

# Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE: TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

**Are you a Spectator  
or participant?**



VOLUME 68 • NUMBER 1 • JANUARY 11, 2019

**JORDAN PETERSON**  
**EUROPE SUBMITS TO ISLAM**

# Clarion

**Clarion: a trustworthy  
and engaging magazine,  
widely spread and read  
in Canadian Reformed  
households and beyond.**

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Our *Clarion* team is thankful that we are able to begin a new volume of our magazine. Volume 68 starts with an article from one of our editors. In "Doing All Things Decently and in Order," Rev. Eric Kampen discusses current controversy surrounding the bounds of the Church Order in our federation. He notes that this discussion has drawn in quite a few participants, also evident in the number of letters to the editor our readers can find near the end of the issue.

Also in Issue 1, we have an article from Rev. Clarence Bouwman on Jordan Peterson, as well as a Treasures, New & Old meditation, the Clippings on Politics & Religion column, and a new *Clarion* Kids page.

Laura Veenendaal

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# Doing All Things Decently and in Order

*These developments and the discussion  
have stirred up disillusionment,  
even a sense of despair in some members*

Throughout the past year, *Clarion* featured several articles to commemorate that 2018 marked the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Synod of Dort. The articles dealt with the doctrines defended in the Canons of Dort, as well as the Church Order that was adopted at that synod. As that synod began on November 13, 1618 and concluded on May 29, 1619, more articles are being prepared for a theme issue in March of this year.

Thankfully, this past year there were no articles in *Clarion* that had to defend the doctrines confessed in the Canons due to controversy in the churches served by this magazine. There were, however, several articles that were related to the Church Order. The Church Order used in the federation is not identical to the one adopted at Dort, as it has been adapted to the Canadian situation, but it is built on the same principles. Even the numbering is very close. The articles were prompted by a church in the federation allowing a minister who did not subscribe to the confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches, or one of the churches with which there is the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, to lead a worship service. Beside this issue, this church also felt free to modify the liturgical forms. Discussion ensued as to whether this was within the bounds of the Church Order. Elsewhere in this issue, the reader will see how the discussion is drawing in more participants.

## Disillusionment

I can't speak for other congregations, but having my ear to the ground in the congregation where I serve, I know that these developments and the discussion have stirred up disillusionment, even a sense of despair in some members.

I suspect that this sentiment is found elsewhere too. Is this an indication of the pending dissolution of the federation? The situation is worsened when information gets around, but it is hard to determine whether it is real or fake news. There is always the danger of judging rashly and unheard.

The discussion, then, goes back and forth. The attentive reader may feel like a spectator at a fast-paced hockey game, with one's head turning this way then that way. When you read the first writer, it seems persuasive, reasonable, with apparent support in history, but when you read the reply, the arguments don't seem so strong after all. It is like it says in Proverbs 18:17, "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him." We might then wish for what is stated in the next verse, "The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders." We know, however, that's not how it works in the New Testament age. We have received the Holy Spirit and are called to evaluate what we hear.

## Spectator or participant

Now in any discussion, there is the choice to be made to sit as spectator or to become a meaningful participant. To continue the image of the hockey game, to sit as spectator means to cheer on your favourite author, and just follow what he writes. To be a participant means you must get on your gear, to equip yourself to come to your own conclusions. In this case, it means you need to become thoroughly familiar with the Church Order which, after all, is being referred to by all the participants in the discussion. The attentive reader may recall that I urged this in an editorial, just about a year ago, (*Clarion*, January 26, 2018, pp 31-33) as an excellent way



to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Synod of Dort. By becoming familiar with the Church Order, one can imitate the Bereans as they heard Paul preach the gospel. We read in Acts 17:11 that they examined the Scriptures daily to see if the things Paul and Silas were telling them were true. I fully recognize the Church Order is not the same as Scripture, but the comparison is that you must go to the sources for the discussion, to see if the arguments presented are sound. Don't just rely on the word of others. Check it out for yourself. That is a good principle for any discussion.

### Easily accessible and easy to read

It is not hard to do this. One of the unique features of the *Book of Praise* is that it includes the Church Order. You can find it on pages 647-660. It consists of a mere seventy-six articles, most very short. The Church Order is not something hidden away, difficult to find, something only for the experts and those interested. It is at the fingertips of every church member.

You will find that the Church Order is not a difficult document. I include a unit on the Church Order in my Catechism curriculum, to familiarize the youth with how the church does things, and what scriptural principles are being worked with. My experience is that the students find it quite easy to read, and it generates good discussion about biblical principles behind many aspects of church life. While it may not always be in one's active memory, a discussion on Church Order-related matters should have one quickly looking for the relevant articles to put substance to the discussion, rather than going by feelings and opinions.

To be able to participate meaningfully in the discussion, it is therefore necessary to take time to read through the Church Order. As one does this, one will see the natural progression of thought. Reading through will also give context to individual articles. When one is familiar with the flow and direction of the Church Order, one will quickly detect when an article is being quoted out of context and given a meaning which does not fit with the purpose and flow of the Church Order. When one would like some more background, there are helpful commentaries available. While these may be helpful, one is not dependent upon them to get the clear sense of an article and of the overall direction. In this way, it can be compared to the way some people handle Scripture. If you have to say, "Where did they get that from?" that is usually not a good sign.

### Adopted with common accord

Now, I want to emphasize that by encouraging everyone to be familiar with the Church Order, this is not so be-

cause it has absolute authority. That is something reserved only for the Word of God. Even our Confessions don't have absolute authority. They simply seek to echo the teachings of Scripture and always point back to Scripture. We speak of derived authority for the Confessions, for it is derived from the way they faithfully echo the Word of God. With respect to the Church Order, the key thing to keep in mind is that the churches have adopted these articles with common accord (see Article 76). No church has been compelled to follow these rules. If it doesn't like the rules, it can follow the process to bring about changes. This is spelled out in Article 76 as it states, "If the interest of the churches demand such, they may and ought to be changed, augmented, or diminished." The final sentence then states, "However, no consistory, classis, or regional synod shall be permitted to do so, but they shall endeavor diligently to observe the articles of this Church Order as long as they have not been changed by a general synod."

### Seeking God's blessings

This concluding statement is critical for the churches to live in harmony. There is the promise to live by the adopted rules. If a church feels the interest of the churches demand changing, augmenting, or even eliminating certain articles, it can make its case. When, however, churches begin to act as if the changes are made already, they should not be surprised when there comes disillusionment and distrust from others. It is worldly to change the law by breaking the law. In the church that is more serious because it is a matter of breaking one's promises. It is not in keeping with the words of Psalm 15, which speak of the righteous who swear an oath (make a promise) to their own hurt and do not change (v. 4). One cannot expect God's blessing where one does not keep his Word.

So, I urge all to gear up, to become familiar with the Church Order. Then, when arguments fly back and forth at breakneck speed, and there is impressive verbal stickhandling going on by both sides, you'll know how to evaluate it and who is playing by the rules adopted with common accord. And no, the Church Order is not absolute. But if the interest of the churches demands changes, let's discuss and listen to each other and so come to proper conclusions in an orderly way. God, after all, is a God of order (1 Cor 14:40). If we seek change by changing on our own, we cause tension, hard feelings, and discord. Where we seek to walk together and listen to each other and persuade one another, where we keep our word, then we not only keep the letter of the Church Order, but also the spirit of the Church Order, namely, doing all thing decently and in order. It is, after all, as Psalm 133 teaches, where brothers and sisters live in unity, that the LORD has commanded his blessing, life evermore.





# Numbered Days

***"So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom."***  
 (Psalm 90:12)

When was the last time you went to a funeral? When was the last time you went to a funeral of someone you barely knew? How often do you think of your own death? Have you ever seen someone dying in front of you? This is a sober beginning to a sober devotion at the beginning of a new year. As the year turns once again, Psalm 90 speaks to our time. In this prayer, Moses confronts the frailty of human life due to the wrath of God.

When did Moses write this psalm? We don't know for sure. It could have been during the desert wanderings. In this period, he saw an entire generation of Israelites die because of God's wrath at their sin. It could also have been after Moses himself was told that he would never see the Promised Land, because of his disobedience at Meribah (Num 20). Whenever he wrote it, it seems to be a time when the reality of death and dying had smacked him right in the face (Ps 90:10-11). It was a time when the dust of death was swirling around him and couldn't be ignored. He was reminded of the frailty of all human life.

Death is a topic our world rarely considers. Western culture is trying to sanitize death's horrors. Funerals are now termed a "celebration of life." Many would prefer to "celebrate" by engaging in the favourite hobby of the deceased (golf course anyone?). Funeral directors find that the body is quietly taken care of by funeral staff and a few fam-


ily members. The LORD says, "Return, O children of Adam!" yet very few are willing to hear these words. They close their eyes, plug their ears, shut off their mind, and keep on chasing after life. They would prefer not to be reminded that their own days are numbered. They prefer not to think about the reason for this numbering of days.

What about us? What about you? As the year turns over once again, do you listen God's teaching? His instruction is heart-shaking and life-giving. We are natural born children of Adam, descendants of our first parents, Adam and Eve. They sinned against the God of life and incurred the penalty of death. All their descendants are born in sin and live with this curse of death. Our loved ones die, we attend funerals, we ourselves will one day die, all because of God's wrath against sin.

If we ignore this, we will never gain true wisdom. We will get caught up in a world where eloquence momentarily inspires another energized step, where money tries to buy a little more time, where power elbows for just a little more room to live, where philosophizing fights for meaning in seemingly random atoms. Sadly, the time will come when the last step will lead right into the brick wall of death, when no amount of money can purchase another minute of life, when no amount of power can push off the grip of death, and where the deepest philosophies can't find meaning in another seeming-

ly senseless death (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-22). We will go nowhere.

However, there is life in praying Moses' prayer. When we *listen* to God's instruction that our days are numbered because of his wrath, when we *hear* that God is the one that said to Adam and Eve and all their descendants, "Return to dust, O children of Adam," and when we *learn* that the wages of sin is death, then we can live in the understanding that in the cross of Jesus Christ we have received from God the gift of eternal life (Rom 6:23). "Teach us to number our days, so that we may get a heart of wisdom." Learning our days are numbered because of sin leads us to the wisdom of God in the cross of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:23).

Don't avoid funerals. Yes, often the business of life, the obligations of work, and the demands of children can be obstacles. However, these can also be opportunities to spread the teaching of Psalm 90:12 to those who may not listen to God's teaching themselves. Your children may say, "Funerals are depressing." Your unbelieving boss may wonder, "Why is it important for you to go to a funeral of someone you barely knew?" Because by going to a funeral you battle the sanitization of death from our dying culture. You bring into focus the teaching of God that the wage of sin is death, and by God's grace you prepare hearts to get the wisdom of God, the person of Jesus Christ. 



# Jordan Peterson

Last year, *Family Post* advertised the “Ezra Institute Escarpment Lecture Series,” with Dr. Peter Jones set to address the topic: “Carl Jung, Psychology and Jordan Peterson” on Friday, June 15. Jordan Peterson: a lecture on him sounded interesting to me – and I’m grateful I went.

As an aside, the Ezra Institute (feel free to Google it) has bought the sprawling property directly east of Beamer Memorial Conversation Area on Ridge Road in Grimsby. The idea is to use that property for a Francis Schaeffer-style *l’Abri* instruction facility. It’s also where this lecture series is held. Neat to have such opportunity in our back yard!

## Who is Peterson?

Jordan Peterson catapulted into fame a couple of years through his resistance to Bill C-16 (“An Act to Amend the Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code”). Peterson, a clinical psychologist connected to the University of Toronto, objected loudly to the intent of the Canadian federal government to compel Canadians to use specific pronouns in relation to specific persons (ie, instead of only he, she, him, her, adding also ze, zer, etc.) depending on the preference of the person you are talking to (or about). His insistence struck a chord with the public, and suddenly Peterson became a household name. As a result, his YouTube lectures on psychology went viral (particularly among millennial males) and his latest book, *12 Rules for Life*, has become an international best seller. The book has already sold over a million copies in North America alone, and has been translated into multiple languages including Mandarin and Russian.

Reactions to Peterson have been strongly mixed. The liberal left wing of our society largely despises Peterson, while the conservative right wing tends to love him. He says things that many Christians deeply appreciate. His rejection of government overreach as described above is but one example. In his books and lectures he shows he’s read the Bible, and he offers insightful analyses of biblical texts from his perspective as a clinical psychologist. One sister in my congregation said to me a couple of months ago that Jordan Peterson is “so close” to being a Christian himself. It raises the question: should we jump on the Peterson bandwagon and hail him as a voice to admire and a prophet to follow? Since I had read a

number of Peter Jones’ books over the years, I was sure he could help provide a good answer to that question.

The lecture I attended did not provide a board outline of what Peterson stands for; instead the speaker sought to expose the well from which Peterson draws his thinking. That analysis was insightful to me, and I think it worthwhile to share it with you. What follows is not a summary of the lecture but my working with the material I learned.

## One room or two?

Catechism students in the congregation will recall the picture I have repeatedly drawn on the whiteboard in the classroom: a circle (the globe, this world) with a box around it. The point of the picture: reality is whatever the eye-on-earth sees, be it the physical eye or the eye of the mind. So: there is no reality beyond the box around the globe. On the whiteboard I then place a second box above the first box, denoting Heaven, God’s residence. Then I tell the students: we who are downstairs cannot see the upstairs, but that doesn’t mean there is no upstairs above your living room. In fact, God has revealed (Holy Scripture) that he has created a two-roomed world, with Downstairs (Earth) the abode of man and Upstairs (Heaven) his abode. From Upstairs he sovereignly directs and controls what happens both Upstairs and Downstairs.

Paganism denies that reality comprises a two-roomed world, with Upstairs the abode of the Creator and beyond our ability to discover. Pagan religions do acknowledge the existence of spirits and demons “up there,” but see them as extensions of what is “down here” (perhaps as spirits of departed ancestors) and so not as inhabitants of a second room known as the Upstairs of the Bible. More, paganism would tell us that we down here and they up there can connect with one another through practices of occult, mediums, dreams, etc.

## Carl Jung

Carl Jung (1875-1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology. The worldview commonly acceptable in the days when Carl Jung laboured was two-roomed, with western thinking still broadly embracing that the Creator was real (in Heaven) and that God revealed himself on earth through his holy Word. But

Jung emphatically rejected this two-roomed perspective and insisted that reality consisted of one room alone – what I’ve called Downstairs. The spiritual and the world of spirits was not “out there” in the sense of Upstairs but was instead deep inside you – part of Downstairs. Jung was insistent that we need to rid our thinking of the Christian two-roomed concept and need to return to the pagan one-roomed concept the fathers embraced before Christianity corrupted their natural religion. In step with that insistence, Jung taught that inner deities are the source of your dreams, fantasies, and instincts, and so you need to analyze those dreams and dig down to what the inner is really telling you if you would cope well with real life. The listening and the unpacking is the science of analytical psychology. That’s why to Jung’s way of thinking, religion and psychology need to merge.

## Jordan Peterson

In the years since Jung did his work, western society as a whole has replaced the two-roomed view of the Christian past with the one-roomed view of paganism. Jordan Peterson (born 1962) is completely comfortable in this one-roomed worldview. In his years as a practicing clinical psychologist, Peterson has spent countless hours with hundreds upon hundreds of clients. As these clients have shared with him the anxieties and stresses of their lives, he has drawn their attention repeatedly to their inner instincts, their dreams, and their fantasies, and as a psychoanalyst has sought to help his clients hear that inner deity and follow its guidance.

To be clear, Peterson does not assume that everyone’s inner voice – that’s the god within – would say chaotic or contradictory or absurd things. Peterson reminds us that we’ve been on this earth for millions of years, and so there’s a code of right and wrong built into our genes. As we’ve journeyed through the eons on our evolutionary journey to what we are today, we’ve picked up natural wisdom together with such forebears and cousins as lobsters and chimpanzees. For communal survival we need to tap into that inner wisdom. Peterson’s *12 Rules for Life* list a dozen examples of this natural wisdom, and through his book he explains how we got this wisdom and why it’s imperative for a good life to embrace this wisdom. As I read the book, I can imagine Peterson coaching his clients into hearing from the inner voice the particular tidbit of wisdom unfolded in each chapter.

## Bible

The Christian listening to (or reading) Peterson will notice that he makes considerable use of the Bible. We need to notice, though, that he does not read the Bible as you or I would. We read the Bible as a book originating from Upstairs since its Author is ultimately God the Creator. Peterson reads the Bible as a book from Downstairs, as an ancient record

of how the (Jewish) fathers analyzed and worked with their inner instincts. To Peterson, the Bible is fundamentally no different from any other ancient texts, be they written (eg, the Hindu *Bhagavad Gita*) or oral (eg, North American First Nations stories). All are myths, containing stories communicating kernels of enlightened wisdom that we can use to help us understand the truth coming from the inner self. As a professor in clinical psychology, Peterson has worked with all these myths to get a sense of the deeper meaning embodied in the stories. That effort comes out in his discussion of Bible texts in his book and in his talks. And yes, from time to time he does say some profound and insightful things about a given Bible passage.

## Evaluation

For my part I appreciate that Peterson dares to espouse traditionalist positions and critique much of what the liberal left says. That critique undermines liberal thinking, and it’s his courage and forthrightness in doing so that spawns the rabid criticism he attracts from many on the left. I think we can learn from Peterson how leftish thinking is bedeviled by contradictions and misinformation, and we can use his arguments to unsettle the confidence of those entrapped by that thinking. For this part of his work I eagerly cheer him on.

I do not believe, however, that just because Peterson is the enemy of my enemy that he must therefore be my friend. Yes, Christians will largely be quite comfortable with the 12 Rules for Life he set forth in his book. I applaud Rule 1: “Stand up straight with your shoulders back.” I applaud Rule 2 as well: “Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping.” And Rule 3: “Make friends with people who want the best for you.” Etcetera. But we need to realize that Peterson’s arguments for these 12 Rules are rooted in a one-roomed worldview, so that he justifies them and argues for them from a pagan perspective. The received wisdom he’s capturing in his 12 Rules ring true to us because this wisdom has come to us through a Christian history and heritage. But he’s given them a pagan foundation.

## Finally

Peterson is very popular today. That’s because, I’d venture to say, he speaks in today’s categories, putting into words how today’s people actually see the world – one-roomed. Yet he doesn’t join the liberal left in despising the received wisdom of what it takes to cope with life – and that’s why much of what he says resonates with those of our society who’ve been raised with a two-roomed worldview. We do well in my opinion to try to understand Peterson well precisely because he puts into words what’s popularly thought in the homes of so many across our nation. That understanding can help us engage with those around us.







# Europe Submits to Islam

On October 25, 2018, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) essentially ruled that criticizing Mohammed, the founder of Islam, means inciting hatred and therefore such criticism is not protected free speech. With this verdict, Europe was basically told to submit to Islam.

The case involved Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff, an Austrian who was convicted of “denigrating religious beliefs” after she had given lectures about the dangers of fundamentalist Islam. A left-leaning journalist had been planted in the audience and secretly recorded the lectures. Soeren Kern noted that “the offending speech was an offhand comment by Sabaditsch-Wolff that Mohammed was a pedophile because he married his wife Aisha when she was just six or seven years old. Sabaditsch-Wolff’s actual words were, ‘A 56-year-old and a six-year-old? What do we call it, if it is not pedophilia?’” Muslim tradition holds that the marriage was consummated when she was only nine years old and thus would have been illegal according to current Austrian law. Her “comments were factually, if not politically, correct.” The journalist who recorded the lectures was instrumental in bringing the matter to court and the case eventually found its way to the ECHR.

Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff appealed to this court to overturn earlier decisions of Austrian courts convicting her of denigrating religious beliefs. She argued that her right to freedom of expression had been violated since what she had said had been value judgments based on facts and her critique of Islam was in the context of an objective and lively discussion which contributed to a public debate and had not been aimed at defaming Mohammed. The European Court did not agree, and the seven judges unanimously found her guilty of “denigrating religious beliefs.” The judges felt that it was necessary to balance the freedom of expression with the right of others to have their religious feelings protected in order to preserve religious peace.

In a perceptive *World Magazine* article, Mindy Belz observed that applying this decision to the 2015 Charlie

Hebdo shooting in Paris “would force authorities to blame the victims rather than the alQaeda gunmen. The cartoonists and editors at the satirical newsweekly killed in the attack would have been guilty of causing the attack because they ‘hurt the feelings’ and created ‘justifiable indignation’ of the Islamic community in Paris.”

The recent ECHR decision was clearly a capitulation or submission to Islam and its Sharia law since earlier decisions of the ECHR showed little sensitivity for Christian feelings. Belz noted that “when a Lithuanian fashion designer posted ads depicting a shirtless Jesus in tattoos and tight jeans, ECHR said it ‘must be’ possible to criticize religious ideas, ‘even if such criticism may be perceived by some as hurting their religious feelings.’” Also, “when the feminist protest band Pussy Riot trespassed and took over Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Savior to record a profane song, ECHR said the band’s right to freedom of expression ‘extends to information or ideas which shock or disturb.’”

Belz noted how ironic that the European Court “appeared to adopt a standard similar to strict blasphemy laws in Islamic-led countries in the same week Pakistan’s Supreme Court dealt such laws a blow,” referring to the famous case of Asia Bibi, a Christian, whose blasphemy conviction was overturned by Pakistan’s supreme court and who at the time of writing is still waiting for a western country to offer her asylum.

The ECHR submission to Islam is a warning for Canada. The trend of catering to the wishes of Islam is evident in our nation as well. With the consequences of Parliament’s adoption of Motion 103, which purports to fight Islamophobia, still unclear, we need to be vigilant to maintain our freedom to criticize Islamic beliefs if necessary.

Sources used: Direct quotes, unless otherwise indicated, are from Soeren Kern, “European Human Rights Court Backs Sharia Blasphemy Law” on the Gatestone Institute website; Mindy Belz, “Silenced Speech” *World Magazine*, November 24, 2018, page 28.





## The Lord's Supper

**Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25**

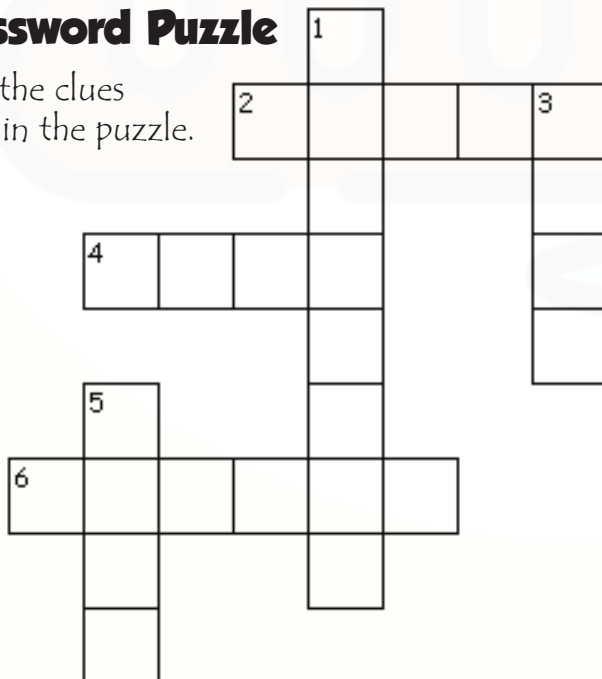
Have you ever wondered what's happening in church during Lord's Supper? You watch your parents eat the bread and drink the wine, but why? A little while before Jesus died, he had a special meal with his disciples. He told them that the bread represented his body, and the wine represented his blood, which he gave for us. Sometimes it is easy to forget what an amazing thing God did for us, so the Lord's Supper is a way for us to remember that Jesus died to take away all of our sins. We celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly in church, so that we never forget.

Go to [www.clarionmagazine.ca](http://www.clarionmagazine.ca) to print and colour this picture!



### Crossword Puzzle

Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.



### Across

2. God sent him to die for our sins.
4. The \_\_\_\_ represents Jesus' blood.
6. We celebrate Lord's Supper regularly so that we never \_\_\_\_\_.

### Down

1. God wants us to \_\_\_\_\_ that Jesus died for our sins.
3. Jesus died to take these away.
5. The bread represents Jesus' \_\_\_\_\_.

**by Emily Nijenhuis**

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Dear Editor,

Greetings from far away Australia. Hopefully a letter from so far away shows that we down here continue to watch for what is happening among the Lord's churches throughout the world. Of course, having had the privilege of serving the Canadian churches for a number of years leaves an additional soft spot for the churches up there.

With thankfulness I recently read Dr. J. Van Vliet's letter to the editor, published in *Clarion* Vol. 67 No. 22 regarding Revs. B. DeJong and J. Visscher's earlier articles.

If I may, in view of his response, I would like to ask Dr. DeJong a further question. This is about his response with regards to the vows made as agreed upon in the Forms for Baptism and Form for Public Profession of Faith. For clarity's sake, let me quote the formulation of the vow in question, as adopted by Synod Cloverdale 1983: "Do you confess that the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian Church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?"<sup>1</sup> This was a linguistic revision from the older version: ". . . the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian Church. . . ."

First, it is helpful to understand the context in which objections were raised to this revision and appeals addressed to subsequent synods. As evident from the Synod Burlington's (1986, Article 144) observations (especially 1 and 2), these appeal(s) suggest that using the pre-Synod Cloverdale formulation means members vow to confessionally accept *only* the Apostles' Creed and not necessarily the other confessions. It may be true, as Dr. N. H. Gootjes shows in his article to which Rev. DeJong refers,<sup>2</sup> that in the original wording of these forms "the articles of the Christian faith" refer to the Apostles' Creed. However, when giving its response, Synod Burlington, in its Considerations 2,<sup>3</sup> does not suggest that this phrase should mean anything different. Instead, this Synod refers to how the addition to this question "as taught here in this Christian Church" which, this Synod says, means that "one gives allegiance to all the confessions of the church."

Synod Burlington itself made this connection between the expression "as taught here" and "allegiance to all the confessions of the church." In a further article,<sup>4</sup> in response to what I had previously written about this decision,<sup>5</sup> Dr. Gootjes says that the phrase "as taught here in this Christian church" must refer to the preaching and catechetical instruction. He concludes that "the Reformed confessions were not directly mentioned in the second question of the Form for baptism. The confessions function in the background." This

may be so, but the addition "as taught here in this Christian church" remains important.

After all, without these words a Roman Catholic would answer this question positively as well; he would claim to believe everything taught in the Old and New Testament and maintained in the Apostles' Creed. He might make this kind of claim, but of course, while retaining his Roman Catholic heresy, will have nothing to do of how we further confess in the Heidelberg Catechism the true meaning of what is confessed in each article of the Apostles' Creed. This is also true when speaking about the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort. In these additional confessions, that which is confessed in the Apostles' Creed is upheld in further detail. Those who truthfully answer to this part of the question "as taught here in this Christian church" can only do so in the context of the church's commitment to God's Word as summarized in the confessions.

While past Canadian Reformed synods maintain how Synod Cloverdale's reformulation of these liturgical forms was *linguistic*, those who appealed this revision show that they do not think all the members of the churches should, by this vow, be required to adhere to the other Reformed confessions.

This is where Synod Cloverdale's revised linguistic formulation is an improvement. It shows more clearly what was meant by this vow all along. It removes the kind of ambiguity shown in these past appeals.

When, in his response to Dr. Van Vliet, Dr. DeJong writes: "If this change really is merely a 'linguistic revision' which has not altered the meaning of the original phrase, 'articles of the Christians faith,' no one can lodge a complaint to a church for preferring the older language even though the formal attempts to reincorporate this language has failed." Sounds logical enough.

However, in view of all this, my further question for Dr. DeJong is, "Why would anyone prefer the older, and possibly ambiguous, formulation above the new, more precise one?" I realize that in a missional context, or in the context of an *outsider* joining the church by way of public profession of faith, it may seem daunting to ask this question. One might question whether it is necessary to understand everything in the confessions when answering this question? However, keep in mind that there is a whole lot more to read and understand in order to confess that one believes the doctrine of the Old and New Testament. The "as summarized" becomes like a shortcut. This is true especially in view of the addition "as taught here in this Christian church." How can one really answer that? Do those who answer positively to this part of the vow know everything that Dr. DeJong, or who ever happens to be

the minister of the church at the time, teaches? It can be done much easier with the assurance that all the teaching is done in commitment God's Word, as summarized in the Confessions. Can those making Public Profession of Faith then not hold those teaching among the churches to keep this commitment? Can those who are considering coming in from the outside not be given a copy of the confessions and told: "See, this is how God's Word is summarized among us; this is what we teach from God's Word, in contrast to various heresies of Roman Catholics, compromises of Anglican and unscriptural views, and practices of Baptists so forth. . . ."

*With brotherly greetings, PKA de Boer*

## Letter to the Editor

With respect to the response of Pastor DeJong to the letter to the editor of Dr. J. Van Vliet in the November 2, 2018 edition of *Clarion*, I would like to note that Pastor Bill's reference to the decision of Synod The Hague 1914 is not helpful for the following reasons. Synod emphasized that they did not wish to make a general pronouncement on this issue so as to say that in any circumstance it was warranted or desirable to allow those who reject infant baptism to partake of the Lord's Supper but that every local consistory should make that decision (preferably with the concurring advice of classis). Furthermore, a very clear stipulation was made that such people should not be actively promoting their errant views and must demonstrate willingness to be instructed. Also, they should not be of child-bearing age so that they would not have to face the question of whether to present their infants for baptism. For those with newborn infants in the cradle, the clear advice was given that "he should be required to have those children baptized." And, furthermore, it was said very carefully "the committee does not desire that the Synod declares that agreement with this important part of our confession would not be necessary [for one] to be accepted as a member of one of our churches." The advisory committee also noted that the Synod of Dort (1618/19) when asked a similar question did *not* answer in the affirmative. And very important for the question at hand re: admission to the pulpit of a Baptist minister is the observation of the 1914 advisory committee that those who reject infant baptism are not qualified to be office-bearers in the church.

Another point of caution is the theological climate of the day. Was this not the era when unwarranted decisions were made concerning common grace and presupposed regener-

<sup>1</sup> Second Question (vow) in the *Form for Infant Baptism*, see parallel formulation in the fourth question (vow) in the *Form for Adult Baptism* and first question (vow) in the *Form for Public Profession of Faith*.

<sup>2</sup> N.H. Gootjes, *Articles of the Christian Faith, Clarion*, Vol 48, no. 5

<sup>3</sup> Upheld again by Synod Winnipeg, 1989, Article 161, Consideration 5

<sup>4</sup> N.H. Gootjes, *Once more' Articles and Confessions, Clarion* vol. 48 No. Year End Issue. Near the end of this article Dr. Gootjes says something about writing further about the expression "this" *Christian church*, but I am not aware of such an article every having been written.

<sup>5</sup> PKA de Boer, *Reformed Polemics*, Vol. 5 No. 16.

ation (Synod Utrecht 1905)? In later years these decisions were revoked. Synods make mistakes too. The same Synod The Hague 1914 ironically decided *not* to add more hymns. On what grounds? Because many were strongly opposed to hymns at that time. Dogmatically, by the theologians of this era, the doctrine of infant baptism was judged not to be one of "the fundamental doctrines of the faith" (*fundamenteel stuk der waarheid*). I sincerely question this judgement considering what we confess in the Belgic Confession, Article 34 "that anyone who aspires to eternal life ought to be baptized only once."

Brother DeJong wishes to differentiate the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century from modern-day Baptists. Certainly, there are many differences, but the core issue remains the same. Baptists reject infant baptism and require those who were baptised as infants to be rebaptized. P. Y. DeJong notes in "The Church's Witness to the World" that this error of re-baptism was considered by the reformers "to be a flagrant insult to God." Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is not a minor disagreement between Christians. It is a major stumbling-block to communal fellowship (see *Form for Lord's Supper* re: "all who despise the sanctity of the sacraments"). That's how I as an elder in the church see it and that is how many in the Canadian Reformed churches see it. I hope and pray that the consistory and members of Blessings Church in Hamilton remain committed to the unity of the bond of churches to which they belong and show some sensitivity to the strong opinions on the other side of the issue.

In summary, I respect the freedom of Blessings consistory to decide these matters, but I also call for wisdom.

*Richard Buist, Winnipeg*

*P.S. I am indebted to the assistance of Rev. Klaas Jonker, my emeritus minister, with translating the relevant Acta of The Hague 1914.*

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





# To Turn or Return: A Response to The Challenge of Being Reformed and Missional

After reading the articles by Bill DeJong and James Visscher in the September 21, 2018 edition of *Clarion*, my Reformed radar was going off. Dr. DeJong asked all of us to accept not his apology, but his apologia, given in defense of some controversial developments at Blessings Church. It seems to come as no surprise to Dr. DeJong that there is a certain amount of discontentment in the broader federation about these events. Dr. Visscher explains that much of this tension is the result of “doing things the old traditional way” versus “the new missional way,” much like tensions that can be observed in the PCA, and the Free Churches of Scotland, and their counterpart, the Free Church Continuing. But is that really all it is? Thus far an important avenue of discussion has been overlooked, namely the doctrine. As it stands, we have been left with the impression that this discussion is merely about practice, but not so much about doctrine. I for one am not convinced because there is always an underlying reason why something is done. And so, I share Dr. DeJong’s hope “of generating discussion and possible understanding.”

What follows is an attempt to further that discussion by clarifying some of the doctrinal positions of the missional movement. One might think that the best starting point would be the theology of Tim Keller or possibly Michael Goheen, both of whom Dr. DeJong credits with spawning the missional turn in Reformed churches. Both Keller and Goheen, however, admit that they are indebted to another theologian named Lesslie Newbigin.<sup>1</sup> Although I could address his view of contextualization or the church, his view of ecumenicity is central to the current discussion.

### Our missional task - to share the gospel

Newbigin’s view of church unity is rooted in his view of mission. For Newbigin, mission is not a task that is performed

by the church, but is, rather, part of her essential character. The church is called by Christ as his representatives on earth to go forth and proclaim the gospel message. Newbigin states that what Christ “left behind was a fellowship, and he entrusted to it the task of being His representatives to the world. ‘As the Father hath sent me,’ He said, ‘even so I send you.’”<sup>2</sup> One can quibble about the fine details, but this is really nothing new to a confessional church which subscribes to the Canons of Dort. Our confession states that the promises of the gospel “ought to be announced and proclaimed universally and without discrimination to all peoples and to all men, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel, together with the command to repent and believe” (CofD II/5), and in respect to the preaching of the gospel we read, by the “ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified,” (CofD I/3). If there is a sense that as churches we have fallen short in this respect, it is not a *turn* that we need, but a *return* to our confessional standards. So far, no missional turn is required.

### United in Word or Spirit?

Now to Newbigin’s view of ecumenicity. Newbigin maintains that the church’s mission requires a unified church. A church divided portrays to the world a deep hypocrisy where they are calling the world to be united with Christ while at the same time being divided amongst themselves. “When the church faces out towards the world it knows that it only exists as the first-fruits and the instrument of that reconciling work of Christ, and that division within its own life is a violent contradiction of its own fundamental nature. His reconciling work is one, and we cannot be His ambassadors reconciling the world to God, if we have not ourselves been willing to be reconciled to one another.”<sup>3</sup>

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In light of this need for the visible expression of unity by the church, Newbigin condemns the Reformation's emphasis on doctrinal agreement as the basis for unity. He states, "The true character of this union of believers with one another in Christ is disastrously distorted when it is conceived of essentially in terms of doctrinal agreement. The effect of such distortion is to break the Christian fellowship up into rival parties. . . ." <sup>4</sup> Quoting Luther, Newbigin declares that the basis for the visible unity of the church lies not in agreement upon the Word but upon the indwelling of the Spirit. "A spiritual unity. . . is of itself sufficient to make a Church." <sup>5</sup> The outworking of this shared spiritual unity within the communion of saints is not a shared confession, but a common experience of faith. For this reason, Newbigin, who was actively involved in the World Council of Churches, wanted to dismantle the denominational walls. Keller readily admits that "Newbigin, at a number of places in his writing, seems to veer close to universalism." <sup>6</sup> Another reason he wanted to overcome denominational barriers. After all, if all men are likely to be saved, then what need would there be for denominational lines.

## Or should it be Word and Spirit?

The alarm bells are going off again. For 500 years, the orthodox Protestant churches have maintained that unity is based upon the Word. Such a confession does not discount the work of the Holy Spirit, but rather embraces it because the Holy Spirit works through the Word. Newbigin attempts to unnaturally separate the work of the Holy Spirit from the Word by claiming spiritual unity can be something different than unity based on Scriptures. In respect to the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come," we accept that God's rule is established by the Word and Spirit. We confess, "So rule us by your Word and Spirit that more and more we submit to you." Closely linked to this rule is the preservation of the church as the catechism continues, "Preserve and increase your church" (HC, LD 48).

Historically, there have always been opponents to a strict understanding of ecumenicity based upon the Word. The battle between good and evil, biblical and unbiblical (also known as the antithesis), is ongoing and does not cease to raise its ugly head. Our forefathers dealt with the same threat to the faithful church as will our children. And so, we ought to take a lesson from history. Klaas Schilder reminds us of our true ecumenical task, rooted in the Word:

That's why the first task of the church will always be the proclamation of that centuries-old antithesis. She does not tolerate a breakthrough on the basis of false slogans proclaiming unity. What she desires is a breakthrough with the sharp weapon of that Biblical antithesis-over against

all groups and all movements that have denied and ridiculed the Biblical idea of the antithesis and have cursed it as the greatest folly and a fragmenting force, including, therefore, the ecumenical church movement which has no confession, and also the youth movement that has allowed itself to become part of this "ecumenism." <sup>7</sup>

We need to root our ecumenical activity squarely upon the Word of God.

## Where do those in the Missional Movement stand?

Although Newbigin's ecumenical view is not endorsed whole heartedly by most leaders of the Missional Movement, they have not completely distanced themselves from his views either. Keller, for instance, in a list of Newbigin's ingredients for a missionary encounter, cites ingredient number six as "a unified church that shows the world an overcoming of denominational divisions." <sup>8</sup> This alone would not be concerning, but last year when Keller gave the Kuyper address at Princeton, he stated openly that Lesslie Newbigin was right about how to have a missional experience. <sup>9</sup> Likewise, Goheen declares that "Newbigin's vast reflection on mission and unity is both motivational and instructive." <sup>10</sup> Now I am concerned.

And my concern becomes more acute as time passes. I fear what Dr. DeJong describes as a "healthy trend" is something quite different. It is not just that a Baptist preached on the pulpit. Blessings Church seems to be distancing itself from its Canadian Reformed identity in several ways and I wonder if it is because they want to break down the ecumenical walls in the same way. They have avoided using the words "Canadian Reformed" in their name. They have changed the standardized forms so as not to refer to or down play the confessions which define us. A policy to allow guests at the Lord's Table who are not Canadian Reformed or from a sister church has been adopted. Events are sponsored and publicly advertised with the Christian Reformed Church as if we are in the same camp. It makes me wonder why we waited until the formation of the United Reformed Church before entering into unity talks.

It suggests there is some doctrinal acceptance of Newbigin's view. Just how much Keller and other Missional initiatives such as Blessings have embraced is difficult to determine. Keller admits there are a "dizzying variety of different and sometimes contradictory definitions of the term missional." <sup>11</sup> One way to evaluate whether his view has made inroads is in the manner of church worship. Newbigin understood that if the essence of unity was exclusively spiritual, then a shared confession would not be an essential component in expressing the communion of

## **CALLED**

The Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church has extended a call to

**Candidate Iwan Borst**

## **CALL ACCEPTED**

Accepted the call to the Eben-Ezer Canadian Reformed Church of Chatham, ON:

**URC Candidate Arjen Vreugdenhill**

## **CALL DECLINED**

Declined the call extended to him by the St. Albert Canadian Reformed Church

**Rev. R. den Hollander**

of the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church in Grassie, Ontario.

Called and declined the call to the Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church, British Columbia:

**Rev. Rodney Vermeulen**

of the Trinity Canadian Reformed Church in Glanbrook, Ontario.

## **PULPIT SUPPLY**

Effective February 1, 2019

**Rev. Mark Zylstra**

will again be available for pulpit supply. He can be reached at: zylstramark@gmail.com or 289-956-0443 home or 613-803-7913 cell

## **CHURCH NEWS**

saints. The communion of saints would need to be expressed differently. He states, "The difficulty about what is purely spiritual is that it is apt to become purely private. We are not discarnate spirits and we enter into spiritual communion one with another only through our sense experience of sight, sound and touch."<sup>12</sup> Newbigin draws the logical conclusion that if unity is not based on a shared doctrine, but rather in a shared spirituality, then it must be expressed through shared experience. It follows that worship will emphasize experience rather than doctrine. Keller is well known for his use of the arts and media to enhance worship, and Blessings has followed suit. For example, pre-service song selections favour contemporary praise and worship music while singing is often accompanied by a band. This development is a departure from the plain, sober services that characterized Reformed worship since the Reformation. Calvin greatly feared that should the singing become too elaborate then men's minds would stop thinking about the words and focus on the melody.<sup>13</sup> If unity, however, is exclusively spiritual and not based on the Word, as Newbigin suggests, then what would it matter? But, of course, it does matter.

## **What now?**

Our forebearers seemed to understand this better than we do. J.M. Batteau in his essay on Schilder and the church said,

In Schilder's view, bowing to Scripture was not just a demand for individual believers, but a necessity for the true church of Christ. Schilder saw the church as a church under the authority of Scripture, and characterized by loyalty to Scripture. In this he was simply but forcefully echoing the Belgic Confession, which call the Holy Scripture an "infallible rule" . . . where loyalty to God's Word was undermined or unclear, there the church ceased to be a biblical church.<sup>14</sup>

And in response to the World Council of Churches, "Schilder responded by pointing out the movement's lack of scriptural foundation, that of the apostles and prophets." Given the roots of the missional movement, I remain uncomfortable about making a missional turn. Rather, as my thoughts begin to crystalize, my Reformed radar is telling me to do something else. Rather than a missional turn, what we really need is an ecumenical return to the confessions that we love and cherish. Moving forward, we must build upon God's Word as summarized and confessed by the churches in the confessions, a foundation where no apology or apologetics (defense) is necessary.

*Rev. Steve van Leeuwen*

<sup>1</sup> Michael Goheen, "The Legacy of Lesslie Newbigin for Today," *Reformation & Revival Journal*, 14, no. 3 (2005): 49-63. Timothy Keller, *Center Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 251-261.

<sup>2</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Household of God*. (1953; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Academic Publishers, 2008), 51.

<sup>3</sup> Newbigin, 17, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Newbigin, 53, 54.

<sup>5</sup> Newbigin, 57, 58.

<sup>6</sup> Keller, *Center Church*. 252.

<sup>7</sup> Klaas Schilder, "Your Ecumenical Task," in *Schilder's Struggle for the Unity of the Church*, trans. Theodore Plantinga (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance Publications, 1990), 451.

<sup>8</sup> Keller, *Center Church*. 254.

<sup>9</sup> Keller, "Answering Lesslie Newbigin," Tim Keller's 2017 Kuyper Lecture. YouTube. <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=tim+keller+kuyper+address&&view=detail&mid=21AE062623165539A8B521AE062623165539A8B5&&FORM=VRD GAR> (accessed November 23, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Goheen, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Keller, *Center Church*. 256.

<sup>12</sup> Newbigin, 58.

<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, 2 vols, 3.20.32, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 895-896.

<sup>14</sup> J.M. Batteau, "Schilder on the Church," in *Always Obedient*, ed. J. Geertsema, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing), 69.





## FURTHER DISCUSSION

I appreciate the invitation of the editor to respond to the three letters to the editor which probe my views on a variety of things.

There is nothing in what Richard Buist writes that contests my assessment of the 1914 Synod The Hague. I fully understand that this synod was rightly hesitant, in part because the particularities of the case presented were not fully known, to make a binding declaration to which all consistories had to adhere. Nothing about this negates my claim that Synod judged that a rejection of infant baptism *per se* need not be a reason to bar someone from the Lord's table. Here precisely, albeit partially, is how Synod answered the Regional Synod of Friesland-South: "Our Reformed Churches always have judged that, according to the example of the Apostolic Church, tolerance can be exercised regarding brothers who in good faith (*ter goeder trouw*) err in some doctrine, if only this does not regard some fundamental part of the truth, and if the erring persons are willing to receive further instruction and promise not to make propaganda for their views, whereby it is a matter of course that such brothers, as long as they abide by their views, are certainly not eligible for any office in the Church" (*Acta*, Art. 135).

Mr. Buist is also quick to remind me that a rejection of infant baptism is not a minor matter. I welcome his reminder so long as he acknowledges that such a rejection is erroneous and not heretical. To allege that the rejection of infant baptism *per se* is heretical is indisputably sectarian and sinful.

Rev. P.K.A. de Boer queries me about my preference for the older wording of the baptismal and profession of faith vows over the newer. I do not want to be perceived by Rev. de Boer as a staunch traditionalist unwilling to accept innovation, but I do think that sometimes we're best off leaving things unchanged. Rev. de Boer cannot accept my preference for the older formulation on the grounds that the newer formulation is clear and unambiguous. My response to Rev. de Boer is simple: unambiguous to whom? I believe that the newer formulation gives the impression that there is *no distinction* whatsoever between the level of

doctrinal commitment required of office-bearers and that required of members. So far as I can tell, this is *never* what Reformed churches have taught. In fact, to teach it is to approach sectarianism.

Rev. van Leeuwen's verbose attempt to critique the missional movement *vis-à-vis* Tim Keller and Michael Goheen is impaired by the genetic fallacy. No one should be convinced that Keller and Goheen are suspect because they're fond of the missiologist Lesslie Newbigin who had erroneous views on some things. I would hope that Rev. van Leeuwen would agree that there's a lot to be learned even from theologians with whom we fundamentally disagree (some of John Calvin's favourite phrases came from Plato!).

More significantly, in terms of the writings of Lesslie Newbigin, one must ask the question, which Newbigin, the earlier or the later? According to N.T. Wright, Newbigin "had, by his own admission, walked the path toward a more liberal or relativistic view of gospel and culture, had seen where it led, and had firmly turned around again" ("Introduction" in Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018] xi). Among other things, Newbigin began to see the World Council of Churches in a new light. "He believed that the World Council of Churches," Goheen writes, "often identified with the culture to the point of departing from the gospel" (*The Church and Its Vocation*, 153). Within the broad ecumenical tradition, Newbigin argued, there was sometimes a solidarity *without separation* with the culture that "ended near or at the point of apostasy" (*The Church and Its Vocation*, 155). Reading the later Newbigin makes one understand why Goheen and Keller have found in him a tremendous resource for faithful gospel ministry in a secular orbit.

I'm quite thankful for the opportunity to contribute to this ongoing discussion, and I reiterate my gratitude to the editors of *Clarion* for allocating me space to do so.

*Fraternally, in our Lord,*

Bill DeJong 