

Clarion

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**WHAT REPUTATION
DOES YOUR CHURCH HAVE?**



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The Church and the Community

Look for opportunities to serve

What sort of reputation does your church have in the community? Does it have a good name or a bad name? Do others scoff when it is mentioned or do they pay it tribute? Or, more basic yet, do they even know your name? Do they know you exist at all?

I ask these questions in order to get us thinking about the relationship between church and community. Many of our local churches are engaged in evangelism efforts of one kind or another, but seldom do we stop to ask the bigger questions relating to reputation, name, standing, or perception. As a result we sometimes are at a loss as to explain why this outreach effort or that never seems to get off the ground. The reality is that if your reputation is bad or non-existent, every effort to reach out will be an uphill one.

An individual face

Before we look at ways to address a bad reputation or an unknown one, we do well to reflect on the church and its role in the community. You might say that in this regard the church has two faces. It has an individual face in the sense that it are individuals that make up the church and their actions impact hugely on what others think about your church. For example, if you say quite openly that you are Canadian Reformed, Free Reformed, or what have you, and then proceed to cuss and curse, to cheat and steal, to drink and carouse, it will rub off on how people see your church, or more precisely the church of Christ. Invariably, it will have a negative impact with people saying, “Those guys over there are nothing more than a bunch of hypocrites.” On the other hand, if people know where you church and see you as a person full of

honesty and integrity, gentleness and kindness, it will spill over and enhance the name of your church and of your Saviour. So to a large extent the reputation of the church and its Lord is in the hands of its members.

A corporate face

But there is more to it. For if the church has an individual face, it also has a corporate face. What do I mean by that? It has to do with how the church is perceived as whole in the community. If your church building is ugly or in a state of disrepair, if the paint is peeling, if the parking lot is full of potholes, it will have negative repercussions. Or if the church does not get along with its neighbours or never bothers to reach out to them in any way, it too will foster a certain perception. The same is true if your church never participates in any way in any local events.

What does it matter?

Of course, some of you may be saying to yourselves, “What does it matter what the neighbours, the town or the world thinks about us? We are in the world but not of the world.”

Now, such an attitude needs a biblical checkup. Is this what God wants? Is it so that he could not care less what people think of his body, his people, or his church? In no way! Throughout the Scripture we hear that our God is always concerned about the reputation of his people among the Gentiles. Way back when he chose Abraham, but for what? Among other things, to be a blessing to the nations. The Psalmist tells the church to sing a new song, a song that declares his glory “among the nations, his marvellous deeds

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

How can our congregations be more connected to their communities? This is the topic of Dr. James Visscher's editorial. Later on in the issue we also have the fourth part of Dr. Wes Bredenhof's "Outward Looking Church" series.

Issue 9 brings readers "A Time to Fight: Sex, Gender, and the Confessions of the Reformed Churches in North America" by Rev. Matthew W. Kingsbury. This article was originally a paper delivered at an OPC symposium.

In politics, we have an article from André Schutten of ARPA Canada on the recent Supreme Court decision in *Loyola High School v. Quebec*.

In church news, we have a report from Willoughby Heights on their twenty-fifth anniversary. We are also pleased to introduce the five men who are finishing up their studies at CRTS this spring.

Additionally Issue 9 contains the Treasures New and Old meditation, the You Asked column, and a letter to the editor.

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among all peoples” (Ps 96:2, 3). The Lord Jesus comes and tells his disciples that they are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matt 5:13, 14). The Apostle Paul commends the believers in Thessalonica on the fact that “your faith in God has become known everywhere” (1 Thess 1:8). A little later he tells them to set a good example in order that “your daily life may win the respect of outsiders” (1 Thess 4:12). Elsewhere when Paul speaks about the qualifications of an overseer he adds that “he must also have a good reputation with outsiders” (1 Tim 3:7).

It matters a great deal

The result of all of this is that how the church is perceived in the community, matters. It matters to God, and because it matters to him, it should also matter to us. Is your local church a blessing to the nations? Is it telling his marvellous deeds among the neighbourhood? Is it a salt and a light? Is the faith you profess together known in your town? Are you respected by those on the outside? These kinds of questions matter. We should be asking them. We should be working on them.

But how?

Just how do we work on them? In the first place we do so by reminding ourselves regularly that a real church is a church that focuses on three things: God, member, and neighbour. Or, if you will, a faithful church looks three ways: up to God on his throne, inside to fellow saints in the pew and outside to unbelievers in the world.

A sick church

At the same time when any one of these aspects is missing, we end up with a church that is sick, or worse. A church lacking in worship to God is a church that needs to question whether it really is a church at all. A church that neglects its members is a distortion of the real thing. A church that cannot be bothered to spread its light is almost invariably ingrown and unhealthy. Real worship, real fellowship, real outreach – these are the qualities of a vibrant, living, and active church.

A plan

Still, being reminded of these qualities is one thing, turning them into a plan or an approach is another. Just how does one go about developing a community-sensitive church?

The first thing that should be done is to look for opportunities to serve. You need to acquaint yourself with the needs in your community. Talk to those in public service: politicians, police officers, firemen, hospital administrators, social workers, etc. Identify the needs that are out there in your town, city, suburb, or township.

Next, look at your congregation in terms of its giftedness. What sort of talents, abilities, and gifts do your members have? Are they such that they can make a difference? Encourage those with abilities to put them to use.

***These kinds of questions matter.
We should be asking them.
We should be working on them.***

There was a time in our history when many of our members were just settling in to a new land. Jobs needed to be found, houses needed to be built, churches needed to be constructed, schools needed to be erected. All of that took a lot of time, prayer, sacrifice, and effort. But that time is mostly over. Our members live established lives. Our children identify more and more with the land of their birth. Our churches are celebrating more and more anniversaries.

The time has come

What’s next? Is it time to put up our feet, relax, enjoy, and do nothing? Hardly, now is the time for our churches and their members to exert their influence. Our world desperately needs people who have morals, integrity, honesty, and neighbourly love. So many of our members possess these qualities and it is time for us to let our voices be heard and to bring our talents into play. In other words, it is time to make a contribution to the land that has welcomed us as immigrants. It is time to make a difference with our gospel-centred lives.

Implications

Naturally, this has many implications, and not only in terms of using our talents, but also in terms of how and where we build our churches. When it comes to the architecture of our buildings, they need to come across not as bunkers but as places that are welcoming and community friendly. When it comes to their location, they should as much as possible be situated where the people are.

Now, I know that the latter is not always possible. Often land in the suburbs is expensive. In addition, a lot of cities and municipalities make property zoning for churches a difficult thing. Nevertheless, as much as possible we should avoid erecting new buildings in the outback.

Better use

In addition, we should look at existing buildings and see if they can be put to better use, both congregationally and publicly. I know of a church that has an empty piece of property very close to a university campus. It would be ideal as a student centre where young people can come for fellowship, discussions, presentations, and study. I know of another church that is situated in a booming area where houses are going up all around but almost every day that church building is locked and plays no role whatsoever in the community. Why not put up a sign and offer courses in parenting, finances, marriage, and communication? Such offerings can be a great way to expose people to the gospel.

Buildings as opportunities

What I am saying is that we need to see our churches as more than just worship places and meeting space for members only. Does your church ever play host to blood clinics, voting stations, concerts, garage sales, ESL classes, community forums?

Think about it. Talk about it. Pray about it. Disagree with me all you want. But just how do you see your church and its members? Is it a fellowship that fears the world and wants nothing to do with it? Do you see your building as a temple that needs to be safeguarded from defilement? Or, do you see yourself as a lighthouse in a darkening world and your building as a place that should beckon and welcome all those who so desperately need the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

In the past when the subject of reaching out to the community was discussed it was often said that we don't need to bother because the doors of the church are always open. Not true! Our doors may be open for two hours on one particular day, but what about the other 166 hours of the week? C





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Our Ascended Prophet-Priest-King

“So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.”

(Mark 16:19)

Acts 1 describes the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. It tells us about the disciples looking as Jesus was lifted up. It tells us about a cloud taking him out of their sight. It tells us about the angels declaring, “This Jesus will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

In contrast, the gospel of Mark has a very short account of Christ’s ascension into heaven. It says, “So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God” (16:19). Even though it is short, these words demonstrate Christ’s three-fold office. He is doing his work as prophet, priest, and king.

The first words “after he had spoken to them” describe his work as prophet. Our Lord had been teaching for three years of public ministry. But even after his death and resurrection he continued his work as prophet. That’s what Mark 16:19 is referring to. Christ is the prophet

who fully reveals the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption (LD 12). For those forty days between his resurrection and his ascension he was fully revealing to the apostles the significance of his death and resurrection so that all his disciples would boldly confess, “Jesus Christ is the Chief Prophet.”

The next few words “he was taken up into heaven” describe his work as priest. God our Father took our Lord Jesus into heaven showing that he is fully pleased with the work of Christ, his Son. God the Father accepts his Son and welcomes him into heaven. Therefore, Hebrews 7:25 says, “Our Lord is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Being taken up into heaven shows us God has welcomed him into the Most Holy Place to be our priest.

Mark’s next words “and sat down at the right hand of God” describe Christ’s work as king. A king at work

is a king who sits on his throne, so these words show us Christ ruling in the throne at God’s right hand. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” That means that Christ is sovereign over everything and everyone in this universe. He governs the world for the sake of his church and he governs the church by his Word and Spirit.

So, with those closing words of Mark’s gospel we are given a lasting impression of our Lord Jesus at work today. We see him continuing to be prophet, priest, and king. As Chief Prophet he moves us to rejoice in the truth and declare to others what God has revealed. As our only High Priest he has made us acceptable in God’s sight so that we now present ourselves to God as living sacrifices. As our eternal King he leads us to victory over sin and the devil so that we would reign with him eternally over all creatures.



For Further Study

1. Which is better for being a Christian: that Christ would have stayed on earth, or that he ascended into heaven?
2. What comfort is there that our Lord is God’s Chief Prophet and Teacher? Can we be sure that we know the truth of God?
3. Were there former high priests that were unacceptable? How does the ascension show us that God accepted the Lord Jesus as our High Priest? What comfort is there that our Lord Jesus is High Priest?
4. What comfort is there knowing that Christ is controlling the universe? How can you tell Christ is your king?



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A Time to Fight

Sex, Gender, and the Confessions of the Reformed Churches in North America

This paper was originally delivered as part of the symposium “Sex, Gender, and American Presbyterianism” hosted by Bethlehem Reformed Church (OPC) the evening before the September 26–27, 2011 stated meeting of the Presbytery of the Dakotas.

I was a commissioner at the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s (OPC) 69th General Assembly (2002), which determined the Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) should be removed from the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council because the 1995 CRC Synod had opened the offices of elder and minister to women. For the first time, I learned the grounds for removing a body from NAPARC: infidelity to its own confessional standards. In this case, it was alleged the CRC violated Belgic Confession, Article 30’s requirement that only faithful men be chosen for these offices, according to the rule of 1 Timothy 3. I voted with the majority because passages such as 1 Timothy 2 limit the ordained offices to men, but was troubled by my vote because 1 Timothy 3 does not;¹ nor, for that matter, do the Belgic Confession (or any of the Three Forms of Unity) or the Westminster Standards. CRC officers could comfortably drift toward liberalism on this issue without any conscience-troubling admonitions from their confessions.

With regard to the struggle precipitated by the old PCUSA’s slide into liberalism, our own J. Gresham Machen wrote, “[t]he really important things are the things about which men will fight.”² By that measure, *the* really important thing today, the most significant question at issue in the church and in our culture, is the nature of gender and sexual relationships. As I write, the latest development is the approval of same-sex marriage by the New York state legislature; at the current pace, I imagine yet another outrage will be more current by the time you read this. The fight is on, but if our confessions are the weapons with which the Reformed churches fight, we are woefully unarmed.

At the time the confessions of the NAPARC churches were written, the present confusion over sex and gender which prevails in our culture at large would have been entirely unimaginable. This is probably why the Westminster divines left us with a ban on the doctrine of purgatory (WCF 32.1), but no statement that, let alone argument as to why, ordained offices are limited to men. In the church and in the world, confessions serve three functions: confessional, catechetical, and apologetic; in order to meet the challenges of this present age in each of these areas, the Reformed confessions³ should be supplemented by a clear and robust statement of scriptural teaching on sex and gender. I shall proceed by describing the three functions of confessions which I have identified⁴ (giving attention to the role of each in the present controversy), and suggest a way forward.

The confessions as confessions

I hazard to guess this is how most officers view their confessions: as a statement of belief, specifically, a belief that the doctrines identified are true, biblical, and ought to be affirmed by anyone holding office in the church. I have heard some suggest that because biblical teaching on sex and gender is implicit in our secondary standards (especially when one includes the Book of Church Order),⁵ the confessions are adequate statements on these matters. For the sake of argument, I am willing to concede this point.

However, I am uncomfortable having an essential point of doctrine stated only implicitly in our confessions, and I believe every church officer ought to share my discomfort. To illustrate: any candidate for the gospel ministry who might teach the Romanist doctrine of purgatory would be screened out by WCF 32.1, and any pastor who veers in that direction would be charged with heresy on the basis of Scripture and (again) WCF 32.1. Matters of such weight and moment, almost by definition, belong in confessions.

I hope my fellow officers agree no man who believes the wife should be head over her husband ought to be admitted to holy office; accordingly, this should be mentioned in our confessions along with the ban on purgatory.

Confessions also guide the deliberations and decisions of church judicatories. If you're at all like me, a moment spent reading what passes for debate on Internet sites over doctrines such as justification inspires a deep appreciation for the sane, wise, and carefully measured statements of our confessions. Unfortunately, a desire to "do something" to stand against the worldly surge toward gender confusion has led some in our circles to take reactionary stances. A thoughtful confessional statement can guard us against errors on both the right and the left.

An additional, more pragmatic matter comes to mind under this head. Some pastors and sessions may avoid sermons against same-sex marriage lest they be accused of "preaching politics." Indeed, I suspect some sessions may even be concerned their congregations could lose tax-exempt status. While I do not believe this concern should restrain the preacher, however the IRS may be proceeding these days,⁶ putting controversial sex and gender issues into our confessions will clarify their standing as matters of faith, practice, and morality, and not mere political preference.

Confessions as catechesis

The Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as is the Heidelberg, are, of course, catechisms: documents framed specifically to instruct the people in the essentials of their faith. To that end, catechisms have been used in the churches not only to directly instruct the youth and converts, but even to provide the doctrines through which the pastor should preach for the edification of all. Even when they are not used in this way, all confessions have a catechetical function: they identify that which must be believed by the church's officers as well as that which all the church's members should be instructed to believe. In a properly ordered congregation, the confessions set the theological agenda, telling the preacher and member alike what doctrines should be believed and what doctrines which, while interesting and true, are not so necessary for the leading of faithful lives.

I trust I can state with little fear of contradiction that Christian families must understand the biblical patterns for their relationships if their homes are to be rightly ordered: these are doctrines without which they simply cannot do. However, one's pastor could faithfully preach

through the Larger, Shorter, and Heidelberg Catechisms (in that order!), and, unless he were inclined to do some extra work on the Fifth Commandment, one would hear precious little about these things. In like manner, one's pastor would have to be fairly creative to work into his course of catechetical preaching an explanation as to why only men may preach. The members of our churches need this instruction, and putting it into our confessions is the most obvious way to begin insuring they get it.

Confessions as apologetic

This function of confessions may be a bit hard to imagine in practice,⁷ but necessarily follows from the previous two. By definition, confessions clearly state where we believe the boundaries of orthodoxy lie. A few years ago, *Modern Reformation* published an essay of mine on preaching in which I referred to evangelical feminism as a heresy. This raised some ire amongst a segment of that magazine's readership, who wrote to complain of my casually reading them out of orthodoxy on the basis of what they believed idiosyncratic and reactionary opinions. I responded by articulating the biblical reasons evangelical feminism is a grave error, but the episode illustrated one way in which confessions could have served as an apologetic: to define and defend the boundaries of orthodoxy to, and sometimes against, erring brethren.

Confession as apologetic also follows from its role as catechesis: that is, the catechized Christian is much better equipped to articulate and defend the faith to a world which, at least occasionally, asks him to give account for the hope within him. When recent judicial and legislative actions by the state come up in the workplace break room, I would like to think the average confessional Presbyterian will be able to explain the foundational characteristics of marriage which are threatened when the civil magistrate recognizes same-sex marriages as legally valid. I would like to think this, but I've had too many conversations in which confessional Presbyterians frankly admit they can't see the existential threat to marriage posed by this innovation, or by no-fault divorce before it, for this to be anything more than a fond wish.

With regard to the major social issue of our day, our confessionally Reformed people are woefully unprepared to defend the commonplace assumptions of untold generations of Christians regarding sex, gender, and marriage. To call this a scandal would be scandalous understatement.

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CHURCH NEWS

A modest proposal

I have often heard it asserted we should not write confessions because ours is “not a confession-writing age.” This is not only a tautology, it ignores the rather cheering fact that the twentieth century bore witness to great advances in Reformed theology. While we all can point to the sweeping insights of Geerhardus Vos and Cornelius Van Til, we should also remember the contributions of theologians such as our own Richard Gaffin, Jr. to the broader church on settled matters of orthodoxy such as cessationism. We are better equipped now than any generation before us to articulate and defend foundational Christian doctrine.

Very little is more plainly stated and widely understood than the Bible’s teaching on marriage and gender. All NAPARC officers in good standing would agree:

- The offices of ruling and teaching elder may be held only by men;
- Sexual activity belongs only within marriage;
- Marriage can only be between one man and one woman, and Christian marriage reflects the eschatological union of Christ and church;
- Divorce is only to be permitted on a very limited number of grounds, which number is much smaller than that presently allowed by the civil courts of our states and provinces;
- The husband is head, in an authoritative manner, over his wife and family.

No one can long question the settled answers to these questions before one begins to question the nature and authority of Scripture itself. Say what one will about the faults of the Reformed churches, our officers are extremely good at stating, explaining, and defending the plain teaching of God’s Word. Against the skeptics, I have every confidence the confessional Reformed communions represented by NAPARC have men of the requisite biblical knowledge, scholarly insight, and personal piety to formulate a statement on marriage, sex, and gender which can stand alongside the original contents of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

I readily acknowledge several of the doctrines I’ve listed above, and other relevant matters, already appear within the Reformed confessions. Others do not, of course, and my concern is that these are not drawn together under one head and their necessary relationships clearly demonstrated. To insert some repetition into the Westminster Confession would be no new thing: the regulative prin-

ciple of worship, for example, is articulated three times.⁸ Surely our standards would suffer no insult by some slight repetition of core anthropological doctrines!

Adding to our confessions need not be the daunting task which some think. It might begin simply by a presbytery overturing our General Assembly to bring a proposal to NAPARC. Said proposal would convene a committee of scholars, drawn from across the member communions, to draw up a model confessional statement on marriage, sex, and gender, along with suggestions as to how it might fit into the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity. The churches of NAPARC would then decide how they might amend their own standards as the result of what would have been a cross-denominational⁹ consultative process.

Ours is not a confession-writing age because we have chosen not to write confessions. As the spirit of our age insists, with ever-greater stridency, that we tolerate and even embrace what God’s Word calls sin, we ought not to neglect our duty any longer. In the place of confusion, let us proclaim the clear teaching of Scripture; in the place of its sin, let us call our age to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ by true repentance and faith in his saving work on the cross.

¹ The relevant verses from 1 Timothy 3 require the personal characteristic of fidelity, and in particular sexual fidelity within marriage.

² *Christianity & Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1923 [1996 reprint]), p. 2

³ By “Reformed confessions,” I mean the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. As an officer in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, I am most concerned with my own communion’s confessions, but the arguments I make in this paper speak to all NAPARC churches.

⁴ I do not intend to limit confessions’ utility to these three functions, but have chosen them as helpful ways to approach the subject at hand.

⁵ The constitution of the OPC consists of the Bible, the Westminster Standards, and the Book of Church Order (technically, our tertiary standard), whose weightiness and authority descend in that order. Only the Bible cannot be amended, as it alone is divinely inspired. (OPC Form of Government XXXII)

⁶ What shall it profit a congregation if it retains its tax-exempt status but loses the whole counsel of God?

⁷ Although one could do worse than throw WSC 1 at Richard Dawkins.

⁸ WCF 1.6, 20.2, and 21.1.

⁹ And/or inter-federational.

Outward Looking Church: Current Craze or Christ's Commission? (4)



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Revised from a presentation for the Spring Office Bearers Conference held March 22, 2014 in Burlington, ON.

How do the Scriptures answer?

Let's start with the Old Testament, at the very beginning. We're supposed to be finished with the Belgic Confession, but here I just can't get the words of Article 17 out of my mind. It's expressed so powerfully: "We believe that, when he saw that man had thus plunged himself into physical and spiritual death and made himself completely miserable, our gracious God in his marvelous wisdom and goodness set out to seek man when he trembling fled from him."

Of course, this is a faithful summary of what happens in Genesis 3. Adam plunged himself into trouble, but God set out after him. God pursued Adam and Eve. He did that to comfort them with a promise, the mother promise of Genesis 3:15. There would be salvation through the seed of the woman. But I want you to take note of what God does here: he pursues the lost and then brings that lost sinner the gospel. He does not turn in on himself and forget about his creation. Instead, he looks outward, has compassion on his creature, and seeks him. If you think about it, this is remarkable. God was the first missionary. True, he set out to seek the lost on his own initiative (no one sent him), and he did this in an entirely unique way. Yet his activity and attitude here should be seen as a model for the church. It is part of *God's character* to look outward, seek out the lost, and call them back to himself. Doesn't Scripture say in Ephesians 5:1 that we are to be imitators of God? Obviously, we cannot imitate an infinite God in every respect, but the context of Ephesians 5:1 is that of God's love and forgiveness. We can certainly imitate him in those ways, and we must! Similarly, as

God looked outward and mercifully sought to save our first parents, we are to imitate him and do likewise with the lost in our world.

Along the same lines, we can think of Ezekiel 18:23, "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the LORD God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" This is why the LORD sent prophets, because he wanted the wicked to turn from their evil ways and live. God looked outward and had a heart of compassion for those who were rebelling against him in their wickedness. He sent prophets to call them to repentance. Here too we see the heart of the LORD looking outward, seeking the lost, pursuing them. If this is our God, aren't we called to reflect him in these ways?

Going back to Genesis, let's briefly look at the beginning of chapter 12 and sort of track the development of redemptive history from there, at least the history as it bears on our question. In Genesis 12:3, God makes the promise to Abraham that "in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This promise comes back in Genesis 22:18. The covenant with Abraham had the salvation of many as part of its purpose. The covenant was not just about saving one man and his family, but salvation for all the nations of the earth. In this, we also have something significant about the reason for the church's existence. On the basis of this passage, we can conclude that the church (where God's covenant people are found), she exists at least partly for the sake of the world.

As the Old Testament develops from that point forward, there is somewhat of a narrowing. What I mean is that, for a period, God is working mostly only with one people, only with Israel. However, if we look carefully we do see signs that something bigger is being conceived through this development. There is an outward looking

perspective in the big picture. There are numerous signs. Let me just mention a couple of passages from Isaiah. Isaiah 49:6 speaks of the Servant of the LORD being given as a light for the nations, so that God's "salvation may reach to the end of the earth." In Isaiah 25:6-8, a feast on Mount Zion is described which will be for all people, for all nations. The church here is prophetically represented by Mount Zion and this illustrates again that, in the big picture, the church at least partly exists for the salvation of people from all nations. There is an outward looking perspective engineered into the church's design.

If we would survey more of the Old Testament we would soon be led to observe a pattern. Despite what I just mentioned, the general pattern in the Old Testament was that the nations could be drawn to Israel. There were exceptions – what happens in Jonah being the most prominent. But in general, the pattern is a passive one. The Israelites were God's people and if Gentiles were attracted and wanted to join them, they were welcome to, there were provisions for proselytes. But there was no explicit mandate in the Old Testament to proclaim God's promises for salvation to those outside of God's people. It's in the new covenant administration that we find the flowering of God's concern for the drawing in of all nations.

As we turn to the New Testament, it's rather remarkable that its first pages don't differ that much from the last pages of the Old Testament. Yes, our Lord Jesus seeks out the lost, but for the most part he only carries out that ministry among the covenant people of Israel. At that period in redemptive history, there was still more of an inward orientation. And when he first sends out his disciples, he doesn't send them to the Gentiles, but to the Jews. We would say not "to the world," but "to the church." He said it explicitly in Matthew 10:5-6, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." As long as our Lord Jesus was on earth, and even for some time afterwards, the covenant people of Israel held priority in the gospel calling of the disciples.

So the focus in Christ's ministry is on the covenant people, the church. It's generally oriented inward. Yet, as in the Old Testament, there are these signs that there is a bigger picture. There are signs that something greater and broader is coming; the orientation is going to dramatically shift with the progress of redemptive history.

I just mentioned Matthew 10:5-6. A little bit further in Matthew 10, in verse 18, Christ says that his disciples will be delivered to kings and governors for the purpose of bearing witness to them. This is one hint that the orientation is going to shift outwards.

Other hints are seen in the several times that our Lord Jesus interacted with Gentiles during his earthly ministry. In John 4, Jesus travels through Samaria. There's a remarkable thing in verse 4. It says "he *had to* pass through Samaria." He was compelled to. There he found the Samaritan woman. Our Lord Jesus had compassion on her and reached out to her, even though that was socially unacceptable for a Jewish man. In Mark 7 and Matthew 15, Christ travelled to the region of Tyre and Sidon, outside the Holy Land. He actively goes to the Gentiles. He interacts with this Syro-Phoenician woman. He acknowledges her faith and heals her daughter. Something similar takes place with the Roman centurion in Luke 7 and Matthew 8. With his faith, the Gentile centurion stands out in contrast to the sin-stubborn covenant people. Because of their stubbornness, they are going to be cast out. Gentiles will be brought into a healthy, friendly relationship with God. There will be judgment for the Jews, but through an outward looking ministry of the church, there will be salvation for the Gentiles. This is all hinted at in preliminary ways in the earthly ministry of Christ.

After his resurrection, and before his ascension, the time is right to begin shifting the orientation. That really begins to happen with the Great Commission. It's most well-known form is Matthew 28:18-20. This is an important passage for our topic and I'd like to make just two points about it. Far more could be said, but we'll stick to these two points.

First, our Lord Jesus addressed these words to his apostles. He was not speaking to all individual Christians at all times and places. The context here indicates that our Lord is speaking for the ears of the apostles first and foremost. There is a connection to believers today, but it is not as direct and individual as many make it out to be. In other words, this passage is not telling every individual Christian that they are a missionary.

However, the fact that Christ speaks of his presence to the end of the age in verse 20 points to a broader application than just the apostles living at that moment. In

fact, our Lord Jesus is giving the Great Commission to the church through the apostles. He is sending out the church to make disciples and baptize. In normal circumstances, the administration of the sacraments is not entrusted to individual believers. Rather, it is the church which baptizes through its ordained ministers. Therefore, the church as a body has been entrusted with the outward looking task of bringing the gospel to the nations – not individual members by themselves disconnected from the church.

The second point I want to make is that the Great Commission's calling is to make disciples of people from all nations. Often when we hear this, we think of other countries. The original word used for "nation" here doesn't mean country in the sense of a geo-political unit or territory. It refers to a people group, an ethnicity. These people groups or ethnicities are found everywhere. We must not forget that the application of Christ's command here begins at home, in our cities, communities, and neighbourhoods – just as it did with the apostles in the days after the ascension of our Saviour. "All nations" includes the people you work with, study with, live next door to, and so on.

This outward looking commission of Christ determines the course of events in the book of Acts. In fact, we have a parallel to Matthew 28:18-20 in Acts 1 and that parallel basically gives us the outline of the book. As the church looks outward, led by the Spirit of Christ, she goes from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and then to the ends of the earth.

Certainly the book of Acts portrays an outward looking church. At the forefront of this outward looking church are the special office bearers, particularly the apostles. Paul and Peter and others were burdened for the lost and proclaimed the gospel to them. Deacons also did this. We think of Stephen and Philip. But this outward looking orientation was not only found with the special

office bearers. It was something that characterized the whole church of that era. In Acts 8:4 and Acts 11:19-21, we read of believers being scattered because of the persecution that arose after Stephen's martyrdom. These believers went about evangelizing, with the result that many people believed and turned to the Lord. As one final example, in Acts 18 we are introduced to Apollos. Later on, he may have become an office bearer, but when we first meet Apollos, he appears as a regular Christian with a heart for the lost.

The book of Acts presents us with a church turned outward, a church with a heart for the world. We see the same picture elsewhere in the New Testament. We're running short on time, so let me just mention one passage from Philippians 1. In verse 14, Paul says that because of his imprisonment, other believers have been emboldened to speak the Word. There again we see New Testament Christians who see a world in darkness and seek to bring the gospel to it.

That brings us to conclude from Scripture that being an outward looking church is indeed the commission of Christ; it is the design of God for his church in this dark world. If it is God's design, then it must be a design for our good, for our collective health. Scripture teaches that we are not only to passively be a light, but also actively to seek and save the lost through sharing the good news of Christ. In this we are to reflect our missionary God. In this we are to show that we are united to Christ, who himself came to actively pursue sinners for their redemption.

So you have heard me make the case. Let me now turn and briefly address some thoughts which might pop up in some minds – let me try to answer some objections or questions. It would be easy to misunderstand what it looks like to be an outward looking church. By way of these objections, perhaps I can make it clearer. I'll do that in the concluding installment.

C





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A (Small) Step in the Right Direction for Christian Education in Canada

The Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Loyola High School v. Quebec*

I've just settled into reading through Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. The editor's note in the first volume sets the historical context of the Dutch Reformed author and it notes something very interesting:

Bavinck again and again addresses the Kantian claim that God cannot be known and the subsequent effort to maintain the study of theology as a form of human religious experience. This issue was an important practical-existential issue for the 19th century Dutch Reformed church as well as an interesting philosophical and theological question. . . . Yet, the ecclesiastical and academic context in which these questions lived and moved and had their being was the 1876 Law Concerning Higher Education, which effectively turned university theology faculties into departments of religious studies. *Rather than a confessionally normative dogmatic theology, a neutral, phenomenological approach to religion was mandated by law.* The response of the more pietist Reformed community in the Netherlands was to create specific, confessionally oriented theological schools [emphasis added].

There really is nothing new under the sun! What happened to the theology faculties of Dutch universities in 1876 happened to all State-run Catholic and Protestant elementary and high schools in Québec through an intentional secularization program over the last few decades. The latest step in this process was to introduce a mandatory Ethics and Religious Culture course (the ERC) for all schools in 2008. However, the Québec government went one step further than the Dutch government did in 1876: Québec mandated secularism for all independent religious schools too.

Loyola school and the religion course

The ERC course, like the Dutch 1876 law, changed the study of religion into a "neutral," phenomenological study rather than a confessional one. Foundational to this approach is the assumption that God (and Truth) cannot be known. Therefore, the experts reasoned that all schools ought (a moral claim) to teach all religions as being equally valid (another moral claim). This is somehow a "neutral" approach.

One school decided to push back. Loyola high school, an independent Jesuit school in Montreal, argued that the imposition of secularism on this school's teaching of ethics and religion (even their own religion!) violated their freedom of religion. They fought a legal battle through three levels of court all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

After twelve months of deliberation, the Supreme Court released its decision in *Loyola High School v. Quebec (Attorney General)*, upholding religious freedom for Loyola school and also, by extension, for all who seek to apply their faith to the education of their children.

At stake: freedom of religion

ARPA Canada, with the assistance and guidance of lawyer Ian Moes (British Columbia), led a coalition of 313 independent Christian schools and eleven post-secondary institutions to intervene in the case. The coalition was called the Association of Christian Educators and Schools (ACES) and we argued that confessional schools must be accommodated as an alternative to State-run schools.

At stake in this case was the religious freedom of parents and institutions to educate children according to a worldview that might be different than that of the State education bureaucracy. Thankfully, the Court was unanimous in finding that religious communities can teach their own faith to their children from their own perspective.

Our hope for this decision was that the Supreme Court would affirm hundreds of years of legal precedent that parents are the first decision-makers for their children, and that religious freedom includes the right to train children within a particular worldview. With this decision, the Court stood up for liberty and for parental rights. While the Court could have been stronger in some places, this is still a welcome decision.

Parents as first educators

Parents ought to have the first and final say on the religious and moral instruction of their children. For a biblical defence of this statement, see God's directions to Abraham in Genesis 18, God's instructions to the people of Israel to teach their children his commands in Deuteronomy 6, the generational instruction outlined in Psalm 78, or scan through the book of Proverbs, filled with instructions on how to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov 22), including as it relates to sexuality (Proverbs 7, and elsewhere). See also Deuteronomy 4:10; Proverbs 1:8-9; Ephesians 6:1-4; and Colossians 3:20. It's pretty clear: parents are responsible for ensuring that their children are properly informed about religion, ethics, and sexuality.

While the State may assist parents in educating children, it may not drive a wedge between parents and their children or use children as pawns to advance a particular worldview in society. There has been a trend towards Statism in education in Canada. This decision gives a glimmer of hope to parents in stopping that slide.

Some problems with the decision

However, there are problems with the decision as well. For example, the majority found "no significant impairment of freedom of religion in requiring Loyola to offer a course that explains the beliefs, ethics and practices of other religions in as objective and neutral a way as possible, rather than from the Catholic perspective" (para. 6). If this means that Christian schools should teach the factual elements of other religions (e.g. the five

pillars of Islam, the eight-fold path of Buddhism, etc.), then those facts can be taught relatively objectively (and all the Christian schools I know do that anyway).

The idea might be that when teaching about Judaism, for example, a rabbi sitting in the classroom should be able to say to the Christian teacher, "Yes, you've accurately portrayed my religion." But even here, we see a problem: imagine ten different rabbis (or imams or priests or monks) from ten different Jewish (or Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist) denominations in the classroom. No matter how "objective" a teacher tries to be, a majority of the rabbis (or imams/priests/monks) will disagree with something that was taught.

When the Court later states that "requiring Loyola to teach about the ethics of *other* religions in a neutral, historical and phenomenological way would not interfere disproportionately with [freedom of religion]" (para. 71), the Court demonstrates the clear influence of their post-Kantian philosophy and worldview that Bavinck was so critical of some 100 years ago.

The Court also remains unclear as to whether and how much the ethics and beliefs of other religions can be critically evaluated through a Christian worldview. Further, a deeper issue is the Court's assumption that the State has the authority to tell schools and parents what must be taught.

A small step is still a step in the right direction

Despite the shortcomings of the judgment, we should still see this as a win. The court states, "A secular state does not – and cannot – interfere with the beliefs and practices of a religious group unless they conflict with or harm overriding public interests. . . . A secular state respects religious differences, it does not seek to extinguish them" (para. 43). For now, this is a fine statement. However, respect for religious differences remains susceptible to changing "public interests."

The crux of the decision is found in paragraph 62, where the Court ruled, "To tell a Catholic school how to explain its faith undermines the liberty of the members of its community who have chosen to give effect to the collective dimension of their religious beliefs by participating in a denominational school." This is a robust defence of independent Christian schools. The court goes further in paragraphs 63 to 67, outlining how the actions of the Quebec Minister of Education "interferes with the

rights of parents to transmit the Catholic faith to their children. . . because it prevents a Catholic discussion of Catholicism. This ignores the fact that an essential ingredient of the vitality of a religious community is the ability of its members to pass on their beliefs to their children, whether through instruction in the home or participation in communal institutions” (para. 64).

The court sets out a clear defense of communal religious rights, makes good references to parental rights (an argument ARPA Canada had advanced) and in the end ruled for religious liberty. While we would have loved a much stronger and broader decision, considering the legal context and cultural climate we find ourselves, this case is a step in the right direction.

Next steps

In light of this case, ARPA Canada will be encouraging our elected leaders in Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta to rethink their one-size-fits-all approach to re-

ligion, ethics, and secularism. Over the past two years, these provinces have imposed a particular religious – that is, secular – worldview on all schools through Bill 13 (Ontario, 2013), Bill 18 (Manitoba, 2014), Bill 10 (Alberta, 2015), and a new sex-education curriculum (Ontario, 2015) while ignoring or suppressing the freedom and concerns of religious institutions and families.

On behalf of the entire ARPA team, we give thanks first to our providential Father who has blessed the work we have all done together and surrounded us with such a supportive community. We are so thankful for the ongoing encouragement of the Christian community for the work we are privileged to do.

You can read the written legal arguments of ARPA Canada, as well as the judgment of the Supreme Court in this case, by going to ARPACanada.ca and clicking on the Loyola tab on the top right or by emailing info@ARPACanada.ca.





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Introducing... Your New Minister?

Spring is a delightful time of year – a time of new beginnings for flowers and forests and so much of God’s creation. (How we need this especially as I write this from Hamilton, Ontario in early March!) But spring is also a time of new beginnings in the world of ministry as students complete exams at seminary, and even the more intimidating classical preparatory examination. Here the students present themselves to you along with some pictures. However, not every one of them will be available this spring. At least one is thinking that spring is a great time to make a new beginning in another area of life – marriage! To find out who and more about them, you need to read and get to know these dear brothers and those who surround them with love and support.

Johan Bruintjes

I have always found it nice to read the *Clarion* write-ups about all those seminary graduates who have come before me, never thinking that one day I might have to write my own introductory article. But here I am finding myself in my last semester at CRTS reading an email from the secretary that the *Clarion* write-ups are due this weekend. Between all the papers and assignments of the semester, and of course planning a wedding on the side, I have been putting this off till now.

One reason for this is because I find it difficult to write something about myself. How much do I say? Should it be autobiographical? Or should I speak about my strengths and weaknesses. *How* much do people want to know? *Why* do they want to know? Perhaps they desire to have a connection to the seminary, so that they can pray for the students? Or maybe in order to consider whether they might call this or that student? Or maybe there is some other reason. Regardless, I hope I can meet some of the expectations of some of the people that may be reading this.



In terms of autobiographical information: My name is Johan Bruintjes. I was born into God’s covenant community in Bethlehem, South Africa into a loving family with supportive and godly parents. In 1991, my family moved to the United States, and for most of my life I grew up in the American Reformed Church in Denver, Colorado. I spent four years at the University of Colorado at Denver studying communication with an emphasis on law. After graduating I travelled abroad for half a year before returning to Denver and working at landscaping and window cleaning.

During this time my desire to serve the Lord in ministry grew, so I took some courses at Denver Seminary. In 2011 after two years at Denver Seminary, I decided to move to Hamilton and attend CRTS.

In my third year at seminary the Lord in his grace led me to meet Nadia Bultena, whom I have since asked to be my wife. She graciously said yes, and we will, Lord willing, begin married life on May 30, 2015.

For this reason, among others, I have decided to not do my candidacy examination this spring. Seminary is busy, and I know that the ministry will only get busier. I believe that when one enters the office of ministry it is a weighty responsibility that one takes on. A responsibility that no man must take lightly; a responsibility placed on a man by God himself through his church. It is only in and by the power of the Holy Spirit that a man can truly preach the Word of God and shepherd a congregation. It is only in humility acknowledging one's own sin and weakness, and in boldness as a messenger backed by the full weight and authority of God's infallible Word, that any man may enter into the office. It is my strong desire to one day preach the Word of God and know nothing among you except Christ and him crucified.

Nevertheless I feel that it would be appropriate for me to take some time to reflect and consider where the Lord has brought me in life, and also prepare for the next stage so that I can enter it with joyful enthusiasm and energy. Taking this time will help Nadia and I to prepare for what will, Lord willing, be a life of service to the honour and glory of his Name. We will be able to do this prayerfully without the pressures of classical examination, and calls (or non-calls) if I sustain the examination.

I would like to close by saying thank you! Thank you for all your support and prayers. The students do not take it for granted! Although I have been very frustrated at times, overall I have thoroughly enjoyed seminary, and am thankful for the education I have received there. The Lord has certainly blessed the work of the seminary as we see through the graduation of five students, all of whom the Lord has given unique gifts and talents. I pray that you may reap the benefit of this work through the preaching of the gospel of our Lord, the king of Kings, our Saviour Jesus Christ! To him alone be the glory!

Rick Vanderhorst

My name is Rick Vanderhorst. I was born in 1983 in Langley, BC to my parents, Henk and Ginny Vanderhorst. Our home was full of energy as I was one of four boys, who, along with our two sisters, kept our parents very busy. I am thankful to the Lord for the childhood I could enjoy in a stable and loving family. When I was young I could usually be found on the soccer field or in the forest behind our house where I spent many hours with my brothers and friends climbing trees and making forts.

For grades 1-12 I attended Credo Christian Elementary School and High School in Langley. After I graduat-



ed, I enrolled at BCIT to pursue a career as a millwright. After taking two pre-apprentice programs, I began working at Burnaby Lake Greenhouses in the maintenance department. While there I gained a lot of welding and fabricating experience and I enjoyed it. So, I went back to school to gain a C-level welding ticket. After this, I continued to work in the industrial maintenance field for a number of years. After a while, the door opened up to go to seminary. There were a number of factors that prompted this decision. One factor was that I had gotten more involved in YPS and I found that the more I got involved in the church, the more I wanted to see it flourish. Several other matters all contributed to my decision to finally take the plunge and head back to school.

After completing my BA at the University of the Fraser Valley, I moved to Hamilton in August of 2011 to begin my theological training. It was there that I met my lovely wife Hannah. Hannah was born in The Netherlands. After a year there, her family moved to Indonesia for five years as her father, Rev. Pol, had been appointed to teach at the Reformed Theological Seminary on the island of Sumba. Later she moved with her family to Guelph, and then to Carman, where her parents still live.

After obtaining a TESOL certificate from Providence Bible College & Seminary, she spent six months in Brazil teaching English. On her way back home she took a detour to visit her brother in Hamilton. Liking what she saw, she soon moved to Hamilton to attend McMaster University, where she obtained a Bachelor of Music and a Diploma in Vocal Performance.

Hannah and I attended the same church and Bible study in Hamilton, which provided ample opportunity to get to know one another. It did not take long for us

to start a relationship and we were eventually married in December of 2012. We have enjoyed nearly two and a half years of marriage now and during that time we were blessed to receive our son Logan, who is about one and a half years old. We are also happy to inform you that we are expecting another child. Lord willing, the baby will be born at the beginning of September. We are excited to serve the Lord and his people in this work.

Steve van Leeuwen

My wife and I are thankful for this opportunity to introduce ourselves to the readers of *Clarion*.

My wife, Kryna, and I were blessed to be born and raised in Christian homes as part of God's covenant community. And although my home in Winnipeg, Manitoba was nearly 2500 km away from my wife's hometown of



Smithers, BC, it was the Lord's plan that our paths should cross. Shortly after Kryna moved to Winnipeg in 1998 we began to date. After two years, we were married in the Lord in 2000. Since then the Lord has blessed us with four daughters, Alicia (age 13), Andrea (age 12), Helena (age 9), and Carmen (age 7).

Prior to getting married, I worked at various jobs while studying part-time. I had seriously considered pursuing the ministry at that time, and had already done some of the preparatory course work. However, after completing a Bachelor of Arts degree my life went in a different direction. I took a position in teaching and moved to Neerlandia. The next eight years gave me many opportunities for growth. I continued my education while teaching, completing my Master of Arts degree in Secondary Education. In addition to teaching, I was able to

serve as vice-principal for the final two years that we remained in Neerlandia. I was also blessed to serve the church of Neerlandia in the office of elder.

I was very grateful for the growth and support that I experienced in Neerlandia, yet I continued to have a strong desire to pursue the ministry. So in 2011, our family moved to Hamilton. In the last four years, we have experienced many of the joys and challenges that come along with seminary life. One of the highlights was the summer internship that I was able to do in Smithville under the guidance of Rev. Bouwman.

As we approach the end of my seminary studies, we look forward with anticipation to where the Lord will lead us. After taking some family time this summer, I hope to present myself to Classis in the fall. We trust that the Lord will use me in his service whether in the ministry or some other task, and it is our prayer that the Lord will give us the strength to work faithfully in his kingdom wherever that may lead.

Gerard Veurink

Thank you for this opportunity to introduce myself!

I am a prairie boy, born and raised in Coaldale, Alberta, and the oldest of six children born to George and Sharon Veurink. My parents had us educated at Coaldale Christian School. Growing up, I often thought about studying for the ministry but it was only in high school that the Lord worked it in me that this was the path I should follow.

So after finishing Grade 12, I began studying history at the University of Lethbridge. After two years, I transferred to the University of Alberta in Edmonton so that I could take more courses in Hebrew and Greek. After a year and a half, I transferred back to the University of



Lethbridge to finish my degree and I graduated in 2011 with a Bachelor of Arts in History.

After finishing that degree, I moved to Hamilton in September of 2011 and began studying at CRTS. And this is where I have been ever since. After my third year, I did my summer internship in the Willoughby Heights congregation in British Columbia under the mentorship of Rev. Anthon Souman. This was an amazing opportunity to experience what life in the ministry is like and I remain extremely thankful for the learning experience I had and also for the way in which the congregation there made me feel completely at home.

The Lord has richly blessed me throughout my whole life and I am thankful for the way that he has guided my path to this point. I pray that our Heavenly Father will continue to guide me on the path he has chosen for me!

Randall Visscher

Hello! We are the Visscher family: Randall and Stephanie, Alexa and Grayson.

I, Randall, am the seventh and last child of Dr. James and Willy Visscher. I was raised by parents who love the Lord and their family, and I grew up attending worship services and catechism classes in Langley CanRC, in beautiful British Columbia.

I grew up believing in Christ, but it was attending Campfire Bible Camp when I was thirteen that really sparked a fire in me. Seeing so many joyful believers and being immersed in the Word at camp made me realize that I needed to live my life for Christ and glorify him with it. Later, in my teen years, I had several opportunities to serve as a counselor at Stepping Stones Bible Camp in BC.

I attended the University of British Columbia where I graduated in 2009 with a degree in Archaeology and History of Greece, Rome, and the Near East. After my freshman year of university, I met my future wife, Stephanie and fell in love.

Stephanie was also raised in a God-fearing, Christian home and is the daughter of Rev. William and Karen Van der Woerd, of Grande Prairie, AB. Stephanie attended Trinity Christian College in Chicago and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English and Biology.

After three years of a long-distance relationship, we were married in 2009. We then moved to South Korea, where we taught English as a Second Language for two



years and learned a lot about marriage, culture, travel, and the catholicity of the church.

Returning to our home and native land, we moved to Hamilton where I attend the Canadian Reformed Seminary. During our time here, the Lord has given us two beautiful children, Alexa (3) and Grayson (1). One highlight of our time here was the summer of 2014, spent under the tutelage of Rev. Peter Feenstra in Grand Valley CanRC where I did my pastoral internship. This experience was invaluable to both me and my wife, as we developed close relationships with Rev. Feenstra, his wife, and many other members of the Grand Valley congregation. I learned so much during that time about ministry and preaching, and it confirmed my desire to pursue the ministry. We also happily spent a summer at Campfire Bible Camp in 2013, where I was the assistant head counselor on staff that year. We had an incredible time there, and loved sharing our hearts and faith with the campers and counsellors, as well as bonding with other members of the staff.

We are so thankful for our beloved families who have supported and inspired us, especially during our seminary years. We also want to express our gratitude to the many people who have helped us, encouraged us, prayed for us and supported us along the way. We eagerly anticipate my graduation from CRTS in September of 2015, Lord willing, and after graduation we look forward to many more new adventures in his service, wherever they may be!



We are Willoughby Heights, Formerly Known as Port Kells

The twenty-fifth anniversary of Willoughby Heights on January 18, 2015 was a celebration of a quarter century of God's faithfulness in yet another of his congregations. To those younger than me, twenty-five years seems an eternity, to those older it is but the twinkling of an eye. Either way, so much has happened in that time it is important to call events to mind and remember them with gratitude.

That is exactly what Paul Schouten did as he led us down the path of most reminiscence. When Willoughby Heights was first born it went by the name of Port Kells. We remember fondly the weekly fire alarm test from the fire station next door, without fail at 10:00. As the siren wound down the consistory would walk in. Where else have esteemed members been announced in such triumphant fashion?

As conservative as some would say our congregation is, I dare say no other Canadian Reformed church has had a Christmas tree decorating its auditorium for seven years like we did. We can thank the Port Kells Community Hall for this festive addition to our worship services. I will add that we were so thankful when in 1997 we were able to

move into our own church building where the décor was left entirely up to our own members!

When our congregation was instituted in 1990 we were some 250 members strong. Since then our numbers have shrunk to around 160. Yet every Sunday we manage to sing strong with our beloved organ that sometimes makes an extra peep or two in its enthusiasm. Every congregation is allowed a quirk or two, isn't it? I'm sure our peeping organ is our only eccentricity.

You could call it resistance to change, but I like to think of it as a preference for consistency. In Willoughby's twenty-five years we have had only two ministers and been vacant for less than five years in total. On our celebratory day we were privileged to hear from both these venerable men. Rev. E. Kampen, our first minister (fourteen years), preached in the morning on Psalm 34. His theme was: As we mark twenty-five years of life as a congregation let us exalt in the name of the LORD together! In our song we 1) Rejoice in deliverance experienced, 2) Teach each other how to experience deliverance, 3) Con- fess the ultimate experience of deliverance.

As Rev. Kampen stood on our pulpit after being absent for eight years many felt it was as if he had never left. Perhaps it was the familiar sound of his voice, perhaps it was the way the rhyming repetition of the words of his theme rolled off the tongue. Whatever it was, there was a heightened sense of nostalgia in the air.

In the afternoon our current minister, Rev. A. Souman, preached on Lord's Day 40 of the catechism. Not an especially festive anniversary text, but he had his opportunity shortly after the service when we gathered in the auditorium one more time. He presented the congregation with a gift of two ancient texts, framed and ready to be hung up in the building.

In addition to the speeches we enjoyed a wonderful humorous skit. It featured long-time pillars of the congregation like our prized organist Dicky Jansen and



*Rev. Souman and Rev. Kampen,
all of Willoughby's ministers in one place*

cherished ladies' aid leader Maritha Dykstra with her ever-available pieces of boterkoek. Our own "I Can Fix That Man" Jack Aikema did a bang up job fixing the organ! Don't worry, Dicky, no organ pipes were harmed in the production of this skit! Eventually they did manage to sing their song, "We are Willoughby Heights, Formerly Known as Port Kells."

The program was followed by a potluck dinner which offered the congregation the opportunity to socialize with our guests, many of whom were former members. Many of them had grown up in Willoughby Heights, then mar-

ried and moved away. It was wonderful to see those faces again. A family reunion of sorts.

Twenty-five years! There has been sadness and there has been occasion for happiness. For some there may even have been times when they wondered how they would ever climb over the mountain of troubles before them. But as Rev. Kampen said in his sermon, we suddenly end up on the other side of that mountain without knowing how we got there. The only answer is that it was God who carried us. And this is cause for rejoicing. We look forward to God carrying us to the next anniversary. C

YOU ASKED

Q

The liturgy of the church is apparently very intentional. Can you briefly explain the intent of each component of it and why it is organized the way it is?

A

Liturgy is the order and meaning behind our worship and service to the LORD. In our worship services the LORD is present among his people; we are standing in the presence of our gracious and holy God. It is in the covenant assembly that the believers and their offspring gather to meet their covenant God. Hence, the intent of the structure in our order of service shows in its covenantal character: the two covenant parties, the LORD and his people, are meeting together. The components of the order of worship can be distinguished as

expressions of these two parties: the LORD speaks to his people and his people respond to their covenant God.


The elements in the order of worship highlight the great blessing and truth of the Word by which the LORD comes to us and addresses us as his people; our response, therefore, should be one of faith, deep respect, and a giving of sacrifices of thankfulness with our heart, head, and hands to this holy God. Ultimately, the main focus and purpose of the worship service must be that God receives the glory and honour that is due to him, our Creator, Redeemer, Renewer, and eternally holy God! It is for purposes of service and worship in



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our entire life that God created us, and he established his covenant with us to restore us to those purposes in our redeemed life with him.

In the context of the above general principles underlying our Reformed and covenantal liturgy, the elements show this alternating speaking of the LORD and his people. Especially the so-called “B-Liturgy” shows this covenantal order of worship more clearly. I find it an enrichment, also, that of late many of our churches have added a call to worship to the liturgy that had been used for quite some time. It is true, of course, that the Consistory calls the congregation to worship, yet they are doing so on behalf of the LORD. The specific “call to worship” consisting in a quotation of such a “call” from one of the Psalms, e.g. Psalm 95:1-3, 6-7, highlights the fact that the initiative to worship is from the LORD (as also the covenant *per se* is one-sided in its origin and two-sided in its existence). Then the votum (Latin for “vow”) or confession of God’s people, expressing their confidence and trust in the help of the LORD, is a proper liturgical element of response. Yes, this is so more clearly than it was in the time that this votum was the first liturgical moment (expressed by the minister). The practice, then, of saying this votum together as congregation also does more justice to this covenantal approach to worship. The addition of a responsive “Amen” as well articulates the covenantal response of God’s people to the LORD’s addressing them with his Word.

Observing the entire Order of Worship along the lines of such a covenantal two-way traffic, we see and hear the LORD bless his people, proclaim his Law, and speak through the proclamation of the Word (and occasionally by the administration of the sacraments), while the *people* respond by songs of praise, prayers, offerings of gratitude, and responsive “Amen.” In the afternoon service the same order should be pursued, which means that the congregation’s profession of faith should not be seen as a replacement for the reading of the Law (the first liturgical element following the song of praise in response to the greeting of the LORD in the morning service) but should be used as the congregation’s response to the proclamation of the Word of the God whom they profess! Hence, as in the B-Liturgy, this profession of faith should be placed after the sermon and preferably be recited in unison by the congregation (or sung together by the creedal song in Hymn 1 or 2) as their covenantal response and confession of faith in the Triune God of the covenant. Finally, the psalms or hymns that are selected for such a covenantal order of worship should also express the particular moment in the liturgy, respectively as psalms of praise, songs of confession of sins and assurance of grace, as response to the reading of God’s Word, as expression of gratitude and joy upon the proclamation of the gospel, and as a closing doxology or song of praise and glory to the LORD of the covenant and the God and Father of Jesus Christ. 

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

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23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0

Dear Editor,

Rev. Stam's article "Was There Ever a Covenant of Works" helped me understand the two covenants, thank you. The part that left me wondering and somewhat concerned is where he makes the statement and I quote, "Adam and Eve were to keep this garden from evil."

That statement is quite often used by those that argue in favour of theistic evolution, by saying that if there was evil there probably would also have been death, arguing that Adam would have stepped on a bug and killed it in the garden and from there all kinds of follow-up questions come to mind. When did death come into the world whether that would be bugs, plants, or animals? Did God use evolution to create? If there was evil was there also sin before his sin fall?

If that interpretation of Scripture correct, that they were to guard against evil, Scripture does not indicate that there was any existence of evil, only that the world was created beautiful and good after the six day creation.

When God came to Adam and Eve in the garden after sin fall, he did not accuse them of not guarding the garden of evil but of eating from the tree that was forbidden.

I do not think that Rev. Stam wants to go in this direction; could he explain the evil that Adam and Eve were to guard against and when did death occur?

I understand that this is not the topic of the article but it led to it with that statement.

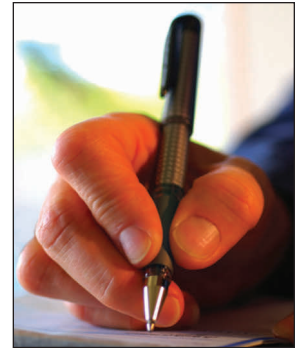
*With brotherly greetings,
Bill Bartels
Ancaster, ON*

Response

Thanks for the response to my article. While I did not really write about the origin of evil in my article, let me respond as follows.

We read in Genesis 2:15 that "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it." Man was not created to spend life in nothingness, but to serve and glorify God. To "work" the garden means to tend and to cultivate and so to let its beauty shine forth even more. That was not hard labour

but a work of love. To "take care of" the Garden means to guard and protect it. The original word used for the verb "to take care of" is the Hebrew SMR, to guard or protect. The verb "to guard" indicates in the least that there was a hostile enemy who would strive to conquer God's creation. Why post a watch if there is no enemy?



We are not told yet in Genesis 2 exactly who the enemy is. That is something about which we read in Genesis 3. The enemy is identified in chapter 3 as "the serpent." We understand that the devil possessed a snake, and came to Adam and Eve in disguise. In Revelation 12:9 the ancient serpent is identified as the devil or Satan. He is the one who instigates rebellion and sin.

We do not know exactly when the angels were created. We do confess that when God created the angels, their task and place was to serve God in heaven and to serve God's elect. In Article 12, Belgic Confession, we confess, "He also created the angels good, to be his messengers and to serve his elect. Some of these angels have fallen from the exalted position in which God created them into everlasting perdition." The Lord Jesus speaks about the devil as follows, "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth for there is no truth in him" (John 8:44).

Note the words "from the beginning:" from the beginning of history or time, the devil was an opponent of God and his people. Adam and Eve had been warned against the lies of Satan. Therefore Eve was at first able to refute the devil. But after the fall, this was no longer possible. Sin had entered the world, and with the entry of sin also death and all related afflictions came into the world. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). This means that before the fall there was no death in the world. The devil somehow gained access to the Garden, but Adam and Eve failed to send him away. Satan would be destroyed by our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the gospel.

K.S.