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TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

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# Clarion

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# *what's inside*

At *Clarion,* we love to see our readers engaged! Inside you'll find a letter to the editor encouraging reader involvement in a particular Christian ministry. You'll also find a heartfelt plea in the *Reader's Forum* concerning a very sensitive matter. Thank you both for your contributions.

We are pleased to present an article by Pastor Rob Schouten who in time past has been a regular contributor. Here he writes cogently on how we ought to look biblically at both marriage and singleness. The Lord willing we'll be reading more from his pen in future issues. Calvin Vanderlinde urges us all to pray in specific ways for our pastors—something needed indeed! How well do we know our Bibles? Jeremy Segstro gets us thinking of ways to deepen our familiarity with God's Word. Clarence VanderVelde helps us meditate on where we are storing up treasures and John Smith explores whether the idea of the Father turning his face away from Jesus his Son is a biblical notion or not.

History is where we can learn much about God's work in the past, drawing from it reasons to praise him and also lessons for Christian living today. To those ends, Keith Sikkema begins a new series exploring some of the history of monasteries in Europe while Jeff Morris rounds off his commemoration of the Council of Nicaea and our still-treasured Nicene Creed at 1700 years old! Eric Kampen, too, delves into history by sketching the origins of Baptist believers in his latest installment of *Outside the PARC*.

Ilse Vandermeulen is back with another *Witness at Work*, this time interviewing Member of Parliament Mr. Arnold Viersen. A grade one student asks Mrs. Veenendaal a deep question in *Clarion Kids* while George van Popta presents us with a new song based on Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3. Rounding out this issue is a review of a book about being born again plus a smorgasbord of news from the latest round of classes across our federation. Please note in said clippings the large number of theological students advancing to the next step toward pastoral ministry and take a moment to thank our heavenly Father. Have a blessed summer!

*Peter Holtvlüwer*

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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:

**C** onfessionally Reformed
**L** oving in manner
**A** ttuned to current issues
**R** eadable and Reliable
**I** n Submission to Scripture
**O** pen to constructive criticism
**N** urturing Christian living

# PRAYING FOR YOUR PASTOR

Consider for a moment the difference between the two following statements: "Pastors need your prayers" and "The pastor needs your prayers."

The first is a general reminder to pray for all those who serve in the office of minister. The second, however, brings it closer to home. The definite article "the" before "pastor" (singular) introduces more specificity and brings to mind a particular man and his particular needs. Pastor Phil In-the-blank, if you will.

These two statements, when taken together, reveal that pastors need prayer in different ways. The apostle Paul knew this very well and made repeated appeals to the saints to pray for him and his ministry (Rom 15:30; Eph 6:19; Col 4:3; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1).

There are many things that one might pray for their pastor, and the space afforded here will not suffice to cover them all. But that should not prevent us from thinking afresh about our prayers for pastors. Perhaps this will trigger a new thought or two, or bring to mind something we have neglected.

That said, here are three areas where every pastor needs your prayers: his pastoral ministry, personal life, and preservation.

## HIS PASTORAL MINISTRY

Pastoral ministry is a special calling in which God ordains men to proclaim his Word to his people. But before a pastor's preaching and teaching can have any positive effect, God must first give understanding and illumination. So, pray that God would enlighten your pastor's mind and enable him to see marvelous things in God's Word. Pray that he would have a firm conviction that the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God and that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Pray that he would have confidence that the Word of God will never return empty but be profitable in every part to encourage and equip the saints for every good work.

Pray that your pastor would be a faithful servant who fears God above all, who is devoted to the truth and feels compelled to proclaim it in power, love, and authenticity; a workman who seeks approval from God and not from man. Pray that he would balance competing demands for his time and attention and expend his energy wisely toward what is most fruitful. Pray that God would grant him a sense that his preaching and teaching are reaching receptive hearts and feeding the sheep of God's pasture.

## HIS PERSONAL LIFE

No pastor can expect God's blessing in ministry if his personal life is out of sync with his calling. That is why Paul told Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching," in that order. Pray that your pastor may exhibit godly character and a humble heart that recognizes his need for God's grace.

Pastors are "jars of clay" and are not immune to the temptations of sin, the weariness of the flesh, and the distractions of this world. So, pray for purity and integrity to mark the life of your pastor. Satan targets pastors, working hard to neutralize their work because when pastors fall, they bring shame on the gospel and great harm upon their churches. So, pray that God would help your pastor to maintain high standards and self-discipline, and do his work always for the Lord.

Pray that your pastor would love God, love his Word, and love his people. Pray that God would provide health and strength and stamina in body and mind. Pray that God would bless his relationships, particularly as a husband or father, and grant him support and encouragement. Pray also for his family, considering the sacrifices that pastoral ministry can demand of them. If your pastor is single, pray he would find great contentment in his relationship with Jesus Christ.

## HIS PRESERVATION

Finally, pray that your pastor would stand firm and finish well. Ministry has unique challenges which require God's grace to remain steadfast and persevere. Faithfulness and longevity in pastoral ministry are not a given and are therefore a most precious and beautiful adornment on one's ministry.

In case he feels depleted, jaded, or tempted to lose his zeal for God's glory and the flourishing of the church, pray that God would resupply his grace to refuel and refresh your pastor's soul and enable him to endure to the end. After all, the Maker of heaven and earth is the one he confesses as his help also, and he is "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20).

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# *Storing up Treasures*

*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* – Matthew 6:19-21

For what are we living? For what are we working? God created us to live and work for his glory and gave us a mandate to do so (Gen 1:28). God prohibited man from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as a test of man's love and devotion toward God (Gen 2:16-17). The devil, however, tempted mankind to eat of the forbidden tree, claiming that man would become like God (Gen 3:5). This was essentially a temptation to live and work for man's own glory and to lay up treasures on earth. It led to The Fall into sin.

God immediately promised a Saviour so that mankind could be saved from sin, death, and the meaninglessness of life and work apart from God. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, mankind is once again able to live and work to God's glory. The renewing power of the Holy Spirit redirects our focus to God.

When it comes to laying up treasure, there is a big contrast between believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers are focused on the things of this life, whereas believers are to be focused on the kingdom of God (Mt 6:31–33). A contrast is evident in Christ's command too: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Mt 6:19–20).

Laying up treasures on earth can happen in many ways. It can be done by a wrongly motivated religiosity, whereby we aim to obtain the praise of people (Mt 6:1–18). Then we will have received our reward on earth (Mt 6:1, 2, 5, 16). It can also be about living for money (Mt 6:24), status, power, or career. It all boils down to being focused on ourselves.

Laying up treasures in heaven is about worshipping God, not so that our piety can be seen by others, but for God's glory. It's about using our time, talents, and money in God's service as stewards of the gifts God has given us. It all boils down to being focused on God.

What happens to each investment? Earth is "where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal," whereas heaven is "where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Mt 6:19,20). Treasures stored up on earth don't last. Prestige fades and people are forgotten, money is stolen, stock markets plummet, companies collapse, the health to work and enjoy life disappears. In the end, treasures stored up on earth don't satisfy. Those who have status and money often experience a sense of emptiness and are left looking for meaning. By contrast, treasures stored up in heaven are lasting. Forgiveness and eternal life cannot be taken away from believers. They are "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Pet 1:4).

The text is not only about the investment described, but it's also about the insight derived. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21). We receive insight about ourselves. Our priorities tell us where our heart is, and our priorities direct our heart. If our life and work are about status, money, and pleasure, that's where our heart will be. But if our life and work are about serving the Lord, that's where our heart will be focused.

Christ demands a choice. That's evident from the wording of the text: "Do not . . . but" (Mt 6:19,20). It's a faith choice. Will we store up treasures on earth, or treasures in heaven? The choice is made every day in the big and the small things of life. Let's store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

## FOR FURTHER READING

Matthew 6:1–34

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What does the Bible say about the heart? See Proverbs 4:23 and Proverbs 23:26.
2. Reflect on the centrality of Christ's death and resurrection in connection with what the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:58 about our work.

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# COMPLETE IN CHRIST:
## *Rethinking Marriage & Singleness*

ROB SCHOUTEN

In our Reformed communities, we treasure marriage. We should. Marriage is a creation gift, a covenant bond, a picture of Christ and his church. The Bible calls it honourable (Heb 13:4), and our churches celebrate it rightly. But even good gifts can be subtly twisted into something they were never meant to be.

We have, I think, allowed marriage to become something of an idol. Young people are expected to marry, and if they don't, their singleness is treated as a problem to be solved, a season to be endured, a mark of incompleteness.

This is not a biblical way of thinking. It is a distortion—the kind of distortion that subtly undermines contentment in Christ and promotes a culture of discouragement for those who, for reasons of providence, remain unmarried.

Christians should affirm that our identity and fulfillment is not found in fulfilling cultural expectations—even Reformed cultural expectations—about marriage and family. Our identity is in Christ. The apostle Paul, who described himself as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," was single. Because he was planted in Christ, he lacked nothing essential for a complete and abundant life.

### CORRECTING THE NARRATIVE

Young people need to hear a better story than the one our culture, and sometimes the church, tells them.

You are not half a person until you are married. You are not in a holding pattern until you find someone. You are not disqualified from joy, purpose, or community because you are single. If you are united to Christ by faith, you are complete in him (Col 2:10).

Your highest calling is not marriage; it is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Marriage can be a beautiful context for doing that, but it is not the only one. Singleness, too, can be a sphere in which God is glorified and his kingdom advanced.

Both marriage and singleness are callings from God, and each person is summoned to receive his or her particular calling with gratitude and faithfulness. In the deepest sense, neither marriage

nor singleness are self-chosen; both are given by God's providence and wisdom. The believer's task is not to demand a different station in life but to walk worthily in the one to which he or she has been called, trusting that God distributes his gifts wisely.

The point is not to rank marriage and singleness, but to call every believer to live for Christ with undivided devotion, whether in the joys and duties of marriage or in the freedoms and challenges of singleness.

## SPEAKING ABOUT SINGLENESS & MARRIAGE

We need to reshape how we speak about these matters. We should celebrate marriage as a good and honourable estate, but not as the pinnacle of Christian life. We must banish the idea that singleness is second-class citizenship in the kingdom of God.

We would do well to avoid casual comments like, "When you get married someday . . ." or "Don't worry, you'll find someone soon." Such words, though well-intentioned, communicate the assumption that no one could be content or useful without marriage.

Instead, we should affirm and celebrate all the ways God's people serve him, whether married or single. When married people serve each other joyfully, we ought to celebrate that. Similarly, when single people pour themselves into their jobs, their families, their churches, and their communities, we should celebrate their Christian service.

*We must banish the idea that singleness is second-class citizenship in the kingdom of God*

We must also recognize that connection matters. Those who thrive as singles are those with strong, supportive connections in church, family, and community life. Those who struggle are often those who are most disconnected. If we want singles to flourish, we must ensure that they are fully integrated into the life of the church—not as an afterthought, but as vital, contributing members of the body. Community is not optional; it is essential.

Church leadership has a particular responsibility here. Pastors, elders, and deacons should ask: Are singles truly woven into the fabric of congregational life? Are our programs and gatherings unconsciously built around couples or families, to the exclusion of others? If we prize marriage but neglect the single members of Christ's body, we betray the gospel we profess.

## TEACHING YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people need to be taught to think biblically—and courageously—about their lives. The goal is not to avoid marriage, nor to chase it as if life depends on it. The goal is to say, "Lord, glorify yourself in my life—single or married."

It is good to desire marriage. It is good to pursue it prayerfully and wisely. But it is not good to pursue it desperately, as if marriage were the only road to meaning and joy. Young people should ask themselves:

- How can I steward this season of life for Christ?
- Am I content in Christ today?
- If God calls me to marriage, will I enter it for his glory?
- If God calls me to singleness, will I embrace it for his glory?

Contentment is not a natural human disposition—it is a learned grace, born from communion with Christ. As Paul writes in Philippians 4:11-13, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content . . .I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

## CHRIST IS ENOUGH

In the end, whether single, married, widowed, or childless, our sufficiency is Christ. Our culture—and yes, even our church culture—often treats marriage as the expected path to stability, maturity, and respectability. But Scripture offers a different horizon. Stability and maturity are not measured by marital status but by steadfast faith, obedience, and devotion to Christ.

Marriage is a good gift. So is singleness. But neither is ultimate. Christ is ultimate. In him, and in him alone, we are made whole.

Let us teach our young people—and remind ourselves—that in whatever state we find ourselves, we can have a fulfilling life in serving Christ. We should carefully remove from our speech and attitudes every subtle trace of marital idolatry. Christ must be held up as our prize and the one true source of lasting joy. And we must ensure that singles find a true home and community within the church, where they are valued, supported, and loved as fellow heirs of the grace of life.

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# DID YOU CATCH THAT REFERENCE?

JEREMY SEGSTRO

References, so they say, are a good way to start and end a piece of writing. Someone else probably said it better than you. Someone else has already said it best (this too is a reference, by the way).

A reference isn't just a good way to start an article, or a good way to write a sermon—this is also shown all throughout Scripture. Scripture, although completely, 100% divinely inspired, does quote other non-inspired material. Paul explicitly quotes the poet Aratus in Acts 17, and the poet Epimenides in Titus 1. The author to the Hebrews shows just how familiar he is with the philosopher Plato, drawing extensively on Plato's *World of Forms* in Hebrews 8. But what the Bible quotes, more than anything else is . . . itself.

## SCRIPTURE QUOTES SCRIPTURE

The number of cross-references in the Bible is actually so staggering— an estimated 63,779 times according to *Greatest Truth Apologetics*—that some will use this as a line of reasoning, as a powerful argument to show that Scripture is divinely inspired. You just can't fake that given that Scripture was written over a period of 1500 years by over 40 different authors, on three different continents in three different languages. It's not going to hold together that well just by accident.

So many of Jesus's wonderful, glorious, comforting statements are quotes from the Old Testament. Now, in Jesus's case, he is quoting himself, as he is God. But still. The two greatest

commandments—loving God and loving your neighbour (Mt 22:37–39)? Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19. "I am the good Shepherd" (John 10:11)? Ezekiel 34. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matt 22:46)? Psalm 22. And on and on it goes.

## "BUT IF NOT..."

There was a time when believers were so biblically literate that they could pick out these quotations at 50 paces with both eyes closed. (Basically. I exaggerate only a little). There is a remarkable example of this in World War II. Picture it—Dunkirk, 1940. (You may be familiar with this story from the 2017 film *Dunkirk).* There were over 350,000 allied troops trapped, surrounded, with their backs to the sea. And then... a miracle! God's people cried out to him on the National Day of Prayer that King George VI had called for this reason, and God responded miraculously. There was a pause in the German attacks, a pause that has baffled historians. And during that pause over 338,000 troops were ferried off the beach and taken to safety. This miracle is enough to make a grown man cry!

But there's something else to this story. Something that the 2017 film *Dunkirk* didn't portray. A British Naval Officer sent a three-word message back to headquarters. Just three words: *But if not.* Headquarters immediately got it. They understood that reference. But do you?

It seems, in that day, the world was virtually teeming with John Bunyan types, of whom Charles Spurgeon once said: "Why, this man is a living Bible! Prick him anywhere—his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God."

*"Why, this man is a living Bible! Prick him anywhere—his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God."*

These were people who knew their Bible so well that these three words conveyed an entire message. These words are found in Daniel 3, the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When they were commanded to bow down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, these three faithful men refused and said: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. *But if not*, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan 3:16b-18, emphasis mine).

The British commander who received the three-word message understood. The trapped men knew that all hope wasn't lost. They

knew that God was able to save them . . . but they were saying that *even if* he didn't, *even if* God's plan for them was to die on that beach, they would not give in. They would resist, they would fight to the very last man.

## LIVING BY THE WORD

Maybe you knew all of that. If so, amazing! Keep going with it! And you can keep going, you can dig a little deeper, by continuing to read this article, because there's another layer to this.

Let's go from Dunkirk to Babylon to the southern kingdom of Judah. From the British soldiers to the three men to a prophet named Habakkuk.Though the book of Habakkuk appears later in the Bible than the book of Daniel, historically it happened about 30–40 years earlier. Habakkuk was a prophet of God who saw the wickedness and the evil of the nation of Judah. And he called out to God about it.

A very condensed summary of the book goes like this:

> *Habakkuk*: God, please do something about the evil!
>
> *God*: I am. I'm sending Judah into exile in Babylon.
>
> *Habakkuk*: God, please - anything but that! The Babylonians are worse than we are! You can't possibly do this!
>
> *God*: I know exactly who they are. I will punish everyone for their evil, whether Judahite or Babylonian. I will accomplish my perfect will. The righteous one will live by his faith.
>
> *Habakkuk*: I understand. I submit to your greatness and your perfect plan. Even if I don't see it working, yet I will still worship you.

Did you catch it? The two words that I used earlier to describe that three-word cable: "even if." This is not just a thematic connection between Habakkuk as a man of faith and Daniel's three friends as men of faith. It's more than that. Habakkuk 3, which contains those words "even if," is written as a song. It's written as a song with a musical notation: "According to Shigionoth, Selah, to the choirmaster with stringed instruments." It was written as a song for the faithful to sing in exile. In Babylon.

I think you know where I'm going here, but let's state it outright: Who were the faithful in Babylon? Daniel's three friends. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Now, I think it's unlikely that these men sang their answer to the king (though, can you imagine how powerful that would be?), but they took their strength, they took their theology, from Habakkuk's song:

> *Though the fig tree should not blossom,*
> *nor fruit be on the vines,*
> *the produce of the olive fail*
> *and the fields yield no food,*
> *the flock be cut off from the fold*
> *and there be no herd in the stalls,*
> *yet I will rejoice in the LORD;*
> *I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*
> *GOD, the Lord, is my strength;*

Though I do not understand . . . yet I will rejoice in the LORD. But if not . . . we still will not bow before false gods.

## BLEEDING SCRIPTURE

This is put best in our rhymed version of Habakkuk 3 in Hymn 14 (truly a gem among many other gems in our *Book of Praise*—both the tune and the versification). It is put second-best in the song *Even If* by Mercy Me:

> *It's easy to sing*
> *When there's nothing to bring me down*
> *But what will I say*
> *When I'm held to the flame*
> *Like I am right now?*
>
> *I know You're able and I know You can*
> *Save through the fire with Your mighty hand*
> *But even if You don't*
> *My hope is You alone.*

Be like John Bunyan. Be like that British officer and his commander. Be like Daniel's three friends. Immerse yourself in the Word until your blood is virtually bibline, so that anytime you are pricked, the gospel will spill out in all its glory.

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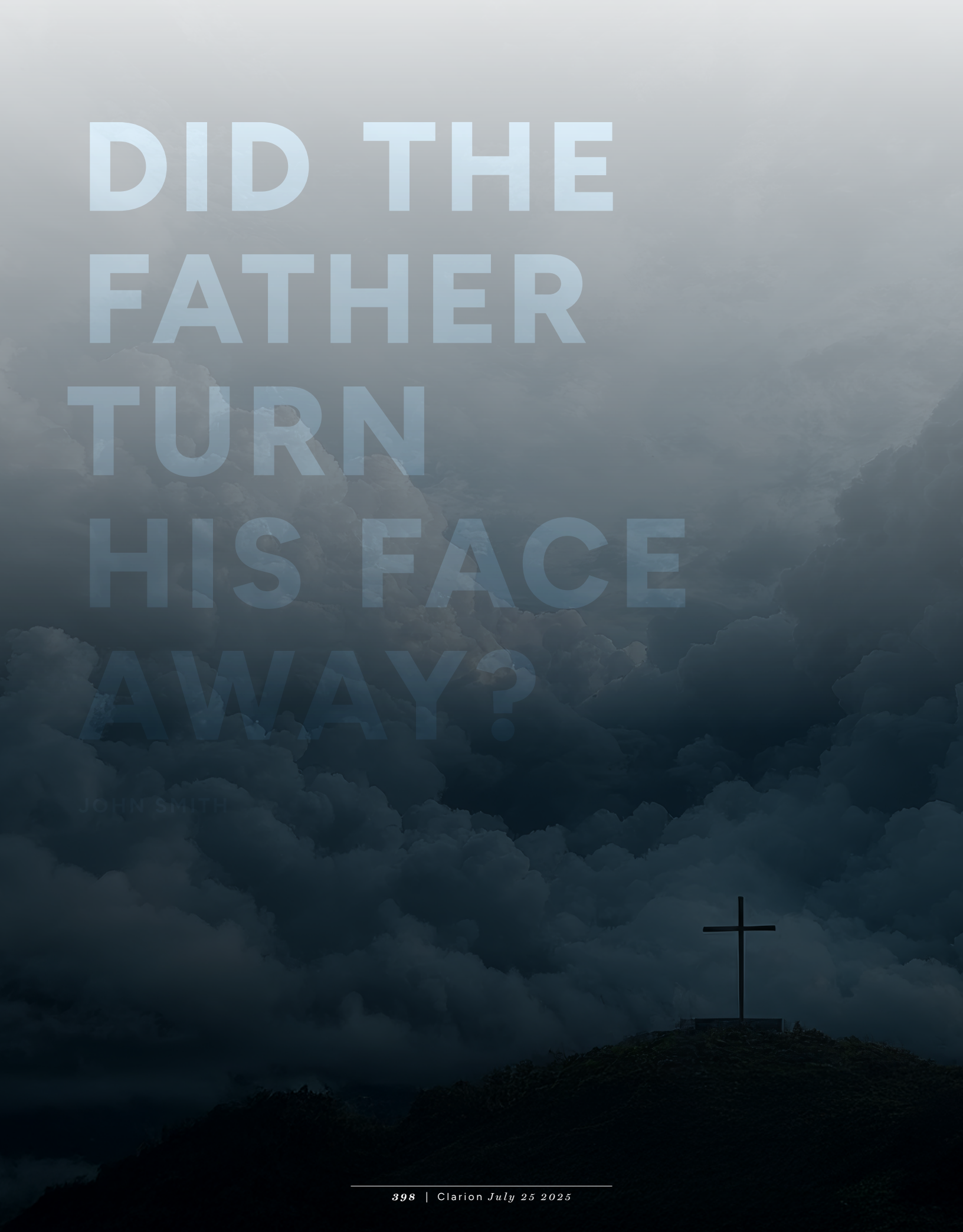
# DID THE FATHER TURN HIS FACE AWAY?

JOHN SMITH



Over the past thirty years, Stuart Townend's hymn "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" has become a favourite for many Christians, including Canadian Reformed folk. Most recently, General Synod Aldergrove approved this song for inclusion in a future edition of the *Book of Praise*. That's no great surprise: two of our sister churches, the URCNA and the OPC, included it in their *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* as well (TPH #351). Further, the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* recommended that it be adopted, observing that, of the thirty-four churches that gave feedback on this hymn, twenty-eight were in favour of it.

## A DEBATED HYMN

Yet the hymn has not been without debate. I remember from my own term on the Standing Committee (which ended in 2022) that a number of churches and individuals had reservations. One concern had to do with the line which says that "the Father turns his face away" as Christ is being crucified. The whole sentence reads as follows: "How great the pain of searing loss: the Father turns his face away as wounds which mar the Chosen One bring many sons to glory." It's a poetic way of expressing the God-forsakenness and glory of the cross.

So, what was the concern? As one church expressed it, to say that "the Father turns his face away" may imply an "ontological change" within the Trinity or promote a misunderstanding of the atonement. After all, the Father never ceased to love the eternal Son, and there is a risk that church members might interpret this line to mean that God was displeased with Christ's person rather than with the sin he bore. This church referred to Psalm 22:24, which says that the LORD "has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him," arguing that Christ's cry of dereliction on the cross ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") should not be understood as literal abandonment.

## GENERAL SYNOD 2025'S DEFENCE

Synod responded to this concern with no fewer than six considerations. Here they are, as found in the Provisional Acts (Article 182 - Appendix A-2):

1. The phrase "the Father turns his face away" is a poetic expression conveying Christ's experience of divine forsakenness as he bore the full weight of sin and judgment on the cross. "To turn the face" either toward or away is a biblical way to express whether favour/help is granted or not (cf. Ps. 27:9, 102:2).
2. The Word of God makes it clear that on the cross Christ took upon himself our sin and all its just consequences. "It pleased the LORD to crush him" (Isa 53:10). "For our sake he made him who knew no sin to be sin" (2 Cor 5:21). "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal 3:13).
3. The Reformed confessions affirm that Christ suffered the wrath of God in both body and soul (HC, Lord's Day 15 & 16). This suffering included real covenantal abandonment—not a rupture in the Trinity, but the judicial withdrawal of divine favour as Christ bore our guilt. The phrase in question seeks to express that truth in devotional language.
4. The concern that the line could be misunderstood is pastorally understandable. However, the possibility of misinterpretation does not render the line theologically inaccurate. Many faithful expressions in Scripture and song require instruction to be rightly understood. This is a normal aspect of catechesis and worship leadership.
5. Psalm 22:24 ("he has not hidden his face") expresses the ultimate vindication and deliverance of the Sufferer, not the absence of forsakenness. Psalm 22 includes both real abandonment and real restoration. Jesus' quotation of the opening verse on the cross must not be reduced to a mere signal of hope—it was also a genuine cry of desolation under wrath.
6. The line in question does not assert a change in the eternal relation of the divine persons, but rather depicts the redemptive moment in which the sinless Son bore divine judgment in the place of sinners. That distinction between Christ's divine person and his mediatorial office is upheld in Reformed theology and is preserved in this line when read with confessional care.

It is not my intention here to interact with either the concern or the considerations. Let me simply say that I am thankful for both the church's concern for theological accuracy and the thorough way in which Synod responded. What I'd like to do instead is reflect a bit more on the idea that the Father "turns his face away." Does Scripture use this language?

## A BIBLICAL EXPRESSION?

The expression "to turn the face away" is not very common in the Bible. The New Testament does not use it at all, and the Old Testament only here and there. For example, when Naboth refused to give his vineyard to Ahab, the king lay down on his bed, "turned his face away," and would not eat (1 Kings 21:4). He sulked! Similarly, when Isaiah told Hezekiah that he would not recover from his sickness, the king "turned his face" to the wall and prayed (2 Kings 20:2; Isaiah 38:2). He was discouraged!

What about when the expression is used of the Lord? In 2 Chronicles 30, King Hezekiah urged the people to return to the Lord: "For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him." Not turning his face away means that God continues to look favourably upon his people, intent on helping and blessing them. In his continued grace and mercy, the people experience, as it were, the light of his countenance as he smiles upon them.

Think also of the high-priestly blessing: "The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace" (Num 6:22 NIV). Yet when we look for passages that speak of God (not) turning his face away, it seems that this expression is rare in Scripture. Or is it?

## GREEK ORIGINS

This past semester, during my sabbatical, I had the opportunity to study the Septuagint, which is the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, the first Bible translation ever made. While studying the book of Psalms, I noticed that this Greek translation often speaks of God turning his face away—far more often than the original Hebrew does. Why is that? It's because the translators used the *Greek* expression "to turn one's face away" to translate the *Hebrew* expression "to hide one's face." They did this not only when the phrase is used in reference to God but also when it's used for humans. For example, in Exodus 3:6, when the Lord spoke to Moses at the burning bush, the Hebrew says that Moses "hid his face" while the Greek translation says that he "turned his face away." In other words, these are two ways of saying the same thing. So, if we want to look for a biblical basis for the idea that the Father turned his face away from his Son, we should also consider passages that speak about God *hiding* his face. And there are plenty!

In Deuteronomy 31:17, the Lord spoke about the covenant wrath that he would show if his people became unfaithful: "Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured." And so it happened: "the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt so treacherously with me that I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword" (Ezek 39:23).

Yet the Lord would also relent: "In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer" (Isa 54:8). "I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord God" (Ezek 39:29). In all of these passages (and more), the Septuagint has "turn away my face" for "hide my face."

This expression is especially found in the book of Psalms—no fewer than twelve times (Ps 10:11; 13:1; 22:24; 27:9; 30:7; 44:24; 51:9; 69:17; 88:14; 102:2; 104:29; 143:7). Over and over, the psalmists beg God not to hide his face from them. They express dismay when God did so, convinced that this would mean their death, and they urge him to relent and to answer their prayers. Surely these passages find their fulfilment in the three hours of darkness which Christ experienced on the cross. It is because God turned his face away from his Son that we may be bold to seek his face and take the Psalms on our own lips.

## PSALM-SHAPED HYMNS

It should be noted that the New Testament writers considered the Septuagint to be a reliable translation. Since they wrote in Greek for Greek-speaking churches, they quoted from the Greek version of the Old Testament, and Psalms is the book they quoted the most. Further, the apostles urged the churches to use the words of the Psalms to give expression to their faith: "Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:18–20; cf. Col 3:16; James 5:13). Indeed, the Psalms should shape the hymns we sing in the New Testament age. In that regard, Stuart Townend did well to write, "How great the pain of searing loss: the Father turns his face away as wounds which mar the Chosen One bring many sons to glory." We need not hesitate to take these words on our lips.

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PART 2

*Celebrating 1700 Years*

# THE REVISED NICENE-CONSTANTINOPLE CREED

JEFF MORRIS

The Nicene Creed was produced to summarize the orthodox faith that was passed down from Jesus, through his apostles, to the church. In the first article on the history of this creed, we saw that Greek philosophical ideas influenced Arius to argue that the Son, who became incarnate as Jesus Christ, was God's first created being. The Council of Nicaea, convened by Emperor Constantine in AD 325 to discuss Arius's ideas, vehemently opposed this view. In this article, we will learn that it would take the work of Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, and the second ecumenical Council of Constantinople (AD 381) to finally put the Arian heresy to rest.

## CHURCH AND POLITICS

It was undoubtedly a relief for Christians under the rule of Emperor Constantine to worship God in freedom after decades of Roman persecution. However, the Emperor's involvement in the Council of Nicaea also brought challenges. The council had decided on a critical doctrinal matter, namely, the divinity of Jesus. Since the council was convened by Constantine, Roman government had become implicitly involved in church doctrine. This was a problem because Eusebius of Nicomedia (who promoted Arianism) was an astute politician so that while the bishops had rejected Arianism, he continued to lobby Constantine. Eventually, when Constantine was baptized on his death bed in AD 337, it was Eusebius who performed the ritual. Of course, this meant that the official Roman position was Arian, so even after the Council of Nicaea the threat of Arianism loomed.

## ATHANASIUS – DEFENDER OF ORTHODOXY

Athanasius was a deacon at the Council of Nicaea and eventually succeeded Alexander as the bishop of Alexandria. During the decades following Nicaea, Athanasius played a crucial role in defending orthodoxy, in particular the divinity of Jesus. For his efforts, Athanasius was banished five times as succeeding emperors alternated between biblical truth and Arianism.

Unlike the sophisticated and intricate philosophizing of the Arians, Athanasius's arguments for the divinity of Jesus have a practical sensibility that make them appealing and also difficult to refute. Athanasius explains that God created humans after the

image of "the Word" in order that they might enjoy fellowship with him, warning them that sin would result in death. Adam sinned against God anyway. Sinning against God separated man from the Word, who shielded humans from corruption, so sin multiplied, and with it, more reasons for condemnation. So, what was God to do? Would God, knowing the result beforehand, leave his creation to suffer eternal corruption? Or would he reverse his judgment on sin and lift the punishment of death?

Athanasius argued that God would do neither, for God would not create humanity knowing he would abandon them, but neither would he compromise his judgment on sin. Further, according to Athanasius, repentance alone is not enough to restore humanity's relationship to God. Humans not only sin against God, but their natures are entirely corrupt, so even after repentance sin would inevitably lead to more condemnation. Thus, the only way for humanity to be saved was if God himself intervened: "Being the Word of the Father and above all, he alone consequently was both able to recreate the universe and was worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to intercede for all before the Father."[1] In other words, Athanasius understood that salvation could only be secured by God himself and, since Jesus is the Saviour, Jesus must be God.

Unfortunately for the Arians, Athanasius's argument exposed a profound inconsistency in their theology. The Arians agreed that Jesus is the Saviour; otherwise, what would be the point of being a Christian? It was difficult to refute Athanasius's position that only God had the power to transform the corruption of humanity and mediate with the Father.

Athanasius's second argument did similar work, this time by exposing inconsistency between Arian theology and practice. Athanasius made it clear that only God is worthy of worship, but as part of their liturgy the Arians worshipped Jesus. Of course, it was difficult to refute that only God is worthy of worship without endorsing idolatry, but there was no sense in being Christian if one was not prepared to worship Jesus.

Eventually, Athanasius' rigorous defense of orthodoxy won the day and was officially affirmed at the second ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381, but not before a related heresy concerning the divinity of the Holy Spirit took the stage.

## MACEDONIANISM

We live in the age of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ revealed the Father to his disciples in space and time, and now the Holy Spirit reveals the Father and the Son to the hearts and minds of all who believe. Still, it took time for the church to formulate its doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which also came under threat in the 4th century.

The Council of Nicaea expended its energy articulating that the Son is of the same essence as the Father, so only a modest statement concerning the Holy Spirit was included at the end of the Nicene Creed. Specifically, the original Nicene Creed simply ends with, "And in the Holy Spirit." A group known as the Macedonians took advantage of the vagueness of the creed to justify their view that the Holy Spirit was created by the Son in order to serve the Father and the Son. The Macedonians were semi-Arian in that they accepted that the Son was of the same essence as the Father, but denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

## CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

Athanasius learned of this heresy while he was in exile. He affirmed the divinity of the Holy Spirit in letters, calling for the rejection of Macedonianism. Still, the heresy continued to flourish, prompting Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea and defender of orthodoxy, to write the first definitive work on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit entitled, *On the Holy Spirit*.

In it, Basil carefully and meticulously outlines the actions, titles, nature, and glory of the Holy Spirit, who works in conjunction with the Father and the Son, sharing their divine essence. He describes the Holy Spirit as "perfecting all other things, but Itself in nothing lacking; living not as needing restoration, but as Supplier of life; not growing by additions; but straightway full, self-established, omnipresent, origin of sanctification, light perceptible to the mind, supplying, as it were, through Itself, illumination to every faculty in the search for truth; by nature unapproachable, apprehended by reason of goodness, filling all things with Its power."[2]

Basil reminded his opponents that believers are baptized into the name Holy Spirit. He also articulated the Spirit's life-giving activities including creating, driving out demons, and sanctifying sinners, and points out the Spirit's divine properties such as uprightness, truth, and righteousness. He also highlights the Holy Spirit's glorious titles such as Sanctifier, Spirit of Wisdom, and Spirit of God, carefully outlining and defending the glories of the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly, Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa, and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus, possibly stirred by Basil, also wrote rigorous defenses of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Today, these three are known as the Cappadocian Fathers. They are recognized as important defenders of the orthodox doctrine of the

[1] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, Translated by John Behr (Yonkers, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 56.

[2] Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, (Beloved Publishing, 2014), 44-45.

Holy Spirit. Eventually, in 381, the second ecumenical Council of Constantinople finally put both Arianism and semi-Arianism to rest. To this end, the council reaffirmed the Nicene Creed while explicitly asserting the divinity of the Holy Spirit by adding the following lines to the first edition which had simply concluded, "And in the Holy Spirit":

> ...the Lord, the Giver of Life,
> Who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.
> In one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.
> I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
> I look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.
> Amen

Arianism and semi-Arianism did not survive past the council of Constantinople, giving theologians energy to specify the boundaries of the incarnation at the third and fourth ecumenical Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. Now, 1700 years later, we honour those first councils, confessing together with them and the holy, catholic, apostolic Church the might of the Father, the self-sacrifice of the Son, and the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, while worshipping each for the one divine essence that they share.

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# Baptist Churches

ERIC KAMPEN

The churches considered in this column so far generally had the words "Presbyterian" or "Reformed" in their names. The most recent churches, the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Bible Presbyterian Church, could be said to have one foot in the PARC, as they send invited observers to our assemblies. As such, it may appear that when we hear of Baptist churches we are getting quite far away from the PARC. Historically, however, there is a connection, and there is a connection in the present as many readers will be familiar with and appreciative of the writings of some leading figures in Baptist churches, such as Mark Dever, Albert Mohler, and John Piper.

As there are numerous Baptist church groupings, this article will need to be broad in scope. It will review some general Baptist history, followed by considering some of the distinct features of all Baptist churches. This will make clear why Baptist churches will have little interest in coming to the PARC, while at the same time showing that there may be things we can appreciate from those of Baptist background.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For the origin of Baptist churches, we should not look back to the Anabaptists, who first came on the scene during Zwingli's ministry in Zurich, Switzerland in the 1520s. Instead, Baptist churches trace their origin back to developments in England in the late 1500s and early 1600s.

In broad strokes, the Reformation had come to England during the reign of Henry VIII, who had rather mixed motives for allowing it. It gained further ground during the reign of King Edward VI, who was only nine when he became king. There was a severe setback when he died at only fifteen and was succeeded by Queen Mary, who sought to bring the English church back into the Roman fold. Her brutal reign was short, and she was succeeded by Queen Elizabeth I in 1568, who acted resolutely in returning to the Protestant side, imposing a settlement on the church to stop the factions competing for dominance. In the Thirty-nine Articles, it was evident the Church in England adhered to Reformed doctrine. At the same time, the Church in England maintained an episcopal form of government, that is, a church ruled by bishops, with the Queen as head of the church.

At this time in history, church and society were seen as completely overlapping. One was a member of the church from birth, evident in the way baptism was given to infants. This made church members prone to nominal Christianity.

In England, as in other parts of Europe where the Reformation had taken root, there were efforts to deepen the spiritual life of the people, as well as to further reform the government of the church. It was thought that church membership should not be automatic, simply by being born within the community, but voluntary, upon evidence of conversion. Also, some more and more wanted a church totally free from the interference of the civil government.

These dual emphases on purifying life and the way the church was governed are known as Puritanism and congregationalism. Those known as Puritans pursued this route while maintaining the practice of infant baptism, but looking for signs of conversion before considering people true Christians. Others pursued this by saying there should be evidence of conversion prior to baptism, and baptism was to be administered only to believers. This latter conviction led to the first Baptist churches being established in 1612.

## OPPOSITION & DIVISIONS

Baptist churches soon met with opposition. Dissent in church life was interpreted as being disloyal to the crown. Nevertheless, over the years, the Baptists steadily increased in numbers. The first Baptist confession was the London Confession of 1644, with an expanded edition in 1689. These confessions showed a Reformed influence, differing mainly in teachings about the sacraments and the church.

Within the Baptist churches, two main streams developed. One continued in the Calvinistic (Reformed) tradition, with emphasis on predestination in salvation. These became known as Particular Baptists. The other followed Arminian thinking, which saw human free will as the deciding factor in salvation. These became known as General Baptists.

Many people of Baptist persuasion crossed the Atlantic to the new world. There they found more freedom to organize church life according to their convictions. It appears that, until the late 18th century, most Baptist churches held Calvinistic theological views, while the 19th century saw a shift to the point that most Baptists are now Arminian in their theology, stressing man's free will as the determining factor in conversion.

Today there are many different Baptist churches. Baptists churches which associate together for common purposes are known as Associations, Fellowships, Conventions or Conferences. Currently, the largest Protestant group in the USA is the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), with a membership of about 13 million in approximately 47,000 churches. The name "Southern" came about in 1845 when there was a separation from the churches in the northern part of the US over the issue of slavery. The SBC has long ago renounced that stand. Mark Dever and Albert Mohler belong to the SBC. The SBC falls on the conservative spectrum in terms of its stance on marriage and human sexuality.

The churches in the northern part of the USA are called the American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA). This church falls on the liberal spectrum in its views of marriage and human sexuality. Its membership is about one-tenth of the SBC. John Piper belongs to this church. In Canada, there are about 450,000 Baptists, with five major associations. Also in the Canadian Baptist churches, there will be a theological range from Calvinistic to Arminian, and in views on marriage and sexuality from conservative to liberal. Worldwide, there are about 43 million baptized members. If one includes adherents who have not been baptized, the number is about 100 million.

## BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

The historical overview shows that Baptists have links to the English Reformation of the 16th century. As such, they adhere to key Reformation emphases such as the centrality of Scripture, the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ, the grace of God, and the role of faith. There is agreement, therefore, on many of the key teachings of the age of the Reformation.

This agreement, however, must be qualified. Theologically, as was noted, there is the diversity of an Arminian versus a Calvinistic understanding of man's free will and its role in salvation. Perhaps what stands out as a distinctive in this theological divide is that both are found under the Baptist banner. One needs to check the websites of specific churches and associations to determine which way they lean in this respect.

As to other distinctives that apply generally to all Baptist churches, helpful information was gleaned from the websites of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and the American Baptist Churches in the USA (ABCUSA). While these two Baptist groups are on different ends of the conservative/liberal spectrum, they referred to similar common distinctives. In the Preamble to the Baptist Faith and Message of the SBC, it is stated that

> Baptists cherish and defend religious liberty, and deny the right of any secular or religious authority to impose a confession of faith upon a church or body. We honour principles of soul competency and the priesthood of all believers, affirming both our liberty in Christ and our accountability to each other under the Word of God.[1]

In the History section of the ABCUSA website, it states that Baptist tradition

> . . . has emphasized the Lordship and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, believers' baptism, the competency of all believers to be in direct relationship with God and to interpret Scripture, the influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers and ministries, and the need for autonomous congregations free from government interference or hierarchical polity.[2]

Some of these distinctives will resonate with those of Reformed background. When it comes to religious liberty from government interference, this is stressed by Reformed and Presbyterian churches too. Often, if there is the word "Free" in the name of a Reformed or Presbyterian Church, that is indicative of a struggle to be free from government control. Even if the word is not used, many Reformed or Presbyterian churches can point to past struggles to become truly independent. The word "Free" can also refer to resisting hierarchical actions where some assembly sought to impose its views on local congregations. Perhaps the Baptists, along with other dissenters in England, can be said to have led the way in this struggle. In the Netherlands, for example, there was not a Reformed Church truly free from government interference until the secession of 1834.

## INDEPENDENTISM VS AUTONOMY

What will also resonate is being free from hierarchical polity, and the stress on the autonomy of the local church. There is a difference, however, between a Reformed and Baptist approach,

[1] Preamble to SBC Baptist Faith and Message 2000, https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/.

[2] https://www.abc-usa.org/what-we-believe/our-history/

as Baptists tend to absolutize the autonomy of the local church. This is called congregationalism, or independentism.

This church government difference is shown in the words used to describe Baptist churches which associate together. It was mentioned before how Baptist churches tend to form associations, conventions, fellowships, or conferences. These associations are not so much based on unity of faith but on unity of purpose. There may be a broad or general statement of faith for churches that associate, but each church is free to make its own statements of faith.

As for Reformed Churches, while they stress the autonomy of the local church, they reject independentism. There will be a clear statement that expresses the unity of faith. In Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, this awareness of unity of faith beyond the local level may be expressed by referring to the denomination by the word "Church." For example, there is the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, showing the unity between the churches. The autonomy, as well as unity, is shown in using the plural "churches," such as the Canadian Reformed Churches.

The distinction may be hard to grasp, but it shows up in the wide variety of statements of faith and practice found among Baptist churches. In principle, each church can have its own version, short or long, Arminian or Calvinist. Generally speaking, they will be very brief. The Baptist Faith and Message is one of the longer ones, but it still comes in at only eighteen articles.

## FELLOWSHIP AND SACRAMENTS

Another distinctive is "soul competency," that is, the ability for all believers to be in direct contact with God. One can see here a rejection of being dependent upon clergy for being in fellowship with God. Reformed believers can sympathize with this, though we may speak of personal faith rather than soul competency. There is some vagueness here, however, for it is not clear whether this opens the door to immediate communication with God, that is, without the mediation of his Word. Also, does this leave a place for office bearers as undershepherds to guide people to the good Shepherd? Soul competency opens the door to making the individual the standard of judging what is true. Many people have been sincere, but they were sincerely wrong.

The final point to consider is believers' baptism. This should be combined with the use of the Lord's supper. Baptists refer to these as "ordinances," that is, commands from God to man to show their faith. This stands in contrast to Reformed teaching that these are means of grace by which God strengthens the faith of believers. When one sees baptism and the Lord's supper as acts of believers to show faith, it is understandable why Baptists reject the baptism of infants of believers.

Their view of baptism means that only those who have professed faith and are baptized are members of the church. This does not mean that there is no hope for children. According to Article 3 of The Baptist Message and Faith, it is only when one becomes capable of moral action that one becomes a transgressor comes under condemnation. This comes across as a form of universalism for all children.

Finally, in connection with baptism it should be mentioned that Baptist churches insist this must be done by immersion.

## REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Since Baptist churches can be traced back to the age of the Reformation, it is inevitable that there are points of contact with Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. Paths began to diverge when some adopted the practice of believers' baptism, even while holding to many of the teachings of the Reformation. The divide became wider when Baptist churches increasingly became Arminian in doctrine, which made man's free will the fundamental determining factor in salvation. While Arminian thinking on salvation may predominate, there are still many Baptists who sympathize with the Reformed views. As was mentioned earlier, writings of some Baptist authors are read with benefit by Reformed believers. One should be aware, though, that Baptist distinctives will shine through. These distinctives explain why Baptist churches do not fit in NAPARC, which has a clear confessional basis, including positions on Arminianism and baptism.

At the same time, it has been said before that where the Word is, the Spirit is working. This will also be true in the case of Baptist churches. All this brings to mind again the prayer *For the Church Universal* found in the Book of Common Prayer:

> Most gracious God, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth; in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where any thing is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen and confirm it; where it is in want, furnish it; where it is divided and rent asunder, make it whole again; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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# RAY OF SUNSHINE

Rachel Vis

## CINDY BLOKKER

*My name is Cindy Blokker. I am 35 years old. I will be 36 on September 15, 2025. I am living at Harbour Home in Hamilton, Ontario. I love being here, even though it is hard to find a paying job. I do volunteer at Timothy Christian School in Grade 2. I do horseback riding that I love and I have been at TEAD Therapeutic Riding Centre for four, almost five, years. I have a family and sisters who love me and brothers-in-law and nieces and nephews.*

Thank you, Cindy, for introducing yourself to us! Cindy will be celebrating her birthday next month, in September. Happy birthday also to everyone celebrating a birthday in August! May the Lord bless you all in the coming year. We hope you all have a great day celebrating in the warm sunshine.

## AUGUST BIRTHDAYS:

**4**
Terence Berends will be 49
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line
RR 3 Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4

**5**
Philip Schuurman will be 66
323 Scott St.
St. Catharines, ON
L2N 1J6

**9**
Rose Malda will be 68
Mt. Nemo Christian Nursing Home
4486 Guelph Line
Burlington, ON
L7P 0N2

**31**
Kristi Oosterhoff will be 35
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3

*"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*
- Psalm 118:24

**- Rachel Vis**

# WELCOME PASTOR CODY SWAVING!

Our calling committee had a clear mandate: research and present the name of a pastor suitable for our Neerlandia Hope congregation. Many sermons were listened to, as we desired a minister that preached *sola scriptura*. We had been without a shepherd for over a year and a half, and had called various ministers, but God had determined that Pastor Cody Swaving would be the one chosen for this task at this specific time.

Cody Swaving's name was presented at our congregational meeting in January. A lot of excitement was stirring in the congregation as a meet and greet was scheduled for the evening of February 9. There was a great turnout, as we were all excited to meet the one we were hoping and praying God would give to be our new minister. Thoughts and concerns about matters in our church were brought forward to show where we needed guidance and help, and positive aspects of our local communion of saints were shared.

Each day that passed we wondered—would today be the day that we heard back? Would God put it on Pastor Swaving's heart to accept this call? Ten days after the meet and greet, we heard back. . . Yes!! God had answered our prayers and had provided for us once again! Our new minister and his family safely arrived on April 25, 2025.

## WORDS OF COMFORT

On May 4, we could witness the installation of Pastor Swaving by Rev. Gerard Veurink, minister of our neighbouring church in Barrhead. Rev. Veurink preached on Isaiah 40:1-2: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

Rev. Veurink began his sermon by reading from the *Form for Installation of Ministers of the Word*: "The exalted Christ gathers his church through his word and Spirit, and in his grace uses the ministry of man." He focused our attention straight on God, and how he had blessed us with a new minister of the Word. As

congregation, we were encouraged to accept that gift and to respond in a fitting way. In speaking to our new pastor, Rev. Veurink emphasized how Christ, in His grace, uses the minister to proclaim the gospel of salvation.

## WELCOME EVENING

A welcome evening for the Swavings was held on May 16. The evening was opened by Br. J. Froma and our MC was Br. Arnold Viersen. A joke about living in the land flowing with milk and honey, because of the amount of dairy farmers and apiarists in his constituency, earned a good chuckle. There were various letters and speeches of congratulations and encouragement shared from congregations in our classis, the local URC congregation, a representative of the Barrhead Ministerial, and our previous minister, Rev. Ludwig.

Many presentations were done, including an introduction to the gifted business people in the area along with a sample of their goods. A map was given which showed where all the members of the congregation reside. Rev. Swaving noted that in his previous congregation he could bike to all of the member's homes—that won't be possible here unless he has an e-bike, one of the members joked!

Welcome gifts included a flower basket, Dutch goodies, and various books, including a history of Neerlandia. A game of matching newlywed photos to current couples earned grins and chuckles as we saw how young some members used to be. Our Fellowship Committee had an Alberta trivia game which matched up three "Veteran Neerlandia Men" against three "Newbie Neerlandia Men," including our new minister. Surprisingly, the "Newbies" won! And what welcome evening wouldn't be complete without singing and delicious food! It was an evening thoroughly enjoyed by all.

We are so blessed by God to once again enjoy a minister of our own. Our Father, in his time, has once again provided for our needs. To him alone be all the glory!

**Arlene Verhelst**
Neerlandia, AB

# MEET ARNOLD VIERSEN, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

ILSE VERMEULEN

With the dust settled after our recent federal election, members of Parliament are back at work in their local ridings and in Ottawa. Arnold Viersen, 39, a member of the Hope Canadian Reformed Church of Neerlandia, represents the riding of Peace River–Westlock in Alberta as a Conservative member of Parliament.

Mr. Viersen grew up in Neerlandia and attended Covenant Canadian Reformed School from grades 1–12. He apprenticed as an auto service technician, attained his journeyman ticket from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), and earned a business degree from the University of the Fraser Valley. In 2014, he was named a Western Canada Master Technician. He is married to Melissa, and they have six children. The family loves the outdoors, including gardening, hiking, fishing, hunting, and snowmobiling.

In 2015, after ten years working as a car and boat mechanic, Viersen exchanged his coveralls for a suit to bring a Reformed voice to Canada's House of Commons. True to his roots, he keeps wearing his cowboy boots.

## Q. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO GO INTO POLITICS?

A. I got mad one day! I was annoyed with the way Canada treats Alberta. I was annoyed with how Canada treats the pre-born. And I wanted to do something about that, even though my friends said: Arnold, there's not a wrench big enough to fix Ottawa.

I joined ARPA [the Association for Reformed Political Action] and became a board member in 2010. I participated in two God & Government conferences and in 2014 I learned that Alberta had gotten six new ridings for the 2015 elections, including in the area where I live. I was 27 and I didn't think I was old enough to be an MP, but the Reformed church community came out strong to support my nomination and the rest is history.

## Q. HOW DID YOU PREPARE TO BECOME A PARLIAMENTARIAN?

A. It was a process of trial and error—it was like trying to drink from a firehose in the beginning. In Ottawa, I have the help of three full time staff and three or four interns, and at my riding's office two full time staff. Fortunately, I had ARPA experience. My friends at ARPA, particularly Mark Penninga and André Schutten, offered any help I needed. The first day, I needed a ride to work and a babysitter! The Reformed community in Ottawa has been amazing too.

## Q. WHAT DOES A DAY AT THE JOB LOOK LIKE, IN YOUR RIDING AND AT PARLIAMENT?

A. To start with, the job of an MP is like being a minister (pastor): you are never *not* doing your job. Rarely do I have a conversation that does not come back to what I do in Parliament. I am mostly focused on changing policy by trying to get a private member's bill going and finding support for the position I try to push by meeting people and making phone calls. I work on battling pornography and protecting our country from prostitution. I work on pro-life issues, oil and gas, and I support honey farming. You might not know this, but our riding is the promised land ☺! About a quarter of Canada's honey comes from my riding.

I also get invited to all kinds of events, like rodeos and parades, and tours to meet people and see businesses. I overlap 400 other elected officials, including town or county councilors, members of the provincial legislature, Native band leaders, and school trustees. I try to maintain a relationship with those people. Today, for instance, a group of town councilors who are in Ottawa for a conference will come to visit me.

When Parliament is sitting, that's when the real work happens: you can table a bill, you can read a petition, you can give a speech in the House of Commons. Basically, for every hour of a committee meeting or that Parliament is in session, an MP needs four hours of preparation, reading and talking to people to hear what's going on so that you can go in making an informed decision or speech.

I usually fly into the capital early Monday morning. The House starts meeting on Mondays at 11 AM and goes to 7 PM. If you are on 'House duty' you're expected to attend the sessions in the House of Commons the whole day. The party aims to have at least fifteen people in the House at all times so, as Opposition, we can stop things from happening if need be. If you're not in the House, you often have Committee meetings.

On Tuesdays, the House starts at 10 AM, but before that I already have three meetings with different groups of the Conservative caucus to discuss particular issues. Often, people and organizations from around the country want to visit during the day as well.

On Wednesdays, we start with a Parliamentary prayer breakfast and Bible study. We also meet as Alberta caucus before the national caucus convenes. The Liberals do that as well on Wednesday morning. The House does not start until 2 PM that day.

Thursday mornings I meet with my interns to discuss what is going on in Parliament. There is also a weekly Bible study for Conservative MPs from 8 to 9 AM, before the House starts at 10 AM.

Fridays are a "softer" day, so I try to catch a plane home on Thursday evening and do my work on Friday via Zoom.

## Q. WHAT ARE SOME JOYS OF YOUR JOB?

A. This is my fourth term and in the fall I will have been an MP for ten years. It's the coolest job in the world! It's impactful and important. I personally like meeting people. I meet thousands of people. And I get to travel a lot across the country. I have gotten to know northern Alberta really well. Hosting people at Parliament is one of my favourite parts as well.

## Q. WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES?

A. Many of my friends are truck drivers; I can say that I spend more time with my family than they do. But still, I am in Ottawa 27 weeks of the year, from Monday to late Thursday evening. All the travel is a challenge. And getting enough sleep is a challenge!

The philosophical battles are tough. The nature of politics is that you have to go out and make arguments, but people do not necessarily agree with you. It's challenging to convince people. The comments on social media are brutal too. I'm here to do the right thing, but I get yelled at and people want me to do the exact opposite. I wear my Christian faith on my sleeve; nobody is under

any illusion about where I stand on issues. I am pleased with the reputation that I have in Ottawa. I see it as a privilege that I'm holding a seat in the House of Commons. I'm excited to represent 100,000 people in Northern Alberta.

## Q. WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

A. I am a fixer; that makes this job interesting. Some of the work is more about the process: how do we get a bill through? I have joined forces with unlikely allies, for example, in the anti-pornography work I have done. We have the same goal, but we come at it from different worldviews. That is an exciting challenge.

Some people think I have to sacrifice my conscience as an MP, but I have never done that. I have lost votes, and that can be frustrating, for example on the conversion therapy ban. I am one of seven MPs who voted against the conversion therapy ban the whole way through, but it did get accepted. However, I did not sacrifice my conscience because I lost that vote. I voted the way I needed to vote. I have never been asked to vote against my conscience.

The most successful work that I have done never makes the news: news headlines are created by the things that *don't* happen. For example, I spend a lot of time trying to protect the prostitution laws our country has had since 2013. I have to constantly watch who is pushing this issue, like playing whack-a-mole. As an MP you often get flack for the things that fail to hold, but people have no idea of the other 25 things we *did* hold the line on. Particularly, being the Official Opposition to the government, we are in the business of stopping things from moving. In the last Parliament we were basically successful in stopping Justin Trudeau from passing any legislation for nearly a year. And we were able to flip the country on the concept of carbon tax. From my perspective, all that was wildly successful.

## Q. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO PEOPLE WHO ARE THINKING ABOUT RUNNING FOR A PUBLIC OFFICE?

A. Politics is about owning the space, taking the seat. You might not move the needle one way or another, but if you hold a spot, you're preventing another from taking it. I also would like to say that there are thousands of influential jobs in the government beyond being an elected official. For example, in my hometown we have a director of communications who drives a lot of posts and messages that we are not excited about. It is not an elected position, but you can make a huge difference as a Christian in a position like that. There are a lot of opportunities for fulfilling work that is very important in the governance of our towns and country that does not include being an elected official.

Many believe that there is no place for religion in politics. They say church and state should be separate. In response, generations of Christians have walked away from politics. But there is no avoiding politics. I always say: you have to have your faith in order, your relationships in order, your finances in order and your politics in order. You might not like politics, but politics likes you! You can either be at the table or on the menu.

## Q. WHAT DO YOU, AS A REFORMED BELIEVER, BRING TO OTTAWA?

A. As Reformed believers, we have a robust Reformed theology about politics based on Abraham Kuyper's teaching of sphere sovereignty and the heritage of Groen van Prinsterer's work in the Netherlands. That is a big motivator for me and helps my understanding of politics. It is this profound Reformed approach that Reformed people bring to Christian politics. And politics puts the churches back together. We cannot always worship together, but we can go into a political fight together, like on pro-life issues.

I am looking forward to picking up the topics I was working on before, like combating human trafficking, getting the honey politics sorted out, and defending the oil patches. I am working on defending conscience rights for doctors and nurses and rolling back the euthanasia laws in this country. I think it's achievable. C

*Mr. Viersen encourages anyone 18 and older interested in an internship in Ottawa (September to September) to contact him:* ***arnold.viersen@parl.gc.ca***

**Ilse VanderMeulen**
Elora, Ontario
**ilsevandermeulen@hotmail.com**

# CLARION KIDS ASK!

## How is God always with us?

**- Reid, Grade 1**

Hello Reid,

When your mom doesn't know where you are, you might hear her calling: "Reid, where are you?" Maybe you are in your bedroom or outside playing or reading a book in your living room. But you can only be in one place, right?

Unlike human beings, God is *everywhere.* God does not have a body like people do. And because he is God and he is very great, he can be everywhere at the same time! He is in heaven and all around the earth and in our hearts.

There are so many stories in the Bible where we know God was with his people even when they couldn't see him. God told Noah to build the ark and was with him during the flood. God was with Jonah and heard his prayer when he was in the belly of the fish. God was with Moses and Joshua when they led the people of Israel to the Promised Land. God was with David when he was in danger hiding from King Saul and when David was the king of Israel.

The Lord Jesus even brings God closer to us by sending his Spirit to live inside of us. As God's children, we can trust that God is always with us, no matter where we go. He knows everything we think and say and do! And we don't ever have to be worried or afraid that we are alone. As God's people, we can be so thankful that he is *always* with us!

Till next time,

**Mrs. Veenendaal**

Email your question to **editor@clarionmagazine.ca** and watch for the answer here in the *Clarion!*

*A History of Monasteries*

# FROM CLUNY TO CITEAUX TO CLAIRVAUX[1]

KEITH SIKKEMA

***Editor's note:*** *This is the first of four articles sketching the history of certain monasteries in the Middle Ages. Keith Sikkema begins with a short explanation of events and moves on to tell this history by way of stories which are fictional but which do contain historical facts and also words known to have been spoken.*

## CLUNY'S DECLINE

Since AD 910, Cluniac monasteries had been seeking active holiness and devotion to God. They meant well, but wrongly believed that their prayers and works earned merit toward salvation for themselves and the simple.[2] As these monasteries became popular, wealthy patrons made them rich, and sometimes they accepted novices who sought benefits more than godliness. One Cluniac monk lamented that "devotion had given birth to wealth, and the daughter devoured the mother."

As they gained wealth, monks became lazier. They liked soft beds, spicy wine, meat, and rich food. They enhanced their buildings with stained glass, carvings, gold, and silver. In 1122, Abbot Pontius de Mergueil was deposed for corruption and his successor, Petrus Venerabilis (1092-1156), grieved that "many monasteries have become synagogues of Satan." Cluny was failing. More zealous monastic movements now started, like the Cistercians.

## THE RISE OF CITEAUX

Abbot Robert de Molesmes (AD 1028-1111) started the Cistercian movement in the backwoods of Citeaux, near Dijon, 100 km north of Cluny. After his earlier attempt also fell for worldly charms, he started over in 1098 with twenty-one zealous others. Cistercians avoided the world. They vowed to strictly keep the Benedictine rules for chastity, modesty, poverty, silence, study, meditation, and prayer. Their buildings were modest. Crosses were of rough-cut wood. A crucifix was allowed, but no statues. Monks slept on thin mattresses and ate plain, greens-based meals from basic tableware. They wore sandals and white woolen habits with a hooded black scapular[3] and a rope for a belt. Coats, pants, shoes, and nightwear were rejected as luxuries. Monks helped with clearing land and farming it. Nothing should distract them from serving God, imitating Christ, and earning merit for salvation. They meant well, but could they do better than Cluny?

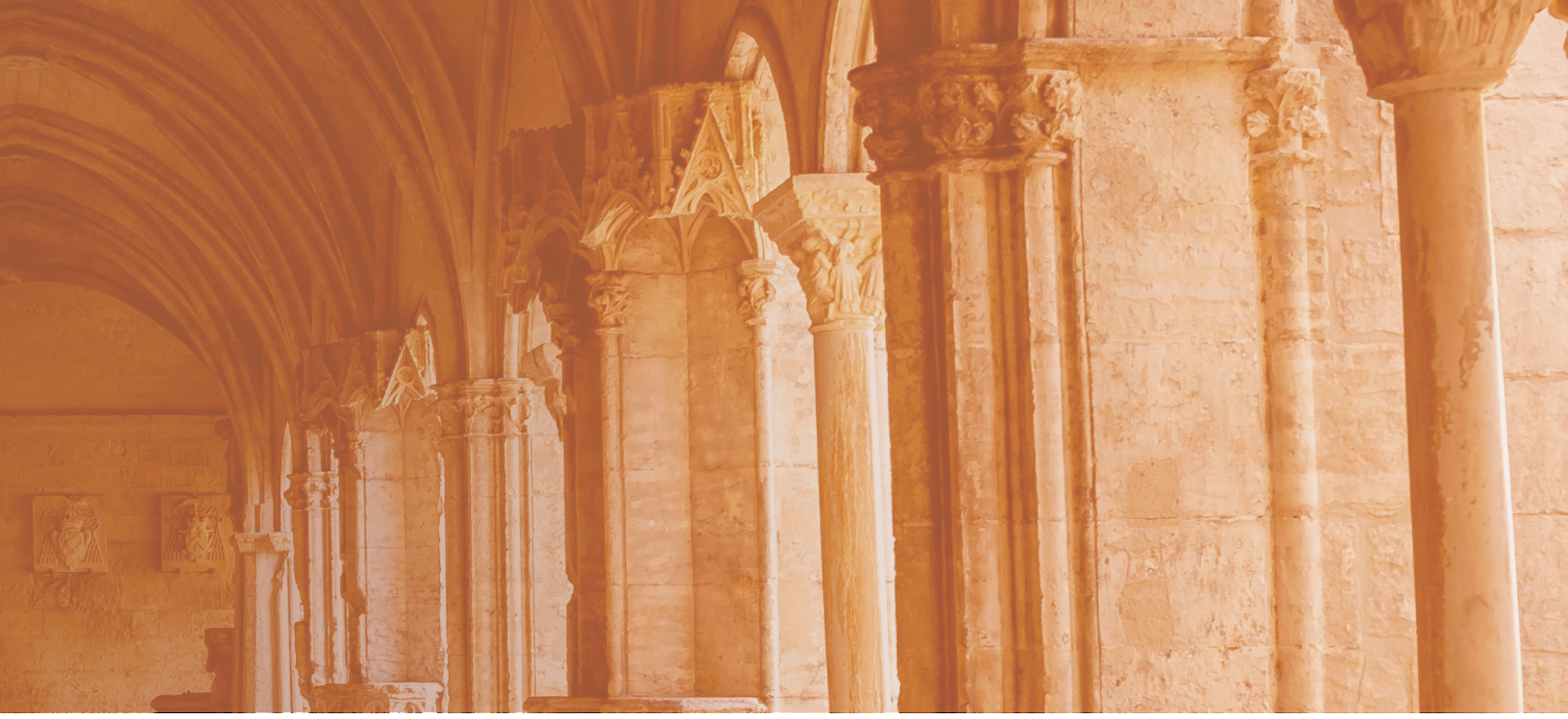
Alberic and Stephanus Harding, Robert's successors, were strict abbots. In 1100, the pope approved their "Cistercian Order." Yet, few new monks joined and soon the abbots thought of giving up. Then, unexpectedly, daughter monasteries sprung into existence. What happened?

Bernard of Clairvaux (AD 1090-1153) came from a noble family near Lyon (France). At age 22, he felt burdened by sin, detested noblemen's battles, and decided to join the strict Cistercians. Four brothers, an uncle, and more than twenty friends came along. More men joined and, within three years, Abbot Harding asked Bernard to start a new monastery "for pilgrims and exiles" in a

[1] These fictional stories link to my previous series on Cluny (see *Clarion*, Vol. 74, nos. 4, 5).

[2] See *Catholic Catechism*, #2010. Ps. 116:6: God's threatened children.

[3] Habits represented prayer (Ora); scapulars represented godly labour (Labora).



desolate forest ravine. Bernard obediently did—and was its abbot till he died. His educated fellow monks and illiterate lay brothers turned the forest into farmland. The lay brothers also lived in and worked for the monastery, taking salvation as their reward. It became known as Clairvaux (Clear Valley) for its "spiritual enlightenment and monastic purity," following Cistercian rules.

## BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

The wind rustled through the trees in the Clairvaux backwoods ravine. A lean[4] blue-eyed monk in a white woolen habit, his tonsure freshly clipped, plodded through the bush. It was Bernard. In a clearing, he stopped and knelt on the mossy ground to seek God's presence. He prayed, "Come, Holy Spirit, whisper your truth to my heart. Set it aflame with your love, guide my thoughts, and lead me on the path to Jesus. . . And if you are silent, let your silence still speak to me."

High above him was the blue sky, and beyond it, he believed, was Mary, "*Theotokos*, the Virgin Mother of God,"[5] and Jesus, whose nearness he craved. Had God not come to earth through Mary? Didn't Gabriel and Elizabeth call her favoured and endowed with grace? Thinking of Mary and Jesus, Bernard prayed for godly peace to fill his heart and soul. The thought of Jesus, God the Son, who through Mary took on the flesh of sinners like himself, filled him with emotion. He wept.

Between sobs, he said, "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Amen." To him, Mary was the second Eve, the mother of the second Adam! In his imagination, she was like his late dear mother, Lady Aleth, and he called Mary "Notre Dame," "Our Lady." Like Aleth, she would understand his need for God's mercy! Would God let him take his shepherd-yoke upon himself? He looked up, wanting to be enabled, wanting his soul to be united with Jesus, as in "a delightful spiritual marriage" just like in the Song of Solomon.

Bernard prayed for forgiveness for sometimes lacking in love as an abbot and treating monks too harshly as "prayer soldiers on the battlefield of Christ." He prayed for reformation of the church's common sins, like simony (selling church offices), nepotism (favouring friends), common heresies and errors (like those of the Cathars), and controlling people with curses, interdicts, and bribes. In prayer, he found inner peace to serve God and to tell his monks, "Persistent prayer brings sudden blessings that will fill your heart and soul with streams of piety."

He trudged back to the abbey, comforted, encouraged, and strengthened. As a good shepherd, Bernard would model the Cistercian rules, study Scripture, comfort some, gently discipline others, and counsel and manage everyone. He would preach to all, teach monks and novices the Cistercian rules, and stir them on to holy devotion in song[6] and prayer to God. He wanted them to be as perfect as he believed Mary had been.

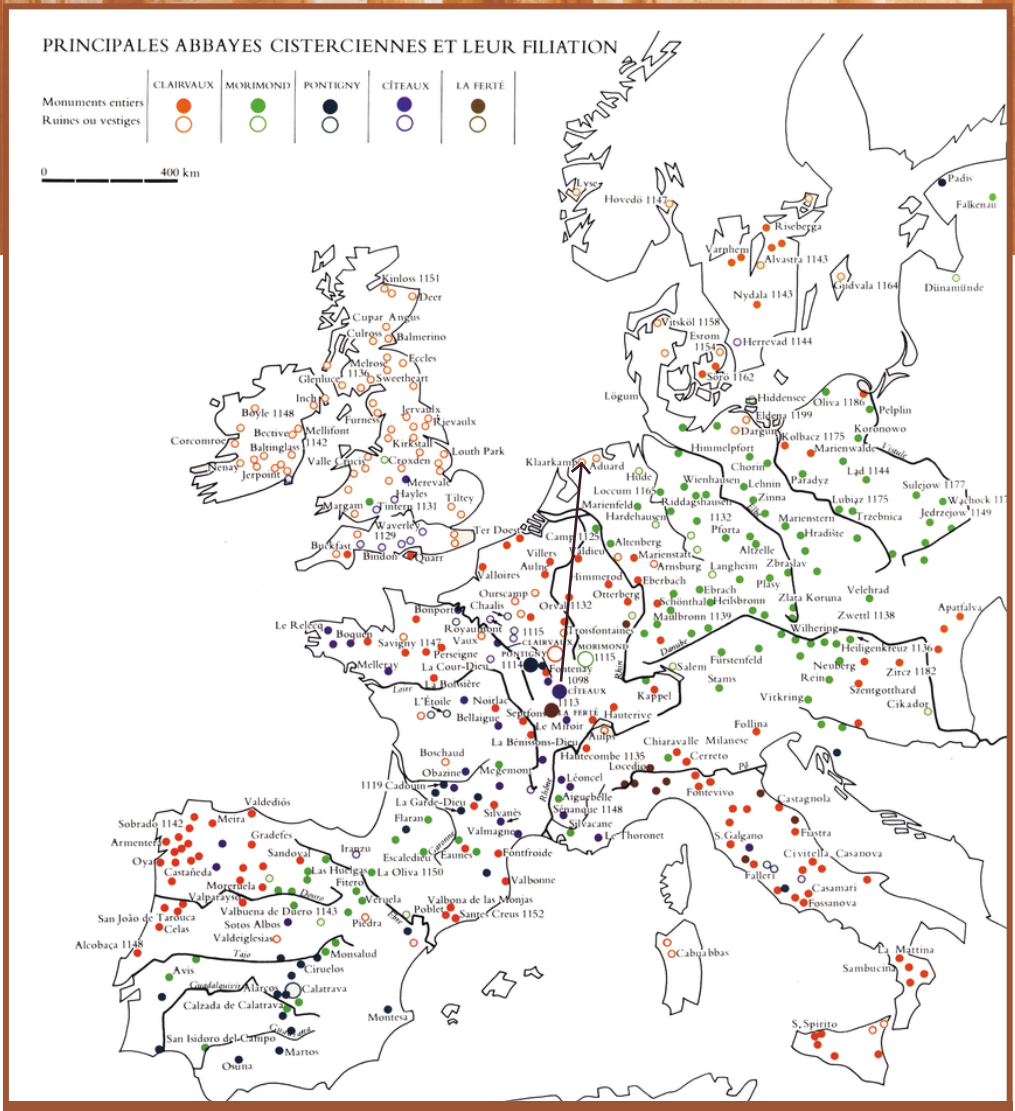
## "THE UNCROWNED POPE"

Bernard's reputation drew pious men to Clairvaux to join, or to glean ideas for new monasteries. In 1153, there were 360 daughter

[4] From prolonged deprivation—he had a life-long stomach ailment.

[5] He went beyond the Council of Ephesus (431) affirmation of Jesus' divinity and incarnation.

[6] *e.g.*, "O sacred head, sore wounded."




Cistercian abbeys and their connections. Arrow: Citeaux to Klaarkamp

monasteries! They liked his idea of *Ora et Labora*—praying seven times a day and working the land as excellent ways to "cross the ocean to heaven."

"There are three ways to get to heaven," Bernard said. "Simple people who only took marriage vows cross over at a ford. That is risky, because they may lose their footing and drown, or die from exhaustion. Celibate ascetics like monks and lay brothers follow the "Royal Way" to perfection. They cross a bridge to heaven by faithfully keeping their burdensome vows and rules. Finally, prelates like popes, cardinals, and bishops use a ship to cross over by leading the church. They will arrive if they are faithful shepherds."

People called Bernard the "Uncrowned Pope" for his knowledge, humility, and wisdom. Indeed, popes, kings, and princes sought his advice about doctrine, peace, and war. When asked by Pope Eugenius III, a former Clairvaux monk, to "preach a Second Crusade" in 1146, Bernard persuaded thousands to "take the cross for Christ and eternal merit. If you defend Christians against Muslims, you will find God's mercy and forgiveness, whether you live or die!" Out of some 60,000 who left from France and Germany in 1147 for this Crusade, perhaps 15,000 returned alive. It was a disaster.

When Bernard died, legend[7] says, he was welcomed into heaven by Mary and angels on one side, and his mother, Lady Aleth, with relatives and deceased crusaders on the other. They went together to meet the Holy Trinity. Twenty years later, he was declared "Saint Bernard" and some churches began to save relics to remember him. He was buried in Clairvaux, but around 1791 French revolutionaries scattered his bones. Parts of his skull were taken to Troyes Cathedral, as a precious relic.

What happened to the Clairvaux monastery and the Cistercian order after Bernard's death? We'll look at that in the next installment.

**Keith Sikkema**
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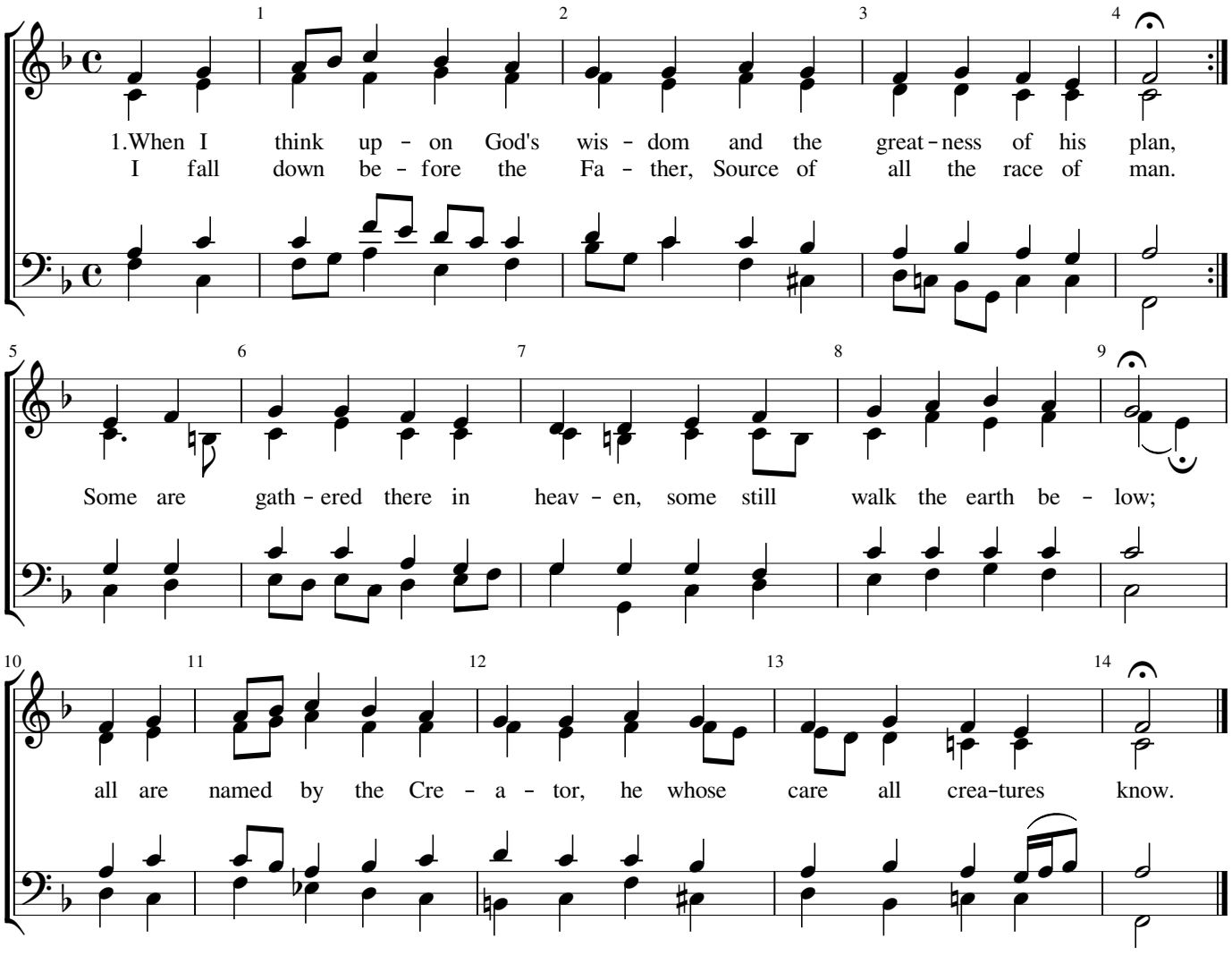
[7] People eagerly believed miraculous and legendary stories.

# Love Beyond All Comprehending

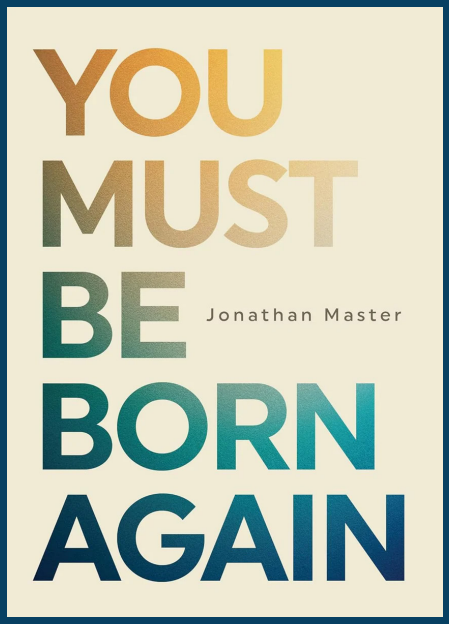
Ephesians 3:14-21
TUNE: GREBE
Meter: 8.7.8.7.D

George van Popta, 2025

Johann Georg Ebeling (1637-1676)
Arrangement: Gertim Alberda

2. Out of all his glorious riches
may he grant you strength and peace;
through his Spirit let his power
in your inner selves increase.
May your heart be Christ's own dwelling,
as you trust his faithful Word,
rooted, grounded in his mercy,
guided ever by your Lord.

3. Lord, we pray, please dwell within us as
by faith in you we live.
Plant our roots in love unshaken;
let us grow in what you give.
May we, with the saints together, grasp
how wide and long love flows—how it
reaches higher, deeper,
than the heart can ever know.

4. May we know the love of Jesus,
vaster than the mind can see,
filled with all the Father's fulness,
boundless as eternity.
Now to him whose power within us
far exceeds all thought and prayer,
be the glory in Christ's body,
now and ever, everywhere.




# A NEW BIRTH PRIMER

*You Must Be Born Again*, Jonathan Master. Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2024. Hardcover, 75 pages.

Way back when we were expecting our first child, my wife and I read a few books on pregnancy and childbirth. Books like *What to Expect When You're Expecting* helped prepare us for the hitherto unknown, telling us what we needed to know. This little book by Jonathan Master similarly gives Christians what they need to know about the Bible's teaching on regeneration, also known as being born again. Because of the book's size (just 75 pages), it's helpful to think of it as a primer—a basic introduction to a subject.

The author is currently president of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in South Carolina. He's also pastored several Presbyterian (PCA) congregations. He's taught theology extensively and written several books. While he is an accomplished academic, *You Must Be Born Again* is written at a simple level.

This book is about why we desperately need new birth and how it completely changes our lives both in this age and in the age to come. Master effectively explains the character of regeneration and how it happens. All of this is supported with biblical references and within the context of confessionally Reformed theology.

Master helpfully pre-empts several questions from readers. One of those has to do with an apparent conflict in how the Bible presents the way regeneration happens. Is it through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit or is it through the instrument of the Word of God? Chapter 3 has the answer.

There are some questions the author doesn't address. They might be important to us in our context but were either not important to the author or he chose not to address them because of his desire to write a short book. Let me just briefly address one of those questions. The author rightly describes regeneration, or being born again, as an event that takes place before someone comes to faith in Jesus Christ. You can't believe unless you've been born again. But sometimes we'll hear that we have to be born again every day, or something similar. This confuses regeneration with sanctification. The first is a completed event ("worked in us without us" as the Canons say in 3/4, art.12) and the second is a process in which we are active participants with the Holy Spirit. You can refer to passages like 1 Peter 1:23 which says of believers, "you *have been* born again." There the perfect tense is used in Greek, which indicates a completed action with effects into the present. We find the same thing in 1 John 3:9, 4:7, 5:1 and 5:18, except in those passages the Holy Spirit speaks of being born of God. Think about it: when Christ told Nicodemus (a Pharisee) that he needed to be born again, was he telling him that he needed to be more sanctified day to day? Or that he needed the wholesale change of heart involved with the new birth?

I can highly recommend *You Must Be Born Again,* particularly for Bible study groups. It consists of five short chapters—enough perhaps to fill a gap in the study season somewhere. Because the author doesn't touch on everything, there will be plenty of scope for discussion. If you need some help to get things going, every chapter concludes with helpful questions for reflection and discussion.

**Wes Bredenhof**
*Minister*
Free Reformed Church of Launceston
**bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca**

# *Dear Church Community...*

Dear Church Community,

I have been blessed to have been an office bearer multiple times. Home visits to believing, faithful members are so encouraging. Witnessing when God works powerfully in a new believer, redirects the wayward, or causes continued growth is beautiful and truly awesome.

However, the reality is that many of us elders are working full time jobs (many younger office bearers are away from home at work over 60 hours a week) and are raising a family. Council and consistory meetings happen once a month, with at least one evening of preparation work. Each meeting often has follow-up work requiring an additional evening. Home visits only happen once a year, but the special visits to the elderly, those new to the church, and the wayward are a significant addition. Marital discord and sinful behaviours in each ward can have constant emotional needs. The amount of federation news, meetings, and learning opportunities continues to grow.

This is manageable. But we need to recognize that this is a constant load, and many are close to their maximum with no reserve. Office bearers too are weak and sinful beings.

Then what do we do when there is something extra? If a family member becomes sick, there is a sudden change in a difficult marriage situation in the church, or a fall into sin of a dear member, it can create an acute additional emotional requirement.

With the extra emotional need or load, a council member can show signs of strain. In these situations, I have often heard variants of the same message: *Buckle up. Keep working. You have a duty*. Sometimes it is framed in nicer words: *You need to take care of yourself. You need to work less. How is your wife?* Or perhaps even a sincere recommendation is made to trust in the Lord, for he will provide. How true! Yet is this enough? When an office bearer shows signs of distress—irritability or becoming emotional at council meetings, increasing depersonalization, an inability to empathize, marital strain—what should be our mindset? If we only help consistent with James 2:16a, saying something like, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," what then of James' follow-up question: "What good is that?" Should we not also "give them the things which are needed for the body?"

It is good to have a culture of self-sacrifice and service as office bearers. But this culture can have a malignant next step of disregard for emotional cost and a self-contained destruction. Ask yourself how many deeply believing, faithful, and sacrificial elders you know that have resigned, or have moved for poorly explained reasons. How many have refused to serve again, have a different version of their service in public and private, have strained marriages during their term in office, have clear signs of burn out, have residual anger, have an inability to empathize, have fraying mental health requiring medication, have experienced self-harm and suicidality, or show stress physically through insomnia or impotence? I have personally experienced or witnessed each of these. And what have we done for these brothers? Do we even know about it?

Let us truly care for each other, not advise those struggling to just self-contain. Not just note with concern the evident emotional damage. Not inherently blame them by telling them they work too hard. But acknowledge the strain and empathize with them, offering a break when needed before a breakdown. Councils and consistories need to be acutely aware and sensitive to emotional distress as those suffering from it may be unaware themselves. When aware of negative effects of strain in a brother, they need to be willing to intervene. Give them a "holiday" by temporarily taking over their duties, or transfer a situation to another office bearer's care. Do a pulpit exchange or a reading service, mandate them not to visit for a period of time, require them to *not* attend a meeting. Or simply organize a date night for the brother and his wife.

The calling to be an office bearer is a high one. Self-sacrifice and service are part of the calling and can be a beautiful expression of the fruit of the Spirit. But it should not be self-destructive. Let us be aware of each other's emotional well-being and let our expression of love for these brothers be interventional, not merely observational.

Sincerely,
A brother in Christ

# *letter to the* EDITOR

Dear Editor,

It is a pleasure to regularly read articles in *Clarion* concerning various mission activities all over the globe, all in obedience to the Great Commission.

The March issue had an extensive article by Julius Van Spronsen on the Canadian Reformed Mission Association, as well as a newsletter of the "Christ for All" ministry. The April issue contained a recent MERF Newsletter, while the recent June issue had another article about Christ for All ministry. Thank you!

In our home, we also receive newsletters from other Christian organizations involved in mission in one form or another, such as Word & Deed and MAF.

All of the organizations mentioned above aim to spread the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

I want to point out to your readers that frequently in the Gospels our Lord mentions preaching the gospel, or the kingdom of God, *and* healing the sick, almost in one breath (e.g. Matt 4:23-25, Matt 10:1, 7-8, Luke 9:1-2; cf. Ps 103: 2-3).

In modern western countries with universal healthcare systems, there is little opportunity for churches to be involved directly in healthcare. However, not so in the developing world!

Permit me to introduce your readers to Medical Ministry International (www.mmi.org). This unabashedly Christian ministry organizes short term medical mission projects all over the world, mostly in Central and South America, but also in southeast Asia, Indonesia, and Africa. These are projects of short duration, usually 1-2 weeks, doable for many people who are otherwise fully employed. Teams coming to a community are a great support for the local Christian church. I urge your readers to have a look at the MMI website. They always need dentists, doctors, pharmacists, and nurses, but if you are not in healthcare they will certainly find a meaningful job for you too.

So, if you're wondering how you can personally be helpful in mission beyond prayer and your finances, join a medical team!

Sincerely,

**H.A. Scholtens, MD.**
Flamborough, ON.
**ha.scholtens@gmail.com**

# CLASSIS CLIPPINGS

*What follows are clippings from the press releases of recent classes across the federation for the interest of our readers. Each press release can be found in full at canrc.org.*
*-The Editor*

## CLASSIS PACIFIC EAST – JUNE 12, 2025

A letter was received from the church council at Abbotsford, with supporting documents. Abbotsford council requests classis to approbate their decision to dismiss their minister, Rev. David DeBoer, according to Article 11 of the Church Order. This is done by mutual agreement of Council and minister following Rev. DeBoer's request to be released from active ministry in Abbotsford. After discussion, classis approbates the decision of Abbotsford and receives concurring advice from the deputies of regional synod. The chairman leads in prayer for the Lord's blessing and healing for Rev. DeBoer, his wife and family, and the council and congregation of Abbotsford.

Classis examined br. Fred Struik, who, having completed his studies at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, is seeking candidacy in the Canadian Reformed churches. All the required documents are present. After judging his sermon sufficient to proceed with the exam, he was examined in Old Testament Exegesis, New Testament Exegesis, as well as Doctrine and Creeds. Br. Struik is asked to share how the Lord led him to seek the ministry. These examinations were also judged sufficient for br. Struik to sustain his exam. After promising not to preach or teach anything contrary to God's Word as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, he was declared eligible for call, valid for one year. Classis thanked and praised the Lord in prayer.

A letter was received from Nooksack Valley regarding financial support for the RCUS Spanish translation project. Due to the funds no longer being required, combined with the difficulty of sending charitable donations cross-border, classis decided to relieve Nooksack Valley of the responsibility.

## CLASSIS ALBERTA – JUNE 19, 2025

*Matters for prayer*: The churches at Calgary and Coaldale remain vacant; St. Albert is planting a church in Spruce Grove; Rev. ten Haaf accepted a call from the church at Arthur, ON and simultaneously declined a call from Calgary; the retired ministers, Revs. Aasman, Huijgen, Kalkman, Slomp, and Tiggelaar in their different circumstances; Rev. Cody Swaving was installed in Hope (Neerlandia); and Rev. Josh Peters was ordained in Taber.

The form of subscription was read aloud and Revs. Peters and Swaving subscribed to it.

*Preparatory exam*: Br. Adrian Tams presented himself for a preparatory examination and supplied the appropriate documents. He presented a sermon proposal from Acts 13:1-3 and classis went into closed session for deliberation. The sermon proposal was deemed sufficient, and the remainder of the exam was conducted. He was examined in OT exegesis, NT exegesis, and Doctrine and Creeds. Once again classis went into closed session for deliberation. With thanksgiving, classis informed Br. Tams that he had sustained the examination and he was declared eligible for call in the churches. Br. Tams verbally promised not to teach anything contrary to the Word of God and the confessions of the church.

In accordance with instructions from the churches, a question of clarification was asked and answered regarding travel expense reimbursement for delegates. Calgary's and Coaldale's requests for continuing pulpit supply were granted.

In closed session, classis dealt with Neerlandia's request for approbation of their decision to dismiss Rev. Emadjeu according to Article 11 of the Church Order. Revs. J. Poppe and R. Schouten were present as deputies of regional synod west. Classis decided not to approbate Neerlandia's proposal to dismiss Rev. Emadjeu.

Several appeals were dealt with in closed session.

In accordance with Article 44 of the Church Order, the chairman asked the churches whether the ministry of office-bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of major assemblies are being honoured, and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of classis for the proper government of their church.

Eight churches reported yes, yes, and no. Immanuel asked for advice in a pastoral matter and advice was given. Neerlandia expressed their current difficulties associated with the ministry of office-bearers and the obligations toward the decisions of major assemblies. It is acknowledged that Neerlandia requires the ongoing help of classis for the proper government of their congregation.

## CLASSIS NORTHERN ONTARIO – JUNE 18, 2025

Classis dealt with three appeals in closed session.

Rev. Daniel Holstege of the Wingham Protestant Reformed Church, who was invited to this classis as an observer, was given an opportunity to introduce himself to the classis.

A letter was received from the appeals committee indicating that two of the committee members will complete their terms this coming September. Classis directed the clerk to instruct the convening church for the next classis to solicit names from the churches of brothers who are able to serve on this committee.

Reports of church visitations to Arthur, Elora, Fergus Maranatha, Fergus North, Guelph Emmanuel, Guelph Living Word, Orangeville, and Owen Sound were received with thankfulness.

Question period according to Article 44 of the Church Order was held. The churches reported that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued and the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. No church asked for advice regarding proper church government.

The church at Fergus North requested an honourable release for Rev. Marc Jagt. Upon presentation of the documentation, the honourable release was granted. Opportunity was given to thank Rev. Jagt for his eleven years of service in Fergus North and in Classis Northern Ontario. Rev. Jagt spoke words of appreciation and farewell. Fergus Marantha was appointed to represent Classis Northern Ontario at Rev. Jagt's farewell service.

A church visitation report was received with thankfulness. Question period according to CO Article 44 was held. All the churches affirmed that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued and that the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. Advice was given to one church regarding proper church government.

A proposal was adopted to change the classis regulations regarding the invitation of fraternal delegates and observers. A letter was dealt with in closed session.

## CLASSIS CENTRAL ONTARIO – JUNE 13, 2025

*Preparatory Exam:* Pastor Ian Wildeboer leads in prayer for student Kevin Wattel, to ask for God's blessing and to encourage Kevin as he delivered his sermon on Matt 5:17-20. Classis then proceeds in closed session to discuss his sermon. His sermon was judged to be sufficient. In open session, candidate Kevin Wattel is examined on the OT, the NT, doctrine, personal life, and public ministry. With thankfulness, classis deemed that student Kevin Wattel sustained his examination. In open session, the chairman informed Kevin of this decision. Pastor Gerrit offered a prayer of thankfulness.

*Memorabilia*: Blessings has approached Pastor Bryn MacPhail to serve as pastor of discipleship, pending an examination (set tentatively for Oct 24, 2025). He is currently serving in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Nassau, the Bahamas. Other matters: emeritus pastor Chris Bosch recently spent some time in the hospital.

## CLASSIS NIAGARA – JUNE 25

(Note: the press release was not published at the time of gathering these clips and so what follows is gleaned from news announcements posted at canrc.org)

*Preparatory Exams:* The brothers Todd Linde and Marc Vermeulen, each having completed their M. Div at CRTS, presented themselves to classis in order for each to undergo a preparatory examination. With thankfulness to the Lord, each brother sustained his examination and both are now available for call within the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

## CLASSIS ONTARIO WEST – (OVER THREE DATES—MAY 28, JUNE 11, JULY 2)

*Licensure Exams:* Four CRTS students submitted sermon proposals and each proposal was deemed sufficient to proceed with an examination in doctrine and creeds. After being examined the following brothers were granted permission to speak an edifying word in the churches: Zachary Bonura, Jayden Houweling, Caleb Poppe, and Thomas VanLeeuwen.

*Question Period:* By God's grace, all of the churches were able to affirm that the ministry of the Gospel is being faithfully continued and the decisions of the broader assemblies are being honoured. One church asked for advice regarding the execution of the disciplinary process.

*Correspondence Received:* A request to extend the permission to speak an edifying word was made by the following brothers: Raoul Kingma and Adam Werkman. Both of these brothers are currently pursuing advanced theological education with an eye to serving in the ministry in due course. These requests were granted for a one-year (12 month) period.

Letters of fraternal greeting from the HRC and Classis Michigan of the URCNA were received and read with thankfulness.

*Preparatory Exams:* Four CRTS students submitted sermon proposals to classis. In closed session, classis deemed that the proposals of brs. Mitchell Bosveld, Reese Gaillard, and Joshua Schouten were sufficient to continue their examinations. The sermon proposal submitted by br. Damon Bosveld was not deemed sufficient to proceed with his examination. Due to illness, Br. Mitchell Bosveld could not be present and Classis decided to reconvene on 2 July, in order to complete his examination, the Lord willing. In turn, brs. Gaillard and Schouten were examined in open session in the areas of OT exegesis, NT exegesis, and Doctrine & Creeds. In closed session, classis determined that each of these brothers had sustained their examinations. After each of these brothers gave their promise not to teach or preach anything contrary to Scripture or the confessions, Classis granted each of them a certificate of candidacy for the ministry, lasting for a period of three years (36 months).

*Re-Opening of Classis (July 2):* The chairman called the meeting to order. All of the properly credentialled delegates were found to be present and the chairman led in opening devotions. Br. Mitchell Bosveld was examined in the areas of OT exegesis, NT exegesis, and Doctrines and Creeds. In closed session, classis determined that Br. Bosveld had sustained the examination. After promising that he would not teach or preach anything contrary to Scripture or the confessions, he was granted a certificate of candidacy for the ministry, lasting for a period of three years (36 months). C

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