecost as the gospel "ripples" outward from Jerusalem to the end of the earth (see Acts 1:8), winning more and more Gentiles for Christ. He hopes that readers will see how various events of the past fit together and have led us to the situation we find the church in today.

It's a most useful goal. We can't truly understand the present or do much to positively affect the future unless we grasp how we got to where we are today. Rev. Kampen's book does an admirable job of helping us fit the pieces together. Practically, it helps us view with historical accuracy other Christian churches, identifying the points which separate one from the other. It also lays a basis for suggesting how Reformed believers can interact with them in an up-building way. Along the way, the author also makes us aware of various secular philosophers, whose unbiblical ideas have trickled down into society and even the church, often doing much damage to the faith of believers. It's critical to know our enemy so that we may defend against him.

## Brief chapters

One feature I really appreciated – and I think many readers will – is the short chapters. There are thirty-five chapters, averaging about six pages each. It's easy to read a chapter or two a night. This book can be navigated in different ways: it can be read straight through (which I found enjoyable) or it can be consulted for a particular topic or time-period. Chapter headings and a table of contents will help with the latter, although a subject index would have been even more useful for quick-checking a particular reference. However, each chapter has an introductory and a concluding paragraph, both of which summarize the content well. If you're in a real hurry, just look to the last paragraph to see if the chapter holds the information you are after.

## Ripples and accuracy

Throughout the book, Rev. Kampen uses the analogy of the gospel being like a rock thrown into a pond

causing ripples. Those ripples come one after the other and move outward. As a picture to visualize the out-working of history, I found it effective and helpful. A small quibble I have is the numbering of the ripples – just how many did the author wish to identify and which is which? On page 22, the gospel coming to the barbarians is identified as the fourth ripple but on page 167 the spread of the gospel beyond Europe is also called the fourth ripple. A future edition, I'm sure, can easily eliminate the discrepancy.

I am no historian but, over the years, I've gotten to know certain periods of church history. Wherever I was more familiar with a time-period, I found Rev. Kampen's information and analysis accurate and helpful. Where I was less familiar (e.g. the rise of Islam and the crusades), I found his work enlightening. His brief analysis on why the Arabs never were Christianized in large numbers and why the religion of Islam succeeded in rapidly making inroads among them was fascinating (page 62ff). I came away from this book with a better sense of the over-all development of the last 2000 years of church history.

## Wish list

Did I find anything missing? Rev. Kampen makes a compelling case that the gospel tracked from Jerusalem in mostly a westward direction. Yet today the gospel is spreading most vigorously in the east (Asia) and in the south (southern Africa) but the book contains only a smattering of tantalizing references to this. Also, we read nothing of Australia or South America. In a second edition (I hope this one sells out!) I would like to see a chapter or two explaining how and when the gospel came to those regions. Also, are there reasons (apart from God's hidden providence) why the gospel never went eastward (or into southern Africa) to begin with?

But these are relatively small matters. This is a fine book, suitable for any Christian adult. There are study questions for each chapter, so it could also be profitably used in a group discussion. I recommend all Christian adults in the churches to educate or refresh themselves on Christ's church-gathering work by picking up this volume!

