

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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13 Reasons and helping struggling teens

THINKING OF LEAVING YOUR CHURCH?

CLARION KIDS

YOU ASKED

13 Reasons Why

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Is there anything positive that can be said about 13 Reasons Why?

13 Reasons Why, the Netflix show about a beautiful girl who commits suicide, is very popular among the younger generation. Apparently, the show was tweeted about eleven million times in the month after its release on March 31st this year! Reaction among the older generation has been mixed. While film critics gave the show a high rating (eighty-six percent on Rotten Tomatoes), educators and parents have been less enthusiastic.

Soon after the show was released, the Ontario Ministry of Education issued a warning to teachers not to use *13 Reasons Why* as a classroom tool because it is “graphic and potentially triggering for vulnerable young people.” Similarly, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board issued a warning to families, informing them that *13 Reasons Why* is causing concern in the educational community because “it has graphic content related to suicide, glamorization of suicidal behaviour and negative portrayals of helping professionals, which may prevent youth from seeking help.”¹ Similar warnings have been issued by organizations such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and the Centre for Suicide Prevention (SCP).

Now, I can imagine some of our readers saying: Why should we even talk about this? Christian families should not have a Netflix subscription and our young people should not even be able to see this. To which I can only respond by saying: Dear reader, most families do have a Netflix subscription these days, and many of our teenagers have already seen the show, with or without their parents being aware of it. So, we should not bury our heads in the sand and pretend that this does not affect us.

Teenage girl

13 Reasons Why is based on a book with the same title by Jay Asher. The book as such can be read in four to five hours. The Netflix show has expanded the story to become a thirteen-episode drama series. The show tells the story of a teenage girl (Hannah Baker) who dies by suicide and leaves behind a set of cassette tapes to be listened to by the people whom she holds responsible for making her life unbearable – thirteen people all in all. For example, there is a guy who made a “Who’s Hot, Who’s Not” list of all the girls in class and put Hannah down as having the “best ass.” There is a guy who let another guy rape his girlfriend when she was drunk and unconscious at a party, while Hannah was hiding in the room. Later, at another party, Hannah herself is raped by the same guy. And then there is a teacher at school (the guidance counselor) who fails to understand the seriousness of Hannah’s situation when she comes to see him. Later that same day, she commits suicide. All in all, this is a story about a young girl who is full of hope in the beginning but gradually descends into despair as a result of being bullied, betrayed, “slut shamed,” and even raped.

Is there anything positive that can be said about *13 Reasons Why*? I guess a show like this can make us aware of things that are going on in today’s youth culture. It can open our eyes for challenges that teenagers are facing: social insecurity, peer pressure, self-centredness, resulting in many teens feeling lonely and vulnerable. From a cinematographic perspective, I can see that film critics give the show high ratings.

However, based on what I’ve seen (I read the book and I watched the first three episodes), I agree with the many reviewers who have said that this show should not be on the

list of recommended viewing for teenagers. For various reasons. First, the show glamorizes suicide. Hannah, the main character, is not only a victim of what others have done to her. She is also the hero of the story. The way her situation goes from bad to worse makes her decision to end her life seem acceptable. This is not a message teenagers need to hear, especially not those who are mentally vulnerable and prone to imitate negative behaviour. Second, by sending out the tapes Hannah is basically taking revenge on all the people whom she holds responsible for

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 16 begins with a guest editorial from Dr. Arjan de Visser, "13 Reasons Why." This may be a familiar title, as it is the name of a new and very popular Netflix show. Dr. de Visser gives some insight and answers into questions that many Christian viewers may have regarding this show.

Rev. Rob Schouten has written an article entitled, "So You're Thinking of Leaving Your Church." This article addresses a number of reasons that CanRC members may wish to withdraw their membership, and shares many questions that we can ask ourselves or those expressing such a desire, in order to spark some in depth thought and conversation on the topic.

This issue contains a report on Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College's 2017 graduation and several of our regular columns: Treasures New and Old, Clippings on Politics and Religion, *Clarion* Kids, and You Asked. There is also a Canticle and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

- 446 GUEST EDITORIAL**
13 Reasons Why
- 450 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
Not Satisfied to be Saved Alone
- 451 So You're Thinking of Leaving Your Church**
- 455 CLIPPINGS ON POLITICS AND RELIGION**
- 456 Report on Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College**
- 458 CLARION KIDS**
- 459 YOU ASKED**
- 462 CANTICLE**
- 463 PRESS RELEASE**

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her death. This is accepted without reservation and there is no indication that taking revenge is morally wrong. On the contrary, it almost seems like suicide – and leaving behind sarcastic suicide notes – is a viable way to teach others a lesson. Third, I have not seen the relevant episodes myself, but I understand that the movie goes into great detail showing the rape events and the suicide, much more so than the book on which the movie is based. There is no good

I'm afraid that we as parents have been quite naïve about the effect that social media has on the lives of our teenagers

purpose to be achieved by having our teenagers watch such scenes. On the contrary, it may leave lasting images in their memories and plant wrong ideas in their heads.

What should parents do? I would suggest that parents talk with their teenage children and find out if they have seen *13 Reasons Why* on Netflix, if their friends have seen it, if

they plan on watching it themselves, etc. If it is not an issue in your teenager's life, it is still worth having the discussion. If it seems like your teenager may be tempted to watch the show at some point in time, it may be a good idea to watch a few episodes together, and have a good discussion after each episode. You will probably learn lots about what is going on in the world of young people today. And hopefully you will be able to help your child develop a Christian perspective on these things. Hopefully, your teenager will come to the decision: I do not want to see any more of this.

Youth suicide

Unfortunately, youth suicide has become “a topic” in our day and age. In the news we regularly hear about teen suicide, how it seems to happen more often than before, and how it seems to come in waves. We have all heard the reports about waves of suicides in certain indigenous communities. As I'm writing this article, there is a report in the *National Post* today about Canadian Rangers patrolling the streets of a First Nation village in northern Ontario, with the aim of catching young people before they harm themselves. Each ranger is equipped with a first-aid kit and knife – just in case they need to cut down a child who might be found hanging from a tree. . .² That's a pretty depressing situation! However, it's not just in indigenous communities that the rate of youth suicide has gone up. A survey done in



2016 among Canadian youth found that twenty-two per cent of them had seriously considered attempting suicide in the last twelve months.³

There are no numbers on suicidal thinking or suicide attempts by Christian youth, but I do know that in our own circles there are reports that teen depression and teen cutting is on the rise. One really has to feel for the parents among us who have had to go through the experience of discovering that their teenage son or daughter has gotten into the habit of cutting himself/herself. Of course, we should feel even more compassion for the teenagers themselves who get caught up in this!

It is hard to determine why this horrible trend is affecting Christian teenagers as well. It seems to me that various factors play a role here. One factor is the influence of rock bands that glamorize teen angst, gloominess, and even death. For example, there is an American rock band with the name Teen Suicide (what a name) who brought out an album entitled *I will be my own hell because there is a devil inside my body* (what a title).

Another factor is the effect of social media. Our kids are always online, texting with friends, posting stuff on Facebook, reading what everybody else is saying on Twitter and other social media. Even when the kids come home after school, they cannot “turn off” because they always have their phone with them. Of course, another effect of always being “connected” is that there is less opportunity for family time and for personal devotions. The last thing you do as a teenager before you go sleep is not to read your Bible and pray but to check your phone and tweet something. A teacher at one of our Christian high schools told me that she has seen a significant rise in students living with anxi-

ety and depression during the last ten to fifteen years. I'm afraid that we as parents have been quite naïve about the effect that social media has on the lives of our teenagers.

Help

What can we do to help Christian teenagers who are struggling with depression and suicidal thoughts? I don't have much space anymore but let me make a few suggestions. First, talk to them and remind them of the promises of God, signed and sealed in their baptism. Remind them that the Triune God has adopted them as his children. This is such a rich reality: you are a *child of God* (God in heaven is your Father), you belong to Jesus Christ (he bought you with his precious blood), you are a *temple of the Holy Spirit* (he dwells in you to comfort you). Second, urge them to do what needs to be done: flee from anything that promotes negativity and destruction (stop listening to those songs, stop watching those movies) and instead, seeking the Lord while he may be found. It means following the example of David who wrote: "You have said, 'Seek my face.' My heart says to you, 'Your face, LORD, do I seek.' Hide not your face from me" (Ps 27:8, 9) Third, urge them to believe that God is the giver of life, even life eternal. Urge them to believe that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the resurrection and the life. Urge them to take the words of David and make them their own: "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!" (Ps 27:13). Finally,

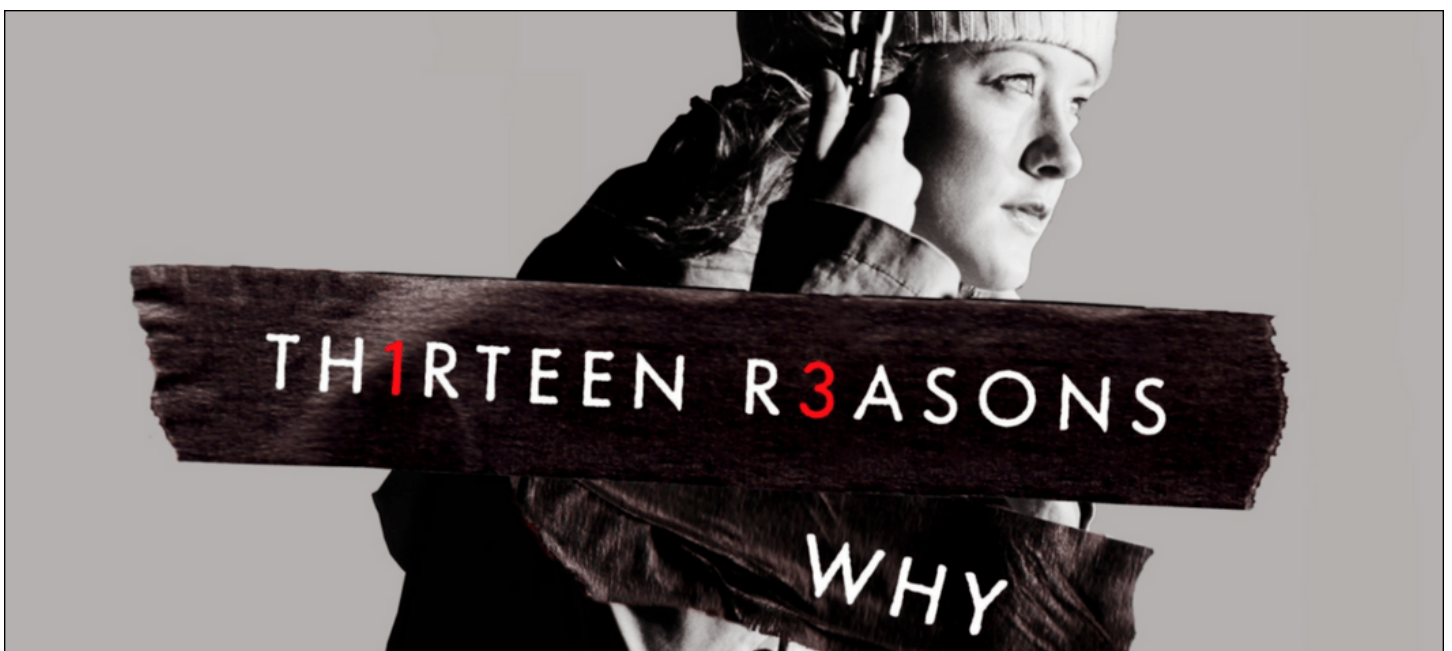


as parents and teenagers we are part of the communion of saints. Seek help within the Christian community! There are Christian counselors and Christian counseling organizations. Ask your pastor, and he should be able to recommend someone to you.

¹ See <https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/blog/13-reasons-why-suggestions-for-families/>

² Douglas Quan, "Volunteer Rangers on lookout for suicide." *National Post*, June 29, 2017.

³ Report Teen Talk 2016, see <http://globalnews.ca/news/2925079/22-of-canadian-teens-considered-suicide-this-past-year-kids-help-phone/>.





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Not Satisfied to be Saved Alone

***"If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here."
Exodus 33:15***

This meditation was originally published in this magazine in 2005.

The ground-up ashes of their golden calf linger in their stomachs, the Levites have killed about 3,000 of their brethren, and the people have suffered a plague of death. But worse than all this, the Lord has said that he will no longer accompany the people of Israel. Otherwise he might destroy them on the way due to their recurring idolatry. Moses alone would live in the presence of the Lord, but not Israel. Here is what the Lord had said to Moses alone: "My presence will go with *you*, and I will give *you* rest" (33:14). It was at this point that Moses replied, "If your presence does not go with *us*, do not send *us* up from here. . . What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" Moses understood that God's living, gracious, and holy presence constituted Israel as a *nation*.

This text depends on a very important interplay of the singular and the plural. The Lord has declared that he is abandoning his people and will go only with Moses (singular), but Moses pleads in response that these people are God's people and thus God must go with all of them (plural). Moses is unwilling to abandon his post as mediator and prophet for this people. Either the Lord goes with them all, or they remain where they are.

Moses could have given in to pride and agreed that he and his own descendants ought to be the new Israel. Instead, he shows that he is interested in his salvation only within the context of the whole nation being under God. He is willing to deny himself in the hope of securing the covenant blessings for all Israel. Don't send us on our way, unless you come with us all!

Israel's mediator was subjected to a thorough-going test. While God on the one hand reveals his great wrath against Israel for their idolatry, he also tests his office bearer Moses to see whether Moses will stand in the gap on behalf of God's rebellious covenant people. Moses does. His words prove his faithfulness.

In this event the church is given a window through which it receives an early glimpse of the great office bearer, Jesus Christ. God gave Moses to Israel to point ahead to the Archetype. By God's grace, and ultimately because of Christ's cross, Moses acted obediently and selflessly (in this instance). He truly did stand in the gap, and was accepted.

If the Lord could say to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name" (33:17), then what has he said to his only-begotten Son? We know that "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses" because he was faithful not just as a

servant like Moses, but as the Son of God (Heb 3:3-6). His faithfulness to God surpasses that of Moses by innumerable degrees, for He ate the ashes of the golden calf, He suffered the sword of his brothers, and he came under death-plague of God's wrath. All for us. Whereas God offered to make a new people out of Moses, he put his own Son under condemnation. This Son, our precious Saviour, would not and did not return to his glory until he had secured the presence of God for us. He did not return alone with the words, "Here am I, to do your will," but in the company of many, with these words: "Here am I, *and the children God has given me*" (Heb 2:13).

Do you know yourself as one of those children, saved by his precious blood? Do you live in the presence of God? In Christ, the redeemed people are assured, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" (Heb 13:5). But none of us is an island, and so we should be careful not to read that promise as though it is only for individuals. Here God's presence is promised for all of us *as his church*. None of us should be satisfied to be saved alone. We belong in a body within which we must also seek the salvation of our brothers and sisters. Ask God to show you where you are falling short in this matter, and then act in ways that serve the salvation of the body of Christ.



So You're Thinking of Leaving Your Church...

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As a pastor in one of our Reformed churches, I have had the job from time to time of meeting with people who are in the process of leaving the church. I enjoy many aspects of my calling, but this isn't one of them. In the majority of cases, I find myself speaking with members who have already made up their minds. Even though they have not shared their thoughts with me previously, they have been unhappy for a while and have already decided to leave. They're heading out the door to attend a local mega-church or perhaps a community church in their neighbourhood. I wonder if you are such a person. If not you, perhaps someone who is quite close to you is contemplating such a move.

Reasons for leaving

What factors lead people to leave one of our Canadian or American Reformed Churches? Reasons vary greatly. Sometimes people leave because they have had relational struggles with other members or with some of the church leaders. If people feel that they or others have not been dealt with justly, it becomes easy to think of leaving as a form of self-protection or even as a form of protest. In other cases, members leave because they are in a dating relationship or getting married to a person who does not have the same church affiliation.

More commonly, I think, people leave because they feel a desire for something new in the way of music. They are tired of the *Book of Praise* and just want something fresh and different. Sometimes, people attend a worship service at a new church out of pure curiosity. They just want to know what's going on but are soon caught up in a matrix of exciting new programs as well as a whole new community of believers. When questioned, they might say, "But I just feel happier and more at home in this new church."

The least common reason I've heard over the last thirty years is doctrine. In fact, many people who leave say quite forcefully, "I don't disagree with any of the doctrines con-

fessed by the Canadian Reformed churches." However, people certainly have left our Reformed churches because they didn't agree with a decision of one of our synods.

Whatever your reasons might be for considering moving on, you would probably agree that such a decision is very important. It will probably affect your faith and your life with Christ for the rest of your life. If you have a family, your decision will also affect your children and perhaps many future generations. Because these decisions are so important, I thought I would put to paper some principles that ought to guide our thinking about church membership. Please hear me out and feel free to respond to what I'm saying by way of an email to me or in the form of a letter to the editor.

One legitimate reason

As far as I can tell from Scripture, the only legitimate reason to leave a church is when it becomes unfaithful to God. Of course, this is never an overnight process. When a church no longer preaches, teaches, confesses, and defends the truth of God's Word, then members need to seek reformation and renewal. Simply walking away when there is a breach in the doctrinal integrity of the church is not an option for those who love the church. Our calling as believers includes struggling for the truth. Such work involves private and public discussion, engagement with church leaders, and potentially approaching the assemblies of the churches. Only when a church hardens itself by holding on to teaching which is not biblical are we free to take our leave – and then we do it with great sorrow in our hearts.

Promises made

People who are contemplating leaving their church should consider the scope of the membership promises they have made. When we say "I do" before God and the church in our public profession of faith, we can be held to this commitment.

People have sometimes told me that they didn't really understand the extent of the commitment of their profession of faith and therefore can't be held accountable. To put some light on this, consider that I've actually heard the same thing said by an unhappy husband who was considering a divorce. He said that he had no idea what he was getting into when he made his vows and therefore couldn't be reasonably held to them.

It will probably affect your faith and your life with Christ for the rest of your life

It's true that people don't always understand the full implications of their marital vows at the time of making them but this does not leave them

with an escape route. The whole point of the vow is to create certainty in the face of an unknown future. The same is true of membership promises made by Christians. Even if individuals didn't really see the full implications of those promises at the time of making them, they are bound by them before the face of God (see Eccl 5:1-7).

Priority of doctrine

So let's bring out a few aspects of the membership promises used in our Reformed churches. First of all, profession of faith involves making a statement that you "wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God" that is "taught here in this Christian church." You also promised to "continue in this doctrine in life and death, rejecting all heresies and errors conflicting with God's Word." The way these promises are formulated echoes Scripture which frequently highlights the necessity of sound doctrine and the need to maintain it (see 2 Tim 1:13; Titus 1:3; Phil 1:27; Jude 3). The Word of God is a sacred trust with which we may not tamper. So as you consider leaving your congregation, you should ask questions like these:

- Am I continuing in the doctrine of the Word of God?
- Do I even think doctrine is important? Why or why not?
- Could I identify the specifically Reformed doctrines of my church?
- Have I spent any time in recent times reflecting on the confessions of the church? How important to me are they? Why or why not?
- What's been influencing my thinking about matters of doctrine? What books have I been reading? Which online speaker has become important to me?

- If I'm indifferent to doctrine, does that show anything about my relationship to the God of all truth who has revealed himself in Scripture?
- Is my thinking about my church membership directed by my passion for truth?
- Are there heresies and errors in the church to which I am attracted? How do I know? Do I even really care?
- What does the doctrinal teaching of the new church look like when compared to the standard of the Three Forms of Unity to which I pledged my allegiance?
- Is the preaching in this church truly biblical, that is, flowing directly from the text of the Bible? Does it truly expound the Word of God in a serious manner? Or is it designed to maximize church growth by catering to what people want to hear?
- If I have any doctrinal issues with my church, am I discussing them honestly with my church leaders?
- If I'm not happy with the preaching in my church, have I discussed this with my pastor? Have I sincerely prayed for my pastor? Have I encouraged him by my response to the Word of God? Does he recognize that I care about him as a person?
- Is it possible that I have developed a consumer's attitude toward the church so that I think it's natural to just go where the product pleases me?
- If I think I'm not being "fed," could it be because I'm not spiritually hungry or because I have a relationship issue with the pastor that I need to work on?

Covenant loyalty

The second promise of your profession of faith focus on a public acknowledgment of God's "covenant promises, which have been signified and sealed to you in your baptism." If you were baptized as an infant, profession of faith was your response. You said *yes* and *amen* to the promises sealed to you in baptism. You acknowledged that our sovereign God included you in his church and congregation. He did this without asking you or waiting for a decision made by your own free will. So if you are thinking of leaving the church, you should ask:

- Am I being loyal to the God of my baptism?
- If God placed me in this church and congregation, am I actually free to leave? On what grounds can I leave the church where God placed me?
- Can I leave my church to join another one which doesn't even acknowledge God's covenant promises made to me in my baptism?

- Am I showing respect toward the church body in which I was lovingly nurtured in the promises and obligations of the covenant?
- Is it a sign of spiritual maturity to walk away from the body and the people which lovingly expended great energy in forming you as a disciple of Christ?

Radical self-denial and worship

The third promise of profession of faith contains mention of “crucifying” our old nature. The language here is shocking and it’s meant to be that. Being a faithful disciple of Christ means a daily process of self-denial. We are called to surrender our whole life to Christ. This includes our thoughts, words, deeds, and even our emotions. At times, the work of putting to death our old self is very painful. It

The whole point of the vow is to create certainty in the face of an unknown future

goes entirely against our natural bent of mind. Frequently we are called to resist what our mind and spirit and body are craving.

The implication of this question of the form for our current topic should be clear to us.

Strong desires and fulfilling emotional experiences are never self-justifying. The call to radical self-denial alerts us to the truth that a strong desire to take our leave from the church to which we present belong doesn’t mean it’s right. Our strong desires are often quite wrong. When we took our stand at our profession of faith we promised that we wouldn’t make decisions based simply on what we want or prefer.

Even if a person feels emotionally more fulfilled when worshiping in a preferred gathering or feels happier when certain musical styles are employed, this doesn’t mean that he is justified in leaving the church for such reasons. For these reasons, people who are thinking about leaving the church should ask questions like these:

- Am I prepared to surrender my emotions to the Lordship of Christ?
- Am I ready to let Jesus veto what I so strongly desire?
- Do I recognize that the verbal (doctrinal) content of Christian songs matters quite a lot more than the melody?
- Have I carefully thought about why my current church has such a strong preference for singing the psalms and desires hymns which are psalm-like?

- Have I been willing to consider that my musical taste has been to a greater or lesser degree shaped and formed by the pagan culture in which I live with the result that I am no longer able to appreciate the God-centeredness of the psalms and psalm-like hymns?
- Do I recognize that truth should trump emotion every time in the Christian life?
- Do I think that my negative emotional responses to the worship services of the Reformed church could be changed? Why or why not?

Being a living member of the church

The last promise of the profession of faith is strongly worded. “Do you firmly resolve to commit your whole life to the Lord’s service as a living member of his church?” Commitment to God involves commitment to the church. This commitment won’t be easy. That’s why a promise of “firm resolve” is needed.

A living member is one who does more than warm the pew on Sunday. Such a member is fully engaged with God and with God’s people. He loves the Lord and loves the Lord’s church. She worships with God’s people and participates in the life of the body. *A living, engaged, energetically involved member of the body of Christ will find it very difficult to leave her current church.* On the other hand, a marginally involved member, someone who hasn’t been using his talents and gifts to build up the body, may find it much easier to leave. If you are thinking about leaving your Reformed church, please ask these questions:

- Have I been praying regularly for my church where I am currently a member?
- Have I been looking for opportunities to use my talents and gifts for the benefit of others?
- Have I faithfully served my fellow members?
- Have I worshiped faithfully?
- Have I rejoiced with those who rejoice and wept with those who weep?
- Have I opened my home for other members and for guests among God’s people?
- Did I step forward when volunteers were needed?
- Ask not: “What has my church done for me lately?” but “What am I doing for my church?”
- Have you considered how your decision to leave will be hurtful, confusing, difficult and painful for those you leave behind?
- Do you realize that a congregation is a covenantal community in which we are bound to God in Christ and thus also to each other?

- If a married person reserves the right to leave if things don't quite work out, have they really understood their marriage vows? Similarly, if I'm reserving the right to leave my church because I'm not fully happy, have I ever really understood my profession of faith promises?

The question of submission

Finally, the last question of the Form for Profession of Faith also involves a promise of strong accountability to the church. A church member promises to "submit

Frequently we are called to resist what our mind and spirit and body are craving

willingly to the admonition and discipline of the church" regarding matters of doctrine and life.

Before you ever have any lifestyle or doctrine issues, you make a promise to be in submission about them to your church and her leaders. The Bible contains many exhortations to

honour and obey your church leaders. Our thoughts about potentially leaving our Reformed church should be put on the table with our church leaders at a very early stage. Otherwise, we lose the safety of accountability and we are in danger of acting individualistically. So here are some last questions to ponder if you are thinking about leaving the Reformed church.

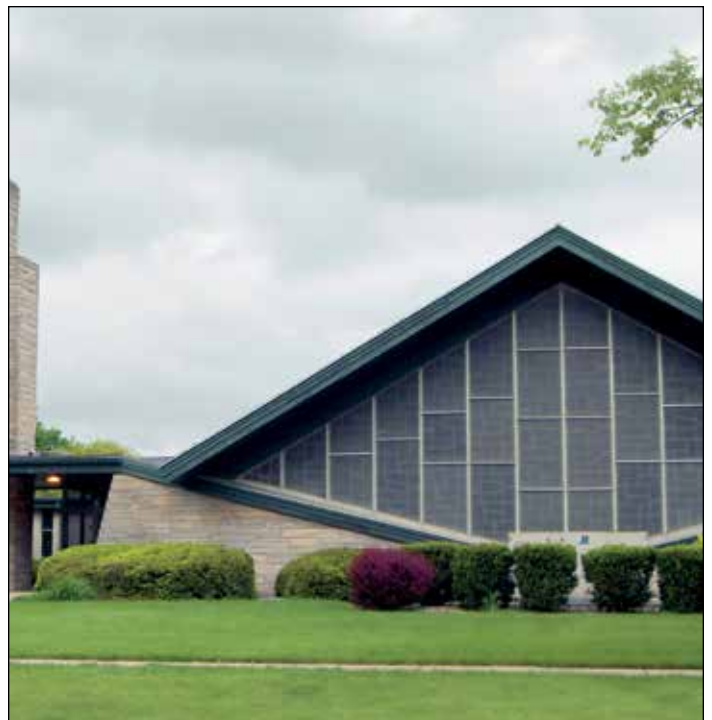
- What is my opinion about my church leaders? Do I fundamentally respect them or not?
- Do I have a basic attitude of submission to my church leaders or not?
- Do I pray for the elders and deacons and the ministers? Do I have genuine appreciation for their visits to me?
- Am I ready to be completely candid with my church leaders?
- Under what circumstances would I be justified in not yielding to the advice and direction of my church leaders?
- If I were to leave my current church without the blessing of my church leaders, shouldn't that trouble me?
- If I'm not ready to let the church leaders in on my thinking and my decision, and if I'm not prepared to be guided by them, can I expect God's blessing on my actions?

- Does the church I am thinking of attending have elders who will hold me accountable in regard to my doctrine and life? Does it have identifiable standards of doctrine and conduct? What are they?

Conclusion

It goes without saying that much more could be written on this topic. Perhaps you can't relate to what has been written because some other circumstance not mentioned here is the driving factor for you. Perhaps you've been deeply hurt or abused by another member and don't know how you can possibly stay. Perhaps your pastor has overlooked you or an elder slighted you.

Everyone has their own personal story and I don't claim to have covered everything in this brief overview of the matter. Nonetheless, when it comes to leaving your Canadian Reformed church or some other faithful Reformed church in order to attend the local mega-church or non-confessional community church, only one way is right. Either it's right to leave or it isn't. I think careful, prayerful, and thorough responses to the questions I have posed will show you the way forward to faithful church membership. Let's be honest to God and to each other and let's not forget our capacity to be deceived and to deceive ourselves. C



Equal Education Rights in Canada?

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The attempts to marginalize Christianity in the life of our nation continues. Two ongoing cases relate to elementary education.

The first concerns whether the state can force children to participate in classroom activities that violate their religious beliefs. A father in Hamilton, Ontario, asked for advance notice from the public school board when certain subjects (like sexuality, gender, and marriage) were to be taught contrary to his Christian faith so that he could remove his children from those classes. The Board refused to accommodate and maintained that excusing students from certain classes would send a message to the other students that there was something wrong with what was taught in that class and so risk discrimination against them. All should participate in order to encourage a positive school climate. The Ontario Superior Court of Justice agreed with the Board. Interestingly, that Court did suggest that if the father's concerns about false teaching remain unaddressed, he may need to seek other alternatives as independent schools or homeschooling.

This case (*E.T. v. Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board*) was appealed and scheduled to be heard on June 26 at the Ontario Court of Appeal. The Christian Legal Fellowship is intervening in the case and in its statement to the court (*factum*) explores the logical conclusions of the School Board's position that it must promote a "positive school environment."

Does this require that all students participate in the celebration of views that contradict their religious beliefs? If so, how far does the school board's authority to promote a "positive school environment" extend? Can the Board compel students to suppress personal beliefs which are deemed inconsistent with the Board's vision of "inclusivity"? If a student were to respectfully express religiously informed views on an issue such as marriage, sexuality, or gender identity that might be contrary to the 'state-approved' view, must the Board take action to silence, correct, or discipline them in the name of "promoting a positive school climate"?

The *factum* notes that answers to these questions have broad implications for all religious minorities in public education and the public square.

Another case that will go to court addresses the issue whether the board of Battle River School District in Alberta can order Cornerstone Christian Academy, which operates in partnership with this public board, to refrain from reading or studying "any scripture that could be considered offensive to particular individuals." This happened on May 27, 2017. The Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms (president John Carpay) is representing this school in its conflict with the board. The Board's chair claimed that human rights legislation prevents religious schools from teaching what a child, or a parent, might find "offensive." But Alberta allows schools such as Cornerstone Christian Academy to respect the fact that not everyone shares the same belief system or world view. Carpay notes that the school board ignored its own legal agreement with this school which supports the government's objective of providing parent choice through alternative programs.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Canada is a signatory, requires government (including school boards) to respect the liberty of parents "to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions." Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." Members of the school board enjoy the same freedom to send their own kids to schools that align with their beliefs, but they have no right to impose their own ideology on schools they disagree with.

May the court challenges be blessed with the legal protection for the rights of Christians. We may also be very grateful for private Christian schools.

Sources: This article is based on and quoted from the websites of the Christian Legal Fellowship and the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms. ARPA Canada has also highlighted one of these cases on their website.



Report on Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College Graduation

*I can do everything through him who gives me strength
(Phil 4:13; CCRTC theme 2017)*



On Friday, May 26, friends of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College (CCRTC) joined the friends and families of four graduating students of CCRTC's "Class of 2017" for the graduation ceremony at Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton. The event was also livestreamed, allowing those far and near to join the festive occasion.

After words of welcome were expressed by the Chairman of the Board of Governors, Mr. Ken Stel, the speaker for the evening, Dr. Bill DeJong, pastor of nearby Blessings

Christian Church, was introduced. The title of his address was "Give thanks in all circumstances: a pedagogy of gratitude." Dr. DeJong began his address by illustrating how we can subconsciously listen by seeing. This contrasts the fact that we as Christians believe in Christ without having ever seen him; we must see with our ears. This seeing with our ears affects the way that we see the world around us. With Paul we are to give thanks in all circumstances. This is only possible when we base the view of the world around us on the good news that we hear from the Bible. As the graduands set out to teach their students about God, they are to point out that the world is guided by God and absolutely nothing can separate a child of Jesus from his love. As Paul's worldview taught him to be content in all situations, so we too are to be thankful in prosperity and adversity because of the gifts of Christ. Dr. DeJong ended with the example of the ten lepers that were healed by Jesus. All the lepers heard what the Lord said and saw the consequence when they were healed. However, only one returned and thanked Jesus, seeing and praising him for who he is. Just as the leper who returned to Jesus could see what he had heard, so the graduands must see with their ears the Bible's worldview. They (and all of us) are then called to celebrate the gift, praise the Giver, and pass this on to the children they will teach.

In the principal's address, Dr. Christine van Halen took the time to reflect on how the graduating class evolved over the past three years. It started as a sextet, and became a quintet in the second year. As the third year progressed, it changed from a quintet to a quartet. As with musical groupings of any size, each voice plays a part. So it is with this grouping of graduands: Each student is unique and provides a specific timbre that adds to

the whole. Dr. van Halen also reflected on the work that is being done to seek accreditation from the government of Ontario. Part of this task entails meeting many people within the government of Ontario and explaining to them what Covenant Teachers College is all about. While this may be intimidating at first, these meetings have become excellent opportunities to speak of the great hope that we have in the Lord Jesus – and how this hope is taught in our Reformed Christian elementary and secondary schools. The principal concluded her address by refocusing on the graduands and on the gift they had received from their fellow students in the form of an award winning children's book. *Last Stop on Market Street* tells the beautiful story of a nana who teaches her grandson to find beauty where he never even thought to look. The graduands were encouraged to use this book as a stepping stone for telling their students of the many beautiful things in Father's world. The remarks concluded with the prayer that God's favour would continue to rest on the graduates and on Covenant Teachers College so that all may tell the next generation of God's marvelous deeds (Ps 78).

A trio consisting of the registrar, principal, and chairman then conferred the respective diplomas on the four graduands. The Diploma of Teaching was granted to Jessica Kampen, Laura Kottlenberg, Kendra VanderLaan, and De-

idre Wattel. It was also noted with appreciation and thankfulness that all of them have been appointed to teaching positions. After the valedictorians, Laura Kottlenberg and Deidre Wattel, treated the audience to a reflection on their and their classmates' years at Covenant, the principal conveyed warm messages of congratulations received from school communities across Canada.

The annual presentation by WATCH also took place. A cheque of \$5500.00 was presented for use on "non-budget" items. Last year's gift was used to update the furniture in the student lounge; an improvement long overdue and much appreciated. A very large thank you was and is extended to all those who contributed to this drive.

As the evening was concluded, we could once again reflect in thankfulness that the LORD has allowed Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College to function for the past thirty-six years, training teachers for our covenant children. Looking ahead we see challenging opportunities, with the largest being the preparation and submission of the application seeking government accreditation of the two-year program. Yet in all this we know that we must look to the LORD to establish the works of our hands that they may stand to his praise. We, too, may live in the hope of knowing that we can do everything through him who gives us strength.



Clarion Kids

Praise the Lord!

Psalm 150

Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!"

Psalm 150 is all about praising God. We should always praise God every day in everything we do. He has done so many wonderful things and He is so great! We should praise Him with music and dancing and singing. All of creation was made to praise God! God loves it when we sing and make music for Him.

Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this picture!



Word Search

E	P	C	F	E	L	J	S	P	D
B	N	Q	Y	U	P	G	J	A	N
P	O	I	P	M	N	I	N	P	O
U	J	N	R	I	B	C	P	R	I
F	Q	A	R	U	E	A	F	A	T
D	T	T	C	A	O	C	L	I	A
L	S	S	G	I	D	B	S	S	E
S	I	N	G	I	N	G	M	E	R
G	M	F	Y	H	N	G	X	A	C
Q	V	F	C	I	S	U	M	N	T

Creation
Cymbals
Dance

Music
Pipe
Praise

Singing
Strings
Tambourine

Double Puzzle

Unscramble the words, then use the numbered letters to solve the final word.

BIANURTOEM

GICNDNA

SNNIGGI

SAMPSL

by Emily Nijenhuis

William den Hollander
Minister emeritus of the
Bethel Canadian Reformed Church
of Toronto, Ontario
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Q What should we do when baptized members refuse to attend the worship services?

When a non-communicant member repeatedly refuses to attend the worship services while residing with the parents, what disciplinary actions ought to be taken by parents and office bearers in view of lessons learned from Deuteronomy 21:18-21 and the NT command given in 1 Corinthians 5:13? The history of the Form of Excommunication is rather brief, but can there actually be an age limit? Moreover, is “repeated refusal” not a clear indication of a definite choice to only listen to the feelings of the self and to no longer show regard for the Word of God, like our first parents did and like Cain did even in spite of God’s warning (Gen 4:6, 7)?

A This question conjures up a situation that could differ in many nuances given the attitude of the sinner or the situation in the family home. Just the plain fact that a child “refuses to attend the worship services while residing with the parents” could apply to a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old as well as to a twenty-year-old. The “repeated refusals,” also, could denote refusal because the child does not believe at all or because the child is lazy, stubborn, and obnoxious. The home and family situation, too, could make a difference in the way the situation is handled. If the child is the oldest, for instance, the bad example could lead the parents to more drastic measures sooner rather than later, especially if and when the “bad” example means a rebellious attitude, abusive behaviour, and an insulting approach to the parents (which applies not only to the pertinent issue of the question but to any and all situations of contemptuous behaviour). In short, the scenarios are multiplied to which the question pertains; therefore, there is

no one answer or approach that fits all in these cases. In one and all situations, however, love, wisdom, patience, tact, and understanding are of paramount importance!

The questioner makes reference to the directives given in Scripture, e.g. Deuteronomy 21:18-21 in the OT and 1 Corinthians 5:13 in the NT. The way Moses describes the scenario of Deuteronomy 21 we see there a reference to “a glutton and a drunkard.” This does not exclude other persistent vices but it does imply a very serious addiction and stubborn disposition. Parents who love their child dearly will have gone to great lengths in their measures of discipline and chastisement, ending up in total despair and helplessness, before they resort to the step of bringing their child to trial before the elders (knowing what consequence this could have!). Whatever the sin and sinful attitude may be, however, the fact that they can involve the elders of the city and resort to trial and justice shows God’s wisdom and love for the sinner, who no doubt will be heard as well, while the parents are protected against their own despair and anger. At the end of the day, though, parental authority

must be protected, preserved, and defended, justice must be done and seen to be done (publicly!), and God's people must be protected from such corruption of covenantal obligations and warned against abusive or insulting behaviour, sinful attitudes, and contemptuous conduct, etc.

The reference to 1 Corinthians 5:13 (as well as the lesson learned from Deuteronomy 21) brings the process of excommunication into the picture. The sin Paul exposes in this congregation was very serious (a man living with his stepmother) and Paul rebukes the members for their lack of disciplinary action. It's clear that the sinner must be removed from the congregation. Excommunication of any member, communicant or non-communicant, is a remedy toward repentance and return, a measure for the salvation of the sinner and for the holiness of the congregation. It does not mean that the sinner is left to himself completely (continued attention should also aim for this repentance!), but the approach and attitude toward the sinner should clearly express the seriousness of the situation.

The lesson learned from these scriptural references shows that much depends on the nature and seriousness

of the sin and the attitude of the sinner. In the process of parental discipline, admonition, and failure to persuade their child, the assistance of the elders as well becomes an important step in the decision to evict the child from the home. Depending on the specifics in the home situation and the attitude of the child, this decision to evict could be made much sooner than the decision of the elders to pursue church discipline leading to excommunication. Age does play a role in the sense that for a younger teen, measures must be put in place that will facilitate continued care for the child, perhaps in a foster home, home of a family member, or by using the Home Registry our churches in Ontario have in place. As far as the steps of discipline are concerned, the scriptural age of twenty years old (cf. Exod 30:14; 38:26; Num 1:3, 18f.) as directive for maturity and responsibility should be kept in mind in all cases. All in all, the earlier observation bears repeating, namely that love, wisdom, patience, tact, and understanding must be maintained and expressed at every step of the way in which these very difficult situations are handled!

Q Why do we have to fear and tremble?

In Mark 16:16 I read: "Whoever has believed and is baptized will be saved." In Philippians 2:12 I read: "Continue to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." I wonder why, when we are saved, we still have to fear and tremble. Does that not take away our comfort? Do I then have to fear and tremble until I die? Personally I think I do not have to fear and tremble when I have been saved.

A In response to this question, I wish to state up front that the gospel is indeed at once very simple and straight forward *and* far-reaching and all encompassing. The questioner is correct, when quoting Mark 16:16, he says that when we believe we may trust that we are

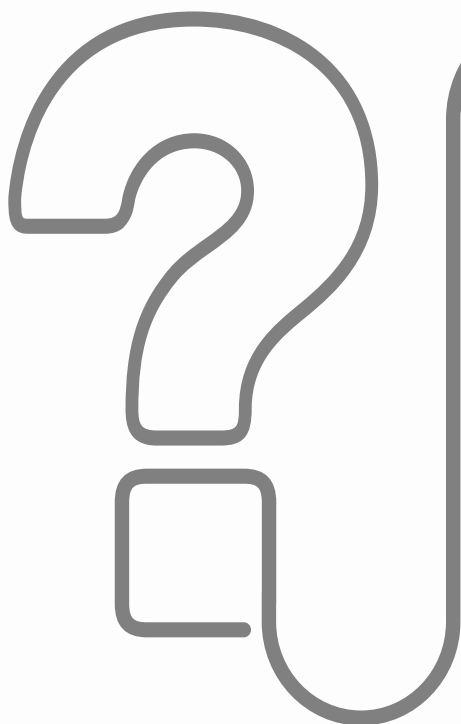
saved. That's the gospel which is revealed in many places, like John 3:16, "That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." At the same time this faith is an all-encompassing and comprehensive reality which requires that we seek our life outside of ourselves, become a new creation, show the fruit of the Spirit, give evidence in our thoughts and words and good works that we surrendered

ourselves to Jesus Christ, live under him as Lord and King, and live to the honour and glory of God again. In short, those who belong to God by a *true* faith in Jesus Christ, are renewed by his Holy Spirit, daily repent of their sins and live with love, joy, and delight according to God's will in all good works!

This is then also where the expression "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" enters the picture. No, that doesn't mean that you have to be afraid (only those who still live in their sins should be, afraid of the judgment of a righteous God!), or that you must be concerned that your chances with God are slim, or that he is a boogeyman from whom we have to hide (the way Adam did when he, trembling, fled from God, BC Art. 17). No, faith and salvation as a work of God are awesome, involving tremendous powers, and are miraculous requiring divine intervention. Against that background we "*fear*," that is we show a deep, deep *respect* for God because of his work in us and with us; we also "*tremble*," deeply impressed as we are regarding all the work God needs to work out in our life (realizing that

the holiest have only a small beginning of this new obedience (HC, Q/A 114).

Of all things, he gave his only Son (incredible!); he shows his grace to us (amazing!); he shows his love to us (awesome!), and he forgives us all our sins (moving!). The fact that the holy and almighty God is your God, who is at work *in* you, and *with* you, and *through* you, and who leads and guides *you*, that (and much more) makes you work out your salvation with all the means of grace, merits, blessings, and benefits of Christ, with the deepest respect (*fear*) and with an eager and willing heart (*trembling*) to show your gratitude to God for all his grace, love, and goodness! As the Lord Jesus said, "Strive to enter," we want to make every effort to obtain all the fruits of Christ's work of salvation in our life, entering his kingdom and seeking its righteousness. The love and joy with which we do this is expressed by Paul in the exhortation to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling!" That's a glorious work which gives us a foretaste of the complete and perfect salvation laid up for us as an inheritance in heaven!



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

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander

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Hezekiah's Prayer of Thanksgiving

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A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery
Isaiah 38:10-20

George van Popta

Genevan 49

1. It seemed to me my life was at an end.
"Must I now through the gates of death de - scend?
Will I be robbed of my re - main - ing years?"
I cried to God as I shed man - y tears.
I said, "I will not see the Lord a - gain,
no more my friends and neigh - bours en - ter - tain."
Though not yet old I felt the end ap - proach - ing.
I wept and called out to my God, la - ment - ing.

2. Just like a shepherd will collapse his tent
so did I think my days were all but spent.
Or as a weaver's cloth is rolled away
so did my sickness cause me to decay.
I have been cut away from off the loom
and all that's left is swept up with a broom.
Throughout the night I waited for the morning
to no avail despite my patient longing.

3. For like a lion he broke all my bones.
I'm like a mourning dove that only moans
or like a swift or thrush that quickly flees
and seeks its safety in among the trees.
My eyes grew weak as I looked to the sky.
I'm troubled, LORD, please help me lest I die.
Throughout the night I waited for the morning
to no avail despite my patient longing.

4. What shall I say? I'm at a loss for words.
What I've experienced came from God, the LORD.
I will walk humbly my remaining years
because of all my anguish and my tears.

Lord, by such things do men and women live;
my spirit, too, finds life in what you give.
Restored to health I was not left to perish.
God let me live! His love and grace I cherish.

5. You kept me from destruction's yawning pit
and you forgave my wrongs; you did acquit
me of my guilt and all my wickedness.
I praise you for your lasting faithfulness.
You cast my sins and evil far away.
behind your back, far from the light of day.
Death and the grave you never hear exulting.
Only the living praise God, as I'm doing.

6. O parents, tell your children, let them know
about this God who saves us from all woe.
Tell them about his love and faithfulness.
Ensure they know about his gentleness.
The LORD will save me and we'll sing his praise
with harp and lyre exulting all our days.
In God's own temple we will all be singing.
From us, his people, psalms and hymns are ringing.

Press Release ICRC 2017

The ninth meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches was held in Jordan, Ontario, Canada, from July 12 – 19, 2017, in the facilities of the Immanuel United Reformed Church and the Heritage Christian School. It was a blessed time of fellowship with one another as delegates and with our hosts, which not only included the calling Immanuel United Reformed Church of Jordan, and her local sister churches, but also regional church members of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), Free Reformed Churches (FRCNA), Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC). The welcome was warm and generous, and a great opportunity to see and experience the Lord's work in this part of his vineyard. Following the beginning of the meeting with a Prayer Service held under the auspices of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) on Wednesday evening, July 12, we were able to work our way steadily through the schedule, capably led by the Chairman, the Rev. Dick Moes. It was our brother Moes who, throughout the meeting, in light of the 500th year since the nailing of Martin Luther's 95 Theses, focused on four of the Reformational Solas – *Solus Christus*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, and *Sola Scriptura* in the morning devotions. It was a joy to receive into the membership of the ICRC the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) and the Presbyterian Church of Uganda (PCU) after reports from sponsoring denominations and consideration by the Membership Committee. We look forward to a fruitful work together with them. Already the CRCA is involved with the Presbyterian Church in Eastern Australia (PCEA) in hosting the 2019 AsiaPacific Regional Conference due to be held in Australia. It was with much sadness, however, that the Conference suspended the membership of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (RCN), as it was deemed that they have broken with Article IV:4 of the Constitution in their recent synodical decision to permit the ordination of persons to the offices of minister and ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture. This took up much time in the meeting as there was much discussion and various options considered. A number spoke of the blessed help the RCN have been in the past to their federations and so this involved an extra heaviness of heart. Yet it was quite clear that the view of the RCN is not the view of any of the other

churches in the ICRC, and certainly was not the view of any of those, apart from the RCN, who spoke at our meeting. Please pray for our brethren there, that the Lord in his grace would turn them in repentance to his Word and so be able to join fully with us once more.

The various Committee Reports brought out the Lord's blessing upon the member churches and service to him in various spheres – Theological Education, Diaconal, and Missions. A new Committee set up is the Publications Committee which takes in the new ICRC magazine – *Lux Mundi* – and the current website. In connection with these different aspects of ICRC work there were four very well received and helpful panel discussions on theological education and growing future leaders for the Reformed faith, the ministry of mercy and the Reformed faith, bringing the Reformed faith to Asia, and on the future direction of the ICRC. There was also much time given for bilateral and multilateral meetings among the member delegations. It was also a blessing to have a number of observer churches present. Financially the ICRC is very healthy with an excess from the past four-year period. It was felt prudent to retain such a balance and continue to receive membership assessment payments to meet the actual costs for the next four-year period. A highlight of the meetings were the evening addresses, given respectively by the Rev. Hiralal Solanki on "A Brief Overview of Christian Mission in India," the Rev. Dr. Derek Thomas on John Calvin's preaching on the Book of Job, Dr. Matthew Ebenezer on "Bringing the Reformed Faith to India," and Dr. Joel Beeke on "Reformed Piety: Covenantal and Experiential."¹ There was also a valuable time of discussion on these occasions where we were joined by many from the local Reformed churches. We were well provided for – physically and spiritually. We leave refreshed in the precious faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and looking confidently for future worship and service of him, praying the Head of the church to keep us faithful to his Word.

Please note: It was decided to hold the 2021 general meeting of the ICRC in New Delhi, India, with Melbourne, Australia, as the alternative site.

¹ These will, in due time, be made available on the Internet.