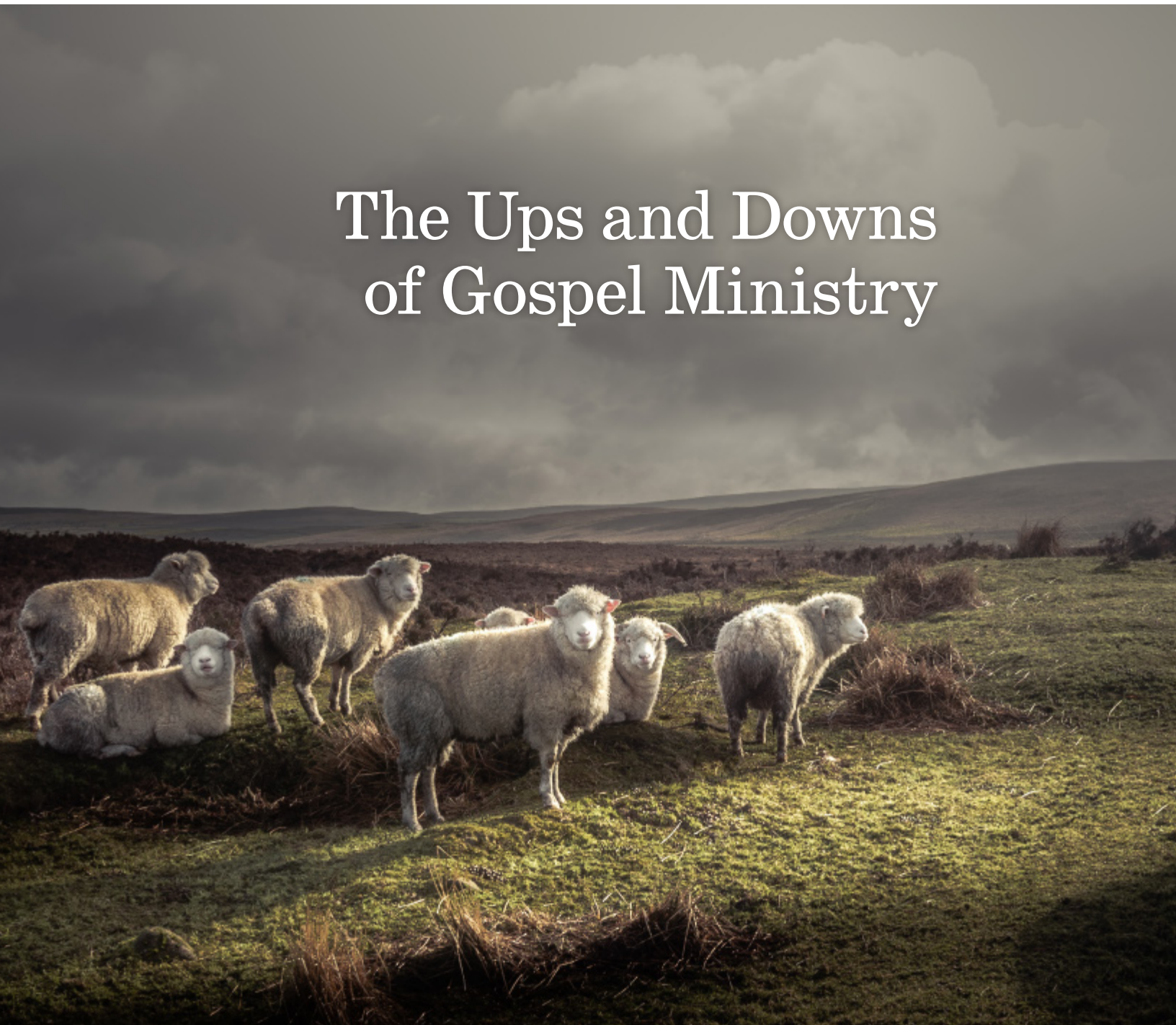


Clarion

The Ups and Downs of Gospel Ministry



Clarion

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

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

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

CLARION
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert AB T8N 5J5
Email: veenendaal@telus.net

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION Premier Printing Ltd. One Beghin Avenue
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What's Inside

This issue begins Volume 69 of *Clarion* with the lead article by our Editor-in-Chief, Dr. James Visscher. He reflects on the ups and downs of being a minister of God's Word.

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam is commencing a four-part series on "Children and the Lord's Supper."

News from the federation includes a report from Providence Canadian Reformed Church at Ancaster on the ordination of Dr. Jeff Temple. It is an interesting read: To date, this is the first successful use of Church Order Article 8 within the Canadian Reformed Churches! There is also a column for Mission News.

Our first Treasures, New & Old meditation of 2020 is written by George van Popta; he is also the author of a Canticle and a letter to the editor in this issue. In addition, Rev. Peter Holtvliuwer has reviewed Dr. Reuben Bredenhof's new book, *Hallowed*.

Laura Veenendaal

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James Visscher *Minister emeritus*
Canadian Reformed Church
Langley, British Columbia
jvisscher@telus.net

The Ups and Downs of Gospel Ministry

Has it ever struck you that almost everything you do in life has its ups and downs? Whether it has to do with daily living, a job, marriage, raising a family, being a church member, going on a holiday, or a hundred other things, you can be sure that there is no such thing as a perpetual high. Life is not lived in the stratosphere. Rather, our lives are filled with oscillation. They go up. They go down. There are happy days and sad ones, days of harmony and days of conflict, days of achievement and days of failure. Indeed, on a constant basis we are reminded in one way or another that we live fallen lives among fallen people in a fallen world.

The same applies to the ministry of the gospel. Yes, even to the ministry! How is it possible? Should this not be the one area of life that is exempt from fluctuation? Are men of God not a cut above the rest? Are they not supposed to be better, higher, and more spiritual?

If we think that then we need a wake-up call. For does the apostle Paul not remind us that “we have this treasure in jars of clay”? (2 Cor 4:7) We may look at Paul as if he is a super apostle, but he does not share our estimation. He calls himself nothing more than a “jar of clay.” He considers himself as little more than dirt. True, it is the kind of dirt that is pliable and has potential, but at bottom it is still a humbling comparison.

What a glorious privilege it is to handle the Word of truth on an ongoing basis!

Hence ups and downs are part of life. They are even part and parcel of ministerial life. How so? In what way? Well, let’s take a closer look first at the “ups” and then at the “downs.”

Exploring the ups

The preaching of the gospel

If you ask me, “what is the greatest ‘up’ or positive of being a minister?” I would reply that it has everything to do with the ministry of gospel. The fact that God in his great wisdom and mercy allows men to preach the great news of Jesus Christ and him crucified is something astounding. What is man that he is worthy of such an honour and privilege? If God had assigned this task only to angels, we would understand. The fact that he assigns it also to people is incomprehensible. Nevertheless, this is precisely what he does. God calls men and tells them to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2).

Long ago Isaiah the prophet was heard to proclaim, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (Isa 52:7). I once heard a preacher expound on these

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd
lays down his life for the sheep” (JOHN 10:11)



words. He spent a lot of time on mountains and some time on feet, but the thrust of this text is about neither. It is about the messenger who comes, even over the mountains, and who brings a glorious message filled with peace, happiness, salvation, and God.

And that is precisely what a preacher may do Sunday after Sunday. Indeed, that is precisely what a minister must do Sunday after Sunday. It is not his task to recycle the daily news or to entertain the crowd. It is not his job to make the listeners feel good about themselves and build up their self-esteem. It is also not his calling to give a new spin to popular passages. No, it is his duty to open the Word, to read it, to expound it, and to drive it into the hearts of his listeners.

This is about the Word, and what a treasure it is! When I started my ministry more than forty-five years ago, I was warned that after about a year I would get that preached-out feeling. And there is some truth to that. Thankfully, that dry time did not last too long and it was on to one discovery in the Word after another.

Upon entering the ministry, more than a few young men are filled with over-confidence and think that they are going to do one better than all of the “old guys.” So, they proceed to preach on what they deem to be one crucial issue after another. Only, over time, their list of hobby horses comes to an end, and what then? Then they need to shift gears and deal with the true reality of weekly, steady preaching.

Thankfully, many of them make the shift and adapt. They get humbled by the Word, by the congregation, and by time. As well, they grow in appreciation for the Word – its depth, its

beauty, its variety, its message. What a glorious privilege it is to handle the Word of truth on an ongoing basis! Truly, it is an inexhaustible treasure!

Working among God's people

Another privilege attached to the ministry is that you get to work among God's people. There is diversity, as we mentioned, in the Word, but there is also diversity among God's people. Young, old, male, female, educated, not so educated, soft-spoken, out-spoken, passive personalities, aggressive ones. The diversity is endless. God's sheep come in all shapes, sizes, and dispositions. No two are alike.

So how does a minister handle such diversity? By loving them all! Indeed, if you do not love people, you should not be in the ministry. I have known colleagues who loved their books but not their people. They retreated to their office and away from people with a mighty sigh of relief. And then they were perplexed when their sermons never landed. No wonder! To preach well means knowing the Word well and knowing your people well.

In this regard, as in so many other things, we need to listen to the voice of our Saviour. He called himself many things, and among them all there is this self-designation – “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14). You cannot be a really “good” shepherd unless you know your sheep. You need to know them. Oh, and how well Christ knows them.

But he does more than just know them, he also loves them. No sacrifice is too much, not even the sacrifice of his own life. “I

am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

One of the most distressing pictures that we come across in the New Testament is the one you can find in Matthew 9. It says there, "When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep *without a shepherd*" (Matt 9:36). Sheep need a shepherd. Above all, they need the great Shepherd, but they need the lesser shepherds too. In due time, Christ gave his church not just apostles and prophets, but also "shepherds and teachers" (Eph 4:11). So, we, lesser and little shepherds, need to emulate, as much as we can, the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ. Know the sheep; help the sheep; love the sheep.

In a variety of ways, he teaches us that truly his grace is always sufficient and his ways are often surprising

now of deacons and elders and working together with them. I am also thinking of a wider team of colleagues. In some of our larger churches, two pastors get to work closely together. In other churches, a single pastor may be so blessed as to have other pastors nearby and even develop a relationship with them. Teamwork is a great thing.

Naturally, I realize that not everyone will agree with me. Some pastors prefer to be Lone Rangers and thus work by themselves. I happen to disagree. I have always found it to be a real blessing and an encouragement to be part of a team of office bearers. Sitting around a table, reading the Word, calling on the Lord, and then dealing with pastoral matters and issues together, what an invigorating thing!

Pastoring the youth

A third privilege of being in the ministry is that you get to work with young people. The church as such is composed of all kinds of people, but there can be little doubt that young people form a special group. Their enthusiasm, their fluctuating hormones, their frankness, their unruliness, their sullenness too at times, all of that makes them a lively and challenging bunch to pastor.

But how to do that? The first thing is that you need to get to know them, and here the catechism classes that you teach play a role. By teaching young people on a weekly basis you get to know their names, their personalities, and their needs. This means that these classes should not just be like lecture halls where the teacher drones on and on and the students write down word for word. No, it means imparting biblical truths in a lively, flexible, and often interactive manner. Confront your students with the truth. Question them. Provoke them, if need be, to get a response. Learn what lives in them and try to draw it out. Find ways to shape their thinking and push it into a biblical direction. Seek to open minds, to mould hearts, and to build personality.

A tall task? Indeed, and sometimes a most frustrating one as well. Still, the effort is worth it. There is nothing quite like seeing young lives begin to flower and mature in the ways of the Lord.

Being part of a team

At first sight this may seem like a strange privilege. What's so great about being part of a team? What team? I am thinking

And is that not what the Lord wants to see as well? When he appoints special offices in the church, he does not merely appoint one. No, he appoints a whole bunch, whether they be kings, priests, and prophets, or apostles, prophets, and evangelists, or pastors, elders, and deacons. In short, the biblical model has never been a one-man model. It has always been a variety of officers working together for the common good of God's people.

Yes, and when all of the brothers around the table buy into the same vision and work towards the same goal, what a joy and a pleasure it can be to serve. Iron sharpens iron, they say, and that applies just as much in the church as in the world.

Endless variety

I have never been a doctor, a lawyer, an accountant, or a carpenter, but I would think that it is hard to beat the variety that one finds in the ministry. No day is ever the same. No week is a duplicate of another. No month is a carbon copy of the last month. The Bible passages to preach on, the students you teach, the visits you make, the issues that come up, they are forever changing.

They are also forever coming. Over the years, whenever things were quiet in the church, I learned to say to my wife and fellow office bearers, "Let's enjoy this time, because it surely will not last." And do you know what? It never did! It was always the quiet before the noise and the peace before the storm.

Now, some people hate that. They cannot handle it. And I would say that if you are that type of person, then the ministry is not

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” PHIL 4:13

for you. On the other hand, if you can cope with the variety and once in a while deal with the storms, it can prove enriching. I firmly believe that there are those times when God stretches us beyond our comfort zones and what we think are our capacities. In a variety of ways, he teaches us that truly his grace is always sufficient and his ways are often surprising. The apostle Paul puts it well when he writes, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13).

Thus far then the “ups” of gospel ministry. Now, we will have a look at the “downs.”

Exploring the downs

Inadequacy

When one begins to look at the other and darker side of the ministry, there are any number of things that come to mind. Speaking personally, the biggest thing that has always bothered me has to do with a sense of inadequacy. Here you have this glorious task given to you by the Lord and then you take a good, hard, honest look at yourself, and what do you see? You see weakness after weakness.

Take the preaching as a case in point. Every preacher worth his salt aims to feed his congregation the best spiritual food. You aim for sermons that are faithful, encouraging, comforting, challenging, interesting, and up-building. Do you always succeed? Hardly! So often one is overwhelmed with a feeling of failure or of not doing justice to the text. Ministers call sermons that do not land “duds” and, unfortunately, we all crank out our share of them.

Only to this confession a proviso needs to be added, and it is this: “Give thanks to the Holy Spirit.” On more than one occasion I have come off the pulpit with a sense of failure, only to hear members say, “Thanks, pastor, that was a great sermon!” So how can this be? How can it be that something that brings me down brings others up? It can only be the Holy Spirit turning a dud into a gem. I have no other explanation.

Never done

Of course, the high expectations related to preaching is not the only thing that can overwhelm and depress a pastor. Something else can as well. It is the feeling that you are never done.

I am the kind of person who makes lists. Regularly I used to sit down in my study and write out a “To Do List.” Even in retirement I still make them. Perhaps you are like me.

So, you have your list and what do you do but work down it and scratch off the one task after the other. And then at last you come to the end. The list is done. Or is it? For no sooner is it done, and a new list has to be made – more sermons to prepare, more visits to make, more articles to write, more people to teach. It just goes on and on, and it never, ever ends. Now, that can be tiring and, at times, discouraging as well.

Over the years I have mastered the art of hidden smiles. What are those? Those are the kind that crop up when I hear an elder or deacon say when their three-year term is up, “I am done! I am going to enjoy a real break!” Then I say to myself, “You may be done, but it seems as if I am never done.” I force myself to make that a smile moment and not a sour one.

Difficult people

Earlier I mentioned it as a plus the fact that a minister may work among God’s people. Yet that is a statement that may need some qualification, as in “It is a plus to work among *most* of God’s people.” For the reality is that not all God’s people are easy to love and easy to pastor. My father used to say in Dutch after a difficult elder visit, “Our Lord has some really odd boarders.”

How true that is! I remember well starting out as a young pastor and one thing I received from the consistory was a list. It was a list of members who had not been faithful in coming to Lord’s Day worship (or in much else). So off I went calling on house after house. It all went about as well as could be expected until I came to a house where the unbelieving husband of the wife, who was a not so regular member, met me at the door and told me, “If you ever ring my door bell again, I will greet you with my shotgun.” How’s that for a warm greeting?

Or what about the lady who was looking daggers at me every Sunday while I preached and whom I decided to visit? No sooner was I over the threshold of her house and she proceeded to unload on me for two hours. Everything that she deemed to be wrong in the church was my fault, even though I had only been her pastor for a number of months.

Or what about the person you spend untold hours counseling but who then, when things do not go their way, proceed to blacken your name and besmirch your reputation? Or what about the people you try so hard to help and all you get is grief?

Over the years then I have had to deal with any number of difficult people. Unfortunately, they are not just their own worst enemies, they also exact a toll on your enthusiasm and peace of mind as a pastor.

Sad events

Another downer, if I may call it that, is that as a pastor you also need to be prepared to deal with any number of sad and distressing events and situations. Some ministers keep track of how many sermons, weddings, baptisms, and funerals they have done. I never bothered. All I can say is that over the years I have made countless hospital visits, been at many death beds, officiated at innumerable funerals, comforted (or tried to) any number of people.

Now, when the saints are old and have lived a long life, death takes on a different character than if it is one who is young or in the prime of life. It is always different too when death happens as the result of accident, murder, or suicide.

The latter ones weigh the heaviest. I had been in the ministry only a year and an eighteen-year-old girl in my congregation was in an accident. She flew out the back window of a truck, hit the road, broke her neck, was rushed to the hospital, had pins put in her head to immobilize it, and a few days later, she died. What a sadness and a sorrow! Broken parents, broken siblings, broken friends. And a pastor to administer comfort who was still wet behind the ears. What a situation and a stress! These, and many more, represent the dark, hard days of ministry.

Same old, same old

And then there are those situations that just keep on repeating themselves. You are confronted with a difficult pastoral situation, try to give it the best biblical counsel that you can, attend no end of meetings, listen patiently, and pray fervently. In the end, you think that you are making progress, and then everything falls apart and the whole cycle begins again.

When that happens, you begin to think of the book of Ecclesiastes, "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?" (1:2, 3).

Criticism

Let me wrap it up with one last "downer" and it has to do with criticism. As a pastor, you have to learn to live with it and not let it get to you. Easier said than done, right? True, so you need to develop strategies to deal with it.

Serving the Lord,
preaching the Word,
shepherding the
flock of Christ -
what a life!

The first strategy that I use is to weigh all criticism seriously. Do not just dismiss it as inaccurate, exaggerated, and vindictive. When someone criticizes you, it is incumbent upon you to listen well, to search your heart, and to examine your actions. In my first congregation, an elderly man once took me aside and wanted to talk to me about my prayers in the worship services. He said that I used the name of God "Lord" so often in public prayer that it came across in a rather unthinking and disrespectful manner. It was as if I was using the name


of God as a comma, a pause, or an exclamation mark. And, after due reflection, I have to say that he was right! I revised my prayers. Thank you, brother!

The second strategy in dealing with criticism is to ask your wife. Now, if your wife worships the ground you walk on that may not work, but if she can be somewhat of an objective judge, she can help you lots. We all fall into bad habits and we all need correction from time to time. "Oh, that hurts!" you say, and especially when it comes from a loved one. True enough, but it is still necessary.

The third strategy is to go to your elders. Whenever a parishioner dumped on me and both I and my wife questioned the validity of the criticism, I went to the elders. I would lay the matter before them as accurately and objectively as possible and ask them to tell me whether I was right or wrong. I would also add, "Do not spare me. If I need to hear something unpleasant, tell me anyway."

The fourth strategy is to realize that in the end you have only one boss. If you, your wife, and your elders have all come to the conclusion that the criticism is just, take your lumps and change. On the other hand, if everyone deems it to be unjust, keep on doing what you are doing and remember that ultimately you have only one to whom you answer, and that is the Lord. If you can square it with him, then do not fear, and sleep well.

Adding it all up

Finally, you may wonder if after all this negative stuff, the ministry is still worth it. To answer that, I can turn to an old military advertisement which had as slogan, "There is no life like it." In spite of all of the hard and challenging things that can and do happen, the good things still outweigh them all. Serving the Lord, preaching the Word, shepherding the flock of Christ - what a life! 

Trust in the Lord

"Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore." (Psalm 125:1-2)

Do you trust in the Lord? We so easily place our trust elsewhere, don't we? Are we really so different from the children of Israel? Shortly after God had led them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, the children of Israel placed their trust in a golden calf. Moses was up the mountain receiving the law from God while the children of Israel were down below running riot, worshipping a statue of a calf. They called the golden calf their "god," who had brought them out of Egypt. Foolishly they placed their trust in it.

Idolatry was a snare to the children of Israel in each following generation. It is a snare to us. Remember how the Heidelberg Catechism defines idolatry: "Idolatry is having or inventing something in which to put our trust instead of, or in addition to, the only true God who has revealed himself in his Word" (Q/A 95).

The key word there is "trust" – as it is the key word in the opening line of Psalm 125. Again, the question: Do you *trust* in the LORD? Can you say what the children of Israel sang in Psalm 20: "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

The Lord is trustworthy. You know that, don't you? Even if you have faced trouble of all sorts in your life, the Lord is worthy of your trust. You can depend upon him and confide in him. Do so, and you will not be disappointed. He will not let you down. His eye is on the little sparrow! His eye is on you, and he inclines his ear towards you.


Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which is immovable and remains forever. Mount Zion was the stronghold that King David had seized from the Jebusites and made to be his own stronghold. He built his palace there but, even more importantly, he moved the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant there. It is where both the Lord and his anointed king dwelt in the midst of the people.

Mount Zion also came to be called "Jerusalem," which means "city of peace," and it became the place of worship. All of Israel's

religious life was focussed there. It was where their hearts were. They may have been far away in another part of the land, or beyond, for the better part of a year, but their hearts were in Jerusalem, on Mount Zion.

Just like Mount Zion was immovable, so are those who trust in the Lord immovable. Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem so the Lord surrounds his people.

What does this mean for us today? Today Mount Zion is in heaven, where Jesus is, as we learn from Hebrews 12: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ... and to Jesus."

Those who trust in the Lord Jesus are immovable. Immovable because the Lord Jesus is immovable. Hebrews 13:8 says that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Look to him, dear reader. If you place your trust in him, then you will have placed your trust in the unchanging anointed King Jesus. Let your heart be where he is. Then you will, by faith, already be in the heavenly Mount Zion. Then you will not be moved but will abide forever, from this time forth and forevermore. 

For further study

1. What does Proverbs 3:5-6 teach us about trusting the Lord? What is the opposite of trusting the Lord?
2. How was Jesus mocked, in Matthew 27:43, for trusting in God? Was his trust misplaced?



George van Popta Minister emeritus
Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church,
Ottawa, Ontario
gvanpopta@gmail.com



Cornelis Van Dam *Professor emeritus Old Testament*
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

Children and the Lord's Supper (Part 1 of 4)

Should children be admitted to participate in the Lord's Supper? Put more precisely, should children by virtue of the fact that they are covenant children have a right to this sacrament? The question came up during last year's annual January conference of our seminary on children and the church and it is a real issue in Reformed circles in The Netherlands. The consistory of the Koepelkerk in Arnhem, one of our former Dutch sister churches, decided to allow children to partake. The rationale according to the report in *Nederlands Dagblad* (June 11, 2019) appears to be that children belong to the body of Christ. That fact is more important than understanding the meaning of the Lord's Supper. According to the same report, there are apparently one or two other congregations in the same federation that admit children to this sacrament. In other news, when our former sister churches and the Netherlands Reformed Churches unite in 2023, the proposed church order will allow child participation. There has been room for this in the Netherlands Reformed Churches for many years.

One of the major arguments for the inclusion of children is that they were part of the Passover celebration in the Old Testament. So why can they not participate in the Lord's Supper, which is a fulfillment of the Passover? It has even been said that we are Reformed with infant baptism but Baptist when denying paedocommunion, the practice of allowing children at the Lord's Table. Is this true or is this a superficial way of reasoning? This four-part series of articles¹ will examine this issue and consider the biblical evidence for the Passover and the Lord's

Supper with a view to determining whether there is biblical justification for our current practice.

The Passover in Egypt

The Lord had commanded that on the final night that Israel was in Egyptian bondage, each household was to slaughter, roast, and eat a lamb along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The blood of the lamb was to be spread on the door frames of the home and everyone was to remain indoors until morning. The Lord would go through Egypt to kill all its first born, but he would pass over the homes with the blood on the door posts and save the first born of those families from death. This Passover was clearly a family event. The use of the term "household" (Exod 12:3-4) and the mention of children who could ask about the significance of this meal (Exod 12:26) make this familial character of the meal

clear. This does not, however, mean that every young infant or child necessarily partook. It would be difficult to imagine infants typically weaned at the age three and thus unaccustomed to solid food to share in lamb and bitter herbs.

At the same time, this celebration was more than a family event. In God's eyes, this meal was also a congregational happening. "The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel" (Exod 12:6, 47) was involved. Those not part of the covenant community had to be circumcised first before being allowed to share in this meal (Exod 12:48). This was therefore a covenant meal of the

The original family setting was pushed into the background

1. These articles are a shortened and popular version of a chapter on this issue that will appear in the forthcoming publication of the speeches of the 2019 CRTS conference which had the theme: "'Do Not Hinder Them': Children and the Church."

people of God and children who were old enough to handle the food participated in this meal as members of the covenant by circumcision. Similar Passover feasts were held in the wilderness (Num 9:1-5) and on the plains of Jericho after Israel had crossed the Jordan (Josh 5:10-12).

We can assume that all these Passovers were celebrated within the context of the home and family. With the settlement in the Promised Land, some important changes took place.

The Passover at the central sanctuary

In preparation for the time that Israel would be in the land of Canaan, the Lord gave modified instructions for the celebration of the Passover which deviated significantly from the rules of Exodus 12. Once Israel was in the Promised Land, the killing and consuming of the sacrificial lamb was no longer to take place at home but at the central sanctuary. "You shall offer the Passover sacrifice to the Lord your God, from the flock or the herd, at the place that the Lord will choose, to make his name dwell there" (Deut 16:2). Indeed, "You may not offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you" (Deut 16:5). With the Passover taken out of the homes, the blood could no longer be spread on the door frames of the houses. Instead, it was sprinkled on the side of the altar as was customary for the sin offerings (2 Chron 35:11; cf. 29:22).

This change of venue for the Passover celebration from the home to the tabernacle or temple meant that the original family setting was pushed into the background. The new location for the feast had consequences for who would regularly attend such Passover sacrifices. God commanded that "three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths" (Deut 16:16; also Exod 23:17; 34:23). Although the Passover is not specifically mentioned, it was included with the Feast of Unleavened Bread which followed it (Exod 12:14-15; Lev 23:5-6). Consequently, the two feasts are sometimes identified with each other (Luke 22:1).


With the centralization of worship, the Passover became a pilgrimage festival to which, judging from the Hebrew word used, only the mature males were required to attend (Exod 23:17; 34:23; Deut 16:16). So, what would be considered a mature male in ancient Israel? The biblical record suggests the age of twenty. One indicator out of many is that all those twenty

and older who rebelled in the wilderness were held responsible for their actions and were excluded from entry into the Promised Land (Num 14:29-31). They were expected to have the necessary discernment. Those below the age of twenty "have no knowledge of good and evil" (Deut 1:39). Other indications of twenty as the age of maturity include the fact that those twenty and older were included in the census of the people of Israel and had the obligation to "give the Lord's offering" (Exod 30:14). That was also the age for military service (Num 1:3).

Although only mature males were commanded to go and were thus expected, it is conceivable that women and even children would attend when possible. After all, the celebration of the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths at the central sanctuary was expected to include sons and daughters, as well as others (Deut 16:9-15; cf. 12:7). In any case, the Passover was no longer legally characterized as a nuclear family event. The national dimensions of the feast were in the forefront.

The Passover in New Testament times

Luke informs us that the parents of Jesus "went up to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when [Jesus] was twelve years old, they went up according to custom" (Luke 2:41-42). Rather than honouring the minimum of the law with respect to the Passover, the entire family went up to Jerusalem from Nazareth. Such a journey was a considerable undertaking on foot. It would have taken three or four days to travel the approximately one hundred and twenty-eight kilometers involved. Much has been made of the age of Jesus being twelve, as if it marked a beginning of adulthood and was somehow related to the age of accountability. However, Jesus is described as a baby (Luke 2:16), a little child (Luke 2:40), and a child or boy (Luke 2:43), that is, one below the age of puberty. He is not yet a man at this particular Passover. In view of the customs of the time as noted above, it is probably deducing too much from the text to assume that this was the first time that Jesus was at a Passover in Jerusalem. In any case, for our purposes, it makes little difference whether this was his first trip or not. Jesus as a young boy partook of the Passover festivities.

If this is the case, why can children today not attend the Lord's Supper? To answer that question, we need to see clearly how the Lord's Supper relates to the Passover. *More about that next time.* 

Providence Receives a New Pastor!

Road to filling the vacancy

On September 19, 2015, Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Ancaster took up the new status of being a vacant church after Dr. W. Bredenhof preached his farewell sermon. Dr. Bredenhof had served faithfully, for six years, as the Minister of the Word for Providence since September 2009.

After five calls were extended and declined, the Calling Committee proposed a different idea. To give some background, a proposal had been submitted by Pilgrim Church in London to Classis Ontario West for a brother in their congregation to be examined by Classis with the view of entering the ministry via Article 8 of the Church Order. This brother was Dr. Jeffrey Temple.

After both Classis Ontario West and Regional Synod East approved the proposal from Pilgrim Church in London, the road became open for Dr. Temple to be examined. On September 19, 2018, Dr. Temple took and sustained the preparatory examination. As a result, Dr. Temple was given permission to speak an edifying word in the churches of Classis Ontario West, as stipulated in Article 8.

Following the September 19, 2018 classis, Providence Canadian Reformed Church extended an offer for an internship to Dr. Temple. This internship included regular preaching, attending consistory meetings, and visiting within the congregation. Included in this internship was the benefit of having Rev. George van Popta as a mentor. Over the next number of months, Dr. Temple laboured faithfully within the congregation and the members were built up by his preaching.

At the Classis Ontario West meeting on May 15, 2019, Classis concurred with the report from the Deputies for Examinations and Dr. Temple was declared eligible for call in the churches as per Article 8 of the Church Order. To date, this is the only successful use of Article 8 within the Canadian Reformed Churches. A momentous occasion and much reason for thankfulness to the



Lord! Immediately following this classis, Providence Canadian Reformed Church extended a call to Dr. Temple. On June 29, 2019, Dr. Temple notified the Providence Consistory that he accepted the call extended to him.

Much work still remained ahead for Dr. Temple, as his focus now shifted to preparing for the peremptory examination. At the Classis Ontario West meeting on September 25, 2019, Dr. Temple took his peremptory examination. The Lord blessed his efforts and, after successfully sustaining this exam, the way became clear for Dr. Temple to be ordained as pastor.

Ordination and inaugural services

On October 6, 2019, the Providence congregation gathered together in the Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church building for the morning worship service. Ancaster Consistory with the Deacons graciously allowed our congregations to swap buildings for the day with the expectation that there would be many guests for this momentous occasion. This concern was warranted, as many members of the Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church in London joined us in worship to witness



God's Word, God's people, God's worship, and prayer to God: There's a theme through this of being fed. Like feeding our own bodies, it keeps them alive and allows them to grow. Similarly, these forms of devotion through the power of the Holy Spirit kept the congregation alive and allowed it to grow.

Welcome evening - Oct 19, 2019

On Saturday, October 19, the Providence congregation gathered together for an evening of fellowship to welcome our new pastor and his family. Dr. Temple, along with his wife Michelle and their three children, Aidan, Ben, and Brynn, were already quite well known amongst our congregation, but we still wanted to give them a proper pastor's welcome!

Joel van Popta emceed the evening. After opening with Scripture reading and prayer, he invited the congregation to sing from Psalm 84:1, 2. Various musical groups from the congregation were introduced and displayed their many talents. The Junior, Intermediate, and Adult Choirs ably sang for the Temple family and were accompanied by a very talented symphony. The Women's Society serenaded everyone with "My Favourite Things: Providence Edition."

Given the fact that Dr. Temple had not attended the Seminary, some seminary students from our congregation felt that he had missed a few important points. Dathan Pleiter, Bryan Vanderhorst, and Rodney denBoer thought they would bring Dr. Temple up to speed and performed for us the "Seminary Rhapsody." While Dathan "layed down the beat" with his b-boxing, the Trio gave us a hip hop style view of the goings-on of the Seminary. Two topics I never would have expected to write in the same sentence! While they received glowing applause and rave reviews, I believe this appearance was a one-time only event. If you ever catch up with them you'll have to ask them about "*Cogitationes Gravis!*"

The Hospitality Committee split the congregation into groups and had us compete in "The Providence Game." This game consisted of hand-drawn symbols and/or caricatures that related to members of the congregation. Each team competed to determine the family name these drawings were about.

After all the celebration and games, the Calling Committee presented the Temples with a painting which was of the text from the inaugural sermon from Dr. Temple. A special piece!

Dr. Temple closed the meeting with prayer after expressing words of gratitude to the congregation and thanks to our Heavenly Father for his guiding hand. Everyone joined in singing from Hymn 85:1, 3. 🎵

this historic occasion. It was Pilgrim Church of London, after all, who initiated this process, so it was nice to see so many of their members in attendance.

Appropriately, being Dr. Temple's mentor throughout the internship, Rev. George van Popta led us in worship for the morning service. He delivered a sermon prepared on the text of Acts 2:40-41. The theme of the sermon was, "One who is called to be a minister of the Word and Sacraments is called to an awesome gospel-oriented task." Through this sermon, he articulated three points: 1. The gospel message to which he bears witness; 2. The exhortation he must continuously speak; 3. The fruit he may thankfully harvest. Peter here was bearing witness to the mighty works of God. Peter spoke of all the redemptive deeds that Christ did: from his life to his crucifixion and death to his resurrection and ascension, all the way to his return on the clouds of heaven. Our minister will lay before us the good works that have been done before us by God. He will speak to us about the full redemption work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We cannot save ourselves. What must we do to be saved? Repent and be baptized and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We need to embrace the one who first embraced us. We need to be reminded weekly for repentance and that our eyes need to be lifted up to our Lord Jesus Christ, so that when our Saviour returns we may be found looking up. The Word is a pastor's only tool. Not all will receive and believe the Word preached, but many will believe. We will experience hatred and scorn from false churches around us, but we stand with the right man, Jesus Christ! Following the sermon from Rev. van Popta, the ordination of Dr. Temple took place.

In the afternoon service, Dr. Temple proclaimed the Word from Acts 2:42. Continuing on from the morning service, he brought forward the theme "Distinguished By Devotion." In his message, Dr. Temple connected that Paul likened Christians to athletes. It is good to remind ourselves to get back to basics, to get back to the fundamentals. There is an entire industry on how to "do church." Dr. Temple went on to explain how the primitive church was distinguished by a four-fold devotion: to the apostles teaching; to each other because of a shared inheritance in Christ; to breaking bread with the Lord's Supper; to prayer.



By Janet VanGoolen

On behalf of the Board of Mission Timor

Visit to the Mission Field

WEST TIMOR, INDONESIA, JUNE 2019

Above: the Pili-Fatukusi church building

Persecution of Christ's church — What does it look like from the inside?

From time to time we receive reports from Rev. Edwer Dethan, Smithville's missionary to West Timor, Indonesia, telling us that certain mission posts or instituted churches of the Reformed Churches of Indonesia in Timor (GGRI-T) are under a real threat of persecution. Some of their churches have been shut down by the local military and government and some of their members have had their livelihoods destroyed. Yes, the Reformed faith that we enjoy here in North America is no longer welcomed in some villages.

Two members of the Smithville Mission Board travelled to West Timor in June of 2019. After a total flight time of twenty-four

hours and almost 18,000 kilometres, we finally landed in Kupang. We were met by Rev. Dethan, who drove us to meet the rest of the family, his wife Femmy and his children, Moses, Grace, Micah, Sam, and Aizaach.

On Sunday we visited the Pili-Fatukusi congregation, a two-and-a-half-hour drive from the Dethan home, deep in mountainous jungle. With the asphalt long behind us, we travelled down dirt roads, across a dry riverbed, and up the side of a mountain, until we finally arrived a little behind schedule, but not too late since the whole congregation was waiting for us to arrive. A group of fifty members, very welcoming! After the service, we were given the opportunity to share our story and give encouragement to them. They had been dealing with the threats of the Liberal (State) church who had been distributing a fraudulent letter with

forged Fatukusi church elders' signatures to the local authorities and saying the church was illegal and disruptive. It was a comfort to them that they are not alone, but that there are brothers and sisters in the world who believe the true gospel as well and pray for them. After lunch, we were invited to a meeting at the village well where a petition was being signed by village leaders and members acknowledging that the letter was fraudulent and the church was not being disruptive to their community.

We thought that everything has settled down until we received an email from Rev. Dethan a month later, after we had returned home again.

Thank you very much for your prayers. It is really quite scary at this moment especially for the Fatukusi congregation. Last Sunday they were able to worship in their church but were scared of police coming to check up on them. The leaders of church are also very unsure of what to do since they also must obey the government. Apparently it was a leader from the Liberal church who lives in Kupang with family connections with the Fatukusi people who sent the authorities into the area. According to them, the church does not have enough families by government standards to have their own church. The leaders of Fatukusi had to sign a letter stating that the activities of the Reformed church would stop and that members go back to the Liberal churches. The leaders disagreed, did not want to sign but were forced to do so. The church leaders are now looking to involve the media or others to bring this misuse of government power to light. At this moment, the worship services in the Reformed church take place in people's homes instead of in the church building. They will have to remain worshipping in this manner until things quiet down. Please continue to hold this in your prayers.

In September, we received a further update that an elder's farmhouse which stores equipment and provides shelter during harvest time was burned down. This included the water pump used to draw water from the river. A big tragedy for this family who lost their source of income! Despite this loss they are encouraged to know that our Heavenly Father keeps track of what goes on and at the same time they trust that he will carry them through this. We were encouraged to remember them in our prayers that they remain steadfast as the attacks become more vicious.

And the persecution continues. What has triggered all this? Over the past years, the instituted churches and mission posts, thanks to God and the continuing work of Rev. Dethan and his colleagues, continue to grow and spread in West Timor. This is done mostly by word of mouth but also through Radio Sahabat 102.7 FM and the Reformed Torch magazine. Many people want


to join the Reformed churches. They now love and treasure the Reformed faith and want to stay Reformed at all costs. In the case of the church at Fatakusi, the church members find the Reformed teachings precious and dear to their hearts. They would do anything to speak out even if it means giving up their lives for the gospel.

In our Western world, we also notice some of our freedoms slowly being taken away, especially our freedom of speech where it concerns faith or moral issues. We can no longer speak or write openly about our faith or beliefs on homosexuality, abortion, and gender identity for fear of hatred and repercussions. Often, we are called "old fashioned" or "fundamentalist" Christians with outdated ideas. We feel that we must learn to get along with everyone without stepping on anyone's toes. Often to our shame, we do not dare speak out for fear that we lose our job or experience hatred or abuse in the workplace. How humbled we should be when we hear of Christians around the world who hold their faith so precious that they are willing to suffer and die rather than deny their Saviour!

Let us not lose heart but be comforted by Martin Luther's Hymn 53:3. We know that the battle has been won already in Christ.

*And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear for God has willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure;
One little word shall fell him.*

This trip was an amazing experience for us and a real eye opener! We truly have a new-found appreciation for the work being done there and are amazed at the Lord's work and faithfulness to his people. We must both admit that we were a little unsure, uncomfortable, and anxious about going, but in the end, it was a trip that we will not forget.

Please continue to pray for our Indonesian brothers and sisters in West Timor. To God be all praise and glory! 

To support the work that **Rev. Edwer Dethan** is doing in **West Timor**, please send your donations to:

Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville
PO Box 268, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0.

Please make your cheques payable to:
Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville and note
"Mission Timor" in the memo line. Thank you.



Clarion

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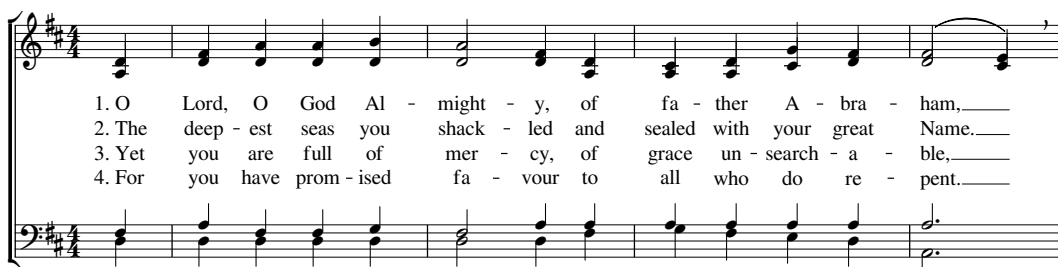
Part 1 of 3: *Ascription of Praise*

This prayer, though apocryphal, is a classic prayer of repentance attributed by tradition to Manasseh, a wicked king of Judah (2 Chr 33:1-11), who pleaded God's forgiveness for his many sins, and was shown mercy (2 Chr 33:12-20).

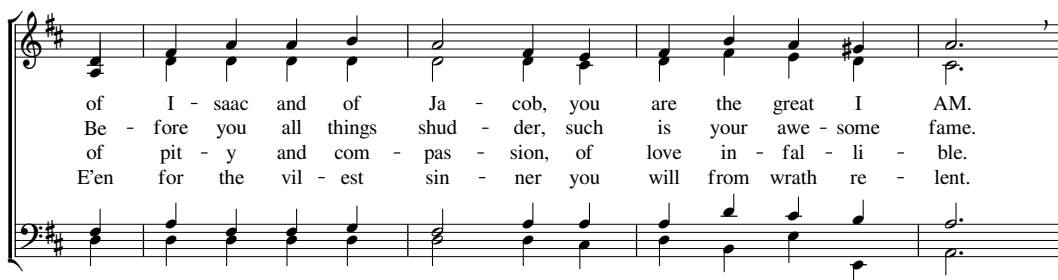
George van Popta, 2019

(Tune: Missionary Hymn)

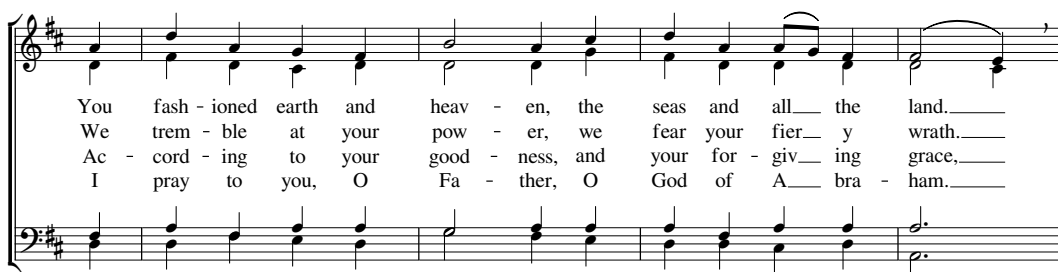
Lowell Mason, 1823



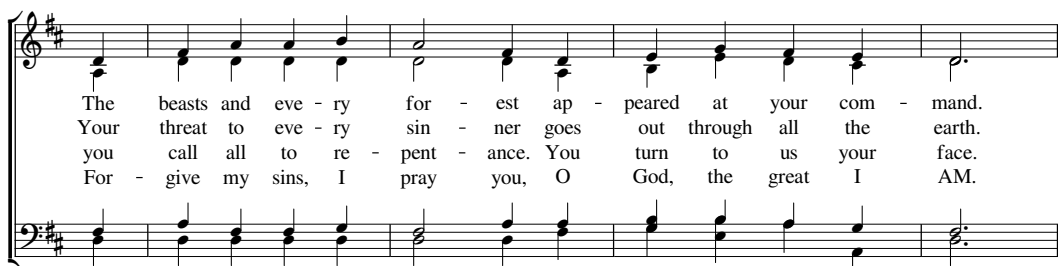
1. O Lord, O God Al - might - y, of fa - ther A - bra - ham,____
 2. The deep - est seas you shack - led and sealed with your great Name.____
 3. Yet you are full of mer - cy, of grace un - search - a - ble,____
 4. For you have prom - ised fa - vour to all who do re - pent.____



of I - saac and of Ja - cob, you are the great I AM.
 Be - fore you all things shud - der, such is your awe - some fame.
 of pit - y and com - pas - sion, of love in - fal - li - ble.
 E'en for the vil - est sin - ner you will from wrath re - lent.



You fash - ioned earth and heav - en, the seas and all the land.____
 We trem - ble at your pow - er, we fear your fier - y wrath.____
 Ac - cord - ing to your good - ness, and your for - giv - ing grace,____
 I pray to you, O Fa - ther, O God of A - bra - ham.____



The beasts and eve - ry for - est ap - peared at your com - mand.
 Your threat to eve - ry sin - ner goes out through all the earth.
 you call all to re - pent - ance. You turn to us your face.
 For - give my sins, I pray you, O God, the great I AM.

George van Popta Minister emeritus Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church, Ottawa, Ontario gvanpopta@gmail.com

Dear Editor,

In Vol. 69, No. 23 (Nov. 15, 2019), the Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer states in his article "Open the School Doors?" that "sometimes voices are heard calling for the doors [of our Christian schools—gvp] to open up to children from other denominations or even the community at large."

According to him, if we admitted children from other churches, many negative consequences would likely ensue, such as: a loss of the confessional basis of the schools; board and staff being drawn from many church fellowships; the necessary bypassing of "uncomfortable" biblical truths, such as baptism, covenant, and election; neglect of the *Book of Praise* songs, especially of the Psalms, in favour of songs from a variety of sources; and all manner of erroneous teaching. He concludes with urging "the members of our churches to keep our schools confessionally Reformed" and not to remove the "confessional underpinnings."

I stand with my colleague on his conclusion, but he makes an error in how he reaches it. He starts with referring to the desire of some to admit non-Canadian Reformed children and ends with warning against a broad interdenominational school. He multiplies the consequences and stacks them up like a cord of wood. But allowing some, a few, or even many evangelical children to our schools would not, of necessity, mean that the Three Forms of Unity would be removed from the basis of the school, or that the teacher will be a member of a local evangelical church.

The school is protected by its constitution, and it is the duty of the board to implement it. As I am a member of the Timothy (Hamilton) association, I read through its constitution.

It states that the basis of both the society and of the school is Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. To be a member of the society, one needs to be a member of a Canadian Reformed, or sister, church. Only members have a vote at the meetings, may be teachers, may serve on the board or on committees, or may enroll their children. There is one exception: "Any other

enrolment is subject to the approval of the board ... which enrolment shall be reviewed annually by the board."

Any amendments to the constitution with respect to the biblical and confessional basis of the society and school must garner the *unanimous* support of the board of directors, as well as a *unanimous* vote in favour by the membership at a general meeting called for that purpose. I do not want to be the one who cries "peace, peace," where there is no peace, but I think our fathers wisely and safely set the bar of confessional basis very high.

In conclusion, I do not think that Rev. Holtvlüwer's multiplication of consequences is helpful. Furthermore, I would urge every member of every Canadian Reformed school society to read through the constitution of their respective societies. I suspect they will all be as strong, clear, and direct as that of Timothy School.

George van Popta
Hamilton, Ont.

Response

I appreciate Rev. George van Popta's desire to discuss the issue a little further. My brother's letter indicates a basic agreement with the article that the confessional basis of our schools should be maintained, and I'm thankful for that. Yet the letter asserts that there is no threat to this in any case because the constitutions of our schools "set the bar of confessional basis very high." I wish I could share that optimism. The bar may be high, but it's not out of reach. If the will grows among the membership to open wide the doors to parents and children from other denominations, how long can it be before the membership will no longer want to refuse these "guests" the full rights of membership?

How long can it be before such guests, who pay the full price of

enrollment (\$900/month in the case of Timothy Christian School in Hamilton), start demanding it? On what moral ground can we refuse them a vote and a place at the board table when we have not earlier refused them enrollment in the school? Can we at that point insist that they must first become church members who adhere to the Three Forms of Unity when we have not insisted on that requirement to have their kids enrolled? Would that be fair to them? If such paying non-member parents took our school boards or societies to the human rights tribunal (and why should that be improbable in our day and age?), if they accused us of a double-standard and unfair treatment, would we have a leg to stand on?

According to the founding documents of our school societies, the purpose of our schools is to assist parents of the Canadian Reformed Churches in educating their children – the covenant youth. They were not established to be mission schools. They were not established to serve families from other denominations. These are principles we should continue to honour. Are exceptions possible? Every school society that I know of has always entertained *rare* exceptions, but those few exemptions always kept in mind the vital connection of the parents or guardians with the local Canadian Reformed Church (or sister church). For example, refugee families just new in the church or grandparents supporting the raising of grandchildren (whose own parents had left the church) are some understandable exceptions. The guardians involved were either committed to the local CanRC (or sister church) or working on it – that’s an important and basic principle.

But, even more fundamentally, does it agree with the confessional basis of our schools to adjust the enrollment policy to simply open the doors to children from other community churches (even “many evangelical children” as the letter says)

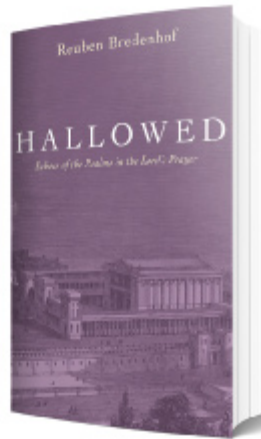
whose parents have no desire to become Reformed? By so doing, would we not implicitly accept and sanction a pluriform or denominationalist view of the church? The truth is, not every assembly called “church” is the church. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession identifies the marks by which the true church may be recognized and we confess in Article 28 that all believers have the duty “to join this assembly wherever God has established it.” Persons from other churches interested in our schools need to accept also this teaching of God’s Word. If their church matches the marks, then unity discussions between consistories can happily get underway and school participation will naturally follow in time. If their church does not display the marks, and if they choose not to depart from it, then *by their choice* they exclude themselves from the Reformed school. Precisely because the Three Forms of Unity *are* the basis of the school, all such parents would have to express a basic agreement with the Three Forms of Unity and that will have practical consequences for their church membership.

Let’s exercise our confessional standard both in principle and in practice. If our schools open their doors to believers from a variety of denominations, the exception will soon become the norm. The classroom and hallways will be interdenominational in makeup, which is not the intent expressed in the constitution of any of our schools nor does it agree with the schools’ confessional basis concerning the church. In such an environment, how long will it be before that bar is reached and the confessional basis of the constitution is replaced to better match the makeup of the student body and parents? Instead, let’s honour the founding principles and ensure that our exceptions *underline* the rule, not *undermine* it.

In Christ,
Peter Holtvlüwer

Hallowed: *Echoes of the Psalms in the Lord's Prayer*

By Reuben Bredenhof
(Wipf & Stock: Eugene OR, 2019)
119 pages.




If there is one thing we all regularly do as Christians, it is pray. On the one hand, prayer is easy. Our kids can do it. On the other hand, prayer is hard to do well and to do so consistently. There are situations where we don't know what to say. Meanwhile, for regular prayer times, it can be hard to avoid repetition and monotony. The more frequently we pray, the more we run the risk of falling into a rut. Perhaps we even use the Lord's Prayer so often that it becomes rote and almost meaningless. A good antidote to this is to spend time thinking about prayer and what the Lord wants to hear flowing from our heart and out of our lips. Rev. Reuben Bredenhof's new book *Hallowed*, which explains the Lord's Prayer, is an excellent help in this and, used thoughtfully, will be sure to freshen and deepen our prayers.

While there are a number of books on the market that walk a reader through the Lord's Prayer, Bredenhof takes a novel approach by searching out the background of each part in the book of Psalms. Surprised? It's certainly not a common tactic, but the truth is that Psalms was not only Israel's *song* book, but also her *prayer* book. Many psalms can be still be used as prayers today (go ahead and try it! Psalms 25, 30, or 90 will get you going). The Lord Jesus, being thoroughly steeped in the Old Testament and in the Psalms especially, drew on what his Spirit had inspired in the psalm-prayers to formulate what we know as the Lord's Prayer. By bringing out this background, Bredenhof helps us see the richness and depth of the prayer's address, each of the six petitions, the doxology, and even the closing amen. He also teaches us to see the underlying unity of all of Scripture, a beautiful thing in itself.

Nine chapters cover the parts of the Lord's Prayer just mentioned at a rate of almost one per chapter, giving ample attention to each. While a number of psalms are referred to throughout, each chapter focusses on one psalm as background to that

part. For example, Psalm 86 is used to explain our attitude and general approach to God in prayer. Psalm 103 is employed to shed light on "Our Father in heaven," while Psalm 29 helps us better understand "Hallowed be your name." Moving through the prayer, Pastor Bredenhof expounds the main lines of Psalms 72, 25, 65, 32, 35, and 147 and serves up fresh ways of looking at each element of the Lord's Prayer. Sending us into the Psalms and causing us to spend time meditating upon their relevance to our prayers today is one of the good gifts offered to us by Bredenhof in this fine volume.

While the content as it presently reads is most edifying, I was personally hoping for more on the difficulties that sometimes surround the fifth petition, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." It's the italicized part that brings confusion at times - what does it mean to forgive my neighbour? Is it just getting rid of bitterness and anger, or does it include reconciliation? Are we obligated to forgive in any and every circumstance? If God doesn't forgive my unrepentant neighbour, must I? If so, how can I? These are pressing issues for people who have suffered a true injustice in their life and the book would have brought added benefit had it paused over these matters (this part of the fifth petition is treated only briefly, in about one page). Related to this, I think it would have been a golden opportunity to bring in one of the so-called "imprecatory psalms" (like Psalm 69 or 109) to let the light of one of those inspired passages shine on the fifth petition. Imprecation and forgiveness are not as far apart as we might think.

But that is only a small point in an otherwise very good and helpful book. *Hallowed* is well-suited for either personal reading or Bible study groups. Each of the nine chapters is quite manageable in length (about twelve to fifteen pages in a compact paperback) and all have five or more questions at the end. Rev. Bredenhof's writing is clear, concise, and easy-to-understand, making this work accessible for teens and up. I think any Bible study or small group (from Young Peoples and up) would benefit greatly from spending a season studying the art and calling of prayer using Bredenhof's book. Recommended! 



Peter H. Holtvlüwer Minister
Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church
Tintern, Ontario.
pholtvluer@gmail.com

