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TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

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Clarion

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what's inside

Welcome to Issue 3! If the winter blahs are getting to you, don't worry: according to God's promise (Gen 8:22) the sap will soon be running in Ontario's maple trees, the frost heaving on the prairies, the sandhill cranes returning to the Bulkley Valley, and the crocuses blooming in the Fraser Valley ☺!

We also have a few treats to encourage you. Jan DeGelder in *Governing the Church* gives a clear, timely, and helpful article on the oft-troublesome matter of membership withdrawals. Using a rarely-quoted text from Numbers, Wes Bredenhof unpacks the gospel of centring our lives on Jesus Christ. Christ as our good Shepherd is worked out with details from Isaiah 40 in an encouraging meditation by Ben Schoof. And to brighten your day a little more, read Jason Van Vliet's uplifting update on how the Lord is working at our seminary and also Paulin Bédard's summary of the good things happening in spreading the gospel in the French language.

History, anyone? Lots to learn from it! Keith Sikkema takes us back to the early centuries and teaches us the beginnings of some of church history's biggest influences (good or bad). Clarence Bouwman offers a deep dive into why we have these things called "confessions." In my own editorial I analyze some of the basics of the "Side B" debate.

Keep up with what's going on across the federation with *Classis Clippings* and a press release from CRTS's Board of Governors. And if you're looking for more stimulating reading, we've got you covered with two more book reviews by Wes Bredenhof.

Enjoy your *Clarion*!
Peter Holtvliuwer

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Clarion

A trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed
Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

WHAT ABOUT SIDE B?

Among same-sex attracted people who profess faith in Christ, a debate continues. There are those who affirm that both same-sex attraction and activity are fully acceptable in God's eyes (known as "Side A") while others reject same-sex activity as sinful but hold that experiencing such desire is *not* a sin ("Side B"). Side A churches (also known as "affirming") allow for practicing homosexuals to be members in good standing (including in leadership positions) while Side B churches allow for homosexuals to live a celibate lifestyle as members in good standing, freely identifying as "gay Christians" or the like.

Leaving aside Side A, what about Side B? Is this a biblical distinction? Does it help us in our efforts to live a holy life?

DESIRE & TEMPTATION

Side B proponents believe that a "person's attractions are not sinful in and of themselves." Sin only factors in with "how a person acts regarding their attractions. A person cannot control who they are attracted to, but they can control their decisions."¹ Side B draws a sharp distinction between "attractions," which are thought to be un sinful because they well up uncontrollably, and "actions" because every person is in control of how they act.

Is this what Scripture teaches? Let's start with the word "attraction"—what exactly is that? As a noun it is not found in the Bible. From the quote above, Side B proponents use the verb "attracted to" to describe the feelings or desires they have toward another, what Scripture regularly terms "desire." If you are attracted to a person, you desire to be with that person. So if, as Side B claims, *acting* on your same-sex desire to be with such a person is a sin, how can the *desire itself* be good or even neutral?

Side B suggests that merely because a desire arises within a person outside of his control, that it therefore cannot be described as sinful. Some point to Jesus and say that just as Jesus was tempted in every way yet did not sin (Heb 4:15), it is possible for Christians to be tempted by same-sex desires and yet not sin. However, for Jesus the temptations always came *from the outside*, from Satan or even humans. Unlike the rest of humanity, Christ was not born with a depraved sinful nature (see Ps 51:5). Therefore, unlike us, Jesus never had an unwanted "attraction" pop up in his heart because his heart was pure.

EVIL IN THE HEART

In fact, the Lord Jesus teaches that our human hearts are factories of sinful desires which in turn make us guilty of sin: "What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person" (Matt 15:18–19). Someone may experience in his heart an unwanted desire to steal (e.g. kleptomania) or to become drunk or even to fornicate. Such desires can arise without invitation, but does that mean they are not sinful? Jesus says "these [thoughts] are what defile a person." In Scripture, desire, attraction, or thought (whatever word you choose to use) goes together with action, and if the one is sinful so is the other. In fact, the sinful action is rooted in the sinful thoughts of the heart.

IDENTITY

This biblical teaching in turn affects what label we give ourselves as Christians. If being gay is contrary to God's will in both action and desire (or: attraction), how can he be pleased if one of his children identifies as a gay (or lesbian or bi) Christian? Would we call ourselves a klepto Christian or a drunkard Christian or a fornicating Christian? Christians are called to repent of both the sinful actions we do as well as the sinful desires of our hearts. This struggle will be a daily grind, and we should certainly help and encourage one another with great compassion.² But such desires cannot define us, for we have been washed in the blood of Christ and now are identified by him as his own possession (Titus 2:14). Same-sex attracted strugglers who trust in Christ are the same as every other struggling sinner who knows Christ as Lord and Saviour. Our identity is this: we are "in Christ" (Rom 8:1).

Let's say a clear "no" to Side B and a clear "yes" to embracing any believer who daily repents of sinful desires and actions. Together, praying for ongoing heart change and crucifying all the wicked desires of our old nature, let us walk on to the new Jerusalem. 



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¹ Josh Proctor, "What is Side B?" found on graceplacemke.com.

² See my "Church: Home for Same-Sex Strugglers?" in *Clarion*, Vol. 61, 2012, No. 15, p.382–84

OUR GOOD SHEPHERD

Behold the Lord God comes with might . . . he will tend his flock like a shepherd . . . and gently lead those that are with young

– Isaiah 40:10-11

Isaiah 40 is rightly one of the most well-known and loved chapters in the Old Testament prophets. Like many chapters in Isaiah 40–66 it proclaims many awesome attributes of the LORD.

Many of these wonderful ways of the LORD can seem contradictory to us. God is so awesome and holy that when he comes the mountains themselves must be cut down to prepare his way (v. 4). And yet he is forgiving of his people's sins, pardoning Jerusalem's iniquity (v. 2). He declares that we are like grass, and all of our strength and beauty fades as quickly as the flower of the fields (v. 7). And yet God also promises that we will renew our strength and run and not be weary; walk and not be faint (v. 31).

What is contradictory, humanly speaking, comes together wonderfully in God. And the same is true of the verses printed above. Verse 10 repeats the message from verse 3 that God is coming down to earth to be with us. But it warns that God is coming in power and might. He is an awesome God; no idol or anything in all creation can compare with him! He brings great rulers to nothing; he can hold the whole world in the palm of his hand. And when he comes, the LORD will use his power to judge. "Behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him."

Given that the whole chapter is comparing the greatness of God with our weakness and failure, we might be tempted to fear God's coming, and his recompense. What have we done that will merit something good? We've too many failures on our record, and what real good have we done? Is he coming in power to punish us?

But that's not the point of verse 10, as verse 11 quickly makes clear. "He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms." Towards his people the LORD does not show anger or judgment. Nor is he even frustrated at how weak and fragile we are. He is tender and caring. In fact, he uses his strength to take care of our weaknesses.

When we are helpless, he tends to us. When we are lost and confused, he gathers us into his arms. When we faint and grow weary, he carries us in his bosom. When we are overwhelmed, he gently leads us. And so, the LORD's awesome power is not something for us to fear; it should make us thankful. Combined with

his faithful love for his people, the LORD's power means that we have nothing to fear. He will always care for us.

This is also the truth that our Lord Jesus teaches us at the beginning of his prayer: "Our Father in heaven." We have a Father who shows compassion to us his children, and with heavenly power guards and keeps us.

This passage is wonderfully fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ. He is God who comes down to us with great deeds of might and divine power. But he also declared himself our good Shepherd (John 10). In Christ we see even more wonderfully what it means for God to love us as his sheep. The good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. And so, by his death he brought us into his sheepfold. And we know him and love him and follow his voice always.

How wonderful it is that we have a God who is equally strong and full of love, that he is for us in power and tenderness. By his great power the Lord Jesus has defeated sin and our enemies forever. And in loving care he gathers us into his arms, carries us in his bosom, and gently leads us all our days. 🐑

FURTHER READING:

John 10:1–18

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Which attribute of God do you think of more often: his power or his love? Why do you think that is?
2. How have you seen in your life that God (in Christ) is with you in might? How have you experienced his tender care?

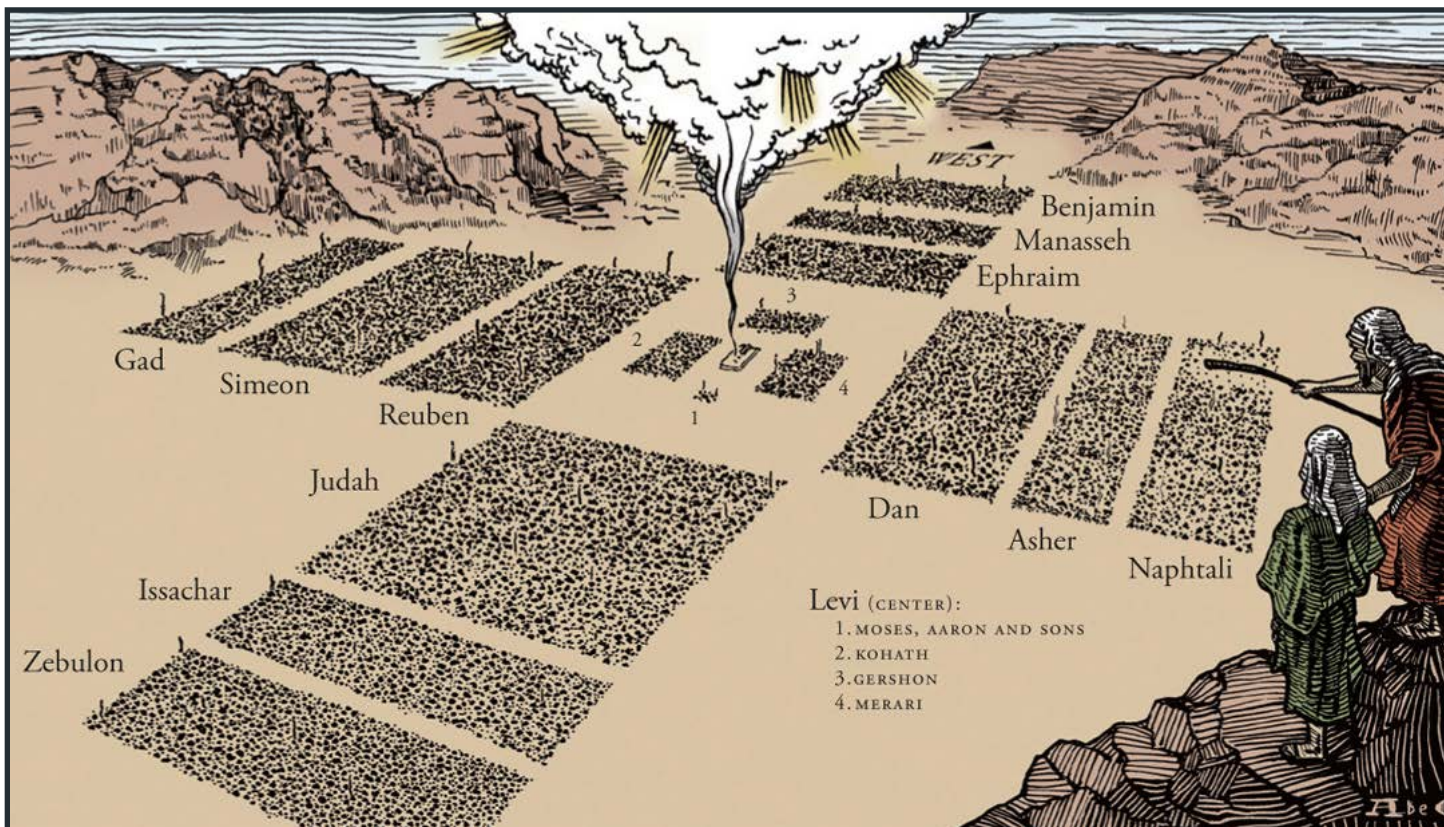


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CENTRED ON GOD'S DWELLING

WES BREDEHOF

Centuries ago, almost everyone believed the earth was at the centre of the universe. The sun circled the earth, as did the planets and stars. To most people this made sense, because human beings lived on the earth and human beings are the most important part of creation. It makes sense that the most important things should be at the centre.

In Numbers 2:2, we read something about the camp of the Israelites during the Exodus from Egypt: "The people of Israel shall camp each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' houses. They shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side."

God had a certain plan for the organization of the camp. One thing we see from that right away is that he is a God of order. But when we look at what's at the centre of all this, we see something even more profound.

THE CENTRE OF THE CAMP

What was to be at the centre of the camp of the Israelites was the tent of meeting. This is also known as the tabernacle. The tabernacle was that special holy tent where God had his dwelling place amongst the Israelites. The tabernacle was where you would find the Most Holy Place, the inner sanctum so to speak. At the

centre of the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant. This holy wooden chest covered with gold contained the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, a golden urn with some manna, and Aaron's staff that budded. Over top of the ark of the covenant was the mercy seat. This had two golden cherubim, angels with their wings spread out. These cherubim represented God's throne. Within the Most Holy Place, God was sitting on his throne in the midst of his people. God was central.

The Israelites were responsible for making sure that God and the ministry of reconciliation was kept central

But there was more. In the outer court of the tabernacle was the bronze altar, also known as the altar of burnt offering. This is where sacrifices were made for the sins of the people. If you sinned against God, you could go to the tabernacle with your animal sacrifice. That animal would be ritually killed, its blood sprinkled on the altar, and the animal burned upon the altar. That animal would be your substitute as it pointed ahead to what Jesus would do. With that sacrifice made at the tent of meeting, you could know that your sin was forgiven, and you had been reconciled to God, restored to covenant fellowship. This ministry of reconciliation happened in the centre of the Israelite camp.

Now it's important to realize that what we have in Number 2:2 is a command. "They shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side." What follows lays out exactly where each of the tribes were to camp around the tabernacle. But it was a command. This means that the Israelites were responsible for making sure that God was central in their camp, that the ministry of reconciliation was kept central. If they had wanted to, they could have ignored God and decided to put the tabernacle behind all the tribes of Israel, or some other random place. They could have done that, but they weren't allowed to. There would be consequences if they disobeyed God. They had to make a conscious choice to obey God and to have the tabernacle central, to have God central.

OUR CENTRE

Of course, we don't live in the Old Testament any longer. The tabernacle doesn't exist and neither does its successor, the temple. Those were Old Testament shadows of a greater reality. That

greater reality is Jesus Christ. In Christ "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19). Therefore John 1:14 says that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." That could also be translated, "the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us." We're meant to imagine Jesus coming as the new tabernacle of God, the place where God is dwelling in the midst of his people. And all of that becomes most explicit in John 2 when Jesus says he is now the temple of God. In him, God is dwelling among his people. Not only that, but in him God is also going to bring about the forgiveness of sins through Jesus's ultimate once-for-all sacrifice on the cross.

Understanding the New Testament fulfillment of Numbers 2:2 helps us see how we should apply it to our lives today. Think about this with me. If the tent of meeting or tabernacle equals Jesus Christ, if the tent of meeting was supposed to be central for God's people, then it follows that for us today Jesus Christ must be central for God's people. That's true in a general sense. Just in a general way, Christ has to be at the centre of our lives as our Saviour and Lord. It's to him alone that we look for the forgiveness of our sins. But we also need to look to him for the way we should live our lives in response to God's grace. We look to him as our Lord and Master. So just in general terms, keep Christ central in your life.

THE CENTRE OF REFORMED WORSHIP

But we can make this more specific. Let's think about worship. In a Reformed church, the way we do things in public worship is carefully designed to fit with these truths from God's Word. Our worship service is modelled on God's covenant of grace. The covenant is a relationship and in every healthy relationship there is communication, back and forth. So throughout our worship service, there is this back and forth dialogue between God and us. God speaks and we respond.

However, a Reformed worship service is supposed to have a centre. Jesus is the mediator of the covenant of grace. That means he's the one who makes this relationship work in a friendly way. Because that's true, he's supposed to be at the centre of our worship. Because Jesus is the fulfillment of the tabernacle and the temple, he's supposed to be at the centre. And if things are done properly in the worship service, Christ will be at the centre with what we call the means of grace.

The means of grace are the ways that God graciously works to strengthen our faith. In public worship, we think especially of the preaching and the sacraments. The preaching of God's Word is at the centre of our worship service and at the centre of the centre is supposed to be the gospel of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Yes, we also need to hear about how Christ works in us

and through us in our sanctification, but the gospel is where it all begins. If we're going to take Numbers 2:2 seriously, we need to have Christ-centred preaching. Our churches need to prioritize that. And when that Christ-centred preaching happens, we need to keep it at the centre of our attention.

**The Because Jesus is the fulfillment
of the tabernacle and the temple, he's
supposed to be at the centre.**

But then there are also the sacraments. Let's reflect particularly on the Lord's supper. With the Lord's supper, we're also meant to put Jesus in the centre. As we participate in the Lord's supper, God wants us to have Christ at the centre of our thoughts. We ought to be reflecting on his body broken for the complete forgiveness of all our sins. We need to be thinking about his blood shed for the complete forgiveness of all our sins. We need to be embracing the reconciliation we have through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we do that, we're also to be anticipating the marriage feast of the Lamb. That's described for us in Revelation 21. In verse 3, the ESV has a footnote at the bottom of the page. It tells us that the Greek for "the dwelling place" of God can also be translated as "tabernacle." The tabernacle of God will be with man. So that's

really the ultimate fulfillment of Numbers 2:2. Revelation 21:3 is telling us of how God will make his dwelling place with humanity, just like he did with the Israelites in the wilderness. He will be central for his people—eternally so.

A COMMAND AND A PROMISE

But you should notice an important difference between Numbers 2:2 and Revelation 21:3. Numbers 2:2 speaks of a command. Revelation 21:3 speaks of a promise. In this age, we have to strive to keep Christ central in our lives and in our worship. We have the Holy Spirit to help us do that, but our striving is still going to be inconsistent and imperfect. And there's grace from the cross to cover that too. But in the age to come, Christ promises to be central. He assures us that he will eternally be at the centre of our existence. That's going to be wonderful, that's going to be so joyful for us, because we're going to have the closest possible communion and fellowship with him.

Dear reader, always keep Christ central. Keep him central in your life in general. Focus on living for him as your Lord and Saviour. But also keep him central in your worship too. Each Sunday focus on Christ as he is proclaimed and whenever you celebrate the Lord's Supper, keep your faith fixed on him. 



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WHY DO WE HAVE CONFESSIONS?

CLARENCE BOUWMAN

The Canadian Reformed Churches, like most churches of Reformed heritage stemming from the Netherlands, have six confessions. The Ecumenical Creeds, dated to the time of the early church, comprise the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. The Reformational Creeds, formulated at the time of the Great Reformation in the sixteenth century, consist of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

CHALLENGES

The dates attached to the six creeds just listed immediately highlight an obvious challenge for twenty-first century churches. They clearly date from a time far, far removed from the present. In fact, a quick read of these confessions informs us that they address issues that are scarcely living issues today (e.g., the oath in LD 37 of the Heidelberg Catechism) while being silent about issues that are very alive in our current western world (e.g., marriage, divorce and remarriage, stewardship of the environment, and homosexuality).

A bigger challenge arises from the spiritual air which twenty-first century Christians daily inhale. Our current climate wants us to think that each person can determine his or her own truth, and nobody should impose someone else's truth on me. In that setting, confessions are seen as restrictive because (it's said) religious authorities are using the confessions to dictate to us what we are to believe. These Confessions are tools the church uses to exercise power over her members (or at a minimum over her office bearers). We ought to stand up against this exercise of power and liberate ourselves from their yoke. We ought to be satisfied simply with the Bible.

In light particularly of this second challenge, it seems to me necessary that we grapple with that pressing question: why have confessions?

SPEAKING & REPEATING

In the Bible the Greek term behind our English word "confess" (or "confession") is *homologeō*, a word composed of two Greek words meaning to *say* and *same*; hence meaning to *say the same thing*. A confession repeats back (in your own words) what someone else just said. The content by definition needs to be identical to the content of the original.

Immediately the question arises: to say the same thing *as who*? In the present discussion that is none other than God himself, as he has revealed himself in the Bible. So in what follows we need to pay attention to two parties: 1) The One who spoke; and 2) The party who echoes.

Our eternal, self-sufficient God has made clear in Holy Scripture that its content is fully and completely his work; its words are *his* words. Though the Bible came through human hands, God himself is its Author. In a few points I want to draw out the marvel of that reality.

HUMAN LANGUAGE

God spoke to people, and had his spoken word put down in writing, in human language. He did not speak to us in the language of angels or in whatever language he would use to communicate within the Trinity. Instead, he came down to our creaturely, earthly level. In so doing he demonstrated that his intent was to *relate* to people; he wished for people to *understand* his communication. So intentional was God in ensuring that his heavenly message be understood on earth that in the person of his Son he even came to *dwell* with us. This Christ (who is the Word of God, John 1:1ff) *taught* us God (John 3:31ff; 6:45), and his heavenly teaching was done in a language and with words that were clear to his earth-bound hearers.

We're confronted here with a marvel of divine kindness. On the last day of creation God almighty observed all that he had made and declared it to be "very good" (Gen 1:31). That means he judged his handiwork able to conform to its intended purpose—including that earthly, human language was able to carry divine thought! Human language was created as it was so that God could share his mind with his creatures—what marvelous goodness!

The fall into sin, of course, did incalculable damage to God's entire handiwork. But the fall did not render human language incapable of carrying divine thought. The Holy Spirit presses upon us that "all Scripture is breathed out by God," a phrase that communicates that every text of the Bible is divinely exhaled so as to still accomplish God's intent, namely, "to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" so that ultimately "the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:15ff). This concept too is so marvelous: despite humanity ruining God's good creation, he ensures that his Word continues to reach human ears and be written down in human language without being tarnished by sin. His purpose continues to be that he reaches our sin-dominated hearts so that we turn from dead-end self-sufficiency to embrace his life-giving mercy in Jesus Christ.

These, dear reader, are thoughts that cannot leave us cold. His creaturely-level words are competent to break through the hardened barriers of our sin-encrusted hearts. More, we sin-embracing people are *his intended audience!*

INTO HIS FAMILY

God's intent in communicating clearly with sinful humanity is as profound as the means he uses to share his holy thoughts. Almighty, eternal God has no need of anything to enhance his own happiness, for he has fullness of joy within himself (Ps 16:11). Yet his good pleasure is to *share his glorious joy* with people (see John 17:24), to make sinners his family. In this life already he has established that family bond with his people, in a relationship tagged in the Bible as a "covenant." Family life needs communication. Our heavenly Father communicates *today* in his living Word.

The Bible is *not* an account of religious experiences felt by peoples of generations past. It is instead God's living, always relevant divine Word addressed to his covenant people of all times, including the twenty-first century. If that sentence sounds puzzling, consider the force of Paul's inspired words in 1 Corinthians 10:11: "These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction." The pronoun "them" is a reference to the people of Israel as they walked through the desert some four-

The Bible is unified, a single book from one Author with a consistent message that's not confusing or misleading

teen centuries before Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians around 55 AD. The "things" that happened to them refers to the plagues God sent upon Israel in response to their disobedience (see 1 Cor 10:6ff; Num 25:1ff; 21:4ff). Now Paul insists: Moses wrote those things down centuries ago "for *our* instruction." We understand that the pronoun "our" refers to Paul and the Corinthians living in the first century AD. But that implies a most amazing thought: God had Moses record the events of Numbers 21 and 25 (and indeed the entire Pentateuch) because he was thinking long ago of the Corinthian Christians who would live fourteen centuries later!

By extension we need to say that the Lord God caused his words to the Corinthians (and indeed all Scripture) to be preserved into the twenty-first century because he was thinking long ago of *today's* Christians! His Word, though initially spoken to generations long dead, remains a living Word for today's people. Through that ancient Word he is still speaking to us directly. Our heavenly Father would have us today *listen in* on what he said long ago to Abram, to Moses, to David, to Peter, etc.—and to learn from both his words to them in their lives' messes as well as from their

responses. It's a mind-bending, soul-stirring thought: one God speaks one Word to all generations as his personal Word to each generation, to each child of his. How rich!

JESUS CHRIST

The content of God's Word, from Genesis to Revelation, is *Jesus Christ* (John 5:39; Luke 24:27, 44), whom God sent into this world because of his love for this world (John 3:16). Ours is a dark world, but the Son of God is its light (John 8:12). Inasmuch as all Scripture is about the Son, all Scripture is light for our feet as we walk the journey of life (Ps 119:105). That also means that if anyone takes the Son of God from Scripture (or any passage thereof), the Bible becomes dark and inaccessible and loses its relevance for today. It also means that every part of Scripture is beneficial for the person who wishes to do life well (2 Tim 3:16–17).

This is not to say that we can easily see Christ in every chapter of Scripture and hence the relevance of that passage for daily life. Our short-sightedness, however, doesn't take away from the fact that God has clearly shown Christ Jesus to us on every page of his Word and so given us light for our paths. Since God says that all Scripture is about Jesus Christ, I need with each passage to make a beeline to Christ and his sacrifice on the cross.

CLARITY

Finally, the fact that God is the Author of Holy Scripture means that the Bible contains no internal contradictions—for God not a man that he should lie (Num 23:19). The Bible is unified, a single book from one Author with a consistent message that's not confusing or misleading. In fact, its message is crystal clear. As Jesus said it: "I have given them your word" (John 17:14). Notice that Jesus does not say that he has given "words," i.e., multiple or confusing or contradictory messages (which would justify multiple faiths or conflicting doctrines). Rather, Jesus uses the singular term "word," implying a single, uniform heavenly message. That's also why Jesus asks the Father for unity among his people, "that they may be one" (John 17:11, 21). And it's why Paul could insist that "there is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph 4:4ff).

All of this brings us to the second party we need to think about, namely, those who repeat what God has said.

WHO ECHOES?

The glorious marvel that God the Creator has spoken to the people he created in understandable human language, with a message that communicates his desire to take people—sinners though they be—into his family and share his glory, leaves an

inescapable implication: *people must respond*. To ignore God's words of love in one way or other, or find them intrusive in our self-determined lives, is sinful arrogance. It is the wrong response. Our creaturely place *under* God implies that the only acceptable response to his gracious generosity is that we receive his words, accept his promise, embrace his gospel. In one word, that we *believe*.

*By God's grace, human language
is also able to express our Spirit-in-
stilled human response to God!*

Specifically, *what* shall we believe, embrace, accept? All that God has said, now written as Holy Scripture. Can you put the message of the Bible in your own words? Can you state what you believe perhaps in one sentence or maybe in many? To do so is *homologeo*—to say the same thing God just said, to repeat after God, to echo what he told you—i.e. to *confess*. Your sentence(s) formulating what you heard God say to you is a *confession*.

Now we're back to the marvelous gift of human words. Those words can carry a heavenly message from God to man, despite our fall into sin. By God's grace, human language is also able to express our Spirit-instilled human *response* to God!

Furthermore, since our place as creatures is so obviously *under* God the Creator, there is no place for us to doctor what God has said to us (e.g. to suit our preferences) or to pick and choose only preferable nuggets from his revelation. It is certainly true that some parts of God's revelation are closer to the core of the gospel than others (I'm thinking, for example, of the centrality of the cross of Calvary verses paedobaptism—which is not to say that that latter topic is not important). But God's identity as sovereign God means that I, a creature, have no license to ignore or alter any part of his revelation, let alone rank his words. It is instead for me to accept and to echo *all* he says to the best of my finite ability—simply because *he* says it.

PERSONAL

Yet my echo can never be simply a listing of biblical truths detached from my heart. The truth that God would adopt sinners into his family so that we share his glory and his joy is an

emotionally laden reality that cannot be properly confessed only from the head.

I have in my possession a Bible that I received when I responded as a young adult to the promises God signified and sealed to me in my baptism years earlier. That Bible was a gift from my parents. They took care to write my name in it and the date of my profession of faith. Imagine that: my name, in a book God wrote! Yes, my parents wrote my name in that book. But behind their action was surely God's providential hand; *he* had my name written in this heavenly book! That's very personal. My heavenly Father would impress on me that this book is his letter of love to me, his child. Of necessity such emotionally stirring action on his part requires a heart-felt response on my part.

CONCLUSION

What, then, are confessions? Why have them? Confessions are our necessary response to God's gracious speaking to us about his intent to adopt us through Christ Jesus into his family. Because the Bible is God's personal Word to his people, the confessions of his people are required. To say it the other way around: to challenge the need for confessions demonstrates a misunderstanding of what the Bible actually is.

Should each reader of God's love letter develop his own confession or echo, as if we each were the first to hear God's message of grace and respond? We're twenty-first century Christians. Countless have gone before us, reading God's Word in their circumstances and responding with words and phrases that invariably carried the aroma of their times. An argument can certainly be made for a new confession that reflects the issues of our day.

Meanwhile, there is so much to be gained from borrowing the confessions of previous generations. God's promises, after all, have not changed despite the passage of time, and human nature has not changed either. The fathers before us have tested and retested the ecumenical and reformational creeds embraced by our churches and have found them to capture excellently what God has revealed. So we humbly stand on the shoulders of those who read the Bible before us and gratefully adopt their labours for ourselves. 📖



Clarence Bouwman

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HEREWITH I *withdraw...*

One day the consistory receives a letter that says: “I have decided to withdraw my membership in this church.” Some call it “resignation.” And then what? Not every question a consistory is confronted with finds an answer in the Church Order. This is one of those occasions that makes the reply the sole responsibility of the consistory. It might be the easiest to simply say: “Okay. We accept your withdrawal.” But somehow that’s not how it is supposed to work, is it? After all, elders are not just administrators. They are shepherds who love the sheep and care for them. Of course, in our society everyone has the right to end his membership in any organization, for whatever reason. But there is a spiritual aspect to church membership which implies submission to Christ as the Head of the church. That makes a big difference.

Or does it? What determines the proper response?

MEMBERSHIP

Is it actually necessary for a Christian to be a member in a local church? There may not be an express command in Scripture, but there are enough biblical reasons to say yes. To begin with, Christ himself has entrusted to the church the means of grace: the preaching, the sacraments, and church discipline. In other words, for these means of grace to work in your life, you need to be in the church. The Bible also calls believers to submit to the oversight of elders (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:5) and urges us to meet together and stir up one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24, 25; see also the beautiful picture in Acts 2:42–47). Moreover, we hear that the church is the body of Christ, and we are told what it means that we are all individually members of it (1 Cor 12:12–31). These aspects are reflected in the Reformed confessions. The one universal church of Christ is present as local congregations, and we confess that all [believers] are obliged to join one of these manifestations of the body of Christ, and that no one ought to

withdraw from it (BC, Art 28). The church is characterized as a communion, and we confess “that everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members” (HC Q/A 55; see also Ch. 26 of the Westminster Confession of Faith). Furthermore, when you make public profession of faith in a Reformed church, you promise “to submit willingly to the admonition and discipline of the church.” This is a public vow in the presence of Jesus Christ, the Head of the church. This makes withdrawing, especially when confronted with admonitions or discipline, a matter of breaking your vow.

All of this does not prove that it is impossible to withdraw from the church, but it makes very clear that deciding to do so is a serious matter.

WHO DECIDES?

Perhaps we can learn from how Reformed churches handled this in the past. Given the length of this column, I can only give a very brief summarizing overview.¹ Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, synod decisions, in response to questions from consistories, reflect the conviction that no one can decide for himself to withdraw his membership from the church of Christ. If someone would announce his withdrawal, it was considered an act contrary to God’s will. Thus withdrawal was seen as a sin which the consistory had to respond to with discipline, following the procedure as outlined in the Church Order and in the Form for Excommunication. That does not mean that there was never any exception, but the dominant view was that only death or excommunication could end someone’s church membership, and not an individual’s decision.

In the Reformed churches after the Secession of 1834 this was still the primary position, but in the course of the nineteenth century this would be challenged. More than once the

¹ For more details see a study report presented to Synod 2009 of the Free Reformed Churches of NA. https://frcna.org/uploads/Study_Report_Synod_2009_WITHDRAWAL_and_RESIGNATION_FROM_THE_CHURCH_59665865d4.pdf

question came on the table: is it up to the individual to terminate his membership of the church, or can this only be decided by the consistory? The major assemblies did not always give clear answers, which led to the practice that the churches were free to choose between accepting a withdrawal or responding with excommunication. The shift came in the twentieth century. In the Reformed churches after the union of 1892 the view was generally accepted that church membership is a voluntary act of the believer, and thus he is also free to leave. When a person decides to withdraw his membership, no one can force him to remain a member, and the consistory can no longer treat him as a member, as in applying discipline. Although this position is generally accepted today, also in our Canadian Reformed churches, it does leave some important questions unanswered.²

OUTSIDE, BUT. . .

While respecting the freedom of every church member to withdraw his membership from the church, do we realize sufficiently the spiritual seriousness of this step, even if someone is going to join another church? Or do we look at the church as a coffee franchise? Some prefer Tim Hortons, others Second Cup or Starbucks, or another one. But in the end . . . who cares? It's all coffee anyway. In our individualistic days we may be inclined to think about the church in a similar way. But how does that fit with the biblical picture of the church, reflected in the Reformed confessions, as mentioned earlier? Do we acknowledge that withdrawing from a faithful church of Jesus Christ and breaking the vows of profession of faith remains a serious sin? Yes, the one who withdraws places himself beyond the boundaries of the church and can no longer be reached by the shepherds with the ultimate remedy for sinners. But that does not mean that a consistory must immediately stop all pastoral action. After all, God calls us to join his church and be a living member of it.

This means that a withdrawal is not just something between a member and some elders. No, the elders must warn that, yes—you can walk away from the church, but you can never walk away from God. And, as Paul points out: “He will judge those outside the church” (1 Cor 5:13). This means for the elders that such judging is no longer their responsibility. But it means for the one who withdraws that his accountability towards the Lord remains. And the elders do have the pastoral duty to point that out to the person involved, with the urgent call to repent.

HUMBLE WISDOM REQUIRED

Although the above may seem pretty straightforward, a few other questions will often become part of the discussion as well. Should the reason(s) why someone decides to withdraw from the church have any impact on how the consistory should respond? And would it make a difference for the consistory which church he is going to join (if any) after his withdrawal?

The fact is that reasons can be different. In many cases someone withdraws from the church, and thus from the supervision of the elders, to escape church discipline. This is nothing less than a hardening in the sin that led to this member's discipline in the first place, and a refusal to acknowledge that in this way the Lord himself is seeking his repentance.

But a person can also withdraw in anger and frustration because of a conflict in the congregation or with the consistory. Or he is disappointed in how the consistory has bungled a sensitive issue in the congregation. Or he is upset because of an injustice done to him or others. In those circumstances the correct response of this member would be an appeal to classis. But let's be honest—the appeal process does not always lead to restored peace in the church either. And the reality is that ministers and elders are not perfect. Sometimes they say and do things that are not helpful in tense relations. Consistories can aggravate tense or complex situations by unwise decisions. I do not suggest that any of those circumstances provides a good excuse to withdraw your membership from a faithful church of Christ. Nevertheless, in those cases, when the consistory is seen as being party to what has led to someone withdrawing, there is wisdom in letting the member go, especially when he is going to join another faithful church. It will leave an unresolved conflict, which is not how it is supposed to end in the church of Jesus Christ, and that's unfortunate. But distance can soften grudges.

This is also why faithful churches should not admit as new members those who have withdrawn from other faithful churches without researching the reasons why they want to join. 



Jan DeGelder

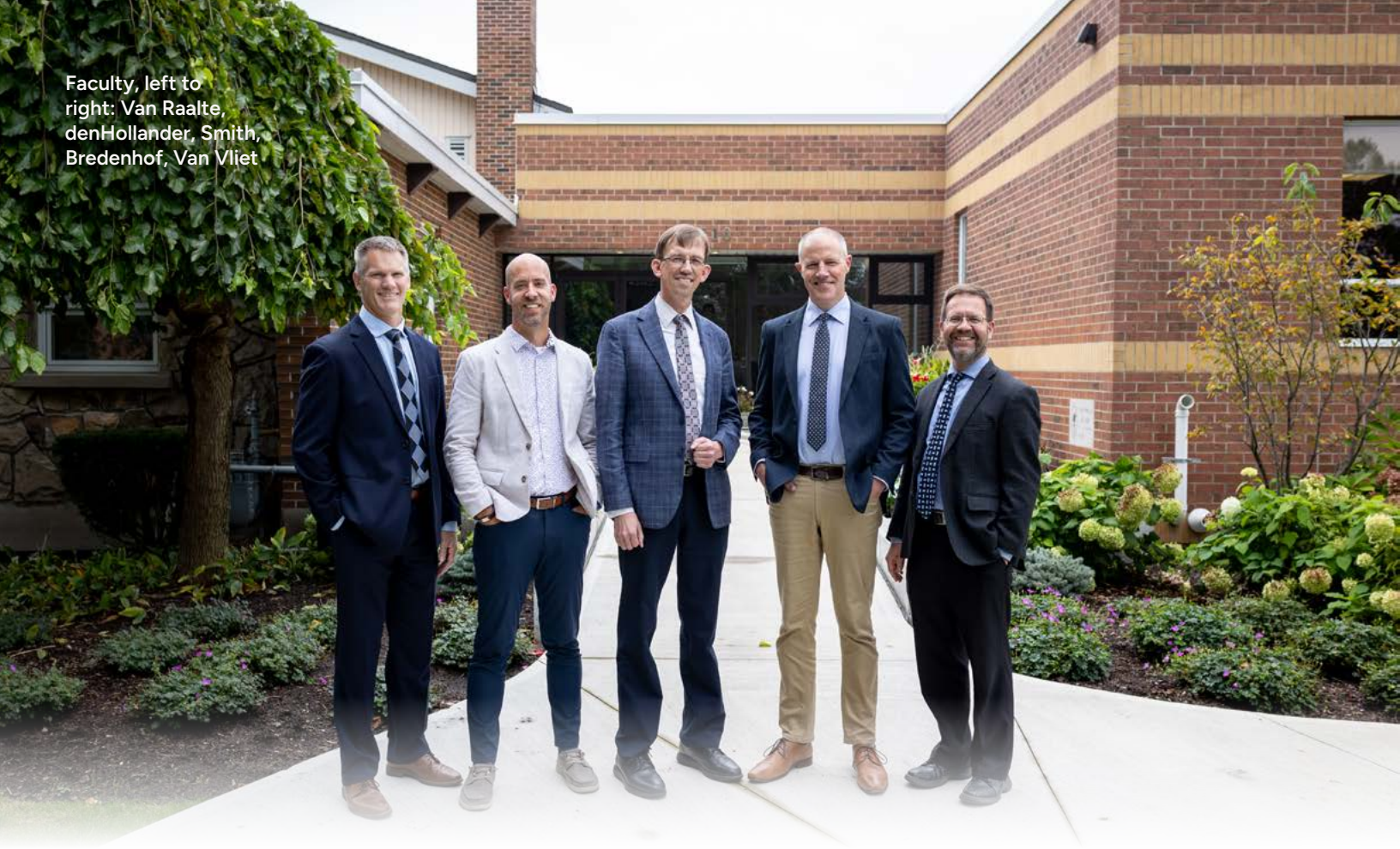
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² See article by URCNA pastor Greg Lubbers, first published in Oct. 2006 in The Outlook magazine.
<https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/ungodly-departure>

Faculty, left to right: Van Raalte, denHollander, Smith, Bredenhof, Van Vliet



CRTS UPDATE

JASON VAN VLIET

Since the last update, our heavenly Father has blessed our seminary in numerous ways. Allow me to share some highlights with you.

STUDENTS & INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Every September our student body begins a “resettling” process. Some familiar faces, last year’s graduates, are no longer in the building, and a group of new faces, the freshmen, appear in the classroom and the lounge. Usually this process takes several months. After all, a few students have crossed paths before starting seminary, but most have not. Add to the mix that most move in from halfway across the country or the other side of the globe, and it is hardly surprising that it takes a while to get used to new surroundings and relationships. This time around, though, that

resettling happened more quickly and thoroughly. In part this is due to the new spacious and attractive student lounge.

For example, one morning I arrived early at the seminary thinking I might be the first one in the building, but to my surprise a group of students was already sitting in the “cozy area” of the new lounge. They had had breakfast together and, as I walked in, they were doing devotions and taking prayer requests from each other. Did a well-equipped kitchen, a bright and spacious lounge, and some comfy furniture have at least something to do with that breakfast? Most likely. More importantly, moments like that are so valuable for relationship building. When I walk in on a breakfast

like that, I see future delegates to classis, synod, and even ICRC meetings praying and working together for the cause of Christ's kingdom. We can't teach things like that in a lecture!

Members in congregations often comment that, yes, our future pastors and missionaries need solid scriptural and confessional knowledge, as well as the ability to write and deliver faithful and clear sermons, but they should also develop good interpersonal skills. Indeed, shepherds should be able to listen well, converse comfortably, and pick up on the emotional undertones of the sheep in their care. To a degree these interpersonal skills can be taught, but for the most part they are caught. The communion of saints, both within the seminary community and the churches, is the best classroom for these skills.

LARGER GRADUATING CLASS

Keeping James 4:13–15 firmly in mind, under the Lord's blessing we look forward to the largest graduating class in CRTS history: ten MDiv and one DipThSt graduates. As you can imagine, discussion has started among the student body—and I suppose also the churches—how the classis and calling process will go for the MDiv students. Who will all be going to classis right away in June? Will some do an extra, post-grad internship? In due time, will the calls be (somewhat) evenly distributed among the candidates?

Ultimately, of course, all these things are governed by our Lord. As he previously guided these students toward seminary studies, each one in a specific way and at a particular time, so our sovereign and wise God will guide them toward their service within the churches, each one in the manner and at the time that he has ordained. Prayer, humility, and patience are key for us all: students, seminary, and congregations.

At the same time, good communication is part of the process. As seminary, we will work to communicate in a timely manner about which students plan to go to classis in June 2025 to become eligible for call. As calling committees and vacant churches, please feel free to reach out to me, as principal, or any faculty member if you need more information to consider the possibility of calling a student. Collectively we have prayed for more ministers and missionaries. Let us also consider together how this large graduating class can be called into gospel ministry.



Students taking notes during a lecture in the senior classroom



Mentor group meeting in the student lounge



Students listening to a lecture in the senior classroom



Chapel



January Interim Semester – panel discussion with Rev. Eric Onderwater and Michael Cooperwhite (Dr. deVisser was moderating). The teacher's college students were invited to attend.



Rebecca Bredenhof speaking at Seminary Wives Day

CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS SEMINAR

Each year, during the first two weeks of January, CRTS has a brief interim semester. J-term, as we call it, includes a variety of guest speakers on a particular topic, augmenting what is already taught during the regular semesters. Our speakers bring different voices, specialized knowledge, and diverse life experiences into our seminary community. We organize our annual J-term in a four-year cycle around the themes of preaching, evangelism and church planting, cross-cultural or global missions, and pastoral care.

This year our focus on cross-cultural missions included a wide range of topics such as facing spiritual warfare and demonic activity, reaching out to indigenous (First Nations) citizens, navigating different cultures within one local congregation, and considering the challenge and joy of being a foreign missionary.

In addition to the main theme for this year, we also served up a smorgasbord of other pedagogical dishes: modules in catechism teaching, time management, dangers of the digital age, and artificial intelligence. As you can see, these two weeks contained so much rich soul-food, we decided our bodies needed some exercise as well. At the end of J-term we headed over to the local bowling alley. Great fellowship, and even some spares and strikes, were enjoyed by all!

As part of J-term, the wives and girlfriends of our students also gather for a special day. (Yes, the guys stay home and take care of the little ones!) The theme this year was “The Pastor’s Wife and the Household of God,” with speeches given by Rebecca Bredenhof and Angela Bout. The ladies always spruce up the seminary with a few tasteful touches of interior decoration. Speaking of tasty, a hearty and delicious lunch is served as well.

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

While thankful for the increased size of our student body, we do well to hold in our hearts the words of our Saviour: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matt 9:37). In this connection, there are three things to mention.

First, on November 8, 2024, CRTS hosted a Campus Visit Day where we invited anyone thinking about the ministry to come and experience seminary life for a day. This was not the big, federation-wide event. We organize that larger event every three years and (save the date!) the next one will be in January 2026. However, the 2024 Campus Visit Day was focused more locally in Ontario. Having said that, several men came out from other provinces as well. In the end, over twenty men, younger and



older, spent the day at CRTS, considering more deeply what preparation for gospel ministry all involves and whether they aspire to such a glorious task. With the animated chatter of the regular student body, faculty, admin staff, twenty-odd visitors, and some dads, the building was *humming* that day.

Second, a similar event was held recently in Australia. One of our retired professors, Dr. A. J. de Visser, was there on a church tour. He participated in the “Timothy Conference,” representing the seminary as well. This event was also well-attended with numbers similar to the event in Canada. What a blessing!

Third, we are making steady progress on our new website. It will include an entirely new section, “Considering the Ministry,” that will be featured prominently. Once complete, that area of the website will walk prospective students through four aspects: deciding, preparing, experiencing, and settling into theological studies at CRTS. The format of these webpages will be Q&A and the tone will be more conversational. Hopefully, this will help men, along with their wives if they are married, consider the ministry of

God’s Word. More importantly, we pray that these webpages will prompt deep and earnest face-to-face discussions in the context of family, friends, and local office bearers.

May the God of all grace continue to preserve and increase his redeemed people throughout his world. Thank-you, brothers and sisters, for all your support and encouragement. It means so much to us all. 



Jason Van Vliet

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Photo Credits: Jeremy James Photography



The 49th Meeting of **NAPARC**

WILL GORTEMAKER

November 11 was Remembrance Day in Canada and Veteran's Day in the U.S., but in Kansas City it was also the occasion of the arrival from all across North America of delegates for the 49th meeting of NAPARC—the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. The Canadian Reformed Churches were represented by a delegation of six members of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations (CER). The RCUS (The Reformed Church in the United States) took its turn to host at Northland Reformed Church of Kansas City. More information could be given

about the weather and attractions of Kansas City if the time from waking to sleeping had not been filled with meetings both formal and informal.

PLENARY SESSIONS

The plenary session of the Council was called to order at 2 pm on November 12. The usual agenda items—roll call, approval of the minutes, review of correspondence, adoption of the docket, election of officers, treasurer and committee reports—make up

a part of these plenary sessions. But the bulk of the time is given to reports from each of the thirteen member churches and three invited observer churches (see sidebar), followed up by questions and prayers on their behalf by other churches. New to this year's meeting was the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada (RPCC, see RPCCCanada.org), formed recently by consequence of a (peaceful) decision of the RPCNA to separate according to the nations' borders (i.e. RPCNA in the US; RPCC in Canada).

Rev. Marc Jagt brought a report on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. He highlighted some of the goings-on in our churches, and especially preparations for our general synod in 2025. He then fielded questions from a designated Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) delegate:

- Is there a trend of lower attendance at the second service? If so, what is being done about it?
- In what ways is the culture of the CanRC changing?
- How can we as NAPARC churches help you?

In response to a question from the floor we confirmed that the CanRC are aware of—and even have some involvement in—an ARP church plant in Windsor, ON. This is in line with the NAPARC “Golden Rule” Comity Agreement, which seeks to ensure that there is not interference nor competition but rather consultation and cooperation where new NAPARC church planting projects are begun.

On the Tuesday evening, Rev. Chris Campbell, pastor of the host church, led a devotional service focusing on 3 John 1:1–4 under the theme “The Joy of Gospel Ministry.” On the Wednesday evening, Dr. Breno Macedo (also an RCUS pastor), presented some of the findings of his doctoral research on “the plain style of preaching.”



NAPARC in Plenary Session

MEMBER CHURCHES OF NAPARC

- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)
- Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)
- Église Réformée de Québec (ERQ)
- Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)
- Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)
- Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC)
- Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) (KPCA)
- Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
- Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
- Presbyterian Reformed Church (PresRC)
- Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA)
- United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA)

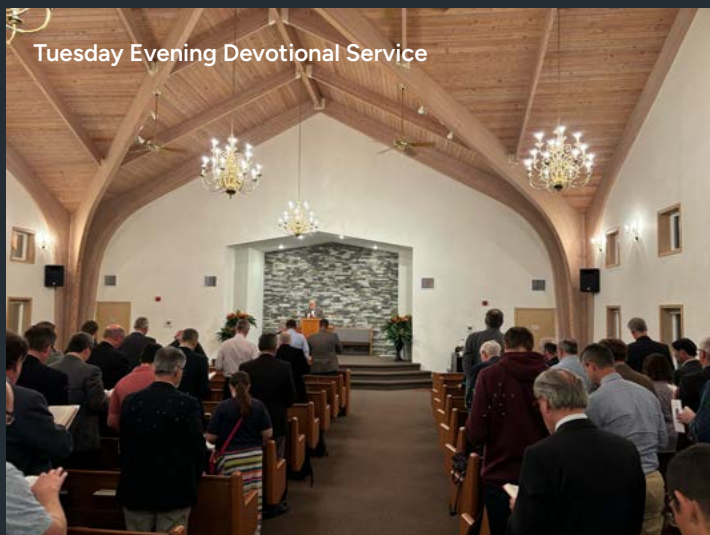
INVITED OBSERVERS

- Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC)
- Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada (RPCC)

NAPARC in Plenary Session



Tuesday Evening Devotional Service



Wednesday Evening Presentation by Dr Macedo.



BILATERAL MEETINGS

Outside of the plenary sessions—starting informally on Monday evening and formally on Tuesday morning—individual churches paired up for bilateral meetings, usually at the main venue, sometimes over a meal or snack. Bilaterals are a chance to focus on the specific relationships, areas of cooperation, and discussion between the two parties. For the CanRC delegates, these bilaterals were characterized by openness and a desire to grow together and be a help to one another. The CanRC delegation met in official bilaterals with its counterparts from the RCUS, RPCNA, HRC, OPC, FRCNA, URCNA, RPCC, ARP, ERQ, and BPC. Besides

these, there was much informal contact and sweet fellowship as individual delegates with counterparts of the other churches.

Northland Reformed Church was a superb host, providing lunch and dinner, including authentic Kansas City barbeque—the specialty being their mouth-watering “burnt ends.” Delicious as that may be, the chief delight of NAPARC can be summed up in those familiar words from Psalm 133: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” 🍌

Will Gortemaker
Member
Committee for Ecumenical Relations



RESSOURCES CHRÉTIENNES IS GROWING!

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

This past December 2024, Ressources Chrétiennes had the joy and blessing of celebrating its 10th anniversary. Ten years have already passed since the very first articles were published on our online Reformed Christian library!

We praise the Lord for how far we've come from this humble beginning. Today, our website offers 8000 articles on a wide variety of biblical, theological, ethical, and pastoral subjects. This rich material is useful for both Christians in general and church leaders in particular, as they include important training material designed to assist office-bearers in their weighty tasks.

We are astonished by the significant growth in the number of users, but more importantly we are very encouraged to hear from them about their deep gratitude for that work and their thirst for nourishment and guidance from solid Christian literature. We hear from faithful readers in Quebec, isolated Christians in France, pastors in Martinique, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Bénin, Tchad, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, DR Congo, and other French speaking countries.



African countries where French is widely spoken

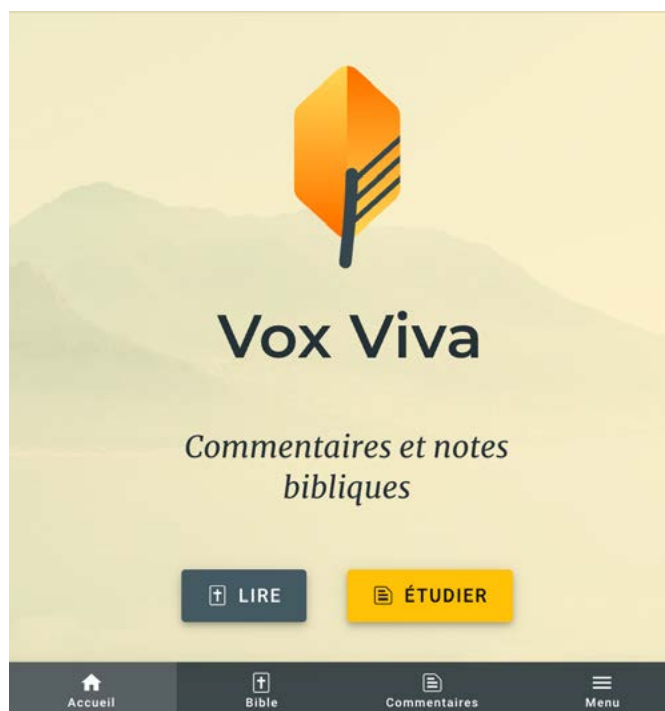
These correspondents, with their questions, requests, and warm thanks, are many—and keep us busy!

But this work is not complete, far from it! The Lord is constantly propelling us forward, as more opportunities are coming our way, and more projects are being prepared. We don't know how the Lord will make these things possible, considering our very few resources. God alone knows. This is his work—he will provide.

A BABY ELEPHANT IS BORN

New projects? Yes! Just consider this one. A baby elephant was born just a few weeks ago. Baby because it's brand new and small. Elephant, because it has its roots in South Africa and, considering its DNA, has the potential to become quite big and impressive!

We are thus delighted to announce the arrival of Vox Viva in French, online. Praise the Lord! This is a special moment for all those who have been praying for this project and working on it for so long.



Vox Viva means “the Living Voice” (of God; see 1 Pet 1:23). We believe that through the faithful explanation and application of God's Word, we hear the living voice of God today, powerful to regenerate hearts, gather his church, and build it to his glory.

This detailed Bible commentary application is designed to help pastors and teachers prepare their sermons, Bible studies, and other teachings, with a view to nurturing and guiding the church according to God's Word. It is also useful to guide believers in their study and meditation of God's Word.

Vox Viva is being developed in English by the Reformational Study Centre in Pretoria, South Africa. Many pastors and theologians contribute to this project. Ressources Chrétiennes is currently translating precious Reformed resources into French, and we just started to publish them on voxviva.app/fr, thanks to the generous support of the Owen Sound Canadian Reformed Church and other supporters, and the participation of the Église Chrétienne Réformée de Beauce.

Among the 20,000 commentaries already produced by the RSC in English, more than 4000 have been translated into French so far. More than 2000 of these, covering nine books of the Bible, have been published.

We hope and pray that this very unique application will make a great impact in the lives and ministries of many pastors, churches, and Christians from French-speaking communities in North America, the Caribbean, Europe, and especially in the numerous French speaking countries in Africa.

We thank you for praying for us so that we can continue our work of faithfully explaining the Word of God, translating this precious material in French, and making it available worldwide. 



Paulin Bédard

Minister

l'Église Réformée du Québec (the Reformed Church of Quebec—ERQ)

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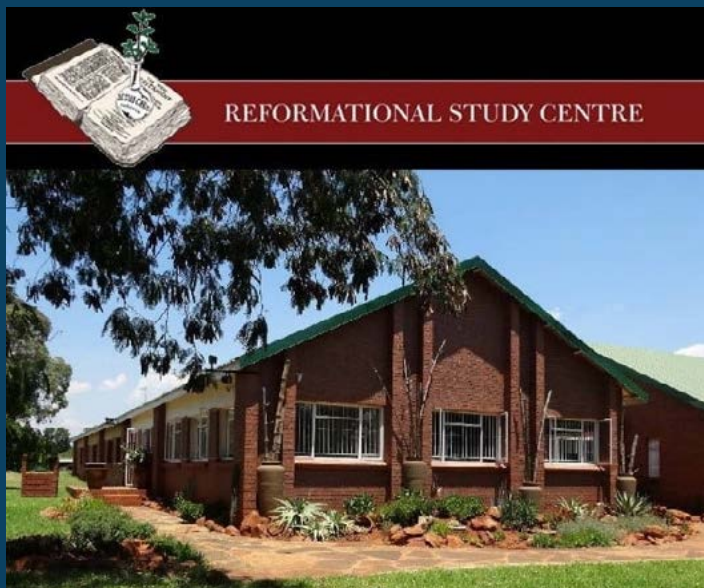
CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions please feel free to contact the Owen Sound Mission Board at:

missionboardtreasurer@oschurch.ca

Donations may be sent via e-Transfer to that same address, or by cheque to:

Owen Sound Canadian Reformed Church—Mission Board
P.O. Box 304, Owen Sound, Ontario N4K 5P5



TESTIMONIES

“I am particularly touched by the Ressources Chrétiennes initiative and your collaboration with the Reformational Study Centre. The Vox Viva and Lamad projects are promising and meet a crying need for quality resources in French, especially for young churches in developing countries. The vision of these projects, combining accessible preaching and Christian training, is truly inspiring.”

O.D., pastor in Haiti



Ressources Chrétiennes Steering Committee:
Anne-Marie Coulombe, Paulin Bedard, and Alexis Piéplu

“I would like to thank you again for the quality teachings you send me for my growth in my walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. The texts and teachings received from you are invaluable. Please be assured that these riches are passed on to several hundred people. I say this because I’m an elder in our church and one of my duties is to feed God’s people. Thanks to your resources, God’s people will be better nourished from now on. May you be richly blessed!”

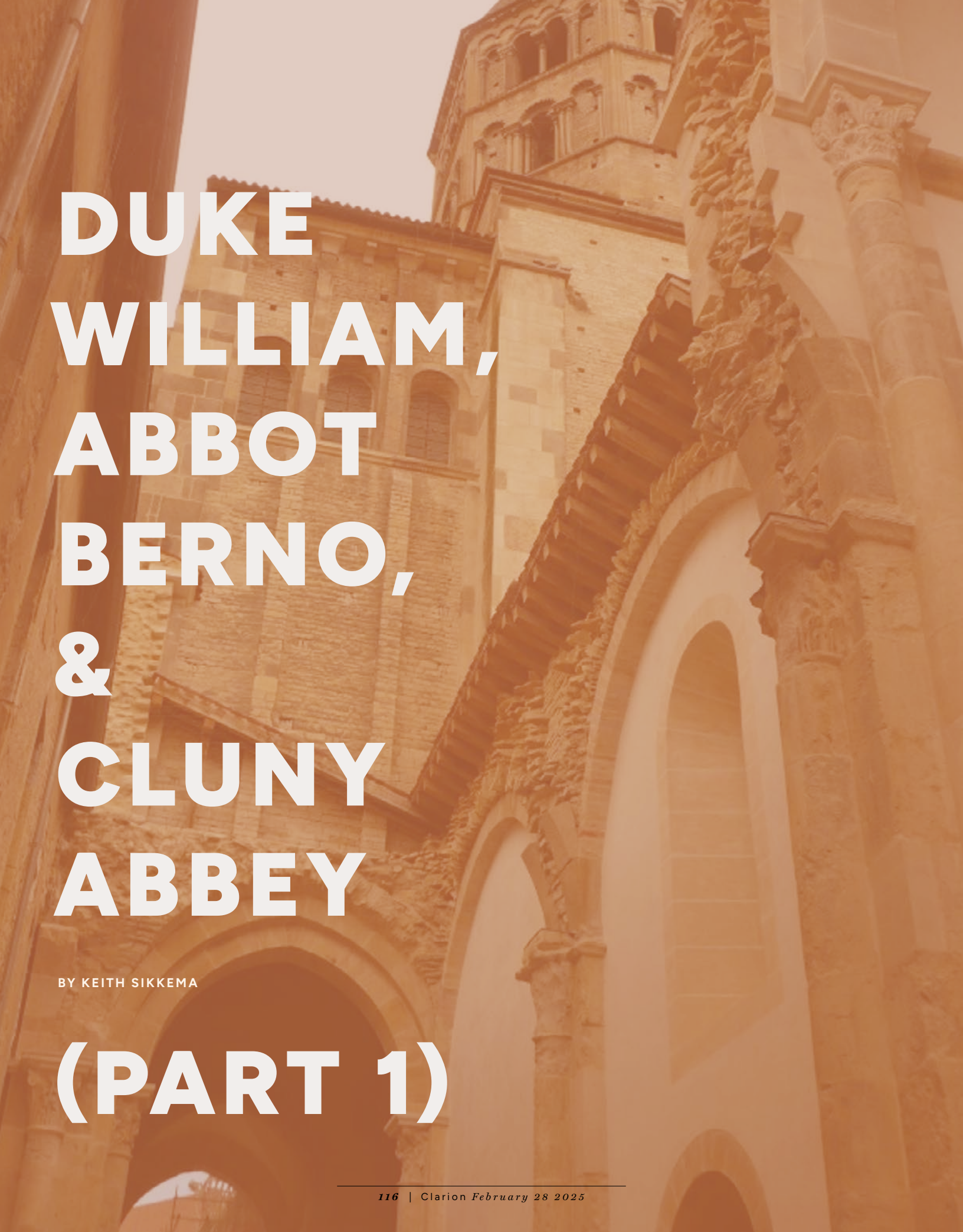
J.A., elder in Bénin



Christian Cruchet (our new pastor, ordained last April 6) giving me a souvenir notebook filled with warm words from members of our congregation who expressed their praise to the Lord and thankfulness for the ten year ministry of Ressources Chrétiennes. It was given to me at the end of my update of the ministry that I presented to our congregation on November 27, 2024.

“I thank you most sincerely for your efforts in spreading the gospel. Thank you for the hard work you put into publishing monthly articles on “Ressource Chrétiennes.” It is very edifying and I encourage you to keep up the good work. Personally and on behalf of the United Reformed Church in Congo, we are grateful to you for the articles you publish, because they inform and train us at the same time. We use your various articles to prepare sermons and teachings, and we use your Catechism material to train Christians in the faith. Our prayer is that the Lord will open ways for you to continue this service.”

M.L.K., pastor in DR Congo



DUKE WILLIAM, ABBOT BERNO, & CLUNY ABBNEY

BY KEITH SIKKEMA

(PART 1)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

By the early Middle Ages, monasticism was an acceptable and even admired way to express one's devotion to God, but it was not without flaws. In this two-part article, the "Background" section briefly presents the error of Semi-pelagianism. Next, historical fictional sections illustrate and identify (with asterisks) such beliefs at the origin of Cluny's Benedictine Abbey. The final section provides some highlights of what became of it after its well-intended start. The church needed to learn again that salvation is by grace alone and through Christ alone—without meritorious good works (HC, LD 33). Footnotes are meant to clarify, without disrupting the story.*

BACKGROUND

The British monk Pelagius (AD 354–418) taught that one could freely choose to keep God's law and avoid sinning, effectively suggesting that "choosing and being good" was key to one's election and salvation. However, following Augustine (AD 354–430), the Council of Ephesus (AD 431) upheld the doctrine of man's total depravity and judged Pelagianism to be a serious heresy. Even then, "moderate" Semi-pelagians asserted that man was "only tainted by sin" and not totally depraved and corrupt. Augustine had called this an "error." The Second Council of Orange (AD 529) upheld Augustinian doctrines like original sin and predestination but (among other flaws) fell short of upholding the doctrine of total depravity and allowed for a Semi-pelagian "synergist" doctrine of good works as man's own contribution* to salvation. In Rome, Pope Boniface II received "Orange's" doctrines as sound.

For monk Benedict of Nursia's (AD 480–547) earnest and unshakable reform-mindedness amidst monastic decline, he faced personal opposition—even poison-attacks. Nevertheless, as abbot at his new Monte Cassino monastery in Italy, he boldly applied his improved rule for ideal monastic life in AD 530. His "Benedictine Rule" stressed the monks' family-like living (under its abbot's fatherly discipline) in modesty and chastity, including periods of silence. It also called for commitment to worship, studying Scripture, and the pursuit of moderation, wisdom, and order—all to merit the salvation of one's soul.* Monte Cassino was to be a holy refuge from evil and apostasy.

In the latter years of the Carolingian Renaissance,¹ Emperor Louis the Pious (AD 778–840), Charlemagne's successor-son, promoted such Benedictine zeal. However, by AD 900, its standards slackened, even as church leadership sank into ungodly decay and immorality. Vikings looted western port cities and monasteries, Muslims threatened the south, and the devil prowled

around like a lion for more people to devour. These were dark times for the church.

PEACE & PIETY

One sunny fall day in AD 909, as Duke William of Aquitaine looked around from his Cluny hunting lodge in Burgundy,² appreciating its rolling hills, forests, fields, orchards, and vineyards. His eyes followed a soaring red kite as it eyed a lizard, bird, or rabbit; he gazed also at its creeks calmly flowing towards the Grosne River below. At the forest's edge, a doe appeared, and a black redstart flitted about. Near scattered clusters of hovels, coarsely dressed serfs harvested grapes, wheat, or beans, and carried the produce to the Cluny mill, or started preparing fields for fall-seeding. Nearby, swallowtail and peacock butterflies darted around colourful blooms. Cluny was a place of peace, far from the ravages of war and conflict. Even the nightly howl of wolves would not change that. The hunting lodge, an aging but solid villa around a courtyard with a built-in private chapel, was William's favourite place.

Unlike battles, what could be a more noble and peaceful pastime in Cluny than a hunt, and what great stories would there be to tell his wife, Ingelberga of Provence! She would listen with interest and never failed to express gratitude for her good Christian husband. This time, William had come to be both host and master of a hunt. He recalled his first hunt here, even before he had inherited Auvergne in AD 886, and became its count at age 11. What a rookie he had been, thinking of hunts as a nobleman's honourable social sporting events! He now knew that it prepared him for war as well. He remembered how, at age 18, he had actually conquered Aquitaine and so became its duke.

People had begun calling William "The Pious." Being Christian mattered to him. He had already given two monasteries to Berno,

¹ See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Carolingian-Renaissance>

² 90 km north of Lyon, France



the black-robed Benedictine abbot from Gigny,³ 80 km further east. Berno's father, a nobleman, once sheltered monks fleeing from marauding Vikings. Berno had then chosen to zealously devote himself to God alone as a Benedictine monk. William had invited him to say mass before the hunt, and to remind guests to behave as Christians and to honour noble hunting rules.

Today, William and Ingelberga were welcoming counts and other friends, who came for business and hunting. William's staff had been training his teams. There were quiet bloodhounds, tireless and sharp-nosed foxhounds, and greyhounds for cornering the quarry. Hornists knew their signals. Wenches knew how to prepare fitting meals. All was ready; everything looked good. It would be a hunt to remember—even if quite unlike what William envisioned.

HOLY HUNT

On the day of the hunt, Berno rang the chapel's bell to summon the hunters to mass. He led the service and prayed for a good hunt. It did not matter whether they would shoot a stag, a boar, or an ibex—or how many, he said. A hunt was good if all acted honourably, by the rules. Even the hunt was to be *holy*.

From the lodge, the mounted hunters and their hounds fanned out at the forest's edge. No one hurried, lest the quarry run away. A red kite watched from above. When they smelled a scent, the bloodhounds wagged their tails and pulled on their leashes. Then the foxhounds were called to find and sniff the quarry's droppings

and trace its trail. The thrill went up: they were on a deer's track! The hornists signaled directions to the hunters about where to go, and safely so. It would take hours, but the hunters steadily pursued the unseen animal. When they finally saw it, it was tall, proud, brownish . . . a fully mature ten-tine stag! Now the hornists called for greyhound teams to chase the animal, wear it out, and corner it.

The stag tried to escape through dense bush. It would be hard for the mounted hunters to follow it, but it was a prepared trap. When the stag's tines got stuck in the branches, it was too tired to break loose. The greyhounds jumped and barked excitedly but knew to wait for the hunters.

As master of the hunt, William must shoot it. He focused his aim with care to not hit some branch, but the stag. With a twang, he released the arrow. Hit in the heart, the animal fell, jerked its legs, and once more shook its majestic antlers. William noted the dark red blood pulsating out from its chest.

The hunters pulled the stag out of the shrubbery. The hounds scrambled to lick the blood—but did not touch the carcass. The hornists signalled victory, and all came to the site. "Good hunt, Duke William!" William beamed. How the Lord had blessed them! The antlers would also make for a fine trophy on the lodge's wall. Cluny was a wonderful hunting ground indeed . . . the best ever!

At the forest's edge, quite naturally and without remorse, a kite swooped down on a rabbit and a wolf pounced on a deer.

³ See <https://en.montagnes-du-jura.fr/churches-and-abbeys/abbaye-de-gigny-2>

SECOND THOUGHTS

The satisfied and cheerful hunters returned to the lodge. The fragrance of good food drifted towards them. When all had arrived and were seated, Abbot Berno asked for a blessing on the food and wine. They ate with gusto, drank wine with cheer, and shared tall tales of this and other hunts. Their girls, Adélaïde (10) and Angilberga (8), had joined William with Ingelberga; they loved the guests' good spirits. Ingelberga looked up to William with admiration: "You did it again! All went well!" He winked and smiled, but she noticed a slight frown in his face. Something was bothering him. She would ask him, afterwards.

"William," she then said, "It was an excellent hunt—but what bothers you?"

"The hunt . . ." he sighed, weighing his words before continuing. "The hunt was honourable, and for that I am thankful. Yet, it made me think of battles I fought. Hunts and wars need similar resources, strategies, talents, and training . . . but when the stag fell, and the hounds licked the blood, they avoided the carcass. Today, it struck me that battles are brutal and bloody, filled with hatred, deception, and cruel bloodshed, that vultures come for the cadavers and victors for the loot, and that no one stops it. I never held them back. Hunting can be holy, but war is hideous."

She tried to soothe him. "My dear William, it always was like that. Joshua and David went to war, but the outcome was what mattered, and it was always the Lord's. Isn't that how Charlemagne viewed his battles, 100 years ago?"

"Sure, but their battles were the Lord's, and, unlike Charlemagne's, my battles, like for Aquitaine, were not meant to convert people. They were not for God, but for status, supposedly to help my friend Ebalus regain his crown. I followed deadly and ungodly pursuits of power, lies, and retaliation, Ingelberga. It made me Duke of Aquitaine, but it was soaked with blood and evil. I am not sure it was a just war.⁴ How could it have the Lord's blessing?"

"You were only a teen at the time, William. That was some fifteen years ago!"

"Yes, that's right, dear, but as Count of Auvergne at the time, I agreed to join Ebalus, and I was responsible for that decision. I have blood on my hands, Ingelberga. I am guilty of the gruesome gore, smells, sounds, and sights of shooting, slashing, stabbing, and hacking people to death. I made people do it and even celebrated my victory and reward—and carelessly left the dead and maimed soldiers' families destitute and in grief. We know what victors do to losers, but how deep is the suffering of those who lost loved ones?"

William was quiet for some time, and then continued, "I know the Lord must be angry with me for that and my many other sins. I think he is punishing me already. Just like many soldiers' families were left without fathers and sons, we have no male heir, Ingelberga. I am past thirty and must soon meet my judge and maker.⁵ How will I be right before God? Must I suffer forever for my sins?"

She pondered this, took his hand, and then said softly, "I see your agony, William. For you, this is not a matter of earthly gain, but of salvation and eternity. I, too, long to have a son, but doesn't the Lord say that the decision is always his? Also, don't you believe the Lord could forgive your sins of youth? Do you not, like David, seek him to show you his paths and remember his steadfast love? Perhaps you should discuss this with Berno before he returns to Gigny. I will support you, dear."

"How I love you, Ingelberga! Yet, I will have no peace until I know that somehow something will preserve me . . . if only I had done my duty before God*," he sobbed. "I must confess my sins and seek absolution so I will know that the Lord has mercy and will forgive me. Yes, I must seek comfort from Berno, and we must pray about this."

To be continued in our next issue. 



Keith Sikkema

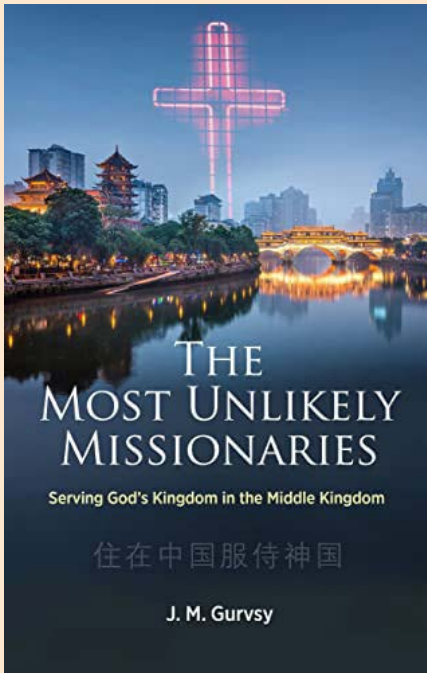
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⁴ See <https://wp.cune.edu/matthewphillips/2017/02/08/augustine-on-just-war/>

⁵ He lived nine more years.



CHINA MISSION MEMOIR

The Most Unlikely Missionaries: Serving God's Kingdom in the Middle Kingdom, by J. M. Gursy. (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2023). Paperback. 219 pages. \$20.95 CDN.

Over the last few decades, the Reformed faith has found roots in China. This has happened despite government strictures and outright persecution. There are networks of Reformed and Presbyterian churches and they continue to grow. This growth happens in multi-faceted ways; for example, through certain churches covertly sending missionaries to China. This memoir is written by one such missionary.

We don't know much about the author and that's intentional. Even the name on the front cover of the book isn't real. The back of the book reveals only that the author "is a minister of the gospel in a biblical, confessional Presbyterian denomination in North America." Many of the names of people and places inside the book are likewise obscured for security reasons.

The author, his wife, and their five children served in China from 2017 to 2019. The memoir relates how the author went from being a pastor in rural Pennsylvania to foreign missionary in one of the most populous cities in the world. We follow their trials and triumphs until they finally land in China in 2017. There they have to adjust to a radically different culture while struggling to learn Mandarin.

Now you might be wondering how it's possible to write a memoir about just two years of missionary service. However, there's a lot that happened in those two years. One of the most dramatic developments had to do with the security situation in the city of Chengdu, where Gursy and his family were serving. Another dramatic development had to do with the health of his wife. These events, especially the latter, conspired to cut short the author's time in China.

As I just mentioned, Chengdu is where most of the action takes place. If you've heard of this city, it's probably because of the Early Rain Covenant Church and its pastor Wang Yi. Pastor Wang was publicly critical of the Chinese regime and he was arrested and imprisoned. The Early Rain Covenant Church was closed down. *The Most Unlikely Missionaries* mentions this situation and adds some helpful context.

This memoir also reminds us of the ongoing need in one of the world's largest nations

I highly recommend this book for a couple of reasons. One is that it's just a fascinating story of missionary service, a story which may inspire others. It may not inspire you to serve in China, but perhaps somewhere else either long-term or short-term. Second, this memoir also reminds us of the ongoing need in one of the world's largest nations. So many lost souls, but also many churches are in need of our support. *The Most Unlikely Missionaries* puts this great work on our radar, so we may pray for it and support it where and when we can, also in our own circles. 🙏

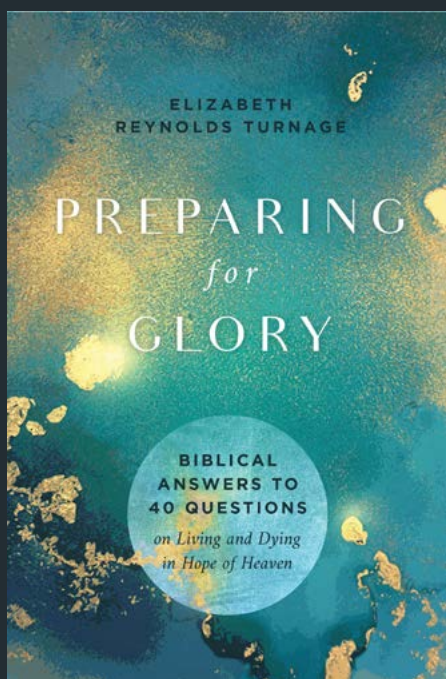


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DISCUSSING DEATH

Preparing for Glory: Biblical Answers to 40 Questions on Living and Dying in Hope of Heaven, by Elizabeth Reynolds Turnage. (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2024). Paperback. 182 pages. \$24.43 CDN.

Like every pastor with some years in his rear-view mirror, I've had much to do with death in my ministry. I've known saints who were well-prepared in every way to go home to be with the Lord. I've known those who were prepared in some ways and unprepared in others. Then there have also been those who made no preparations of any kind. Those situations often bring the most difficulty for those left behind. It can be difficult to have conversations around death, which is why a book like this can be such a huge help.

The author became familiar with her topic through experiences with her parents, as well as her twenty-two-year-old son. She writes, "In the valleys of grief, sorrow, and affliction, I have discovered that the Bible offers profound hope" (p. 13). She shares that hope through answering forty questions related to death.

Here are a few of the questions Turnage answers:

- What happens to us when we die?
- What will life be like in the new heavens and new earth?
- How do we know which medical means to employ at the end of life?
- What is a spiritual legacy, and how do we create one?
- What is anticipatory grief?
- How do we grieve when we don't know a loved one's eternal destiny?

Each of the questions is answered in a brief chapter that includes a Bible reading, prayer, and questions for reflection. Each chapter also has something I've never seen in a book before: a QR code that will link you to more resources related to the topic of the chapter.

Most of the book gives sound biblical answers and counsel. The only chapter where I put a question mark was the one on

cremation. Turnage writes, "Cremation isn't against biblical counsel, but many theologians and pastors recommend burial because they believe it more clearly honors the dignity of the body" (p. 92). Then a short bit later, "... many theologians agree that both burial and cremation are biblically acceptable options" (p. 93). Historically the Christian church has rejected cremation. The body of a deceased person is still a human being. Therefore, that body should be treated honourably and the best way to do that is burial, akin to sowing the seed in anticipation of the harvest (1 Cor 15:36-49). I was recently in Singapore, and I learned about funerary practices in this tiny and extremely land-poor nation-state. Cremation there is often a necessity and there's little that can be done about that. But that's not an issue in land-rich countries like Canada and Australia. We have the option to do what's best.

Aside from that point, this would be a helpful book for every believer in their "sunset years." It could be used as a devotional or read on its own. It would also be helpful for pastors and elders as they engage in conversations with members about death. Death can be difficult to discuss, but it's something 100% of us are going to face unless Christ returns first. Turnage helps us have those difficult discussions and make every necessary preparation for our homecoming. 



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CLASSIS CLIPPINGS

What follows are clippings from the press releases of recent classes across the federation for the interest of our readers. Please note that a number of classes were cancelled for December, hence the fewer number. Each press release can be found in full at canrc.org.

CLASSIS ONTARIO WEST DECEMBER 11, 2024

At question period according to Article 44 Church Order, a church requested advice in a matter of pastoral oversight. Advice was given. The church of London requested advice about their relationship with the House of Prayer, a Congolese Christian fellowship. Advice was given.

An overture from Trinity Canadian Reformed Church of Glanbrook regarding the financial support of the American Reformed Church in Grand Rapids was discussed. The overture was amended and adopted. An ad hoc committee was appointed and is to report to the May/June 2025 Classis.

A request was received from Br. Arjan van der Meer, a third-year student at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, requesting permission to speak an edifying word within the Canadian Reformed Churches. Classis granted this requested based on his successful completion of a licensure examination by Classis North of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa.

Appointments

1. Convening church for the next Classis: Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church; date March 5 with May 28 (reconvening on June 4) as the cancellation date; and suggested executive: Rev. K. Kok, chairman; Rev. J. Temple, vice-chairman; and Rev. T. Van Beek, clerk.

2. Classical Committee of Appeals: The churches brought forward only one name for this committee. As a result, this committee could not be appointed. The churches are urged to bring a sufficient number of names to the next classis so that this committee may be constituted.
3. Classical Committee for Inter-Church Relations: Br. J. Janssens (convener), Br. P. Engbers, and Rev. J. Temple.

CLASSIS NORTHERN ONTARIO DECEMBER 11, 2024

The agenda was adopted with some minor amendments. Elora requested the judgment of classis as per Article 71 CO in relation to Rev. Theo Wierenga. After discussion in closed restricted session, classis decided to approve Elora's request to proceed to deposition. The deputies of regional synod gave concurring advice.

Question period as per Article 44 of the Church Order was held. Two churches requested advice. Advice was given.

Classis received names for nominations for the Committee for Needy Churches and the Committee of Appeal. Appointed to the Committee for Needy Churches: Br. John Vanderwoerd. Appointed to the Committee of Appeal: Rev. Eric Kampen and as alternate, br. Richard Hoeksema.

CLASSIS CENTRAL ONTARIO OCTOBER 18, 2024

A Colloquium was held with Rev. Richard Eikelboom in regards to his calling as missionary to Papua New Guinea by the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto. All necessary documents relating to this calling were received, examined, and found to be in order.

The Rev. Dr. Bill Dejong engaged Rev. Richard Eikelboom in matters pertaining to doctrine, missions, and ecclesiology and Rev. Hilmer Jagersma followed with a conversation regarding church

polity, specifically regarding the Provisional Church Order for the churches in Papua New Guinea.

Classis judged the colloquium was satisfactory and approbated the call. Installation service for Rev. Richard Eikelboom is set for November 3, 2024 during the 9:30 morning worship service. Ebenezer church was appointed to represent classis at the installation service.

CLASSIS NIAGARA OCTOBER 23, 2024

Welcomed and seated as regional synod deputies were Rev. Clarence Vandervelde and Rev. John VanWoudenberg. After the adoption of the agenda, the chairman then asked each of the churches the questions from Article 44 of the Church Order, with each of the churches answering in turn. Advice was requested by one church and given by classis.

After ensuring that the proper documentation had been submitted, classis then proceeded to the peremptory examination

of Candidate Zachary Vanderploeg, called by the church of Dunnville East. Br. Vanderploeg presented his sermon on Matthew 8:5-13, which classis in closed session judged sufficient to continue with the examination. Br. Vanderploeg was then examined in the categories of Old and New Testament Exegesis, Doctrine and Creeds, Knowledge of Scripture, Church History, Ethics, Pastoral Ministry, and Church Polity. With great joy and thankfulness, classis judged that br. Vanderploeg had sustained his peremptory examination.

The chairman then communicated the result of the examination to br. Vanderploeg and wished him the blessing of the Lord as he enters the ministry of the Word and sacraments. Rev. Kampen led in a prayer of thanksgiving, and then classis was given an opportunity to congratulate br. Vanderploeg. Classis then approbated the call. The church of Dunnville West was appointed to represent classis at br. Vanderploeg’s ordination. 

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CANADIAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Meeting of the Board of Governors

JANUARY 9, 2025

OPENING & ROLL CALL

The chairman of the Board, Rev. John Louwerse, led in opening devotions. The governors were all present. Dr. Jason Van Vliet was present as principal and administrative assistant, Leanne Kuizenga, was present to take the minutes of the meeting.

MEMORABILIA

Information was shared about the personal circumstances of emeriti professors, as well as widows and families of professors.

MINUTES & AGENDA

The agenda for the meeting was established. The minutes of the regular meeting held on September 5 were approved. Outstanding matters on the action log were reviewed.

DECISIONS, REPORTS, AGENDA ITEMS

1. At the last meeting the Board approved a memorandum of understanding outlining the way South African students will be financially supported. A signed copy of this memorandum of understanding was received.
2. An oral report was given by the principal on a meeting held between him and the dean of students (Dr. W. den Hollander) with the men appointed to organize classical examinations for students from CRTS. The goal of this meeting was to communicate openly about how these examinations were conducted so that there may be some level of consistency in how exams are administered between various classes. It was a helpful and productive meeting.
3. Last year a letter was sent to the churches to make them aware of the need for future professors, and to encourage them to support those pastors deemed qualified for further studies. With the letter the Board sought feedback from the churches about the merits of establishing a bursary fund to support students who pursue an advanced degree, and how such a bursary should be funded. Based on feedback received from the churches the Board is sending a supplementary report to General Synod 2025 requesting the establishment of a bursary fund to support students who have recently graduated from seminary (not pastors in active ministry who have a church that could support them) in pursuing an advanced degree that would enable them to potentially serve as faculty at CRTS. The proposal will aim to strike a balance between offering meaningful support to students who meet appropriate criteria for advanced studies and maintaining fiscal responsibility toward the churches.
4. The chairman gave an update on the visits he and the vice-chairman made to administrative staff members, noting that things are going well with our staff. Following a comprehensive review of the principal's work last September, the Board's chairman reported on the implementation of various proposals aimed at streamlining the principal's responsibilities. The Board expresses sincere appreciation for the leadership of Dr. Jason Van Vliet at CRTS.
5. The Academic Committee passed on the minutes of their past meeting. They were received for information.

6. Revs. John Louwerse and Clarence VanderVelde reported on lecture visits to CRTS on November 5–6, 2024, as well as on visits with professors. This report was received with thankfulness.
7. The Finance and Property Committee provided minutes of the recent meetings they held. They were received for information. While there remains an outstanding balance on the fundraising campaign, the committee reported with thankfulness that additional money was recently received. The committee will also supply names of potential Board members in a confidential report to synod.
8. Margaret Alkema, as ATS coordinator, joined the meeting. After the Board meeting in September, CRTS submitted its report on diversity to the Association for Theological Schools (ATS). According to ATS's own standards, we are required to value, define, and demonstrate diversity within the context of our mission, history, constituency, and theological commitments. The Board is thankful that within ATS room is given for seminaries to define their own understanding of diversity rather than having others define diversity for us. We received correspondence back from ATS on this report commending CRTS for the "clarity and completeness" with which the report and appendices were presented. ATS was "very pleased" to accept our report. Considering the culture of our day, the Board is thankful that our perspectives on diversity were received in this manner!
9. A survey was conducted of Board and Senate members evaluating the effectiveness with which the Board, the Academic Committee, and the Finance and Property committee do their work. The evaluation was generally positive. Some matters were addressed to help the Board and its committees to function better.
10. As part of our commitments to ATS, the Board agreed to go through its handbook and review all the policies and procedures of CRTS (this report is due in November 2025). Last September, the decision was made to merge the CRTS Handbook and the Admin Procedures Manual into one document. At that time proposals were also made for changes to Bylaw 12, putting some of the policies contained in it into the CRTS Handbook (at the time the original bylaw was passed CRTS did not have a Handbook). Thus, the CRTS Handbook went through a thorough review, worked on by the Board, Senate, Academic Committee, Finance and Property Committee, Governance Committee, and especially some of our staff who have put countless hours into this revision. Many of the policies remained the same, some went through some linguistic revision, and some were brought up to date to reflect current practices. The Board approved another long list of revisions, and these will be passed through the governance committee and contained in a report to ATS in November. Margaret Alkema left the meeting.
11. A Principal's report was received. It outlined the real practical benefits of the renovated facilities, highlighting how the students were using the kitchen and lounge to meet for breakfast and devotions at the beginning of a certain day. Such opportunities are great for relationship building and for fellowship. Some of the students at CRTS were born and raised in different ecclesiastical contexts, and it may be beneficial for some of them to undergo an extra internship or vicariate before entering the ministry. The Lord willing we will have a large graduating class of ten Master of Divinity students and one Diploma of Theological Studies student. Faculty are doing well. It appears that Dr. Ted Van Raalte is recovering well from his heart attack. Dr. John Smith is looking forward to a full sabbatical, beginning this semester. A campus visit day (mostly from students in Ontario) was held in November and was attended by about twenty young men. A similar event was held in Australia when Dr. Arjan De Visser was there and was attended in similar numbers. We are thankful that there appears to be significant interest in attending seminary!
12. Dr. Arjan De Visser reported on his visit among the Australian churches, making presentations in the churches and schools, leading worship services, and meeting prospective students. Dr. Jerry Visscher reported on his attendance at the Evangelical Theological Society in San Diego, California. Dr. John Smith reported on his attendance at the Society of Biblical Literature, which also took place in San Diego, California. These reports were received with thankfulness.
13. An agreement, in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding, was reached between the Asia Mission Board and CRTS regarding the administration of funds from the Asia Mission Board via the Foreign Student Bursary Fund for Asian students studying at CRTS.

PRESS RELEASE & CLOSING

The completion of the press release was delegated to the vice-chairman in consultation with the executive and the principal. Brother Kasper van Veen closed the meeting with prayer. 

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,
Rev. Joe Poppe (Vice-chairman/Corresponding Clerk)



letter to the **EDITOR**

Dear Editor,

I would like to offer some critical thoughts on Rev. Kampen's recent assessment of the CREC. After briefly mentioning Federal Vision, Rev. Kampen quickly moves on as the topic is "beyond the scope" of his article. A more transparent approach would have been for Kampen to at least define what he means by the term. How does the CREC define this term? The topic has too many facets to mention in passing.

He also criticizes the CREC for "reinventing the wheel with the thought that it can be done better." Well, can it be done better? Kampen presents the CREC as "no different than many other groups that spring up on the ecclesiastical scene." Paedocommunion is an obvious difference.

Kampen mentions that the CREC sees itself as "the spokesman for God in this world." Is that not what the church is? As Christians, do we not all communicate in the name of Jesus? Further, it is simply not true that they claim exclusive rights to the name of Jesus.

The CREC's choice to allow congregations the freedom to choose their confessional documents (from a predetermined list) is presented negatively by Rev. Kampen. However, the CREC is a communion, not a denomination. A communion allows for more differences from congregation to congregation. While the CanRC has less freedom in this regard, it is similar to the CREC in its wide spectrum of congregational flavours.

I encourage Rev. Kampen to visit a CREC church some time to ask questions and get some clear answers.

Jess VanSydenborgh
Caistor Centre, Ontario

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