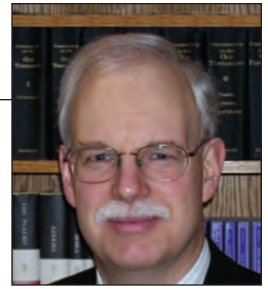


# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
Volume 63, No. 8 • April 25, 2014



WHAT USE AM I?



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# Senior Saints

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*The thought, "What use am I?  
I am only a burden to my family and all those  
around me," may rush in and not go away*

---

## Distinguished members

A distinguished part of every congregation is what can be called the Senior Saints. I am thinking here of the brothers and sisters that are in the seventy-plus category. Most likely, they are not officially known as the Senior Saints in any congregation. They might informally be known as the *Seventy Plus Club*, or more formally as the *Golden Agers* or the *Youth of Yesterday*, or something similar. In some congregations, the entry age may be sixty-five, but with the increases in life expectancy, seventy is the new sixty-five. When one adds that the government is increasing the retirement age, the bar may soon be raised to seventy-five. For now, seventy-plus can safely be considered as the age for entry into the Senior Saint category.

Being a Senior Saint brings with it a few perks. At the very least, they get their name in the church bulletin when it is their birthday, and, depending on the size of the congregation, they may be remembered in congregational prayer by name. Some congregations host special dinners for their Senior Saints around Christmas time or other times of the year. In some congregations, the deacons may deliver a gift basket around Christmas time as well.

## Early stage

While it is true that some enter the Senior Saint stage with a variety of ailments, and some are taken home to be with the Lord when they have barely entered that stage, many brothers and sisters still have a great deal of life left in them. They have too much energy just to sit around with nothing specific to do. For some, after a life

of hard work, there is time for travel to far-flung places, perhaps going on one of those trips to the Bible lands. This is not for everyone, because either it does not really interest them or they do not have the resources. Some get involved in volunteering, such as helping at a local Bible for Missions store, volunteering at the local hospital or with the Red Cross, or some other worthwhile endeavour, where they can apply their wide variety of skills. Others look after a multitude of tasks in the congregation, perhaps picking up the local bulletin from the printer each week, quietly seeing to it that the yard around the church is in tiptop shape, or attending to administrative tasks in the congregation. This is all done without fuss or drawing attention to themselves. They understand the church is a body where everyone does whatever the Spirit has equipped them to do, and they do it out of love for the Lord and his church. In this way, they contribute much to the upbuilding of the body of Christ.

To be sure, this is not true for everyone. Some Senior Saints take the word "retired" a little too seriously. They can travel so much, for example, that it looks like they have retired from their local church body. Some, when asked why they don't seem to be involved too much in the life of the congregation anymore, may say, "I've done my share, now it's time for someone else to take over." That is not good for their own spiritual and physical health, nor is it good for the health of the church body. No part of the body can say it is no longer needed, but all must pull their weight. Idleness is the devil's handmaiden when one is young, and it is no different when one is older. We are called to serve, not be selfish (cf. John 13:1-20; 1 Corinthians 12; Belgic Confession Article 28).

## Final stage

In fact, the time of dependence on being served by others may come sooner, rather than later. Eventually, even the most vigorous among the Senior Saints has to face the reality described in Ecclesiastes 12:1-5, which describes in a series of metaphors the fading of vigour as strong bodies shrink and bend over with age, eyesight grows dim, deafness sets in, teeth fall out, and sleep is elusive. I have

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

In this issue, Rev. Eric Kampen addresses his editorial to the "Senior Saints" in our churches – the challenges they may face, the tasks they might like to take up among the congregation, and their calling.

Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer continues his series on NAPARC. He writes that "this is the third in a series of articles explaining what NAPARC is and does. Beginning with this description of the ARPC, a number of short articles will follow (DV) introducing each of the eleven member churches, so that we may get to know our NAPARC neighbours."

Issue 8 reports on the retirement of Rev. Bill Slomp. There are regular columns Treasures New and Old, Clippings on Politics and Religion, and Ecumena, as well as a Mission News insert. In addition, readers will find a book review, a few press releases, two letters to the editor, and a question for the You Asked column. There have been quite a few questions coming in – look for them in the coming issues.

*Laura Veenendaal*

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### ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

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

**Subscriptions** [clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca](mailto:clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca)  
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**Website** [www.clarionmagazine.ca](http://www.clarionmagazine.ca)

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
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### PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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heard that stage of life described as, “Having nothing to do and all day to do it in.” Then the gold goes out of the golden age, as it becomes evident that human bodies are mere tents, rapidly fading away. It is always sad to see Senior Saints, who have been involved in the life of their own family and the extended church family, reduced to faint shells of their former selves by heart attacks, strokes, and cancers. Depending on the severity of the ailments at the end of their lives, they have to wait out the end of their days in some care facility, as dependent upon the care of others as they were when they were first born. With all the faculties that are fading away, the thought, “What use am I? I am only a burden to my family and all those around me,” may rush in and not go away. It is also the time when, despite many visits and contacts, there is a sense of loneliness, and that all the more so when one has lost one’s spouse.

In some cultures, it appears to have been considered proper to quietly slip away from the family one day and find an ice flow, so your family wouldn’t feel burdened having to look after someone who could not make any significant contribution to the life of the family and community anymore. In our culture, it appears that, for some, the concern is not so much to spare others the burden of having to care for them but that they want to spare themselves the suffering that may come with dying. Therefore, they want the right to determine when their own end will come by means of assisted suicide, on the assumption that they will be better off dead than lying in bed.

### **Prophetic calling**

Yes, there is that lingering question, “What use am I?” That question might not wait for the final stage of life but may come sooner, especially when one has to deal with a whole variety of ailments requiring surgeries and follow up treatments to the point that life revolves around doctor visits. When that question does not want to go away, it is good to think of Psalm 92:14,15, where the Psalmist says that the righteous “still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.” Senior Saints may wonder how it is possible to still bear fruit. As they experience physical frailty, they will have a hard time seeing themselves as young green saplings. They may come across more as an old stump. The key, however, lies in the last line, “To declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.” This touches on the prophetic aspect in the office of all believers. It brings

to mind the words of Peter about being “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Indeed, declaring the greatness of the LORD is one of our core tasks as his children. By declaring the uprightness of the LORD, how he has proven to be a rock of refuge over a long life, sustaining one through all the trials and tribulations, a Senior Saint can still bear fruit in old age. Senior Saints can say, “This faith is more than just words. I have experienced it time and again that my only comfort is that I belong to Jesus Christ.”

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*The Psalmist says that the righteous  
“still bear fruit in old age;  
they are ever full of sap and green. . . .”*

---

What Psalm 92 brings out is that Senior Saints still have an important task in the midst of the congregation, a task that cannot be fulfilled by anyone else. No one else can look back on a long life where they experienced the LORD was their help, their keeper, their shade on their right hand (Ps. 121). That task ends only when the Lord calls his children home. Even when that time draws near, in the way one approaches death’s door is a testimony. It certainly is not a good testimony if it appears to others that one has rigidly put one’s hands and feet against the frame of death’s door to delay entry. It is a glorious testimony when one shows a readiness and eagerness to be with the Lord, knowing that is far better. Furthermore, when Senior Saints show themselves eager and willing to testify to the goodness of the Lord throughout their life, as expressed also, for example, in Psalm 71, they will be able to encourage all who come to visit them.

I started by mentioning that Senior Saints are honoured in the life of the congregation. It is good for all to be reminded of their task, so it is possible to look at all the Senior Saints marching into church each Sunday with renewed appreciation for the task the Spirit gives them. The congregation may expect spiritual encouragement from their older members. It is also good for the Senior Saints to be reminded of their task, just in case they were feeling a little useless and a burden to others because there seems to come a stage they can only be on the receiving end and not give anything in return. Senior Saints can give a great deal when they speak about the Lord, declaring he is upright, their rock, their only comfort. In that way, they will still bear fruit in old age.



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# God's Word – My Light

**"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."**

(Psalm 119:105)

Psalm 119 in its entirety is devoted to extolling the glory of God's Word. As Bible readers know, it's the longest in the whole collection. Especially in our youth we are inclined to see it as monotonous. We find this Old Testament poet, whoever he was, to be rather verbose.

Yet such an assessment betrays either a superficial reading of this psalm or a lack of love for God's law. From a literary viewpoint there is meticulous attention given to structure. The poet has lovingly followed an intricate pattern. It's an acrostic psalm which means that the author has composed it around the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each letter introducing eight successive verses about the beauty and blessings of God's Word. Every section praises the wisdom, truth, and moral perfection of God as embodied in his law. Just as we have many synonyms to describe something we love and enjoy, so too this author. He has all kinds of words to describe his theme: law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, ordinances, promises, and word. That last one is in verse 105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet."

Your *Word*. That shows he does not have a narrow preoccupation with the Ten Commandments. His focus is the entire revelation of God that Israel had at that time – everything God had promised, demanded, threatened, or stated. His heart is

ravished by God's revelation, filled with it, therefore it spills forth from his mouth. If you love God's Word as much as he did, then you can identify with him when he says things like, "To study God's statutes is like finding treasures."

To grasp the imagery of the Word as a lamp to his feet, and a light to his path, we have to think of the time in which the author lived. For us there's relatively little danger when we go for a walk. We enjoy the benefit of wide, level sidewalks with street lamps, and clear signs telling us where we are. We can't imagine what an Israelite traveller had to endure. Travel was difficult; it was never a pleasure. For the most part there were small dirt paths that wound through mountains and along deep ravines. In some places the roadways were so overgrown that it was difficult to determine what was road and what was not. Psalm 107 tells of a group that lost its way, prayed to God for help, and were led by him to a city. There were wild animals and highwaymen lurking behind rocks – think of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In our text, life is being compared to a path. We still have the expression "walk of life." Without God's Word we would stumble over rocks, fall into holes, stray from the path, and plunge headlong into ravines. That light is necessary implies that a condition of darkness exists. Not merely in a physical sense, but the psalm-

ist understands it in a spiritual and ethical sense. Darkness in Scripture is the image of deep misery and of life under the dominion of sin. Where there is darkness there is ultimately death. Does not Scripture describe hell as the place of "outer darkness?" Darkness isn't just a negative term denoting the absence of light, it's a hostile force, full of resistance to the light of God's Word.

By nature we are inclined to blaze our own path and follow the flickering lights of this world – "candles in the wind," to borrow from Elton John's meaningless hit. There is the light of science which claims to have all the answers to the mysteries of life. Yet how many times have scientists been embarrassed by their discoveries and divided over their data? There is the light of wealth and affluence, the notion that money buys happiness. Yet what misery in the lives of the rich and famous! It is God's Word alone which not only explains all mysteries, revives the soul, and offers true happiness, it's also the light by which we test the spirits, discerning the "false lights" and steering clear of the dangers in a fallen world.

Notice the author calls God's Word a lamp "to his feet." It is not merely a light to bask in, but a light to walk by. The Bible is not only a source of knowledge, it is a rule of obedience. So how necessary it is to pore over the Scriptures, to read

them diligently and systematically from beginning to end. Think about every line you read. God himself is speaking to you: “Your Word,” says the psalmist, “is a lamp.”

For that we depend on God. We need our eyes and hearts opened by the Spirit of Truth. Therefore we need to pray for his illuminating power and renewing grace. The author of this psalm shows us the way. He petitions God, “Open my eyes, that I may see wonderful things in your law. . . Turn my heart toward your statutes” (vv. 18, 36).

The light of God’s Word: we come to the heart of the matter when we understand that the light is the Christ of God. Jesus is the *Word* of God made flesh. He is the true light that enlightens every man. Zechariah the priest foretold that the holy child to be born of Mary would “give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” Jesus himself stood up and proclaimed, “I am the Light of the World.”

God’s Word is a light because every book testifies of Christ in whom alone there is life and light. How is it that the Word-made-flesh is our light? Through

his redemptive work. He perfectly fulfilled God’s law, and bore its severe penalty. On Golgotha, God the Father plunged “the Light of the World” into the bottomless Pit. The physical darkness that covered the land in those three hours was frighteningly symbolic of God’s ultimate punishment. But our Saviour was victorious. He endured the curse. He stilled God’s wrath. The light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. So let our life be guided by the Word! Whoever does that “will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” **C**

## NAPARC

# NAPARC Neighbour – ARPC (Part 3)



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*Note: This is the third in a series of articles explaining what NAPARC is and does. Beginning with this description of the ARPC, a number of short articles will follow (DV) introducing each of the eleven member churches (besides the CanRC) so that we may get to know our NAPARC neighbours.*

Have you recently been vacationing in the south and noticed church signs for an ARP congregation? Perhaps you’ve met a Presbyterian from the Carolinas who said he attended a psalm-singing ARPC – who are these folks? To begin with, they are one of our NAPARC neighbours, so let’s get to know them a little bit.

### By the numbers

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC) is a body of some 35,000 members forming close to 300 congregations clustered largely in the southern United States, particularly in the Carolinas.<sup>1</sup> They are organized into nine presbyteries (a “presbytery” is a broader court of the denomination which oversees the affairs of congregations under its jurisdiction). The ARPC has been a member of NAPARC since 1982.

Of interest to us Canadians is that they have several congregations on the Canadian east coast as well as a few in southern Ontario (none west of Ontario though). The Can-

RC and ARPC appear to “overlap” in two cities, Chatham and Toronto (specifically North York for the ARPC), where each has one congregation. Also, as it happens, for the first time in its history, the moderator of the ARPC Synod (which is a permanent governing body, their highest court) is a Canadian, Rev. Jeff Kingswood, who pastors a church in Woodstock, ON.

## **Scots-Irish Presbyterian**

Members of the ARPC come largely from Scots-Irish stock. As is the case with most Presbyterians, historically they come out of the reforming work of John Knox (student of John Calvin) in Scotland in the 1550s. By God’s grace and through the work of Knox, Reformed churches sprung up and joined together as the Church of Scotland. Similar to what we find in our Dutch Reformed church history, the Scots also struggled to stay Reformed and this led to various secessions and splits. For the ARPC, a key reforming movement came under the leadership of Rev. Ebenezer Erskine in 1733. Erskine was forced out of what had become the Established Presbyterian Church of Scotland and went on to lead a group of churches to form an “Associate Presbytery.”

Some ten years later, another group emerged from the EPCS calling themselves the “Reformed Presbytery.” Members of these two churches faced pressure because of their beliefs and soon migrated to Northern Ireland. From there, members of both groups came to North America and began to organize themselves separately. Talks of merger began in the late 1770s and they joined together in 1782 as the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. By 1803, this union had expanded to four regional Synods and one General Synod. Issues of concern, however, did not go away, and by 1822 the (regional) Synod of the Carolinas was granted separate status and it alone continues today as the ARPC.

## **Church life**

So, what are these churches like? One thing that becomes clear is their love for the Psalms! While hymns are not forbidden in their worship services, their zeal for the regulative principle and their strong tradition in Scottish psalmody makes for robust psalm-singing Christians, often without musical accompaniment! At NAPARC meetings, the psalm-singing of these southern men (and others in the same tradition) is indeed sweet to the ear!

ARP folks, like all NAPARC churches, hold to a high view of Scripture and are committed to the doctrine confessed in the Westminster Standards. They are not afraid to take public stands against doctrinal deviation and the prevalent sins of our culture. For example, on their website ([www.arpchurch.org](http://www.arpchurch.org)) you can find statements endorsing

the infallibility of Scripture as well as the historicity of Genesis 1-3 (including Adam and Eve as unique creations of God in his image). They also call out the sins of abortion and homosexuality (while holding out Christ’s call to forgiveness through repentance and faith).

The ARPC has taken a strong stand against women serving in the teaching offices of the church, that is, the offices of elder and minister. However, they do not regard the office of deacon as a teaching office nor is it, in their system of government, an office which exercises oversight over the congregation. For this reason, since around 1970, the ARP churches have allowed the sisters to serve as deacons (as decided upon by each local “session,” which is their term for “consistory.”) However, this continues to be a point of discussion within ARP churches and even among some other Presbyterian churches within NAPARC.

## **Mission**

The ARPC is also quite active in outreach, church planting, and foreign mission work. Within the US, they have a large group of Korean Presbyterians in California and New York. In other parts of the world, they have for many years had active mission works in Mexico and Pakistan. The ARP congregations in both those lands have since organized into their own independent synods while the ARP of North America continues to maintain a mission presence in each country. Amazingly, God has blessed the work in Pakistan so that there are more ARP churches there than in North America! In more recent years, mission work has been undertaken in Germany, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Spain.

## **Seminary and ministers**

As a denomination, the ARPC has owned and operated its own seminary and college since 1839: Erskine Seminary and College in Due West, South Carolina. These institutions serve to give members of their churches (and others) a Christian liberal arts education as well as to supply candidates for the ministry. Among the ARP ministers active today are some names familiar to us: Revs. Jay E. Adams, Sinclair Ferguson, and Derek Thomas.

The ARPC with its Scottish-Presbyterian roots is likely closest to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), another NAPARC neighbour of Scottish descent, and I hope to introduce them next time.

<sup>1</sup> The basic information for this article is a summary of the data found on the official ARPC website ([www.arpchurch.org](http://www.arpchurch.org)) as well as in the annual reports of the ARPC to NAPARC.







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# Worsening Persecution of Christians in China

ChinaAid is an international non-profit Christian human rights organization devoted to promoting religious freedom and the rule of law in mainland China. It recently released its 2013 Persecution report on its website (<http://www.chinaaid.org>) which concluded that government persecution against Chinese Christians increased almost 39 percent since 2012 based on six categories. These include “the total number of persecution cases, the number of people persecuted, the number of people detained, the number of people sentenced, the number of abuse cases and the number of people abused.” All categories increased between 2 and 50.9 percent, except for one. There was a decrease in the percentage of abuse cases, which fell 42.9 percent since 2012. The report acknowledges that due to circumstances they are only aware of a small fraction of what is really going on in China; it is but “the tip of the iceberg.” But the report is quite confident about the trend it detected.

ChinaAid notes that the persecution in 2013 was a continuation of the strategy of previous years which included targeting house church leaders and churches in urban areas, especially those with societal influence. Generally severe punishment has been handed out to top leaders so as to deter those of less influence in the churches. Even officially recognized churches experienced harassment and in some cases seizure of their property.

Because Christian publications have had an enormous impact in China, there have been government attacks on such publication ministries, also on college and university campuses. For example, Ren Lacheng who managed Enyou Bookstore in Taiyuan, Shanxi, which carried Christian publications was condemned to five years in prison on June 17, 2013, and the bookstore was shut down.

Some positive developments can be noted. The government has cancelled the “reeducation through labour” system. According to this system minor offenders could be detained for up to four years without an open trial. Such a law was also used against Christians. The authorities have also reduced the level of persecuting lawyers who defended the rights of Christians. This practice sought to make it impossible for such lawyers to do their work. Another positive development is the fact that the Chinese Roman Catholic Church experienced relative peace, although it is too early to know whether this is the beginning of a positive trend.

In spite of these bright spots, the overall trend is to more repression. This is regrettable as Chinese Christians are good citizens, respect the rule of law, and honour the authorities. However, the conflict is essentially the same as in the days of the early Christian church. Who has the highest authority? If one confesses that “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3) then one acknowledges that there is an authority higher than the Roman emperor or the Chinese government. And that is intolerable for those who do not acknowledge God’s sovereignty and assert their own supremacy.

However, in spite of all the trouble and oppression, which we in the West can hardly appreciate or fully comprehend, ChinaAid remains hopeful. “House churches in China had a difficult year in 2013, but we won’t lose heart ... only in such circumstances can churches be constantly purified, free of blemishes, mature and strong, and prepared for even greater mission. When political regimes and figures, one by one, sink into the long river of history, Jesus Christ’s Church stands tall and firm, and like it was 2,000 years ago; even the power of Hell cannot triumph over it.”





# Reverend Willem B. Slomp's Retirement – February 2014

The Edmonton Immanuel congregation gathered together on Saturday evening, February 1, to say “farewell” to her current pastor, Reverend Willem Slomp. All of Reverend and Barb Slomp's children and grandchildren were present, and also the Reverend's sisters and a brother of Barb, along with extended family from Ontario and Alberta.

All the hard work and preparations by Immanuel's Church Life Committee members paid off, and made for a joyous and entertaining evening, with more fellowship and great food in the foyer afterwards.

The evening ceremonies were mastered by Gus Rus, but the Master who received all our thanks and praise was our Heavenly Father. This was the overriding tone throughout the evening.

Numerous letters were read, and several ministers congratulated Reverend Slomp in a sincere and sometimes humorous fashion. (Who knew that Ministers could *actually* be funny and entertaining? They even poke fun at each other!) But all the Ministers expressed their heartfelt appreciation for the help and advice Bill gave them over the years. Reverend Slomp has brought people together, and the Lord enabled him to be an instrument of peace within the federation. He was involved in the training of elders and often was called upon to provide general counselling in our local churches.

The evening was interspersed with a variety of music, some by Council (can we *sing*, or what?) some chronicling Reverend Slomp's life journey, and some in rap-form (we are a very *current* congregation). It was all good and



Retirement evening  
(ceremony mastered  
by Gus Rus)

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## DECLINED

Declined the call to the Bethel CanRC of Toronto, ON:

**Rev. R. Schouten**  
of Aldergrove, BC.

## CHURCH NEWS



*Rev. Slomp giving  
"thank you" address*

generated laughter and appreciation for what Reverend Slomp did, in the Lord's strength.

The representatives of the Tuesday morning Bible Study group brought Barb Slomp's supporting role to the fore, in the form of "many hats" Barb has worn over the years; that of a loving and supporting wife, mother, grandmother, quilter, avid gardener, and homemaker.

The PKs (preacher's kids) without hesitation took to the pulpit and frankly proclaimed "How hard it was for them as young kids to disobey a father who reads the law to you every Sunday!" It was stirring to hear them describe their father as "a man whose mind was never far from his sermon." The driving question for their father was always: "Do you love the Lord?" Mom was

praised as a great support for Dad, right from the beginning, when he studied to become a pastor, and throughout his ministry.

After a beautiful slide show presentation, Reverend Slomp was presented a travel voucher from the Immanuel congregation, which will DV enable him and Barb to take a wonderful trip to a destination of their choosing.

Reverend Slomp thanked the Lord and all those present for a wonderful evening and ended with "To God be the praise!"

The next morning Reverend Slomp preached his farewell sermon on 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 under the theme: You are my letter from Christ. He reflected on 1. My personal letter to you; 2. You as my personal letter; 3. You and I as living letters. He stressed that we may have a loving and living relationship with God, and that we are victorious in Christ!

Reverend and Barb, allow me to conclude with the blessing that you so often have blessed *us* with: "The Lord bless you and keep you, The Lord makes his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you, the Lord turn his face towards you, and give you peace." To God be all the praise indeed! A-Dieu!

**C**





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# Twenty-seventh Annual Ministers' Conference: Redeemer University College

Since 1987 Redeemer University College in Hamilton, a Christian degree-granting university (where a number of Canadian Reformed young folks study, and where several Canadian Reformed professors teach) has been hosting an annual ministers' conference. This conference invites prominent theologians and preachers in the Reformed and Evangelical world as keynote speakers. Lecturers are invited who can speak to one of three areas: church leadership and congregational life; practical / pastoral theology; or worldview / Christ and culture. Past speakers include Lewis Smedes, John Stott, Marva Dawn, Paul Wilson, Bruxey Cavey, and Tom Long, among others.

This past March 4, more than one hundred people registered, coming from various federations and denominations of churches. Pastors, preachers, and pre-seminary students from the Christian Reformed Church, the United Reformed Churches, Reformed Church of America, United Churches of Canada, various Baptist communities, (and even Canadian Reformed) and others, were treated to two lectures on preaching by Darrell Johnson.

From 2000 – 2009, Rev. Johnson taught preaching, worship, pastoral theology, and biblical spirituality at Regent College, in Vancouver. Before taking on teaching duties at Regent, he was a gospel preacher for thirty years in various Presbyterian churches in California as well as in Manila in the 90s. He has authored a number of books: *Experiencing the Trinity*; *57 Words That Change the World* (a lovely exposition on the Lord's Prayer); *Discipleship on the Edge*; *Who is Jesus?*; *It Is Finished*; and *The Glory of Preaching*.

This year's conference theme was "The Mystery of the Preaching Moment." Rev. Johnson's morning lecture was called "Probing the Mystery," and the afternoon session was entitled "Preparing for the Mystery." In the morning lecture he laid out what he considered to be the essential

elements to consider when preparing and delivering a sermon. The afternoon session was crafted as a sermon on Ephesians 3:14-21, demonstrating the application of the principles outlined in the morning.

Rev. Johnson drew our attention to six essential elements, but first he highlighted Romans 10:1-15, about the centrality of preaching the Word, and Luke 24:13-32, where the Lord Jesus, on the road to Emmaus, beginning with Moses and the prophets, taught the two disciples that all of Scripture points to him. Faith comes through faithful preaching, and faithful preaching points to Christ.

Based on those two foundational thoughts he introduced the first essential element to consider in sermon preparation. Rev. Johnson highlighted for our reflection that it is the text, not the preacher, which is central. He noted the trend in various churches to get rid of pulpits and replace them with small lecterns. Sometimes there is the complete removal of any pulpit-like piece of furniture. This is an attempt "to make the preacher more accessible." His criticism of this trend was striking: it's the text that must be more accessible, not the preacher! The pulpit accents the centrality of the text. He also encouraged preachers, when reading publicly, to read Scripture, not from a digital Bible or from a projection screen, but from a physical book, in order to accent the centrality of the text.

The second essential element to consider is "the gathered people." This is a congregation gathered together in the preaching moment. "The gathered people" is that complex organism with many and various needs and hurts, joys, and sorrows. The third element he highlighted was "culture. Here we need to address complex world views, cultural baggage, and worldly inroads. The fourth element to consider is the preacher himself. He too, is a complex creature, with many different gifts and talents. He too, is a clay vessel, broken in many ways. The fifth element, on reflection shouldn't have been surprising: the Evil One.



He is the accuser of God's people; hates everything Jesus loves; calls all truth into question. He also hassles the preacher constantly, seeking to undermine his work. But the Evil One has been defeated already.

The final essential element to consider, Rev. Johnson put forth, is *The Preacher*. For in every faithful sermon it is the risen Lord Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, who is preaching. The Lord Jesus is present in the preaching and is still preaching. He drew our attention to Hebrews 2:12 – 13, where the Lord Jesus is speaking in the present, even to today! The Living Word still speaks. Jesus is The Preacher in the midst of the congregation. He is the only one who can do this faithfully.

Darrell Johnson worked with these six elements and suggested that the preacher should understand that the text, faithfully interpreted, is giving an alternate interpretation of reality. A faithful sermon takes us to another space. Faithful preaching should take us into God's space. The goal of preaching should not be to get a message out of the text, but to get people into the text. The preacher should help his people get into that place so deeply that they don't want to go back to an old way of life. Preachers shouldn't think that they're just giving their people a little energy boost for the week – "apply the text to my life" – but rather preachers should strive to preach in order to change people's interpretation of reality.

Preaching is about the risen Lord Jesus, not the preacher. It is transformative news, not advice. It should transform worldviews. It should transform people, and it

should lead to the obedience of faith: our Lord Jesus calls us to trust him. The preacher should realize the power to do this lies in the Text. Faithful preachers should realize that when The Preacher is preaching, words come with performative power, not just informative data. The Word preached is performative, not just informative.

Each session was followed by an interesting and engaging discussion in which the participants were able to ask Rev. Johnson to elaborate on several and various points of his presentations. Lunch was served in the cafeteria and was included in the modest registration fee of forty dollars. Refreshments were available an hour before the first lecture. During that hour and the lunch break there was time to renew old acquaintances, and to make new ones.

Next year, March 3, 2015, at the Twenty-eighth Annual Ministers' Conference, Dr. Reginald Bibby, well-known Canadian social demographer, will be the featured speaker. The theme will be "Christians in Canadian Culture." Dr. Bibby has been monitoring social trends in Canada for the past forty years, especially focusing on the Christian community.

The participants in this year's conference certainly have received much to digest, to consider, and to implement in their weekly sermon preparation. However Rev. Johnson lifted from our shoulders the burden that the preacher must transform people: rather it's The Preacher alone who can do that.



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

***An answer you've been looking for?***

***Ask us a question!***

***Please direct questions via email to Rev. W. denHollander***

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**Q** After reading 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. . . ,” we were wondering whether skipping some portions of the Old Testament is wrong. In our table Bible reading we have often skipped all those ceremonial laws, cleansings, offerings, etc.

**A** In this passage the Apostle Paul is instructing Timothy with a view to his work as pastor. Doing his work in the congregation of Ephesus, for instance, he will come across a variety of circumstances. Then Paul reminds his spiritual child Timothy that in all these different situations the Scriptures are very important. They are God-breathed, which means that the words spoken and written in the Bible were written under the guidance of God. Therefore the Bible has absolute authority in all and every situation. They are useful for various purposes: for teaching, giving instruction in the true doctrine; for rebuking, convincing, and convicting people of wrongs; for correction, exposing what needs to be changed to be on the right path; for training in righteousness, showing what lifestyle, what activities in life are in obedience to God’s will. This was important encouragement for Timothy in his work as office bearer.

“The man of God,” however, as Paul calls the believer in general, will be engaged and involved in many other “good works” as well. Hence, the Scriptures are useful for many more situations than the ones pertaining to Timothy’s pastoral work. Every believer, therefore, will do well to study the Scriptures, because they equip them for every good work! He needs to be instructed, trained, and equipped by all parts of the Word of God. Just as Paul indicates already, however, not every part is useful for every scenario. The Bible, indeed, contains a variety of accounts, descriptions, lists, genealogies that have their usefulness for particular purposes. God’s wisdom shows as well in providing such great diversity for the situations in which special instruction is required.

One of the situations in which we use and study the Bible is in our table reading. We do so for the purpose of getting to know the LORD and his work of salvation, his mighty deeds, and his faithfulness and steadfast love, etc. At the table we may be reading the Scriptures with adults only, or with some who are older while others are younger, or with just a few children who are too young yet to understand everything. Hence, the father needs to be wise in reading those passages that are “useful” for that particular setting and purpose. He may wish to read one such passage about a ceremony, or washing, or list of names, and show what we can learn from it with a view to God’s work of salvation, showing how it points to Christ. At other times it may be useful to pay some more attention to that, or have a brief discussion about it.

Skipping certain passages, therefore, or peculiar portions of Scriptures that are not “useful” in that setting, is not wrong; it shows discretion. Having said that, though, these same passages will be very “useful” for serious study at a Bible Study society! There they may be “useful” to gain a deeper insight in the mysterious and marvellous ways the LORD trained and prepared his people, or to see his will for our walk of life in holiness, or to be assured of his faithfulness through all generations! Teachers at school, or elders in their home visits, or believers in their outreach, may be selecting different passages again for their specific situation and purpose, “so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Thus, with discretion and discernment, we use the Scriptures to be faithful in the midst of our life as people of God!

**C**

## Healthy or Unhealthy Fear?

Dear Editor,

Re-(Editorial *Clarion* Vol. 63, No.5)

The refrain which Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer “can’t seem to get out [his] head. . .” namely “*fear is a bad counsellor. . .*” is coming verbatim from the late Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene, in his commentary on the Church Order (With Common Consent, page 18) and yes, it has to do with women voting.

I have often wondered why many of our current ministers have fears about this subject (perhaps culturally driven?), while many senior ministers do not seem to fear the issue. I could also mention the late Rev. G. VanDooren in the book *Before Many Witnesses* (page 62).

Regards,

Aubrey Vandergaag

## Letter to the Editor

Re: “Healthy Fear” (Vol 63, No 5, March 2014)

My colleague, Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, will remember the warning we received as young seminarians. Never go looking for a text to hang your sermon on. I fear that in this case the warning has gone unheeded. The message he expounds in his editorial is that one should not dismiss the “slippery slope” argument when it comes, for instance, to discussions on women in the church voting for office-bearers. He teaches that in these discussions there is a place for something he calls “healthy fear.”

He turns to Scripture to look for his texts to support his message of “healthy fear.” He finds it in the biblical teaching concerning the fear of God. He says that the fear of God is a combination of reverence and obedience. I agree. But then he writes that Scripture goes further. He states that Scripture teaches us that the fear of God leads us to fear sin. I disagree. That is not what Exodus 20:20 teaches. It teaches us to fear God that we may not sin. Fear of sin is not mentioned. From Exodus 20 he turns to a variety of biblical warnings about the consequences of living in unrepentant sin. One can rightly conclude from these warnings that we are to fear God’s judgment against sin. But again, fear of sin is not taught. “Healthy fear” as he expounds it for the purpose of not dismissing the “slippery slope” argument is simply not there. And no amount of illustrations on risk assessment can support what is not there.

In conclusion I submit that Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer has failed to biblically connect the fear of God to the issue of the day. Since the Bible teaches us to fear God that we may not sin, let him first prove from Scripture that a woman’s participation in voting for office bearers is a sin. However, others have already discovered that this is quite the uphill climb.

Rev. Doug Vandeburgt



## Response

Let me begin by thanking Rev. Vandeburgt for his interaction with my piece. He is a sharp exegete of Scripture. My intended point (not made with precision, I’ll admit) in citing Exodus 20:20 was to show that fear of God is meant to lead us away from sin. Sin is the opposite of God’s will. God hates sin and so should we. Rev. Vandeburgt puts it more accurately when he says we are to “fear God’s judgment against sin.” That should put us on high alert from anything which might lead us to sin. Thanks, brother, for the fine-tuning.

With respect to connecting to this to what Rev. Vandeburgt terms “the issue of the day,” I think my colleague has misunderstood the intent of the editorial as whole. Perhaps I was not clear. I did not venture to comment directly on women’s voting or to insinuate that it is a sin. I have written previously and stated publicly that I feel that this issue is a matter where a difference of opinion can exist. I have never called it a sin so I have no need to prove such.

But could it *lead us* into something which is in fact sin? Is there reason to fear that the introduction of female voting for office bearers may act as a stepping stone to something against which the judgment of God clearly stands? If so, then we have reason to fear. But that’s another article for another day. My point in this editorial was simply that in this *and all* our discussions, we should not dismiss out of hand the voices that express caution. If there is valid reason to think one decision might lead us at some future point into sin, should we not carefully listen and assess lest we risk falling in time under God’s judgment? Is that not a healthy fear?

Peter H. Holtvlüwer

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.  
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*

## **Press Release of the Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary held on Jan. 15, 2014**

The Board of Governors met at CRTS in Hamilton, Ontario on Jan. 15, 2014. All the governors were present at the meeting. In light of Dr. G. Visscher's sabbatical, Dr. J. Van Vliet attended as acting principal. Sr. Leanne Kuizenga, who will be performing clerical work for the Board under the supervision of the Secretary and Corresponding Clerk, was welcomed to the meeting. Rev. R. Aasman opened with the reading of Mark 1:1-20 and prayer.

### **Memorabilia**

In our memorabilia we remembered: the improved health of Prof. Geertsema; the continuing needs of Dr. N. Gootjes and Dr. J. DeJong, both of whom are now at Shalom Manor; Sr. Faber is living in a home with nursing care.

### **Minutes and agenda**

The minutes of the Board meeting held on Sept. 5, 2013 were adopted. The agenda for the meeting was established.

### **Correspondence of note**

- a. Press Release of the Sept. 5, 2013 Board meeting.
- b. Letter to Dr. J. Visscher thanking him for his assistance as Adjunct Lecturer during the sabbatical of Dr. A. De Visser.
- c. Letters from the churches at Ancaster and Grand Rapids regarding the January 2014 CRTS Conference on "Correctly Handling the Word of Truth."
- d. Letter to Dr. J. Van Vliet regarding his appointment as vice-principal.
- e. Letter and a Board-approved "Discussion Paper" to the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa and to the Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia regarding distance education for the first year of theological training.
- f. Letter to R. Tomlin that the Board has hired him as adjunct lecturer for the foreseeable future to give public speaking seminars to the students.

### **Receipt of reports-material agenda items**

- a. Report on Visits to the Lectures in the Fall of 2013 by Revs. E. Kampen and M. Van Luik. These reports provided cause for thankfulness since the faculty is providing thorough instruction in faithfulness to the Word of God and the Confessions.
- b. An "Alumni Survey" prepared by an Ad Hoc Committee was approved and passed on to the Senate for its review.

- c. The 2013 Pastoral Training Program Report by Dr. A. De Visser was received with gratitude.
- d. The Senate's proposal to integrate the PTP into the M. Div. program was adopted. After some editing by the librarian it will be sent to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).
- e. Reports by the following professors were received for information: Dr. C. Van Dam attended the 65th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) and the meetings of the Institute for Biblical Research in Baltimore; Dr. G. Visscher attended the meeting of the ETS in Baltimore and the meeting of the Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents in Tampa; Dr. T. Van Raalte attended the Christian Faith and University Conference in Montreal; Dr. J. Smith attended the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Baltimore; Dr. J. Van Vliet toured the churches in Classis Alberta.
- f. ATS has recommended, among other things, that CRTS needs to work on its Statement of Institutional Purpose, on the matter of Shared Governance, as well as carry out a Strategic Planning Exercise. An ad hoc committee was established to do some preliminary study on the matter of Shared Governance (2016), and report to the Board at the next meeting. The Executive will make arrangements with Br. F. Oostdyk for contacting an external facilitator in regards to a Strategic Planning exercise, and for discussing the Statement of Institutional Purpose. The Board will meet on Sept. 3, 2014 to work on the Statement of Institutional Purpose, and a Strategic Planning exercise is scheduled for January 2015.
- g. Dr. J. Van Vliet, acting principal, reported that the transition to five professors is going well, that the Senate would like to make the current structure of the January interim semester permanent now that the three year trial period is over, and that the Senate is planning for the 2015 CRTS Conference.
- h. Next meeting of the Board was scheduled, D. V., for Sept. 4, 2014 at 1:00pm.

### **Press release and closing**

The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the Vice Chairman in consultation with the Executive and the Principal, and the meeting was closed with prayer and thanksgiving.

*On behalf of the Board of Governors  
of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,  
Rev. J. Ludwig, Vice Chairman/Corresponding Clerk*

## **Press Release of Classis Pacific East, Yarrow, February 27, 2014**

On behalf of the convening church Yarrow, Rev. Eikelboom welcomed the brothers and opened the meeting in a Christian manner. The delegates from the church of Vernon reported that upon the examination of the credentials all of the churches were duly represented. Classis was declared constituted, and officers were appointed: Rev. Eikelboom chairman, Rev. Witten vice-chairman, Rev. Roukema clerk. The agenda was adopted. A request was received from Rev. Pol for a credential to attend the Twenty-ninth Annual Western Spring Meeting of the Reformed Church in the United States meeting at Sacramento Covenant Reformed Church, March 4-6, 2014. A letter of greeting was received from the United Reformed Church of Abbotsford, expressing thankfulness for the fruitful relationship that we have enjoyed. A number of reports were received: the treasurer of Classis report from Br. R. Leyenhorst, the church for auditing the books of treasurer of Classis, church for the inspection of the archives,

church visit reports to the church at Chilliwack (Dec 13, 2013), Yarrow (Feb 10, 2014), Lynden (Feb 20, 2014). The chairmen asked the questions required by Article 44 of the Church Order. All the churches responded affirmatively that the ministry of the office bearers is being continued and that the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured, no church requests the advice of Classis for the proper government of the church. Various appointments were made, among which: Abbotsford is the convening church for the next classis; the date is set for June 5; with the alternate date set for Sept 11. The deputy for contact with the United Reformed Churches Classis Western Canada: J. Roukema. A discussion was held whether the mandate for this deputyship should also include Classis Pacific North West United States of the United Reformed Churches. That is left for the consideration of the churches to propose. The deputy for contact with the RCUS: A. Pol. The Acts were adopted, and press release approved. After prayer, the vice-chairman closed the meeting.

*Arend Witten*

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## **Press Release of Classis Niagara March 19, AD 2014**

### **1. Opening of Classis**

On behalf of the church at Dunnville, Rev. J. Van Woudenberg opened the meeting in a Christian manner. Several guests were welcomed: Rev. and Mrs. Ron Potter from the Covenant East Classis of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS); Rev. Doug Bylsma from the Presbytery of Michigan-Ontario of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC); and Rev. Norman VanEeden-Petersman from Classis Ontario-East of the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA).

### **2. Memorabilia and constitution of Classis**

As memorabilia, Rev. VanWoudenberg mentioned that the church at Grassie has received a positive response to their recent call to Rev. R.J. den Hollander. He is expected to arrive in June 2014, the Lord willing. It was also noted that the remaining members of the group of believers in Blue Bell, PA have now formally joined the RCUS in Waymart, PA.

After finding the credentials in good order, Classis was declared constituted. The following brothers formed

the moderamen as per the suggestion of the previous classis: chairman – Rev. D. Wynia; vice-chairman – Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer; clerk: Rev. J. Huijgen. The agenda was adopted as proposed. The three visiting ministers were seated as fraternal delegates with privileges of the floor.

### **3. Question period ad Article 44, C.O.**

All the churches are continuing the ministry of the office-bearers as well as honouring the decisions of the broader assemblies. No church sought the advice of Classis.

### **4. Proposals**

The church at Tintern had submitted to the churches a proposal for Classis to appoint Deputies for Contact with Neighbouring Classes/Presbyteries. After several rounds of discussion, Classis decided in favour of the proposal in principle but that it cannot be adopted in its present form. Some adjustment is needed. Spring Creek church was mandated to re-work the proposal in light of the discussion at Classis and present it to the next classis.

### **5. Fraternal Delegates**

Rev. Bylsma brought greetings from the Presbytery of Michigan-Ontario of the OPC. He sketched the current



happenings within this Presbytery. Rev. VanWoudenberg then presented a report on his recent visit to Covenant-East Classis of the RCUS in Iowa, giving an extensive summary of the classis proceedings. Rev. Potter then brought greetings from Covenant-East Classis of the RCUS. After providing a summary review of the history of the RCUS, he mentioned that the Blue Bell believers (the remnant of the American Reformed Church once there) were received into membership into the Waymart congregation on March 16, 2014. Following this, Rev. VanEeden-Petersman extended greetings from Classis Ontario East of the URCNA. He expressed appreciation for the relationship and especially the pulpit exchanges (in the Niagara area) as well as the recent office bearer training sessions in which both URC and CanRC men have participated. Rev. VanWoudenberg then led in a prayer of thanksgiving and intercession for these churches.

## 6. Reports

In closed session, church visitation reports were received and read for the churches at Attercliffe, Dunnville,

Grassie, Lincoln, Smithville, and Tintern. These were received with thanksgiving.

## 7. Appointments

- a. Convening church for the next classis – Grassie
- b. Date of the next classis – June 11; if cancelled, then Sept 10, 2014
- c. Suggested officers for the next classis – Rev. C. Bouwman (chair); Rev. J. Huijgen (vice-chair); Rev. D. Wynia (clerk).
- d. Various other appointments were made as well.

## 8. Closing of Classis

Personal question period was offered and some informational comments were made. The chairman declared that censure according to Article 34 CO was thankfully not necessary. After the Acts and the Press Release were each read and approved by the assembly, Rev. Wynia led in prayer of thanksgiving. Thereupon Classis was declared closed.

*For Classis Niagara March 19, 2014  
Rev. P. H. Holtvliuwer, clerk at that time*

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## Press Release: Classis Ontario West, March 19, 2014

On behalf of the convening church, the American Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Rev. K.A. Kok welcomed the brothers. He read Psalm 125 and asked the brothers to sing Psalm 125:1, 2. He then led in prayer, especially remembering the J. Vanderwoude family and the Glanbrook congregation at the death of Br. Vanderwoude.

The delegates of the Grand Rapids church examined the credentials. All of the churches were properly represented, except the Trinity Canadian Reformed Church of Glanbrook. They had informed the convening church that they would be unable to send delegates to this Classis, because of Br. Vanderwoude's funeral. Classis was declared constituted.

Two of the brothers suggested by the previous classis to serve as officers, Revs. B. De Jong and J.E. Ludwig, were not present. Rev. W. Bredenhof volunteered to serve as chairman and Br. S. VanVeen volunteered to serve as clerk. This was acceptable to the assembly and the officers took their place: Rev. W. Bredenhof as chairman, Rev. K.A. Kok as vice-chairman, and Br. S. VanVeen as clerk. The chairman remembered the continuing vacancy of the church of Kerwood, that Rev. P Aasman has a call to the church in Launceston, that Revs. R. Bredenhof, B. De Jong,

and R. Vermeulen had declined calls, and the continuing needs of the Drs. De Jong and Gootjes and their families.

The chairman asked the questions set out in Article 44 of the Church Order. None of the churches needed the help, or advice of Classis.

Br. D. Winkel sent a letter requesting that his permission to speak an edifying word be extended for a year. This request was granted by Classis.

The reports of the church visits to the churches of Ancaster, Chatham, Glanbrook, Grand Rapids, Hamilton (Cornerstone), Kerwood, and London were tabled and discussed.

The convening church for the next classis will be Hamilton (Cornerstone). The suggested date is May 21, 2014. The suggested officers are: Rev. K.A. Kok (chairman), Rev. J.E. Ludwig (vice chairman), and Rev. R. Vermeulen (clerk).

The personal question period is made use of. The chairman determined that nothing censurable was said, or done in the meeting; he thanked the brothers for their cooperation. The Acts are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved.

The chairman asks the brothers to sing Psalm 133:1, 2 and closes in prayer.

For Classis Ontario West, March 19, 2014,  
Rev. K.A. Kok, Vice Chairman (e.t.) **C**

*Cornelis Van Dam*  
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at the Canadian Reformed  
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### **Kingdoms Apart**

**Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed. *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*  
Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012**

**Additional Information: xl + 284 pages. Also available electronically in Kindle**

This is an important book which in a constructive way interacts with the so-called Two Kingdom teaching. At issue is the question how Christ and his kingdom relate to our current culture. There are some important differences between the way neo-Calvinism, in the line of Kuyper, and the Two Kingdoms perspective answer that question.

#### **Two views**

In his introduction, the editor, Ryan McIlhenny, a professor at Providence Christian College in California, notes that neo-Calvinism's key claim is that God's sovereignty extends to every square inch of the cosmos. Thus, as Christians pursue their cultural mandate to subdue, rule, fill, and tend creation (Gen 1:26), this pursuit has to be done in full accord with God's intent for his world. This understanding has enormous implications for how one engages the culture. There is the need to witness to the gospel of Christ's redeeming work, to apply God's norms to the cultural and the political life of our times, to challenge the tyranny of sin over the world, and to call back (or buy back, as in redeem) the created order to its original state as God intended. With Satan pushing back, we experience the antithesis. The renewed mind (Rom 12:2) compels Christians to destroy "arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor 10:5).

The Two Kingdoms perspective as articulated by an important spokesman, Professor David VanDrunen of Westminster Seminary California, differs in significant ways. He asserts that the cultural mandate is no longer relevant for Christians today. In his popular exposition, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* (2010), VanDrunen writes that Scripture "requires a distinction between the holy things of Christ's heavenly kingdom and the common things of the present world" (26). The rationale is that



there are two kingdoms: the common kingdom which God preserves according to his promises given after the great flood (Gen 8:20-9:17) and the redemptive kingdom whose citizens are the redeemed whom God is gathering together in the church.

Christians live as members of both kingdoms.

They rejoice to be citizens of heaven by their church membership but also recognize that for the time being they are living in Babylon as exiles, striving for justice and excellence as Christians (15, 26). Although on the surface this all seems reasonable and many good observations are made, the implications drawn from these distinctions are considerable. In general, Christians are not to seek an objectively unique Christian way of pursuing cultural activities (168). More specifically when it comes to education, VanDrunen ends up downplaying the significance of Christian education and questioning whether the adjective "Christian" can be attached to non-theological fields of learning (179-187). With respect to politics, VanDrunen asserts that since this is a matter of the common kingdom, speaking of Christian political activity can be misleading, since Scripture speaks only in a general way of civil government and political responsibilities (198). The net effect of his reasoning is to downplay specifically Christian action to influence the political process.

These Two Kingdom views are discussed and contested in *Kingdoms Apart*. The book is divided into three major parts. The first is "Kingdom Reign and Rule."

#### **Kingdom reign and rule**

In the opening chapter, "The Restoration of All Things to Proper Order: An Assessment of the 'Two Kingdoms/Natural Law' Interpretation of Calvin's Public Theology," Cornel Venema, a professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, takes issue with the Two Kingdom interpretation that Calvin sharply distinguished between the civil or natural kingdom and the ecclesiastical kingdom. According to the Two Kingdom view, natural law is to be the norm for human conduct within the civil kingdom and the Scriptures are to be the norm for the ecclesial

kingdom. In other words, a distinctively Christian culture can only be advocated within the sphere of the church. Venema, however, concludes that this is not an accurate representation of Calvin's views. "It is impossible to restrict the spiritual kingdom of Christ to the realm of the church, as VanDrunen suggests, since the obligations of obedience to the law within the spiritual government of Christ are as extensive and farreaching as the demands of God's moral law" (32). Also, the "claim that the Scriptures are principally a norm for the conduct of believers in the ecclesiastical kingdom, and not in the natural kingdom, is belied by Calvin's theology and practice throughout his life and ministry in Geneva" (32). Indeed, "Calvin's public theology offers a coherent and integrated conception of the sovereign and gracious rule of Christ over the entire range of the believer's activities and callings" (32).

In chapter 2, "Calvin, Natural Law, and the Two Kingdoms," Gene Haas, a professor at Redeemer University College, deals with similar issues and comes to similar conclusions. Natural law alone is not a sufficient guide for government to make laws to govern human social life. The law of the civil domain is to be based on the Decalogue. Although Calvin clearly distinguished between the Two Kingdoms, "believers should be active members of the civil realm, both as subjects and as rulers. . . believers are called to engage in various activities of social life so as to fulfill their mandate to have dominion over creation under the lordship of Christ, the second Adam" (60). Contrary to Van Drunen's claims, "Calvin did consider the teaching of Scripture to have a role in directing and guiding the ruler and laws of the civil realm" (61).

Nelson Kloosterman, executive director of Worldview Resources International, discusses "Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck" in chapter 3 and demonstrates that although there are tensions in Bavinck's thinking about natural law, these should not be elevated to irreconcilable themes. With respect to the Two Kingdoms, Kloosterman shows that although Christians are pilgrims, everything they do must be directed to the glory of God and that includes engaging the culture and getting involved in the civil affairs of the nation. "For Bavinck, church and world, grace and nature, faith and reason, although distinguishable, are best understood as integrated in Christ Jesus" (73).

## Kingdom citizenship

Part 2 of the book, "Kingdom Citizenship" has a notable feature which is a highlight of this book, namely Kloosterman's translation (complete with appropriate annotations) of two speeches by S.G. de Graaf, the well-known author of the four volume *Promise and Deliverance*. Kloosterman also provided an excellent introduction to these speeches which are entitled "Christ and the Magistrate" and "Church and State." These addresses were delivered in 1939 in the tense time when Hitler had invaded Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland and Jews were being terrorized. The 1936 Synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands had spoken against unscriptural principles, such as the nationalistic totalitarian state as being incompatible with membership in a Reformed church. In this context De Graaf spelled out "his biblical-theological vision of an integrated, comprehensive, historically concrete lordship of Jesus Christ." And Kloosterman added: "We must thank God for the continuing biblical vision for Christian cultural obedience that is *fueled* by the pulpit, *formed* by corporate public worship, and made forever *fruitful* by the wholelifetransforming power of the gospel" (94).

Timothy R. Scheuers, described in the book as an M. Div. candidate at Mid-America Reformed Seminary at the time of his writing, discusses "Dual Citizenship, Dual Ethic? Evaluating the Two Kingdom Perspective on the Christian in Culture." In an engaging and helpful chapter 5, he correctly affirms that Christ is lord of all our life, both in the church and in the public square. He concludes that even while the Christian "pilgrim fixes his gaze firmly on the future, his hands are busy at work, cultivating God's creation in the glorious hope of the New Jerusalem" (153).

In chapter 6, John Halsey Wood, Jr., an independent scholar, gives an interesting account of Abraham Kuyper's revolutionary proposal to separate church and state as discussed in Kuyper's three volume work, *Common Grace*. These views are brought into sharp focus by also profiling the opposition he received from his contemporary, Philip Hoedemaker.

In chapter 7, Branson Parler, a professor at Kuyper College, shows key differences between the Two Kingdom vision along with Kuyper's notion of common grace



over against the cultural views of the early church father Augustine and the Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder. While the Two Kingdom doctrine and Kuyper's common grace assert that fallen humanity can still function well with respect to its immediate cultural task, Augustine and Schilder maintained that humanity can only do its task properly when it is done in God's service. There is to be no sharp division between the cultural and the religious. Religion and politics or religion and culture are not two distinct spheres but different forms of serving God. In this chapter several highlights of Schilder's thinking on Christ and culture are helpfully brought to the fore. It is good to see Schilder's heritage being used in North America.

### Kingdom living

The final part of the book, "Kingdom Living," contains three essays. Scott A. Swanson, a professor at Providence Christian College, gives a detailed and edifying study of Revelation 11:15 and concludes among other things that we must confront the political idolatries of our times with the all-encompassing claims of Christ's lordship. At the same time Scripture warns against any triumphalistic

overconfidence (224-225). The contribution of Jason Lief, a professor at Dort College, has the title "Eschatology, Creation, and Practical Reason: A Reformational Interpretation of the Two Kingdoms Perspective." One of his conclusions is that "if we are going to use the language of the Two Kingdoms at all, we must insist that the two spheres inform and interpenetrate each other within the context of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (248). The editor's concluding chapter, "Christian Witness as a Redeemed Culture," brings together the various themes of the book and forms a fitting conclusion. He shows how Christians need to be culturally engaged and in God's providence can transform culture. He notes, for example, that "along with the preaching of the Word, the doing of good works by every Christian – works done out of grateful response to what Christ has already done – can have a radical cultural impact" (273); and, "Christians serve in culture exactly because they have been redeemed; their redemption now surrounds everything they do and consequently communicates that redeemed identity to the world. Christians *are* redeemed culture" (275).

There is much food for thought here. This is a book to be read and studied. Highly recommended!

