

Clarion

YEAR-END 2017

*As each has received
a gift, use it to serve
one another, as good
stewards of God's
varied grace . . .*

1 Peter 4:10



*Best Wishes and the Lord's blessings
in the year 2018 to all our readers.*

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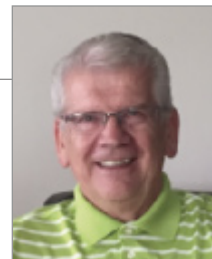
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Gifts and Giver

Christmas and gifts

"Christmas is all about gifts!" At least that is what many people think today, and children too. They identify the Christmas season with gift-giving. It starts early in November. The decorations and the lights come out. The trees are all aglow. The sparkling catalogues and the glossy flyers appear on your doorstep. The fancy notices come flooding into your inbox. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Christmas really is all about shopping and giving gifts. Take away the shopping fix and the gifts and what you have is a huge hole in the festivities.

Sometimes in the midst of this busy season the question may even be asked, "Where did this all come from? How did this originate? Who turned Christmas into a gift extravaganza?"

There is a connection between the birth of Christ and the giving of gifts

And the answer? There are those who have been known to say, "Blame it on the wise men! After all, read the gospel according to Matthew and what do you find but this, 'Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh' (Matt 2:11)." Notice that it is the wise men who offer gifts to the new born Child. In other words, they are the ones who started this tradition.

A closer look

Now, there may be more than just a little bit of truth in that. Still, one should really take a closer look at the biblical text. What does it really say?

The reality is that each gospel writer frames the great event of the birth of our Lord in a slightly

different way. Luke makes it quite clear that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. Mark skips the birth narrative altogether and gets right into the Messiah's work of bringing on the kingdom. John places Christ's coming in the context of eternity and the coming of God's pre-existent Son.

And then there is Matthew. For Matthew, the birth of Jesus is all about the coming of the great King. This King comes in "the days of Herod the king" (v. 1). This King comes when the question is being asked, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" (v. 2). This King will come fulfilling the royal words of Micah 5:2 (v. 6).

Gifts for the King

In this context it is not so surprising to read about the coming of wise men from the east. They have seen his special star in the east. How did they know it was his? This may very well be a residue from the teaching of Daniel ages before. In any case, they follow a course that leads from natural revelation to Word revelation to person revelation. God reveals something to them in that star (nature). Then Herod's priests and scribes quote from the Word (Scripture). Finally, they find Jesus the newborn King (person).

What do you do when you know that you are going to meet a king? What is the most natural and expected thing? It is that you will bring him gifts! And that is what they do. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh are royal gifts, gifts fit for a king.

Hence there is a connection between the birth of Christ and the giving of gifts. In a sense it is only fitting that when the greatest King of all finally makes an appearance in human flesh that he be honoured, adored, praised, worshipped, and enriched. Gifts are his due!

Giving derailed

Yet is that still a consideration today? By and large one can say that the course of our gift giving has become perverted. What do I mean by that? Well, look at the direction of the gifts of the wise men. They flow from them to the Christ Child. These are not gifts that are distributed indiscriminately far and wide. No, they have a certain specific person in view.

We should strive to get our giving back on track

Only that is not what we have today. Christmas comes around and people buy gifts for their children, their other family members, and for their friends. They are scattered in every direction. And in the end, what is directed at God or at God's Son? Little or nothing. You see we have managed to turn a specific giving for a special King into an indiscriminate and common outpouring of things and stuff.

On-track giving

So what does all of this mean in practical terms? It means that we should strive to get our giving back on track. How do we do that? We start with developing and maintaining a deep sense of indebtedness. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 the apostle Paul writes a lot about gifts and giving. Specifically, he writes about the Macedonian churches. These churches were very poor and living in "extreme poverty" (8:2); nevertheless, this poverty did not prevent them from displaying "a wealth of generosity" (8:2). Quite simply, their dire circumstances did not lead to all manner of excuses and cause them to put a padlock on their wallets. Hardly! The opposite was the case.

How come? What happened? They looked to Jesus Christ. And when they did so what did they see? They saw someone who had been rich beyond measure. Consider Jesus Christ before he was born in Bethlehem, before he was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, before he took on our flesh and

blood. What was he? He was in heaven enriched beyond measure. He lived there with his Father in glory. He had all of the power, the light, the glory, the peace, and the beauty imaginable. He was super rich, Paul writes (8:9).

Yet what did he do? He left it all behind. He came down – down into our world, down into our humanity, down into our sin. Paul says rightly that he became "poor" (8:9). But not just a little bit poor either. His poverty was all about having nothing, yet it was also about something else. It was about taking on our debts. Thus he became the poorest of the poor.

Do we understand this, even a little? Do we appreciate this? Do we stand in awe of this? Does it shape our lives and our pocketbooks? The apostle Paul sums it all up by saying at the end of chapter 9: "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift." How rich and blessed we are as the people of God. How much has God not given to us in and through his beloved Son?

Thus when it comes to giving, let us start with this, namely that as Christians we are a most blessed people because God has given us a gift beyond all measure – his Son!

Giving back

Being on the receiving end of so much divine love and generosity produces ripple effects. Look at the Macedonians again. In the eyes of the world they were considered to be a pathetically poor people. But that is not how they looked at themselves. They saw themselves as a rich people – rich in all manner of spiritual gifts and blessings, rich at bottom in their possession of Christ. And it was out of that richness that they acted and donated to help the needy saints in Jerusalem.

Now this is the spirit that Paul writes about and that he seeks to foster in all of the churches. He wants them to give not out of their poverty but out of their riches in Christ. Only he is not alone, for he knows that this is also what God wants. In chapter 9:7 he writes, "For God loves a cheerful giver." In other words, God is not in love with those who give with a grudge or a frown. Donations should not be the result of twisted arms. No, they should flow freely out of deeply thankful hearts.

What's Inside

Our year end issue of *Clarion* magazine brings Volume 66 to a close. As usual, Issue 25 dedicates space not only to many of our regular columns but also to the celebration of Christmas and a look back over happenings in our federation in 2017.

Our editorial and a number of articles were written specifically for the Christmas season: "Gifts and Giver" by Dr. James Visscher, "Christmas: Celebrating the Kingship of Christ" by Rev. Eric Kampen, and "The Son of David Reigns" by Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher. The Treasures New and Old, Canticle, and *Clarion* Kids columns are also prepared with the season in mind.

This final issue of the year contains news reports from the federation that show a variety of events and developments throughout Canada and beyond. This is clear also from Dr. James Visscher's annual Year in Review – we at *Clarion* are thankful that after some time taken for healing and restoration, Dr. Visscher can take up his task with the magazine again.

On these pages you will find a note from the publisher, greetings from members of our churches, and I take this opportunity to do the same. To all our readers, I wish you a blessed and joyful Christmas season celebrating the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. God keep you in his care in the coming year.

Laura Veenendaal

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Receiving back

When that happens there will also be fallout – blessed fallout. What do I mean? Well, consider the words of 2 Corinthians 9:6, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” This means that if you are a grudging giver there will be little or no blessing on your giving. On the other hand, if you are a generous giver you will reap all sorts of unexpected rewards.

Oh and how often have I, and perhaps some of you as well, not seen this. You look around at people and circumstances and you wonder why is it that this brother or family is always struggling in terms of money, work, or business, while others are doing well. What sets the one apart from the other? The answer can be in a host of different factors.

Nevertheless, over the years of my pastoral ministry one thing has always stood out and it is this: those who put God first in all things, also when it come to their money, receive blessings from above. On the other hand, those who are selfish and stingy so often struggle financially and in other ways too. It is a pity that it takes some of us so long to learn that God loves a giver, and especially a cheerful one.

Getting back to Christmas

So is it wrong to give gifts at Christmas? If you do it out of purely materialistic motives, it is always wrong, no matter what time of the year it may be. On the other hand, if you do it filled with the awareness of who is our greatest Gift, and how we should honour and serve him in all things, it is never wrong. 





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Christ's Coming: God's Proclamation of Peace!

"He came and preached to you who were far away and peace to those who were near."

(Ephesians 2:17)

Leading up to Christmas Day, many people sing of baby Jesus having come into the world and bringing peace on earth. Do we know what that really means? The apostle Paul speaks in Ephesians 2 about Christmas, or better, about Christ's coming into the world and what it means. In this chapter Paul has spoken about a dividing wall of hostility. Before the coming of Jesus Christ, it was symbolized in two ways. The walls of Jerusalem would keep unholy feet from entering Jerusalem. That wall separated two worlds: Jew and Gentile.

But the Jews were also separated by a wall. The curtain of the tabernacle was the separation between the Holy Place and the world of sin. No eyes could gaze into the tabernacle without first having gone through the cleansing of the sacrifice for sins. And so it was in the Jerusalem temple as well. The Law prevented sinners from getting access – just as Adam was prevented from re-entering Paradise so long ago. Even Abraham, the father of many nations, had to wait. In fact, all the nations had to wait.

But then there is the coming of Christ. The apostle speaks about the truth of Christmas when he says: "He came" (Eph 2:17). That is a summary of the coming of Christ in this world. It is the incarnation!

Such is foretold already in Genesis 3:15, when a male descendant is promised to Adam and his wife. The coming of Christ is shown in the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law and it is also foretold in the

words of the patriarchs and prophets. For example, the prophet Isaiah calls him "the Prince of Peace," the one who will bring light to the people who walked in darkness (9:2). We also hear that Christ will come to bring justice to the nations (Isa 42:3-4), and that all mankind together will see it (Isa 40:5). And in Isaiah 49:9, it is prophesied that the Lord will "say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'"

Now all this happens when the Christ comes. He brings light, as on that first night in the fields of Ephrathah. He is the one of whom Simeon spoke when he said: "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32).

The birth of Christ is that long-awaited turning point in history. The spotlight that was on Israel brought into view the place where the Saviour of the world would be born. And now that Christ has come, there is a new situation. For now even the Gentiles, who were once "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12), have been brought into the congregation of the Lord.

And it's because the wall of hostility, that wall of separation, has been destroyed. Christ did so when he came to break it down through the work he accomplished on the cross. The law with all its

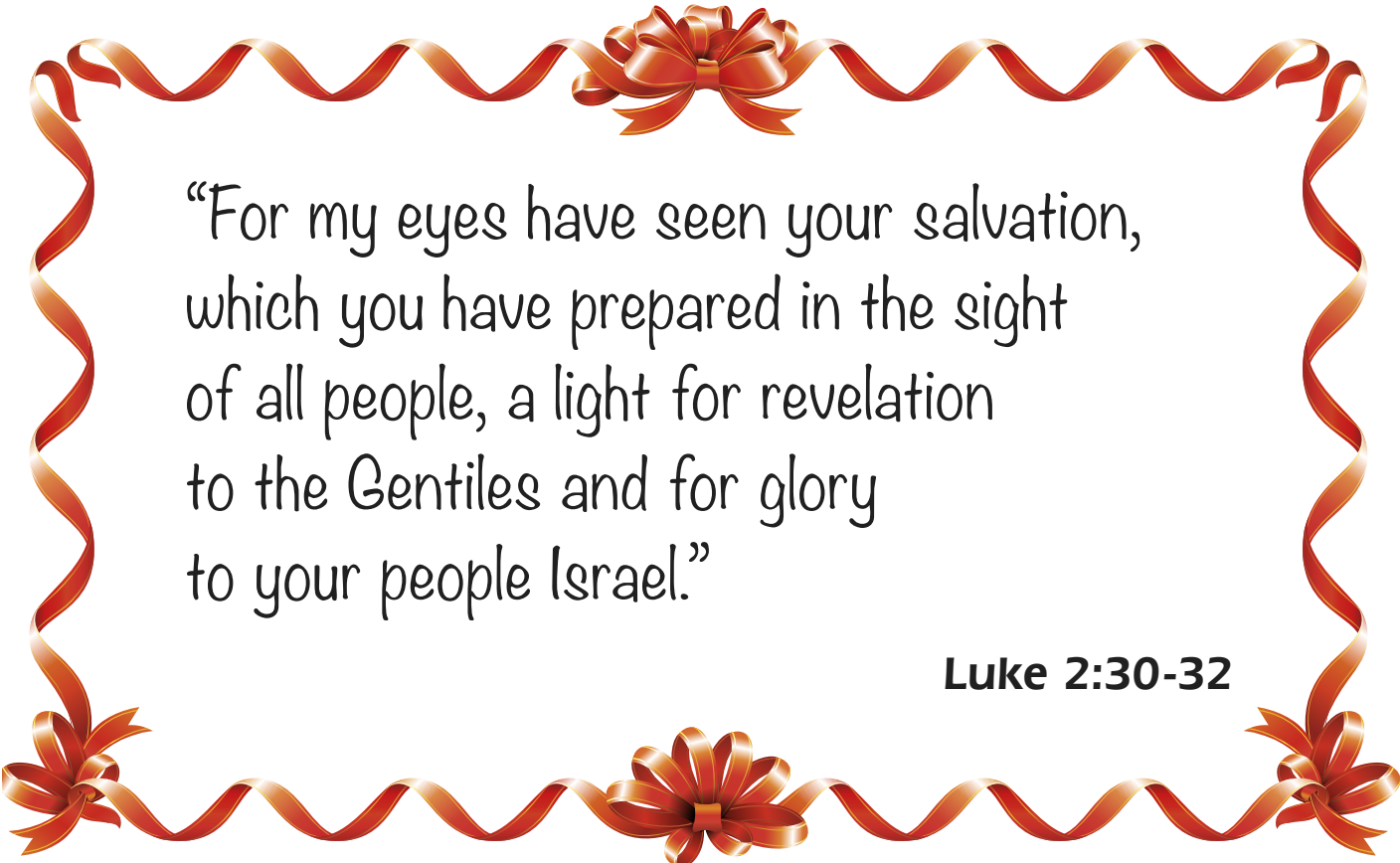
commandments and implications did not bring anyone any closer to God, neither Jews nor Gentiles. But the work of Christ is the gospel of true peace with God.

It is interesting to note that Paul mentions the coming and the proclamation in one breath: "He came and preached" (v. 17). For that's exactly how it is: Christ's arrival and his presence in this world were like a sermon, for he was the image of the invisible God (John 1:14; Heb 1:3).

And so Jesus Christ went around during the time he was on earth, making peace and proclaiming peace. As was prophesied by Isaiah, he also included the Gentiles at various occasions. He went to those who were "far away," like to the Samaritan woman (John 4) and to the Roman centurion (Luke 7).

But now much more has happened. For the Great Commission clearly speaks of how the whole world is on God's mind: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). This is because of what we read in Hebrews 10:19, that we now have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. Since Christ has come there is direct access to God, for both Jews and Gentiles. That is the proclamation of Christ's coming into the world. It reaches wide and it reaches high!

This meditation was originally published in this magazine in 2009.



"For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight
of all people, a light for revelation
to the Gentiles and for glory
to your people Israel."

Luke 2:30-32



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Christmas: Celebrating the Kingship of Christ

When we celebrate someone's birthday, we don't focus on the birth of the person, but on who the person is now. In fact, I suspect that the actual birth receives no attention. There is thankfulness and joy over another year of life that has been granted. There is celebration over accomplishments of the past year. In short, the celebration is about the way the person is now.

It seems that this is not followed through when it comes to celebrating the birth of our Saviour. There is a tendency to focus on the baby Jesus. Christmas is the time of manger scenes and songs about the baby Jesus. That, however, misses the real joy that should mark Christmas. It is the time to celebrate what the Saviour, born so many years ago in Bethlehem, has become and what he is doing. It is the time to celebrate the Kingship of Christ. That is reason for joy and it gives confidence to face the future.

Indicators of kingship around the time of his birth

The kingship of the Lord Jesus, of course, was already announced when the angel Gabriel told Mary she would give birth to a son. He said, "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32,33). When the wise men from the East saw a new star, they went looking for one "who has been born king of the Jews" (Matt 2:2).

His kingship, however, was not evident at his birth, nor throughout his life. He was born in poor circumstances and obscurity. If the Lord God had not sent angels to the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem to announce the birth of Jesus, the birth of the king would have gone completely unrecognized.

The reason for this low-key approach is that, while Jesus may have been born with the promise of being king, the kingship was not waiting for him when he was put in the cradle. The cradle was simply the starting point of the journey towards the cross. Only after the cross would he be crowned as king.

Indicators of kingship after the cross

That the cross was the way to the crown is evident in the concluding words of Matthew's gospel. After his resurrection and just before his ascension, Jesus told his disciples that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18). As an expression of that authority he commissioned his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. That our Lord has been crowned as king is evident also in his ascension into heaven, where he now sits at the right hand of the Father.

The connection between cross and crown is evident in Paul's words in Philippians 2. After stating that the Son of God humbled himself even unto death, Paul writes, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil 2:10). Paul also testifies to the kingship of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:27, when he writes that "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." We hear a similar message in Ephesians 1:20-22, where Paul writes that after God raised Jesus from the dead, he "seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church. . . ." We also have a reminder of the kingship of our Lord in

the words we hear every Sunday, namely, that Christ is “the ruler of the kings on earth” (Rev 1:5). His being crowned as king is also portrayed in Revelation 5, where John sees the Lamb that once had been dead, but now alive again, receiving the scroll from the hand of God. The kingship of Jesus is also described in Revelation 19:16, where he is called “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Encouragement in celebrating Christ’s kingship

By this point it should become clear that if we want to have a true “birthday” celebration for our Saviour, we should not have *baby talk* but *King talk*. This is important not only so that we may do justice to the progress in the history of salvation, but also so that we may find encouragement for daily life. Baby talk does not help, but King talk does.

The cradle was the necessary step toward the cross, which led to the crown

We do, indeed, need encouragement. We live in a post-Christian society, where criticism and mockery of Christians and Christian beliefs seems to be fair game. This will disturb us and make us wonder in what sort of world our children and grandchildren will grow up. This will test our faith in the kingship of Christ. After all, if he is king, why is there such opposition to the Christian faith? Why is there such a rejection of Christian morality?

We gain a perspective when we remember that our Saviour is not a king in earthly terms. He does not use violence to establish his rule. As was evident from the moment he sent out his apostles, he uses his Word. That is evident too in John’s vision as we find it in Revelation 19, where we read that the one seated on the white horse is called “Faithful and True,” and he is also called by the name “The Word of God” (Rev 19:11, 13). While King Jesus does not use force to promote his kingdom, those who oppose him do use force. The Lord Jesus made that clear during his time on earth, when he said that the enemies of the gospel would seek to destroy the bodies of those who

confess his name. Over the ages, many have died for the sake of the gospel. This, however, is not to be seen as evidence of King Jesus being defeated, but of King Jesus being at work. Some gladly embrace the gospel, despite the hardships that will come, while others get their back up and fight against it. In short, the presence of opposition to the gospel is evidence the King is at work.

This evidence of Christ’s rule is also seen in the increasing immorality. We can say this in light of Paul’s words in Romans 1. He mentions how those who knew God did not honour him as God or give thanks to him. They became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. We then read in verse 24, “Therefore, God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.” In verse 26, Paul writes about God giving people up to dishonourable passions. In verse 28, he writes about God giving them up to a debased mind, to do what ought not to be done. He mentions a variety of sinful conduct. That was how Paul saw God exercise his kingship in his days. That authority has been given to Jesus, our King. As is evident from the book of Revelation, he is the one who is already passing judgment over a world that has rejected him. What we see in this world is therefore not an indication of a world outside of Christ’s control, but under his control.

Celebration and proclamation on our King’s birthday

Christmas will continue to be a time of celebration for Christians. Let us take care, however, not to be stuck in the past. The cradle was the necessary step toward the cross, which led to the crown. Let us celebrate who Jesus is now, namely, our glorious King, and how he is exercising his kingship. At the same time, we have reason to proclaim this message, warning about rejecting this awesome King, while also holding out his promise that he will forgive all who in true faith turn from their sin and seek refuge in him.





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The Son of David Reigns!

Living in a world with a rapid increase in moral decline, constantly shifting political borders, and ever growing chaos on all sides, it is sometimes difficult to imagine that anyone is really ruling over all this. Just as one might walk into a building in which everything is turned upside down and ask, "Who's in charge?", one might look at the state of the world and ask, "Is there anyone who is in control of this place?" Indeed, as 2018 is around the corner, do we have a basis to confess that there is one today who is still King of kings and Lord of lords? In times like ours, it is good to reaffirm that confession and to see on what it is based.¹

David's house and God's house

There is no doubt that the kingship of Jesus today has Davidic roots, and that those roots go all the way back to 2 Samuel 7. For our purposes, there are two striking facts about 2 Samuel 7. The first is the manner in which David's house is intertwined with God's house. When David wants to celebrate the victories the Lord has given him so far, he declares that he will build a house for the Lord to live in; but just then the Lord comes through Nathan and declares that rather than David building him a house of wood and stone, the Lord will build David a house of flesh and blood: "I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (12, 13). The second striking fact is the fact that this son of David is said to be also *God's Son*: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (14; cf. Ps 2, Ps 89:26-27!); it must mean that henceforth there can actually be no proper discussion about that most significant "son of God" title which does not take into account

its Davidic roots.² The net effect of these close interchanges is to bind David's rule to God's rule and vice-versa. One can see this also in a startling way, for instance, in how it is later said of Solomon that he does not just sit on the throne of David, but repeatedly it is said that he "*sat on the throne of the Lord* as king instead of David his father" (1 Chron 29:23; cf. 1 Chron 28:5; 2 Chron 9:8). This is what the whole ensuing struggle in the house of David is all about – the need for David's sons to rule over Israel in obedience to the Word of God out of the recognition that their throne is none other than the throne of God. Their repeated disobedience and the chastisement they receive (in accordance with 2 Samuel 7:14b!) is what causes the prophets and the people to cry out for a greater occupant of David's throne who will rule the world in righteousness and will through his own obedience merge the throne of his father David with the throne of God forever!

David's son and God's son

There is probably no gospel that makes the point that Jesus is this person more emphatically than the gospel according to Matthew. Writing to the Jews, Matthew's overriding emphasis is that Jesus is the King of the Jews, David's Son and David's Lord!

This intention is evident right from the very first chapter where all the emphasis is on David. The opening line in the gospel gives priority of place to David (1:1). In the list of kings that follows, the only one who receives the title "king" is David (1:6).³ Moreover, the whole genealogy is deliberately placed in a Davidic mould with the number 14 (1:17), which Matthew can arrive at only by intentionally leaving out the names of three kings in verse 8 (Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah). What is so significant about the number 14 that Matthew will even resort

to this? In a practice called *gematria*, letters would be given a numerical value in order to stress a particular message; when the value of the Hebrew letters of the name David are added together (d = 4, v = 6, d = 4), the total comes to 14!⁴ What Matthew is trying to show stylistically then is that the whole Jewish history has to do with David! The first period, from Abraham to David, reaches its climax with the reign of King David. The second period, from David to the Babylonian exile, is viewed as a period of decline because of the loss of the Davidic reign. But the third period is a time of renewed hope again as Matthew refers to his subject as the long awaited son of David. Interestingly as well, in a genealogy where the numbers 3 and 14 are predominant, the name with 3 consonants and a value of 14 is placed on the fourteenth spot. Clearly, the name David is the key to the pattern of Matthew's genealogy. The Davidic focus of Matthew's gospel is clear from the outset!

No less significant in this respect is our understanding of the role of Joseph with respect to the birth of Jesus (1:18-25). The more common interpretation of the passage suggests that Joseph, upon hearing of Mary's condition and of the adulterous act which must have led up to it, resolved to have no part in the matter but to divorce her quietly instead. Then it appears that Joseph wants out because he realizes that another *man* is involved! There are difficulties with this view however. Among them is the fact that it presumes that Mary would not have told Joseph anything about the angelic messages and would just leave him with this miserable idea that his betrothed had committed adultery. Moreover, there is the fact that this view makes it difficult to understand how Matthew would consider Joseph "a just man" while following such a process. Would forgiveness and reconciliation not be called for? What would be so "just" about such a divorce (cf. Deut 24:1-4; Matt 5:31, 32)? And would it not actually have to lead to the stoning of Mary (cf. Deut 22:23-24; Num 5:11-31)?

Recently, however, a better exegesis has come to the fore, one that already existed in the early church.⁵ According to this view, Joseph is aware of what Matthew says in 1:18, that Mary is "with child of the Holy Spirit," and respecting this awesome work of the Spirit, concludes that there can be no room for him in this mysterious future that Mary now has. Mary must have talked with Joseph about

the words of the angel and the wonder that God was doing in her! Are we really to believe that the woman who composed that beautiful song in the presence of her sister Elizabeth (Luke 1:46-56) said nothing to her beloved in the six months that followed? And would it be a surprise that Joseph then, hearing about all this, concluded that if the Spirit had been involved in this part of the husband's role, there was no room anymore for him as husband? Being a man who is "righteous," which according to Matthew means fearing God and doing his will,⁶ he concludes that he is in the way of this mysterious work of God and that it must be God's will that he withdraw from the scene, even if that can only be done by way of divorce. Interesting in this regard is also the fact that we are told that the reason that Joseph chooses to go this way is not because he does not want Mary to be his wife anymore, but because he is *afraid* to take her as his wife (1:18). His fear has to do with the fear of the Lord! And that makes it all the more significant then that an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph and tells this righteous man what the will of the Lord

*Joseph, son of David, must be
the husband of Mary so that
Jesus might be the great Son of David!*

really is, namely, that he not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. It brings out as well the real significance of the fact that Joseph is here explicitly referred to as "Joseph, son of David" (1:20). The Joseph who feels that he is not needed because God has somehow mysteriously taken his place is told that he is needed after all because he is a son of David and the child who has been conceived by the Holy Spirit must be the son of David.⁷ Joseph can not go away! Joseph, son of David, must be the husband of Mary so that Jesus might be the great Son of David!

Of course, it raises the question: if Joseph was not in a physical sense the father of Jesus, how then can it be said that Jesus is really of the house of David, even heir to the throne? Matthew never dares to say "Joseph the father of Jesus" (1:16), and Luke sensitively adds the words "as was supposed" (3:23).

In a classic work, J. Gresham Machen responds to our concerns:

He was a gift of to the Davidic house, not less truly, but on the contrary in a more wonderful way, than if he had been descended from David by ordinary generation. Who can say that this New Testament representation is invalid? . . . The relation in which Jesus stood to Joseph. . . was much closer than is the case with ordinary adoption. By the virgin birth the whole situation was raised beyond ordinary analogies. In an ordinary instance of adoption there is another human being – the actual father – who disputes with the father by adoption the paternal relation to the child. Such was not the case with Joseph in his relationship to Jesus, according to the New Testament narratives. He alone and no other human being could assume the rights and the duties of a father with respect to this child. And this child Jesus could be regarded as Joseph's son and heir with a completeness of propriety which no ordinary adoptive relationship would involve.⁸

With this first wonderful chapter then, the stage is set for the drama that follows. It begins in the next chapter already with Herod the king conducting a desperate search for this new king of the Jews (2:3), and it keeps on building up towards the cross in which the King of the Jews is rejected by his own people, and it ends with the King, who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18), about to ascend to his new throne!

One of its most disturbing messages, however, is how emphatically the people reject this King in the process. It is striking that in almost everyone of the passages in which the title "Son of David" is used, it is in the context of blindness. In 9:27, there are two blind men who call out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." In 12:23, when Jesus heals a blind and dumb demoniac, the amazed people cry out, "Can this be the Son of David?" In 15:22, it is after a passage in which the Pharisees are called "blind guides" (15:14), and just before the blind and so many others are brought forward to be healed (15:30), that a Canaanite woman comes forth and calls Jesus "O Lord, Son of David!" In 20:30, 31, it is two blind men sitting by the roadside who cry out: "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" Matthew's message clearly is that while those who are blind are able to see Jesus,

there are those who can see but are totally blind to the person and the mission of Jesus! The outcasts, underprivileged, and the heathen acknowledge Jesus in faith, but the Jewish leaders who have the Old Testament Scriptures have become blind guides who step forward only to show their unbelief and opposition. Even when there is that optimistic moment when the crowds call out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (21:9) and the blind are still being healed (21:14), the only response of the leaders is indignation (21:15). So often the words of a prophet dear to Matthew lie close at hand, particularly this Isaianic theme about blindness: "You will be seeing, but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes."⁹ What is it all but the fulfillment of prophecy?

The deep meaning of the whole Davidic monarchy is all fulfilled as Jesus is exalted to the right hand of God

Even when the Lord Jesus makes one final appeal to them in that famous question of 22:44, based on Psalm 110, "If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?", those who suffer from spiritual blindness are struck dumb, having nothing more to say, so that in the next chapter Jesus confirms their blindness no fewer than five times (23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26). And the crowds, seeing better only a short while ago (21:8, 9), follow these blind guides, fall into a horrendous pit, and surrender even their own King (27:24)!

The King of Israel

But there is a peculiar irony in all of this. For Matthew's message is that this Jesus whom the Jewish leaders and the Jewish people crucified was the King of Israel (21:5)! That message is left to ring out in the last chapters in various ways: from the lips of Pontius Pilate (27:11), in the mocking of the soldiers (27:29), on the plaque above his head (27:37), and in the mockery of the chief priests and elders (27:42). Whether meant as mockery or jest, Matthew leaves it all in his gospel so that the reader will get the message. The bottom line is uttered in a climactic fashion by that impartial bystander who

CALLED

Called by the St. Albert Canadian Reformed Church:

Rev. Abel Pol

of the Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church.

CHURCH NEWS

sees the signs at the death of Christ and cries out: "Truly, this was the Son of God!" (27:54). What a tragic note! No one other than the One who was both Son of David and Son of God (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:26-27) has been crucified! And that by the people of David, the people of God!

But King he is nevertheless! Exactly in these ironic ways, God's purposes are fulfilled. As a result of the resurrection, the Son of David becomes the Son of God-in-power (Rom 1:4). He ascends into the heavens and reigns as King today (Eph 1:20-21)! Just compare the first book of the New Testament with the last book, where he is referred to as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David" (5:5) and "the root and the offspring of David" (22:16). The first word on Christ matches the last word: Jesus is the Davidic King who has been victorious!

The deep meaning of the whole Davidic monarchy is all fulfilled as Jesus is exalted to the right hand of God. If it can be said of the first son of David that he "sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father" (1 Chron 29:23), how much more can that not be said of he who is David's Son and David's Lord!? He unites with finality the throne of David and the throne of God. He is everything that all those other sons of David failed to be, everything that even David failed to be. The need for chastising the Davidic son of God has come to an end (2 Sam 7:14b), for all obedience has been offered by this Divine and Davidic Son! Through his royal rule, God himself is in control for ever!

And so we see it: the confession that Jesus Christ is King today has strong biblical roots! So many of the words the church rejoices in during these festive days have tremendous significance. The world may appear to be a chaos, many of the people of God may suffer. Yet all God's people have hope, for through God's Spirit they receive spiritual vision and with those eyes of faith they can see what the people of God did not perceive before: Jesus is King! Indeed, we see Jesus the King crowned with glory and honour in the heavens because of the

suffering of death (Heb 2:9)! And we know it in faith: there is someone who is busy making order out of the chaos. With his eye on the church, he will lead the world to its final end. The suffering will lead to glory! For the Son of David reigns!

This article was first published in this magazine in 1993.

¹ What follows is a summary of aspects of what I wrote in *The Son of David*, (1991, 77 pages), which was submitted in connection with graduate studies under Dr. J. Van Bruggen at the Theologische Universiteit van de Gereformeerde Kerken (Broederweg, Kampen). Due to space restrictions, I will only deal below with the gospel according to Matthew as it is here that the title is most predominant.

² For a very significant article in this respect, see D.J. Verseput's "The Role and Meaning of the 'Son of God' Title in Matthew's Gospel," *New Testament Studies*, vol. 33 (1987) pp.592-556. Unfortunately, space prevents a discussion of its contents.

³ It should be noted that the intention of Matthew's genealogy is to present us with Jesus' royal line. The view that Matthew gives us Joseph's line and Luke gives us Mary's will not do since Luke tells us that it is Joseph who is of the house of David (1:27; 2:4), that Mary is at least partially of Aaronitic descent (1:5,36), and that he is giving us the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph (3:23). It seems more likely then that whereas Matthew give us the royal line, Luke gives us the line of the actual physical descendants of David.

⁴ The vowels do not count in this process since they are considered secondary, having been added below the consonants by the Masoretes later. For another example of gematria, consider Revelation 13:18. Symbolic numbers were often used in Jewish literature around this time; in fact, in the opinion of one scholar, the New Testament stands out as a unique document precisely because it does not use them more often! See J.J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology* (Baker, 1989), p.11. For a review of eight different solutions to the significance of the number fourteen and a further defense of the position taken above, see W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (I.C.C., 1988), p. 161-5.

⁵ Eusebius, Basil, Ephraem, and Theophylactus held to this view. It has recently been defended by Dr. J. van Bruggen in his *Matteus: het Evangelie voor Israel* (Kok, 1990), pp.35-7.

⁶ Compare Matthew 10:41 13:17,43,49; 23:29,35; 25:37,46.

⁷ To suggest that Jesus might depend on Mary for his Davidic descent will not do since according to Jewish sources, descent was not traced through the mother.

⁸ *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (Baker, 1985), p. 129-30.

⁹ Isaiah 6:9-10 as quoted in Matthew 13:14-5; cf. Isa 29:18; 32:3; 35:5,6; 42:16. It's significant to remember that the concern in Isaiah too is the house of David and the Davidic son, as is evident from 7:2,13; 22:22; 55:3-5, and the numerous references to both Jerusalem and Judah.





FROM THE PUBLISHER

This is Eternal Life

*And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

John 17:3

In Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, he shows that eternal life is bound up in knowing God and Jesus Christ whom he sent. Earlier, Jesus had told Thomas and his disciples: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." What a blessing it was for the disciples that they knew Jesus personally and intimately, even though they would yet have to grow considerably in their knowledge of whom he was and why he had come.

Yet Jesus, responding again to Thomas after the resurrection calls *us* blessed: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Immediately following this blessing, the Apostle John identifies the purpose of his book: the signs of Jesus were written "so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." So we too may know Jesus and the Father from his word (*sola scriptura*). Hence Jesus at the end of his prayer prays: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

Thank you

Dear readers, our hope in publishing *Clarion Magazine* is to enrich your sanctification in the knowledge of God and Jesus whom he sent, through Scriptural content. We pray that this goal has been met, and we thank you for your continued support!

Our editorial team has provided and reviewed content for another excellent Volume. Thank you Rev. J. Visscher, Mrs. Laura Veenendaal, Rev. Holtvlüwer, Rev. E. Kampen, and Dr. Van Dam, and Rev. Van Luik. We are thankful to see Rev. Visscher resuming his regular activities after his health concerns this past fall. Thank you to Dr. Van Dam and the rest of the team for covering in his absence.

We also heartily thank the coordinators and writers of our regular columns: Mrs. Rachel Vis (*Ray of Sunshine*), Mrs. Emily Nijenhuis (*Clarion Kids*), Mr. Arthur Kingma (*Education Matters*), Rev. W. den Hollander (*You Asked*), and Dr. Van Dam (*Clippings on Politics and Religion*). Other writers have contributed under these columns, *Church Snapshot*, or in church news submissions. Thank you all!

Our advertisers play an important role in making our magazine possible. Thank you all for your continued support. Readers, please consider them when you need the services they offer.

Greetings

As publisher, we extend warm greetings, and best wishes for a blessed New Year. Especially we pray that God will sanctify us by his word so that we may know him more fully. For us who know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent, eternal life is then not a distant hope, but a current reality that we may now enjoy already.

William Gortemaker

Year in Review



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Soon you will begin to see the Latin words “*anno domini*” and the numbers 2018 on various books and calendars. This means that the information provided is meant to inform you in the year of our Lord 2018.

Yet we are not only looking ahead, we have also made it a custom to look back over the previous year and to single out some of its highlights as far as our federation of churches is concerned.

In that regard, the biggest overall religious highlight of 2017 may well have been the fact that it marked the 500th anniversary of the Great Reformation. At 9:00 am on October 31, 1517 in Wittenberg, Germany, an unknown monk called Martin Luther lit a spark that would transform not only Germany, but Europe and the world. Together with believers everywhere, we celebrated the fact that the Reformation put the teachings of grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone, and glory to God alone back at the heart and centre of the Christian faith.

Churches East

Still, there is more to take note of. We begin, as always, with the churches. This time our movement is from east to west. In 2017 our most easterly church, the Church at Ottawa, was in the news as it received a new pastor. The Rev. Winston Bosch, who was serving a Reformed church in Quebec belonging to the ERQ, was called and accepted the call. He began his ministry in our nation’s capital in the spring of the year.

Further southwest the pastor of the Fellowship Church in Burlington, the Rev. John van Popta, informed his congregation that he would be undergoing a special operation in the fall to alleviate some of the symptoms of his Parkinson’s disease.

Further to that, it appears that this disease will see him take early retirement in 2018.

Nearby the Church at Flamborough seems to be moving closer to having a building of its own. Property has been found in the hamlet of Freelon, and if all of the permits can be obtained, a physical home may finally be erected.

Across the Bay in Hamilton, the Blessings Church is also occupying new premises. It did not take them long to outgrow their rented building and, as they were casting about for a new place of worship, they were led to the Stanley Baptist Church. It turns out that the folks there did not want their church to become a restaurant or some other sort of commercial venue. When approached by some Blessings members, they were ecstatic and quickly made an arrangement to share and transfer the use of their building.

Now that is great news, but due to the fact that Blessings keeps on growing, it will not satisfy their needs for long. They may soon be looking for an additional site and thus planting another church in the downtown area.

Travelling up the Hamilton “mountain” one comes to the Providence Church. It has been vacant since the departure of Pastor Wes Bredenhof to Australia, and is actively searching for a new minister. Thus far, its efforts have not been crowned with success.

Moving east again we travel into the Niagara Peninsula. There the Smithville Church is looking for a second pastor to work beside the Rev. Clarence Bouwman. As this is being written they are hoping for a positive response from the Rev. Arend Witten of Vernon, BC. Not too far away the Attercliffe Church is also in the calling mode as it is looking for a replacement for the Rev. Jan Huijgen who went to Coaldale, Alberta.

Further south the pastor of the Dunnville Church, John VanWoudenberg and his wife Carolin, together with their family, received the shocking news in October that their son Ben, who was living in the Guelph area, had been killed in a motorcycle accident. Our deepest condolences go out to them. Readers, please be so kind as to remember them in your prayers.

Moving west, but still in Ontario, the London Church remains vacant and has been busy calling, but without success thus far. In May of this year it will be three years since the Rev. Reuben Bredenhof departed for Down Under. In other words, this has not been a short vacancy. Hopefully, it will soon be filled.

Next door and still further west, the Chatham Church too is facing a time of vacancy as the Rev. Dave de Boer has accepted a call to the Abbotsford Church.

Churches West

Next, we travel further west and south and come to Denver, Colorado. This church, too, has been vacant for some time and will be looking for a new pastor in 2018. The fact that it is far removed from other American and Canadian Reformed Churches means that it leads a somewhat lonely existence. This makes its need all the more pressing.

Going north the Manitoba churches have for some years been busy calling in the hope that their mission project would become a visible reality. Success has eluded them for years but in 2017 they called Candidate James Zekveld and he accepted. Finally, their dreams have been realized and their prayers have been heard. Now it is on to the challenging work of calling the lost.

For some years the churches in Alberta all had their own pastors, but that situation has now changed. The Neerlandia South Church has been busy calling. They even tried to dislodge an Aussie out of his tropical oasis, but without success. The St. Albert Church, north of Edmonton, has also been calling and receiving declines. Thankfully the Calgary Church recently experienced a change of status as Candidate Steve van Leeuwen accepted its call, passed his classical exam, and could be ordained as its new spiritual leader.



Before leaving Alberta mention should be made of serious illness in the family of the Rev. Bill and Barb Slomp. Their son, Stephen, somehow contracted an illness that has left him disabled and barely conscious. He has been in the hospital and care home for months and, while it is hoped that he will eventually recover, there remains a lot of uncertainty. Your prayers are needed for him, his wife and their young children.

Across the mountains and into BC, we come to Yarrow. The church there had to say "farewell" to its pastor when the Rev. Richard Eikelboom accepted a call to Byford, Western Australia. In addition, some members of the Yarrow Church, together with some from the Chilliwack Church, are hoping to plant a new church in nearby Sardis. Thus far, however, their efforts have been stymied as there are no facilities to rent or buy in the area. It should be added that the city of Chilliwack is refusing to grant any new permits for religious purposes as it is of the opinion that there are enough churches already.

Next door in Abbotsford things have also changed. In 2016 this church had two pastors, but as 2017 dawned it suddenly woke up with none. The Rev. R.C. Karlo Janssen accepted a call to the Willoughby Church and the Rev. Justin Roukema requested to be released from the ministry. Thankfully, the Rev. Dave de Boer was called and accepted the call. His arrival will improve the situation, but there will still be one more vacancy to fill.

Going west again we come to the Cloverdale Church. This church became vacant in 2016 and it is not known at this time when precisely it will be in a position to call again.

Pastors – New, Retired, Repaired, and Promoted

The ministerial ranks in the Canadian Reformed Churches continue to be supplemented with new and young men joining the ranks. In 2017 Winston Bosch, Steve van Leeuwen, and James Zekveld were added to the list.

As for the Rev. Henry Versteeg, he is not being added to the list but is being placed in another category. After many years of faithful and active service in Chatham, but especially in Papua New Guinea and area, he reached the age of retirement. No doubt even in that state he will continue to be “active” in different ways and we wish him and his wife, Rita, well.

Although I hesitate to mention my own name, I know that if I do not some of you will have something to say about it. So let me add a new category to the list here. It is called “repaired.” What it means is that the Lord in his providence guided things in such a way that a serious heart condition that I had could be discovered in time and treated. I am now the recipient of a new heart valve and a tuned-up heart. Hopefully it will translate into some more years of “active” service.

Meanwhile, death took two well-known men away to be with the Lord. The first was the Rev. Johannes Mulder who died on March 23 at the age of eighty-eight years. For the last number of years, he and his wife Elisabeth had been living on the independent living side of the Shalom Manor complex in Grimsby. But then when his health started to deteriorate, and more care was needed, he was moved to the special care side, and from there the Lord also took him home.

For many years “Hans,” as he was known to many, had been a leading figure in the churches, having pastored in Carman, MB, Coaldale, AB, Cloverdale, BC, and Toronto, as well as Burlington, ON. His friendly, outgoing nature endeared him to church members far and wide. His wisdom and experience was an asset at many a major assembly. All in all, his was a fruitful ministry. Our condolences go out to his wife and family. May the Lord comfort them richly.

Three weeks after the passing of the Rev. J. Mulder, another leader died. Prof. Dr. Jack DeJong, who had suffered already for years from Alzheimer’s



disease, was called home on April 15 at the age of sixty-eight. He left behind his wife Margaret and their children, and our condolences go out to them all. After serving as pastor of churches in London and Burlington, our brother was called to serve the churches as the professor of ecclesiology and diaconiology at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. This meant that he was given a heavy teaching load, as his subjects included church history and polity, homiletics, catechetics, liturgy, counselling, missions, and evangelism. Still, he never complained and did his work with much dedication and commitment.

It should also be mentioned that already early on Prof. DeJong became involved with the work of promoting church union between the Canadian and United Reformed Churches. Under his leadership considerable progress was made in clearing away misunderstandings between the two church federations and in developing strategies for a possible future merger. The fact that there is a flourishing relationship today between these federations is in part a tribute to the early work done by our brother.

One more thing that deserves mention is the fact that Rev. Mulder and Prof. DeJong died only weeks apart. In some ways this was also fitting as during all of the years of Dr. DeJong’s illness these two were often together. It was Rev. Mulder and his wife who were the most faithful in visiting Dr. DeJong. Every week they were there to help, whether Dr. DeJong was living in Hamilton or Grimsby. Rev. Mulder saw it as his special retirement calling to be there for his younger ailing colleague, and he was.

Ministerial Globetrotters

There is a famous basketball team called “the Harlem Globetrotters” and there is a not so famous team called “the Ministerial Globetrotters.” What do I mean? Well. It has to do with the fact that at the beginning of the year, my wife and I were in Australia helping out in the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis. Only we were not the only Canadian Reformed retired ministerial couple there. The Revs. Bill Slomp, Pim den Hollander, and Jack Moesker and their spouses were there as well. Who bothers to go to Palmetto, Florida or Palm Springs, California anymore when you can go to Perth, Western Australia?

What it shows you is that the world is getting smaller and retired ministers still have some shelf life left. Helping out vacant and isolated churches in different parts of the world is an ever-increasing reality and it is resulting in unexpected benefits for retired pastors and churches alike.

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

Still, we should not look to the older generation when it comes to the growth and development of the church. This is the task of a younger and more energetic generation. In other words, this calls for young men filled with zeal, commitment, and knowledge. And that is where our seminary comes into the picture. After a large graduating class in 2016, the year 2017 saw only one student graduate CRTS, namely James Zekveld. And you know what that means. It means that the supply is not even close to keeping up with the demand! The Canadian Reformed Churches are in desperate need of more young men to come forward and to be trained for the ministry of the gospel.

Having said this does not mean that there are no bright spots on the horizon. The fact that the incoming class could welcome four new M. Div students: Raoul Kingma, Ruurd Offringa, Kevin Star, and Timothy Veenstra means a lot. Also, the fact that they join thirteen other returning M. Div students is significant. Together they will make a dent in future demand; however, more are needed. So, if you have a son, a grandson, a student, a catechumen, or know of a young man who shows

promise, encourage him to join the ranks of the workers in the harvest.

The year 2017 was also a year of transition at CRTS. For close to ten years Prof. Dr. Gerhard Visscher had been the Principal, but as of September the reins were handed over to a new man, namely Prof. Dr. Jason Van Vliet. It will be his task to guide CRTS in the coming years. At the same time thankfulness needs to be expressed to Dr. Gerhard Visscher for being at the helm during those years when CRTS was going through a rather long, arduous but successful accreditation process.

Almost every year is a year full of travel for the professors, and 2017 was no different. Dr. de Visser went to South Africa and China. Dr. Smith visited Texas. Dr. Van Raalte made his way to Brazil. Dr. Van Vliet also made the trek to South Africa.

Of course, it takes more than students and professors to make a seminary. It also requires capable staff such as Catharine Mechelse, Leanne Kuizenga, and Margaret Alkema. It needs fund raisers such as Debbie Alkema, Karen Schuurman, and Janet Van Vliet (Women’s Saving Action). It needs governors (see the long list in the Yearbook). Finally, it needs you as church members – your prayers, your financial support, and your sons. May the Lord continue to bless CRTS!

Conferences – Seminary, Ministerial, ICRC

In January of 2017 the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary hosted its annual winter conference in Burlington, Ontario. This time the main topic had to do with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the theme was entitled: “Relevant and Rich: Why the Reformation Still Matters After 500 Years?” Lectures were delivered by Dr. Ted Van Raalte on “By Grace Alone,” Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn on “Luther on *Solo Christo*,” Rev. Bill Bolkenstein on “Zwingli on *Sola Scriptura*,” Dr. Jason Van Vliet on “Calvin on *Sola Fide*,” and Dr. Jason Zuidema on “Stealing God’s Glory.” Seminars were also offered on such topics as worship and psalm singing, prayer and spiritual life, church planting and mission, as well as politics, church, and state.

In 2017 ministerial conferences were held in both eastern Canada and the western USA. In the east ministers from the Canadian and United Reformed Churches met near Goderich at the Benmiller

Inn and Spa. Dr. Joel Beeke was the featured speaker and he spoke on "Lessons from John and Idelette Calvin" and on "Ten Helps in Dealing with Criticism." Mr. Kevin Hoogstad spoke on "Self-Awareness in the Ministry."

In the west ministers from both federations met at the Cedar Springs Resort in Sumas, WA. The featured speaker was Prof. Dr. Gerhard Visscher who spoke on "Preaching on the Gospels: The Major Theme of Matthew," "Preaching on Ephesians: Grace Upon Grace," and "Ministering Well." The Rev. Richard Aasman also made a presentation on "Preaching on the Psalms."

In speaking with attendees at both of these east and west gatherings, I learned that the food and lodging was great, the speeches edifying, and the fellowship wonderful. Hopefully it helped to re-charge ministerial batteries and prepared the participants for tackling the challenges of ministering to their respective flocks in the coming season.

Church planting efforts

Moving into a different but closely related area, we go from conferences to efforts to plant new churches. Currently, the Smithers Church continues to be the main church supporting and directing the mission work in Prince George. There Pastor Tim Schouten is busy feeding the saints and reaching out to those who express an interest in the Reformed faith.

Further south in the Fraser Valley, the Rev. Frank Dong continues to lead the Chinese Reformed Church that worships in the Cloverdale Church building in Surrey. As the name suggests, this is a church plant made up exclusively of people of Chinese origin. Most of them are recent immigrants and this means that Mandarin remains the language used in the worship services. All that stands between it and instituted church status is a lack of office bearer material. Still, this is being worked on as this church has several young men in training who are maturing and proving that they meet the biblical qualifications for office.

As mentioned above, Candidate James Zekveld has accepted the call to become the Manitoba church planter. It is hoped that over time, as this work acquires a focus and a target area, it will be met with success.

In Ontario, the closest thing we have to a church plant is the work that is being done at Streetlight Ministries in downtown Hamilton. A recent campaign to raise money for a new building has been largely successful and now it is on to obtaining permits and city approval. Whether or not this effort will result in an instituted church remains to be seen, although hopefully that will remain the aim.

In London, the local Canadian Reformed Church has teamed up with several United Reformed Churches in the area to establish Lighthouse Ministries. Its aim is to start an inner city mission project. Several calls have been extended, but thus far without success.

In the Brampton-Toronto area efforts are underfoot to call a home missionary who would work towards the establishment of a new church in the GTA. Apparently funding is not the problem; finding the right man to spearhead this effort is. Let it be our collective prayer that here, as well as elsewhere, the Lord will work in the hearts of young and capable men to rise up and embrace the challenge of planting new churches.

Outreach efforts

Still, church planting does not happen in a vacuum. It arises out of a context in which believers share their faith in the community. How do we share? In a host of different ways whether organized or unorganized. Under the organized banner, we have literature distribution, care home ministries, radio broadcasting, Facebook, live feed broadcasts, concerts, fairs, vacation Bible schools, ESL, *Christianity Explored*, and the list goes on. Under



the unorganized banner, we have believers simply sharing their faith and their faith experiences with neighbours, co-workers, and friends. It might be over coffee, at a barbecue or potluck, or at a garage sale.

I suppose that under the "organized" banner, one can also speak of summer camps. And there are a lot of them. There are camps for those with special needs organized by Anchor and Bethesda. There are summer camps for kids whether at Campfire! in Ontario or Stepping Stones in BC. There are family camps such as the one that members of the Denver church organize every year. Of course, it has to be said that not all of these are strictly speaking meant for outreach, but almost all do have an outreach component to them.

Foreign missions

Papua New Guinea

In addition to being busy with local mission projects, all the churches are also busy supporting various efforts to bring the gospel overseas. Among the oldest efforts is the work done by the Bethel Toronto Church and its supporting churches in Papua New Guinea. Historically, that work began way back in the 1960s when the Rev. Henk Knigge and his family went out to Irian (or Irian Jaya), Indonesia. Later the Rev. Henry Versteeg also worked in that area, but then in due time he switched to the other side of the island called Papua New Guinea. The Rev. Cornelis Kleyn later joined him and continues to labour there in PNG.

There, together with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, they are concentrating their efforts on the work of the Bible College. In this place local young men are being trained to proclaim the gospel and a number of them have already been ordained and are busy in the work of ministry.

2017 also saw a new phase of this work as Rev. Versteeg retired and returned to Canada. In the meantime, it was decided not to call another missionary but to replace him with a school administrator and teacher. It was felt that the needs of the College were such that it required someone whose expertise lay more in the area of education than theology. To that end Br. Mark Mulder, an

experienced educator from Australia applied, was hired and is now busy in Port Moresby. Meanwhile, the teaching work is being done by the Rev. Alan Douma from New Zealand, the Rev. Ryan deJonge from Australia (Canada formerly) and others.

Of course, the missionary work in PNG is not limited to teaching. There is also a constant need to train men for the offices of deacon and elder, to support, encourage, and advise local churches, to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, as well as to take advantage of all and every opportunity to share the gospel.

Brazil

Much farther away on almost the other side of the world the churches in Canada, especially most of them in western Canada and some in the east, continue to support the mission work in Brazil. This too is a long-standing work going back to the early 1970s when the Rev. Kees VanSpronsen was sent out to that part of the work. Subsequently others came as well, such as Rev. Ralph Boersema, Rev. Piet Meijer, Rev. Elso Venema, Rev. Ken Wieske, Rev. Abram DeGraaf, and Rev. Jim Witteveen. Currently the last three brothers are still actively working in Brazil.

Only a new problem has arisen of late and it has to do with the health of the Rev. Ken Wieske. A few years ago he experienced a type of burnout and now recently the news is that he is suffering from colorectal cancer. Not much is known yet about how the doctors will approach this illness. Surgery, radiation, and chemo are all tools in their medical toolbox. Also, no news has reached us as to whether the treatment and recovery will take place in Brazil, Canada, or a combination of both. Still, we do want to wish our brother every encouragement as he heads down this unknown and difficult road. May it be our fervent prayer that the Lord will strengthen him and his family for what lies ahead. We know that he is faithful, and he will do it.

Prior to his diagnosis, the Rev. Ken Wieske had taken up again a good deal of his regular work of teaching, preaching, translating, and administering, although he often complained of tiredness and exhaustion. Needless to say, he now has a clearer picture as to what was really ailing him.

Thankfully, Rev. Wieske and his wife Tamara, together with some of their children, are not the only missionary family in Brazil at this time. The Rev. Abram DeGraaf and his family have been there as well living to the south in Maceio. Lastly, Rev. Jim Witteveen, together with some of his children, came earlier in the year.

Meanwhile, Rev. Witteveen's wife, Nallely, has also been there for some time with the other children. The reason that she and some of the other children have not been there all the time relates to the ongoing challenge of trying to adopt their three foster children. Since these children are native, the Witteveen's need not just the support of the social workers (which they have) but also the support of the native band (which is proving more difficult). Hopefully the Lord will hear the many prayers being offered and make it possible for the family to be permanently united in Brazil.

Still, this tenuous situation is not preventing the Rev. Jim Witteveen from proceeding with his work. The speed at which he learned the Portuguese language is amazing and thus he is already able to connect, preach, teach, and counsel in that language. His days are filled with preparing lessons, sermons, lectures, and speeches as he trains men as deacons and elders, preaches in local churches, lectures at the John Calvin Seminary, and gives presentations on the Reformed faith in different parts of Brazil.

Much of the same can be said for the Rev. Abram DeGraaf. He too has largely the same sort of work description. In addition, he is also doing a fair bit of translation work, as he makes more and more study material available in the Portuguese language. Also, more than either Revs. Wieske or Witteveen, he is directly involved in planting another local church in the Maceio area. At the same time, he continues to assist the existing church that was instituted in 2012 with his good counsel.

It should also be noted that a considerable amount of time is spent by the missionaries dealing with contacts with other churches that are interested in the Reformed faith. This year Pastor Abram has been busy with the project Refo500 Brazil which has to do with celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. In all he has organized six conferences and been a speaker too (as have the Revs. Wieske and Witteveen).

The Hamilton Church is also supporting a native Brazilian pastor, Lucio Manoel, who works alongside Rev. Abram DeGraaf in Maceio. Pastor Lucio preaches, visits, and teaches, also assisting the local pastor – Flavio. He provides written monthly sermons to the federation which are shared on the web. He serves on a number of committees and is active in promoting Reformed education. At the moment he is assisting Pastor Abram in the Refo500 project and is also helping him as they launch the Dordt400 project in 2018.

China

Any number of Canadian Reformed Churches also support the outreach work that the Cloverdale-Langley Churches do in China. Because of ongoing security concerns, this is not a good place to pass along too many details. Our missionary, Rev. Frank, continues to travel regularly to China. Often he is assisted and accompanied there by other men. Meanwhile, the circle of churches that are committed to the Reformed faith in China continues to grow and grow.

Nevertheless, the work is becoming more and more difficult. You may have read that recently new laws have been passed in China that make it harder for believers who do not want to register with the government to meet together. Those who rent space to unregistered Christian groups face heavy fines and punishments. Neighbours are being urged to report all suspicious activities. Fear and uncertainty have become the order of the day. Government control is more and more becoming a regular feature of Chinese life.

All of this means that your prayers and support for this work are needed more than ever. We who live in Canada or in other countries where there is freedom of speech, freedom of worship, and freedom of assembly do not always appreciate the rich quality of life that we have. Truly, we need to prize our freedoms as well as be concerned about those who have none and are living lives filled with oppression.

Indonesia

The Smithville Church continues to act as the main church supporting the work being done by the Rev. Edwer Dethan in West Timor. Currently he remains busy operating the College and Seminary that he has erected. His wife Femmy is



very much involved with orphanage work. One of the latest developments has to do with the start of a new church federation in which he and some of his former students are involved. About a dozen churches now meet in two classes and call themselves the GGRI Timor. Currently they are making moves to affiliate with the other GGRI church of Indonesia.

Outside help is also received. In 2017 the Rev. Dick Wynia from the Lincoln Church was there to do some teaching. Others also continue to travel there to assist Rev. Dethan.

Mexico

The newest mission field for the Canadian Reformed Churches is Mexico. Some time ago the local churches of Abbotsford and Vernon decided to end their support for the mission work in Brazil and to adopt Mexico as a new field. Since then a mission board has been appointed. Visits have also been brought to northeast Mexico where it is hoped the work will be located. The latest news is that Rev. Richard Bout of the United Reformed Churches, a former missionary to Mexico, is in that country and is actively scouting out opportunities for future mission work.

South Africa

The Lincoln Church in Ontario is involved with the Timothy Project from South Africa. This project is part of the Reformational Study Centre and seeks to provide study material for African pastors and other interested believers. Many of these people are struggling financially and cannot afford to buy the books or resources they need. Closely connected to

this is the help that the Centre gives to pastors who are preparing sermons. They can contact the Centre and it will send them information that will assist them in sermon preparation.

It may be noted that the Centre is the brainchild of the Rev. Jopie VanderLinden. He is assisted by a large staff of employees and volunteers. The Rev. Eugene Viljoen assist him in doing the promotional work and the Rev. Paulin Bedard from the ERQ (who is familiar to many of our readers) is developing the French language ministry support side.

Other mission efforts

Many churches in the federation also have the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) on their collection schedule. This organization is headquartered in Cyprus and has been promoting the Reformed faith throughout the Middle East for years. In the city of Larnaca they have a beautiful multi-functional building that serves as a worship and teaching centre. Seminars are held on a regular basis and people come there from all over the region to lodge, to learn, and to be better equipped spiritually. Radio broadcasting is organized from Beirut, Lebanon. Office bearing training is done in various places in Africa. Relief work is also a part of MERF's ministry.

Mission Aid

Often when missionaries are sent out it does not take long and mission aid efforts follow closely behind. Perhaps the most obvious case of that relates to Brazil. Over the years John and Ardis Kuik worked there as mission aid workers. In due time they were succeeded by their son Jake, and his wife Darlene. They in turn were followed by Chris and Thecia Boersema.

Over the years their work has involved nursery and health care, educational assistance, employment development, literacy programs, construction projects, and other efforts and ways that improve the quality of life of our Brazilian brothers and sisters.

A more recent development in Brazil is the hiring of a Reformed Education Worker in the person of brother Elias Barbosa. It is his task to promote the cause of Christian education both in schools and homes.

On a broader scale, one can also think here of the relief work done by the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (CRWRF). This organization supports efforts and projects in Kentucky, Nepal, Mexico, South Africa, Syria, Kenya, South Sudan, India. The list is long and the needs are great.

Some of the same kind of work is also done by Word and Deed which is active in Columbia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nigeria, Indonesia, and so forth.

Mission workers

If br. Barbosa is a type of mission worker, let it be quickly said that he is not the only one who fits that general description. At present there are a growing number of people, especially young people, who fall under that category. I am thinking of Jeremy and Ana VanBeelen, who work as orphanage administrators in Mexico, Duane and Mirabel Visscher, who are into construction work in the same country, Andrew and Meghan VanAndel, who work for the Wycliffe Bible Translators in the Solomon Islands, and Chantel V who works for the same organization. And what about those who work for Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) and other organizations? Unfortunately I do not have all of the names, places, and organizations, but they are many. May God bless their efforts and keep them safe.

Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA)

In June 2017, the Canadian Reformed Missions Association held its annual meeting in Aldergrove, BC. Currently all the churches and agencies of the federation involved in either foreign or home mission work of one kind or another are members of this organization. Any number of their representatives were present at the meeting. There they had the opportunity to re-connect, to listen, to learn, and to share. The speakers this time were Mr. Jim Beeke, a well-known Christian educator in BC, and the Rev. Julius VanSpronsen. The former spoke about Christian education on the mission field, and in particular in China. The latter addressed the subject of missionary care once a missionary family repatriates. Both presentations were well done and well received.

Inter-church relations

2017 was once again a year in which the Canadian Reformed Churches spent much time and money promoting their relationships with other churches around the world. At present we have "ecclesiastical fellowship" (which is often called "sister church relation") with eleven churches. This means that we have the closest possible relationship with them, outside of actual merger. One of those eleven churches has special status in that we are still actively pursuing union with the United Reformed Churches of North America.

In addition, we also have special, if indirect, fellowship with the thirteen churches that are members of NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council). And with thirty-four churches that are members of the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches). As the names suggest, the former organization is limited to churches in North America; whereas, the latter includes churches from there and from around the world. Also, whereas the former meets once a year, the latter meets every four years (although member churches in some regions meet more often).

From time to time I hear from our readers and thus I know that some of you wonder about all of these contacts. You especially wonder at all of the manpower currently involved in maintaining all of these relationships. If one turns to Article 113 of the General Synod Acts 2016 Dunnville and adds up all of the names of ministers and members dealing with one or other facet of inter-church relations, the number comes to thirty-three (this includes those on the various committees appointed to meet with the URCNA). By any measure, and especially by those of a small federation like ours, that represents a lot of people!

One can also say that from this a case can be made for the need to look at how we presently conduct our inter-church relations and at finding ways to streamline the process. Do we really need two committees and seventeen men to administer ecclesiastical fellowship? Do we really need to visit as many assemblies and synods as we do? Can a case not be made for prioritizing some of these relationships?

Now, all of this is not to argue that inter-church relations do not matter in today's world. They do!

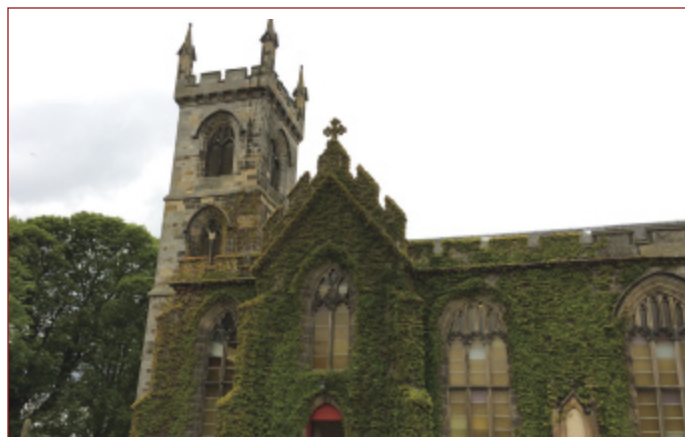
Indeed, they especially matter when it comes to small, struggling, poor, and isolated Reformed churches in different parts of the world. They badly need our help. So instead of directing so much attention at our affluent North American and Western sister churches, should our needy brothers and sisters not go first? This is a question that churches and assemblies will need to wrestle with and attempt to resolve.

The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands

Of all the relations that the Canadian Reformed Churches currently maintain, the one with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (RCN) is the most challenging one by far. Reasons? For one, it relates to the fact that this church is the closest thing that we have to a mother-church. Two, the RCN is a sister church that has chosen for a road that leads it away from the clear teaching of Scripture on the matter of the biblical offices. Three, the RCN has turned a deaf ear to our entreaties, failed to interact with our concerns in a credible manner, and has decided to implement an erroneous decision. To underline its concerns, Synod Dunnville 2016 even went so far as to suspend some of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Yet up until now it has all been for naught. This means that Synod Edmonton Immanuel 2019 will be called upon to make some serious and far-reaching decisions as to maintaining or severing ecclesiastical ties.

The International Conference of Reformed Churches

In 2017 the member churches of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) met for the ninth time since its inception. They did so in Jordan, Ontario in the month of July. In total around 100 delegates, advisors, and representatives came together in the Immanuel United Reformed Church and the Heritage Christian School from almost forty churches originating in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe. Speeches were delivered in the evening sessions and were given by Dr. Joel Beeke, Dr. Derek Thomas, Dr. Matthew Ebenezer, and Rev. Hiralal Solanki. In the morning sessions panel discussions were held on diaconal aid, missions, and theological



training. In the afternoon sub-committees met and delegations also took the opportunity to gather together.

Applications for membership were also received and approved for the Christian Reformed Church in Australia and the Presbyterian Church of Uganda. This increased the official membership of the ICRC to thirty-four member churches.

The sad note of the Conference was sounded when the assembly decided to suspend the membership of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. The reason for this was related to a recent decision by the General Synod of the RCN to admit women to the office of deacon, elder, and pastor contrary to the clear teachings of Holy Scripture.

In spite of the latter development, the overall reaction to the meeting of the Conference was very positive. New insights were shared. A lot of church business could be transacted. Contacts could be made between large and small churches. Special needs could be noted. Future assistance could be discussed.

The Conference hopes to meet again in plenary session in 2021. Delhi, India, is the proposed site and Melbourne, Australia, is the backup. For more information about the ICRC, readers are directed to the website: www.icrconline.com.

Delegations to synods

Both the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad and the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America took the opportunity to send delegates to the general assemblies

and synods of a number of sister-churches in Brazil, Indonesia, Korea, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, and United States. Representatives were also present at the meeting of NAPARC. Finally, the various committees sent a full delegation of two delegates and two advisors to the ICRC meeting in Jordan. All in all, it was a busy year for the brothers.

Christian education

Across the land our church members support a considerable number of both elementary and secondary Christian schools. Seeing that in Canada education is a provincial jurisdiction this means that our schools in different provinces are required to meet somewhat varying standards and requirements. Often this translates into little or no difficulty, but of late governments across the land have started to develop and promote a more aggressive gender based curriculum. And this represents a problem. The reason being that in areas such as sex education, pre-marital sex, marriage definitions, homosexuality, and LGBTQ issues the secular and Christian world views are not always on the same page.

At present it is hard to say where this is going; however, Christian schools and their supporters should prepare for rough sailing ahead. The secular agenda is not going away any time soon and there will be ever increasing pressure on Christian schools to conform.

In addition to external factors impacting our schools, there is also an internal one. It has to do with the fact that there is a real shortage in the principal staffing area. Read any issue of *Clarion*, turn to the back pages and you cannot fail to see that any number of schools are looking for principals for their elementary but especially for their secondary schools. It would appear that in our community we have not only a ministerial shortage but also a principal shortage. Something else to add to the prayer list.

Still, our schools are coping, adapting, and getting the job done. Thousands of children are receiving a quality Christian education; hundreds of teachers are shaping young lives, and a host of boards and committees are busy behind the scenes.

At the same time schools keep on changing as renovations are made, and as additions and new facilities are added. No sooner is school out in June and it seems the local school maintenance committee gets busy improving the physical plant in either a minor or major way.

Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College

On May 26, 2017, the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College hosted another graduation. Four young ladies were added to the ranks of graduates and teachers. The Rev. Dr. Bill DeJong gave the address entitled, "Give Thanks in All Circumstances: A Pedagogy of Gratitude."

On a related but different front, the Board of CCRTC continued to work on the matter of obtaining degree granting status. The fundraising target was met. New staff was hired. And so the effort continues. Whether or not it will be successful remains to be seen. Humanly speaking the situation does not look promising, at least not with Ontario's long history of insisting that the public education system is for all and with a political climate that is less than friendly to Christianity. Nevertheless, the Lord is still in control of all things and he continues to hear the prayers of his people.

Christian social and political involvement

This past summer Mike Schouten, the voice and face of *WeNeedALaw*, was hit by a truck as he was biking in northern BC. Thankfully, his life was spared and he continues to recover from his injuries. It is hoped that in due time he will be able to take up his pro-life work again.

On the political front, ARPA Canada is involved in educating Christians across the land about civic developments and duties. Mark Penninga continues to act as executive director. Andre Schutte heads the legal team, which includes John Sikkema and Tabitha Ewert. Colin Postma acts as grassroots manager and policy analyst. Together with others living across the country they represent a formidable group of believers who are doing what they can to influence and educate governments – federal, provincial, and local – about Christian norms and standards.

As this is being written, ARPA announced that its lobbying efforts had paid off in that Bill 51 which threatened to weaken or remove special protect for worship services was being reconsidered by the federal government. What this illustrates is that ARPA is making a difference and that its ability to inform and mobilize believers across the land produces results in Ottawa and elsewhere.

Special homes and places

In view of the fact that the Canadian population is getting grayer, the need for retirement homes and nursing villas is an ever increasing one. This is also obvious in our church community. Whether one looks around in BC, Alberta, Manitoba, or Ontario, one will see special housing for seniors. In some cases, it is limited to living together as "oldy goldies" in the same building. In others, there is a nursing home component as well. Together, whether the name be Elim, Manoah, Ebenezer, Greenview, Maranatha, Shalom, Trinity Towers, Mount Nemo, or something else, they are doing a most commendable job.

Seniors homes, however, are not the only places that deserve special mention. The same also applies to homes for the handicapped or disabled. Organizations such as Anchor, Bethesda, Rehoboth, and others continue to provide premium care for our special members. In some provinces government funding is available and helps to lighten the financial load; whereas, in others the faith community has to pitch in and do most of the funding raising.

In closing

Once again it is time to bring this annual epistle to a close. As always it has been long, and no doubt it has also been incomplete. If there is anything major that has missed my attention, please let me know at jvisscher@telus.net. The fact that most of this material ends up later on in the *Yearbook* of the churches gives me a chance to rectify any omissions.

May the Lord who saw you through 2017 also guide and keep you in 2018!





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Christians and the Fall of the Islamic State Caliphate

The retreat of the Islamic State (ISIS) from its self-proclaimed caliphate over a wide territory in the Middle East to a remnant of its former greatness is one of the big Middle East events of the past year. ISIS has viciously persecuted and killed Christians found in their territory. It was so bad that the European Union unanimously voted to recognize this persecution as genocide on February 3, 2016. The United States and Great Britain followed suit, both with unanimous votes, on March 15 and April 20, 2016 respectively. To Canada's shame, a similar motion did not pass our parliament because the majority of Justin Trudeau's Liberal government opposed it. You wonder why.

As we come to the end of another year, it is good to remember that Christians are the most persecuted believers in the world. Living in the comfort of the West makes it easy to forget their plight, but we must never forget to pray for them even though the Western media are largely silent on the persecution Christians endure.

Muslim oppression

In spite of the fact that Christians have lived in Iraq and Syria for almost two thousand years, they are now on the verge of extinction. Those who remain face an uncertain future, as the demise of ISIS does not necessarily mean complete freedom for Christians. For example, the opposition in Syria fighting against Bashar al-Assad's government is becoming increasingly Islamized and the civil war is changing into an Islamic jihad against what is left of Syria. Humanly speaking, Christians in the Middle East need all the help they can get. There are still a significant number there who want to shine the light of the gospel in their dismal context. Let us not forget to pray for them.

And Christians in the Middle East are not the only ones that endure Islamic oppression. Open Doors, a non-profit organization focused on serving persecuted Christians, lists countries according to the degree of persecution that Christians endure. After North Korea, where being a Christian is illegal and results in death or labour camps, the vast majority of countries where Christians are oppressed and harassed are Muslim. The top nine after North Korea are: Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and Eritrea. Open Doors ranks these as countries of extreme persecution.

For example, in Pakistan, the second most populous Islamic state after Indonesia, the almost four million Christians endure horrific oppression. According to the Open Doors website Christian communities are subject to stringent rules and constant monitoring. Those converting from Islam are persecuted both by radical Islamists as well as by family and neighbours. "Christians are targets for murder, bombings, abduction of women, rape, forced marriages and eviction from home and country. Unjust and arbitrary blasphemy laws are used to punish Christians and prevent evangelism."

ISIS has done much with its caliphate to arouse fundamentalist Muslims to the cause of Islam in Islamic countries outside the Middle East. Indeed, ISIS has attracted adherents worldwide. One might think that with the gradual collapse of ISIS, the threat of fundamentalist Islam would be considerably diminished. However, that would be an exercise in self-deception. While it's losing in the Middle East, ISIS is making progress in the West and elsewhere with the aid of Western political correctness that stifles honest debate about Islam. The ongoing threat of more terrorist attacks is a

sobering reality in Europe. Also in North America the security forces are kept busy.

The situation in Europe is especially sobering.

The jihadist threat in Europe

The number of official Islamic extremists that authorities in Britain, France, Belgium, and Germany need to keep an eye on now totals about 66,000. As Giulio Meotti, an Italian journalist, noted in a Gatestone Institute article, "That sounds like a real army – on active duty."

To keep track of all these individuals must be a Herculean task which may even be beyond the capability of available resources. Britain has identified 23,000 potential terrorists and, not surprisingly, there was "intense criticism that many opportunities to stop the Manchester suicide bomber had been overlooked." There are simply too many to keep under surveillance.

"French authorities are monitoring 15,000 Islamists according to a database created in 2015" but "different surveys estimate up to 20,000 French radical Islamists." "Belgium's anti-terror watch-list surged from 1,875 in 2010 to 18,884 in 2017." And as Meotti notes over against those thousands of jihadists are just over 30,000 Belgian soldiers on active duty. Germany's number of potential jihadists "has exploded from 3,800 in 2011 to 10,000." These statistics have led the chief of the Swedish army, General Anders Brännström, to tell those under his command that there might be war in Europe "within a few years."

The Islamists are well organized. They "have built a powerful infrastructure of terror inside Europe's cities. These terror bases are self-segregated, multicultural enclaves in which extremist Muslims promote Islamic fundamentalism and implement Islamic law." They can easily get their weapons from the Balkans, thanks to Europe's open borders. They can get their money from Qatar and Saudi Arabia and "human resources" are available "donated by unvetted mass migration coming through the Mediterranean."

This invisible army is creating destructive havoc. From 1970 to 2015 "terrorism across Europe has killed

10,537 people in 18,803 reported attacks. And it is getting worse." In Meotti's view, "a jihadist takeover of Europe is no longer unthinkable. . . .

The terrorist's ransom is already visible: they have destabilized the democratic process in many European countries and are drafting the terms of freedom of expression."

In some ways, the battle-front against Islamism has been moved from the Middle East to Europe itself. "Of all the French soldiers engaged in military operations, half are deployed inside France; in Italy, more than half of Italian soldiers are used in 'Safe Streets,' the operation keeping Italy's cities safe." With massive Muslim immigration and political correctness, it seems "as if Europe had accepted to turn its own cities into a new Mosul."

*"Do not be afraid,
for those who are with us are
more than those who are
with them."*

Meotti ends his article on an ominous note. "If Europe's leaders do not act now to destroy the enemy within, the outcome may well come to be an 'Afghan scenario,' in which Islamists control part of the territory from where they launch attacks against cities. Europe could be taken over the same way Islamic State took over much of Iraq: with just one third of Iraqi territory."

Even if one does not accept Meotti's analysis, it is obvious that the current political strategy of open borders and blind political correctness could indeed lead to disastrous results. European rulers have an obligation to protect its citizens, its democratic system, and its Judeo-Christian heritage. They must not let the jihadists set the agenda.

Meotti's account of this invisible jihadist army is not very pleasant to read and may even make one depressed. But we must not let that happen. His article about this invisible jihadist "army" made me think of an event recorded in 2 Kings 6. The prophet Elisha woke up one morning to see a Syrian army

surround the city he was in. It looked hopeless. His servant asked, "What shall we do?" Elisha said: "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." God then opened the eyes of his servant and he saw what he had not seen before – horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. The Lord's army surrounded them.

As we enter a new year, we need to remember that our sovereign God still protects his people today. "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him (Ps 34:7) and God commands his angels concerning those who trust in him to guard them in all their ways (Ps 91:11). Are the angels not "ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" (Heb 1:14).

While we have to be vigilant and responsible, God's control of all things is of great comfort to us. We know that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church (Matt 16:18). Furthermore, we and all Christians who find themselves harassed and oppressed know that in Christ, "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:37-38).

Sources: "Genocide of Christians by ISIL" Wikipedia; The website of Open Doors; Giulio Meotti, "Are Jihadists Taking over Europe?" June 7, 2017 on the Gatestone website.



Clarion Kids

The Christmas Story

Luke 1: 26-38, 2:1-21

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem because Caesar Augustus had ordered a census. Mary wrapped Jesus up and laid him in a manger in a stable, because there was no room for them in the inn. An angel appeared to some shepherds who were in the fields with their flocks. He told the shepherds the good news of Jesus' birth, and they went and found Jesus. They told everyone they saw what they had seen and heard, because they were so excited about the birth of Jesus. We should be very thankful to God, because he sent his only son Jesus to save us all from our sins.

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



Crossword Puzzle

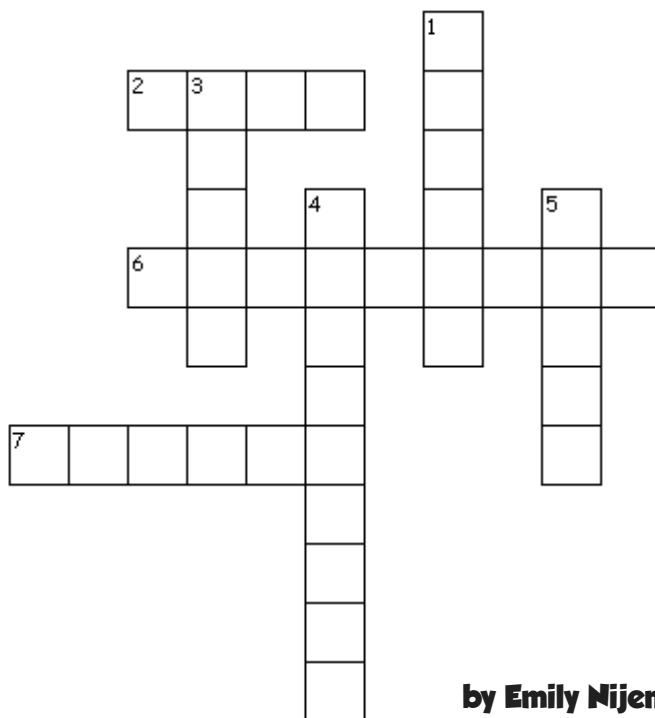
Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

Across

- 2. Jesus' mother.
- 6. Town where Jesus was born.
- 7. Jesus' earthly father.

Down

- 1. Where Mary laid Jesus.
- 3. Appeared to tell the shepherds about Jesus.
- 4. They were taking care of their sheep.
- 5. Sent by God to save us from our sins.



by Emily Nijenhuis



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Gabriel's Message

Based on Luke 1:26-35; 2:4-7

1. The an - gel Ga - bri - el from heav - en came _____
 2. A child you will con - ceive, a son you'll bear. _____
 3. Then maid - en Mar - y meek - ly bowed her head, _____
 4. In Beth - le - hem, of Mar - y, Christ was born; _____

to Vir - gin Mar - y and he did pro - claim: _____
 He will be great and will be named 'Sa - viour.' _____
 "To me be as it pleas - es God," she said. _____
 Em - man - u - el, for whom God's peo - ple yearn. _____

Greet - ings, O high - ly fa - voured one! May God bless you! _____
 The Lord will give to him the throne of Is - ra - el, _____
 "My soul will praise and mag - ni - fy his ho - ly name. _____
 And Chris - tians all through - out the world will ev - er say, _____

Don't be a - fraid or trou - bled!"
 And he will reign for - ev - er."
 He lifts up all the hum - ble."
 "The Lord is al - ways faith - ful!"

Glo - - ri - a! _____

Translated by Sabine Baring-Gould 1834-1924
Adapted by George van Popta © 2017

Basque carol
arranged by Edgar Pettman 1865-1943

*And so the end of the year has come once again!
Thank you all for continuing to read the Ray of Sunshine.
I wish you all a blessed Christmas and Happy New Year
in our Heavenly Fathers care.*

Today I would like to introduce you to James Kamminga. He is celebrating his birthday on December 10.

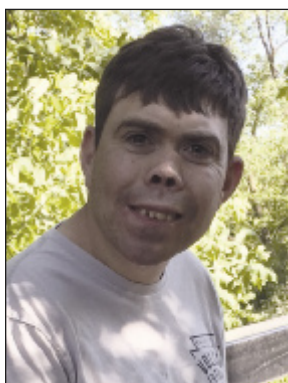
James Kamminga

James was born and raised in Carman, Manitoba. He has four older brothers, one younger sister, and fourteen nieces and nephews. He attended school at Dufferin Christian School in Carman.

James is very interested in what is going on around him. He likes watching the traffic and people walking by. He especially likes watching large machinery working. He loves animals and has many pictures hanging in his home and likes to point them out. James says "Hi!" to friends and strangers alike. That is the only word he says but he gestures and makes sounds to communicate with you. He can become very animated when excited and is generally good natured but knows how to dig his heels in when displeased. He likes going to church and gets very excited when he sees his brother playing organ.

James lived with his parents until April 2014 when he became the first resident at Cornerstone Christian Care. He now has one housemate. James settled in very easily and feels it is his home. He has been going to a day program run by Cornerstone since summer 2010 and they continue to provide this as well. The home is near the outskirts of Carman but there is a walking path across the road that goes into town and throughout it as well as going the other direction up to DCS.

James helps doing all the household chores that need doing in a home like vacuuming, dishes, and laundry. He learns to put his own belongings and



clothes away. Baking, doing crafts, and playing games are also favourites. He crushes hundreds of pop cans and the money that raises helps pay for activities. He loves playing "hockey" all year around, inside and outside, with a hockey stick and a ball. He has an adapted bike which he rides and

goes for walks almost daily. During cold weather, the nearby greenhouse provides a good walk area - with many friends/family to greet - as does the public high school. The local library is a regular stop for new books to read with pictures to enjoy.

James helps deliver meals on wheels once a week, cleans desks at DCS twice a week, watches a variety of sports at the school and the local sports fields. A favourite activity is swimming and in the summer months he goes to the local pool almost daily. The rest of the year he gets to swim about once a week. He also enjoys watching the choir practice, going to Friendship Group, music therapy, concerts, and other events when they are offered.

On Sundays, James's parents pick him up for church and he spends the day with them. James is blessed with wonderful caregivers. He is thriving with an active life of opportunity to learn new skills and participate in many activities and be part of the community. We pray for God's continued blessing over Cornerstone and the "extended family" of staff, board, and supporters of this home.



January birthdays

- | | |
|--|---|
| 6 Jason Herrewynen will be 44
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3 | 17 Grace Homan will be 62
c/o Anchor Home, 361 Thirty Road S., RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2 |
| 7 Christine Breukelman will be 46
2225-19th Street
Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4 | 19 Edwin Schutte will be 34
844 Bowman Road
Abbotsford, BC V3G 1S9 |
| 13 Ben DeJong will be 27
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3 | 19 Janine Smid will be 48
141 Kittridge Avenue E.
Strathroy, ON N7G 2A9 |
| 14 Stephen Dykstra will be 35
Box 3573
Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0 | 26 Katherine Nijenhuis will be 52
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4 |
| 17 Henry Driegen will be 62
#19-31450 Spur Ave
Abbotsford, BC V2T 5M3 | 30 Tyler Hoeksema will be 29
6755 Lorne Drive, Sardis, BC V2R 2G3 |
- Congratulations to the many of you celebrating a birthday in January! May the Lord bless you in the year ahead, and grant you a wonderful day with family and friends.*

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

If there are any address or other changes that I need to be aware of please let me know as soon as possible.

Rachel Vis

731 Lincoln Street, Wellandport, Ontario L0R 2J0
tom.rachelvis@gmail.com • 905-329-9476





S. Carl Van Dam
*Minister of the
Canadian Reformed Church
at Houston, BC*
s.carl.vandam@gmail.com

Visit to South Korea

Introduction

As a Westerner, South Korea has for me been a country shrouded in mystery. This past September, I had the privilege of visiting this beautiful, mountainous country wherein the Lord has worked his mighty works of grace and mercy. As a matter of fact, just recently in 2015 it was announced by the Korean national census that Christianity has become the most popular religion in South Korea, surpassing also Buddhism. Given Korean history, as we shall see, this is certainly a miracle.

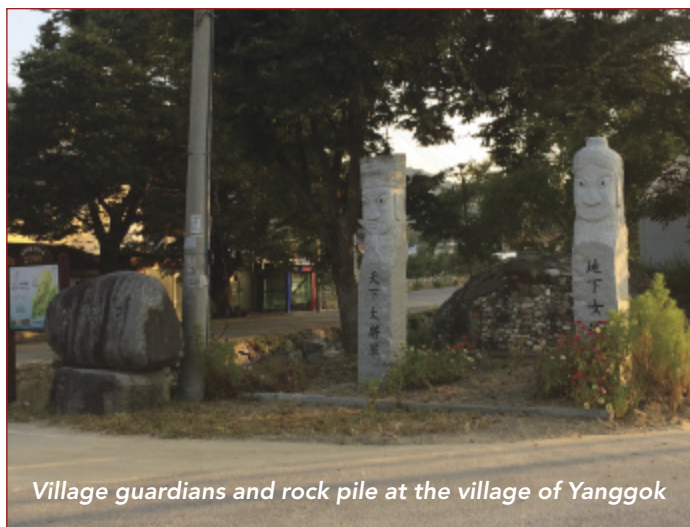
The specific occasion for this visit was the fact that the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCK), with whom we, as Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), have ecclesiastical fellowship, holds their General Assembly each year in September. General Synod Dunnville 2016 mandated the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad to visit the KPCK General Assembly once every three years. As CanRC, we have a cooperative agreement with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) (RCN) and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to take turns visiting the KPCK every three years. So 2017 was the year that it was our turn to make the visit. I was accompanied on my trip to South Korea by Jerome Lee, an elder in the Surrey Canadian Reformed Church. He is also a minister of the Word with his credentials with the KPCK. This is the first time that the Canadian Reformed delegation to the KPCK included someone who knew the Korean language and people. Needless to say, Jerome Lee's assistance was invaluable and much appreciated.

South Korea: a few impressions

South Korea is a relatively small country which has a population of fifty-one million people. Much of the country is covered with mountains which, although they are generally not very high in South

Korea, are often quite steep. This means that the usable portions of flatter land are densely occupied, on the one hand with many apartment buildings to accommodate the large population and on the other hand, with rice fields and other agricultural enterprises to provide food. Every square inch of usable land is used as efficiently as possible.

After landing at the Incheon airport, we crossed over to the mainland and, some time later, entered the city of Seoul. I can't say exactly when that happened as it was all urban sprawl. Seoul is the centrepiece of South Korea and is a city of about nine million. It is surrounded by the Gyeonggi ring province with a further fourteen million people. So about half the population of South Korea is in the greater Seoul area. In the last few decades, South Korea has progressed very quickly to become one of the more powerful economic countries in the world. South Koreans have fully embraced the most recent technological developments as seen, for example, in the abundant use of devices, ubiquitous presence of GPS systems, bullet trains, and so forth. In the cities, there is little visible evidence of Korea's long history; the wars with the Japanese and North Koreans in the past century have devastated Korea's cities, including many historic buildings. As I walked through the crowded streets of Seoul, I couldn't help but think of the great devastation which could occur again if the tensions with North Korea were to result in actual war. While I was there, North Korea had fired another missile into the sea and President Trump had delivered his boisterous speech at the UN. This is a reality which the people of Korea have lived with now for a long time. There is great uncertainty about the future, but God's children there rely upon their heavenly Father and know that nothing can happen without his will. The knowledge of God's love in Jesus Christ gives real comfort in these unsettled times.



Village guardians and rock pile at the village of Yanggok

For centuries, the Korean people did not know of this comfort. This becomes especially apparent when you go to the countryside and visit the villages. Often at the entrance to older villages you find ancient piles of rocks, known as *seonangdang*, to which you can add a rock for the purpose of having your wish fulfilled – the bigger the rock you add, the more chance you have of success apparently. You will also often find the village guardians (*jangseung*), who are supposed to greet visitors and especially scare away evil spirits. A lot of things seem to be dedicated to scaring away evil spirits: elaborate tombstones which you also find at the entrance to villages, figurines on the corners of the roofs at, for example, the various buildings of the Gyeongbokgung Palace in downtown Seoul and fierce-looking dragons as well as other figures just beneath the roof line of Buddhist temples. The people felt threatened but turned to idols for protection.

These kinds of beliefs turn out to be more contemporary than one might suppose. A few hours after coming off the plane, I found myself climbing a forested mountainside in Anyang, a city near Seoul, and then arriving at a Buddhist temple. There are quite a few of them in the mountains – the higher up in the mountains the better. A Buddhist temple typically consists of several different smaller temples or shrines. This particular one (Manghaeam Temple) had a rare stone image of Buddha made in 1479. The fact that this image was made of stone was supposed to assist in helping one's ancestors who had passed away. People pay money to have their ancestors'

names placed in the temple. Above that temple was another one, named the temple of a thousand Buddhas because that is how many small images of Buddha it contained. The idea is that the more images of Buddha there are, the greater the chance of him hearing your prayers. Incense and offerings of fruit were common in these temples. The sight of a man in a business suit praying in the temple drove home the fact that this ancient looking manner of worship is still practised in modern South Korea.

History of the Korean Church

Thanks be to God that he did not leave the people of Korea to such superstition and idolatry. For a long time, up until the late 1800s, Korea was a closed society, hostile to non-Asian foreigners. The few who tried to enter Korea before it opened up its borders were treated harshly and either banished or killed. In 1866, despite the dangers, Rev. Robert J. Thomas was determined to share the gospel with the Korean people. He realized that educated Koreans could read Chinese and so he distributed Chinese Bibles in various places as he made his way up the Tai Tong River, aboard the American ship *The General Sherman*, towards Pyongyang, then the most important city in Korea. Eventually the ship became trapped in the rapids near Pyongyang and the Koreans sent fire ships into *The General Sherman*. Faced with the burning of their ship, those on board had little choice but to get off the ship and try to reach shore. One of them was Rev. Thomas. He struggled ashore with his arms full of Bibles. As he tried to give the Bibles to the Koreans, they clubbed him to death. And so he became the first martyr of the Christian faith to give his life on Korean soil. Many of the Bibles which he had brought were burned but others survived and were read and so began the spread of the gospel in Korea.

About twenty years later, under the leadership of King Gojong, Korea opened its borders to foreigners and soon American Presbyterian missionaries arrived. The first Presbyterian missionary was Rev. Horace G. Underwood from the Presbyterian Church in the USA (Northern) and he was followed by others from the Presbyterian Church in the US (Southern) as well as the Presbyterian Church in Canada and Australia among others. Because of this strong American Presbyterian presence among the Christian

missionaries to Korea, the Korean Presbyterian Church was established along the lines of the traditions of American Presbyterianism, a factor which remains influential to this day.

The Lord richly blessed the mission work to Korea. One of the most remarkable moments of the early history of the Christian church in Korea was what has come to be known as the "Korean Pentecost." On a January evening in 1907, there was a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit which gripped hundreds of men who had gathered together for a week-long conference. They were all praying to God for mercy, confessing their sins and weeping. The powerful revival swept across the whole country. A moving account of what happened can be found in the book *The Korean Pentecost* by Rev. William N. Blair and Rev. Bruce F. Hunt, published in 1977 by Banner of Truth Trust.

This revival came at a time when the Korean church was also facing much persecution from the Japanese authorities. Korea had become a Japanese protectorate in 1905 and then was effectively annexed by Japan in 1910 and remained under Japanese rule until 1945. The Japanese were aggressively trying to stamp out Korean culture and forced the population to worship the Japanese emperor (also called Shinto shrine worship). Those who did not want to worship the emperor were severely punished, imprisoned, tortured, and even killed. Sadly, there was also internal division in the church, with some holding the position that emperor worship was merely being patriotic. Yet despite these difficulties as well as a time of persecution

under the communists during the Korean War period, the church in Korea continued to grow by leaps and bounds and by the early 1970s, after about ninety years of mission work, the number of Christians in Korea had gone from zero to over 2.5 million (Blair & Hunt, *Korean Pentecost*, 193). What an amazing work of the Lord Jesus Christ who has gathered and continues to gather his church!

Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea

As CanRC, we have ecclesiastical fellowship with the KPCK. Because of the language and cultural differences between Canada and South Korea, these churches remain largely unknown to many of us.

The Presbyterian Church of Korea underwent much turmoil as a result of the difficulties of the Korean War and even more so because of how many had compromised themselves by submitting to Shinto shrine worship. The strongest resistance to emperor worship had occurred in the Gyeongnam area in south-eastern Korea, including the city of Busan. It is in the Gyeongnam presbytery that there was a real desire to reform the church, to officially repent of the sin of Shinto worship and exercise self-discipline where necessary, and return to biblical, faithful worship. As part of the desire for reform, the Korea Theological Seminary was established in 1946 since the existing Joseon Seminary in Seoul was seen as being liberal and tolerant of shrine worship. To make a long story short, these efforts at reformation and renewal were not well received by the larger body of the Presbyterian Church of Korea and as a result the KPCK was established in 1952. For more detail, see the book by Dr. S.G. Hur, *The Church Preserved Through Fires: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Korea* published by Inheritance Publications in 2006.

Currently the KPCK is a large federation, consisting of about 2000 congregations, organized in thirty-nine presbyteries with over 400,000 members. The KPCK is a biblically and confessionally faithful federation of churches which, under the blessing of the Lord, has largely avoided the fracturing which has beset so many churches in South Korea. The significance of this problem is seen in the fact that, in South Korea today, there are around 200 Presbyterian federations of churches, many of whom are biblically faithful in theology. All too often a



Martyrdom of Rev. Thomas

spirit of competition or a centering around certain prominent individuals can lead to these divisions among brothers and sisters in the Lord.

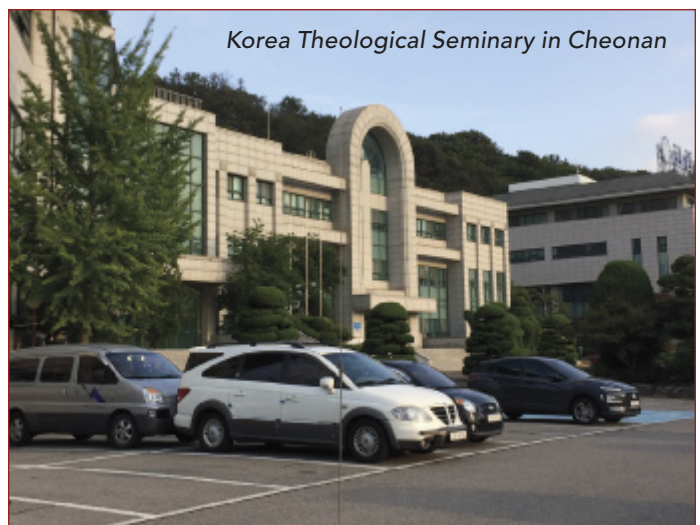
In 2015, at the 65th General Assembly of the KPCK, the Korean Presbyterian Churches (KPC) and the KPCK were officially united. This ended a separation which had occurred in 1976 due to a difference in how to handle a disciplinary matter which involved a crime (whether or not the civil authorities should be involved). While the KPCK believed that the civil authorities should be informed and take up their responsibilities in such a matter, the KPC believed that 1 Corinthians 6 forbade such involvement. In the meantime, the KPC has come to accept the KPCK position and therefore the union could take place. At this General Assembly in 2015 there was much joy and the hope was expressed that the church's missional witness would also be strengthened. It was also hoped that this union would encourage other church federations in South Korea to unite with others according to the prayer of our Lord Jesus in John 17.

The KPCK maintains and runs the Korea Theological Seminary in Cheonan, a city about an hour south of Seoul. This seminary seeks to remain faithful to the Scriptures "as the inerrant Word of God and as the only standard for faith and life." It does this also in line with the Westminster Standards. The seminary has around 400 students and eighteen professors. In addition to offering the M.Div. program for training ministers, it also offers a variety of other degree programs in theology and missiology. To achieve its goals of serving the church, making a positive contribution to society, and raising up academically solid as well as passionate evangelists, the seminary states the following emphases in their promotional pamphlet,

1. to build up the Church of God, we train students to teach and preach the Word of God faithfully and help them to live piously in the spirit of Coram Deo;
2. to contribute to the evangelism of Korea and the world mission, we inspire students to be passionate toward the Gospel of Jesus Christ;
3. to contribute to the development of the nation and the society and to be responsible for God's creation, we educate and train students to live with a servant-heartedness in love and justice.

The admirable focus on mission is also seen in the fact that the KPCK sends out 498 missionaries to fifty-nine countries. Many of these missionaries bring the gospel to the Korean diaspora throughout the world.

On Sunday, September 17 in the morning we worshipped at the Gwanak church in Seoul. This church started out as a church plant by Rev. Haeshin Yoo about nine years ago. The Lord has blessed his work of gospel proclamation and the church has around 90 members. At 10:30 Rev. Yoo taught a Bible class, after which the regular worship service began at 11:30. He has been preaching through the epistle of Paul to the Romans. On this particular morning, he expounded Romans 15:22-33. As those who had received grace, we were exhorted to also serve one another as indebted servants. The saints in Jerusalem shared spiritual blessings with the Gentile Christians and now the Gentile Christians were able to assist the Jewish Christians with material blessings and encouragement. The apostle urges all the churches to join with him in praying to God for him and the progress of the gospel. After the service, lunch was provided for everyone and we could enjoy a time of good Christian fellowship. I have found the Korean people to be very warm and kind and it was a real pleasure to get to know them more. After the lunch, Jerome Lee and I were invited to tell about the Canadian churches and also our own journey with Jesus Christ. This was a very good experience. It was encouraging to speak to one another about how the Lord has worked in our life and served to build



a lasting connection between us as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

KPCK General Assembly

The KPCK 67th General Assembly was held from September 19 to 22, 2017 at the Korea Theological Seminary. In attendance as delegates were 249 ministers and 248 elders. The seminary has a large auditorium which holds about 1300 people. It seems that about that many were present for the opening service. At this service the chairman, Rev Sang-seok Kim gave a sermon on Hebrews 12:2 under the theme, "Let us look to Jesus." In obedience to Jesus' command and in following the faith of those who have gone before us, we must look to Jesus, the only Saviour. It is only when we look to the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, that the church here on earth will be able to overcome its troubles and afflictions.

On the Wednesday morning of the assembly, I was able to bring greetings on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches along with many other churches and organizations. There were representatives from many different Korean Presbyterian churches all over the world, as well as from Reformed and Presbyterian churches in The Netherlands, South Africa, Indonesia, and Japan. Further, greetings were brought from Korean Christian media networks and the Korean Bible Society.

In order to get a flavour for what is currently living in the KPCK, it can be noted that the following were some of the topics discussed at the assembly: proper definition and regulation of "institution ministers" (i.e. ministers working at the seminary or hospital, etc.), the proper size of a congregation (the size of 250 was recommended for a single pastor), support for opposing the "Anti-Discrimination Law" at the national assembly, and providing clear direction on the matter of homosexuality. The recent decision of the RCN to open all the ecclesiastical offices to women was received with shock and sadness in the KPCK. The assembly commissioned a committee of seminary professors to study the matter and come back to the next assembly with recommendations as to how best to respond to this development.



Jerome Lee (I.) with members of the Gwanak congregation

Two Reformed church federations

General Synod Dunnville also instructed us to have contact with the Independent Reformed Church in Korea (IRCK) as well as with the Reformed Churches of Korea (RCK).

IRCK: When I first arrived in South Korea, I was graciously hosted by Rev. Heon Soo Kim and his wife for the first few days of my trip. Rev. Kim is a minister in the IRCK and also runs the Theological Academy of the IRCK, which is currently training eight students for the ministry. The IRCK was established in 1964 under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Hong Chun Kim. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Presbyterian Church in Korea was in a state of turmoil and confusion regarding the ecumenical movement represented by the World Council of Churches. This matter resulted in various schisms in the church and the focus of the debates was too often on issues surrounding false ecumenicity and financial support from various organizations from abroad. Out of this confusing situation arose Dr. Hong Chun Kim who desired to turn back to the real reason for being church, the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and complete reliance upon God and the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word. The word "Independent" in the name of the church should not be understood in a congregationalist sense but rather in the sense of being totally dependent upon God alone.

The federation currently has four congregations with a total membership of around 700. The IRCK



subscribes to the Westminster Standards as well as the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort together with the ecumenical creeds. It follows a mixture of Reformed and Presbyterian church polity; they have sought to use the best of both traditions in a way that would be most fruitful for the Korean context. In addition to maintaining the Theological Academy, the IRCK also has a publishing house called the Sungyak (Holy Covenant) Press. They produce much good Reformed material and also translate Reformed books from English into Korean. In this way, they make a substantial contribution to the wide dissemination of the Reformed faith in Korea.

On the Sunday evening at 7:00 pm we worshipped in the Independent Reformed Riverside Church in Anyang. Rev. Hyung Do Huh led the worship service and preached on Mark 5:21-43. In this account of the raising of Jairus' daughter, Jesus teaches Jairus and us to depend upon him completely, even when it might seem to us that the Lord has forgotten us. Jesus revealed himself as the one who has power even over death and strengthened Jairus' faith in him. This encouraging message was accompanied by some of the most powerful and beautiful singing I have ever heard in a worship service. It was one of the distinctives of Dr. Kim that he trained his church well in singing. He had a doctorate in both theology and music and put those talents to use in writing a hymnal, *Hymns for Worship*, composing both the music and the words. These hymns have a strong scriptural and

Trinitarian focus. In recent years, there has been a desire to sing the Psalms as well in worship and this has been received among the churches with much appreciation. Sadly, however, there is also a contingent within the churches who disagree with this and believe that only the hymnal should be used. We pray that the IRCK will receive what they need from the Lord to work through this matter and maintain the unity of the brothers and sisters.

RCK: On Monday afternoon, September 18, Jerome Lee and I met with representatives of the Reformed Churches in Korea. This federation arose quite a number of years ago as a result of difficulties within the KPCCK. Presently this federation consists of three congregations with a total membership of around 200. They have been saddened by the fact that in 2015 one of the churches was suspended from the federation. We were able to have good contact with them in our meeting and could encourage each other in the promises and blessings of our heavenly Father in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is our hope that there may be healing and reconciliation with the KPCCK. May the Lord give what is needed.

Concluding observations

It was a very good experience to visit our brothers and sisters in South Korea. Although the language and the culture is very different, the bond of the faith is very real and genuine. As South Korea becomes more and more westernized, the challenges facing the church there become more and more like our own challenges as well. They are also faced with increasing secularization and materialism, as well as the exaltation of sinful immoral lifestyles. In this worldwide climate of the rejection of God's good law, we can be of tremendous help and assistance to one another. The fact that Jerome Lee, as someone who understands the Korean language and culture, could be present in our delegation helped a great deal to build bridges and hopefully maintain greater contact in the future. May the Lord bless these efforts of interaction of fellow believers across cultures so that his Name may be glorified!





www.merf.org



Adversity Turned to Blessing



Top: South Sudanese internally displaced Christians express gratitude for MERF diaconal aid delivered by a chartered plane.

One hundred fifty years ago, David Livingstone searched the depths of Africa for the source of the Nile, yearning to open the way for gospel proclamation in a region oppressed by paganism and slave raiding. The wild flatlands of South Sudan feed the White Nile. Scores of tribes follow primitive ways of herding and farming between streams, swamplands, and rivers. They continued to suffer even into the 20th century from demonic paganism, slave raiding, and intertribal violence.

After more than 30 years of civil war with the Arab north of Sudan, South Sudan gained independence in 2011. Sadly, it was only a short lull in the ruthless violence and destruction; war-

lords continue to fight over political power and natural resources.

Still, amidst all this adversity, hearts have been softened to the gospel on an overwhelming scale. Small churches planted by faithful missionaries shared their eternal hope in Christ with troubled countrymen. Many thousands came to faith, creating a growing need to raise up biblically-trained spiritual leaders from among largely illiterate tribal people.

Tribal Witness

MERF's Lokichoggio (Loki) Ministry Center was opened in 2003 in response to this need. It is situated in the last outpost of northern Kenya, the land of the largely unreachable Turkana tribe, just over the border from

South Sudan. A gospel witness to the local Turkana tribal community blossomed out of simply being good neighbors. Sharing well water and giving first aid won their trust. Grain is shared in times of famine. When Sunday services began, families flocked to attend. They still make up the majority of the local congregation. Most of the rest are trainees from various South Sudanese tribes, usually considered traditional rivals. This has not gone unnoticed by the elders of the Turkana community, who have defended the compound in times of insecurity.

Radio Lifeline

Before the Loki MERF compound was completed, South Sudanese gospel radio broadcasters camped there in tents, preparing messag-

es to instruct and comfort their people in God's Word. Shortwave radio gospel messages are now broadcast daily in the major Nuer language reaching all across South Sudan and beyond. This is a lifeline for those lacking Bibles or Christian fellowship or trained leaders.

Equipping Spiritual Leaders

MERF's Loki Center hosts three intensive 3-month Bible courses each year. Twenty to thirty trainees travel long distances from different South Sudanese and other East African tribal churches to become equipped to study and share



God's Word. For many it is their first time to sleep in a bed, use a library, or get to know people from a different tribe. Preparatory English classes unify the very different tribal language groups for Bible study.

Faithful Service

Experienced pastors and teachers from different parts of the world serve as short-

term guest instructors. Praise God for the efforts of Pastors Bruce Powell, Tim Burden, and Ian McClean from the UK, and Peter van der Laan of the Netherlands. They have tirelessly recruited pastors and elders as Loki guest instructors, and the latter three have repeatedly served themselves.

It is a joy to see men from tribes with a long his-

tory of animosity enjoying Christian fellowship, thanks to the wise leadership of Loki Manager Pastor David Wat and his team.

Armed conflict in South Sudan often makes it difficult to transport trainees. The Lord has given him the wisdom not only to arrange safe travel for trainees, but also for the delivery of much needed diaconal aid to South Sudanese churches ministering to thousands displaced by fighting.

Prayer & Praise

- 🌐 Praise God for the shining witness of MERF's Ministry Center in Lokichoggio.
- 🌐 Pray for the light of the gospel to bring lasting peace in South Sudan.
- 🌐 Please pray for the Lord's provision of a qualified resident instructor and suitable coordinator for MERF's biblical training programs.
- 🌐 Especially remember the 24 pastors, elders, and evangelists completing their course on October 30.

Top: Guest instructor Stuart and Beryl Owen with July 2017 Loki graduating class. **Below:** MERF Loki Center offers diaconal aid to needy Turkana.



MERF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support! Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through www.canadahelps.org

*"...in you all families of the earth will be blessed."
—Genesis 12:3*



Edusketch

Chris Deboer
Principal of
Dufferin Christian School,
in Carman, Manitoba
chrisdeboer@dufferinchristian.ca

"Eighteen summers. This is the average amount of summers parents will spend with their children before the children 'leave the nest.' To what extent did we enjoy this past season, and take the opportunities available to love and nurture our children?" It's a compelling question that Ken Leffers, Principal of Parkland Immanuel Christian School, asked in his August 2017 Principal's Report. He then goes on to suggest that during the ten months of the school year, the educational staff of a school have a major impact on the lives of students and assures parents that "our Educational staff, both teachers and EA's, will care deeply for your children, do their best to help them succeed, and [all while] relying on God's help and strength throughout the process." This truth is echoed by many principals – we are richly blessed to have caring staff members who love the community of the saints in which they labour.

The oldest school in our families of schools, William of Orange, has our newest principal, Mr. James Kanis. In a recent issue of the school's magazine, he writes, "Please continue to be engaged in your child's learning. Ask them about their strengths and challenges, try to make singing memory work a habit around the dinner table, and keep communication between home and classroom open. Most of all, continue to support the important cause of Reformed education, carrying William of Orange students, staff, and board to our heavenly Father in prayer." A good reminder for all of us at any time of the school year.

Steve Hofford, treasurer of Cornerstone Christian School in Lynden, WA, reminds parents of what is written in their Parent Handbook: "Parental responsibility and involvement are cornerstones to

a relationship of mutual respect between teachers and parents. Parents will appreciate the assistance they receive from teachers in meeting their [the parents] obligation to educate their children." It is interesting how often things like memory work, spelling words, or other homework are viewed as the parents assisting the school, but it really is the school assisting those very same parents. Look at homework as an opportunity to become more fully engaged in your parental responsibility to know what and how your child is learning!

In a number of different school magazines, there is the callout for board nominations. Some communities seem to have a better level of success in finding nominations. This process is a good reminder that our schools are parental schools, and it remains important that men or women who seek to help shape the covenant school in their own community must be available to help serve in this capacity.

From the information that I was able to glean from newsletters, it is striking how many of our schools are able to function with a balanced budget. Some have significant surpluses for future planning, and one or two have small yearly deficits but still have an overall healthy financial situation. Much reason for thankfulness!

The vice-principal in Neerlandia, Quinton Harthoorn, speaks about the Fall Retreat that his high school staff and students could experience. While there were some highlights, he concludes, "This event was a nice opportunity for students and staff alike to build relationships with one another, and glorify the Lord together." Relationship building is one of the key goals of this retreat. Providence Reformed Collegiate has a similar practice to help kick-off their school year, too. Another practice that

has been gaining in some popularity is an annual kick-off BBQ where everyone brings a dessert to share and the Board/PAC/Ladies' Aid serve the meat and salads. This is another fine way of building relationships in the school community, without having to ask for money which also takes up so much of our time.

Neerlandia also has leadership committees that organize different events. They have ARPA, Fundraising, Service, Assembly, Rejuvenation, Events, and Athletics committees. This certainly helps to ensure that students all have an opportunity to develop servant leadership skills. This idea of servant leadership or godly leadership also came into focus at the annual dinner and speech hosted by Hope Reformed Christian School. They had Rev. Jeff De Boer from Mid-America Reformed Seminary speak on the topic "Raising Up Godly Leaders in an Age of Followers."

In the League of Canadian Reformed Schools of Ontario's June 2017 newsletter, their director, Jason Heemskerk, writes an intriguing article entitled "Being Professional?" He writes that professionalism "consists of more than checking off the boxes on a list; it is a state of being." He then highly recommends a book entitled, *The Checklist Manifesto* by Atul Gawande where three commonalities in the definitions of professionalism across "learned occupations" comes forth. They are selflessness, an expectation of skill, and an expectation of trust-worthiness. A fourth one that was less common, but Heemskerk rightly highlights as common to Christians, is discipline. He concludes his article:

If you read Gawande's definition it is interesting to note that he calls professionals to do the hard work of being disciplined enough to serve selflessly, skillfully, and show ourselves to be worthy of trust. This resonates with us as Christians. We read his words as focused on

the other, not on ourselves. The only thing he is missing is the "why." Why do we serve the other in a professional manner? What drives us to be disciplined at it? As teachers, board members parents and students we are called to "serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people" (Eph 6:8a). The Christian's "why" is the fountain of our passion – whether we are teaching, completing assignments or cleaning toilets, we work because we serve our Lord. We do so professionally, out of thankfulness to the Lord who gave us gifts to use so richly.

This newsletter is completed with the introduction of a new Professional Development Strategy adopted by the League and encouraged for use in the schools belonging to the League (many of our Reformed schools in Ontario). It may be a good idea for non-Ontario schools to make contact with Heemskerk and see if the PD Strategy might be a good fit for their own school.

Finally, as a family of schools and a broader Reformed community, we continue to remember the efforts of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College and their efforts to attain government accreditation in Ontario for their two-year post under-graduate program. In so doing, students who graduate from this college will be easily licensed to teach across Canada and the world. May the Lord bless CCRTC in this good pursuit. Of course, even more importantly, may the Lord bless CCRTC and all of our schools in educating covenant children to increasingly grow in their walk of faith.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@echs.ca.



Emmanuel Christian High School: Graduation 2017

On a clear September evening, community members of Emmanuel Christian High School gathered at Lakeside Church in Guelph to celebrate the commencement ceremony of the graduating class of 2017.

The evening began with a dinner for the graduands, their parents, and their staff. Squeals of reunion, talk of bygone summer adventures, serious and less serious reflections of parents, and chats about new college classes, university courses, or job adventures filled the venue. A delicious dinner, put on by three amazing Grade 12 parents and their helpers, was enjoyed by all. Entertainment during the dinner included a long-standing favourite jeopardy game (put together by Mr. Gerald Alkema with input from all other staff members) that recalled funny moments and character traits of the former students.

As graduands left the dinner to don their gowns and receive instruction in graduation etiquette, friends and family members filled the auditorium and watched a video compilation of hundreds of goofy and not so goofy pictures of the grads while they waited for the ceremonies to begin. As the video faded off the screen, Stephanie Breukelman took over on the keyboard, bringing the music to a climax as the graduands marched in and took their seats. Mr. Ken Swaving, the chairman of the board, then opened the formal portion of the evening. He reminded the students to continue to do everything to God's glory and in the fear of the Lord.

Mr. Andrew Wildeboer, a parent and former board member, gave the graduation address. He divided his address into three parts: the *place* of Emmanuel Christian High School, your *place* in your new *place*, and the *place* of understanding. He referred to Job 28:12-28. In this passage, Job asks: "But where can wisdom be found?" and the answer: "Behold, the fear of the Lord,



*ECHS Board Chairman,
Mr. Ken Swaving*



*Keynote speaker
Mr. Andrew Wildeboer*

that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding." Mr. Wildeboer highlighted that this class is the first to graduate from the new ECHS school building, a building that symbolically culminates the work and dedication of grandparents and parents for Reformed education. He said, "The Emmanuel Christian High School Association supports a *place* that values much more than a building, more than great academia, more than the feats of athleticism. We value it as a *place* of understanding, teaching what true wisdom is." He then reminded the students of their place in their new schools or jobs and their *place* in that journey of gaining true wisdom: "His Word reminds us that technical knowledge and practical skill are not

Honours Achievement Award:

Nicholas Feenstra	Shania VanLeeuwen
Zachary Harlaar	Korey VanSydenborgh
Sarah Hoebeke	Isaac VanVeen
AJ Jonker	James Westrik
Emberly Meerveld	Julia Westrik
Claire Niezen	Josiah Wildeboer
Alexis VanLeeuwen	

Royal LePage RCR Realty Business Excellence Award

AJ Jonker

L. Martin Toet Memorial Athletics Scholarship

Greg Eygenraam
Korey VanSydenborgh

Governor General's Academic Medal

James Westrik

Jordan Hutchinson Memorial Academic Proficiency Award

Julia Westrik

Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award

Bailey Van Dyk

Citizenship Award

James Westrik

Stewardship Award

Julia Westrik
Korey VanSydenborgh



*The valedictorian,
James Westrik*



enough. . . . If we don't live in his Word, we have no understanding."

Mr. Henk Nobel also addressed the students as principal of Emmanuel. He asked the students their final question – what will you remember? The answer: to keep in the love of God. Mr. Nobel drew

a nautical parallel when he compared the love of God to the keel of a boat in the wind. As students pull out of the harbour, they will face storms, but the love of God will keep them steady.

The thirty graduands were then called to the stage to receive their diplomas and to become the Emmanuel Christian High School class of 2017. All in attendance filled the auditorium as they sang Psalm 100:1-4 in celebration.

Graduates with special skills and distinctions were presented with various scholarships and awards, recognizing academic talent, hard work, and community service. Graduate James Westrik took the podium to deliver his valedictorian address. James compared the graduating class to eaglets learning to fly by being forced to free-fall by their parents, who then swoop down and catch the fledglings on their backs. When eagles mature, they deal with storms by flying over top of them and waiting until they pass; this, James said, is how Christians are lifted up in life by our loving God, who raises us on his wings.

Mr. Andrew Wildeboer closed the evening with prayer, and family and friends filed out to greet and congratulate the new graduates.



Presenting the Graduating class of 2017



Guido de Brès Christian High School: Graduation 2017

On Saturday, September 29 the McIntyre Centre's auditorium at Mohawk College was packed full with family, friends, teachers, and Guido students all excited for the ceremony that was four years in the making.

The ceremony started with Guido Board President Dave Kampen reading from John 8:31-47 and then asking the graduates the rhetorical question: What are you grounded to? School? Job? Your phone? Mr. Kampen spoke to the grads about the importance of finding their identity in Jesus Christ. Acting principal Paul Leistra then came to the podium with a parable about three workers, all laying brick. While the first worker described what he was doing as just that, the second had the broader vision of building a wall, and the third could see that his work was building a cathedral. All three men working on the same job but each with a different view to the task at hand. Mr Leistra's short speech encouraged all grads to use the gifts that our heavenly father has given them and spoke of the joy it gives our Lord to see his gifts used. We were all reminded that the tasks we do in life are not done for ourselves or to win favour from our peers, but all for the glory of our Lord.

We then enjoyed a beautiful performance from Jane Bartels, Sam Boisvert, Darrin Bethlehem, Renee Kieft, Hannah VanVliet, and Marc Vermeulen singing G. F. Handel's "And the Glory of the Lord."

Reverend Vermeulen spoke about society's new favourite word: post-truth, an idea which embraces truth as subjective. He broke it down, revealing its futility, and contrasted that ideology with Christianity and its one objective truth that we know to be infallible. Graduates were encouraged, as they enter the world, to stand firm in this truth they have been taught, the truth dictated by God: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we

have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Diplomas were handed out to a lot of cheering and clapping as graduates crossed the stage. Awards and scholarships were given in recognition of a range of gifts, some in athletics, some in academics, and others in the contribution of time and talent within the community. It was truly amazing to hear what these students were able to accomplish in their four years.

The valedictory address was given by Joe VanHuisstede, full of anecdotes and fun insights into the class of '17. More importantly, Joe spoke of the blessing that Guido was to them all, giving them the tools needed to face the spiritual challenges in the world outside its four walls. Graduates can all go about their life's tasks knowing that God loves and cares for each of them no matter what. With these encouraging last words, the class of 2017 was sent on their way.

After a full and special day, the ceremony concluded with the performance of "Blessings" by Laura Story, sung by Sara Kamstra and accompanied on the piano by Chloë Boss.

Congratulations Guido graduates of 2017, and may God continue to bless you and make you a blessing in the years ahead.



*Rev. Vermeulen
giving the
main address*

Tyler Aalbers
 Hannah Alkema
 Lauren Alkema
 Joshua Baker
 Jane Bartels
 Darrin Bethlehem
 Madison Blokker
 Victoria Boerema
 Angela Boeringa
 Karlee Boersema
 Samuel Boisvert
 Breanne Boone
 Ethan Bontekoe
 Chloë Bos
 Joseph Bos
 Shawna Marie Bos
 Rachel Bosscher
 Andrew Boverhof
 Shane Boyko
 Daniel Breukelman
 Natalie Breukelman
 Russell Buikema
 Kristyn Buist
 Lauren Buist
 Mitchell Dam
 Noah Datema
 Cailyn De Boer
 Kurtis De Boer
 Garnet DeGelder
 Alexander DeJong
 Calvin Dekker
 William den Hollander
 Darren Draaistra
 Brandon Feenstra
 Wesley Gelms
 Marissa Gritter
 Chelsea Groen

Reuben Harink
 Keisha Heeringa
 Erin Heikamp
 Douglas Hoeksema
 Kara Hofsink
 Naomi Hofsink
 Kiana Hulleman
 Esther Jager
 Devon Jans
 Laura Jansema
 Justin Jongsma
 Cullen Kampen
 Sara Kamstra
 Mackwiz Kasweka
 Joshua Kelly
 Renee Kieft
 Todd Komdeur
 Joel Ludwig
 Lee Muis
 Justin Nienhuis
 Joel Nordeman
 Tyneesha Petter
 Jacob Poort
 Nadia Post
 Shania-Lee Post
 Peter Ravensbergen
 Kelsey Reinink
 Jesse Salomons
 Joshua Schenkel
 Noah Scholtens
 Tristan Sloots
 Sara Spanninga
 Bailey Stegenga
 Karissa Stegenga
 Jocelyn Togeretz
 Seth van Barneveld
 Sarah VanDasselaar
 Cullen VandeBurgt

Valedictorian
 Joseph
 VanHuisstede



Eleanore Vandenbos
 Justin Vanderboom
 Debra VanderLaan
 Kimberly VanderVegte
 Nicolette VanderVelde
 Taylor VanderVelde
 Ethan Vanderwoude
 Jaymee Vanderwoude
 Amber VanEgmond
 Karissa VanEgmond
 Joseph VanHuisstede
 Dean VanSydenborgh
 Griffin VanVeen
 Hannah VanVliet
 Justin VanWoudenberg
 Timothy VanWoudenberg
 Sarah Vellenga
 Abigail Venema
 Marc Vermeulen
 Theadora Verwey
 Megan Werkman
 Alexis Westlake
 Marya Woudenberg
 Raymond Wynia



William den Hollander
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Q Why do we call ministers "Reverend"?

Where in God's inerrant Word are we taught to call pastors "Reverend"? My entire life I have been expected to address a sinner by this term and I just cannot bring myself to do it with conviction. Today some ministers go by "Pastor" and my current pastor is perfectly fine with us calling him by his first name.

A For starters, we may not be able to find a specific text in God's Word teaching us to call ministers or pastors "Reverend." We do find in Scripture, however (1 Tim 5:17), that "elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching." Perhaps this scriptural notion is the underlying inference for the use of the title "Reverend," which means "worthy of reverence," or "worthy of honour and respect," as the dictionary defines its meaning. Hence, the term "Reverend" became a title of respectful address in the fifteenth century. In the seventeenth century some were addressed as "very reverend," or "the right reverend." These distinctions came into being in order that a difference in ordination or experience or standing in the church could be expressed. In common usage, this term as address has become a noun as well; so that we could say "the Reverend is coming for a visit tonight." Whether or not the title of "Reverend" should be used or the name pastor (shepherd) is a matter of personal conviction and preference.

The other matter in the above question is the point about a "sinner" being called by this term. Then we question the legitimacy for the use of

titles all together, in the church or in the world. We call queens and kings "Your Majesty," or judges "Your Honour," and Members of Parliament are called "The Most Honourable." In the history of the church we hear about the Westminster Divines. These all are sinners, yet addressed with honorific titles because they, too, are to be respected (or, revered, from which the title "Reverend" is derived). The reason why someone might have a problem using such titles for sinners could well be due to a general process of informality and lack of respect because such titles are considered "outdated." When ministers seek to "fit in" and come across as more "casual" or "relevant" and wish to be called by their first name, they in fact are undermining this scriptural notion of "double honour." Sure, we may not wish to speak about our seminary professors as the "Hamilton Divines" – which wouldn't be too unusual, given the fact that they are theologians, or Doctors in the knowledge of God Divine (just as lawyers are called thus as dealing with the law, or electricians work with electricity) – yet we do wish to maintain a level of dignity regarding their special position! The same should be considered with regard to the preference of maintaining the title Reverend as a special way of acknowledging their worth of double honour!

Q Is singing from the hymns incorrect?

The last few years I have begun to see a trend in the liturgy. The majority of the selection is taken from the book of Psalms. Are we incorrect to sing anything but from the book of Psalms?

A This question expresses a personal observation which may not be shared by others. In fact, the sentiment has been expressed more often that ministers tend to select more hymns than Psalms; i.e. a trend opposite of the questioner's observation. Then it is important to remember that in the Reformed liturgy the use of Psalms has had a predominant place (General Synod Chatham 2004, p. 120, 6.1.1). There are church federations that maintain an exclusive Psalmody approach, yet the Reformed Churches in Continental Europe (and Scotland) and in North America have not excluded the use of scriptural hymns. These hymns, too, constitute a thank offering of praise when we sing of the facts of redemption by God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Psalms, too though, are characterized as hymns sometimes (the whole section of the Psalms 42-72 is called David's Hymns, Ps 72:20), while the "hymn" the Lord Jesus and his disciples sang after the celebration of the Passover in Matthew 26:30 was a Psalm as well (customarily the Psalms 113-118 were sung at the Passover). When Paul and Silas were singing "hymns" in prison in Ephesus (Acts 16:25) those must have been Psalms as well.

Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:19 to address one another in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" were all terms characterizing the scriptural

songs that may be used for congregational singing, i.e. songs that are based on Scripture in Old and New Testament and faithful in confession and doctrine. These are to be distinguished, for instance, from the so-called "free hymns," religious and/or spiritual poems put to music that are not based on Scripture and confessions. As far as the selection of songs for a Reformed worship service is concerned, therefore, we should maintain the predominance of Psalms, while hymns that are suitable to highlight the text or theme of the sermon may be used as well. In my own ministerial practice the latter has been the leading principle: the unity in the liturgy in Scripture passage, text, and focus of the entire service as expressed in reading and singing (and prayers)!

Is there something you've been wanting to know?

An answer you've been looking for?

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to

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A thorough account of Kuyper's Reformed Philosophical Framework

Craig G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction*

Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2017. 363 pp.
ISBN 978-0-8308-5158-4. \$53.99

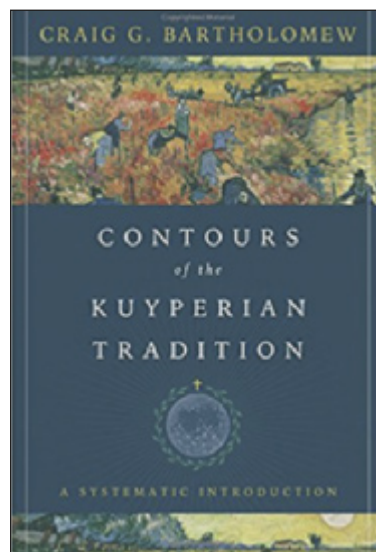
Ever since the Liberation of 1944, the children of Schilder often have allergic reactions to most things Kuyperian. This seems to have been the case back in 1998, when *Clarion* dedicated an issue to the centenary of Abraham Kuyper's "Stone Lectures on Calvinism." This special issue contains perceptive and largely appreciative articles on Kuyper by the late Dr. Jack de Jong, by John Van Popta, and by Ken Boessenkool (Vol 47, No 23).¹ Van Popta observed then: "For the Canadian Reformed community (and the other daughter churches of the 1944 Liberation), all things Kuyperian have been considered suspect" (548). The present generation of Canadian and American Reformed Christians appears to have moved on from the theological battles of the post-war generation. It is now more likely the case that Kuyper's thought is simply ignored than that it is suspect in our churches.

For this reason, therefore, a new book on Kuyper's legacy by Craig Bartholomew should be required reading in the Canadian and American Reformed community. Until recently H. Evan Runner Chair of Philosophy at Redeemer University College, Bartholomew has written a comprehensive introduction to Kuyper's most influential ideas on creation and redemption, Scripture, worldview, sphere sovereignty, the church, politics, mission, philosophy, theology, education, and spiritual formation. The opening chapter tells the story of Kuyper's conversion and makes the claim that

spiritual rebirth (*palingenesis*) is the central theme in Kuyper. The book's chapters outline the contours of Kuyper's thinking in key areas, beginning with the foundational doctrines of creation and revelation. Kuyper's principled stance against the naturalism and biblical criticism of his day is remarkably relevant for Reformed believers who are in conversation with friends in both secular and liberal Christian settings today. Bartholomew's objective in this and subsequent chapters is to show that Kuyper's work holds great promise for Reformed Christians who want to impact society in the name of Christ the King.

Not only does he provide a thorough account of Kuyper's Reformed philosophical framework, Bartholomew looks both upstream to Kuyper's sources in Augustine and Calvin and downstream to Kuyper's successors in Bavinck, Van Til, and others. In the chapter on creation, for instance, Bartholomew documents the close kinship between Kuyper and Bavinck on the relationship between nature and grace. Under God's providence, in submission to the kingship of Jesus Christ, and with hope for the new creation (Rom 8:19-22, 1 Cor 15:20-28), for both theologians *grace renews nature*. Reading Bartholomew's book provides a better understanding of the balance that Kuyper was trying to achieve between common grace and antithesis, not unlike Bavinck. Bartholomew notes repeatedly that Bavinck is the more precise theologian, whereas Kuyper is the more expansive visionary.

Kuyper was at his most visionary in social and political arenas. Bartholomew traces Kuyper's political ancestry to Calvin and Groen Van Prinsterer. The anti-revolutionary party of Groen and Kuyper embodied principles and practices that are core to such organizations as ARPA and Cardus, namely,



associating for the purpose of Reformed and Reformational political change. Bartholomew knows firsthand that Kuyper's ideas were used in South Africa to justify apartheid, and he rightly tempers his admiration with criticism of his racist and cultural imperialist tendencies. Kuyper's biblical approach to

politics is an antidote to distorted thinking on both extremes of the political spectrum: servants of the King are called to advance his royal reign wherever they serve.

Bartholomew believes that Kuyper's notion of sphere sovereignty (namely, that each discrete realm in society is independent, yet interdependent, and is governed by the norms particular to that sphere) continues to hold promise for positive Christian engagement in culture. Sphere sovereignty is sometimes caricatured in our churches as sidelining the church to merely one of many spheres.² In practice, however, Canadian and American Reformed communities often operate in a sphere-sovereign sort of way: the reason we don't have parochial schools, for example, is because the church's sphere does not include education. Given the political climate in Canada, with the religious freedom of independent schools increasingly under threat, Kuyper's sphere-sovereignty framework may be relevant: the Kuyperian tradition may prove helpful as Christian schools and colleges respond to growing interference from government agencies in the sphere of education. As Bartholomew shows, the concept has potential also for contentious issues such as the toleration of religious difference and the rights of LGBTQ in a pluralistic society.

The ongoing influence of Kuyper is also evident in the mission statements of Christian schools and colleges. The learning outcomes and expectations for graduation in our high schools (such as developing a biblical world view; engaging creatively with culture; advancing God's kingdom in the

society we are called to inhabit) have the markers of Kuyper's DNA.

On the other hand, some of the pitfalls of Kuyperian thinking also become evident. Bartholomew concludes the chapter on ecclesiology with a call for "transdenominational ecumenism" (189): separating the bimodal aspects of the church – as organism and as institution – necessarily results in an unhealthy conception of the church as pluriform. The dilemma of one organic church consisting of many institutional churches is not so easily resolved. I do not want to downplay the significance of the theological issues of presumptive regeneration (re: baptism and election) and of the invisible church (re: ecclesiology), nor the limits of local autonomy (re: church polity), in the shared histories of "Article 31" churches in The Netherlands and in North America. Bartholomew concludes his chapter on Kuyper's theology with an appeal to a charitable reading of Kuyper and Bavinck.

Our present circumstances certainly warrant a fresh look at Kuyper, including the spiritual (rather than just the theological) potential of his work. Members of our churches now in their 20s and 30s may be tempted to dismiss the names of Kuyper and Schilder for being associated with their grandparents' battles in The Netherlands. They are working in different social and cultural circumstances here and now. Bartholomew is acutely conscious of present challenges and opportunities, and he wants his readers to see the resources offered by Kuyper and Kuyperians for today. As a comprehensive, systematic, and detailed account of Kuyper's thought, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition* makes a significant contribution to the cause Reformed and Reformational theological philosophy. It may even go some way toward rehabilitating Kuyper's reputation in our churches.

Published by the academic imprint of InterVarsity Press, this book is recommended for church libraries, serious book clubs, school staff professional development retreats, and for college and university students, ministers, and others in church leadership.

¹ See http://www.clarionmagazine.ca/archives/1998/541-568_v47n23.pdf.

² See Hans Boersma, "Sphere Sovereignty," *Clarion* 36.21-23 (1987).





*Season's
Greetings*

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