

Clarion

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

What are you doing with
your counsellor?



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EMOTIONALISM AND OUR DUTCH SISTER
WHAT ABOUT ONCERS?

Clarion

**Clarion: a trustworthy
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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvlieter, E. Kampen, C. Van Dam, M. VanLuik

ADDRESS FOR MAGAZINE CONTENT



Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J5
Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Who needs a counsellor? asks Dr. James Visscher, in the lead article of our issue. Perhaps not the counsellor you first think of – rather than a psychologist, we are speaking here of a church counsellor, appointed to counsel a neighbouring congregation during their vacancy.

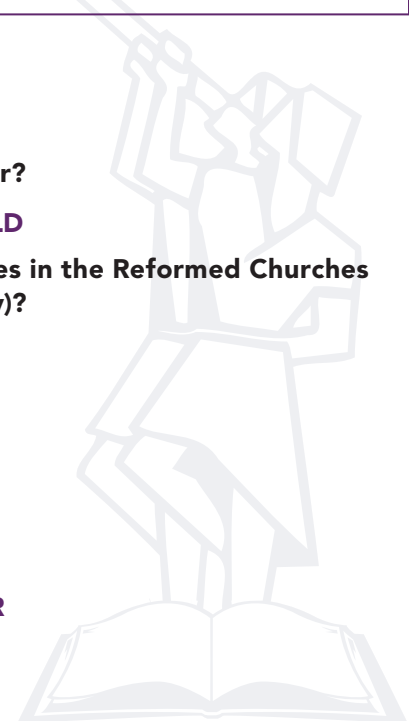
Next, we have an article from Rev. Jack Moesker. As a member of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad, he discusses what led to changes in The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKv).

Issue 13 contains articles in many of our regular columns: Treasures, New & Old, You Asked, *Clarion Kids*, Ray of Sunshine, and Mission News. Rev. George van Popta continues his Canticle series on the Apostles Creed. There is also a letter to the editor, a book review, and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

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Who Needs a Counsellor?

Periods of vacancy can prove to be trying times for many consistories

At first glance, the title of this article may lead you to think that I am going to try to make the case that counsellors are unnecessary. Added to that, you are probably assuming that I am referring here to psychological counsellors of one kind or another. Well, let me clarify and state that actually, if you are thinking along these lines, you are wrong on both counts. I am not writing here against counselling in general nor about those who counsel people with personal or inter-personal problems.

A particular type of counsellor

So, what am I referring to here? Well, it has to do with a very particular type of counsellor, namely a church counsellor. What kind of counsellor is that? For an answer, I would direct you to Article 45 of the Church Order, which reads as follows: “Each vacant church shall request classis to appoint as counsellor the minister it desires as such, to the end that he may assist the consistory in maintaining good order and especially may lend his aid in the matter of the calling of a minister; he shall also sign the letter of call.” What this means is that the Church Order is here giving guidance to vacant churches. It is telling them that they need to approach their classis and request the appointment of a counsellor. This counsellor is then to assist them during the time of their vacancy and in particular is to help them when it comes to the calling of a minister. As well, reference is made to the letter of call, which means especially to the so-called third page of that letter which goes into the particulars of his call relating to stipend, allowances, benefits, housing, holidays, and so forth.

Now, on the surface all of this appears to be eminently reasonable. Periods of vacancy can prove to be trying times for many consistories. So often a good deal of the leadership in a congregation is left or delegated to the minister – and when he leaves, there is a huge hole that needs to be filled.

Interestingly, it is sometimes only when a church is vacant that it begins to realize all of the work that goes into leading and shepherding a congregation. More than once I have heard consistory members comment after a minister has departed, “We had no idea that he was doing this, that, and everything else.”

All of this and more supports the fact that the Church Order is wise when it directs vacant churches to ask for a counsellor. Instead of stumbling around or making up the rules as we go along, it’s good to have a source to which one can go for some sound advice.

Does it work?

But, and here is the matter that I want to bring to your attention, does it work as well as the Church Order envisages? Based on my own experiences over the years and based on the comments made by many of my colleagues, the finding is that often it does not work as it should. What do I mean? Well, more than a few colleagues know what it is like to be appointed as a church counsellor by classis and then never to hear a word from the vacant church that they have been appointed to advise. They receive no requests for advice. At times they even know that things are going off the rails in that vacant church, but not a peep is heard – no phone call, no email, no knock on the door – nothing!

In addition, the counsellor knows that the vacant church is in the process of issuing a call to a certain minister or candidate, but again nothing is heard. No phone call is made asking to meet with the counsellor to talk about the suitability of the man under consideration. No proposed letter of call is sent for him to scrutinize and consider. Sometimes at the eleventh hour a knock is heard on the door of the counsellor’s home and there stands the elder of the vacant church, “Quick, can you sign this letter of call?”

Is it thus any wonder that some counsellors are made to feel like rubber stamps?

Indeed, to go a step further, letters of call are issued and sometimes there is no signature of the counsellor at all. In one case I had to remind a church that I was counselling that their call was illegal as they had neither asked for my advice nor had I signed the letter of call. I could, and some would say I should, have written to the classis and derailed the whole calling process. In the end I resisted the urge and moved on to other things.

Why bother?

Taken together, what this means is that more than a few ministers question the sense of being appointed as a counsellor. Of course, this is not to say that this is true in all cases. Thankfully, I can report there are churches that make very good use of their counsellor; however, there are still far too many cases in which Article 45 of the Church Order does not function as it should.

And that is regrettable! It pains me as a pastor to see a local church making mistakes during a vacancy that could so easily be avoided. It pains me as well to see a church calling a man who is not really a good fit for the congregation and then learning some time later that things are just not working out.

A threefold plea

Taken together, let me make a plea here to vacant churches. In the first place, give careful thought before you approach classis as to who you want as your counsellor. Article 45 speaks about a vacant church asking for “the minister it desires as such.” In theory I believe that all ministers in a classical region, both active and retired, are eligible to be asked. At the same time, I know that some vacant churches need a counsellor with experience. Whatever the case may be, a vacant church would do well to consider its pastoral needs and then ask classis for the man that they believe can best help them to meet these needs.

In the second place, a vacant church asking for a counsellor would do well to make good use of him during its time of vacancy. In other words, the idea that the counsellor is only there to sign the letter of call is both a distortion and a disservice. The Church Order again in Article 45 mentions “that he may assist the consistory in maintaining good order.” Quite simply, a vacant church should utilize the experience of a counsellor all during its vacancy. Do not neglect to ask for his help when pastoral problems arise and do not dither while a pastoral situation heats up and then blows up.

In the third place, a vacant church should involve its counsellor all through its calling work. Too often he is ignored or only asked to sign on the dotted line in the letter of call. A better approach is to insist that the calling committee (and/or consistory) meet regularly with the counsellor to discuss the needs of the congregation, to identify the best possible ministers and candidates, and to make sure that the stipulations of the letter of call are well thought out.

Letters of call

Speaking of letters of call, it should be added that this is not always a simple matter. A calling committee (and/or consistory) may think that it knows what the needs of a particular minister and his family are, but they are always at a disadvantage. What do I mean? Without knowing what life in the manse is really like, it is hard to get a handle on the pressures and the true costs. Here again is where an experienced counsellor can help. He can tell a calling committee what is reasonable and what is not when it comes to stipend. He can point out some of the peculiarities that come with parsonage living. He can also give advice about questions of workload, preaching, and holidays. In short, he can ensure that the letter of call contains the right provisions.

To illustrate this matter, let me recount an experience that I once had. It relates to the fact that years ago I received two calls at the same time. A few days after being told about the calls by phone, I received both letters of call. On opening them I was surprised to see that there was a difference in the stipends being offered, and not just a little difference either. As a matter of fact, the difference was 100%! The one church was offering me double what the other church was offering. Now, I know that the cost of living varies on where you live in Canada or the USA, but that much?

So how did this happen? It had to do with one vacant church not asking its counsellor for advice on what constitutes an adequate stipend and just taking what it deemed to be a suitable figure out of the air.

Needless to say, something had gone wrong and should have been caught and corrected. (Oh, and in case you are wondering, both calls were declined.)

In closing

In closing, if your church is a vacant church, let me ask you, “What are you doing with your counsellor? Are you making good use of him or are you ignoring him?” The former will very much be to your benefit and the latter to your hurt. So, please, give some serious thought to the wisdom and provisions of the Church Order.





Rest for the Weary

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

A few years ago, our family went to New York City and walked around on Liberty Island at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. The words associated with the Statue of Liberty are well-known: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me. . . ." Millions saw the Statue of Liberty beckoning with its torch and flame as they disembarked on Ellis Island to begin a new life in the United States.

I can't help but think of those words when reflecting on Christ's words in Matthew 11. Christ invites the wearied and burdened to come to him. The question is: Wearied and burdened by what?

Christ uses the imagery of a pack animal loaded down with baggage and wearing a yoke to keep it going on the correct path and to help it carry the burden, as was common in those days and still is today in some parts of the world. Let's not think that this is only about people wearied and burdened by special problems in life. Christ came into the world as the Saviour of sinners, and we are all like pack animals labour-

ing under the reality of sin in our own lives and in the world at large, whether we realize it or not.

The Statue of Liberty beckons people from all nations, and after Pentecost Christ calls people of all nations to come to him. But the gospel offers so much more than the words on the Statue of Liberty! People can move to a new country to seek a better life, but people cannot escape themselves and the reality of their sinfulness. The gospel offers not just relief from symptoms, but relief from the cause of our eternal hunger and misery, namely, sin.

Christ's invitation to come to him and to take up his yoke is a call to believe in him as the Saviour from sin and all the brokenness of life. It also implies not to go anywhere else. In Christ's day, that meant not to adopt the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees, who added burdens to God's people. Today it means not to pin our hopes on temporary helps, and not to pursue earthly riches and pleasures as an escape. Many who entered America at the Statue of Liberty thought that the streets would be paved with gold in America, only to be disappointed. But the Bible presents

the New Jerusalem as having streets of gold (Rev 21:21) – a picture of eternal blessedness – and the only way to enter is through faith in Christ.

Christ describes himself as gentle and lowly in heart (11:29). Christ is so gentle and lowly that he took the burden of sin from our shoulders, took it upon himself, and carried it to the cross where he suffered and died for our sins!

Christ describes his yoke as easy and his burden as light. That's because Christ did it all for us. We are simply called to believe.

Christ promises rest to those who come to him in faith. It is stated twice, each time in a slightly different way: "I will give you rest. . . and you will find rest for your souls" (11:28,29). We only find when God gives; salvation is God's doing.

When we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, we have rest for our souls. The Church Father Augustine (354-430 AD) once said, "Our souls are restless until they find rest in God." And a new world is coming – better than any immigrants seeing the Statue of Liberty as they came to North America could ever have imagined!



For further study

1. Consider that "the law was our guardian until Christ came" (Gal 3:24). How did the commandments and the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law teach God's people something about the burden of sin? See also Acts 15:10.
2. Think about how Isaiah 53:4, 5 and Philippians 2:6-8 are related to this text.
3. Reflect on how the gospel of eternal rest from sin puts all of life's other burdens in proper perspective. See Revelation 21:3, 4.



What Led to the Changes in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKv)?

I'm no expert, I'm just an old minster who still knows Dutch and who has family in The Netherlands and has visited The Netherlands numerous times over the past fifty years. As member of the Committee for Relations with Church Abroad (CRCA), I attended the last four synods of the GKv. As you know, the Subcommittee for Relations with Churches in The Netherlands recommended to Synod Edmonton this May that we discontinue the sister church relations with the GKv, a recommendation which has been adopted by synod. The following are some personal thoughts on what has happened in those sister churches leading to this.

Changes in worship

If you recently worshipped in a GKv church, you likely noticed that the worship services in most of those churches have undergone some big changes. Many churches, for instance, have become pretty free in the musical part of the worship services – there is a much-increased collection of songs. And besides organ or piano, there are also bands and solo singers in worship. The use of projection screens has become fairly standard – useful, since there are now multiple songbooks and churches are no longer bound to songs approved by a synod.

The law isn't always read from the Bible in the morning worship services, but often simply a kind of modernized summary. There is increased congregational participation in worship services. Male and female, young and old often participate in Bible reading, collecting, making announcements, giving presentations, or proffering personal testimonies. There is a fairly casual atmosphere in most worship services, reflected in the casual dress of the worshippers, as well as office bearers, including ministers. In many churches there are also "child moments," when younger children are called to the front and the minister sits with them on the podium and gives a child-friendly summary of the sermon.

Afternoon worship services are much more sparsely attended than morning services. Some churches combine afternoon services with a neighbouring church. Some churches no longer have exposition of the Reformed doctrine in the afternoon services. You can hear some good sermons, but sometimes they are also very topical. There are often outlines on the "beamer" and pictures or videos to try to make things more interesting and relevant. And the ministers occasionally also make use of props or even short plays to make a point. There are many special services focussed on inclusiveness in the church or on youth or other causes. There are also combined worship services with Christian Reformed Churches and Netherlands Reformed Churches, as those churches have been accepted as sister churches. On special occasions such as Reformation Day, GKv churches participate in combined services with most of the local Christian churches, including Roman Catholic churches.

The administration of the sacraments has changed in many churches. Baptism usually takes place now with the children of the congregation gathered around the baptismal font and often with photos and a short speech to the parents afterwards. Recently we noticed that baptism by immersion is also taking place. The adopted forms for baptism and Lord's Supper are not always made use of. And after the verbal warning, the Lord's Supper seems to be open to guests from various churches. The reason is not to cause offence to visitors from other churches. As well, a number of ministers have recently asserted they see no reason why the profoundly handicapped and also children should be excluded from the Lord's Supper. Profession of faith is often accompanied by an extensive ceremony with much symbolism and giving of personal testimonies. Special occasions have become quite elaborate celebrations, with much of the attention focussed on the people involved.

The GKv have become quite missional. I have also noticed that various church groups cooperate in outreach programs such as inner-city mission projects. In those churches worship is quite informal, and many liberties are taken with the adopted church order. There is much heart for “faithworks” type projects in third world countries with all kinds of interchurch organizations. As well, a lot of money flows from the GKv to the third world. There is much heart for works of charity abroad.

Some profound changes

A change which is now becoming more noticeable involves seeing female office bearers in church. Synod Meppe 2017 decided that the Bible isn’t clear about the role of women in the church and there are examples in the Bible of women giving leadership. Since there is no clear prohibition in the Bible against women serving in the offices, it was decided that the church cannot forbid them from being ordained to any offices. This is a deviation from the historical Reformed interpretation of the Bible. A new hermeneutic has been accepted among the church leadership, in particular at the Theological University in Kampen.

Visitors to GKv churches may also learn that couples who cohabit are, in general, being embraced as members in good standing. At Synod Ede, it was said that official marriage is recommended but can no longer be required, as the state recognizes cohabitation as marriage. And there are questions about the institution of marriage in the Bible, reflected in the renewed marriage form used in the churches. More recently, same-sex couples are being accepted as members in good standing in many churches. Synod Meppel established a committee to see if there needs to be a change in how same-sex relationships are dealt with in the churches.

Emotionalism

Why have these changes happened in the GKv? I believe that this has taken place because of the pressures of contemporary western culture on church members. Contemporary post-Christian and post-truth western culture in Europe is very man-centred and hence emotion-centred. And the choices of a majority of people today are based more on their individual feelings than on any truth outside of themselves, such as in the Bible. This is called emotionalism. Contemporary culture is very much about feelings. Think of how – in spite of being born male or female – if you feel that you aren’t what you were born as, then that’s what you can be. Or think of the LGBTQ lobby. You need to

follow your feelings. Or think of how many people try to escape the reality of their lives by using drugs like marijuana to feel good.

I believe that the emotionalism of post-truth western culture has deeply influenced the GKv. Other factors certainly also play a role. But from what I have experienced and read of the GKv, many allow their feelings to interpret their circumstances and to form their thoughts about God more than the Word of God itself. This might be an overreaction to the opposite problem in the past, where faith was strongly rooted in theology but was without much feeling. And while orthodox doctrine is critically important to the health of the Christian and the church, that doctrine also ought to lead one to emotion. For example, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ isn’t only something we ought to affirm and defend, but it also needs to be something in which we rejoice.

Western secular culture, however, has drawn many people who call themselves Reformed to judge things more and more by their emotions than by what the Bible says. And as Paul shows in Romans 10, zeal without knowledge leads astray. Our feelings are affected by sin and so we can’t depend on them to interpret who God is or how he wants to be worshipped and served. His Word is the authoritative and sufficient norm for faith and life and worship, as we confess in the Belgic Confession. As long as we truly keep the Bible as the basis of our faith and life and worship, then the emotions will certainly also come. Think of the deep emotions – joy as well as sorrow – shown in the Psalms as the psalmists contemplate the truth about who God is and his justice and his covenant love! But those emotions come in response to the truth of God’s revelation.

Emotionalism and the GKv

I’m afraid that this is where the Dutch sister churches have accommodated to the contemporary culture. Emotion has more and more become the measure of what is done in many GKv worship services and what is accepted as norm in those churches. The emphasis has shifted from God-centred worship and church life toward more man-centredness. There is a sense that many only want to experience him, want to feel good, and want others to feel good. But this comes at the cost of some of the sober and difficult things the Bible speaks about, such as self-denial and the fight of faith.

This happens to be the measure of quite a bit of the contemporary evangelical worship we know in North America.

No one can deny that good things are said and done. But evangelical worship is generally designed to bring on emotions, which are then interpreted as evidence of the Spirit's presence. I noticed in a number of worship services in the GKv that some lift up their hands and faces when they sing and during prayer or song, as in many evangelical churches today. Some songs sung in GKv worship services are what are called "*Opwekkingsliederen*." In other words, songs meant to give positive emotion.

The matter of women in office wasn't something suddenly discovered in the Bible. I believe that that change in Bible interpretation has come about over time because of the same emotionalism. The report on Men and Women in the Church to Synod Meppel 2017 emphasized that many gifted women in the churches feel called by God to minister in church office – and how can a church deny those feelings? The feminist push for equality with males in all roles in society have caused people in Reformed churches to feel uncomfortable about denying church offices to women. Maintaining such a position hardly seems inclusive and welcoming in a church today.

Many good works of mercy abroad taking place among GKv members are, I'm afraid, more based on human emotion than sober biblical reason. People feel that God is calling them to join certain ministries in the third world. Helping out in third world countries is a wonderful thing. However, the feeling that God is issuing you with a special call to a certain ministry can sometimes trump sober biblical reason.

There is also a strong current of emotionalism behind the so-called "ecumenicity of the heart." That means a readiness to embrace and work with and worship with Christians of many stripes. There is a feeling of unity with them which transcends most theological differences. For instance, Baptists and even Remonstrant Brethren have been included in a so-called ecumenical conference called the Synod of Dort. This "ecumenicity of the heart" has long been promoted by the Dutch Evangelical Broadcaster (EO), which pretty well all GKv people support. One cannot deny that the EO can do good. But the "ecumenicity of the heart" it promotes has caused many of the organizations with roots in the GKv to give up their confessional distinctiveness and become colourless among all the other interchurch organizations.

I do not deny that there are also good things happening in the GKv. However, the changes that have taken place show a big shift of attention from the Bible towards man. This is evident with the general acceptance of same-sex re-

lations. How can anyone deny those people what they feel? We certainly need to empathize with the struggle of those with same-sex attraction. But acceptance of those relationships requires a radical re-interpretation of the Bible. Recently there was a great outcry throughout The Netherlands concerning the "Nashville Statement." This statement was drawn up in North America to promote the biblical teaching that men and women are designed by God to perform different, complementary roles in society. Sadly, this statement was strongly condemned by many in the Dutch Reformed circles, also by many in the GKv.

Concerned groups

There are many GKv members who are very concerned about all the changes that have happened, and a group of concerned ministers are working on a last-ditch appeal against the decision of Synod Meppel. However, unless there is a miracle, I doubt they will have any success. More than fifty GKv churches have already taken the step to ratify the decision to open the offices to females, and some already have female officebearers. Some members have separated themselves and two much smaller church federations have been formed – *De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (in 2003) and *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (in 2009), each with around eight or ten churches. They are working on uniting, but with some difficulty. The subcommittee has had regular contact/meetings with both groups and encourage that unity. A large problem the CanRC has with the DGK, however, is that they have recognized the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford as sister church. This group separated from the CanRC ostensibly because of our relations with the OPC which adheres to the Westminster Standards. Synod Edmonton 2019 has decided to mandate the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad to continue to follow the developments in the DGK and GKN and I expect that we will in time seek closer contact with them.

What about the CanRC?

What should we learn from this? Are we maybe being drawn into a similar kind of emphasis on feeling as so many in our sister churches in The Netherlands? I'm afraid I do see some signs that something similar is stirring in the CanRC. After all, though our culture has some differences with Europe, here in North America we also live in a post-truth culture which finds its direction very much in emotion. And we exist as Reformed churches among all sorts of evangelical and charismatic churches, where faith is often

measured by feeling. We interact with people from those churches regularly, and their enthusiasm can cause us, especially the younger members, to question whether the CanRC shouldn't also be more emotionalistic in worship. Many have left the CanRC for evangelical churches simply because they feel better there.

Our *Book of Praise* is often criticized for its Genevan tunes, and I suspect that the continual push for additional and more contemporary style hymns is due to a desire for worship that plays more to the emotions. There is also a move underway to involve congregation members male and female, young and old in the liturgy. I see a growing polarization among CanRC members concerning these changes.

Again, I want to emphasize that emotion isn't bad of itself, as the Psalms show us. But emotion in worship is different than emotionalism in worship. Dr. Ted VanRaalte was asked a couple of years ago at a conference about the place of emotion in worship. He replied that there is emotion and there is emotionalism. *Emotionalism* seeks to arouse positive emotions. Like happy, clappy worship. On the other hand, *emotion* is the good benefit of godly worship, but it's not the aim of such worship. In fact, the effect of biblical worship should also be negative emotion when confronted by one's sins and weaknesses. The gospel is, after all, an affront to our pride and weakness.

So, there's also constant and increasing pull on CanRC members to emotionalism, to judge things more by our feelings and emotions than by the plain and sufficient Word of God. We're affected by the culture we live in too! That's always a danger to the church of the Lord. Think of what happened with Israel in Canaan. It says that in the time of the judges the covenant people forgot the great works of God and eventually every man did what was good in his own eyes. People followed their own feelings and reasonings more than God's will as Moses had written for them.

Change isn't always wrong. CanRC worship services have changed in various ways over the years. Change is positive if we find biblically better ways to glorify God in Christ and to encourage one another in praise of him. The thing is, though, sometimes proposals to change the way we worship are intended to keep people from becoming bored or to attract outsiders to church. Changes ought not to be made on the basis of feeling more than on the basis of Scripture. As we confess in Lord's Day 35 about the second commandment, we are not to worship God in any other manner than he has commanded in his Word. The focus of worship has to remain God himself.

CALLED

The Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta and the American Reformed Church in Nooksack Valley, Washington, USA, has extended a call to

Candidate Mark ten Haaf

to serve as Minister of the Word.

The Free Reformed Church of Armadale, Australia has extended a call to

Mark ten Haaf

to serve as Missionary in Papua New Guinea.

Called by the Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church of London to serve as missionary for Lighthouse Ministries in London:

Candidate Nathan Zekveld

The Redeeming Grace United Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario has extended a call to

Eric Onderwater

to serve as Minister of the Word.

CHURCH NEWS

Concluding thoughts

In light of this, I would urge churches to think of one another when introducing changes in liturgy and worship. We are a federation in which we are all called to care about one another and to take each other along in what changes are introduced. As well, I believe that helping one another as churches and members also means allowing those changes to be tested by one another to see if they meet the standard of Scripture as interpreted in the confessions. Our adopted Church Order emphasizes this. We need to hold each other to the agreements which underlie the federation of churches. Confessions and Church Order have helped the Reformed churches stand through all kinds of cultural changes over hundreds of years. And when we do our duty as churches and members, we need to pray constantly, for it is ultimately Christ himself who gathers, defends, and preserves for himself by Spirit and Word in the unity of faith a church chosen to everlasting life (LD 21). As the apostle Peter writes throughout his epistles, we need to be sober-minded, self-controlled, and watchful. In other words, not carried away by emotion but by the prophecy of Scripture which was not produced by the will of man but through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21).

This article is a summary of a speech that has been given in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia.





Jesus Christ alone is God's eternal Son

*... his only begotten Son, our Lord;
 he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.*

1. Je - sus Christ a - lone is God's e - ter - nal Son
 be - got - ten from all ag - es, the on - ly One.
 He shares God's di - vin - i - ty, true Light of ver - y Light.
 We, too, are God's chil - dren, but not by our own right: By grace a - lone.

2. Jesus is our Master. He has ransomed us.
 He bought us, soul and body. In him we trust.
 Jesus paid for all our sins, by him we have been freed
 —not with gold or silver but with his precious blood.
 He is our Lord.

3. By the Holy Spirit Jesus was conceived,
 born of the Virgin Mary. This we believe.
 Christ is both true God and man, and thus fore'er he'll be
 both in true perfection through all eternity:
 True God, true man.

4. Christ, our mediator, with his innocence
 from God hides my corruption and all my sins.
 I'm conceived and born in sin and endless misery.
 But my Saviour Jesus in love delivered me.
 He set me free.

Text: QA 33-36, Heidelberg Catechism (Art. 2b & 3, Apostles' Creed); vers. George van Popta, 2019
 Tune based on the 14th c. Dutch carol, *Sijs willekomen heirre kerst*
 For SATB version, please see <http://mostlycanticles.blogspot.com/>

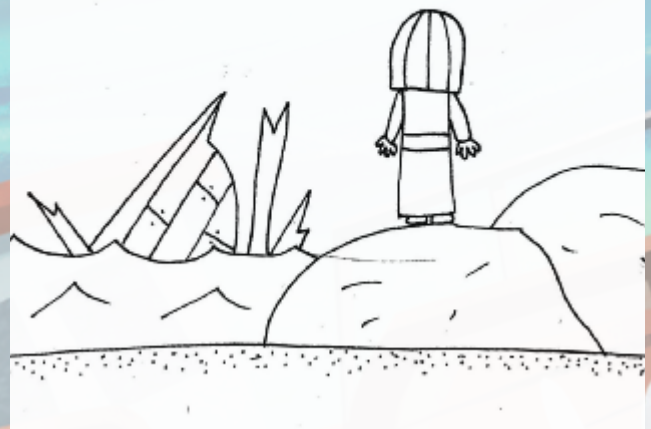
Clarion Kids

A Storm and a Shipwreck

Acts 27:13-44

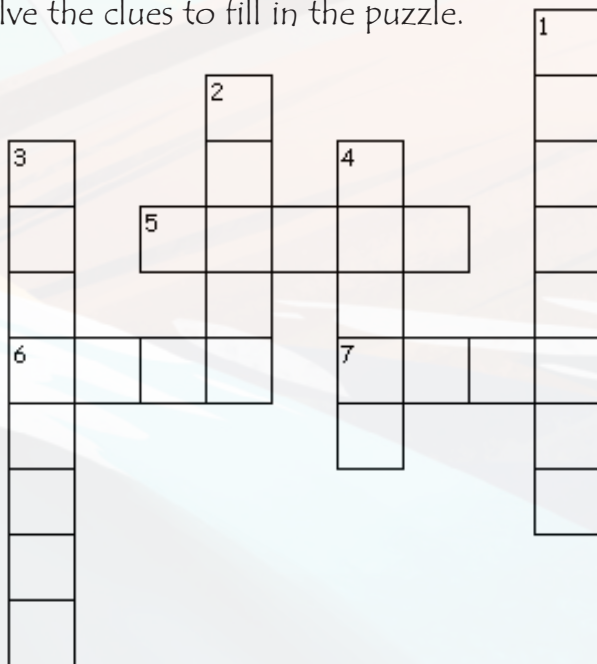
Near the end of his missionary work, Paul was taken as a prisoner. He was sent to Rome on a ship, but the weather was very bad. After several days of being stuck in a storm with no food, Paul spoke to the people. God had told Paul that everyone on the ship would be safe. After fourteen days, they finally spotted land. The ship ran aground on a sandbar. There were 276 people on board. The island where the ship landed was called Malta. The people there were kind and built a fire for the travellers. When Paul went to pick up some firewood, he was bitten by a very poisonous snake. But God protected Paul's life and all the people who saw it were amazed.

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



Crossword Puzzle:

Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.



Across

5. Island where they ran aground.
6. God told Paul that everyone on the ship would be _____.
7. Where the ship was heading.

Down

1. How many days the ship was stuck in the storm.
2. The animal that bit Paul.
3. Paul was taken as a _____.
4. The ship to Rome got stuck in a _____.

by Emily Nijenhuis



Jeff Jansema

Here is brief introduction to a unique young man, Jeff Jansema. Jeff is the youngest of five boys, born on July 11, 1997. He was diagnosed with Down's syndrome, which many may define as being "slow." Yes, Jeff began his life a bit "slow," but once he mastered the art of getting around, he became the "speedy

escape artist," causing his family to have a sixth sense, namely the whereabouts of Jeff.

At three years old Jeff attended a Children's Learning Workshop, where his energy could be redirected and he could interact and play with children his age. He then moved on to our Christian Schools, A.C.R.E.S. and then Guido de Brès High school. Jeff very much enjoyed being able to go to school, especially boarding a bus with his brothers! With the help of his brothers, teachers, EAs, and peers, he was able to participate in most school activities. Jeff developed a lasting bond and friendship with many people throughout his school years.

In his late teens Jeff was also diagnosed with being highly autistic. This was no surprise, and it explained many of his behaviours and fascinations throughout his life. Jeff has an obsession with numbers. Every combination seems to have a meaning in his mind. Yet above all, Jeff's love and

passion are for the Bible and *Book of Praise*. He has typed out the whole Catechism many times, as well as large portions of the Bible. Sundays are his highlight of the week; he makes sure he takes extra copies of the liturgy so he can bring them to his day program the following week.

Presently, Jeff attends Kinnections Life Centre three days a week, which includes highlights like swimming and bowling. Jeff is not shy about his strong faith and readily will tell anyone speaking or doing wrong, "No swearing, Praise the Lord, you need the Cross, a Saviour."

At home, Jeff spends his days helping on the dairy farm, typing on his laptop, arranging and rearranging his hundreds of toy animals, equipment, and anything that can use some "rearranging." Cheering for the Toronto Maple Leafs. . . whether they win or lose. . . is also part of entertainment.

Jeff is looking forward to Anchor Camp! He thoroughly enjoys these weeks and seeing all his friends again. Shortly after he comes home is the most important day of the year, his birthday! Yes, on July 11 Jeff will be turning twenty-two years old, the Lord willing.

Our God has blessed him with special gifts, as well as limitations. He has no worry and cares of this life and will be able to sing his praises perfectly when he joins his Saviour on that great day.

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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

Rachel Vis

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

July Birthdays

- 4 James Buikema will be 58**
c/o R. Jager, 627 Maple Avenue,
Burlington, ON L7R 1M7
- 11 Jeffrey Jansema will be 22**
158 Lane Road,
Dunnville, ON N1A 2W1
- 14 Sarah Vandergugten will be 24**
23 Jane Street,
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
- 20 Charlie Beintema will be 44**
29 Wilson Avenue,
Chatham, ON N7L 1K8
- 20 Derrick VanderHorst will be 32**
c/o Twin Oaks, 3217 Twin Oaks Crescent
Burlington, ON L7M 3A8
derrickvanderhorst@gmail.com
- 25 Joel Slomp will be 34**
316 Church Road, Apartment 102
Spruce Grove, AB T7X 0G2
joelrslomp@gmail.com
- 25 Julie Ostermeier will be 31**
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive, Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3
- 29 Janine Kamstra will be 34**
6 Tyler Bay, Oakbank, MB R0E 1J1

Happy Birthday to the many of you celebrating a birthday in July! We wish you the Lord's blessing the coming year, and a wonderful day with family and friends.





www.merf.org



Made Thirsty for the Gospel



A new Dardasha program gives biblical answers

MERF's Arabic Media ministry team is regularly encouraged by the obvious work of the Holy Spirit in preparing souls to receive the saving and comforting message of the Gospel. Whether young or old, there always seems to be a distinct reason behind a Muslim's encounter with the gospel message. Events that initially appear incidental, in time prove to be the result of very profound divine causation. This seems to be the story in each conversion.

Seeking Answers

Nowadays, disenchantment

with their own religion is most commonly guiding Muslims to ask a question or visit a website or listen to a message or read an article. Also, witness-bearing



Muslim widows protest injustice

by converted family members or trusted friends often has a great impact. In many cases, the shining example of changed lives leads thoughtful observers to investigate the reason. Other times, the stimulus is a conversation between Muslims or a dispute over a relevant issue, such as polygamy, divorce or a certain disturbing Islamic 'fatwa' (religious edict).

Tunisia

FN is a Tunisian businessman who was converted about two years ago. He had two close friends, A and B. During

the month-long Islamic fast of Ramadan, he noticed unhappiness in the demeanor of A, who was public about keeping the fast. B seemed more peaceful, even though it was not clear whether or not he was fasting. At the time, FN was feeling guilty about his personal weakness in observing the prescribed fast. He mustered the courage to ask B if he was fasting. To his shock, he replied directly, "I am convinced of the teachings of Issa al-Masih on this matter." B went on to explain. This made FN very curious and opened up an opportunity to find out that Jesus was



Dardasha slogan -- Chat with Us

the Savior and not merely another good prophet.

Sudan

TY of Khartoum, Sudan came from a very conservative religious family. He was raised not to ask questions nor allow himself to entertain doubts. At the funeral of an older relative, the officiating imam pleaded with God to generously account for the dead man's good deeds and give less attention to his bad deeds. This didn't make sense to him. He brought

up the matter with an atheist friend who mocked the whole idea of life after death. TY decided to research the views of other religions on the subject on the internet. The process ultimately led him to become a maturing disciple of Christ. He says: "...I feel liberated by the conviction that I am at peace with Almighty God... The only one whose works guarantee salvation for me here and in the afterlife is Jesus (Issa)."

Jordan

The journey of SA of Jordan was more direct. He says: "...I always wondered what

happened to our prophet Mohamed after he died and where he went...All the time I hear religious leaders intercede with God on his behalf. So, I asked myself if I should so blindly trust a religious way whose founder's destiny is not secured. I wondered about other prophets mentioned in the Koran. The one who obviously differed from all is Jesus (Issa) who not only rose from death but also secures heaven for those who belong to him..."

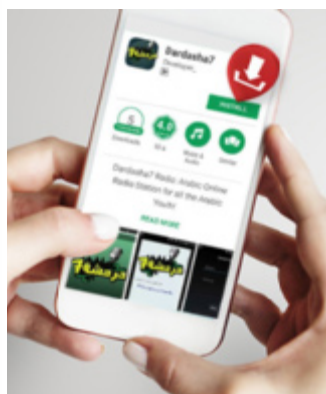
Saudi Arabia

HM is a Saudi lady, converted to Christ in May 2017. This came about when she had the opportunity to study medicine in another Arab country. There was another Saudi young lady in her class who became her closest friend. Not long before entering university, this friend and her mother had become Christians. HM explains: "My friend was very open with me from the very beginning. She told me one day that she is now

a Christian. I was initially shocked and offended, but said that we could be friends as long as we do not discuss religion. Deep down I didn't trust her. Still, her unique peaceful and relaxed demeanor attracted me and I decided to secretly learn about what Christians believe. One evening I opened up to her that I was listening to Christian things online. Afterwards, she and I began to have regular discussions and study the Gospel (Injeel) and other Christian books..."

"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

— 1 Peter 3:15



Dardasha Mobile App

MERF-Canada

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



Q How Do Consistory and Congregation Deal with "Oncers?"

What needs to be done by the congregation and consistory for those willfully absent (without a biblical reason) in the worship services: for example, "oncers," i.e. those who attend only once a Sunday and do not see the need for coming twice?

A Why do we attend the worship services *twice* on the Lord's Day? This question can be asked, of course, in a good way; the way the children in the Old Testament were urged to ask such "why" questions on Passover or when passing by memorial stones or monuments. Then the intent of the question is to understand the reasons that lie behind this practice that we have. It's always good to know why we do what we do, to give reasons for our behaviour: good reasons besides mere habit and tradition. With regard to our worship services, the reason why we attend twice is deeply rooted in God's Word and in the worship of God's people in the old and new dispensation. As the Song for the *Sabbath* exclaims, "It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the *morning*, and your faithfulness by *night*" (Ps 92:1-2). This was the pattern of worship in the OT, a pattern of *morning* and *evening* worship (Num 28:10); in the NT as well, the disciples came together in the evening after the resurrection and the next Lord's Day (John 20:19, 26), while we may infer from Acts 20:7 that also later on the church worshipped in the evening.

When we consider this history of the practice of Lord's Day worship further, we find that morning and evening worship was the norm. In the early fourth century (by the time

persecution had receded and the church had the possibility to settle), we find the church historian Eusebius describing church practice as follows: "It's surely no small sign of God's power that throughout the whole world in the churches of God at the *morning* rising of the sun and at the *evening* hours, hymns, praises. . . are offered to God" (Commentary on Psalm 64). During the Middle Ages, *morning* worship became known as "matins" and *evening* worship as "vespers." At the time of the Reformation, the custom of morning and evening worship was continued in Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* with its rubrics for morning-prayer and evening-prayer. The National Synod of Dort, also, agreed and accepted on the basis of God's Word that "the consistory shall call the congregation together for worship twice on the Lord's Day," as per our present Article 52 of the Church Order of Dort.

Attending the worship services *diligently*, therefore, as we confess in Lord's Day 38 and articulate in the Form for the Lord's Supper (admonishing those who do *not* do so to abstain from participating as long as they persist in such sinful lifestyle, declaring to them that they have no part in the kingdom of Christ and will be at risk of a heavier judgment and condemnation!), has been understood scripturally, historically, and confessionally to mean attending *twice*. Of course, this has always been understood to apply to those only who are willfully absent, implying that there is and has been legitimate oncing; e.g. in case of illness in

the family, or with a baby at home, or difficulties due to age, engagement in works of mercy and necessity, and other valid reasons. To those *willfully* absenting themselves from the “second” worship service (commonly called “oners”), the words of Hebrews 10:25 have been applied, “Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Such members neglect the means of grace, the preaching (one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven) and the sacraments, which the Lord has given to his church to work and strengthen faith.

The Sunday is rightly called the “Lord’s Day,” and is the NT continuation of the Sabbath the LORD established in the OT. The *whole* day is for the LORD! On this day the LORD called his people together for worship and sacrifices; he wanted to see them together, hear their praises and prayers, and give them his blessings. The people responded to this call to worship saying, “Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving. . . Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (Ps 95:2, 6-7). This call to worship continued in the new dispensation, and today is done on behalf of our Beautiful Shepherd, Jesus Christ, on his day, the “Lord’s Day,” by his ambassadors, the elders, with the same “call” as agreed upon and committed to in the Reformed churches, as per Article 52 CO: in the morning and in the evening!

This is so for the same reasons as in the old dispensation: because the LORD our God wants to see us together as his covenant assembly. Hence for many centuries we have been engaged in this covenant *dialogue*: in the *morning* the Word is proclaimed “Thus says the LORD,” while in the *afternoon* the congregation is encouraged, equipped, and engaged in her *response* and confession of faith (with the use of the systematic instruction in the Scriptures). Yes, the LORD’s speaking to his people and his people’s response to his Word has been the covenantal *dialogue* in each worship service *per se* as well (morning *and* afternoon)! In these worship services the congregation gathers together and worships together as the church, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. They share in the unity of the true faith in all the benefits and merits of Christ. The Bride wants to be together with the Bridegroom as much and as often as possible, to show her love to him! Yes, the congregation as his body is engaged with one another in their joys and sorrows (1 Cor 12:26), so that we could say, “If one part is worshipping, every part should be worshipping with it.” Hence, the whole congregation ought to be together to share in the joy of the Lord, in the blessings in him, and so receive a foretaste of the eternal joy of being in God’s presence; yes, so to begin in this life the eternal Sabbath!

It is important to consider the question posed above in *this* context and against *this* background. Members who ask, “Is once not enough?” display a spiritual problem. The question, “Where does it show in the Bible. . . ,” too, is a childish question, because we know that the Bible is not a dictionary or encyclopedia where in alphabetical order one can find answers to questions like this. Besides, although the OT people of Israel in its infancy as covenant nation (Gal 3:24) received *prescriptive* norms and standards, the NT believer should not need chapter and verse for going to church once or twice. Rather, on the basis of the above we receive sufficient instructions and inferences on which to base the authority of the elders, on Christ’s behalf, to “call” the congregation together for worship. Yes, even more so in the NT dispensation, seeing all that we receive in Christ, the Lord of the Lord’s Day, through his gift of the Holy Spirit and Word working on this holy day! Hence, not to heed the call to worship by the office bearers is sin against the fifth commandment, while a self-willed standard of worship attendance is sin against the second commandment.

Thus, the pertinent answer to the above question is first of all a call for self-discipline and repentance. Secondly, it is a call for mutual encouragement and discipline of the members of the congregation, admonishing each other with the Word of God (Heb 10:24). In the third place, we should conclude from the above exposition of the principles and norms regarding the Lord’s Day that poor, unfaithful church attendance, and willfully absenting oneself from the worship services, is a sin and therefore subject to church discipline. This is for the well-being of the member whose faith will surely and undoubtedly (and imperceptibly!) erode and decline spiritually. The elders (and other members), therefore, should deal with this sin in the way of loving discipline, visiting, and admonishing out of sincere spiritual concern for those unfaithful in attendance. They do so for the sake of the eternal welfare of the sheep! More importantly, however, it is for reasons of God’s right to receive our worship to God, to honour, glorify, and praise him, that we should take this sin seriously and all together, members and office bearers alike, deal with it for the members’ well-being and for the greater glory of God’s name!

*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



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear editor,

Once again, I'm thankful for the space *Clarion* afforded me in previous issues to present and defend claims surrounding Blessings Christian Church, where I serve as a pastor. I'm also grateful that the editors decided not to publish further letters related to these questions. Having said that, my colleagues and I at Blessings warmly welcome those with questions to address us privately. We attempt to dignify every such question with a thoughtful response. In this connection, I want to express my regret for overstating a claim I made in my last response to a letter – namely, that the primary association for unchurched individuals familiar with the name “Canadian Reformed” is with people who are “hard-working albeit heavy drinking and judgmental.” Though this is an association some have, I was wrong to

indicate, especially without any quantitative data, that it is the primary association. This misleading claim was borne out of a level of frustration for which only I am culpable, and I thought I, as a leader in Christ's church, should admit this much to the readers of *Clarion*.

*Sincerely, in our Lord,
Dr. Bill DeJong*

From the Editor

My thanks to Drs. Bill DeJong and Jason VanVliet for their willingness to engage in the recent discussion. The graciousness of your responses to one another, and to those who wrote in, is most commendable.

Herewith our readers are informed that the discussion in *Clarion* is closed.

James Visscher

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions can be sent to editor@clarionmagazine.ca and need to adhere to a 750-word limit.*



PRESS RELEASE

The Study (formerly ILPB) May 2019 Waterdown, ON

Present for the Board: Dick Nijenhuis (Chair), Elsa DeGelder (Secretary), and Daniella DeVries (representative of the Women's League). Present for the Administration Committee: Paul DeBoer (Coordinator), Teresa Jongsma (Treasurer), and an advisor to The Study.

The Study Chairman, Dick Nijenhuis, opens our spring meeting with Scripture reading and prayer, and a welcome to all.

Several reports are discussed from the Committee of Administration.

Progress: There are several books at various stages of the publishing process. Two books, *Seven Wondrous Words* (by Rev. W. Bredenhof) and *Ruth* (by Rev. G. Wieske), should be ready to go to the printer in the next month or so.

Marketing: Miranda Feenstra has taken on the Marketing role.

Treasurer: Financials are running smoothly. We are thankful that we are able to restock shelves and reprint books when necessary.

The new website continues to be very well received.

We are still looking for a replacement for our administrator, Cathy Jonker. The possibility of dividing her many roles over more than one person is discussed. It is agreed that this would be desirable in order to make the workload manageable.

The Board continues to seek out new material to be published. We are very thankful to the ministers in our federation who consider publishing their material through The Study so we can continue with our mandate to provide Reformed study books to enrich and promote the study of Scripture.

Press release read and approved.





Connect with him on Facebook or Twitter (@PeterHoltvluwer) where he is currently tweeting on Christ in the Psalms.

The Future of Everything: Essential Truths about the End Times

Reformation Heritage Books, 2019,
166 pages, approx. \$21 CDN on Amazon

Do you wonder what happens to believers when they die? Do you spend time thinking about what life will be like once the Lord Jesus returns? If not, Rev. William Boekestein's fine little book will show you the importance of doing so. And if you already do ponder such things, *The Future of Everything* will help deepen your understanding and answer some questions as it overviews the Bible's teachings on the afterlife and end-times.

Boekestein sets out to explain to everyday Christians what theologians refer to as "eschatology" – the study of the end-times as taught in Scripture. That's an area that can be complicated and is often obscure to us, but the author succeeds in making all the main lines plain. Pastor Boekestein has a gift for clear, accessible writing, which manages to be fresh at the same time. Although this book is a succinct primer and not an exhaustive analysis answering every question, yet the author packs in a significant amount of content as he outlines each issue. The reader will learn much.

One of Boekestein's burdens is to show that how Christians understand what's coming in the next life directly impacts the way they live the present life. A skewed view of eschatology leads to a skewed way of Christian living, from being lazy and careless on one hand to arguing excessively about the finer details of the future on the other. The author takes his goal from the apostle Peter, who wrote on the last things in order to promote "holy conduct and godliness" (2 Pet 3:11). A more laudable purpose would be hard to find.

The book's contents

The writer works hard and is effective at showing the personal relevance of his topic to every person and doubly so for every Christian. Following the two introductory chapters, Rev. Boekestein spends two chapters writing on facing our own mortality, six chapters on being ready for the return



of our Lord Jesus Christ, and two more on putting into practice today the lessons the Bible teaches about tomorrow (i.e. the end of time). His conclusion that better understanding the coming of the kingdom of heaven will motivate God's people "to begin to put into

practice now the social righteousness that will permeate the new heaven and the new earth" (p. 122) is a welcome and refreshing truth that deserves more attention among us. The final chapter aims to highlight the importance and even urgency of mission work in light of Christ's pending return.

The book is arranged in twelve easy-to-read chapters of about ten to twelve pages in length. Each chapter has a set of approximately eight well-worded questions (located in the appendix) that aid in reflecting on the teaching presented. Any adult would benefit from reading this volume, but its setup makes it ideal for Bible study groups (from young adult and up, in my estimation).

In a book on the end times there are bound to be thorny issues, and to Pastor Boekestein's credit he does not shy away from any of them. For example, he dedicates a full chapter to the topic of hell, another to the final judgment, and yet another to what happens after death. While here and there I placed a question mark in the margin of my copy, the writer explains all points within the pale of Reformed orthodoxy (where, it must be admitted, consensus on some points is lacking).

So, the reader at times will be challenged in his/her thinking on these and related issues – that is the point of good writing, isn't it? This book stimulates the reader to dig further into Scripture and discern God's will with greater clarity and conviction, and that too is one of the benefits of *The Future of Everything*. Recommended!

