

Clarion

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



The symbol of the cross

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THE GOLDEN SILENCE OF THE LAMB
2019 CRTS CONFERENCE

Clarion

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widely spread and read
in Canadian Reformed
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

With Good Friday and Easter Sunday approaching, our focus this issue is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While the cross represents grace and love to us, Rev. Matthew VanLuik writes that many have and continue to take great offense at the message of the cross. The hope of the message of the cross is also written about in Treasures, New & Old from Rev. Richard Aasman and an Easter hymn from Rev. George van Popta.

This issue reports on the ninth annual CRTS Conference, "Do Not Hinder Them:" Children and the Church. We also include the annual newsletter from Women's Savings Action and a press release from the CRTS Board of Governors.

Various other columns also appear in Issue 7: Church News Review, Education Matters, You Asked, and some letters to the editor. I would also like to mention that we have Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's final contribution to the Clippings on Politics & Religion column – thank you for your time and dedication in starting and writing this column!

Laura Veenendaal

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The Offense of the Cross

Our society speaks about tolerance and religious freedom and yet more and more people feel offended by the message of the cross

The cross has been the symbol for the Christian religion for centuries. It reminds us of the great sacrifice Christ gave on the cross for the salvation of his people. It symbolizes the great love and deep devotion the Lord Jesus has for his people, for he was willing to sacrifice everything, even his own life for the life of his people. We would expect this message to resonate deeply in the heart of all mankind, and yet the reality is that people have taken great offense at the message of the cross.

The scriptures often speak about the gospel as an offense or stumbling block. Paul specifically writes about the “offense of the cross” in Galatians 5:11. As the cross was an offense to many in the past, it continues to be so today. Our society speaks about tolerance and religious freedom and yet more and more people feel offended by the message of the cross.

The challenge of the cross

Recently a discussion arose in a class I teach for new believers: that the gospel can seem offensive to people. The gospel message is not just a nice story about the life of a good man named Jesus, but the story of the cross of Christ challenges everyone who hears it. As one said, “I thought I had my life all figured out and understood what was right and wrong and now the gospel challenges me to look at my life from a new and different perspective.” The gospel does not just challenge us to make a few adjustments to our life – it is a call for a radically new and different life. Many will experience the gospel as an existential threat that challenges who they really are. Today people want to be affirmed in who they are, affirmed in the choices they make, and be protected from anything that might challenge their comfortable assumptions about themselves.

It is not the cross itself but the one that is represented by the cross that offends people. The Lord Jesus himself was crucified on the cross because he became offensive to the people. His own people were offended because of his message. He challenged them to see their own sin and hypocrisy; he called them to repentance and to live a new life in the kingdom of God. Through his preaching, Christ touched a nerve that penetrated deep into their hearts, but instead of reacting in humble repentance, they reacted with fury and anger, and demanded that he be crucified on the cross.

The cross a stumbling block

When the Lord Jesus was arrested and crucified, he gave the appearance of weakness. Even his own disciples abandoned him, for it appeared that his enemies had won. On Good Friday, we are brought back to the foot of the cross and reminded that the events on this day stand at the heart of the Christian faith. The Lord Jesus had the power to lay down his own life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). He offers his own life as the complete payment for the sins of all his people. That wonderful message of Good Friday becomes an offense, a stumbling block both to the Jews and the Gentiles.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:20ff, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? . . . God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” The Jews were looking for a Saviour who would come in power to restore Israel to glory and the Gentiles thought it foolish that anyone who died on a cross could be the Saviour of the world. What is amazing is that many felt so threatened and offended by

this message of the cross that they responded in anger and persecuted Christian believers. The message of the cross of Christ was experienced as a threat to their existence. This gospel message called them out of their old sinful way of life into a new way of life in the service of Christ and his kingdom.

From tolerance to intolerance

Now, many people immigrated to North America to flee religious persecution (think of the Huguenots to New France and the Pilgrims to New England), to seek a new life where they could freely serve the Lord. This continent has experienced a measure of religious freedom, seldom experienced in the world before, but today, hostility against Christian believers is growing as many are offended by the gospel that proclaims Christ crucified. This is happening in a time when people increasingly speak about the need for toleration in our society.

In the past it was understood that everyone should have the freedom to express their own thoughts and beliefs. The only limit on this freedom was that one could not incite people to hatred or violence against others. For a free society to work, there needs to be freedom of expression. Today the mantra of toleration is used to stifle free speech and the ability for people to freely discuss or debate many issues. Speech has become politicized so that the only positions that are tolerated are those deemed to be politically correct. This is true with regard to reproductive rights (the abortion discussion), gender issues, sexuality, marriage, climate change, etc.

Believers must reflect on how we present the gospel message concerning the cross of Christ

Not so long ago it was possible to speak with love and care to others without needing to approve or affirm their views or their lifestyle. Today the rules are being changed by society so that everyone must approve and affirm others in their life choices; not doing so results in a charge of intolerance. It is instructive to think about the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who are the people that came to the Lord Jesus? It was the sinners and outcasts in society. They came to him because they experienced his grace and mercy towards them. Christ showed compassion and care

for those who had fallen into sinful patterns of life. While Christ spoke to them in a loving and caring manner, at the same time he also directed them into a new way of life by commanding them to stop sinning (John 5:14, 8:11). He commanded them to repent and no longer live in their former sinful way of life. This loving and caring approach of Jesus Christ is no longer tolerated by many today. Those who advance the politically correct agenda would even demand of Christ today that he approve and affirm such sinners in their way of life.

Our challenge today

This is the challenge that we face in our society. Thankfully we still enjoy religious freedom to a large extent, and we pray that society may push back against such extreme attitudes. It should at the same time cause us, as Christian believers, to reflect on how we present the gospel message concerning the cross of Christ. When people are confronted with the cross of Christ, it confronts everyone with their own sin and corruption. The reason that Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross is because all humanity has fallen into sin. The cross exposes the sinful nature of all humanity. The cross is a reminder that Christ was willing to sacrifice his own life to pay for the sins of his people. This message is offensive to many for they do not want Christ to die for their sins but to approve of their life of sin.

The reality is that many in society think Christians are unloving and uncaring. It often seems to them that Christians stand in judgement of others and will condemn people to hell because of what they do. We must admit that often the rhetoric that has been used by Christians, in which they condemn others, has done great damage to the reputation of the Christian faith. While the message of the cross may be offensive to many, as believers we need to be careful that we do bring the gospel in an offensive way. Keep in mind that sinners and outcasts came to Jesus not because he didn't challenge them, but he spoke to them with love and compassion. He saw the brokenness in their lives, he saw what their sin had done to them and in his grace, he offered them a way out that gave them hope. The message of the cross is a message of hope to those who struggle with the terrible effects of sin on their lives.

God gives his law to protect us from the devastating effects of sin. Therefore, when believers call others to live according to the law of God, our desire is that they may experience the blessing of living under the will of God that protects them from the devastating effects of sin. Sin destroys life, while the message of the cross gives hope to ev-

everyone who believes. The message of the cross is not just about saving us from sin but more importantly, it is a message of reconciliation with God.

The cross and reconciliation

The discussion in class about the offense of the cross came from a question about the believer's responsibility to address sin in one another's life (Matthew 18). Christ commands us to go to those who have sinned in the church and point out their fault. For a new believer, this is a whole new way of thinking, for our default position is to think that everyone can believe what they want to believe and live as they please, as long as they do not harm others. The prevailing thought is that everyone is free to live as they like and that it is immoral or even hateful to judge the actions of others.

Keep in mind that Christ is speaking about the relationship between brothers and sisters in the faith, which means that we are to deal with a member of the church differently than those who belong to the world. That also means our approach towards an unbeliever will be different than someone who has made a commitment to Christ. The reason that Christ gives this command in Matthew 18 is that this is the way of reconciliation, first with God and then with one another. Sinful ways always destroy relationships. It is our sin that has destroyed our relationship with God, and the only way to restore it is to confront our sin and confess it before the Lord in humble repentance.

This rule of Matthew 18 reflects the great work of Jesus Christ on the cross. In the gospel the crucified one calls us to repentance from our sins. Christ's call to repentance hurts. It is hard and difficult to confess that we have sinned and it is difficult to confess that the lifestyle I have chosen is evil and corrupt. In our sinful state, we do not want to give up the sinful pleasures of life, for they seem so important for our wellbeing. At the same time, the cross reveals the way of reconciliation.

Standing amazed before the cross

On the one hand the cross stings us to the very core of our being and at the same time it gives us the most incredible joy. We see that in the life of those sinners in the gospel who came to the Lord Jesus. It is amazing that the one who calls out sin is the one to whom sinners looked for their help. Today people take offense at the call of Christ to repent, for they want to promote the way of sin and wickedness and feel threatened when believers call them out of their life of sin to seek their life and salvation in Jesus Christ.

Although the forces of evil take offense at the cross, yet the message of the cross continues to resonate. It is a message of hope for all those who live without hope. The cross gives meaning and purpose to those who live without purpose. Therefore, we should feel no shame to proclaim the message of the cross, but stand amazed at the joy the cross brings to everyone who seeks salvation in Christ Jesus. **C**





The Golden Silence of the Lamb

"He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"
(Luke 23:35-39)

At Golgotha there was a whole lot of mockery against the Lord Jesus Christ. We read that "the rulers scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!'" Then the soldiers mocked him saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" And finally, one of the two criminals being crucified alongside the Christ said, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" In the sneering, mockery, and hurling of insults there was the attitude: this is no Saviour; this is no king; there is no way that he is going to save himself or anyone else.

How did they come to this? Five days earlier Jesus Christ had made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. We read in Matthew 21 that the crowds went ahead of him and shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" The people were ready to crown Jesus Christ as King of the Jews, and to believe in him as their Saviour. They were begging him to be their Saviour! So why were they now crucifying him and mocking him? What had gone so horribly wrong? How could the people one day praise Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and five days later mock him as a cardboard Saviour?

Well, he made "the mistake" of getting arrested. All dreams and hopes

were dashed when he was arrested. Now at the cross they would have agreed with the sentiment: "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" It is striking that Paul would write later on in 1 Corinthians 1, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." That explains what happened during those five days in Jerusalem between the triumphal entry and the crucifixion. The idea of an arrested, condemned, and now dying Saviour on the cross made no sense. Who needs a dying, bleeding Saviour? Even Jesus Christ's own disciples figured all was lost and all their hopes were dashed with a crucified Master.

But did no one understand? Did no one remember? Even the fact that Jesus Christ made his triumphal entry riding on a colt of a donkey was a powerful testimony that his victory would not be accomplished by traditional displays of power: a war horse, armour, weaponry, and so on. Even when one goes all the way back to Genesis 3:15, which is the first promise of the coming Christ, we read that as the offspring of the woman crushes the head of the serpent, God says the serpent "shall bruise

his heel." The victory of Jesus Christ will not come about in display of power as human beings understand it, but in his obedience to suffering and dying as a punishment for our sins.

We notice in the crucifixion story that Jesus Christ is largely silent. As Isaiah 53:7 had prophesied, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." This is the golden silence of the Lamb. He was focussed on dying as payment for our sins. He did not display mighty power by wielding a sword or flexing his muscles. He showed obedience to the Father. A dying, bleeding, sweating, crying Saviour brings victory to sinners who long to be the children of God.

There was a lot of silly talk at Golgotha. A lot of yapping by people who had not a clue! The Lamb remained silent. For a moment I would like to stand there at Golgotha. I don't want to hear the guffaws of rough soldiers, or the evil remarks of the priests. I want to put a hand over their mouths and sneers. I want to stand there in awe of the silence of the Lamb as he bled and died. He died for you and me so that we might live eternally with him.



For further study

1. Why were the Jews sneering at Jesus when only a few days earlier they wanted to crown him as king?
2. How can we know from the OT that Jesus Christ's victory would not come through brutal, physical power?
3. Why did Jesus Christ die silently like the Lamb led to the slaughter?



Union Between RCN and NGK Planned for 2023

The *Nederlands Dagblad* (Dutch Christian daily newspaper) of January 17, 2019 reported on the latest developments in the planned union between the RCN (Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, liberated) and the NGK (*Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*).

What will this new united church federation look like? This is the question which a new vision statement drafted by a committee, made up of persons from both churches, seeks to answer. It has now been distributed among the members of both churches to solicit their feedback.

In an interview, Mr. Ad de Boer, member of the NGK and one of the authors of the vision document, noted that its purpose is to facilitate discussion in the congregations about the upcoming union. The intention is to sketch the “spiritual contours of the new church.” The second purpose of this vision document is that it would become a matter of consideration and discussion for the ecclesiastical assemblies of both church federations, as well as their meetings together in 2020.

The text of this vision is also published in the same issue of the newspaper. It begins by wondering what the ideal church would look like. Perhaps it would be like the church of the first Christians in the book of Acts. Then it was so “wonderfully simple: praise God, listen to his Word, share your life together, pray together, celebrate the holy supper together in a small group. Back to the core.” Wouldn’t it be lovely if the church of today was like the church then?

Of course, they realize that this is not possible, and it is also not necessary. God continues to build his church through the centuries. We may benefit from our rich heritage, but mistakes were also made. In the view of this document, it is a gift from God that the RCN and NGK may now find themselves on the path to union after some fifty years of separation.

The document goes on to formulate six key points which express the basis of this new church: “1. Jesus Christ central, God’s Word in the centre; 2. Multicoloured and yet one in grace; 3. Room for everyone; 4. Concerned for the world; 5.

Together with all believers; 6. In one fellowship of churches.”

On the surface, these are laudable sentiments which should be agreeable to all Christians. And yet it does not really resonate with us because of the overall context in which this is happening. The church split which happened in the RCN in 1967 had many tragic aspects and therefore we fully understand and appreciate how wonderful it now sounds to become united once again. But a church union which does not occur in the context of the truth of God’s Word is not something to be celebrated. The document says good things about “the Spirit of Jesus Christ giving the Bible authority” but, in the meantime, that authority is denied by various decisions which the RCN and NGK have made.

The Report of the CanRC Subcommittee Relations with Church in The Netherlands for Synod Edmonton 2019 puts it well when it says,

“The assertion that the churches have found each other by listening to what the Lord says in his Word sounds rather hollow, as both the GKv and NGK have admitted women to office in spite of the clear directives of Scripture that only males are to be assigned church offices. Though it was decided in 2016 that the offices are not open to same-sex couples, they are generally welcomed to the Lord’s Supper table as members in good standing if they live in a relationship of love and fidelity in spite of the clear norms of Scripture regarding same-sex relationships. We therefore deny that a union GKv-NGK would truly be based on the Word of God” (pp.163-164).

When asked in the interview why the vision statement does not mention anything about women in office or homosexuality, De Boer responded by saying that these topics have already been sufficiently dealt with in other contexts. This kind of response is most regrettable. We hope that the feedback from the congregations will draw attention to these significant matters of biblical authority and cause as yet a return to the truth of God’s Word.





He Lives Forever! Alleluia!

1. Our Lord is ris - en. He burst our pris - on. Je - sus, Sav - iour
 2. Now filled with glad - ness, no more with sad - ness, we de - light in
 3. Christ is our sov - ereign rul - ing from heav - en, King of kings and

of our lives. Death could not hold him, could not con - trol him. He to
 Christ our King. We are re - joic - ing and prais - es voic - ing, cheer - ful -
 Lord of lords. He reigns vic - to - rious. He is all glo - rious. From a -

us sal - va - tion gives. It's what he prom - ised. Why be a -
 ly we all will sing. Come, sons and daugh - ters, moth - ers and
 bove he speaks his word. Let us be watch - ful and heed the

ston - ished? The grave was o - pen. Death's grip lay - bro - ken.
 fa - thers: trust in him sure - ly and live se - cure - ly.
 gos - pel. For him we're yearn - ing. He is re - turn - ing.

CALL DECLINED

Declined the call extended to him by the Legana Free Reformed Church in Legana, Tasmania

Rev. Calvin Vanderlinde

of the Barrhead Canadian Reformed Church in Alberta

CALLED

The Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church has extended a call to

Rev. R.J. denHollander

of Covenant Canadian Reformed Church in Grassie, ON.

The St. Albert Canadian Reformed Church has extended a call to

Rev. Ken Wieske

former missionary to Brazil.

CHURCH NEWS

He lives for - ev - er! Al - le - lu - ia! The snake he tram - pled.
He lives for - ev - er! Al - le - lu - ia! Our hearts are long - ing
He lives for - ev - er! Al - le - lu - ia! Then we'll in - her - it

Hell's claim he can - celled. Christ is the Con - queror, he is our
to see his com - ing. Liv - ing or dy - ing in Christ a -
by Je - sus' mer - it a place in heav - en gra - cious - ly

Vic - tor. He lives for - ev - er! Al - le - lu - ia!
bid - ing! He lives for - ev - er! Al - le - lu - ia!
giv - en. He lives for - ev - er! Al - le - lu - ia!

George van Popta, 2019

Giovanni Giacomo Gastoldi, 1593
IN DIR IST FREUDE



2019 CRTS Conference "Do Not Hinder Them:" Children and the Church

On January 17-19, CRTS hosted its ninth annual conference. The topic this year addressed the place of children in the church, addressing how God views the children of believers and how this ought to work out practically in parenting, education, and church life. If the crowd sizes were any indication, this topic is dear to the hearts of God's people. For those who were unable to attend, fret not – videos of all the speeches are available on the seminary's website at www.canadianreformedseminary.ca.

The 2019 conference featured an added twist – for the first time ever the conference went on tour, adding a stop in Langley, British Columbia. It was a wonderful opportunity for CRTS to show its gratitude for the support of the churches in western Canada. It also provided a chance for many who live far from Ontario to attend the conference for the first time. Hopefully this will not be the last time!

Reflections from Burlington

This year's conference featured an impressive turnout of more than 250 people, including various ministers, a large contingent of teachers, and numerous interested church members. It was encouraging that people with all sorts of backgrounds and professions came out for the day-time sessions – the conference is not intended to be only for scholarly types. We were also joined by over thirty young men from all over Canada who had come for the CRTS campus visit day. With such a large group, there was ample opportunity to catch up with old acquaintances and make new ones. The singing also benefitted – with so many strong voices, the auditorium of Burlington Ebenezer was bursting with song. Attendees enjoyed excellent catering throughout, eating their fill and never running short on coffee.





A variety of speeches covered the topic for numerous angles. Some speeches dug into the biblical teaching on infant baptism and the place of children among God's people. Others took a historical approach, elaborating the first-century understanding of households and the place of children within them, the early church's attitude towards infant baptism, and how the Reformers viewed the work of the Spirit in the children of believers. Still other speeches highlighted practical concerns, exploring how our theology should work out in education and in how the church ministers to adolescents. We were also treated to a Presbyterian perspective on these things, courtesy of Dr. Eric Watkins of Covenant OPC in St. Augustine, Florida. The speeches generated plenty of discussion during question periods. In addition, two panel discussions allowed us to delve more deeply into matters of education and parenting. Again, we'd encourage you to have a look through the posted videos. In addition, the seminary plans to publish expanded versions of all the speeches in the near future. Keep your eyes peeled for this book!

Interested in watching the speeches given at the "Do Not Hinder Them:" Children and The Church conference?

All videos are available to watch online at www.canadianreformedseminary.ca

Further reflections

We frequently refer to our children as "covenant kids" and rightly confess that they belong to God's congregation. One helpful takeaway from the conference was the importance of letting these words touch down in daily life. If our children have been claimed by God at baptism and belong to him, then we must do our utmost as parents, grandparents, and fellow members of Christ to train them to know God and walk in his ways. It can be easy to assume that this will happen "automatically" – that simply by growing up in the church, our children will come to love God and his commands. After all, they receive solid teaching each week through worship, catechism classes, and Christian schools. But we must resist the temptation to become passive in our homes and daily lives. If we do not catechize our children continually, the current culture is happy to fill the void. Through entertainment, social media newsfeeds, and all manner of websites, the desires and values of our children are being shaped and molded, often in ungodly ways. And so they must continually hear the message of the gospel and God's design for human flourishing. For myself as a parent, the conference was a great encouragement to become less shy and more intentional about speaking about Christ with my own children. I am hopeful that the speeches and discussions will inspire all of us to greater faithfulness in how we treat the children of the church.

Conclusion

We are thankful for the work of the organizers in pulling off another successful conference and look forward to future years. For those who have not yet been able to attend, we encourage you to do so. Good food, good fellowship, and good discussions are waiting – and not only if you are one of those people who likes to curl up in the evenings with a thick theology book.





WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION

FOR THE CANADIAN REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Women's Savings Action Annual Newsletter

"This is the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes." Psalm 118:23

In a newsletter dated November 2009, Mrs. Dinie Gootjes, who served on WSA as secretary for ten years, wrote this:

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the Theological College, and with it the fortieth anniversary of the Women's Savings Action. We are very thankful to the Lord that what began forty years ago as a small plant, has now grown out to be a sturdy tree. As long as there is a Theological College to train ministers for service in the churches, there will be a need for a library with up-to-date books and periodicals; the tools of any student, professor and minister. It is therefore with great joy that we can tell you that this year, on the fortieth anniversary, we were able to hand the Principal of the College a cheque for \$40,000, the largest contribution the Women's Savings Action ever gave for books in the library.

\$40,000 on the fortieth anniversary – how fitting! Interestingly, this donation amount was never topped, and only matched once, in 2012. Why mention this now? Well, here we are almost ten years later on the cusp of the Seminary's *fiftieth anniversary*. Do you hear the challenge? Wouldn't it be special to gift \$50,000 to the CRTS library on our fiftieth anniversary?!

We recognize that it is not always easy to collect these much-needed funds, but when we consider the fact that half a century ago our reps used to collect pennies by knocking door-to-door, we know it can be done through hard work under God's blessings. Our WSA reps are key in helping us carry out our mandate and we simply cannot

do this work without them. Make no mistake, our reps are certainly hard working as can be seen in the longevity of their dedicated service!

- ***10** or more years of service – Joanneke Kottlenberg
- ***15** or more years of service – Wanda VanderVeen
- ***20** or more years of service – Ellie Buist, Dinah Hutten, Mary Poppe (retired 2017)
- ***25** or more years of service – Liz Buist
- ***30** or more years of service – Liz VanderWoude
- ***43** years of service – Joanne Dewitt
- ***47** years of service – Jannie Jans (retired 2016)

God continues to bless our seminary library through the efforts of our representatives.

Each year at our combined Women's Savings Action/Library Committee meeting, our librarian presents some detailed data that represents the success of our library and gives accountability to the work we do. Some of these statistics are included in the abbreviated *Clarion* version of the 2018 WSA Convocation presentation. We would encourage you to read it as we think you may find it interesting, insightful, and perhaps a little surprising.

Once the WSA is finished meeting with the Library Committee, we break off into our own meeting to discuss all things WSA. Here too, we have the opportunity to look at some statistics, trends and facts:


- We have fifty-four Canadian Reformed churches in Canada. Forty-four of them returned their donation forms. Of those, eighteen churches donated less than the previous year.
- Some churches have no WSA representative.
- Over the last five years, the Women's Savings Action has donated \$35,000 annually; we are thankful that the years of plenty have helped us cover the lean years. Every year about \$20,000 goes into subscription costs,

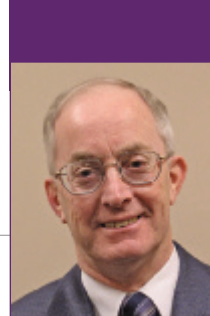


which leaves about \$10,000 for books. With inflation, the US/Canada exchange and donations that have “flat-lined,” our surplus is running low. Some periodical subscriptions were cancelled due to rising costs.

- The seminary’s library contains 34,722 books and includes eighty-two periodical subscriptions.

Another interesting statistic came out of an unofficial survey this past summer; only fifty percent of those surveyed knew what WSA stood for and even less knew what our specific purpose was. Perhaps we need to come up with something

more fitting, a name that better communicates who we are and what we do. And perhaps as we look forward to celebrating our Silver Anniversary D.V. by reflecting on the past, we would do well to engage in some forward-thinking as it relates to increasing awareness and support for the seminary’s library through the work of the Women’s Savings Action. After all, to quote Mrs. Dinie Gootjes once more, “It is our way of showing thankfulness to God for his gift of the Theological College where future preachers and teachers of the Word may be trained. To him alone be the glory.” 



The Disappearance of Christians in the Middle East

The countries which were once the cradle of Christianity are working to virtually eradicate all Christians. This sad truth is becoming more and more evident, especially in Iraq and Turkey.

Iraq

According to Chaldean Archbishop Habib Nafali of Basra, “More than a decade of violent persecution has virtually annihilated Iraq’s Christian minority. Since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, the Christian population has dropped from 1.5 million to about 250,000 – a reduction of 85%.” Enormous tragedy is hidden in those figures. “During those 15 years, Christians have been abducted, enslaved, raped and slaughtered, sometimes by crucifixion; a church or monastery has been destroyed about every 40 days on average.” One might think that with the retreat of the terrorist Islamic State, things might have improved. But this unfortunately is not so. “Christians continue to suffer from systematic violence designed to destroy their language, to break up their families and push them to leave Iraq.” According to the World Watch List 2018 report from Open Doors, besides the threat of kidnappings and killings by radical Muslims, persecution also comes from Islamic leaders at any level, mostly in the form of hate-speech in mosques. Furthermore, government officials at all levels threaten Christians and “encourage” them to emigrate. Also, normal citizens have reportedly made public remarks questioning why Christians are still in Iraq.

An Iraqi Roman Catholic priest said that what is happening to his people (Christians) “is nothing other than genocide. I beg you: do not call it a conflict. It’s genocide. . . . When one lives amidst Muslims [as a minority], everything becomes impossible. . . . Wake up! The cancer is at your door. They will destroy you. We, the Christians of the Middle East, are the only group that has seen the face of evil: Islam.” When Christians take the risk to contact the authorities, police

will sometimes rebuke Christians instead of helping them and say something like: You should not be in Iraq because it is Muslim territory.

Indeed, the Iraqi government helps foster anti-Christian sentiments. In 2015, for example, “It passed a law legally forcing Christian and all other non-Muslim children to become Muslim if their fathers convert to Islam or if their Christian mothers marry a Muslim.” In government-supported schools, the courses taught present indigenous Christians as unwanted “foreigners” although Iraq was Christian long before the Muslims took over in the seventh century. Small wonder that if children say that they believe in Jesus, they face beatings and scorn from their teachers. The government also supports radical Muslim clerics whose teachings are virtually identical to those of the Islamic State. With Iraqi Muslims being indoctrinated from their youth by anti-Christian rhetoric, “starting in the schoolrooms and continuing in the mosques, it should probably not be a surprise that many Muslims turn on neighbouring Christians whenever the opportunity presents itself.” One Christian family even had their young children burned alive simply for wearing the cross. Those who murdered them “were their own Muslim neighbors, with whom they ate, laughed, and to whom they even provided educational and medical service – but who turned on them.”

The presence of Christians in Iraq is in real jeopardy, “less because of ISIS, and more because virtually every rung of Iraqi society has been, and continues to be, chipping away at them.” Things are not much better in Turkey.

Turkey

This country has many Christian tourists because more biblical sites are found in it than in any other part of the Middle East, except Israel. Yet, the Islamic government of Turkey is hostile to Christianity and makes every effort to remove its presence in the country. A prime example is the fact that



the Turkish government has ordered the greatest Christian Orthodox seminary, located on an island in the sea of Marmara, to be closed for almost fifty years now. However, less than a kilometer away a huge new centre for Islamic studies is scheduled to be built on a 200-acre site. The shuttered seminary, being the only school for training the leadership of Orthodox Christianity, has made it impossible for the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople to train clergy and potential successors for the position of Patriarch. So, students are sent to theological schools in Greece, but the Turkish government makes it very difficult for them to get a work permit in Turkey. Furthermore, the Turkish government's restrictions on Christianity include their refusal to even acknowledge the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a legal entity and so all the property this body holds is not recognized as such by the government. Indeed, the Turkish government has been confiscating thousands of properties from the Greek Orthodox community over the years including monasteries, church buildings, an orphanage, private home, apartment buildings, schools, and land.

Not content to make Turkey Islamic, the government of this country is investing heavily in promoting Islam abroad. The budget for this work is about 1.38 billion US.

This amount has built mosques all over the world. It has funded the largest mosque in the United States, The Diyanet Center of America in Maryland, just thirteen miles from Washington. It was opened by the President of Turkey himself in 2016. He also most recently opened Europe's largest mosque in Cologne, Germany on September 29, 2018. The Turkish government is also actively supporting Islam in Canada.

Islam is aggressively fighting Christianity in the Middle East and elsewhere; this includes Turkey, a NATO "partner." The weak, Christian-forsaking West hardly protests and does little to help Christians facing Islamic persecution. At the same time, we give every liberty and freedom to Islamic forces to establish their religion in the West. It's hardly a fair arrangement, but then the followers of Islam are convinced they have a faith worth fighting for while the West is by and large to their enduring shame and hurt abandoning a Christian heritage that has given them so many blessings.

Sources used: Raymond Ibrahim, "The Annihilation of Iraq's Christian Minority" and Uzay Bulut, "Turkey: Building Mosques, Erasing Christianity" both on the Gatestone Institute website.

Endnote

This is my last article in this column. It is time to pass the baton for this endeavour on to the next generation. I am very happy and thankful that my colleague Dr. Theodore Van Raalte is willing and able to take up the challenge. May his efforts be blessed. My heartfelt thanks to all those who took the time to respond via email or otherwise to articles in this column over the past five years.



Clarion Kids

Philip and the Ethiopian

Acts 8:26-40

When Jesus was on earth, he had twelve disciples who spent a lot of time learning from him. One of these men was named Philip. While he was travelling, Philip met an important official from Ethiopia on the road. The man was on his way home from worshipping God in Jerusalem. He was reading from the book of Isaiah. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. The man said he could not understand it unless someone explained it to him. So, Philip explained the gospel to the Ethiopian and baptized him. He was very happy to learn about God.

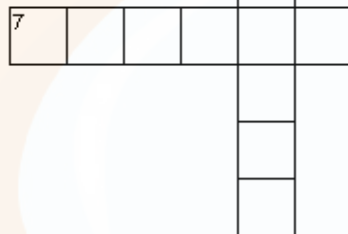
Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this picture!



Crossword Puzzle: Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

Down

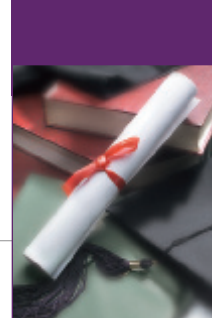
1. The Ethiopian wanted someone to _____ the gospel to him.
2. After Philip explained the gospel, the man was _____.
4. Where the Ethiopian was travelling from.
5. When Jesus was on Earth he had twelve of these.



Across

3. The name of the disciple in this story.
6. The country where the official was from.
7. The Bible book the Ethiopian was reading from.

by Emily Nijenhuis



Not a Day Care: The Devastating Consequences of Abandoning Truth

A book by Dr. Everett Piper

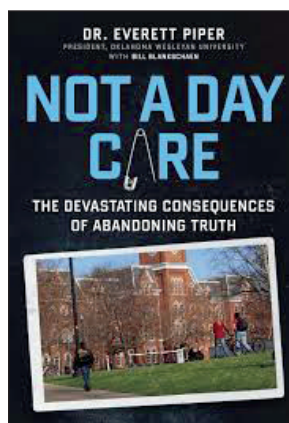
Dr. Everett Piper is the President of Oklahoma Wesleyan University, an evangelical Christian college whose goal is to enable students to impact culture with the lordship of Jesus Christ. Dr. Piper is a courageous leader who makes the case that institutions of higher learning need to help their students become thought leaders in our society. In his book he laments that

We are quickly becoming a culture of Peter Pans, believing we can avoid reality in a Neverland of our own making. We're encouraging students to embrace their selfish fantasies and to expect everyone around them to bend and submit to their narcissistic whims and personal prejudices. We have created a generation that expects to receive affirmation for every feeling they have and every emotion they feel. Objective reality doesn't matter. Subjective opinions are king (p. 16).

In response, the author articulates a powerful argument in favour of a classic liberal education in which students are encouraged to explore and engage with ideas that have been articulated through the ages.

I found the book to be a troubling read, because it seems to accurately capture much of what goes on in our secular (including many independent and ostensibly Christian) institutions of higher learning across North America. So often in public institutions students are indoctrinated with anti-Western and anti-Christian faith rhetoric, being told what ideas they are allowed to embrace and believe and what our society's thought leaders (and by extension students themselves must) consider anathema. When Piper first began to publicly articulate his observations and sentiments, many media outlets soundly condemned him – thus ironically validating his assessments.

Admittedly, elementary and high schools associated with our church federation are not institutions of higher learning. However, the book was a helpful one to read during



this past summer. It inspired me to be more determined than ever to be deliberately attentive to the overall trajectory being articulated by our “educational thought leaders.” While university professors and students are clamoring today that their educational experiences all must be affirming and deliberately aligned with a socialist worldview, it needs to be acknowledged that secondary and even


elementary institutions have also been successfully infiltrated. As an example, consider the sexual revolution; the institution of marriage has been attacked and an entirely new curriculum has been developed regarding gender identity and sexual orientation. Institutions which “celebrate” traditional understandings of marriage and sexuality are reviled – think of Trinity Western as a recent national example.

Though the book heightened my appreciation for working in an independent context, we do well to communally be on guard, so that we continue to provide, in a primary and secondary context, the necessary building blocks for our students to develop a distinctively Christian worldview. Our young students need to be able to master the skills associated with reading, writing, thinking, and living life to its fullest, so that later in life they will be able to identify what others are saying and critically evaluate others' thoughts on the basis of Scriptures.

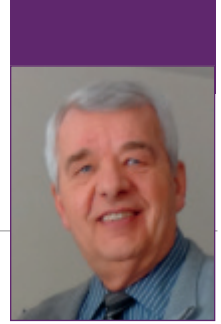
Thankfully, we have Reformed teachers who are entrusted with teaching our children from a distinctively Christian perspective. Thankfully, we have Education Committees which often engage in the verification process of curriculum review. We rejoice that we have a Covenant Teachers College that trains teachers to develop and approach their craft from

a Christian perspective. Thankfully, we have organizations like the Ontario League's CARE (Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Education) or the West's RCDC (Reformed Curriculum Development Committee), which have been given mandates to be actively engaged in the development of Christian curriculum materials. However, as Dr. Piper's book also reminds us: many institutions of learning began with wonderful intentions, but as time went on, they veered significantly from their founders' vision. I encourage parents

and colleagues to read *Not a Day Care* and other books like that to become increasingly aware of the cultural context in which we do our work. That is likely to encourage us to continue to build on the foundations of those who have gone before us. May God bless us in these efforts.

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





Q What Do We Mean With "God's House Meeting God in Church?"

When speaking about our Sunday worship services, why do we say, "We are going to God's house" and, "We meet God in church?" What do we mean with these words? In the OT times the temple was God's house, and he lived there. The people did meet him there, but that's not so today. So why do we say so? Worship services are very special, but are we using the right words when we speak about them in Old Testament terms?

A Indeed, in the Old Testament God lived among his people in the "House of the LORD." Especially the tabernacle and temple received this designation, which is used synonymously with the name "House of God." Of course, God was everywhere present and could not live in a house made with human hands (1 Kgs 8:27); however, it was in these buildings that God's people met their God, worshipped him, and had communion with him. God wanted to be in the midst of his people, and that's what the communion and worship in tabernacle and temple made a reality. In the New Testament, the LORD also dwells among his people. There the name "House of God" is used spiritually of the church as community of believers (1 Tim 3:15; Hebr 10:21; 1 Pet 4:17). The NT church is built as a spiritual house in which the members are like living stones being built into it (1 Pet 2:5).

So if we want to use the name "House of the LORD" or "House of God" correctly, we should use it for the *congregation* in the midst of which God, the LORD, wants to dwell. As NT church we *meet* God in the midst of this congregation. Thus, the questioner is correct that the expression is used incorrectly when saying "we meet God in church." Then we mean the building, most likely; just as we say "we're going to church," or "the meeting will take place at 8 p.m. in the church," while meaning the building where the congrega-

tion/church comes together to worship. Perhaps it's not only due to a persistent use of an OT expression but also due to the expression in many a Psalm which speaks about God's people going up to the House of the LORD (namely, as OT Psalm in the OT connotation!). Psalm 84:1 in the rhymed version, therefore, must be sung in the *understanding* that "the house of the LORD of hosts," this "lovely habitation," is the church of Christ. The apostle Paul says of it in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that *you* are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in *you*?"

In conclusion, I should add that a question like this reminds us of the correct way not only of our speaking about the church, the congregation, as the house of God but also of thinking of our NT church when we sing our songs of praise. Hopefully, it will also be expressed more accurately in our announcements (speaking of the church building rather than announcing that the meeting will take place in 'the church') and in the choice of our words according to the rich NT meaning of who we are as God's people!

Is there something you've been wanting to know?

An answer you've been looking for?

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander

denhollanderw@gmail.com

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Rev. J. Visscher's Year in Review is well-read, I am sure, as far as *Clarion* subscribers are found. The contents of his review also extend far and wide to events in sister churches all around the world. However, his reporting on the Australian synod gave a different picture than the reality, and I would like to use this opportunity to correct the record for *Clarion's* readership.

Firstly, his reporting of the concerns of the FRCA Synod about Blessings Church. Rev. Visscher highlights two elements in the Deputies' Reports to that synod, dismisses them, but fails to give the bigger context to the concern about boundaries. The full comment in the Deputies' Report was: "Further, we note that Blessings Christian Church has no defined church boundary or catchment area, and additionally specifies its members to give evidence of a commitment to mission/outreach." This suggests that membership requirements in Blessings Church are different than in other CanRCs, and surely it is fair enough to raise questions about this. For the sake of the reputation of the FRCA, it would have been good to give the fuller context.

Secondly, he commented that the synod decided to establish closer ties with the OPC and the URCNA. This was not the case, but rather Synod decided to investigate these two federations, with a view to, in the case of the URCNA, deciding whether to "proceed to establishing a sister church relationship" (Art. 63) and in the case of the OPC, deciding "as to the feasibility of further contact" (Art. 83). It is inaccurate to call a decision to further investigate a federation "establishing closer ties" with that federation.

Finally, he commented that "in spite of a number of appeals, it was decided to continue the sister church relationship with the RCNZ." This sounds like a number of appeals were considered, their arguments weighed, and yet the decision was made to continue the relationship, denying the appeals on various grounds. The reality was that all the appeals were declared inadmissible, and therefore not considered at all.

*Yours in Christ,
Rev. Carl Vermeulen*

Letter to the Editor

I read with interest the material written by Dr. Van Vliet and Dr. Bill DeJong regarding the pulpit. What surprised me was that Dr. DeJong used R.C. Sproul and the Ligoniers in his defence of, in certain situations, allowing a Baptist pastor on the pulpit. He correctly writes that they have shared platforms together, etc. Quite true, they did share platforms, but that is not the argument. The argument is about sharing the pulpit.

R.C. Sproul and St. Andrews Church have never shared their pulpit with a Baptist pastor for basically the same reasons Dr. Van Vliet provided.

Andrew Jans

Dear Editor,

Re: the exchange between Drs. DeJong and Van Vliet

I was quite relieved to read the clear refutations by Dr. Van Vliet (Feb 22 issue) of much of Dr. DeJong's argumentation. The worry was, given the prevailing culture of false ecumenism and weakening doctrinal positions by churches due to pressures from an unbelieving society, that the CanRC's would also be subtly enticed to some compromise via their own magazine.

I'm thankful to the *Clarion* editors then, for not only allowing this discussion by encouraging the two Doctors of Theology to continue their dialogue, but also to ensure in so doing, that sound scriptural and confessional order was decisively presented to challenge some changes in practice. There is always a danger when publishing articles and letters skilfully and persuasively written, especially from an emotional standpoint, that these might promote an unhealthy trend and gain wider acceptance, if not questioned via editorial comment or an opposing article.

I have found the recent *Clarion* writings of Dr. De Jong to fall into that category. If one were to allow mainly their heart to decide about preachers and pulpits, and minimize one's head input, then of course, a great many of us would love to have a John MacArthur or John Piper on our pulpit, perhaps even each Sunday. But why stop there, why not include famous writers and preachers we're fond of, like

J.I. Packer or M. Lloyd-Jones, or even the theologian C.S. Lewis, who in their day did not meet the reformed Baptist description, yet proclaimed good doctrine?

The proper means of promoting and experiencing unity with brothers and sisters, ministers, or otherwise, of like faith, is through the regular means of ecclesiastical fellowship, the guidelines for which are clearly defined to ward of problems such as judging the faith and credibility of ministers not belonging to a sister denomination. As an example of emotional argumentation, it was ludicrous for Dr. DeJong to suggest, in his view of Dr. Van Vliet's logic, that office bearers ought to chastise members that read Baptists literature or CRTS profs that recommend Baptists books. Fortunately, when that writer did skirt the issue or deflect a direct question the other was able to direct him back to the salient point of the conversation, that of avoiding error.

One temptation the Lord's people often succumb to, against the good instructions of the apostle Paul, is elevating the messenger above the message. We're attracted to eloquent speakers and many of us read books by the big names, and as Dr. DeJong mentions, to our edification. I wonder how the force of the argument would change if these well-known names were not bandied about. With respect to that I'm reminded of a line by D.A. Carson in one of his devotionals; "If you must skip something, skip this book; read the Bible instead." He follows that up by quoting Isaiah 66:2, where the Lord says, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." We should not allow the stature of the preacher, nor sincere collegiality, to determine how wide the door to the pulpit may swing open.

Ben Meerstra
Vernon, BC

Response

I appreciate Ben's endorsement of *Clarion's* decision to publish articles that challenged the status quo and to create space for some healthy debate between two pastors in the Canadian Reformed churches. In response to Ben's claims, I would indicate, first, that I defend the position that access to pulpits across the federation is the province of the broader assemblies and not local churches. My argument is that there may be local contingencies for which a consistory decides to invite someone to preach who does not have such access. This is precisely what occurs in some URCNA churches whose church polity differs only slightly from ours. Secondly, I fail to see why Ben concludes that I've skirted the issue of "avoiding error" when I probed Dr. Van Vliet about the extent to which this must be done by a consistory. It seemed that Dr. Van Vliet interpreted the form of subscription regarding "opposing, refuting and preventing error" to mean that the Baptist voice could never be given a platform among members of the congregation. In one of his responses, he clarified his position that Baptist preachers should be banned from our pulpits but not from our homes. I ask, why? Where in the form of subscription is the injunction to "oppose, refute, and prevent error" restricted to the pulpit? My own view is that this injunction is best upheld when the church publicly critiques those positions at odds with the confessions. Here I would conjecture that no church in the federation has featured as many sermons critiquing the credo-Baptist position in the past year as Blessings Christian Church, the very church I pastor. Clearly my colleagues and I are very intent on honoring the form of subscription and in a very public fashion.

Bill DeJong

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



Press Release of the Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary held on January 17, 2019

Opening and roll call

The Board of Governors met at CRTS on January 17, 2019. All governors were present with the exception of brs. B. Medemblik and K. van Veen, who were absent with notice. Dr. J. Van Vliet was present as principal. Sr. L. Kuizenga was present as requested to take the minutes of the meeting. Two guests were also welcomed to the meeting: Revs. W. Bredenhof and D. Poppe – Australian Deputies for Training for the Ministry.

Memorabilia

The following brothers and sisters were remembered in prayer: Srs. K. Deddens and M. DeJong, Dr. N. H. Gootjes and his wife, Dinie, as well as the two emeriti professors: J. Geertsema and C. Van Dam.

Minutes and agenda

The minutes of the Board meeting held on September 6, 2018 were approved. The agenda for the meeting was established.

Receipt of decisions, Reports-Material agenda items

1. Committees that had been appointed at the Strategic Planning Meeting held on September 6, 2017 to deal with the present and future operation of the seminary gave reports. The Committee dealing with Enrollment reported with thankfulness that thirty-three men from across Canada were attending the first ever “Campus Visit Day” held at CRTS which included attendance at the conference (Jan. 17-19). A brief oral report was given from the committee mandated to investigate Distance Education. The Senate had invited someone who has a doctorate in online education to give a presentation to learn what such a change would mean for the faculty. It became clear from this presentation that the professors need to be very well prepared before the commencement of a semester in order to pull together both the online as well as the brick and mortar parts of the program. This is all still in the initial stages of consideration and much more work needs to be done.
2. Since a new self-study needs to be ready by 2020 for the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the Steering Committee reported that good progress is being made by the sub-committees and encouraged them to have their written reports ready by the end of this semester.

3. Report of the Executive Committee. An oral report was given regarding the principal evaluation. The executive is thankful for the work of the principal and the process of this evaluation.
4. The report on visits to the lectures at CRTS in November of 2018 was received. This report gave reason for thankfulness since the students are being taught in faithfulness to the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity
5. Dr. J. Van Vliet reported on his Manitoba Church Tour. This report was received with thankfulness.
6. Report of the Finance and Property Committee: The Board accepted the recommendation of this committee for the nomination of a non-ministerial governor.
7. Governance Committee: The Board agreed with the suggestion of this committee that the Life and Conduct Policy be reviewed.
8. Report from Australia regarding the possibility of establishing their own seminary. Revs. W. Bredenhof and D. Poppe spoke about this synodical report. They made clear that this was not a slight to CRTS. The Australian churches are very thankful for the training at CRTS. There will be a round table discussion sometime in 2019 which the principal and chairman will attend.
9. Search Committee: The Board accepted the recommendation of the Search Committee in regards to a replacement for Dr. G.H. Visscher.
10. Report to General Synod 2019: It was noted that if Synod requested the Minutes of the Board meetings, the request would have to be made to sr. M. Alkema as the official archivist of the seminary.
11. 50th Anniversary Report: A special logo has been designed for that event and the Commemorative Book is on track to be ready for publication before convocation.

New business

The date of the next Board meeting was set for September 5, 2019.

Press release and closing

The completion of the press release was delegated to the Vice-Chairman in consultation with the Executive and the Principal. Thankfulness was expressed for the work done by the outgoing board members during their years of service: Revs. Richard Aasman and John Ludwig, as well as to br. Barry Hordyk. Rev. M. Van Luik closed the meeting with prayer and thanksgiving.

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