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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 clarionmagazine.ca

2020 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada	\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
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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Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch.

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd. Winnipeg, Manitoba

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

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What's Inside

What should a Christian's approach be to church-state relations? This is the question addressed by Dr. James Visscher in his lead article, "Church-State Relations Revisited." An important and relevant question with all that is going on in the world today.

Over the past couple of issues, Rev. Clarence Bouwman has been writing about the Canadian Reformed Church and its history. In his third and final part, "Why Are We Still Canadian Reformed in Canada Today?" he looks at our current environment. What opportunities and realities do we as a federation face?

There is a report on Christians for Armenia's Publishing Program; the CFA is supported in Canada by Reformed Faith and Life. Issue 14 contains our regular Treasures, New & Old meditation and the Clippings on Politics & Religion column. There is also a canticle, a book review, and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

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Church – State Relations Revisited

There is little doubt that the coronavirus continues to dominate the news today. Whether one turns on the television or logs onto a computer or tablet, the news is all the same. Disasters may strike here or there, military tension may rise between nations, ugly crimes may occur, no matter what it is, it just does not seem to get the same amount of coverage as the pandemic.

Yes, and when it comes to that coverage, there is a great deal of controversy too. Did China purposely send this plague abroad? Was President Trump negligent not to act sooner? Has PM Trudeau emptied the financial cupboard for future generations? The discussions are often hot and fierce.

Why, even among Christians, there is controversy. Have governments overstepped their legal limits? Are religious freedoms being curtailed? Should churches be allowed to worship freely? How should churches and Christians react in these strange COVID times?

Often the debates wax hot and heavy. Sometimes the comments made are reasoned and well-thought out, while at other times they are off the wall, inflame the situation, and only serve to increase anxiety levels.

All of this means that it would do us good to turn down the rhetoric, as well as take a more objective approach to the current situation. In that connection it may be beneficial to examine the church-state relationship, and what each can or cannot do.

A brief historical look

A brief historic review of this matter soon leads to the conclusion that tensions in church-state relations are nothing new. One has only to think of the times of the early church and whether or not Christians should call Caesar “Lord.” Or what about the Middle Ages and the contest between the

Papacy and the rulers of Europe as to who should obey whom? Or what about the days of World War II and the question of whether or not Christians should obey their German overlords or not? Hence, the fact that there are questions and issues about this relationship should not surprise us.

Biblically speaking

Still, we do well to do more than just examine this matter historically. What about the biblical dimension? Turn to the Old Testament and you will soon come to the conclusion that there is no end to the comments that can be made about the interactions between Abram and Abimelech, Moses and Pharaoh, Elijah and Ahab, Elisha and Naaman, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. What is instructive, however, is the fact that the OT always maintains that God is the ultimate Ruler and Sovereign and that all earthly ones need to recognize and obey him. Mock him, ignore him, resist him at your peril (Ps 2). By all means, honour and obey your earthly rulers, but never at the cost of rendering homage to God.

When we come to the New Testament, the narrative changes somewhat. Respect and submission are still Christian hallmarks. Consider the exchange that takes place between the Lord Jesus and Pontius Pilate. Our Lord does not tell Pilate to mind his own business. Neither does he challenge or mock his authority. He remains composed, acts respectfully, and corrects him carefully. Much of the same can also be said of the apostles when they are arrested and arraigned before the powers that be. Indeed, Peter is even on record as telling his readers, "Honor the emperor" (1 Pet 2:17). Paul elaborates on this in Romans 13 when he tells Christians that they are to "be subject to the governing authorities" (Rom 13:1). Why? Because "those that exist have been instituted by God" and "whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed" and, if they are not careful, they will incur "judgment" (13:1, 2).

Article 36

All of this biblical data served in time as the basis for Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, where Reformed believers are on record as stating, "We confess that, because of the depravity of mankind, our gracious God has ordained kings, princes and civil officers. He wants the world to be governed by laws

and statutes in order that the lawlessness of men be restrained and that everything be conducted among them in good order. For that purpose he has placed the sword in the hand of the government to punish wrongdoers and to protect those who do what is good (Rom 13:4)." What one sees here in particular is the clear necessity for government. Without it, lawlessness and anarchy would get the upper hand and evil would triumph. Why? Because of the "depravity of mankind." Government has thus been given to us by God for our good.

In addition, the people are not just to acknowledge this, they are also to make the task of those who rule over them manageable. Article 36 goes on to remind us that we "ought to be subject to the civil officers, pay taxes, hold them in honour and respect and obey them in all things.... We ought to pray for them...." So, obedience, respect, paying taxes, and prayer are to be the hallmarks of Christian citizens.

Radical Anabaptists

Still, not all who considered themselves Christians agreed. In the days of the Belgic Confession, both before and after, there were those who disagreed. The radical Anabaptists of the Munster variety refused to recognize the government, resisted taxation,

resisted oaths of allegiance, refrained from prayer, and openly defied their rulers. We also had other milder strains of Anabaptism which were still largely negative about those who governed.

Reformed believers, however, disagreed with them. Some-times the disagreement took on serious tones, as when Article 36 concludes, "We condemn the Anabaptists

and other rebellious people, and in general all those who reject the authorities and civil officers, subvert justice, introduce a communion of goods, and overturn the decency that God has established among men." Unlike the Anabaptists, the Reformed are not "anti" government nor do they approach those in government with suspicion and distrust. We esteem them for their office.

Such regard once stood one of my ministerial colleagues in good stead. When he was called on the carpet by the Chinese authorities, he explained that as a Christian he was not a political radical seeking to undermine authority. He explained that he, along with his fellow believers, confessed and practiced the truth of Article 36. Upon which the Chinese official interrogating

Tensions
in church-state
relations are
nothing new

him quoted parts of that same article. After further questioning, he was released and urged to register with the government.

Oppressive governments

While this meeting turned out well, the same cannot be said of all meetings between Christians and those who rule over us. One is led to think back to that incident in the book of Acts where Peter and John were commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus (Acts 4). How did they react? They refused and told the Jewish authorities “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (4:20). Sometime later, when he was arrested again, Peter was reminded, “We strictly charged you not to speak in this name [of Jesus].” So, what did he say in reply? He declared, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

The fundamental truth that needs to be upheld here is the truth that for Christians God always comes first. He receives our first love, our first allegiance, and our first obedience. When the government told believers long ago in Roman times that they needed to bow and confess that “Caesar is Lord,” they respectfully declined. Sometimes they did so at the cost of their very lives. Or, should the government tell us today that we need to keep quiet when it comes to such evils as euthanasia and abortion, we will not comply. Or, if the government were to tell us that we can no longer worship the Lord together, we will not bow. In the final analysis, our obedience to the civil authorities is conditional and not absolute. Only God receives our complete and utter submission.

The situation today

Now, having put the matter of church and state in this context, what are we to think of today and the COVID situation in which we live? Is the government overstepping its boundaries when it insists that churches observe certain limits on attendance? Is it thereby trampling on our religious rights and freedoms? Should Christians rise up and resist these restrictions? Should we have church no matter what?

Before I answer these questions, please enter with me into a certain scenario. Imagine that you are a premier or governor and a new and unknown disease begins to attack and kill the people in your province or state. You consult with the medical

authorities and they tell you that there is a lot that they do not know about this nasty illness, although what they do know is that it is easily passed on, that it loves to spread in large crowds, and that it is a deadly threat to all those who have prior medical conditions or are old.

So, what do you do as a caring and responsible premier or governor? You instruct your medical people to prepare themselves as best as they can for the onslaught, even at considerable risk to themselves. At the same time, you tell your citizens that they need to take certain precautions as well. Among them is the need to avoid large gatherings: rock concerts, hockey games, church services, and the like. Why are you doing this? You are doing it in order to protect and safeguard the lives of

your citizens, especially those who are weak and vulnerable.


Now, of course, this is not your only possible course of action. You could ignore what your health authorities are telling you and take your chances.

What is easy?

The point of all of this is that in the current situation it is an easy thing to sit back and criticize or to second guess those who rule over us. It is also an easy thing for us to get

all worked up by reading all kinds of scary stuff on the Internet. Some of it may be true, but a lot of it is false and distorted. Who to believe is a huge question in these uncertain times. Unfortunately, all too many side with the purveyors of rumour, half-truths, homemade solutions, and one-sided quotes.

Do those who rule over us have all the facts and are they making all of the right decisions? Of course not. They too are making their share of mistakes. At times they may err on the side of being ill prepared or on the other side of too much caution and regulation. No doubt future inquiries will identify and analyze their mistakes to death. Oh, the wonderful gift of hindsight!

So, what should our approach as Christians be? Pray for those who are in authority over us, speak about them with respect, follow their instructions, and when in disagreement, approach your elected representatives and offer them your best counsel. Realize that they are people just like us, so they will never get it all right, but at the very least give them an “A” for trying to save lives. 

God receives
our first love,
our first
allegiance,
and our first
obedience


The Long Way Home (Part 2)

"But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea." (Exodus 13:18a)

If you know your geography, you know that God leading his people toward the Red Sea was a huge detour. The people expected to go north, but instead God led them directly south, on a desert road that would lead them to the middle of nowhere, to the Red Sea, instead of the Mediterranean! Now as big as this detour was, we need to make sure that we don't miss God's grace in this detour. The Israelites weren't ready to face the Philistines. If they did, they would be tempted beyond what they could bear! Weak as they were, and untrained for battle, our good Father in heaven refused to put his son (Israel) in a situation that was destined to fail. He took his people the long way home, not to spite them, but to protect them from failure, to protect them from destroying themselves! That's grace! Rather than guide them down the short road that would lead to destruction, God took them down the long road that would lead to life. And if they would but let the Father guide them on this detour, they could be certain that the Lord would not let them be tempted beyond what they could bear. He would be evermore beside them, supporting them, enabling them to stand up under all and every temptation.

Many years later, God the Father did the same with his own beloved Son, Jesus Christ. When he began his ministry, he too was taken on a wild wilderness adventure of his own. There he was tempted three times by the Devil. These temptations were not too much for God's Son to bear. God the Son knew that his heavenly Father would indeed strengthen him by his Spirit to withstand those three temptations of the Devil. And God the Father did. He supplied the Son with all he needed. The Father did the same when the Son was led to face our greatest enemy – death itself – on the cross. There again, the Father didn't let his Son be tempted beyond what he could bear. Even as he poured out his wrath upon him, he supplied him with strength, filled him with the Spirit, so that he could pay the penalty for

our sin, and die in our place without falling into temptation! Again, what grace!

What is true of God's son (Israel) and of God's Son (Jesus Christ) remains true for all the sons and daughters of God who are united to Christ by faith. When the Lord leads us down the long road that leads to life eternal, we can rest assured that God won't set us up for failure! He won't hang us out to dry. God doesn't do that! This doesn't mean he will never lead us on roads filled with trials and temptations. He will. He does. But when the temptations and trials come, we know that God will supply us with all we need and more to serve him with joy! This is something the apostle Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability." Again, what grace! God knows how much we can handle! He will not push you beyond your limits. What an incentive, then, to take the long way home, to follow the Lord's long ways! We have nothing to fear! No matter how fierce our enemies may be, God is stronger than them all! 

For further study

1. If God doesn't let us be tempted beyond what we can bear, why do we so often give in to temptations?
2. How might trials and temptations strengthen us to rely more and more on God's faithfulness in Christ?

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Why Are We Canadian Reformed in Canada Today?

Last January I attended a Ministers' Conference and directly on its heels the CRTS conference on Missions. This article grows out of material I learned at those two conferences.

Two realities merge to form the question addressed in this third article on being Canadian Reformed.

1. The Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) have now been in this country for seven decades and have become well established in Canada. The Lord has blessed us richly with churches, schools, an excellent seminary, the *Book of Praise*, numerous mission fields, and so very much more.
2. Canada has welcomed hundreds of thousands of migrants from every nation under heaven in the last thirty to forty years. The result is that many members of the CanRC find themselves interacting on a daily basis with people whose worldview and belief systems were not formed by Christian principles in any way.

These two facts converge to raise this question: why did the Lord (for all things come from his hand) put these two realities side by side? Why did he have the CanRC settled in Canada and then bring numerous multi-ethnic communities into our neighborhoods? *Why are we Canadian Reformed in Canada today?*

Mission

The first CanRC migrants to Canada back in the 1950s understood that the Lord would have his people do mission work. At that time, Canada's citizens were predominately Caucasian with a worldview influenced in some way by the Christian faith. So, missionaries were sent overseas, to peoples untouched by the gospel. Despite limited resources, the churches in 1960 together supported the church in Toronto in sending Rev. Knigge to the jungles of Irian Jaya. By 1970, there were enough resources in the CanRC for the churches of Western Canada to support

Surrey in sending Rev. C. Van Spronsen to Brazil. In the years that followed, the churches have sent other missionaries to various other corners of the globe. What I say below may not detract from continued support for the men already sent to distant lands.

Psalm 67

Whereas traditional mission work sees a lot of geographic distance between sending church and mission field, Psalm 67 puts the two side by side. Look at the wording of the prayer of verse 1: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations." The small word "that" is short form for "in order that." The psalmist prays that God would bless "us" – that's God's people Israel in the psalmist's day – *in order that* the nations around Israel might know God's saving power. The reference is to *observation*, the peoples around Israel (near and further away) seeing and hearing of God's graciousness towards and his blessings upon his people. So, in the days of King Solomon, the Queen of Sheba (wherever that was) made the journey to Jerusalem to see for herself all the evidence she'd heard concerning God's blessings on Israel. When she saw Solomon's wealth and heard his wisdom, she remarked that she had not heard half of the truth of the matter (1 Kgs 10).

Jesus Christ

In the course of the years, God gave his people the gift of his only Son Jesus Christ. Christ went to the cross in sinners' place so as to reconcile them to God. After his ascension into heaven,

he poured out his Holy Spirit to renew sinners' hearts. This glorious wealth God has entrusted (among other people) to the generations forming the CanRC. From that perspective alone it may truly be said that the Lord has answered the prayer of Psalm 67; he has been gracious to us and blessed us and made his face to shine upon us. He did so *in order that* his way might be known on earth – including in Canada – and his saving power among all nations – including the nations who call Canada home. In fact, since the exalted Christ does nothing for nothing, it is accurate to say that he has deliberately brought people from multiple races and ethnic backgrounds into the same land in which he gave us a home some years earlier precisely because he in some way is *interested* in these people. That's the significance of that line from Psalm 67: these people are put into closer proximity to us so that they might see something of God's saving power.

Opportunity

The consequence is surely this: we receive the privilege to add to our existing far-off mission focus a new dimension that has us focussing locally. We need, after all, to work along with what the Lord is doing. To give some colour to it: the church in Brampton is located in a heavily Hindu area, the neighbourhood around the long-established church in Surrey is now predominantly Punjabi. Streetlight is labouring among the multi-ethnic residents of downtown Hamilton, while Blessings church in West Hamilton and the Denver church and the church plants in Prince George and Niverville are working among whatever peoples they find in their neighbourhoods. The Mercies church plant in East Hamilton is labouring among a largely Muslim population. So many other churches in the federation enjoy – or should I say, grapple with – the privileges that come with the Lord's work of moving the nations into our vicinities as peoples from our communities (perhaps visible minorities, perhaps not) visit our churches. It represents *opportunity* – and that in turn brings excitement and adrenalin! With a nod to Mordecai's question to Esther, I think it right to say that God has brought the CanRC to our present situation precisely for a time as this (Esther 4:14). I am deeply grateful that so many of our churches are making work of the openings the Lord has provided.

A little aside: please, let no reader sense a touch of arrogance in the preceding paragraph, as if it's presumptuous to say that God has brought us into our present situation precisely for the benefit of the nations. No, dear reader, what "we" have

received is a gift of God's grace. And if the Lord would use "us" to benefit "the nations," that's no cause for pride; it's instead cause for humble gratitude – and then making the most of the privileged opportunity God has given.

How?

The question now is: how can we optimally be for others the blessing the Lord would want us to be? The CanRC is currently wrestling with this question. Consider two examples of this grappling.

Brampton

Some years ago, the Brampton congregation received a new church building built in a neighbourhood of new housing now predominately inhabited by recent migrants to Canada; these residents are mostly Hindu, together with many Sikhs and Muslims. Every week visitors from the surrounding community visit the Brampton church to check out the worship services. Today the consistory of this church has a minority of Caucasian (let alone Dutch) members, a reality reflected also in the church's membership. The church has made no changes in how they "do" church, preferring to stay with worship services as they have commonly been done across the federation for years. In God's providence, their work is growing to such an extent that Brampton last fall called and received a second minister to answer the need that comes with so many visitors frequently attending the worship services.

Blessings

In an effort to be meaningful to their very established neighbourhood, Blessings Christian Church in Hamilton has been very intentional in doing church somewhat differently than has been the case across the federation. The brethren there have chosen to dress in a less formal-looking fashion, have initiated a coffee hour before church to make visitors feel welcome, have introduced contemporary singing before and after the service, have moved away from reading the entirety of the Baptism and Lord's Supper Forms in favour of providing succinct summaries, have replaced the pulpit with a lectern, etc. By the grace of the Lord this church is attracting numerous people from the neighbourhood, be they unbelieving, unchurched, or other-churched.

These two churches illustrate two different ways of grappling with the challenges that arise from the changes we've seen in Canada. Perhaps the models used by these two churches could

be viewed as experimental: which is more effective? Or should we look for a third, more preferable model?

Heritage

The glorious wealth of the gospel as rediscovered in the Great Reformation of the sixteenth century has been marvellously encoded in the three forms of unity – these being the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. The liturgical forms (eg, the Baptism Form or the Lord's Supper Form) laid out in further detail vital elements of these confessions. Through the struggles of the Secession of 1834, the Doleantie of 1886, and the Liberation of 1944, that wealth has formed the minds and perspectives of CanRC preachers and believers so that we have learned to delight in how God deals with sinners.

Specifically, he claims sinners for himself in a covenant of love, graciously giving them rich promises and requiring them to embrace his mercies in faith precisely because he is God. That we contribute nothing that might move God to claim us as his own is pointed up in the fact that God claims *infants* for himself – and signifies that claim in infant baptism. That's why parents in our midst teach their children from infancy that they belong to God and they sacrifice big dollars to provide God-centred education in covenantally-based schools. As the children mature, we show them how to respond rightly to the wealth God has placed in their lap.

In the same line, preachers in our midst address the entire congregation as God's people, comforting and encouraging the distressed and burdened in our midst with the assurance that the promises of God are truly *for them*. In distinction from so many other preachers in North America (yes, of Neo-Calvinist persuasion too), preaching in CanRC pulpits does not ask church members to move themselves from where they are to a delightful gospel placed some distance from them, but it deposits the gospel in the lap of each member, younger and older, in accordance with God's covenant promises as signified in baptism. Yes, each member is to believe the promises in their daily grind, yet not to obtain God's favour but to unpack a grace that is already theirs. Our members are taught to describe a present reality with Lord's Day 1: "I belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ...."


That language of belonging pervades the three forms of unity and the liturgical forms – and indeed the language of the psalms (and hymns also). In a word, it's what makes our *Book of*

Praise so delightfully rich. It's why a middle-aged couple who joined one of our churches last year, after their interview with Consistory, held up the *Book of Praise* and told the body of elders: you do not realize how much of a treasure you have in this book! It's the wealth of the Scripture as rediscovered in the Great Reformation and channelled through Dutch church history to form the heritage that by God's grace may be entrusted to the CanRC. Again I say: please, this is not arrogance. It's instead acknowledging the merciful good pleasure of God to make us carriers of a rich heritage.

Today

CanRCs today wrestle with how to "do" church in such a way as to reach best the people God has placed in our neighbourhoods. The details of the answer to that question can obviously not be caught in a one-liner. But I offer this thought: the Lord has been very gracious to us and blessed us so richly in granting us the privilege to be carriers of the glorious gospel as he's channelled it through the riverbeds of the Great Reformation, the Secession of 1834, the Doleantie of 1886, and the Liberation of 1944. So we do well to be unashamedly proud (in the healthy sense of the word) of our Dutch heritage in the understanding that the Lord has given us this treasure *so that* the nations today around us may see something of God's wonderful ways on earth.

It's said from time to time that being known in our communities as a "Dutch" church is an embarrassment. I disagree. Our popular identity as the "Dutch" church is *opportunity*. Canada is a multicultural country with its citizens and residents all celebrating their ethnic roots. That makes it easy for us to do the same. A huge part of our Dutch aroma lies embedded in the *Book of Praise*.

The Lord God has put the CanRC in this country for a reason and placed nations from around the globe into our vicinity. Let's eagerly grab hold of the privileged responsibility that follows from the delightful heritage the Lord is bringing to the nations through the medium of the Canadian Reformed Churches. 



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An Actual Conversion Ban

Last time we looked at an ARPA policy report on conversion therapy bans. It addressed bans of help for those who struggle with the feeling that their biological sex of male or female somehow doesn't match who they think they are. In that case the "conversion *therapy*" being banned was indeed a "therapy," that is, an effort to provide "healing" to suffering souls.

This time I want to look at what might more rightly be called a "conversion ban." It's not about banning conversion therapy but banning the untherapeutic surgeries that attempt physically to change someone's biological sex.

The Telegraph, a well-known British newspaper, featured a story on April 22, 2020 about a UK ban that, when it becomes law, will end so-called "sex re-assignment" or "gender alignment" surgeries for minors. The story opened, "Children who wish to undergo surgery to change their gender will be banned from doing so in future, the equalities minister has announced."¹ Currently, minors are permitted to undergo such surgery, but only with parental consent. "However, the equalities minister today signalled plans to ban under-18s with gender dysphoria from genital reconstructive surgery in a move, she claimed, which would 'protect them from making those irreversible decisions.'"

All people should be encouraged that the equalities minister in the UK was willing to speak the truth about the irreversible nature of such surgeries. Confused children and adults need to know that both the hormone blockers and surgeries are likely

to leave them sterile and unable to enjoy marriage relations, and this condition cannot just be reversed.

"Trans rights activists" decried the move as a "new form of inequality." Even though the government minister was very clear that adults should have every right to such surgery and even though her bill would not ban the use of hormone blockers for minors, the banning of actual surgeries upon minors was called an inequality. One opponent even argued that the block would be "effectively treating transgender teenagers as less capable than their cisgender peers." This statement assumes, of course, that "ciscenders" *choose* their gender. Such nonsensical language assumes that every person defines and even creates their own nature, sex, and gender. It is utter nonsense.

Albert Mohler, speaking on *The Briefing*, analysed the statement above, and stated,

First of all, you have this word "cisgender" used; that's a word that only makes sense in the aftermath of the intentional confusion of the transgender revolution. Cisgender refers to people born male who believe themselves to be male and identify as male, and those born female who believe themselves to be female and identify as female, which means the vast majority of all persons now living, one or the other, male or female. But "cisgender" indicates that it's just another option. It's just another identity.²


On the idea that "cisgender" minors will be privileged because they will be able to exercise their *choice* to identify

¹See <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/22/trans-children-banned-surgery-change-gender-equalities-minister>. Accessed May 15, 2020.

²See <https://albertmohler.com/2020/04/27/briefing-4-27-20>. Accessed May 15, 2020. I hope to feature *The Briefing* in the Clippings articles more often and I highly recommend readers to listen to Mohler's podcast five days a week, every week. If ever you hear something on *The Briefing* that is dissonant with our Reformed faith, let me know, as I have not.

their gender and sexual orientation with their biological sex, while “transgender” minors will be oppressed by not being able to exercise their choice, Mohler responds, “Now at this point, we are in the deepest part of the deep end of the pool of irrationality.... This is the strangest, most Orwellian definition of equality imaginable.”

In conclusion, we can be thankful that in the UK a ban on mutilating the bodies of minors is likely to come into place. But much more is needed: People need to acknowledge that the whole transgender idea is a fiction. As Christians who hold

to God’s Word, we can be so thankful for its truthfulness and its affirmation of created reality. We also enjoy the sure hope that male and female are equally redeemed in Christ, finding freedom and purpose in him. 



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Christians for Armenia’s Publishing Program

Since its beginning in 1992 through the ministry of Rev. A. R. Kayayan, until today, Christians for Armenia (CFA)’s mission has consisted of providing materials based on God’s breathed Word, pointing towards the only redeemer, Christ, the new Adam who makes all things new. Rev. A. R. Kayayan was called to the Lord in 2008 after labouring intensely on the Armenian field. He was himself perfectly fluent in the Armenian language. Following his vision, the current committee of CFA keeps publishing, at a regular pace, new books and also producing new radio programs (translated into Armenian from a stock of programs available in French). Apart from solid Reformed works in dogmatics (Ursinus, Berkhof, Bavinck), the development of a biblically-based worldview motivates our choice of books to translate, either from English or from French. A brochure on biblical ethics for sexuality is but one example of this choice: it was translated from a RCUS synodical report and released in August 2015.

Other recently published books are:

- *Truth Under Attack*, by Eryl Davies (a much needed guide on cults and sects for a country like Armenia, targeted by Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses);
- *Darwin’s God, Evolution and the Problem of Evil*, an excellent critique of the Darwinist worldview, both from a scientific and a philosophical perspective, by molecular biophysicist Cornelius Hunter;
- *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* the classic work by biblical scholar F. F. Bruce;
- *The Christian and Politics*, a Kuyperian approach of this topic originally written by Rev. A. R. Kayayan and myself for the French speaking public in 1995;
- 2 volumes of Bible studies on Genesis 1-11 and 25-49 by Rev. Mark Vander Hart (the latter was released two months ago);
- Our latest - long term - project is to offer to the Armenian public a reliable translation of the New Testament and Psalms made directly from the source texts, not a mere revision of ancient translations or a paraphrase, which is all that is currently available in Armenia. This translation has now been completed and is currently going through a second editing phase.


Among future projects we would like to see Dr. Egbert Schuurman's *Faith and Hope in Technology* (the English translation by John Vriend) made available to the Armenian public, as a very important and relevant contribution to a Christian reflection on contemporary culture. We hope to get enough funding from our donors to be able to initiate this project in the near future.

CFA has the privilege to work with a very dedicated and competent team of fellow workers in Armenia itself. Their enthusiasm and reliability with the tasks entrusted to them makes it a very exciting task to minister to the Armenian public. Being in contact with them on a regular basis allows us to remain tuned to the needs and particularities of our mission field.

Our books are used by many clerics in the traditional Armenian Apostolic Church as well as in all the evangelical churches. They aim at bringing together Christians from various (sometimes opposite) backgrounds around a shared understanding of the doctrine of grace and its application in the lives of believers.

Armenians have a great intellectual, cultural, and historical heritage, which they are proud of. This heritage, visible in the remarkable centuries-old church architecture found throughout the country, cannot but remind them about the tenets of

Christian faith. Their ancestors have lived, suffered, fought, and hoped on behalf of this Christianity. Seventy years of communism under the Soviet regime have not managed to destroy it. But what is it worth in their shattered world today? What is an authentic faith? Can it transform individual lives, bring hope, and challenge patterns of corruption, of discouragement, of self-pity? Can it set the nation on a course of prosperity? If Christianity is Armenia's distinctive heritage, under which form should it be transmitted to the next generations? Can it ensure not only the survival of the nation, but a real and healthy renaissance?

The literature and the radio broadcasts we produce are there to show that whatever the circumstances, Armenia is part of God's creation, belonging to him and as such not forsaken: Armenians must turn to the living Word to receive this only comfort and live by it! 



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The work of the CFA is supported in Canada by
Reformed Faith and Life – Canada



You are invited

to send us your most thought provoking questions
to explore in our **You Asked** column.

Please send questions to **William den Hollander**, *Minister emeritus*
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Children and the Church



Children and the Church
by William Den Hollander and
Gerhard Visscher
Lucerna Publications, 2019
219 pages

\$20.00 through
[amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca)

In the days of the COVID-19 restrictions, the worship services were awfully quiet. When there are just three or eight people present, the congregation doesn't produce much noise, either in the singing or in the ambient sounds of books closing, jackets rustling, and little children talking or whimpering. In a congregation blessed with many young families, the noise of youth is almost a constant, and when it is gone, the silence is deafening.

But the children belong. Children of believers have an essential place in Christ's church, and this is why we baptize them and why we include them in the worship services even from a young age. As Reformed believers, we hold the scriptural conviction that a covenant child is part of the community of God's people, a community where they are the recipients of the precious promises and commands of the Triune God.

Such is also the beautiful theme of the book *Children and the Church*, a collection of essays edited by Dr. Gerhard Visscher and Dr. William den Hollander. The book has its origins in the conferences organized by the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary held in Ontario and British Columbia in early 2019.

Considering a broad swathe of evidence from Scripture, and viewing the topic from various angles including the confessions, church history, and culture, the authors are unanimous in their view that children must be seen as integral parts of the church. In this respect, the book does not reach a conclusion that Reformed believers will find surprising. Does anyone who reads this book need to be convinced about the



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place of children in the covenant of grace? Perhaps few. Yet it is exactly on the matter of infant vs. believer-only baptism that the question is asked with increasing frequency these days: Does it matter? Should we really make the case so strongly that it becomes a matter of *must*? Is this a salvation issue?

In this connection, Tyler Vandergaag in his chapter surveys a diversity of viewpoints in the early church concerning who baptism is for, and he contemplates the challenge that this presents for those who seek to be guided by the practices of the church fathers. While there is diversity, he makes the interesting observation that there is no evidence that this was considered acceptable, encouraged, or promoted.

Ted Van Raalte engages with the writings of a couple of figures from the Reformation period and shows how they helped to enhance the church's understanding of the grounds, meaning, and implications of baptism.

Besides the perspectives gained from church history, of course, it is important to take a view of the children of believers that is thoroughly shaped by Scripture. If we fail to articulate the biblical basis for our beliefs, we face the danger of a creeping theological ignorance and underappreciation. And so, the chapters which explore the biblical basis and meaning of baptism are helpful. For instance, Gerhard Visscher explores the attitude of the Lord Jesus toward covenant children, and also the views of Paul and Peter. The language of "sign and seal" is familiar to Reformed believers, but our understanding is refined by Jason Van Vliet's investigation of how this language is used in Scripture and the confessions. Scripture presents baptism as a sign of God's promises and a seal of their reliability.

William den Hollander considers how baptism was administered in the time of the apostles, examining the household baptisms that are recorded in Acts. He argues that when these are viewed in relation to the Graeco-Roman cultural context, any first century reader would have assumed that infants and youth were also included in the baptisms. Indeed, the "silence" of the New Testament about the baptism of children – far from being an exegetical strike against paedobaptism – actually supports the notion that children were regarded as part of the church community, just as they had been in the Old Testament. The denial of baptism to the children of believing parents would have required an apostolic defence or a clarification.


Every time an infant is baptized in our churches, the Form for Baptism is read. In this theologically rich form, it is said that our children are "sanctified in Christ." Arjen Vreugdenhil

demonstrates how this phrase presents both a comfort to Christian parents and a serious call.

For if we are agreed that children are included, then the next vital question is how we nurture and discipline them. How can covenant children be guided along the path to maturity in a way that will equip them for a lifetime of walking with Christ? We affirm that they belong, so we also seek to give them a true sense of the privilege and calling of belonging. Bringing them up in the security of God's covenant promises, we aim to cultivate faith, and under the Lord's blessing, God-honouring behaviour will be in evidence.

Thus, it is right that the church is also a place where covenant children are called to personal faith and repentance. If they do not hear this call clearly, the emphasis will naturally fall on outward conformity – doing what is expected as members of a community – and not on inner transformation. So, are our covenant children receiving instruction that is soundly biblical and culturally relevant? Are they benefiting from meaningful relationships with their parents and other believers so that they can grow in Christ?

In arguing for a deliberate approach to discipling our youth, Bill DeJong proposes that Reformed churches should consider the advantages of admitting early adolescents to the Lord's table, perhaps as young as ten, as was sometimes done in the early Reformation period. The reader of his essay will of course need to reach their own conclusion. In this they may be assisted by Cornelis Van Dam, who writes on children's participation in the Passover, and the relationship between that meal of the old covenant and the new covenant Lord's Supper. In the final chapter, Eric Watkins (OPC) offers good insights into how confessional Presbyterians seek to foster maturity in Christian youth, and what can be learned from these practices for the important task of guiding them to Christ.

In *Children and the Church*, the amazing truth which emerges time and again is that the children of believers belong: they belong in loving fellowship with the Triune God, and they belong in his covenant community. And so, I am sure that the chapters in this volume could be read with profit by many. Some of the authors at times employ jargon that may be unfamiliar, and occasionally threaten to overwhelm the reader with footnotes, but readerly perseverance will surely be rewarded. May this volume cause us to appreciate anew the riches of God's rich grace by including believers and their children in his covenant. 

Then Azariah stood still in the fire and prayed aloud (LXX):

1. We praise your Name, O LORD and God, the God of all our fa - thers,
 2. God, we have sinned and done what's wrong. Your word we have re - ject - ed.
 3. For your Name's sake do not re - voke your cov' - nant made with Is - rael
 4. With con - trite hearts we hum - bly bow and plead up - on your pit - y.

for you are glo - rious and we laud your fair - ness and your pow - ers.
 We have pro - voked you all day long. Your laws we have ne - glect - ed.
 Though we have sinned and you pro - voked have mer - cy on your peo - ple.
 For - give us, Lord, ac - cept our vow that we will walk up - right - ly.

Your ways are good; you've made them known. Your jus - tice is un - swerv - ing,
 Now you have cast us from our land and sent us in - to ex - ile
 Lord, we con - fess our wick - ed - ness, our guilt and in - dis - cre - tion,
 Lord, for the sake of your great name save us from e - vil pow - ers

un - wa - ver - ing. We bow be - fore your throne
 to re - bels vile. You have your peo - ple banned
 our trans - gres - sion. O God of right - eous - ness,
 and hell - ish fires. De - liv - er us from shame

and in our grief we soft - ly groan.
 and thrown us out with your own hand.
 whose love and grace are lim - it - less:
 ac - cord - ing to your glo - rious fame.

George van Popta, 2018

Apocrypha additions to Daniel, inserted between 3:23 and 3:24

J. Klug, Geistliche Lieder, Wittenberg, 1535

87 87 874 68 / Ich ruf zu dir / BWV 639

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario held on June 5, 2020

The convening church was Fellowship, but Classis met at the Ebenezer church building; however, because of current COVID restrictions, all but five of us joined by Zoom. Thank you to Ebenezer for providing the technology to make all this possible.

As is the normal custom, we opened with Scripture, meditation, and prayer. Rev. Jake Torenvliet, on behalf of Fellowship church, opened with the reading of Psalm 84.

We acknowledged the following matters for prayer among the churches in this classis: the passing away of Prof. Geertsema; Mrs. Mulder finds herself in isolation because of COVID restrictions; Prof. Jerry Visscher's imminent retirement from our college after many years of faithful service; Fellowship's call to Rev. Boekestein, which is now on hold while pandemic restrictions are in place; student Timothy Veenstra, as he appears before Classis seeking consent to speak an edifying word.

All the people who were expected to attend Classis were accounted for and had their duly signed credentials available.

Appointed as Chairman: Rev. Jake Torenvliet, Vice-chairman: Elder Rick Smeding, and Clerk: Rev. Clarence Vandervelde.

With the regular protocol completed, Classis was declared to be constituted and the agenda was adopted.

Timothy Veenstra, a member of Blessings Christian Church, presented his credentials and his sermon proposal as he came to be examined to speak an edifying word. He is a third-year student at our seminary. This was done as per Article 21 of our Church Order.

Tim's sermon proposal was on Matthew 11:28-30, which was accepted, and his presentation of the gospel met the approval of Classis. Tim was then able to move on to the next step in the process, which examined him on doctrine and creeds. Once again Tim's responses were deemed to be solid and he was unanimously endorsed to speak an edifying word in our

churches. Tim's pastor, Bill DeJong, offered a pray of thanks and asked for a blessing for Tim as he begins a year of work among us.

All the churches in our classis were asked, as is expected according to Article 44 of the Church Order, "Whether the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured, and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of Classis for the proper government of their church." All the churches answered in the affirmative to the first two questions and no to the third.

We then moved on to discuss two proposals. The first was from Rehoboth church, who presented an overture to remove the bracketed qualifier "For the Second Service" from the abbreviated form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper. The overture was adopted after discussion. Next, Blessings submitted an overture to amend the questions in the liturgical forms for Baptism and Profession of Faith to restore the language to reference the Apostles' Creed. The overture was unanimously adopted after discussion.

The next classis meeting will be convened by Rehoboth church on September 18 with the following officers:

Chairman: Rev. Clarence Vandervelde

Vice-Chairman: Elder delegate from the convening church

Clerk: Rev. Ian Wildeboer

There were no questions during question period, as it was late in the day, and thankfully Christian censure was not required.

Rev. Jake Torenvliet thanked us for the collegial manner with which today's meetings was conducted, and then closed the meeting with the reading of Psalm 133 and prayer.

On behalf of Classis, Vice-chairman
Elder **Rick Smeding**

