

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
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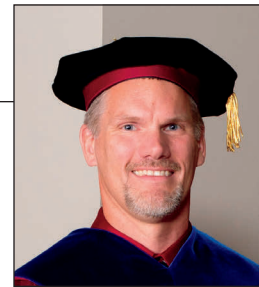
PSALM 101:1

## Psalm 100

A psalm. For giving thanks.

- 1 Shout for joy<sup>a</sup> to the LORD, all the earth.
  - 2 Worship the LORD<sup>b</sup> with gladness; come before him<sup>c</sup> with joyful songs.
- <sup>b</sup>Know that the LORD is God.<sup>d</sup>  
It is he who made us,<sup>e</sup> and we are his;<sup>a</sup>  
we are his people,<sup>f</sup> the sheep of his pasture.<sup>g</sup>
- Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts<sup>h</sup> with praise; praise him, O Jerusalem, and praise

**FORTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY MEETING AND  
FORTY-FIRST CONVOCATION OF CRTS**



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# Seminary Oversight: Relating Biblical Principles to Historical Circumstances

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*At first, then, mission-minded ministers just put  
 their shoulders to the wheel to train anyone*

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Generations of Reformed Christians have prayed to receive ministers of the Word who can “correctly handle the Word of Truth” and are therefore “able to teach,” “gently instruct,” and “rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness” (2 Tim 2:15, 24–25, 3:16). But such men don’t drop ready made out of heaven or appear out of thin air. Rather, the churches – as “pillars and foundations of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15) – have also asked their pastors to entrust what they had learned “to reliable men who would also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2).

## **Federational seminary**

As Canadian Reformed Churches we have asserted that having our seminary (CRTS) under the oversight of the ecclesiastical assemblies is biblical (based on 2 Tim 2:2 & 1 Tim 3:15, quoted above). Thus, all the churches in the federation agree to support the seminary prayerfully and financially; General Synod gives the Board “leave to appoint” professors; and General Synod “approves” the work of the Board. We even have a sort of position paper (gasp!) on our CRTS website called, “Why Do The Canadian Reformed Churches Have Their Own Seminary?” You can find the link at the bottom of our history page. It’s a valuable paper that includes some careful Scripture study and interesting historical information. But what if ecclesiastical control is at least as much a matter of historical circumstances, as it is of biblical principles? Let’s have a look at some examples not found in the paper I just mentioned.

## **Desperate need for pastors**

At the beginnings of the Great Reformation, the few ordained men who had returned to Scripture needed to search desperately for more leaders. For example, when the Swiss city of Basel decided via a referendum in 1529 that their worship would henceforth be based on Scripture alone, the number of their clergy dropped from 400 to about twelve. When the Swiss city of Lausanne decided the same in 1536, about fifty percent of the laity converted, but only 1.6% of the clergy. When John Calvin stopped in Geneva on his way to Basel in 1536, Guillaume Farel’s threats upon him in case he would not stop and help Geneva were not a unique event: Farel was in the business of securing men to lead the fledgling Reformed communities that the Lord had allowed him to begin. By 1528–1529 he had secured three such men; about eight shortly after; and about forty by the time he was recruiting Calvin in 1536.<sup>1</sup> At first, then, mission-minded ministers just put their shoulders to the wheel to train anyone who was willing and able. The work was haphazard and hurried, but much blessed. The church grew quickly.

## **Early semi-organized training**

In Reformed Zurich already in 1525 Zwingli established a way of training called *prophezei* in German (other cities followed this pattern, including Geneva and Berne). These were meetings of the ministers and theological students that occurred regularly – in Zwingli’s case, five of seven days per week, for about one hour, around sunrise,

in the central church building. After prayer, a student would read an Old Testament chapter in the Latin translation, then a master would read it in the original Hebrew and give some comment. Zwingli himself often read the Greek translation (Septuagint) and gave comment. After a discussion in Latin by the scholars about the text, the exercise switched to a German-language prayer, sermon, and intercessory prayer in order to address the citizens who had now arrived. What a refreshing way to start your day!

We can conclude that this training was in the hands of the church, directly. Masters and students met in the central cities, whose larger churches often had a limited authority over some of the neighbouring churches.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Each year *Clarion* magazine publishes a convocation issue celebrating the CRTS Convocation evening held in September. On these pages readers can find reports from the Chairman of the Board of Governors, Rev. Richard Aasman, the Principal of CRTS, Dr. Gerhard Visscher, as well as from Women's Savings Action. A special thank you to Dr. Ted Van Raalte for assisting in gathering material as well as preparing the guest editorial (also following the theme of seminary education). Our best wishes to the graduates of 2015, who received the degree of Master of Divinity: Johan Bruintjes, Rick Vanderhorst, Steven Van Leeuwen, Gerard Veurink, and Randall Visscher.

Issue 20 features the keynote speech given at Convocation, from Dr. Arjan de Visser, entitled "His Excellent Word."

This issue also contains Treasures New and Old, the You Asked column, "North African Migrants and the Future of Europe" by Donald Macleod, and an article on "Your Sister in Brazil."

*Laura Veenendaal*

- 534 EDITORIAL**  
**Seminary Oversight**
- 538 TREASURES NEW & OLD**
- 539 Report of the Forty-Sixth Anniversary Meeting and Forty-First Convocation of the CRTS**
- 541 His Excellent Word**
- 545 A Word from the Principal**
- 547 Presentation of the Women's Savings Action**
- 549 North African Migrants and the Future of Europe**
- 551 Your Sister in Brazil**
- 552 YOU ASKED**

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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## New academies and universities with food and beer

But this sort of method also proved to be insufficient to supply the growing demand for pastors, particularly for reliable and well-trained pastors. In the Swiss cantons the city councils decided to appoint Reformed faculty members at existing universities (Basel, 1532) or start full-time academies (Lausanne, 1537; Geneva, 1559). Various rulers in Germany, The Netherlands, and England established new Reformed universities (Marburg, 1527; Leiden, 1575; Herborn, 1584) or transformed old ones (Oxford & Cambridge in the 1550s).

Because towns, cities, states, etc. became Reformed *as a whole*, all of these institutions – their finances and professors – were under the oversight of the civil authorities. This did have its benefits: one Wikipedia article states that the ruler in Herborn granted the students two warm meals and three liters of small beer per day (“small beer” is a term for a low-alcohol brew).<sup>2</sup> I’m afraid CRTS doesn’t quite meet that high standard! But there’s no doubt the civil authorities had oversight of these institutions; thus, for instance, when King James of England was concerned about the teachings of Arminius, he wrote about it to the Dutch States General (parliament).

## French Reformed theological academies, etc.

For a final stop, let’s visit the Huguenots. In 1561 there were in France about 648 Reformed churches with consistories, about 816 in 1562. Besides these, more than a thousand other preaching points existed. These are remarkable numbers.

How did these churches assist each other in the matter of theological education? Under the Edict of Nantes, beginning in 1598, the King of France agreed to help the French Reformed Churches pay their pastors. The Synod of Saumur (1596) had already decided that every French province should erect its own college (basically an undergraduate program, for bachelors’ degrees) and altogether the churches should have at least two theological academies to train men for ministry. The Synod of Montpellier (1598) then distributed the king’s monies to set up a university in Saumur and in Montauban and an academy at Montpellier and Nîmes (the latter had already been functioning in prior decades). In Saumur, Philippe de Mornay, a famous Huguenot political leader, did much to plan and staff the academy, but he did not act without synodical direction. These institutions typically had professorships in the biblical languages, in philosophy, in Old and New Testament, and in theology (five or more



professors). Our CRTS professor of dogmatics will be heartened to know that professors of theology received a wage almost double that of the language professors!

### **Synodical and consistorial oversight**

While the national synods took account of the king's funds and the decisions about establishing institutions or not, the provincial synods dealt in more detail with the regulations, appointments, and curricula of these institutions. New professors were typically nominated by the existing professors together with the consistory and pastors of the church nearest to the academy, but provincial synods actually made the appointments. The academies – in operation from about 1600 to 1685 – were indeed “federal seminaries.” Unfortunately, their dependence on the king's monies created tension and trouble. Soon the kings not only stopped paying, but slowly strangled the churches and their educational centres until in 1685 the Edict of Nantes was revoked and the Huguenots expelled from France.

### **Students from other institutions**

Interestingly, the Synod of La Rochelle (1617) counted the Academies of Geneva, Sedan, and Béarn as suitable places for their ministerial students, even though these were not under the control of the French Reformed Churches. Geneva's academy, for instance, was under the city council's oversight. Evidently the principle of synodical control of the seminaries was not absolute. Historical circumstances impacted their establishment and practices.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, I've little doubt that the French churches would have permitted the civil government to oversee their institutions *if only their king had chosen to remain Reformed* (King Henry IV). The churches at this time thought in terms of whole provinces and nations following one religion or another, and they did not so neatly distinguish church and state as we do or have room for religious pluralism.

### **Conclusion**

Early approaches to theological education in the Reformed churches depended upon particular pastors teaching others one-on-one or upon prominent churches assembling the pastors of the city and nearby villages regularly for training. But as the number of churches in-

creased, more pastors and missionaries were needed, and institutions were formed or transformed to meet the need. Some were larger universities with theology being one of several departments. Others were exclusively theological. Most were under control of the civil authorities. I am not aware of any that were private undertakings.

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***We ought to appreciate the way in which the Lord used these circumstances to help the churches grow towards a better distinction of the roles of the church and the state***

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The French Reformed Churches – lacking full government endorsement and often suffering persecution – are the best model I know of for seminaries fully under control of the ecclesiastical assemblies. But it's debatable whether they did this *entirely* for principled reasons. The historical circumstances of persecution also played a role.

We ought to appreciate the way in which the Lord used these circumstances to help the churches grow towards a better distinction of the roles of the church and the state. I am convinced by the biblical arguments for having CRTS under the control of the ecclesiastical assemblies, especially when I think of the role and purpose assigned by the Lord to his church. However, we should also have room for different ways of implementing this principle and for the different ways in which other federations might also put it into practice. Historical circumstances also play a role.

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<sup>1</sup> For references, see Theodore G. Van Raalte, “François Lambert d'Avignon (ca. 1487–1530): Early Ecclesial Reform and Training for the Ministry at Marburg,” in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> I haven't researched the matter, but it's likely true. John Calvin's pay from the Geneva city council regularly included caskets of wine.

<sup>3</sup> More detail about the French academies can be found in, Theodore G. Van Raalte, “The French Reformed Synods of the Seventeenth Century,” in *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, ed. Martin I. Klauber (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 83–87.



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# Contented in the LORD

We live in the midst of a culture that is a walking contradiction when it comes to the idea of contentment: contentment is deeply desired and yet people can never have enough. True and lasting contentment appears to be impossible – it simply describes a point in life that, if ever achieved, will never stand for long. In Psalm 131 David shows us the way to true contentment in life.

It has been suggested that 1 Samuel 20 and 21 may be the context for this psalm. In 1 Samuel 20 David is on the run from King Saul and he is anxious and unsettled about his future. He was told he was to be king and now his life is in danger. But here in Psalm 131 he says, “My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me” (Ps 131:1). He knows he is to be king, but does not get caught up in thinking about or imaging the greatness that may await him in the kingship. He does not concern himself with them

because they are in God’s hands and God’s concern.

David then uses an image of a weaned child with his mother to bring home what his contentment looks like. He says that his soul is like a weaned child with its mother. A weaned child will be at rest with his or her mother and not simply see her as a source of food. He or she is simply content in her arms. Her presence, nearness, and love are what she offers and what the child wants. That is how David is with the LORD. He does not come to LORD wanting anything more than to be close to the LORD. He is content in the LORD and his love. And then he points the way ahead to God’s people. He says, “O Israel, hope in the LORD, now and forevermore.” Wait on the LORD. Rest in him. Rest on him.

Sometimes, we must confess, we don’t have that way about us. We know who God is and what he has done for us in Christ, but we are not content. We want something more from him. What good is the gospel of Jesus Christ and God’s love and near-

ness if I don’t have the job I want, or the recognition I desire, or the relationship I long for? There is then the danger of the un-lived life standing before us all. We live dreaming of the life God has not given us, ignoring the one he has given. We can still have dreams and aspirations but we can’t dream or think too highly and ignore where God has placed us right now. David’s words here move us to find contentment with where God has placed us and live for him where we are, knowing that we are loved by God in Christ, being content in the arms of God. Wherever you go, whatever you dream, Psalm 131 encourages you to stay in those arms and know that wherever life takes you those arms are what you want most deeply and dearly. The secret to true contentment in this life is centred on embracing the gospel of who God is and what he has done for you. The question that confronts us then when we find ourselves mired in discontent is not concentrating on what we lack, but on what we have in the Lord. **C**

## For Further Study

1. Is the knowledge that God loves you in Christ something that truly means everything to you? Can you say that you are with the LORD like a weaned child is with his or her mother?
2. Is there something in your life that is stopping you from being truly content in the LORD and makes the gospel a little less good news? Find that thing and you will find the false god that is pushing you away from God and contentment in him.

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# Report of the Forty-Sixth Anniversary Meeting and Forty-First Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), September 11, 2015



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The rain had started to fall and traffic was heavy as people made their way to the CRTS convocation. But that did not hold them back. The auditorium at Redeemer University College filled up entirely on the main level. The meeting started a few minutes late because of some technical problems with the live streaming. Thankfully the problems were overcome and the convocation was live streamed for the first time. This proved to be a real blessing. I understand that the grandfather of one graduate who could not attend the graduation watched the entire convocation in his own home, and the parents of another could do the same. While it's always better to be there in person, there were at least 100 addresses where people were watching and in many of those places of course more than one person was watching. Some even rose early in Australia to watch the convocation!

The evening was opened by the chairman of the Board, Rev. Richard Aasman, who read 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:15; 3:14-4:2 and led in prayer. The prayer remembered, among other things, the special needs of the widow of the late Dr. K. Deddens, Dr. J. DeJong and his wife Margaret, sister W. Faber, widow of the late Dr. J. Faber, Prof. J. Geertsema, Dr. N.H. Gootjes and his wife Dinie. Appreciation was also expressed for the continued work and health of Professor Emeritus Dr. C. Van Dam. After prayer a letter was read from the Free Reformed Church of West Albany, Australia.

The principal of the seminary, Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher, presented his principal's report. You can read the

entire report elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. Dr. Visscher mentioned that the upcoming year will have the largest body of students ever in the history of the seminary. Seven new students have been admitted to studies at CRTS for a total of twenty-one students. Five students were graduating this evening. Dr. Visscher gave some encouraging words to both the students and the churches. He spoke about patience: students are well trained at seminary but as they enter the ministry they need to have the patient support of their churches to allow them to mature in their work.

The keynote speaker for the evening was Dr. A. de Visser, professor of Diaconology. His address was "His Excellent Word." Dr. de Visser pointed out that these days expectations are very high for ministers of the Word. Who is equal to such a task? Using the passages read earlier in the evening, Dr. de Visser demonstrated that the Word of God is rich, clear, contemporary, and sufficient. The task of a minister is to dig into that Word and to bring out the message. There is no need to add to the Word of God. Faithful preaching that opens the Word will speak in a contemporary way to the hearts of the listeners. The entire speech can be found elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*.

The climax of the evening was the graduation of five students. We witnessed the conferring of the degree of Master of Divinity on Mr. Johan Brintjes, Mr. Rick Vanderhorst, Mr. Steven Van Leeuwen, Mr. Gerard Veurink, and Mr. Randall Visscher. A word of thanks

was expressed by Randall Visscher on behalf of the graduating class.

The Women's Savings Action was represented by Mrs. Chris Nienhuis, Mrs. Joanne Van Dam, and Mrs. Janet Van Vliet. In a lively way they reminded everyone that the CRTS library is an amazing resource not just for professors and students, but anyone in the church community. People are encouraged to use these resources and to note how much is available to them through our website, [www.canadianreformedseminary.ca](http://www.canadianreformedseminary.ca). Are you aware that the titles of the complete holdings of the seminary are available through the library page, and that an index of all issues of Clarion and other Canadian Reformed magazines is available through the Reformed Periodical Index

on the same web page? The Women's Savings Action presented a pledge for \$35,000.00 for the coming year.

The collection was for the CRTS Publication Foundation – a fund that provides money for the faculty to produce books. During the collection we listened to the able playing of our organist for the evening, Mr. Carl Oosterhoff.

Rev. Matthew Van Luik led in closing prayer. As is customary, the assembly concluded with the singing of "O Canada." After the program everyone had opportunity to congratulate the graduates. It was also a time of good fellowship, and of renewing friendships and acquaintances. You are welcome to view a video version of the College evening at [www.canadianreformedseminary.ca](http://www.canadianreformedseminary.ca). C



*Senate and Students*

*Seated: Dr. Van Dam, Prof. J. Geertsema*

*Standing: J. Brintjes, G. Veurink, Dr. T. Van Raalte, Dr. A.J. de Visser, S. Van Leeuwen, Dr. John Smith, Dr. J. Van Vliet, Dr. G.H. Visscher, R. Vanderhorst and R. Visscher*





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# His Excellent Word

*This article was the keynote speech at Convocation Evening 2015.*

Mister chairman, members of the Board, brothers and sisters,

This evening we rejoice in the fact that five students have completed their theological studies. The Lord has blessed them in their studies and they stand ready to become preachers of the gospel. As we think about these young men and their future, you wonder: what is going to happen to them? Where will they go? Will they be able to flourish in the ministry and will their congregations flourish as a result?

I do not need to tell you that the ministry of the Word is a daunting task. It seems that in our time the expectations are higher than ever before. We are being told that there is less patience in the churches than before, especially with respect to preaching. People want a sermon to have good content but you also need to present well, be passionate, speak to the heart, be practical, etc. During the time I've been teaching at the seminary, I have seen more than a few students become reluctant about entering the ministry, and understandably so. Who is equal to such a task?

The Apostle Paul asks that same question: Who is equal to such a task (2 Cor 2:16)? And he gives an answer: We are not competent in ourselves. Our competence comes from God who guides us through his Word and Spirit (2 Cor 3:5-6).

In my speech I want to give our graduates some encouragement by reminding them that God has given us an excellent tool for ministry: his Word. The title of my speech is borrowed from the Lutheran hymn *How Firm a Foundation*: "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent Word." The point I want to make is this: God's excellent Word is a firm foundation for your faith and ministry.

## The church has the Scriptures

It is instructive to listen to the Apostle Paul and what he has to say about the Scriptures. Earlier this evening we read a few passages from Paul's second letter to Timothy. When Paul wrote this letter, he was old and nearing the end of his ministry. We can imagine that Christian believers were wondering about the future. What is going to happen after the death of Paul and the other apostles? Is the Lord going to raise up a new generation of apostles? Answer: no, there will be no apostolic succession. Is the Lord going to continue to give fresh revelations of the truth through the Holy Spirit? Answer: no, there will be no continuing special revelation. So then, how will men like Timothy and Titus find their way?

Quite remarkably, Paul tells Timothy that he has enough to work with. He asks Timothy to "follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (1:13). Timothy does not have to go looking for the truth. Rather, he needs to "guard the good deposit entrusted to you" and to do so "by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us" (1:14). In other words, the church does not need to search for the truth. She already possesses the truth and the Holy Spirit will guide the church in guarding it!

In 2 Timothy 3:10-16 Paul explains that Timothy has received the Word of Truth in two ways, first of all in the "sacred writings" (what we would call the Old Testament), and second in the apostolic teaching (what we would call the New Testament). When Paul then uses the phrase "all Scripture" (3:16), he refers in the first place to the Old Testament but by implication also to his own teaching. "All Scripture," he says, "is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (3:16).

In dogmatics class our students study this text, especially the word *theo-pneustos* (God-breathed). The term highlights the fact that the Scriptures, though written

down by human authors, have been spoken (“breathed out”) by God himself. This is why the Scriptures have the power to convert, to teach, to correct, and lead people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Dear students: let this text not just be a proof text for a dogmatics test. Let it be a text on which you build your ministry!

Because God’s Word is breathed out by God himself, Timothy’s task is simply to preach that Word (4:2). Preach the Word which is breathed out by God! That is your assignment. British theologian Alec Motyer comments: “What a simple, compelling prospectus! What a satisfying, attractive and assuredly fruitful task! What a manageable calling! What a privilege – to inherit, possess, guard and absorb oneself in and preach what God has ‘breathed out’: His Word, our education to maturity, our message to the world!”<sup>1</sup>

### **Sola scriptura**

The history of the church has something to teach us in this regard. The church of the Reformation needed to defend the authority and the sufficiency of the Word of God in its confrontation with the Church of Rome. The Roman Catholic Church believed that Scriptures are not sufficient. Yes, the Bible is God’s Word but. . . you need to add the wisdom of tradition and the authority of the Pope. The church of the Reformation broke with this view

and defended the *sola scriptura*: the Bible is the supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. In article 7 of the Belgic Confession we confess: “We believe that this Holy Scripture fully contains the will of God and that all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein.” Therefore, the article continues, “we may not consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with the divine Scriptures.”

The Reformers were unanimous in upholding the authority and the sufficiency of the Scriptures. But if we look at the history of Protestantism we find that this position was soon questioned and undermined. The historical-critical method came up and caused the Bible to lose its authority. The Bible came to be seen as a human book that contained faith testimonies of believers from long ago but *not* the infallible Word of God. It was suggested that there was a huge gap between those old testimonies and the modern world. In order for the Bible to be relevant for today, its message had to be reinterpreted and updated. Of course, you need clever people to do this kind of work: theologians.

In effect, classic Roman Catholic theology and modern Protestant hermeneutics are not far apart when it comes to their view of the Word of God. Rome says you need the church’s tradition and the authority of the Pope.



Faculty: Dr. T. Van Raalte, Dr. A.J. de Visser, Dr. J. Smith, Dr. J. Van Vliet and Dr. G.H. Visscher



Graduated Students: Gerard Veurink, Johan Bruintjes, Steven Van Leeuwen, Rick Vanderhorst, Randall Visscher

Liberal-Protestant theology says you need advanced hermeneutics to make the Bible relevant for today. In both cases the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation is denied.

We cannot escape taking a position in this matter and we want to stand with those who continue to defend the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation and the sufficiency of the Scriptures. We trust the Word of God to have its own marvellous power and clarity and sufficiency.

We need to be vigilant because this position will always be questioned. Let me take you on a brief excursion to illustrate this. In the early 1990s Bishop N.T. Wright introduced a metaphor which has since been adopted by many theologians in the evangelical world: the so-called “drama of Scripture.”<sup>2</sup> Wright says that the history of salvation has five stages: creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, the church. These five stages are like five acts of a drama. The Bible, he says, may be compared to the script for this divine drama. The only problem is that we only have the script for the first four acts. The script for act five (the church) is incomplete, because it stops at the end of the first century. We do not have a full script for today. So as Christians we are like actors who are expected to play out the rest of the drama, going by the script that we have for the previous parts. This means that we have to *improvise* as best as we can in order to bring the play toward the conclusion in the final act.

As I said, this way of looking at the Scriptures has become quite popular. You find the “drama of Scripture” metaphor in many publications, even publications by theologians who consider themselves to be Reformed or neo-calvinist.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately Bishop Wright is not a good guide in this respect. There is a fundamental difference between saying that the New Testament is an *incomplete script* (as Wright does) and saying that the Bible *fully contains the will of God* (Belgic Confession, article 7). If we go with Wright, we will have to improvise our way forward. If we go with the Belgic Confession, we trust that the Bible is sufficiently clear to give us direction.<sup>4</sup>

### Implications

This has profound implications for the practice of preaching. If we maintain that the Scriptures are sufficient and clear, our preachers do not need to reinterpret the Scriptures nor do they need to “make” the Bible “relevant.” Instead, we can trust the Word of God is amazingly contemporary. It has its own in-built relevance.

From this perspective, the classic Reformed definition of preaching is very appropriate. In Reformed homiletics preaching has typically been defined as the *administration* of the Word of God. C. Trimp has pointed out that this is a *modest* description of the task of the preacher.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the Reformed preacher, because he has such a

high view of the Scriptures, can be modest about his own role. You don't have to "assist" God's Word to become relevant. If that were the case, preaching would be a daunting task. But as Reformed preachers we believe that the Word of God speaks powerfully to people of all times, and therefore you can limit yourself to *administering* the Word, trusting that with the help of the Holy Spirit it will work itself out in the lives of the hearers.

This is liberating! As Reformed preachers we can free ourselves from the idea that we have to tweak or improve the Word of God. Let's not give in to the idea that the text will only speak to the people in the pew if we do something creative with it. Relax! Let the Word and Spirit do their work. Your task as a preacher is just to present yourself as a faithful worker who is rightly handling the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15).

## Applications

Let me draw two practical applications for young men who stand ready to go out and preach the gospel. First, *trust the Word of God to be relevant*. Sometimes as preachers we do not have enough trust in the power of God's Word. We tend to think that we have to do something special to get the message across. You need to find a wonderful illustration or tell a captivating story so that the people in the pew will *really* get the message of the text. Well, there is nothing against good illustrations and stories, but when you do this because you think the Scripture text itself is not powerful enough, you have a problem. When you (perhaps subconsciously) think there is not "enough message" in your text, you have not studied your text well enough. As a Reformed preacher, you need to stand by your confession that the Word of God is sufficient. Trust the Word of God for doing what it is supposed to do: to teach, to reprove, to correct, to train in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). I'm not saying that sermon writing is easy. I'm saying that there is often more in the text than we think.

Second, *trust the Word of God to be able to speak to the heart*. In this connection I'm thinking of the popular complaint that Reformed preaching is too rational. There is too much explanation, people say, and not enough application. Reformed preachers speak too much to the mind, not enough to the heart. Or, the same complaint in a different form: we need more emotion and passion in the pulpit.

I do not know enough about the preaching from Reformed pulpits to say whether these complaints are valid.

Of course, preaching should not just be exposition of the text or just a rational discussion of a biblical theme. Preaching is heralding! It does more than convey information. It addresses the hearers and aims to generate a response in their hearts and minds. But we can never do without good content.

As preachers we need to trust that biblical content has the power to set hearts on fire! Remember the story of the two men who were on the road to Emmaus and how the Lord explained to them how the Scriptures pointed to the suffering and resurrection of the Messiah. Remember what these men said afterwards: "*Did not our hearts burn within us* while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32) You see what happened: the Lord opened the Scriptures to them, and their hearts were set aflame.

Sure, it is possible to stir the emotions in other ways. Apparently, the great preacher George Whitefield was able to make people weep just by the way he said the word Mesopotamia. The goal of faithful preaching, however, is not simply to stir emotions but to bring people to repentance and faith, knowing that this will inevitably touch the heart and stir the emotions.

## Conclusion

In closing, I say to our graduates: administer the Word and do it well. Show how the Scriptures speak about salvation in Jesus Christ. Do your best to preach that gospel in all its riches. Preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Trust that this will capture the minds and set the hearts aflame. You do not need to manufacture passion. Just bring the life-giving truth out from God's Word and serve it up to God's people. Then, stand back and let the Holy Spirit work through and with the Word. Remember that old hymn: "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent Word."

<sup>1</sup> Alec Motyer, *Preaching? Simple Teaching on Simply Preaching* (Christian Focus, 2013), 22.

<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, "Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7-32.

<sup>3</sup> Two examples: Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today* (IVP, 2014), 69-71. Kees de Ruijter, *Horen naar de stem van God: Theologie en methode van de preek* (Boekencentrum, 2013), 99-118.

<sup>4</sup> For a thorough evaluation and critique of N.T. Wright's view of the authority of Scripture, see D.A. Carson, *Collected writings on Scripture* (Crossway, 2010), 283-301.

<sup>5</sup> C. Trimp, *De actualiteit der prediking in het licht van het 'Sola Scriptura' der Reformatie* (De Vuurbaak, 1971), 23.



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# A Word from the Principal

## Seminary Evening 2015

### “Patience is a Virtue”



*Gerhard H. Visscher*  
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On the last day of the last academic year, the remark was made that we were sending out to the pulpits of the federation probably the largest body of students ever in our history: five graduates, who had successfully completed the four year program, could be presented to the churches for the ministry of the Word, and no fewer than eight men, who had completed three years of study, could begin their internships for the summer. That's thirteen new voices proclaiming the glad tidings of Jesus Christ to the church and the world.

#### **Welcome**

Tonight we welcome seven new students to the seminary for a total student body of twenty-one, our largest number so far.

For the Master of Divinity degree, we welcome:

- Mark ten Haaf, from the American Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI
- Chauncey Knegt, from the Canadian Reformed Church of Grassie, ON
- Eric Onderwater, from the Canadian Reformed Church of Langley, BC
- Jeremy Segstro, from the Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Winnipeg, MB
- Nathan Zekveld, from the Hope United Reformed Congregation of Etobicoke, ON

All the way from Poland, also in the MDiv program:

- Filip Sylwestrowicz, from the Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church of Warsaw, Poland

For the Diploma of Theological Studies:

- Scott Bredenhof, from Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church of Edmonton, AB.

We certainly wish these brothers and our fourteen returning students God's blessing as they engage in study and fellowship. We are hoping that they will enjoy this period of their lives as a gift from a most gracious God.

#### **Farewell**

Later this evening we will present you with those first five students who will receive the M.Div. degree; three of the five are yet busy with classis examinations, one (Johan Bruintjes) has started an internship at Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington, and one (Rick Vanderhorst) is preparing for a second classical examination so that he might become the pastor the Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Winnipeg.

We say farewell to these five young men who have graced the halls of the seminary for four years. We wish you God's blessing on your lives from here on. If that means ministry, then especially we wish you insight into God's revelation, perseverance in pastoring God's people, and God's abundant blessing as you seek to develop skills and abilities that you were initially taught at CRTS.

#### **Patience**

Perhaps the operative word for tonight is the word "patience." We are often slow to realize to what degree "patience" is a fruit of the Spirit, being something that God practices very well (2 Pet 3:9) and that his people are called to do likewise. We live in an instant world that wants what it wants now, not later. In such a world, it's natural for a student entering seminary to be impatient with a lengthy four-year process in which his own development seems to come much too slowly. It's possible for professors, ecclesiastical assemblies, and congregations to have expectations that far exceed what is possible at

the moment. Life is a process. Fresh new graduates are often compared with the top five percent of evangelical preachers, and the question is asked: “How come he can’t do it like that?” But patience has to do with recognizing potential. The young man who has just graduated from law school is not likely to land the greatest case of his career in his first months. Medical school can’t prepare you immediately for every eventuality that will arise in a world of sickness and suffering. Neither can seminary. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit. Christian ministry, like the Christian life, knows of a process of growth and development. Sermons prepared in haste just make waste. God is not in a hurry. Why are we? Instantaneous change and development really is a rare thing among the people of God. Blessed is the young man who comes out of seminary and receives a consistory and congregation that understands that, and gives him the room to put what he has learned into practice, to develop new skills, to make some mistakes, to establish new routines, and to grow gently in the grace of God so that he can gently lead God’s people in that same grace.

### At CRTS

At CRTS we continue to enjoy the results of a most intense process whereby we became a fully accredited institution, and we continue to press on to provide excellence in theological education. It is our wish to be second to none in terms of what we do for our students, for the federation, and ultimately of course for the spread of the gospel and the glory of the triune God. We are therefore ever so grateful for the work of faculty and staff, for the prayerful support of the federation, for the labours of the Board, and for the funds generously made available by the churches. May God continue to bless seminary and federation as we work together for the same goal – the praise of his glorious grace.

Alongside the teaching we do we are involved ourselves both in a process of continued learning and in the occasional moment when we can share what others at conferences. You will understand that to do that, sometimes we have had to leave our safe abodes in Hamilton and travel elsewhere. Here is our annual list of where we’ve been.

#### Dr. A.J. de Visser

- travelled to British Columbia in October 2014 to visit the churches throughout the province, to preach and promote the work of the seminary

- to Recife, Brazil in May 2015 to assist in evaluating the work of the John Calvin Institute.

#### Dr. J. Smith

- travelled to Sumas, Washington in November 2014 to speak for the Western Ministerial conference
- to Lisbon, NY in March 2015 to speak for the Annual Reformed Leadership Workshop
- to Ottawa, ON in May 2015 for the meetings of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies
- to Denver, CO in August 2015 to speak for the Denver Family Camp.

#### Dr. T.G. Van Raalte

- travelled to Emden, Germany in October 2014 to join colleagues working on a critical edition of documents related to the Synod of Dort
- to Grand Rapids, MI in April 2015 to attend the Calvin Studies Society Conference and launch a book of collected essays.

#### Dr. J. Van Vliet

- travelled to San Diego, CA in November 2014 to attend the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society on the theme of Ecclesiology
- to Neerlandia in February 2015 to speak and preach in Neerlandia.

#### Dr. G.H. Visscher

- travelled to San Diego, CA in November 2014 to attend the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society on the theme of Ecclesiology
- to Fraser Valley, BC, in February 2015 to speak for a Men of Integrity conference
- to Winnipeg, MB, in May 2015 to attend a conference on spiritual formation in theological education at the meetings of Christians in Higher Education of Canada.

#### Dr. C. Van Dam

- travelled to San Diego, CA in November 2014 to attend the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society, the Institute for Biblical Research, and the Society of Biblical Literature
- travelled to Kristiansand, Norway in August 2015 to speak for the Norwegian Summer Academy for Biblical Studies on multiculturalism.



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

# Presentation of the Women's Savings Action at Convocation 2015

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

From time to time we get the question or comment, "You're still collecting money for books? Aren't there enough volumes and titles?" Maybe some scenarios will help answer these questions.

1. What if a student receives an exegesis paper assignment from his New Testament professor on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16? He groans inwardly. That's a difficult passage about the role of women in the church. "Well," he thinks, "I need to be prepared for the ministry and I've already come across questions about this passage in Young Peoples' Society." He starts by translating the passage from Greek into English. He heads off to the library to use some of the newest exegetical dictionaries to help him understand the nuances of each word. He studies the context. He becomes so intrigued with the passage and its cross references in 1 Timothy and other passages that he soon has a great deal of research done. He has dug into the church fathers, the Great Reformation and many current resources on the role of women in the church. He found all of this in the seminary library. He has so much research that he could write three papers. Trimming is going to tough; however, the library has been fantastic. He's tremendously thankful for the historical depth as well as the amount of material he could glean on the contemporary scene.

2. Now imagine a different scenario. A sister in the congregation really enjoys using her church library. A few evenings a week she can indulge in the luxury of reading a novel before her eyelids become too heavy to continue. One evening warning lights flash in her brain. She reads about a character who is discovering the Bible and the Christian faith for the first time, and comes to certain conclusions about Jesus. "These conclusions are not quite right, but I just can't pinpoint exactly why." She



feels badly about bothering the minister, but maybe he won't mind a little question via email. She explains the context and sends a little quote. "Why is this wrong?" she asks. The minister recognizes the heresy. It is Arianism. He is able to help the sister with a few paragraphs explaining the reason for the warning bells. He remembers with thankfulness how the library at the seminary helped him so much when he was writing a paper on the Athanasian Creed for the Symbolics course. The historical resources he needed were excellent. He did not have to use any other university library to round out his bibliography. He even used the library recently as he was preparing to teach catechism classes again this fall. He recommends to the sister to do some further research

herself at the seminary library. The sister has never tried that before, but typing in “crts.ca” into google search brings her to the seminary website. She finds the library tab and clicks. She finds “search library catalogue” and clicks. Now she types in “Arianism” into the search box of the library catalogue and clicks “find.” Twenty books come up. She sees something called “Community Borrowers” and there discovers how she can go about taking out a book called *Archetypal heresy: Arianism through the centuries* by Maurice Wiles. This should be interesting reading. She thinks she will start reading two hours before bedtime, not just an hour before.

3. One more scenario to picture: An elder just received an official letter in the mail from the clerk of Regional Synod. In the letter he reads that he has been delegated to General Synod. At council meetings at his local church, the elders and deacons had previously split up the Acts of the last general synod. Each team had to read through the material, and had given a report. One of the issues he needs to learn about is Federal Vision. It is not an issue that he has to deal with in his own congregation but one that some of our ecclesiastical contacts have been struggling with. He recalls reading in *Clarion* that some of the professors at the seminary had spoken on this very topic. It slowly dawns on him how useful and necessary that library is for them and the students. It is essential for them to have historical background, as well as books and articles on current ideas and issues. For his own situation, he needs to read those who proposed the idea and those who oppose it. Where to start? His minister suggests using the seminary library. He is

### **CALLED AND DECLINED**

Called and declined the call by Kelmscott Free Reformed Church of Australia:

**Rev. R. deJonge**  
of Langley, BC

### **CALLED**

Called by Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church at London, ON and by Providence Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, ON:

**Rev. R. Vermeulen**  
of Trinity Canadian Reformed Church at Glanbrook, Ontario

## **CHURCH NEWS**

so thankful that the library is up to date, and has all the resources he needs. In fact, he quickly finds six books on this topic of Federal Vision. That should be more than enough to get him started.

Is it so important then to keep collecting for the library? Most definitely. Not only does language change, but ideas, both good and bad, keep coming. Our library needs to stay current on the ancient resources, the books on church history, the commentaries on Bible books, titles on ethics, pastoral work, and articles on a large range of topics. Especially our faculty and seminary students, but also our ministers, elders, and deacons, and, as we saw, even all of us can use this precious resource to fulfill the commands given by our Lord Jesus Christ: to spread the gospel, to preach the word, and to test the spirits.

It is with great gratitude to the Lord that we may make our annual contribution to help keep the library up-to-date. A very sincere thank you to the representatives and all those who assist in collecting and counting, and to all of you for your generous donations. During this past year a total of \$35,818.53 was collected, making it very easy for us to pledge \$35,000 for the coming year. C



### **Correction**

Please note that the email address for Janell DeBoer in the *Ray of Sunshine* was printed incorrectly in Issue 18. The correct email address for sending birthday wishes is [janell.db90@gmail.com](mailto:janell.db90@gmail.com).



# North African Migrants and the Future of Europe

*This article first appeared in the West Highland Free Press, May 22, 2015. It was the author's final Free Press column. It is republished with permission.*

The flow of migrants from North Africa into southern Europe is no new thing. It has been going on for decades, but now it's become the stuff of tragedy as thousands cram into tiny vessels scarcely fit for a mill-pond and head off across two hundred miles of treacherous sea.

Europe is suddenly caught in a dilemma. Will it rage against illegal immigrants, or weep over the loss of thousands of lives? But behind the dilemma there is also guilt. For centuries we Europeans shamelessly took advantage of freedom of movement to turn up unbidden and unwelcome on other shores, killing native inhabitants, destroying their culture and plundering their treasures.

Today, people of European origin dominate Canada, the United States, Brazil, Argentina, New Zealand, and Australia. From the Mayflower to the Metagama, migration, driven by poverty, has been a key factor in our history. Deep-down, then, we know the heart of a migrant and the curious paradox of a mind that is filled with *cianalas* and yet knows it could never forsake the comforts of central heating and air-conditioning for the romance of a peat-fire.

Europe's movers and shakers are now calling for a concerted response to the migrant crisis, but this has not been the only note. Influential voices have also suggested that the migrants are part of a coherent plan to increase the Muslim presence in Europe, and this is even being linked to predictions that within twenty-five years Britain will be a predominantly Muslim country. Yet, while for all the years of the Cold War we trembled at the spectre of Communism and the thought of "Reds under the bed," none seems to be taking the Islamic threat seriously.

Is such complacency wise? There can certainly be no doubt that the thousands of North Africans now pouring into Europe are Muslims. Nor can there be any doubt that after centuries of relative passivity Islam, like Scottish separatism, is now all fired-up with new energy and

zeal. Quite where the fuel-injection has come from is not clear, though it probably owes something to fabulous oil-based Arab wealth, the emergence of a new generation of fanatical religious leaders and, above all, the creation of the state of Israel. But whatever the reasons, the millions of North Africans who will enter Europe in the next twenty-five years are not likely to arrive full of gratitude. They will bring with them Islam's innate sense of superiority and its contempt for the infidel.

Equally clearly, our freedoms will never survive under a dominant Islam. No Muslim country on earth grants civil rights or liberty of speech to its citizens. In Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, even members of his own party lived in daily fear of summary execution. In Saudi Arabia, no woman may drive a car. And in the countries of the so-called "Arab Spring," the spring quickly turned to winter. The toppling of Mubarak brought no freedom to Egypt and the toppling of Gadaffi brought only chaos to Libya. Islam and the ballot-box, Ayatollahs and civil liberties, can never live together.

But is the influx of Libyan refugees part of a conspiracy? It's certainly hard to believe that it's a pan-Islamic one. The Muslim community is too deeply divided for that, and even Islamic State is scarcely in a position to orchestrate the movement of thousands of Libyans. It is, however, perfectly capable of placing among the migrants hundreds of its own radicalized Muslims; and it is beyond belief that it hasn't done so.

All minorities prefer to keep a low profile and avoid trouble. Generations of British Muslims have done exactly that, many have made an invaluable contribution to British society, and many are perfectly prepared to listen quietly while Christians "witness" to them. But when minorities become majorities, things change, as German Jews discovered in the 1930s. Once the Nazis achieved ascendancy, friendly German neighbours suddenly became informants for the Gestapo; and in the event of Islamic dominance in Britain our friendly Muslim shopkeepers will have little option but to march behind the radicals.

Have we any protection? Tighter immigration controls bring their own complications. We cannot close our doors on asylum-seekers simply because they're Muslims, nor can we set up border-controls which specifically target Muslims. That would simply raise the level of Islamic paranoia, and they already have countless spokesmen prepared to "explain" that if Muslims behead a soldier it's no more than a natural response to the way they were treated in school.

But have we no intellectual, ideological, or spiritual barriers to raise against Islam? The prevailing secular humanism is too preoccupied with hating Christianity to notice the threat posed by Islam; and anyway, when it comes to the bit, a negative ("There is no God") can never have the motivational force of a fanatical positive like, "Allah is God."


What of Christianity? Can it save us (and our freedoms) from Islam? Yes, but only if it is robustly biblical, and robustly confident that Jesus is the one and only Lord.

But Christianity must also address the fact that in many parts of Britain it is invisible: simply not there. Even in many parts of the Highlands, the church has now withdrawn, leaving a religious vacuum, and a generation that is spiritually spineless.

The churches speak much of mission, but usually only as part of a plea to modernize. But more, surely, is needed: a legion of formally ordained Evangelists committed to the many Scottish communities where Christ is unheard of, and where a passionate Islam would meet with no counter-faith.

But then, Islam has never needed to win the intellectual battle, and in the eyes of its radicals it still doesn't need to. Bombs and beheadings will suffice; or, in the worst possible scenario, an Islamized France, armed to the hilt and ready to pounce.

Apocalyptic delusions of an aged brain? Possibly, but consider Augustine, the greatest Christian mind the world has ever seen. Born in Algeria, he became Bishop of Hippo (also in Algeria) in 396. There, if anywhere, Christianity seemed secure for all time coming. But by 622 Mohammed had established himself in Medina, and a hundred years later Christianity was obliterated in Algeria. It was no victory of the mind. Augustine's diocese had merely been overwhelmed by a Muslim army.

History need not repeat itself. But let's not sleep-walk our way into the loss of all our freedoms. 

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## Your Sister in Brazil

*Otto Bouwman*  
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A year ago, Brazil received a great deal of international media attention because of FIFA's World Cup; currently, substantial attention is being given because of an alleged corruption scandal involving the country's political elite; next year events surrounding the summer Olympics in Brazil are expected to again capture everyone's attention and imagination. Soccer, apparent bribery, scandal, Olympics: Brazilians like to do things

noticeably. In the midst of such a culture, the Reformed Churches in Brazil (RCB) federation, despite limited numbers and resources, has great intentions and trusts that, with the blessing of the Lord, their federation can become a great blessing to the entire Brazilian nation.

The RCB is likely the smallest federation with whom our churches have ecclesiastical relations. By God's grace, the federation continues to grow and mature; just this

past summer the federation grew from six to seven instituted churches. The number of ministers in the federation is also increasing; almost a year ago the ninth ordained minister joined the ranks and currently there are three seminarians just completing their practicum. If all goes well, these three seminarians are likely to become ordained ministers of the Word in 2016. Additionally, there are three more students at the seminary making progress towards the completion of their theological training.

A review of some topics that have received attention at some recent RCB *Concìlios* (synods which meet biannually) reveals evidence of a young federation. For example, though the federation was formally established already fifteen years ago, more work still needs to be done to adopt finalized creeds as well as some liturgical forms. Additionally, a federational song book still needs to be created and various committees need to conduct their work more consistently between the *Concìlios*. Evidently, there is need for a lot of work to be done to further establish and stabilize this young federation.

On the other hand, the amount of time and attention that is given to other topics at *Concìlios* reveals a deliberate intention to make meaningful contributions to the spread of the Christian faith in their country. One such topic is the John Calvin Institute (IJC), the federation's theological seminary. During the last few *Concìlios* there were extensive discussions about various matters related to the seminary, including the level of financial support which should be given to seminarians and their families and also the further development of Brazilian governance structures to oversee the program and work of the IJC. Though the IJC is in the first place a federational seminary, many are also mindful of the potential impact the IJC could have in Brazil and recognize a potential role for the IJC beyond the RCB federation.

Another topic which the federation has been dealing with is their relationship with like-minded Christians in their country. Some Brazilian churches and pastors, whose heritage is outside of the Reformed tradition, having recently discovered the richness of the Reformed confessions, seek to have greater contact with the RCB. That is a cause for gratitude and indicates that substantial work still can be done; these incoming churches need to learn much not only about the Reformed confessions, but also about Reformed church polity. That takes time

and effort. Sometimes that work goes well, and the newcomers join the RCB; at other times a painful parting of the ways occurs. These developments require sensitivity and wisdom, in part because there is a large Presbyterian Church federation in Brazil (known in Brazil as the IPB). At the most recent RCB *Concìlios*, because of ongoing discussions in the IPB related to topics such as the position of women in worship, the RCB has adopted a "wait and see" approach to determine what kind of ecclesiastical relationship they should pursue with their Presbyterian neighbors. In the meantime, RCB pastors and churches have been encouraged by *Concìlios* to enter into and continue informal contacts with IPB churches at the local level. Additionally, the *Concìlios* indicated awareness of the need for the RCB to understand the challenges and strengths of these Presbyterian churches in order to prepare for possible future relationships; clearly the RCB is thinking ahead.

Since the very existence of the RCB is – humanly speaking – the result of the efforts coordinated by mission boards (initially from western Canada and later also from Ontario) it is understandable that the main points of contact between the RCB and the CanRC continue to be via personnel associated with the mission (aid) boards. All parties are cognizant that the relationship between our federations is an evolving one; there seem to be more and more points of contact and connection in this "shrinking" world of the twenty-first century.

The numerous contacts between the RCB and "searching" Christians in Brazil suggest a tremendous opportunity for our brothers and sisters there. There is an evident thirst for the gospel that the RCB, along with the missionaries sent by Canadian mission boards, can address. That, in turn, represents a great opportunity for our Canadian churches to support not only our missionaries but also the entire RCB federation in their efforts. May God move them and us in such a way that the RCB continues to grow and mature, and that many more Brazilians respond positively to the call of the gospel!

Because of these realities, the CRCA will recommend that Synod 2016 instruct the CRCA to continue using every opportunity to have contact with the RCB and to provide ongoing encouragement to this young church federation.

C



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**Q I have a question concerning Revelation 20, about the binding of Satan and the 1000 year reign of Christ. There seem to be different thoughts on this chapter in the Bible such as millennial kingdom, versus premillennialism and postmillennialism.**

**It is a very difficult chapter to understand.**

**A** After chapter 19 showed what will happen with the helpers of the devil, the beast, and the false prophet on the day of Christ's return, Revelation 20 shows us the place and power of the devil during the history of the church and in the end. The first few verses show us the third end-vision. It shows us a picture that is concurrent with the previous chapters. We see the beginning of the judgment over the dragon himself, followed by his final overthrow. We are going back in history; the order is not chronological but thematic. We view it from a different aspect. The book of Revelation doesn't give us a calendar of the future but more like an x-ray of history. We get to see not only the outside but also the inside of world history, as with an x-ray. That's how we have to read chapter 20 also. The ultimate judgments over Satan's helpers and over Satan himself do not follow each other in time but they run parallel. The preceding visions told us what happens to four of the five foes introduced in chapter 12. Only one is left, namely Satan himself. His position and place in the history of the NT church are described in this vision in chapter 20. Altogether, however, they serve to reveal Christ's triumph over every enemy and the ultimate victory of his church.

### **The thousand years**

In Revelation 20 the Lord Jesus shows John an angel coming down from heaven. He has the key to the Abyss and on his hand (lit.) is a great chain. It shows that this angel has an important task to fulfil. As the entire chapter demonstrates, there is a lot of symbolism. The chain is "great" because it must bind a powerful creature. The key signifies

authority, implying that this powerful creature can only be restricted by a divine command. Christ's power and authority appear in the person of this angel to arrest the dragon. All his names are mentioned at this time to highlight the significance of this moment: the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan (cf. Rev 12; Gen 3). He is Satan, God's adversary! He has to be arrested and chained up. The Abyss is the place the demons dreaded, as we know from Luke 8; it's the place in which they're held in remand until the day of the execution of God's judgment and they be thrown into the lake of burning sulphur.

In Revelation 12 we see what happened when the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven. Then the devil was cast out of heaven. No longer could he accuse the brethren, for their mediator Jesus Christ had made atonement for them. That's when a voice had sounded from heaven, which said, "But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." Now here, in chapter 20, the Lord Jesus shows us that this does not need to make the church desperate and discouraged. From heaven he sent an angel to bind the devil for a thousand years. Again, this period of a thousand years must be understood as symbolic. It's not a period of a thousand years but the number 1000 is ten to the third power, ten being the number of fullness, of completion. The time between Christ's ascension and return is divided into these 1000 years and a short time. Just as in previous visions, the devil will receive a short time for his last attack, at which time he will be defeated definitively. The number 1000, however, indicates a long time, a long history of the church, and a time in which the devil will be bound! Satan won't be free any longer, as he was before, to roam

and deceive the world and exert his power. When Satan was cast out of heaven and hurled to the earth, he lost the authority he once possessed, and his binding on earth was “signed, sealed, and delivered,” so to speak.

### **Ideas and theories**

When we consider this we might think: we’re probably not yet in this long period of Satan’s binding, for when we look around we see too much misery and apostasy, which must be caused by the devil. When you look at the history of the church also, you don’t see any long period yet in which the church has peace without troubles. There hasn’t been a reign of peace either, you would say. It’s this kind of thoughts, indeed, which gave rise to ideas and theories about this thousand year reign of Christ. The premillennialists, whom we find among the Pentecostals, Adventists, and other evangelicals, believe that Christ will return twice, the first time at the rapture of the believers, who will be reigning with him on earth for a thousand years. The postmillennialists believe that this passage shows that there will be a time of peace and spiritual prosperity before the Lord Jesus will return; they’re also found in evangelical circles, and among some Reformed-Presbyterians. Nowhere in the Bible, however, do we find this prospect promised.

### **Binding of the devil**

We should note well that we read about this binding of the devil for a certain purpose: to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. It doesn’t say that he can’t do anything anymore, or that there will be a time of perfect peace on earth. Rather, he can’t do anymore what he used to do! In the OT we read how the devil was able to rally the whole world against that small nation Israel; he wanted to stop the coming of

the Christ! Now that Christ’s word would go out into the world, he would try even harder to oppose this, to destroy this work, and to stop the course of the gospel. There is nothing he would like more; yet, God binds him! Before Christ’s ascension, as the Lord Jesus mentioned many a time, Satan was the ruler of the world. At that time, as Paul mentions in Acts 14:16, God let all the nations go their own way. After his ascension, however, Christ received all power and authority in heaven and on earth; hence, he has Satan bound so that he cannot obstruct the great commission to have the gospel brought to the ends of the earth. As the Lord Jesus had explained before, in Matthew 12, before entering the strong man’s house the strong man must be bound first. The same word for “binding” is used here in Revelation 20. Satan must be cast away, bound. He can go only as far as God permits (cf. Job 1). In 2 Thessalonians 2:6, as well, Paul writes how the lawless one is being restrained, that the evil one is kept in check.

Now, this doesn’t mean that the influence of the devil is nil. Many will hear the gospel, but will not heed it. The false prophet still carries out his devilish work; the beasts still exert their deceptive powers. The binding means that the devil can no longer bring together a complete world power, the way he did in the OT with the Babylonians, the Assyrians, to eradicate the people of the LORD. Nevertheless, he still uses his influence to seek to paralyze the power of God’s Word in our life. The Apostle Peter already warned the church of his days for the devil, prowling like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He’s been compared to a mad watch-dog on a chain. We’re comforted and encouraged by this vision: the church will succeed and Christ will prevail, but there will be victims too. We’ll have to stay close to Christ and live for him in order to share in his triumph (cf. Col 2:15). He reigns, together with his people in heaven (v. 4f). C



**Is there something  
you’ve been wanting to know?  
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