

# Clarion

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



**Called to sand?**

VOLUME 68 • NUMBER 14 • JULY 12 2019

**CONSIDERING CREMATION**  
**WHY GIVE THE PSALMS PREFERENCE?**

# Clarion

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

To equip God's people for his  
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## EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal  
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliuw, 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  
Premier Printing Ltd.  
One Beghin Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB Canada R2J 3X5  
Phone: 204-663-9000, Fax: 204-663-9202

**Subscriptions** subscriptions@clarionmagazine.ca  
**Advertisements** ads@clarionmagazine.ca  
**Website** www.clarionmagazine.ca

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			Regular Mail	Air Mail
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U.S.A. U.S. Funds			\$69.00	\$102.00
International			\$98.00	\$171.00

\*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra.  
GST/HST no. 890967359RT

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Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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We acknowledge the financial support  
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Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Rev. Eric Kampen leads our issue with his article, "Sanding." And to what is he referring? The training and equipping of office bearers. He writes, "By means of this article, I wish to make a small contribution to that training. Hopefully, it will also help the other members gain some insight in the work of the leaders, to appreciate what they do and encourage them in their task."

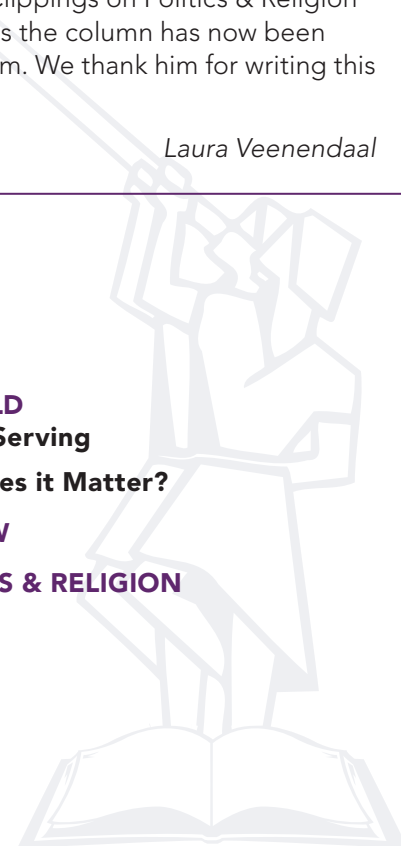
We also have an article from Rev. Gijsbert Nederveen, entitled, "Burial or Cremation: Does it Matter?" While burial was rather a given choice in previous centuries, cremation has become a more common choice in our current time. This article discusses implications of this change.

Issue 14 brings readers columns such as Treasures, New & Old, Church News Review, You Asked, and Clarion Kids. The General Synod Edmonton 2019 press release is included, as well as a Canticle. We also have the first Clippings on Politics & Religion article from Dr. Ted Van Raalte, as the column has now been passed from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam. We thank him for writing this column for the past five years.

Laura Veenendaal

## CONTENTS

- 403 Sanding
- 405 TREASURES, NEW & OLD  
Not Being Served, But Serving
- 406 Burial or Cremation: Does it Matter?
- 411 CHURCH NEWS REVIEW
- 412 CLIPPINGS ON POLITICS & RELIGION
- 414 CANTICLE
- 415 CLARION KIDS
- 416 YOU ASKED
- 418 PRESS RELEASE





# Sanding

*The glory of the task lies in being able to serve  
our gracious God*

As you read this issue of *Clarion*, the ordination of new elders and deacons will have occurred some time ago. The timing of ordination to office is such that the reality of it does not sink in for some time, as the summer months see an easing up of meeting schedules and visiting. Come September, however, the full range of activities will kick in. The summer months, therefore, provide an opportunity for both new, as well as veteran, office bearers to perhaps do some related reading to train themselves. This is also mentioned in the Form for Ordination for Elders where it states, “To do their work well as shepherds of God’s flock, the overseers should train themselves in godliness and diligently search the Scriptures, which are profitable in every respect, that the man of God may be equipped for every good work.” By means of this article, I wish to make a small contribution to that training. Hopefully, it will also help the other members gain some insight in the work of the leaders, to appreciate what they do and encourage them in their task.

## Construction workers

For the purpose of this article, we will look at the work of the office bearers in terms of building. There is a biblical basis for this image. Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 3, where he writes, “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” He then continues by calling for building carefully, for the work will be judged when Christ comes in glory.

It is helpful to think through this image of building, considering the different tasks involved. Paul mentions the laying of the foundation and the building of the walls. From

a building point of view, this can come across as the most impressive, for the results are obvious. We think of situations where they begin to build a new house. If you drive by such a construction site, much changes in the first few weeks. In a remarkably short time, the hole for the basement is excavated and the foundation poured, the walls are framed, and the roof goes on. Then, however, to the average observer, little seems to change. That is because there is much work going on inside the house, with the plumbing, heating, wiring, and drywalling. There is a lot of fine carpentry that takes place. Eventually, the house is ready. This is also true for those who like to do woodworking. You can make quick progress on the construction of a piece of furniture, but then it comes to the trimming and the sanding and the finishing. Proportionally, that takes much longer. A wife who saw a project take shape quickly may wonder why her husband has not brought it in the house yet. Sanding and finishing take time!

If we think this through with respect to the life of the church, the office bearers are not really the ones laying foundations and building upon the foundation. That is more descriptive of the work of mission. If we think of Paul’s labours, he quickly established many congregations. As you follow his missionary journeys in the Book of Acts, you see how quickly churches were established. But Paul realized there was much work left to be done, so he supervised the appointment of elders in each church before he moved on. The task of the elders can be compared more to all the work that goes on once the walls are up, or the sections of a piece of furniture have been cut and assembled. There is a lot of interior work and finishing carpentry that must be done. In the grand scheme of things, the work for the office bearers can best be described as sanding.



## Implications of sanding

There are several implications for seeing the work of office bearers as sanding. First, it is humbling. In a place where they build furniture, the sanding is more likely to be assigned to the newcomer. We might call it grunt work. The more experienced workers handle the big tools. Second, it requires patience. Sanding is slow work if done properly, as one must go through different grits of sandpaper to work up to the desired finish. It is easy to say, “Well, that’s good enough,” while really one should go on for a while yet. Third, it is dirty work. To be sure, cutting makes dust, but sanding makes finer dust.

## Perspective for the work of office bearers

Now, we should think this through in terms of the work of office bearers. It was said that sanding is grunt work. The big work has been done by our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the foundation. Office bearers are called to work in churches built on that foundation. In most cases, the churches have been established for a long time, so office bearers are given the newcomer job of sanding. Their sandpaper is the Word of God. This is true also for ministers. Only a few ministers are church planters. Most are called to work in existing congregations. They should not think too highly of themselves in terms of constructing the walls. They are also working within the walls, sanding as they proclaim God’s Word.

Second, there is the need for patience in working on God’s building project. While there may be examples of dramatic results, in most cases the progress is slow. If this is forgotten, the office bearer may get frustrated, and even angry, with the people for not responding faster. It is easy to skip steps. There is also the danger of saying, “Well, good enough,” when really, one should move through a few more grits of sandpaper, that is, further applying the Word of God.

Third, as sanding is dusty, dirty work, an office bearer must be ready for that. It is inevitable that one will stir up clouds of dust, sanding away the imperfections and weaknesses in the lives of God’s people. While wood does not argue with the abrasive paper applied to it, people may. Some will resist the work of the office bearer and vent their anger and frustration on him.

When we consider these aspects of the work of the office bearers, we can see the benefit in having terms of office. Elders and deacons have their regular jobs to attend to, so it is a good thing to have others take a turn at sanding.

That some members require extensive sanding is evident to many brothers who serve in office and, after a couple of years off, when reelected to office, discover the list of those requiring extensive sanding has changed little. They may even end up back at the same station, working once more with a brother or sister requiring extensive attention.

## Further perspective

Does this description of the work of office bearers come across as rather depressing? Who wants a task like that? It is important to remember then whose building project office bearers are working on. It is the building project of God, as he builds his church. The glory of the task, therefore, lies in being able to serve our gracious God. Paul describes office bearers as God’s fellow workers. That’s a great privilege. It is essential to see this, for it is only then that an office bearer will be ready to gladly take up the work of sanding.

There is yet another aspect to consider. Sanding may seem like grunt work, but sanding is also the part that will make the big difference in how a project turns out. How much time was spent on sanding will make the difference between an OK job and a job that impresses people. After all, by the time the work is finished, people don’t see all the cuts and joinery, but they see the gleaming, smooth surface, the fruit of patient sanding.

## Encouragement

It is my hope that these words will serve as encouragement to the office bearers as they think about, and prepare for, the activities of the regular season. In a way, it may be grunt work, but in the end, it is glorious work to be given a task in God’s building project. He is pleased to use men faithfully sanding away, to look after the people bought with the blood of his Son. As humble and simple as their task may seem, they really are the instruments of the Holy Spirit as he sanctifies the believers.

At the same time, may these words serve to all as a refresher of what the office bearers are called to do. So, when they do their work, be it in the sanding that takes place from the pulpit, or the sanding that takes place through the personal work done in the congregation as they handle the Word of God, when the dust is flying, be thankful that our gracious God has given men to sand away on our lives.

When office bearers humbly do their work, and the members humbly submit to that work, then the building of God, that is the church, will begin to shine more and more and bring glory to his name.





# Not Being Served, But Serving

**Matthew 20:20-28**

We are often very slow to learn. Christ had been teaching against pride and had been teaching humility (Matt 18:1-4 and Matt 20:1-16), but this message is hard for us sinful people to learn. The mother of the sons of Zebedee and her two sons – James and John – came to Jesus asking a favour about status in the kingdom of heaven. They wanted one son to sit at Christ's right hand and the other at Christ's left (20:21). That was evidence of sinful pride!

When the other ten disciples heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. Their indignation likely shows that they were cut of the same cloth. One commentator perceptively and sensitively remarks that humility is saddened by the sins of others, while pride is irritated by them. The others probably had their eye on those positions for themselves!

Christ called the Twelve to himself and taught about humility and service, pointing out that lording it over others and jostling for position is the way of the world (20:25). Christ says, "It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave" (20:26, 27). Servanthood is to be the attitude of the Christian. The way to

greatness in the kingdom of heaven is totally different than the way to greatness in the world. As Christians, we must think in different categories. Greatness in the kingdom is measured in terms of serving one another.

This is true for all members of the congregation, but there is a special message here for office-bearers in the church today. Like the Twelve, the office-bearers have a leadership position. How were the Twelve to act toward the other followers of Christ, and toward one another as fellow-leaders? How are ministers, elders, and deacons to act toward members of the congregation over whom they have been set as office-bearers? How are office-bearers to relate to one another? The message for office-bearers today is that there is to be no lording it over other members of the congregation, and no jostling for position among one another as office-bearers. Instead, there ought to be an attitude of servanthood.

It is partly because of this text that we have Article 74 in our Church Order: "No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no office-bearer over other office-bearers." A big church may not lord it over a small church, nor an experienced office-bearer over a less experienced. If a congregation has two

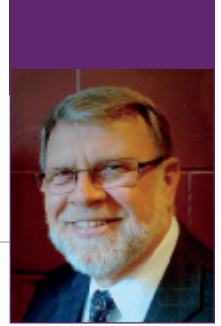
or more ministers, we do not use terms like senior pastor and junior pastor, but we call them co-pastors. Because seeking status and jostling for position is a temptation for us sinful people, we have this Church Order article.

Christ presents himself as the example for us to follow – "Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (20:28). To come, he left much behind. Christ laid aside his heavenly glory and did not count equality with God something to be grasped (Phil 2:6-8). Christ wasn't vying for position, like the sons of Zebedee and their mother. The Son of God humbled himself by taking on the limitations of the human nature. And he did it to serve us by saving us! He became the Suffering Servant who gave his life in place of ours. He ransomed us by paying the price of his own precious blood to set us free from Satan, sin, and death. He did it to raise us from the depths of depravity to the heights of salvation.

Knowing this gospel, we ought to serve one another out of thankfulness for Christ's redeeming work. Rather than displaying pride toward one another, let us show humility. It's not about being served, but serving! **C**

## For further study

1. Pride was at the root of the Fall into sin. In what way do you think this was so? See Genesis 3:4-6.
2. Christ uses the Messianic title "Son of Man" in 20:28. In what way is this a Messianic title? See Daniel 7:13, 14.
3. Christ told James and John that they would drink his cup of suffering (20:23). In what way did this happen? See Acts 12:2 and Revelation 1:9.



# Burial or Cremation: Does It Matter?

The topic of death and funerals is not a happy one. Yet it is something we are all confronted with in one way or another. Thankfully, as Christians we may rejoice that the death of the believer is not the end, but the entrance into God's eternal kingdom. We believe that death is an intruder into the created order. God created mankind with the intent to live everlastingly in glorious fellowship with the Creator. For that reason, the Old Testament believers already lived with the expectation of life after death. This expectation of eternal life had a bearing on how they took care of the dead. The Israelite funerary practice of burying their dead was influenced by their faith perspective.

Does this faith perspective still have a bearing on how we bury our dead? In the Reformed community, scriptural directives have a fundamental bearing on how matters in life are governed. This includes funerary practices. However, since cremation is becoming the norm in our society, one cannot assume any longer that Christians automatically choose burial as the final act of caring for the dead, especially since cremation is actively promoted as a more sanitary alternative.

But, is this really an issue? Or is this no more than a personal preference and therefore something that should not occupy any of our time?

Basic to our discussion is the question: Does the Bible convey something on the matter of caring for the dead? The answer depends on whether one considers the biblical practice of burial as something that sets an example for us to follow, or whether one considers burial as no more than a culturally conditioned custom. In this article I hope to make clear that the Bible relates more than a cultural practice. We know that burial was practised throughout the ancient Near East and, therefore, it was not restricted to Israelite culture alone. But just because burial happened in other cultures does not make it primarily a cultural-

ly conditioned practice. It was very much a religious rite. The Egyptians buried the dead and provided supplies for the afterlife. We do not read of such a practice in the Bible. So, while there may have been a cultural sameness among nations, their cultural practice was influenced by religious values. The way one takes care of the dead is a reflection of one's religious conviction. Both cremation and burial are conditioned by one's religious views and these religious views shape one's cultural value system.<sup>1</sup>

It is my view that burial is the biblical model Christians should be encouraged to follow. It would be in keeping with the practice of Christians for the last two millennia and with the practice of Old Testament believers before that. A shift towards cremation did not occur until the end of the nineteenth century and is becoming increasingly more popular. What occasioned this change? We will first take a quick historical survey, then highlight the main reasons for the shift towards cremation, and, finally, present biblical evidence favouring burial.

## Selective historical survey

Burning the dead can be considered to be both an ancient and a recent practice. Archeological digs have found cremated remains in Palestine dating to a time long before the coming of the Israelites. I hope to show from biblical evidence that the Israelites themselves did not practice it except in unusual situations.

Right from the start, Christians followed the Israelite custom of body burial, and wherever Christianity gained prominence the practice of cremation disappeared. Constance Jones observes:

The Scandinavians practised cremation until the 11th century, when they converted to Christianity. Pre-Christian Russia also used cremation, switching to burial after converting. Today, Jews, Greek Orthodox

Christians, Southern Baptists and Moslems largely disapprove of cremation, but in 1963 the Roman Catholic Church removed its ban.<sup>2</sup>

For the early Christian church, burial became the only proper way of caring for the dead. Cremation was gradually abolished in most of Christianized Europe. In A.D. 785, Charlemagne even prohibited cremation in his realm as a pagan rite. He proclaimed this edict: "If anyone follows pagan rites and causes the body of a dead man to be consumed by fire, and reduces his bones to ashes, let him pay with his life."<sup>3</sup> This "universal law" lasted for about eleven centuries. It was not until late in the nineteenth century that cremation became a prevalent alternative to burial.

From this quick historical sketch, we may conclude that even though the practice of burning the dead can be traced back several millennia, cremation is a relatively new phenomenon and a recent practice among Christians. Significant is the fact that up to the middle of the nineteenth century Christians considered only burial to be in line with their religious convictions. This indicates that for nearly 2000 years Christians treated the biblical example of burial as the standard to follow, and as being the God-honouring way of caring for their dead. This Christian practice replaced the religious and cultural practices of the peoples who turned from paganism to Christianity.

What brought about the shift in thinking and practice we experience today? In his excellent book, *The Hour of Our Death*, Philippe Ariès has traced the transitional phases in the burial customs from the fifth to the nineteenth century. He discovered a gradual shift in the direction of a contempt for life. By the eighteenth century, death had become a medical issue. It was the time for scientific knowledge. Looting of graves for the purpose of medical science and the study of anatomy became common. With it came a disrespect for the bodies of the dead.

These insights may also help us understand the development in nineteenth century England. In 1874, Sir Henry Thompson tried to introduce cremation in England. He did so after visiting Italy, where cremation was practised, and after he had seen a model of one of the experimental furnaces at the Great Exhibition in Vienna (1873). He organized the Cremation Society of England which found supporters among prominent writers, artists, and scientists. However, because of fierce opposition from the Church of England and the Home Secretary, his plans were temporarily frustrated. A test-case arose in 1883 when Dr. William Price tried to have the body of his child cremated. Legal

action was initiated against him which, in 1884, produced the judgment that cremation was a legal process provided it did not cause a nuisance.

In 1902, the first Cremation Act was passed and updated in 1952. The general principle of the Act was to ensure that cremation would not be a means of concealing crime and that proper safeguards would be established in the public interest. Since that time, cremation has become the norm in Britain.

Closer to home, in Ontario the Hamilton Mausoleum & Crematory has been in operation since 1958. The crematorium in Toronto has been operational a little longer. Prior to that, the only place in this area where cremations were done was Buffalo.

## Reasons for the shift toward cremation

The rapid increase of cremation warrants a brief investigation of the reasons for this shift away from burial. The most common ones listed are cost and cemetery space. The Consumers Union of the United States lists yet another motive: tolerance. "There is more religious tolerance – even encouragement – of cremation than in the past."<sup>4</sup>

The point I wish to pursue is the matter of religious tolerance. As noted earlier, until 1963 the Roman Catholic Church was strongly opposed to cremation. In 1926, Rome had taken a stand against cremation in order to warn against the dangers of de-emphasizing the resurrection of the body. One might well ask whether this danger is less real today than in 1926. Evidence points in the direction that the number of people who reject this key Christian belief is increasing. The resurrection of the body is denied, or, at best, its significance is not understood by many.

So, what has changed? William E. Phipps puts it squarely within the realm of a broader religious tolerance most Christians now have on the subject of cremation. He mentions that this tolerance "is anchored in a reinterpretation of their basic sources of authority"<sup>5</sup> i.e., the Bible, and cites the bodily resurrection as one of the main objections by those opposing cremation. Phipps, who advocates cremation, comes with some fanciful interpretations of Scripture. One example of his fertile imagination to prove his point has to do with the apostle Paul. He opines that Paul venerated the living body as "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19), but that Paul did not find the dead body of sacred value. Paul viewed his worn-out body as a transient "earthly tent," soon to be demolished. Asks Phipps: "As a tentmaker, how might Paul have disposed of dilapidated



tents? Is it not likely that he would salvage any reusable parts and then destroy by fire the remaining organic stuff?” The implication is, of course, that if Paul would burn parts of dilapidated tents, he would also approve, and probably practice, the burning of dilapidated bodies.

There is no question that the matter of the resurrection of the body plays a role in the discussion. However, any attempt to argue against cremation on the basis that it may reflect a denial of faith in the resurrection is a weak argument. Such denial can equally be present with burial. We need to build our case by investigating the funerary practice of the Israelites, and that of Christians for the past 2000 years, within the framework of the whole Bible.

## Summary

There is a decisive shift in attitude towards cremation after a period of nearly 2000 years in which Christians looked after their dead by burial. This funerary practice was based on the conviction that the biblical example set the standard for Christians to follow. Wherever Christianity replaced paganism, burial became the biblically sanctioned way of looking after their dead. One of the Old Testament beliefs was that the body is an important part of our being and that even in death the body should be cared for with respect and dignity. Christians who reject cremation do so because biblical examples point almost exclusively to the practice of burial. It is a religious matter that finds sanction in Scripture.

## Biblical evidence favouring cremation

Biblical evidence favouring the practice of burning the dead is lacking. But what about texts that refer to funeral fires (Jer 34:5; 2 Chr 16:14, 21:19)? As Roland de Vaux pointed out years ago,<sup>6</sup> and as modern Bible translations reflect, these texts do not refer to cremation. Mention is made of a fire being lit at the death of a king who died at peace with God. The dead were not burned, but incense and perfumes were burned near the body in honour of the deceased.

Closer scrutiny of biblical data reveals that in Scripture fire is most of the time a symbol of destruction. That is the meaning of Joshua 7:15, 25-26. The burning of Achan is a deviation from the norm because it is God’s judgment on Achan’s sin. Burning is also a prescribed punishment for certain cases of sexual immorality (Lev 20:14, 21:9; cf. Gen 38:24).

Two biblical references are sometimes advanced as evidence for cremation. The first one is 1 Samuel 31:11-13,

which tells us about the people of Jabesh Gilead who took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan, burned them, and then buried their bones. Here I follow the most commonly held Reformed view that this passage forms an exception due to the circumstances. A crisis situation called for desperate measures. In this case it was probably used to prevent insult of Saul and his sons at the hands of the Philistines.

The second passage is Amos 6:9-10, which depicts a horrible scene of war where people in hiding were left to die and relatives came to burn the bodies. Once again, we have a crisis situation which called for drastic measures out of the ordinary. Therefore, these two Bible passages cannot be used as biblical support favouring cremation.

## *Burial should be promoted and practised as the God-honouring way of caring for the dead*

Another important passage is Amos 2:1-3. There God pronounced Moab’s doom for burning, as if to lime, the bones of the king of Edom. The specific reference to the burning of the bones to lime highlights the repugnant nature of the act of revenge on the dead. God revealed his anger because the bones of the dead were not respected. His judgment upon Moab suggests that burning the dead is a violation of human dignity.

Clearly, then, the biblical evidence does not support cremation as a common practice in biblical times. With the exception of 1 Samuel 31:11-13 and Amos 6:9-10, the passages cited place the burning of the dead in the realm of judgment. Destruction of the body by way of burning was not practised except as a form of punishment commanded by God for serious offenses (Lev 20; Josh 7:15, 25), or in exceptional circumstances. That is one reason why Christians have resisted the trend and have not felt free to choose cremation as an alternative to burial. The other reason is that the Bible supplies overwhelming evidence for burial as the normative practice in ancient Israel.

## Biblical evidence favouring burial

In contrast to the lack of scriptural support for cremation, numerous texts from both the Old Testament and the New Testament can be cited in support of body burial. Biblical passages that come to mind are Genesis 23:19-20;



25:7-10; 35:19; 50:3, 7-9, and 24-26; Judges 8:32; Luke 7:12-15; and John 11:43-44, to mention just a few. Of special interest are Deuteronomy 34:5-6 and John 19:38-42.

Deuteronomy 34:5-6 relates the death of Moses and his being buried by God himself. This detail already indicates that it must be more than a passing interest that God's method was burial and not some other means of disposal. Added to that we find in John 19:38-42 details of Christ's burial. John 19:40 provides the specific information that they took care of his body "in accordance with Jewish burial customs."

Why did the Israelites have the custom of burial? I believe it is because of their understanding of who we are. God formed man from dust, but man did not become a living being until God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. When the breath of life is taken away and the person dies, he remains a human being, albeit a dead one. Family of the deceased still recognize the person as father, mother, brother, sister, etc. They see the person whom they have known intimately and that is how they speak their name. Although dead, the person's body still is with them and they pay their last respects to the body as is befitting in a proper funeral.

In other words, we are dealing with a custom that shows the same respect for the dead as for the living. From the biblical standpoint, the body as created by God does not lose its importance at death. This is clear from the care given to the dead. The Israelites treated the body with respect and dignity. It was not a matter of disposing of a corpse. Great care was taken to lay the body to rest. We only have to think of the care given to Jesus for his burial which happened according to the burial custom of the Jews. Lazarus' body was also wrapped in grave clothes. From the details given about strips of linen and the cloth around his face (John 11:44), we get an indication how carefully the dead were attended to. As one would not destroy a living person, so one should not destroy a dead person for he is and remains a created being. In death God claims the person he created "from the dust of the earth" and he lets the body return to dust.

Under normal circumstances, burial is the God-honouring way of caring for the dead. For Christians, the best example and proof is the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. Associated with his burial is his resurrection. The connection between burial and resurrection is portrayed by Paul in the symbolism of sowing and reaping (1 Cor 15:36ff; cf. John 12:24-25 where Jesus speaks about his death in terms of sowing a seed). The body is sown perishable; it is raised

imperishable. This symbolism can be properly understood only if it refers to the sowing of the body in the earth to await the great awakening of those who have fallen asleep (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18).<sup>7</sup>

Based on the overwhelming biblical evidence in favour of burial, Christians have for nearly two millennia avoided cremation as an option. From the start they followed the Jewish custom of burial. This method of caring for the dead led to the virtual abolition of cremation in Europe. Now the tide is changing, and Christians are being persuaded that cremation is an acceptable alternative to burial. However, in light of Scripture, I am convinced that burial should be promoted and practised as the God-honouring way of caring for the dead and for that reason alone, a shift to cremation is not a positive development.

Another argument often put forth in favour of cremation, but clearly secondary in the discussion, is the scarcity of cemetery space. The practice of clearing the graves after a period of time has been practised for centuries and solves the problem of cemetery space. The point is not that our bodies lie in a fixed spot until resurrection day; the significance of bodily interment is that Christians give testimony to their faith that the body is sown in the ground as symbolism of a seed that will be raised imperishable to a new life.

### *The resurrection of the body is denied, or, at best, its significance is not understood by many*

I recognize that there are Christians who in good conscience have opted for cremation on the basis that Scripture does not explicitly forbid it. This article is not a judgment on their actions. The intent of this article is to cause us to reflect upon a fairly recent trend and to present the case that burial is the biblical model Christians should be encouraged to follow because burial is a way of showing respect to the body God has created. Body interment is a statement of faith about the sowing of the body as a seed for resurrection day and reflects most closely the burial practice of the Old and New Testament believers for many millennia.

Finally, it should be clear that my reservation about cremation does not stem from a fear that a cremated body cannot be raised. That is an irrelevant point and not an issue at all. If that were the case, then many men and women who were burned to death for the faith, or anyone who is

killed in a fiery crash, would have no hope. My reservations concerning cremation stem from the fact that what rightly is a religious issue, i.e., a matter in which one's religion plays a prominent role, is being reduced to a marketing item in which religion is minimized, and economics are placed central. I agree with Jochem Douma's assessment that "cremation is a symptom of our secularized world."<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

The biblical model of caring for the dead points to respect and dignity for the deceased. Disrespect for the body is not a biblical concept, and therefore even in death the person received similar respect and dignity as when alive. Burning of the body was a means of punishment and therefore not practised as a normal way of disposing of the dead.

It is a fact that cremation is gaining ground as the funerary practice of choice and the momentum is too great to stem the tide. The fact that among Christians the practice is also on the rise is an unfortunate development. The increase in cremations among Christians is not only a matter of economics; it is also a symptom of our secularized world.

Christians should be encouraged to maintain burial as the clear biblical example under normal circumstances. Burial is a powerful statement of faith. It is the best witness Christians can give that they are sowing the body for the

glorious resurrection. Christians should be encouraged to maintain that clear witness as long as possible.

<sup>1</sup> For example, among Hindus and Buddhists, burning of the body is the prescribed method of disposal. Hindus believe in the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. With emphasis on the constant reincarnation of the soul, the body is of lesser importance. Cremation is understood to facilitate the quick separation of body and soul, and burning the body takes place soon after death.

<sup>2</sup> Constance Jones, R.I.P.: *The Complete Book of Death and Dying* (1997), 101. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), "The Church permits cremation, provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body." (#2301)

<sup>3</sup> From the Paderborn Capitularies, in H.R. Loyn and John Percival, *The Reign of Charlemagne: Documents on Carolingian Government and Administration* (1976), 52 #7. One could escape the death penalty as long as the "crime" went undetected, and the person who went of his own accord to a priest and was willing to make his confession and undergo penance, would be excused the death penalty on the priest's testimony, 52 #14.

<sup>4</sup> Consumers Union of the United States, *Funerals: Consumer's Last Rights* (1977), 158

<sup>5</sup> William E. Phipps, *Cremation Concerns* (1989), 53

<sup>6</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (1961), Vol. 1, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Such symbolism is not present in cremated ashes. Ashes are a waste product and cannot be "sown" like a kernel that dies. The symbolism is that the body is sown perishable – it will decay – it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour – a corpse – it is raised in glory (1 Cor 15:42-43).

<sup>8</sup> Jochem Douma, *Rondom de Dood*, 159.





# Teaching in Nairobi, Kenya

This past April, Rev. Marc Jagt, minister of the Fergus North Canadian Reformed Church, and Rev. Steve Swets of the Hamilton United Reformed Church had the wonderful opportunity of preaching and teaching in Nairobi, Kenya. They went to Kenya under the auspices of ITEM (International Theological Educations Ministry).

ITEM, previously known as “Christ for Russia,” “Christ for Ukraine,” etc., is “a religious, charitable, educational, non-profit corporation serving in the countries of the former Soviet Union, Central and Eastern Europe, and worldwide.... ITEM assists denominations and local churches by offering pastoral training at no cost to nationals. ITEM sends professors to teach at local institutions at regular intervals to equip pastors, teachers, and laymen and women to accomplish their God-given callings.” They are an active organization; in 2018, they sent out sixty instructors. The stated mission of ITEM is to “provide Biblically-based, Reformed teaching and training worldwide to indigenous church leaders for ministry” (from item.org). ITEM requires all board members and instructors to subscribe to at least two of these historic Reformed confessions: Westminster



*The Class at All Nations College, Thika, Kenya*

Confession of Faith and Catechisms, the Belgic Confession, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

After arriving in Kenya and seeing some of the sights, including observing gazelle, zebra, and lions on a safari on the outskirts of Nairobi, the work began by preaching in local churches. Rev. Jagt preached in a church in the slums, which has really grown in the last four years. It was moving to witness the members coming to church in their Sunday best amidst so much poverty all around them.

On the Monday through Thursday, Rev. Jagt and Rev. Swets did some teaching at All Nations College, which is located near Nairobi. This is a theological school which was established in Nairobi in 2008 to provide classes to pastors from many denominations throughout central East Africa, including countries such as Uganda, Tanzania, Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda. In 2016, All Nations College reached out to ITEM inviting them to send teachers to the college. ITEM responded by establishing four teaching sessions of one week throughout the year.

During the week Rev. Jagt and Rev. Swets were there, they taught between twenty-five and thirty-five students




*Rev. Jagt and church members in the Nairobi slum*



who came from a wide area and were all church leaders in their local churches. The idea was that they would take the material they had learned back to their local settings and teach other leaders there, so that in all a few hundred leaders were reached by this teaching.

Rev. Swets taught a course on “Preaching Christ from the Old Testament,” while Rev. Jagt taught “Christ and the Cults.” Both courses were much appreciated. It is a sad reality in twenty-first century Kenya (and Africa more broadly) that not only is the church growing but so are the cults. All too often it happens that strong-minded individuals gather a cult around their personality and teach unsound doctrine,

leading many astray. In addition to these courses, in the evenings there was time for informal question and answer sessions in which the Canadian ministers were questioned about Reformed church life, church government, Christian education, the value of creeds and confessions, and also about the demonic world, an issue of living concern among the people of Africa.

Rev. Jagt and Rev. Swets found it to be a very rewarding and valuable experience to share the riches of the Reformed faith and to learn about the Lord’s work in Africa. May the Lord bless their labours there and may there be more opportunities in the future for this work to be done to God’s glory. 

## CLIPPINGS ON POLITICS & RELIGION

Ted Van Raalte  
Professor of Ecclesiology at the  
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary  
in Hamilton, ON  
tvanraalte@crtcs.ca



# British Foreign Office to Defend Persecuted Christians

Eighty percent of all religious persecution in the world occurs against Christians. On average, 345 Christians are killed for their faith every month; 245 million face systemic persecution for their confession of Christ. Such are the findings of a recent study commissioned by the British government. Its interim report was presented to the public by Jeremy Hunt, Foreign Secretary of the UK, and Philip Mountstephen, Bishop of Truro in the Church of England.

Timed for Easter 2019 and running fifty-three pages, with 344 footnotes, this report brought together the find-

ings of many organizations that compile stories and statistics of worldwide persecution.

The report studies persecution region by region, noting that in some cases persecution is by government (e.g., North Korea), while in other cases by religious radicals (e.g., Iraq), by war (e.g., Syria), or by paramilitary forces and criminal gangs (e.g., Mexico).

Secretary Hunt, who is currently running to replace Theresa May as leader of the Conservative Party, introduced the report to the British public by stating that freedom of worship is not just a human right, but a *fundamental* human



right, that there is an invisible line between open societies and closed societies. Freedom of worship is like a weathervane; where it is curtailed, this usually is a sign that lots of other things are going wrong. He mourned the fact that Western countries, which have such good governing systems on paper, have done so little about this worldwide problem.

Stating that the levels of persecution in some cases fit the United Nations' definition of genocide, the report explained,

The eradication of Christians and other minorities on pain of "the sword" or other violent means was revealed to be the specific and stated objective of extremist groups in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, north-east Nigeria and the Philippines.... The main impact of such genocidal acts against Christians is exodus. Christianity now faces the possibility of being wiped-out in parts of the Middle East where its roots go back furthest. In Palestine, Christian numbers are below 1.5 percent; in Syria the Christian population has declined from 1.7 million in 2011 to below 450,000, and in Iraq, Christian numbers have slumped from 1.5 million before 2003 to below 120,000 today. Christianity is at risk of disappearing, representing a massive setback for plurality in the region (4).

Foreign Secretary Hunt has asked the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices (FCO) of the UK what actions they are taking or have taken to "support the 80% of persecuted believers who follow Jesus Christ" (31). He also wants the "ministers and FCO civil servants to turn these [recommendations] into workable solutions that can be implemented" (31). His statement that he wants to build an international coalition of countries that are concerned about this makes us hopeful that this was on the agenda when President Trump visited the UK in early June

2019. Will the UK's diplomatic network, third largest in the world, do more for persecuted Christians? Will other countries join? We hope and pray so.

Hunt identified himself as a Christian when he presented the report. In both 2009 and 2019 Hunt stated in newspaper interviews that in his political work he is mainly inspired by the [evangelical Anglican] William Wilberforce (1759–1833), who dedicated his life to ending the institution of slavery.

Ironically, the report comes at a time when attendance at Church of England services has fallen another ten to twenty percent in the last decade. At the same time, the number of Muslims in England is increasing quickly – if all spelling variations of "Muhammad" are included, it is now the most popular name for baby boys.

Christians everywhere can be thankful when governments take seriously their God-given calling to defend the followers of Christ. Let us pray that this report will bear fruit.

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#### Sources

The Foreign Office has dedicated a website to the report: <https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk>

#### Note:

*This is my first attempt at continuing Dr. Van Dam's fine work of the past five years with his column, "Clippings on Politics and Religion." On behalf of all readers, I express sincere thanks to him for his labour of love for the church. I am happy to continue the column and pray that God will help me equip readers to live as citizens of Christ's here-present heavenly kingdom in the midst of and for the benefit of various changing earthly kingdoms.*





## Christ Jesus for us Suffered

*...suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell.*

1. Christ Je - sus for us suf - fered in bod - y and in soul.  
 Him - self for us he of - fered to save us, one and all.  
 His of - fering brought a - tone - ment, the need - ed sac - ri - fice,  
 to give us full en - joy - ment of ev - er - last - ing life.

2. Though innocent he suffered  
 conviction unto death.  
 The sinless One was offered  
 to free us from sin's threat.  
 Christ's death gives me assurance  
 that he's removed the curse.  
 The cross showed God's abhorrence  
 for sinful deeds and words.

3. The truth of God demanded  
 the death of God's own Son.  
 Christ Jesus was abandoned  
 and shunned by everyone.  
 By two men he was buried;  
 they lay him in a tomb.  
 To life we now are carried  
 and saved from certain doom.

4. Christ's death for us is helpful;  
 with him we're crucified.  
 Through him all that is dreadful  
 in us begins to die.  
 Sin reigns in us no longer;  
 't was buried in his tomb.  
 Sin's lust we learn to conquer  
 by giving it no room.

5. To hell our Lord descended  
 to free us from its pain.  
 He suffered, was tormented,  
 to set us free again.  
 His pain was without measure;  
 he suffered it for me  
 to give me heaven's treasure  
 that I may with him be.

Text: QA 37-44, Heidelberg Catechism (Art. 4, Apotles' Creed) vers. George van Popta, 2019  
 Tune: Hans Leo Hassler, 1601  
 For SATB version, please see <http://mostlycanticles.blogspot.com/>

76 76 D  
 PASSION CHORALE



# Clarion Kids

## Justification by Faith

### Romans 4

Justification is a very big word, but it is a very important part of our Christian faith. Being justified means that all of our sins are taken away by God. Our sins are taken away because Jesus died on the cross for us. We believe that we are justified by faith alone. This means that nothing we do can make up for our many sins. We are forgiven only by believing in Jesus Christ. There are no good works that we can do to add to what Christ did. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do good things! We should want to do good things because we are thankful to God for sending his son to die for all of our sins.

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

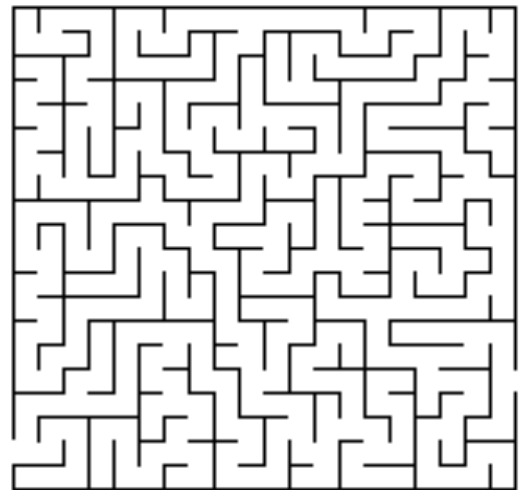


#### Word Search

D	W	C	B	P	J	L	L	C	S
J	E	K	H	E	K	U	S	R	K
S	Q	I	S	R	F	Q	U	O	R
L	N	U	F	K	I	D	L	S	O
P	S	I	N	I	R	S	Y	S	W
S	Z	A	S	I	T	Q	T	U	D
P	H	T	I	A	F	S	E	J	O
T	F	S	V	J	K	V	U	N	O
F	O	R	G	I	V	E	N	J	G
M	W	J	N	D	K	R	E	K	S

Christ	Cross	Faith
Forgiven	Good works	Jesus
Justified	Sins	Thankful

**Maze:** Justification is by faith alone, just like there is only one way out of this maze! Find your way through to the other side! elp Paul navigate through the city of Athens!



by Emily Nijenhuis



## Q Why is Singing the Psalms Preferable?

*I am beginning to wonder, why would we sing the rhymed version of the Psalms as we know them? The LORD of the covenant is addressed in a large part of the Psalms. What is the significance of this? Does it have value today? We have been singing the Psalms since around 1562. Why did our forefathers decide on this time and again?*

A The Psalms are the songs of the covenant. The Book of Psalms is one of the richest in the Bible; it's a true treasure which is read and re-read most of all the books in the Bible. Also, of this book the Holy Spirit is its Author, who inspired the poets to express their faith, their feelings, their experiences, and their circumstances in the songs they wrote. God, in his special care for us and our salvation (BC Art. 3), ensured that we would receive these songs as well and use them for the strengthening of our faith, for the comfort of his people, and for the worship of his great and holy Name. Very early in the history of God's people they have sung of the mighty deeds and virtues of the LORD, confessing him as their covenant God (e.g. Miriam's Song of the Sea, Exod 15; the Song of Deborah, Judg 5; David's Lament, 2 Sam 1). Outside the Book of Psalms there are many "psalms" in the Old Testament (song of Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Jonah).

In the Psalms, we hear the prayers of God's people, their pleadings as well as their jubilant words of thanksgiving. We receive insight into his people's struggles of faith, their suffering, as well as their hopes and expectations. We see them struggle with temptations and sins, and we share in their joys of deliverance and redemption. The people of God wrote in their songs of the threats of their enemies, their trust in God in times of war. The poets articulated in faith

their communion with God, their calling upon his Name, their cry for comfort, and their adoration of God. They related his mighty acts of deliverance, his mighty works among the nations, and his special care and compassion for his covenant nation. They spoke of the joy of worship in his courts, rejoicing in the sacrifices in his holy temple; jubilant in communion, grieving when absent. In them all, the LORD, their covenant God is central, and the people's faith in all his promises flourished thanks to his faithfulness and steadfast love!

The majority of Israel's Psalms would have been utilized within the formal setting of worship within the temple (and later, most likely, within the synagogue). These songs and the musical accompaniment were integral to Israel's activities of worship. Many of the Psalms show in their style and structure their usage for worship. The fact as such that the Psalms lack concrete and specific points of reference made them more easily useful for various contexts of worship. The use and development of these songs for worship by the congregation of the Lord happened more fully after the day of Pentecost. God's people in the New Testament dispensation sang them: Paul and Silas sang them in the prison at Philippi (Acts 16:25); Paul recommended it in Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13. From various places in the New Testament it appears that the conclusion may be drawn that they did: 1 Corinthians 14:26, James 1:17, 1 Timothy 3:16, 2 Timothy 2:11-13, Titus 2:2-6.



This usage of the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19) continued till the days of Augustine. After that time the church of the Lord for more than a thousand years hardly sang any psalm, until the time of the Reformation and the work of John Calvin. In Calvin's conviction the church didn't just start on the day of Pentecost but he saw her also in ancient Israel. Calvin saw the unity of the covenant of grace in Old and New Testament as well as the unity of the church from the beginning of the world till today (HC, LD 21). In that context he wanted to place and restore the singing of the Psalms as well. The Psalms which God had given in his special grace, he didn't just mean to be used by ancient Israel or the early Christian church, but he intended them to be sung in the church of all times and places. Calvin applied the principle of *Sola Scriptura* for the proclamation of the Word in the worship services but also for the songs to be sung. It will be helpful here to quote the Preface of our *Book of Praise*.

John Calvin wrote the following about congregational singing in his preface to the Genevan Psalter, 1543: As for public prayers, there are two kinds: the one consists simply of speech, the other of song. . . . And indeed, we know from experience that singing has great strength and power to move and to set on fire the hearts of men in order that they may call upon God and praise him with a more vehement and more ardent zeal. It is to be remembered always that this singing should not be light or frivolous, but that it ought to have weight and majesty. . . . Now, what Augustine says is true, namely that no one can sing anything worthy of God which

## CALLED

The Canadian Reformed Church at Neerlandia South has extended a call to

**Rev. John Ludwig**

Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Brampton, Ontario has extended a call to

**Eric Onderwater**

to serve as Minister for Mission, to assist in reaching the community with the gospel. This call is extended with cooperation between the Grace Brampton and Bethel Toronto Canadian Reformed Churches, working together through the GTA Mission Board.

## CHURCH NEWS

he has not received from him. Therefore, even after we have carefully searched everywhere, we shall not find better or more appropriate songs to this end than the Psalms of David, inspired by the Holy Spirit. And for this reason, when we sing them, we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth, as if he himself were singing through us to exalt his glory.

In the Reformed churches on the European Continent and in North America, therefore, the Psalms have a predominant place. This has been articulated in various versions of the Church Order of Dort as adopted by these Reformed churches so that ministers in their selection of songs for the worship services give priority to the rhymed versions of the Psalms as they are in use within their federations. These churches, however, have not excluded the use of scriptural hymns. The New Testament church desires to sing of Christ not only in prophecy (the Psalms) but also in fulfilment (the hymns). "They, too, constitute a thank offering of praise when we sing of the facts of redemption by God in Jesus Christ our Lord (Preface, *Book of Praise*)."



**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. denHollander  
denhollanderw@gmail.com**

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0

### Press Release of General Synod Edmonton Immanuel 2019

On Monday May 13, twenty-four delegates from across Canada gathered in Edmonton, Alberta in preparation for the convening of the 2019 General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches. In the evening, Rev. Richard Aasman, the chairman of the previous General Synod in Dunnville, led a special worship service. He preached on 1 John 3:1-3 – focussing on how lavish is the love that the Father has showered upon us in Jesus Christ. This message provided encouragement to the delegates about to begin their work the next day and to the many members in attendance from the Immanuel and surrounding congregations.

On Tuesday morning, Rev. Julius VanSpronsen, on behalf of the convening church, opened the meeting by welcoming all present, especially the delegates to GS 2019. He led in opening devotions, which included a brief meditation on the words of 1 Timothy 6:11-21. The credentials were examined and found to be in good order. Twenty-two primary delegates and two alternate delegates were present and signed the attendance list.

Through a free vote, the following brothers were chosen to serve in the executive: Rev. Douwe Agema as chairman, Rev. John Louwerse as vice-chairman, Rev. Karlo Janssen as first clerk, and Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer as second clerk. On behalf of the convening church, the Rev. VanSpronsen declared Synod constituted. The newly chosen chairman thanked the assembly for confidence expressed in the elected officers of Synod. He expressed much appreciation to the convening church for all the work done in preparation for Synod. Apart from receiving and organizing hundreds of documents, the host church also arranged lodging and transportation for the delegates and had the responsibility of providing three meals a day for at least twenty-four men and often more when delegates from sister churches were present. This work was very much appreciated by the delegates.

Synod was briefly adjourned, while the executive took the opportunity to prepare proposals regarding the proceedings of Synod and the division of tasks among the various members of Synod. When Synod reconvened, the agenda was adopted, and five advisory committees were appointed. Each committee was assigned particular agenda items to consider and came forward with proposals for discussion, deliberation, and adoption in plenary session. In the early stages of Synod, most of the time was devoted

to meetings of these advisory committees. As time went on, there were more and more plenary sessions.

In the following paragraphs, the major decisions of Synod Edmonton Immanuel will be reviewed, not necessarily in the order they were made. Synod had to deal with several personal and confidential appeals, as well as appeals and overtures from individual churches, which are not included in this review.

Anyone who wishes to have more detail about the decisions of Synod can explore the *Acts of Synod*, which have already been published on the Canadian Reformed Churches website and will be released in printed form in the near future.

### Ecumenical relationships

The Canadian Reformed Churches enjoy ecclesiastical fellowship with various churches in North America and around the world. Delegations from these churches were present at General Synod and were given the privileges of the floor and many availed themselves of this opportunity.

On the first evening of General Synod, a letter of greetings from the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (GGRI) was read, as these churches were unable to send a delegation to Synod. The Rev. Ben Westerveld, delegate from the Reformed Churches in Quebec (ERQ), addressed Synod describing the ERQ and its ministries and expressing gratitude for our sister church relationship. Elder Dr. James Wanliss spoke on behalf on the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)(FCC), describing the FCC, its worship and outreach efforts, its history and distinctives, and expressing gratitude for the unity of faith. The Rev. Travis Grassmid, representing the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS), expressed appreciation for the relationship with the CanRC and urging the Synod to be faithful to the Word in the matters before it.

On the second evening, Br. Johannes Moes, delegate from the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, gave an address, describing the FRCSA, its history, and its ministries. He expressed gratitude for unity in the faith, evident in the assistance the FRCSA received from CRTS in training theological students. He outlined the need for financial support in South Africa for mission projects and described the inter-church relations of the FRCSA. The Rev. Adriano Gama, one of three delegates from the Reformed Churches of Brazil (IRB), addressed Synod, expressing gratitude for the relationship with the CanRC and the forty-eight years of work by the CanRC in Brazil. He also described the history of the IRB and some of its projects and ministries.

The Rev. Yonson Dethan, delegate from the Reformed Calvinist Churches in Indonesia (GGRC), was given the opportunity to address Synod. Besides passing on greetings, he expressed appreciation for the ties with the CanRC and regret over the fact that those ties have not yet become ones of ecclesiastical fellowship. He described the history of the GGRC, its Indonesian context, its current ministries and outreach projects, including its involvement with Smithville's mission work in Timor.

The Rev. Rinze IJbema and the Rev. Dr. Melle Oosterhuis, delegates from Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKv), also addressed Synod. Rev. IJbema brought greetings and described the origin of the relationship between GKv and the CanRC in 1952. He also expressed regret about the tension that exists between the GKv and the CanRC at this time and stated that the GKv would dearly love for the sister church relationship to continue. The Rev. Dr. Oosterhuis then addressed Synod, explaining the decisions of GS-GKv 2017 (Meppel), especially regarding hermeneutics as the background to GKv decisions that concern the CanRC.

On the third evening, the Rev. Hendrik Alkema, delegate from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, addressed Synod, expressing appreciation and gratitude for the close ties between the FRCA and CanRC. He described some of the many ways in which the two federations are connected. He spoke briefly of the development of the Australian *Book of Praise* and the study of the feasibility of training for the ministry in Australia. He also gave an overview of the inter-church relations of the FRCA. The Rev. Leo de Vos, delegate from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, described the history of Christianity in New Zealand and the blended character of the RCNZ. He gave an impression of church life in the RCNZ and expressed appreciation of the way in which the RCNZ and CanRC cooperate in mission in Papua New Guinea. The Rev. Bill Pols, delegate from the United Reformed Churches of North America, expressed appreciation for the ties between the URCNA and CanRC, describing how some of those ties are evident in church life. He outlined some of the recent developments in the URCNA, including the doctrinal affirmation on marriage and the introduction of the *Trinity Psalter-Hymnal*.

The last fraternal observer to address Synod on Thursday evening was the Rev. Bill Barron, from the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC). He spoke of the history of the ARPC and its current character. He described how the ARPC and RPCNA are growing together. He gave an impression of some of the works in the ARPC, including its education ministries and its mission projects.

On Monday evening, a letter of greeting was received from the Rev. Jack Sawyer on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Personal circumstances that arose at the time of Synod prevented him from coming. Hence the Rev. Holtvliuwer read the speech prepared by Rev. Sawyer. The history of the OPC was briefly described, followed by a description of ministries and current activities of the OPC.

It was good to hear about the gracious work of our Lord Jesus Christ in many countries and church federations. It was also a joy when Synod decided to maintain ecclesiastical fellowship between the CanRC and these various church federations and maintain our participation in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) as well as the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

## Reformed Churches in The Netherlands

One of the most difficult decisions which Synod had to make was, with sadness, to discontinue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands and to implore the Canadian Reformed Churches to continue in prayer for these churches. This decision came upon the recommendation of the subcommittee appointed by a previous synod to deal with the Dutch sister churches. In coming to this decision, Synod considered, that nothing in Rev. Oosterhuis' presentation showed that the sub-committee's outline of developments was inaccurate or that its assessment of these developments and their implications was in error. Synod also observed that sister churches from around the world have encouraged the GKv to rethink the course upon which they have gone, and yet in Synod Meppel 2017, the GKv were not convinced by the admonitions of their sister churches. And Synod noted that now these churches approve of developments contrary to the Lord's instruction in his Word; the marks of the true church cannot with confidence be said to be consistently present in these churches. Further, it considered that continuing a relation with the GKv would communicate that we are not sorely grieved by their recent decisions and are not earnest about our past letters and words of admonition. Conversely, severing the relation would communicate to our own members the need to be watchful that we in the Canadian Reformed Churches do not follow a similar path. At the same time, severing the relation would give encouragement to the faithful members in the GKv to take similar action. Lastly, it noted that the discontinuation of the relationship at this time is not irreversible. Should a future synod of the GKv give evidence that the churches have reversed their direction, the CanRC's can reestablish

relations. Synod also adopted the text of a letter to be sent to all the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv) and brought in person to their synod 2021.

## **New contacts and relationships**

Synod Edmonton did decide to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Calvinist Churches in Indonesia (GGRC). Synod also decided to extend ecclesiastical fellowship to the Reformed Churches Indonesia (GGRI) as a whole, being the federation of the churches in Kalimantan Barat (GGRI-KalBar), the churches in Nusa Tenggara Timur (GGRI-NTT), and the churches in Papua (GGRI-Papua). These decisions were a reason for thankfulness.

It was also decided to accept the invitation of the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC) and the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA) to enter into their Level One correspondence. The Committee for Contact with Churches in North America was mandated by Synod to engage in continued dialogue and contact with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America.

Synod decided to mandate the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) to continue contact with the Reformed Churches in Korea (RCK) and the Independent Reformed church of Korea (IRCK) where possible.

On another note, Synod decided to instruct two of its committees, the CRCA and the CCCNA, to jointly do a thorough study on how Article 50 CO can best be executed in today's ecclesiastical realities. This study would, among other things also indicate how these two committees might most effectively and efficiently work together. These two committees are to submit a report to the churches six months prior to the convening of the next synod.

## **Unity with the United Reformed Churches**

Synod decided that the coordinators for the committee for Church Unity have completed their mandate given by Synod Dunnville 2016 to seek ways to facilitate the work of building unity on the local level, as well as visiting churches and Classes of the URCNA, particularly in the United States. Also, the decision was made not to reappoint the Committee for Church Unity, (including the sub-committees – Church Order, Theological Education, Common Songbook, and Creeds and Forms).

General Synod, however, also expressed that the CanRC remain committed to the pursuit of unity with the United Reformed churches and are looking forward to re-engaging in this discussion when the URCNA is ready. Thus Synod

decided to continue ecclesiastical fellowship (phase 2) with the United Reformed Churches in North America under the adopted rules.

## **Committee for the official website**

Thanksgiving was expressed by Synod to those involved in the development and implementation of the new federation website. When perusing the website, you will find all the Acts of Synod Edmonton 2019 available for everyone to read. The committee was given a mandate to maintain the existing website and associate technical functions. Some of the technical functions associated with the website will be changed.

## **Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary**

The Board of Governors informed General Synod that it granted Dr. G. H. Visscher's request to retire upon the completion of the 2019-20 academic year. Synod approved of his retirement and expressed deep gratitude for his many years of faithful and diligent service to the Seminary and the churches as professor of New Testament and of his nine years as Principal of the Seminary. The Board of Governors was directed to appoint Dr. William Den Hollander of Langley as Professor of New Testament at CRTS. Dr. Den Hollander was able to visit and address Synod and inform the body of his acceptance of this position at CRTS.

The Synod received the report of the Board of Governors, in which it could be noted that CRTS continues to be a source of great blessing in the churches and to many others around the world. Synod appointed three new governors, the Rev. Rob Schouten, the Rev. Clarence Vandervelde, and br. Alan Datema. Thankfulness was expressed for the support of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the financial contributions of the Women's Savings action to the well-being of the Seminary.

Synod adopted a proposal which came from both Regional Synod East and West which gave permission to seminary students to pursue licensure following two years of study in the M.Div program. This permission to speak an edifying word in the church after two years was granted under several conditions. It was also decided to mandate the Committee for Pastoral Training Program, to continue with its present mandate by funding one full-summer internship for each M.Div. student of CRTS who aspires to ministry in the CanRCs, whether the internship occurs after the second or third year of a student's studies at CRTS. The PTP continues to function very well in the churches.

The Committee for the Needy Students Fund was instructed to seek advice, and if need be propose bylaw amendments to ensure that they remain in compliance



with the Canadian Income Tax Act (CRA regulations) and the Church Order.

### The Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*

Synod Edmonton made a number of recommendations with respect to the *Book of Praise*, including the one, which had also been given by previous synods: “Seek, receive, evaluate, and recommend proposals for changes to the hymn section to be compiled for possible submission to a future synod.” Connected with this recommendation that has great importance for the future of the *Book of Praise* in answer to an overture submitted by Regional Synod West 2018: This regional synod had sent an overture to General Synod 2019 to approve, in addition to the adopted *Book of Praise*, the Psalms and hymns of the *Trinity Psalter-Hymnal* (TPH; psalter-hymnal recently adopted by the OPC and URCNA) for use in public worship as per CO Article 55. Many churches made submissions interacting with this overture. General Synod decided to receive the overture submitted by RSW 2018 and to mandate the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* with the following:

Concerning Psalms: to seek input from the churches as to which non-Genevan renditions of the Psalms could be added to enhance the Psalm section of the BoP and to compile a list of suitable additional Psalm renditions for possible inclusion in the Book of Praise, using the TPH as a primary source.

Concerning Hymns: to seek input from the churches concerning replaceable and additional hymns for the 2014 Book of Praise, using the TPH as a primary resource: to compile a list of such hymns keeping in mind that at this time the final number of hymns in the Book

of Praise should not exceed 100 (as per GS 2004) and being flexible with the structural template (Apostles Creed) of the hymn-section of the 2014 *Book of Praise*.

Synod also gave the Committee the following instructions: to send, at least eighteen months before the next general synod, an explanatory report out to the churches together with a provisional list of songs for immediate testing in the worship services if so desired, so there can be well-considered feedback to the next general synod and to receive feedback from the churches on the Committee’s interim report and include its evaluation of that feedback along with actionable recommendations in its report six months before the next general synod.

This decision with respect to the overture from Regional Synod West 2018 was considered to serve as answer to several appeals/requests from a few churches.

### Concluding thoughts

We may give thanks to the Lord for the good working atmosphere among the delegates both while at work in committee and in plenary session. Under the capable leadership of the chairman Rev. Douwe Agema, General Synod could complete its work in eight days, making this Synod one of the shortest in recent times. May our Lord Jesus Christ bless the work of Synod Edmonton 2019 and may he also guide the churches as they consider and evaluate and implement the decisions that have been made by our broadest assembly. May the love of our Lord continue to rest on the churches represented at Synod Edmonton 2019.

Rev. John Louwerse  
Vice-chairman Synod 2019 