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The sacrifice of thanksgiving

*SATISFIED WITH THE GOODNESS OF GOD'S HOUSE
CONVOCATION 2018*

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

We start our issue with a Thanksgiving editorial from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam and a Treasures, New & Old meditation from Rev. Carl Van Dam.

Speaking of Thanksgiving, the rest of our issue covers an event for which we can be very thankful: the forty-fourth convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). There is a report from the Chairman of the Board of Governors, Rev. Richard Aasman, an update from the Principal, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, and we also feature the keynote speech from Dr. Arjan de Visser. And coverage would not be complete without the Women's Savings Action presentation.

From us at *Clarion* we send our congratulations to Scott Bredenhof, Darren Feenstra, Robert Smith, Cody Swaving, and Sungwon Yoon.

Laura Veenendaal

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The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

How do we respond to this abundance of blessings?

One of the few official remnants of Christianity still widely acknowledged on Canada's calendar of public holidays besides Christmas and Easter is Thanksgiving Day. It is a day we as Christians cannot ignore. It presents another wonderful opportunity to stop the daily rush and reflect on the blessings the Lord our God has given us.

Compared to Christians in many parts of the world, we have many freedoms and, although they are being eroded, we do have the opportunity to challenge the forces of darkness through several means available to us, including letting the light of the gospel shine in our life, the political process, and challenging decisions which undermine our freedoms in court. Besides these freedoms, we also enjoy prosperity, comforts, and a standard of living that is probably unprecedented for the general population in world history and that is certainly far beyond anything that many Christians outside the Western world could ever hope to experience. Then there are also the blessings we experience in our personal lives: being a child of God and part of a fellowship of believers, the blessing of family and friends, health, employment, and the list goes on. When the going is tough and we journey through times of trial and discouragement, we may by God's grace experience the blessings and comfort of the gospel. The Spirit energizes us again and enables us to call God Abba, loving Father, whose Son mediates for us and understands because he as a human being has been through it all before us.

How do we respond to this abundance of blessings? By giving thanks of course. But what is involved in expressing our gratitude? One way that God instructed his Old Testament people to show their thanksgiving was by way of the thank offering. That sacrifice has implications for us as well.

The thank offering

Thanksgiving Day is usually a time to get together. Family and friends traditionally meet to share in a thanksgiving

dinner. It is an occasion to celebrate in a communal way. This was the case in God's Old Testament nation as well.

The Israelite feast closest to our Thanksgiving Day was the Feast of Weeks, when thanks were offered to the LORD for the first fruits of the wheat harvest. This feast had to be celebrated in Jerusalem in the presence of the LORD (Deut 12:6-7). The time of the year was early summer when the weather was typically very favourable. Israelites from all over the land, and even from outside the country, would stream to the temple to appear before God and offer to him two loaves of bread, representing the harvest, as well as their burnt offerings. The feast culminated with a thank offering, the only feast for which God required such a sacrifice.

Israel's thank offering was in the category of the peace offering. Other peace offerings were the vow offering and the free-will offering (Lev 7:11-18). Because the thank offering was the most common of the peace offerings, the terms "thank" and "peace" offerings are sometimes virtually synonymous (as in Leviticus 23:19-20).

A common feature of all peace offerings was the communal meal which followed the giving of the sacrifice to God. That is one reason why some translations call them fellowship offerings (compare Leviticus 7:11 in ESV and NIV). Such a meal would have been a joyous time of celebrating the goodness of the LORD. The bloody sacrifices for the atonement of sins had been made and there was fellowship with God and each other. Joy now dominated, a joy to be shared with others outside the immediate family, like the servants, the needy, and the local Levite (Deut 12:12; cf. 14:29). Such sharing was also encouraged by the fact that the entire sacrificial animal of the thank offering had to be eaten on the day it was given to the LORD (Lev 7:15). For those partaking, this meal would have been most special, since it was the only sacrificial meat that the common people could eat.

It is noteworthy that apart from the official annual thanksgiving inherent in the Feast of Weeks, God did not

legislate thank offerings for particular times. God expected his people to offer such sacrifices spontaneously in gratitude to him for blessings they received. Reflecting on the deliverance of God's people, the psalmist therefore exhorted: "Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!" (Ps 107:21-22) The believer, saved from a deadly illness responded: "What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? . . . I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Ps 116:12, 17). Such spontaneous thanksgiving could also be articulated in songs of praise and thanks, like Psalm 100, which has the heading: "A psalm for giving thanks."

The sacrifice of our thanksgiving

Songs of praise can be one way for us to offer our sacrifice of thanksgiving to God. We have been set free from God's demand for a literal sacrificial thank offering since Christ has fulfilled that law for us. If Israel was exhorted to offer thanksgiving, and praise to God, how much more should that be so for us today? Not surprisingly, the New Testament urges us to do just that. "Through him [Christ] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Hebr 13:15). Similarly, the apostle Paul enjoins us to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs "with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:16-17). Our life is to be characterized by thanksgiving, a point also underlined when the apostle Paul addressed the Ephesians: "Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:18-21).

When we sing our thanks to God, then we are in effect praying to him. Such prayers are very intensive, for singing is a more emphatic form of speaking. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of our sacrifice of thanksgiving by prayer to God in gratitude for his many blessings, whether in words spoken or sung. God wants to hear from us in prayers of thanksgiving as our sacrifice to him. Surely a very modest and simple request. Yet, as the Heidelberg Catechism notes, "prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us" (Q/A 116). The first proof text given for this statement is Psalm 50:14-15. We do well to note this.

In this psalm, God appears and summons his people. He emphasizes that he is their God and that what he wants

is not the outward obedience of bringing animal sacrifices to him. But above all: "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving!" (v. 14) and, "The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me" (v. 23). In other words, God does not want a superficial outward show of commitment to him, but the heartfelt response of gratitude for blessings received. Such are the sacrifices God desires as thanksgiving. Scripture therefore pictures the future Zion as a place full of "songs of thanksgiving" and happy voices, "the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD" (Jer 30:19; 33:11). A passage somewhat analogous to all of this is when David repents in sorrow for his sin and acknowledges that God does not delight in mere outward sacrifice. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps 51:17). So, God will never despise the sacrifice of a heart of genuine gratitude in prayer of thanks to God. This is the sacrifice God delights in. Without the sacrifice of gratitude, the prayer is not pleasing to God. New Testament commentator, William Hendriksen, once wrote: "When a person prays without giving thanks, he has clipped the wings of prayer so that it cannot rise."

Without ceasing

If the sacrifice of our thanksgiving goes to God in our prayers, then this is a sacrifice that goes on and on in the life of a Christian. After all, Christians live a life of prayer and fellowship with God. Scripture teaches: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). No wonder the Catechism calls prayer "the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us." Living a life in communion with the living God in Christ Jesus means that we cannot stop thanking him for the new life we may have in him. The life of a Christian is a life of prayer. "Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess 5:17-18). As we live a life of gratitude, we offer ourselves and all we have as a sacrifice of thanks to God (Rom 12:1-2). Like David long ago we can affirm with a view to our prayers and life: "I will render thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life" (Ps 56:12-13).

As we enjoy thanksgiving dinner, think about and savour God's many blessings and enjoy the peace and fellowship with him that is possible through the one sacrifice of Christ. And pray, offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and let it rise as incense to God's throne where "the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever" (Rev 4:9).





Satisfied with the Goodness of God's House

"We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple." (Psalm 65:4b)

Psalm 65 paints a beautiful picture of the Lord's care over the land, which really resonates with us during late summer and onward towards Thanksgiving. As we look out over the countryside, we see the meadows and fields, harvested crops, and ripe fruit. Surely it is the Lord who crowns the year with bounty so that the wagons (trucks) overflow with abundance (v. 11). Our dinner tables overflow with tasty and wholesome food because of the enduring faithfulness of our heavenly Father. Give thanks to him for he is good!

While these images of harvest bounty form a lasting impression on our minds, this is not how David starts Psalm 65. He begins by praising God in Zion because he hears prayer and forgives our transgressions and iniquities (v. 2-3). He gives blessings to those whom he has chosen and has brought near to dwell with him in his courts (v. 4a). The blessings of harvest must be seen in the context of the Lord's spiritual blessings.

In David's time, the worshipper in God's house would have enjoyed being in God's presence and participating in

the meal associated with the fellowship offering. It was a clear sign of the communion between God and his people. It symbolized the good relationship that there was between God and man, for man's sins were atoned for. David stresses that it is in God's house, his holy temple, that this goodness is to be found. Come near to God and experience his good things in his temple.

As believers in Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, in this present time of the new covenant, in our formal worship of the Lord, we may experience God's spiritual blessings of fellowship and communion with him, of the forgiveness of sins, of receiving the Holy Spirit, of progressing in acts of holiness and righteousness, of receiving the sacrament of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

We may experience God's goodness towards us in so many ways when we worship him with his people in church. There we hear the preaching of the gospel of the forgiveness of our sins and of God's love for us, his abundant grace and sovereign free will. There surrounded by God's people, we experience the blessing of the commu-

nion of saints and the unity that we may enjoy because of Christ's work.

May we always have an eye for God's specific blessings and find our satisfaction in them as we seek him in worship. Then we will be filled with his abundant gifts and open ourselves up to the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When we draw near to God, then he will also draw near to us more and more and we will find ourselves content in him. The more we desire to grow in holiness and to enjoy God's gifts of salvation and reconciliation, the more we will also receive from him. Then we will go from strength to strength in the service of the Lord and he will overwhelm us with his love and compassion more and more.

Give thanks to God for his abundant blessings: the forgiveness of sins, his sovereign choosing in love, and his coming near to us in Jesus Christ our Saviour. Give thanks to God for all the good things he gives to us. There is nothing that we have that did not come from him. May we respond with lives of holiness and thankfulness, always praising him for his plentiful blessings!

For further study

1. In what ways can we encourage each other to draw near to God?
2. How can we grow in appreciation for God's spiritual blessings to us? How do we help our children to have an eye for this?





Report of the Forty-Ninth Anniversary Meeting and Forty-Fourth Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), September 7, 2018

After several days of relentlessly high temperatures and humidity, the day of the convocation brought comfortable weather under a clear blue sky. Once again at the Redeemer University College old friends and acquaintances arrived early and had opportunity to catch up on what was going on in their lives. Clearly people came from all across Canada, and even further. Family and friends of one of the graduates, Sungwon Yoon, were attending from South Korea. Live streaming meant people could participate in this evening from around the world. By eight o'clock the auditorium had filled up nicely.

The chairman of the Board, Rev. Richard Aasman, opened the evening by reading Psalm 87, the focal passage of the featured speaker that evening, Prof. Arjan de Visser. The opening and closing prayers remembered the recent passing on of sister Wietske Faber, the widow of the late Prof. J. Faber, sister G. Deddens, the widow of the late Dr. K. Deddens, sister Margaret DeJong, the widow of the late Prof. J. DeJong, Prof. J. Geertsema, Prof. N.H. Gootjes, and his wife Dinie. Appreciation was also expressed for the continued work and health of Professor Emeritus Dr. C. Van Dam. After the opening prayer, a letter was read from the Deputies Curators of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. In the letter, appreciation was expressed for the relationship between CRTS and the FRCSA: "We are very excited with the prospect of having up to eight students from South Africa commencing studies at CRTS or through CRTS course material in the next four years."

The principal of the seminary, Dr. J. Van Vliet, presented a principal's report in a lively and interesting fashion. You can read the contents of his address elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. One of the things that Dr. Van Vliet focussed on was the publications from CRTS professors: Dr. C. Van Dam's book, *The Deacon*, Dr. T. Van Raalte's *Antoine de Chandieu: The Silver Horn of Geneva's Reformed Triumvirate*, and Dr. J. Smith's recently completed *Intermediate Hebrew Grammar*. Dr. Van Vliet also introduced the new students: the six new students in the M.Div. program are Tsjibbe deJong (Ontario), Rodney denBoer (Australia), Dathan Pleiter (Australia), Timothy vanBeek (Manitoba), Anson vanDelden (Australia), and Bryan Vanderhorst (British Columbia). There are two students from Korea who plan to join us for one year of study at the M.Div. level. They are Jaeyong Jung and Sung-min Hong. There is also one student from the Philippines, Kim Lapiz, entering the Diploma of Theological Studies; he is still travelling but should arrive shortly.

The keynote speaker for the evening was Dr. Arjan de Visser, professor of Ministry and Mission. His address was entitled, "Glorious things of thee are spoken." You will find the full text of this speech elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. Dr. de Visser focussed on Psalm 87, which can be summarized as "the glory of the Christian Church to be a mother to all kinds of believers." Connections were made to other parts of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and to Church History. Psalm 87 demonstrates that Jerusalem

has a place for all peoples, including hostile nations. This is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who ascended to heaven, the “Jerusalem above” (Gal 4), from which he regulates and nourishes his church on earth. The emphasis is on the fact that Jerusalem above is “mother” to all her children. The graduates were encouraged of their place in this glorious work of Jesus Christ: they may have the expectation that Jesus Christ will use them to bring people to faith and nourish them. There is also the glorious truth, as Psalm 87 makes clear, that people from all backgrounds and nationalities may be “born in Zion.” That is to say, they may be born again through the Spirit and his Word. The graduates were also encouraged to take the “motherly” role of teaching the youth and making their pastoral visits. Dr. de Visser’s address was edifying, easy to listen to, and encouraging to the graduates who hope to become ministers of the Word.

After a rousing singing of Hymn 52, “The Church’s One Foundation,” led by our capable organist, brother Martin Jongsma, the degree of Master of Divinity was conferred on Darren Feenstra, Cody Swaving, and Sungwon Yoon; the Bachelor of Theology degree was conferred on Scott Bredenhof; the Diploma of Theological Studies was conferred on Robert Smith. The Selles Book Prize was presented to Darren Feenstra. Cody Swaving spoke on

behalf of the graduating students. He shared some good memories of their time together at CRTS. He made special mention of thanksgiving for the work of the professors and the staff, and the support of the churches. He also encouraged men to consider carefully whether studying at the CRTS would be something for them.

The Women’s Savings Action (WSA) was represented by the sisters Deb Alkema, Karen Schuurman, and Janet Van Vliet. \$35,000 was presented for the CRTS library. Dr. Van Vliet expressed CRTS’s thanks for the faithful work and the amazing contribution by the sisters in the WSA. He suggested, among other proposals, that WSA could stand for “women that should be appreciated.” They surely should be.

The collection was for the CRTS Publication Foundation – a fund that provides money for the faculty to produce books. Rev. James Slaa led in closing prayer, focussing particularly on the work of the seminary in the upcoming year. As is customary, the assembly concluded with the singing of “O Canada.” After the program, everyone had opportunity to congratulate the graduates. It was also a time of good fellowship, and of renewing friendships and acquaintances. You are welcome to view a video version of the College evening at www.canadianreformedseminary.ca. C





Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken

This article was the keynote speech at CRTS's 2018 Convocation.

"Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" is a beautiful hymn – one of the best hymns in the English tradition, according to experts. It was written by John Newton, the former slave trader who repented and turned to the Lord – the same man who also wrote "Amazing Grace." Various melodies are used for the hymn but the one that is used most often – called Austria – was composed by Joseph Haydn. It has a triumphant character with a military feel to it. Apparently, the hymn was a favourite of the Confederate general Stonewall Jackson.¹

Unfortunately, the Nazis used the same melody for the song "*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*," a nationalistic song that was sung by German soldiers during the Second World War. I have met elderly Dutch people here in Canada who had a hard time singing or even hearing Newton's hymn. It reminded them too much of the horrors of the war.

I noticed that the hymn "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" is included in the new Trinity Psalter Hymnal of the URC-NA and the OPC. Who knows, in due time we might be singing this hymn in the Canadian Reformed Churches as well!

For the purposes of this evening I want to focus on the *reason* why glorious things are spoken of Zion, the city of God's favour. I believe that there is an important message here for the Christian church today. It is a message that I want to pass on to our graduates as they enter the ministry here in Canada, South Korea, Mexico or wherever the Lord may call them. I know that sometimes our young men look at things that happen in the churches and they think: Can I really do this? Will things go well? Indeed, there is a lot of strife and struggle in the churches. But then there is this message: *It is the glory of the Christian church to be a mother of all kinds of believers.* I will illustrate this from the OT, the NT, and church history. After that I will draw conclusions.

City of God's favour

"Glorious things of thee are spoken." That line is taken from Psalm 87:3, where we read that someone is speaking glorious things about Zion, the city of God. Who is this someone? It is the Lord himself! The Lord exalts Zion as the place where people of all nations find a place to live – not just the people of Israel but people of all nations. "Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon. . . (Egypt and Babylon, the two superpowers of the ancient world), behold, Philistia and Tyre. . . (Israel's neighbours and rivals), with Cush. . . (Ethiopia, representing remote nations of the world)."

Now it would be one thing – and a great thing – if all those nations heard about the Lord and came to know him. But there is a greater miracle, something truly remarkable: people of those nations shall come to Zion to dwell in her, to become citizens of Zion. Listen to what the Lord says in verse 5: "And of Zion it shall be said, 'This one and that one were born in her.'" In other words, even if they were born somewhere else, they will be "born again" as it were, and be adopted as true children of Abraham. Gentiles will fully share in the birthright of the people of Israel. It is striking that the expression "born in her" is used three times in the Psalm: This one was born there (v. 4), this one and that one were born in her (v. 5), this one was born there (v. 6).

This repeated use of the image of people of various nations "born in Zion" has led to Jerusalem being thought of as the *mother* of believers. It is an image that is used by the prophet Isaiah as well, for example in Isaiah 54 where Jerusalem is described as a desolate woman who will have more children than a woman who is married (54:1). Or Isaiah 60, where Jerusalem is described as a woman whose sons will come from afar and whose daughters shall be carried on the hip (60:4).

In Psalm 87 the word *mother* is not mentioned explicitly, at least not in the Hebrew text. But it is interesting to note that the word does appear in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament which was well-known to the Lord and his disciples. In the Septuagint translation Psalm 87:5 reads as follows: “A man shall say: Zion is my mother, and that man was born in her.”

Conclusion #1: In the OT there was the expectation that Jerusalem would become a mother to all kinds of believers – Jews and Gentiles alike.

Jerusalem above

Moving from Psalm 87 to the New Testament, we need to discuss Galatians 4, because it is here that the motherhood of Jerusalem is mentioned again. In this chapter the apostle Paul actually speaks about two Jerusalems: the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem. Both Jerusalems are mothers. Both have children. But there is a huge difference between the two. The earthly Jerusalem, the apostle says, is in slavery with her children (they are slaves of the law). The Jerusalem above, however, is free, and *she is our mother*” (Gal 4:24-26). We are not slaves of the law, but children of the promise. We receive salvation through faith in God’s promise that Jesus Christ is our righteousness.

What does it mean that the Jerusalem above is our mother? How does this work? We are on earth: how can the Jerusalem that is above be our mother? Well, we know what a mother is supposed to do. She does two things: she gives birth to children, and then she nurtures them. If we think this through, we see how this applies to the heavenly Jerusalem indeed. The ascended Lord Jesus, who is seated in heaven, sends his Word and Spirit to cause his chosen ones to be born again. He sends preachers to preach the gospel. He sends the Spirit to make the human heart willing to accept the gospel (Canons of Dort, III/IV, 12). In other words, even though the Lord uses human instruments such as preachers of the gospel, we know that regeneration is something that comes from heaven. That is the first aspect.

The second aspect is that our nourishment in faith also comes from heaven. Our Christian faith is nurtured by the teaching and preaching of the gospel. It is strengthened by the use of the sacraments, which the Lord has given to his church. When we gather for worship and we receive the Lord’s Supper, we lift up our hearts to heaven where Christ is, seated at God’s right hand. “He nourishes and refreshes our hungry and thirsty souls with his crucified body and shed blood to everlasting life” (Form for Lord’s Supper). In

all these things, it is the Holy Spirit who applies the gospel to the hearts of believers and nourishes them with Christ.

Conclusion #2: the heavenly Zion is the mother of believers. The regeneration and the nurture of believers comes from above, even if the church on earth is used in the process.

Church fathers

The church fathers were fond of using the image of mother for the church.² Well known in this regard is the statement by Cyprian (third century): “He cannot have God as Father who does not have the church as his mother.” Augustine and other church fathers made similar statements. Over time, this led to the Roman Catholic Church developing the doctrine that she herself is the *mater fidelium* (mother of believers).

It is interesting to note that the Reformers, even though they rejected key doctrines of the medieval church, did not distance themselves from the idea that the church is the mother of believers. It is a key concept in Book 4 of Calvin’s *Institutes*. A quote: Calvin notes that God is pleased to gather his sons in the bosom of the church, “not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith. . . so that for those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother” (IV.1.1).

Calvin argues that the title “mother” teaches us how necessary it is that we should be part of the church. “For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels” (*Institutes* IV.1.4). This service of the church is absolutely necessary for the well-being of God’s children. Calvin argues that “away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation” (in these words we hear an echo of another famous statement by Cyprian: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* – there is no salvation outside of the church).

In our Reformed tradition we have the voice of Dr. Klaas Schilder, who agreed that the church has a motherly role to play, but he warned that this should not lead to any particular church thinking too much of itself. In his booklet *Ons Aller Moeder*³ he criticized the tendency of the Hervormde Kerk in The Netherlands to consider itself to be “the mother church” of Reformed believers in The Netherlands. Schilder argued that in God’s Word the name “mother” is applied exclusively to the Jerusalem that is above, and that therefore no church



on earth – whether it is the Roman Catholic Church or the Dutch Reformed Church or the Reformed Churches – has the right to call itself THE mother church.⁴

Schilder is correct: The New Testament does not call any church or church federation the mother of believers. The Christian church does not have the power to give birth to believers – only the Spirit can do that. In that sense, only the heavenly Jerusalem is our mother. At the same time, the New Testament does call the church the bride of Christ and Christ himself is called the Head of the church. Because of this close connection, the church has a “motherly” role to play. She is the place where people are born again when they hear the gospel being proclaimed and the Spirit works in their hearts. She is called to be a home for the believers. She is called to nurture and protect them.

Conclusion #3: The church of Christ in this world may rightly be called a mother of believers. She is the place where people come to saving faith in Christ. She is the household of faith where God’s children are nourished for growth in faith.

Application for CRTS graduates: If the Lord calls you to the ministry, remember that you have a fatherly role to play but also a motherly role. At times you will need to be firm like a father, teaching, encouraging, and disciplining God’s children as needed (1 Thess 2:11,12). But you will also need to be gentle like a mother, just like the apostle Paul says about himself: “But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children” (1 Thess 2:7).

Conclusions

What does this all mean for us? Three aspects: First, it is the church’s glory to be a place where people come to faith and are nourished in their faith. And this is why the ministry is such a wonderful calling. CRTS graduates: By faithfully proclaiming the Word of God, you get to be involved in the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit: of causing people to be born again and to grow in faith. You will not be able to understand how it happens, but you are going to experience it. Always remember that the real power to cause people to be born again and to grow in faith comes from above. It comes from Christ, our Head, through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. And therefore, dear students, I encourage you to go out into the field with great expectations. There will be problems, for sure, but you can expect miracles too! The Lord willing, you will see your church increasing in number and growing in strength. Just make sure to maintain your relationship with the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother, where Christ is, seated at God’s right hand. Remember the words he spoke to his disciples: “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit” (John 15:5).

Second, we need to recognize that glorious things are spoken of Jerusalem because people of many different backgrounds are born within her. When Psalm 87 was written, this was still largely a vision for the future. In the book of Acts we read how this started to happen – think of the man from Ethiopia who was baptized by Philip (Acts 8). We are privileged to live in a time that we can see how this vision





has become a reality. The Christian church is spread around the globe. We stand amazed as we see how the church has become a multi-national and a multi-cultural enterprise. We rejoice in receiving international students from Poland, Korea, China, Australia, and the Philippines at CRTS. We are happy to serve the churches in South Africa with recordings of our lectures, and we hope to receive some of their students here in coming years. Even in our small institute, we see a little bit of the fulfilment of Psalm 87 in all this. The Lord rejoices in seeing people of many different nations being part of the Christian church, and so should we. Students and graduates, do not forget the missionary dimension of the church. And may the Lord grant you to be involved in his church gathering work from many nations, because it is a fascinating and glorious work indeed.

Third, glorious things are spoken of Jerusalem because it functions as a mother of all kinds of believers. She is called to nurture her children. To quote John Newton's hymn once more: "See, the streams of living waters, well supply thy sons and daughters." When we read through the letters of the New Testament, it is striking how much Paul and the other apostles emphasize this aspect of the church's mandate. The church is called to be a light of the nations indeed, but the church is also called to be a mother to her own children. A lot of effort goes into building up the body of Christ and helping the members to attain maturity in faith (Eph 4:11-16). Any church planter and missionary can tell you: as soon as you have people in

your church, you have a lot of work to do. You are called to strengthen the weak, admonish the wayward, and guard the peace. You may wish it was different, but this is the reality. Therefore, students and graduates, give yourself fully to this task. Be diligent in teaching Catechism to the youth of the church. And do not neglect to do your pastoral visits. This is extremely important, whether you are working in an established church or a church plant situation. And if I may add one more thing: remember to do this work not in isolation, but in cooperation with the other office-bearers that the Lord gives to his church (elders and deacons). Make it your goal that the church you are called to serve will be a *home* to God's people – not a prison, not a motel, but a home!

In closing, let me repeat my proposition: *It is the glory of the Christian church to be a mother to all kinds of believers.* There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Likewise, there is joy in heaven over a church that functions as a mother to all kinds of believers! Glorious things of her are spoken, both in heaven and on earth.

¹ According to Wikipedia article on "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken."

² For this section I borrowed insights of J.W. Maris, *De missie van een moeder*, Apeldoorn: Theologische Universiteit, 2008.

³ K. Schilder, "Ons aller moeder" anno Domini 1935: een "roepstem" beantwoord. Kampen: Kok, 1935.

⁴ Schilder, *Ons aller moeder*, 51.





Principal's Report 2018

Once again it is time to update the readers of *Clarion* on the events and activities of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). We hope you learn some interesting new facts about the seminary, and we respectfully ask that you continue to keep this school in your personal and public prayers.

Students

This year we are grateful to witness the graduation of five students: Darren Feenstra, Cody Swaving, and Sungwon Yoon from the M.Div. program, as well as Scott Bredenhof with a Bachelor of Theology and Robert Smith with a Diploma of Theological Studies. Darren has accepted a call to be a co-pastor of the Cornerstone congregation in

Hamilton. Cody is helping in the Smithville congregation and hopes to present himself to classis to become eligible for call in the future. Sungwon, and his wife, Anne, are in the process of returning to Korea where he hopes to begin serving as pastor of the Gwangju Reformed Church. Scott Bredenhof is now becoming involved in a new mission work in Mexico, spearheaded by the CanRC congregations in Abbotsford and Vernon. Robert Smith has returned to Arizona, USA, and is exploring opportunities in which he can put his CRTS education to good use. May the Lord bless our graduates as they follow the Lord's leading and enter service within his kingdom.

We are also excited to welcome six new students into the M.Div. program, which is intended for those studying



to become ordained ministers of the Word. The names of these men are: Tsjibbe DeJong (Ontario), Rodney denBoer (Australia), Dathan Pleiter (Australia), Timothy vanBeek (Manitoba), Anson vanDelden (Australia), and Bryan Vanderhorst (British Columbia).

We also welcome two students from Korea, who are joining us for one year of study at the M.Div. level. They are Jaeyong Jung and Sung-min Hong. Sung-min and his family have already arrived, and we hope that Jaeyong will follow soon, but he is still waiting for some paperwork from the visa office. We are also looking forward to welcoming Kim Lapiz from the Philippines, who will take our two-year program, the Diploma of Theological Studies. He is scheduled to arrive next week.

This means we receive nine new students in total: three from Canada, three from Australia, two from Korea, and one from the Philippines. We are extremely grateful for this, and we look forward to getting to know everyone in our freshman class, along with their respective families. This also brings our total student body up to twenty-four, including students from Canada, the USA, Australia, Poland, China, Korea, and the Philippines.

Faculty and staff

Concerning the professors, we can report that everyone has been healthy and the Lord daily provides stamina to do our work. This past academic year we went through a transition, since Dr. Visscher completed nearly a decade serving as Principal and Academic Dean, so we had to redistribute our administrative hats. Thankfully, the transition has been quite smooth.

In large part, this smooth transition has to do with the three ladies who form our staff: Catharine Mechelse (Office Administrator), Margaret Alkema (Librarian), and Leanne Kuizenga (Faculty Administrative Assistant). They have worked at CRTS for thirty-two, twenty-six, and six years respectively, for a grand total of sixty-four years of experience. Need I say more? With that kind of experience inside the building, there is not much that misses their eyes, and there are quite a few things that they notice, which the faculty does not. . . and thankfully so!

Thinking now of our retired professors, we mention in particular that on June 30, 2018, the Lord called sr. Wietske Faber, the wife of our first principal, Dr. Jelle Faber, from this life and into eternal glory at the age of ninety-seven years old. It was good to be with the Faber family at the funeral where the truth of the gospel comforted us all and words of appreciation could be spoken about the quiet, gracious, and

dignified manner in which this sister in the Lord served her heavenly Master. Let us continue to remember the Gootjes and De Jong families in our prayers, as well as Prof. Geertsema, who continues to do quite well, considering his age.

Publications

In the past year a number of publications from CRTS professors have rolled off the press. Dr. C. Van Dam was thankful to see *The Deacon*, a companion volume to his widely-read *The Elder*, published with Reformation Heritage Books. Perhaps with even more excitement in his heart, Dr. Van Raalte saw his doctoral dissertation published with Oxford University Press. The title is *Antoine de Chandieu: The Silver Horn of Geneva's Reformed Triumvirate*. Also from this corner we congratulate him on this significant milestone. As those who have gone through the process know, it is one thing to obtain a doctoral degree; it is yet another to have your dissertation published.

The fruit of another lengthy labour is Dr. Smith's recently completed *Intermediate Hebrew Grammar*. For the moment this book is being published in-house and the next class of freshmen students will serve as guinea pigs to fine-tune the work. Yet already at this point we wish to commend our brother for his patient and meticulous work on this project. There are introductory Hebrew grammars and full-fledged reference grammars, but there is a crucial need for something between those two, and the grammars that fit that category tend to be quite outdated by now. Perhaps Dr. Smith's grammar can one day fill that need, also beyond the walls of CRTS.

Next, Dr. Visscher shepherded the publication of a translated work from Dr. Douma's dissertation called *Common Grace in Kuyper, Schilder and Calvin: Exposition, Comparison, and Evaluation* (Lucerna CRTS Publications, 2017). We also thank br. Albert Oosterhoff (translator) and William Helder (editor) for the hours they poured into this important work. In this way a part of our own ecclesiastical heritage can be shared with the English-speaking world for the first time.

Turning to more popular literature, the much-anticipated work on the Psalms, edited by Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, is now in distribution. It's called *Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms*. To begin with, the daily devotional volume has been released, but the larger and more detailed study resource volumes have already been written and are in the final stages of editing and pre-press. Two faculty members were involved in this project. Dr. de Visser contributed the material for Psalms 23-32 and Dr. Van Vliet did the same

for Psalms of the Sons of Korah, which are 42-49, 84-85, and 87-88. Apparently copies of the devotional are already flying off the shelf, which is encouraging.

In addition to full-length books, over the past year professors have written popular articles, for example on the pages of *Clarion*, as well as scholarly articles in journals such as *Unio Cum Christo*, the Mid-America Theological Journal, Calvin Theological Journal, the Sixteenth Century Journal, Renaissance and Reformation and chapter contributions to books such as *The Early Sessions of the Synod of Dort* and *The SBL Commentary on the Septuagint*.

More publications are also in the works. Most of the professors are busy writing contributions for an upcoming volume called “*Let the Children Come to Me*”: *The Position of Children in the New Covenant Community*, edited by Dr. William den Hollander and Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher. Work is also already underway for a special publication planned for the fiftieth anniversary of the seminary next year. . . (but I can’t say too much about that yet because it would ruin the surprise).

Visits

It’s always a special time when someone visits the seminary. Although we can’t list every guest here, allow me to highlight some. Various alumni agreed to come back to lead one of our chapel gatherings: Revs. W. den Hollander, sr., D. Poppe, J. Louwerse, and J. van Popta. Students genuinely appreciate hearing from experienced ministers. We were also privileged to receive three classes of primary school children from Bellstone Christian School (Mt. Hope), Harvest Canadian Reformed Christian School (Owen Sound), and John Calvin Christian School (Smithville). By the way, if you are a primary teacher, or you have a child or grandchild in school, and they have *not* come to visit the seminary, feel free to generate some discussion about this possibility. There’s nothing like an on-site visit to connect the next generation with the seminary, and who knows, with the Lord’s guidance, some young lads may return one day to become ministers. It’s never too early to plant a few seeds.

Travels

On occasion professors leave the “City of Waterfalls” (formerly known as Steel Town), and travel to speak or teach in other provinces or countries. During the summer, Dr. de Visser travelled to South Africa, where he taught a group of students from our sister church, the Free Reformed Church of South Africa. He, and his wife Inge, also spoke to the brothers and sisters in the congregation about

various topics, including a special emphasis on Christian education. Earlier in the year, during his sabbatical, Dr. Van Vliet went to both Korea and China for about two weeks to teach there. It is heart-warming to witness firsthand the fervent enthusiasm for the Reformed faith there. Sometimes we underestimate what a rich and desirable heritage the Lord has given us.

Other updates

Dr. de Visser’s travel to the churches in South Africa is connected to a larger project between the FRCSA and CRTS that has been underway for over two years now. The South African churches asked us to make video recordings of the lectures in Hamilton and store them in the cloud. The South Africans can then download the videos on their end, and with the help of Rev. Hannes Breytenbach, who serves as a facilitator, a group of students there watch and discuss the lectures. You may wonder, “Why don’t these students come to Hamilton and receive the complete educational experience, face-to-face?” It is a good question that, unfortunately, does not have a short answer. But the heart of the matter is that having their students come to CRTS is still the first choice of the churches there. It also looks like some of their students may come in the next few years. At the same time, they also have students that do not have the English-language skills that would enable them to study effectively at CRTS. But they still need a solid education in Reformed theology. So, with the help of this video link and Rev. Breytenbach’s work, they receive that. We are glad we can help them out in this way.

One more thing deserves mention. Last fall, the Board of Governors initiated our second strategic planning session that led to the appointment of various ad hoc committees. To give you an impression of the work being done, there are committees focussing on prayer and spiritual growth, distance education, encouraging enrollment, expanding the PTP program, and improving our instruction about mission and church planting, among other things.

Suffice it to say that there is no lack of activity within the walls of 110 West 27th Street. Please continue to uphold the seminary in your prayers. We appreciate our supporting federations so much. And, if you happen to be in the area, please stop in and say hello. It is *your* seminary, and you are welcome any time between 8:30AM and 4:30PM, Monday through Friday. Coffee is at 10:30AM, and tea is at 3:00PM. We look forward to seeing you soon.



Women's Savings Action Presentation at the 2018 Convocation

Imagine being a Women's Savings Action Rep. It's time to collect again. Should you follow the same strategy you've always followed? Although your church's annual donations generally hover around the same amount, your church's giving slipped a little last year. Should you try something new?

This is just a sample of the thoughts possibly running through a lady's head as she prepares to collect. Next comes the work. We are incredibly grateful once again for their energies and their work among the communion of saints and their support of the Seminary library.

Now imagine being on the Women's Savings Action board. Actually, don't worry about the imagining; here's a glimpse. Obviously the WSA recognizes that having access to a well-stocked library is very important. The library is a place for reading, writing, and yes, even arithmetic. In fact, when considering the mandate of the WSA, we need to consider the math, including the finances, the statistics, and the numbers that represent the success of our library and give accountability to the work we do.

Each year at one of our meetings, our very organized librarian compiles significant numerical data and presents it in a neat, user-friendly way. Statistics don't always tell the whole story, but sometimes they are good enough to paint a general picture for us. With that in mind, this past summer provided the opportunity to gather some additional, slightly more informal data in the hopes of determining what the general Canadian Reformed population knows about the Women's Savings Action.

The survey consisted of four verbal questions that were aimed at fifty unsuspecting individuals between the ages of twenty-one and seventy-seven. All of them had ties to a Canadian Reformed Church within the Golden Horseshoe. Once a "target" was located, the surveyor would approach and simply ask if they would mind answering four questions about a Canadian Reformed Committee, to the best of their



WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION
FOR THE CANADIAN REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ability. Very quickly it was rather obvious that depending on the age and gender of those being surveyed, the results could be radically different. It was quite clear that the older one was, of the female kind, the more knowledge they possessed of WSA. Readers of *Clarion* typically scored higher.

The first question posed was "What does the acronym WSA" stand for?" Fifty percent of those surveyed knew, but, interestingly, those that didn't know suspected that the "W" stood for "Women," and therefore figured that it had something to do with women helping other women. "Women's Shelter Association," "Women Standing for the Abused," and even "The Women's Study Society of America," were suggested. The second question was "What is the primary purpose of the Women's Savings Action?" Many knew, but equally as many weren't quite sure and chose to guess. In this case all the guesses were the same, and not too far off the mark: "To raise funds for the Theological College," but with no specific mention of the library. The last question was "On average, how much money does WSA donate annually?" Most didn't know. The guesses ranged from \$2,000 to \$100,000.

However, once the participant was told that WSA has donated \$35,000 annually over the last four years in support of the seminary's library, the majority readily agreed that this is a worthwhile cause that needs our continued support. Those between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five were especially sensitive to the cost of books and electronic information. They were quick to appreciate the funds needed while offering encouragement and thanks.



As one of the professors so aptly mentioned at last year's convocation, the WSA is quite simply a fundraising committee. In reality, that's basically true. But when we consider the results of our informal survey, perhaps there's a bigger conversation that we need to have. How can we better communicate what we do? Is there something missing in our name? How can we connect with the younger generation?

Last year we created a poster in the hopes of bridging some of these gaps – to remind our churches that the Women's Savings Action is still active, engaged, and dedicated to our work. Have you seen it? All of our church reps received one.

Now, let's take a look at some of the numbers provided by our librarian. They are far more statistically sound. The seminary's library contains 34,722 books and includes eighty-two periodical subscriptions. Over the last four years, the Women's Savings Action has donated \$35,000 annually. This does not mean that we have collected the same amount every year. Depending how much we gather per year, we work with our bank reserve so that our annual funding of the library remains more consistent – which is helpful from a budget perspective. Understanding the needs of the library we are thankful that the years of plenty have helped us cover the lean years. As a point of interest, back in 1991, a little over

\$27,000 was collected. This year we collected just over 1,000 dollars more than that, twenty-seven years later.

So where does the money go? The answer is presented with this article in graph form. In today's world of electronics, where information is at the tips of your fingers, it's easy to forget that if you want access to professional, accurate, meaningful, and relevant databases of periodicals and journals, it costs money. Similar to books, if you want to own it, you have to buy it. Most post-secondary students can attest to this reality and appreciate the cost involved. Obviously, as the years go by, the same amount of money will have the ability to purchase fewer books. In fact, CRTS has reviewed all of its subscriptions and cancelled some to deal with rising costs.

Most importantly, the library needs to serve our students well as they work on their studies. For this reason,



each year the students are given the opportunity to offer their personal comments, feedback, and suggestions regarding the library. This also includes the question, "On a scale of 1-10, rate how important CRTS's library is to you." Last year the weighted score was 9.33 out of 10! It is clear that the library is appreciated

and valued by the students. So, we continue to give thanks to the Lord for all that we have in our Seminary, understanding that he blesses each one of us through it.

It is with great thankfulness and gratitude to the Lord that we can again make an annual contribution towards keeping the Seminary library books current and up to date. We are so very thankful to each of the representatives and those who helped with the collecting and counting within each of the congregations, and to all of you for the generous donations. Throughout this year, we have been blessed to have collected \$28,297.30, and we once again pledge \$35,000 toward the work of the library in this coming year.



Clarion Kids

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:21-35

Jesus told the people this parable: There was a man who owed the king a huge amount of money that he couldn't pay. The man begged the king to be kind, and the king cancelled his entire debt. Then the man went out and found a man who owed him a very small amount of money. He demanded his money and the man begged him to be kind. He refused and had the man thrown into prison. When the king found out, he was very angry, and he had the man thrown into prison until he could pay back all the money that he owed. Jesus said that this shows how important it is that we forgive each other from the heart.

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



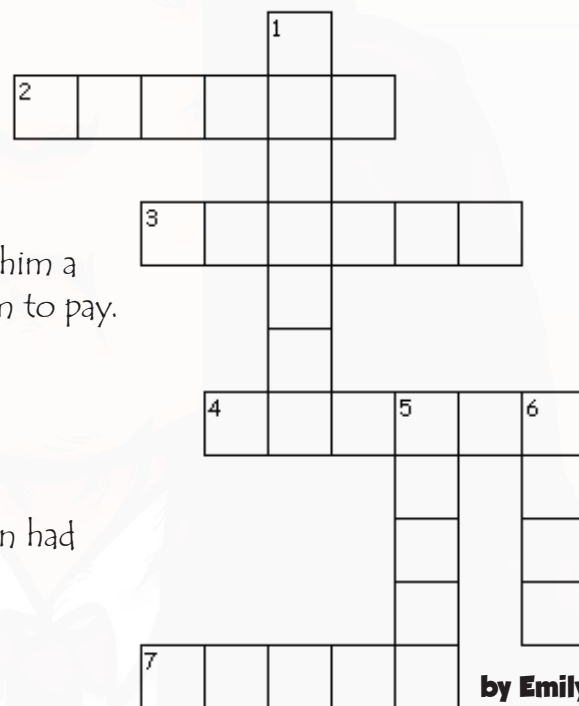
Crossword Puzzle

Across

2. Where the king sent the man
3. The man _____ the king to be kind.
4. The man went to someone who owed him a small amount of money to _____ him to pay.
7. A man owed the king a lot of this.

Down

1. It is important to _____ each other.
5. When the king found out what the man had done he was _____.
6. The king cancelled the man's _____.



by Emily Nijenhuis