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# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

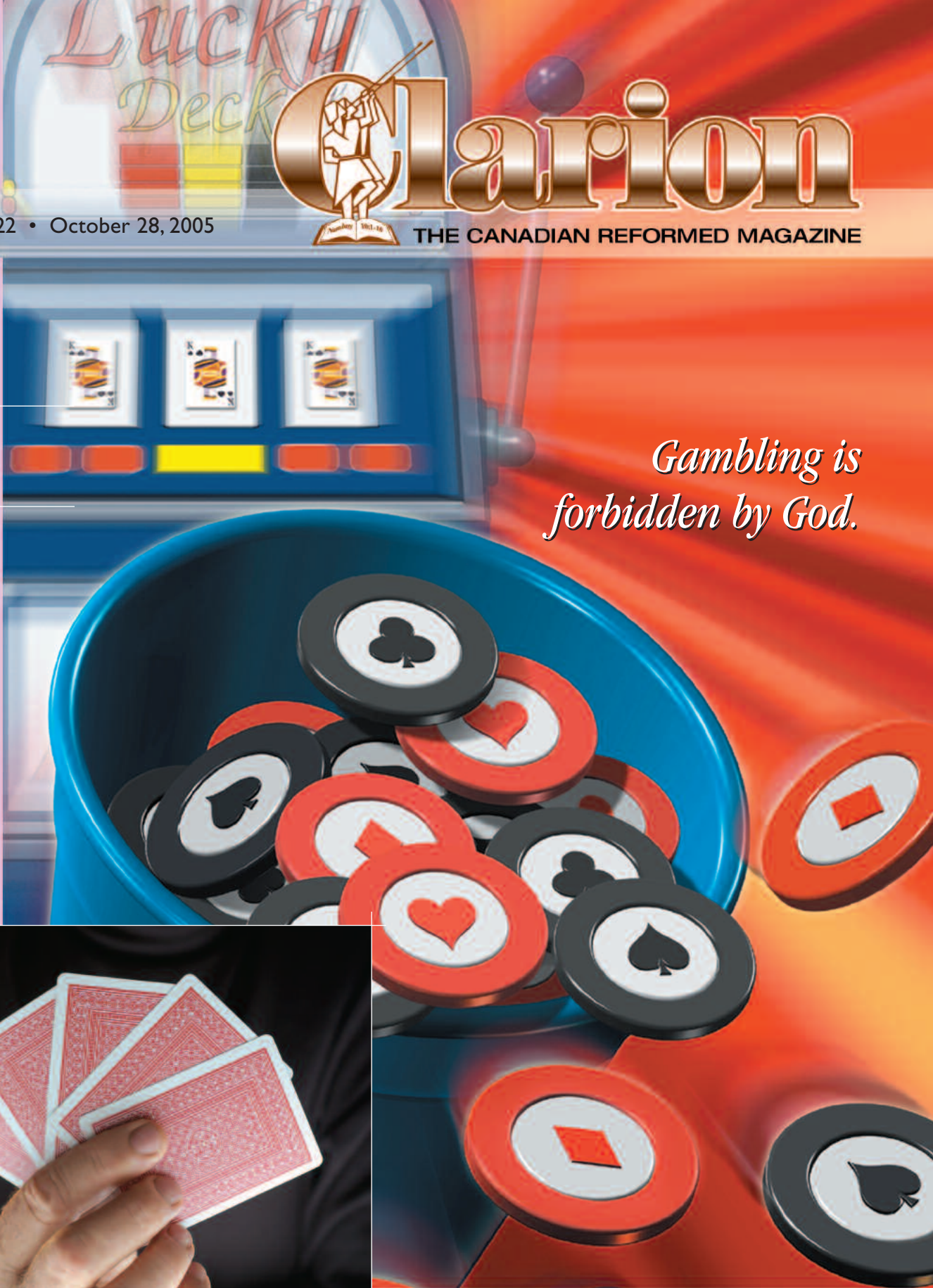
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*Gambling  
Revisited*

*Thesis #1:  
Repent*

*Help Denver  
Grow:  
Discovering a  
new vision for a  
small church*

*Gambling is  
forbidden by God.*





R. Aasman

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# Gambling Revisited

*The church needs to offer help to those who suffer from compulsive and destructive addictions.*

My previous editorial in Issue 16 dealt with gambling. Soon after publication, a brother came to me to tell me some of his experiences regarding compulsive gambling. It was a heart-rending story. But he told it in front of his wife who knows all about it and has been his best support. By God's grace, this brother's life turned around. However, as with alcohol and drug addiction, one is never free in the sense that there is no more attraction to go back to this compulsive and destructive behaviour. The brother mentioned that he has fallen back into his old ways even after turning away from gambling. However, because of certain precautions put in place (supervision of money by his wife), that did not last long. Soon after the visit this brother sent me an email. I include it in its entirety with his permission. I have withheld his name for obvious reasons.

## The story of a gambler

### Hello Reverend:

Here are some of my thoughts about my problem of compulsive gambling. The only place I felt comfortable was at the casino; no demands were made on me to do something; no pressure to think about problems in my family; life felt secure; I could create images of a great and wonderful person I could be with the BIG WIN. I could avoid everyone I wanted to. I wouldn't even notice if there was a male or female sitting beside me most of the time as I was in my own little world. The big thing about gambling is that when the BIG WIN happens I could have all the good things in life without any great effort. Unfortunately the BIG WIN never happens. Yet some might think that having a couple thousands of dollars in front of you at 5:00 and then borrowing money from the house (Poker house) at 6:00 is a BIG WIN, but pathetically it was never enough. Finally I knew it was time to quit after the reality final struck (my rock bottom) and that I

had to grow up and realize that this was not in God's plan that I should continue gambling. Yet through my gambling years my ward elders had often told me to just turn to read the Bible when I had the urge to go and gamble. Yeah that would only last so long and I was gone to the casino. Yes I knew it was wrong but somehow I felt God would forgive me my sins (lack of faith here). Thankfully when I hit my rock bottom I had an understanding wife that would help me.

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*Yet through my gambling years my ward elders had often told me to just turn to read the Bible when I had the urge to go and gamble. Yeah that would only last so long and I was gone to the casino.*

---

I had asked a friend to go with me to Gamblers Anonymous and he did. I then joined the program and it helped enlighten me to my faith and drew me closer to God. I can now understand the song "Amazing Grace" (I once was lost but now I'm found). My faith life in God has accelerated so that I now feel closer to God than at any other time in my life. I have had almost eight years of not gambling and am very thankful for that. I have learned the saying in the program. "Give us a try for ninety days and if you don't like what you see or hear here then we'll gladly give you your misery back." It is no shame in admitting we have a problem whether it's gambling, drugs, alcohol, or any other form of addiction, God's willing to help you if you are willing to help yourself. Yes I know that Gamblers





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Anonymous may not be from a biblical background but it's a start for meeting people who have been in the same place as you were. Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other so that they may solve their gambling problem. No matter what anybody says to you about "you have a gambling problem," unless you know yourself that you want to stop gambling, it is not going to happen. Asking for help is the greatest gift you can receive from that person for it is the gift of humbleness we need to accept. Gambling can affect anyone in life, rich or poor, healthy or sick, young or old. The Devil is powerful and we must stand on guard not to fall into his reign. Praise God for it is from Him that all blessing will flow to his children.

This is my thoughts; hopefully it is helpful. . . .

**Truly destructive**

You can see from firsthand experience how destructive gambling is. I have had people tell me that gambling at casinos or race courses or other venues is purely recreational. The fact is, it is forbidden by God and those who venture into the world of gambling do so with tremendous risks, as the brother outlines in his story above. I have heard personally from the experiences of other gamblers and seen how invariably gambling can destroy careers, marriages, families, lives, and a relationship with God. It is a world of greed, lying, embezzling, theft, poverty, resentment, and suicide. It is a world which we should not enter. If we do, we need escape – fast and totally!

**Getting help**

The church needs to offer help to those who suffer from compulsive and destructive addictions. But notice what the brother wrote above: "Yet through my gambling years my ward elders had often told me to just turn to read the Bible when I had the urge to go and gamble. Yeah that would only last so long and I was gone to the casino." I definitely do not want to make a judgment about this brother's elders since I

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only hear one side of the story. But we have to ask ourselves the question: do we as church community, with preaching, supervision, discipline, and a practising communion of saints, really create a safe and caring environment where a gambler can open up and seek help? Or is there a vacuum in this regard? Consider this: do our alcoholics find refuge primarily in Alcoholics Anonymous, drug addicts in Narcotics Anonymous, and gamblers in Gamblers Anonymous? I don't want to make a judgment about AA, NA, and GA. I have known too many people who were tremendously helped by these organizations and who used them to change their behaviour and live their lives to the praise and glory of God. But the church cannot shirk its responsibility. The church needs to love and to care for those in need. As office bearers and church community we are to help those in need, to struggle with them, to guide them, and to pick them up when they stumble and fall down.

### **What we need to do**

We need to become well aware of such things as addiction to alcohol, drugs, gambling, and for that matter, addiction to sex and power. This requires education. This requires doing some reading and study. The better we understand the seriousness of these things and really want to help those who are overcome by sin, the better we can help them. As church community we also need to be ready to spend ample time with someone struggling with such a sin. An addiction is not something one shrugs off quickly and easily. When a brother or sister phones to say that they have been at a casino three evenings in a row, or is standing outside one and thinking of going in, that's a time to talk, to drop what you are doing, and go to that person. When someone calls and cries for help, they need our support. It is a matter of following Jesus Christ's urgent call to leave the ninety-nine sheep and to go after the one which is lost.

To be involved with someone who is struggling with sin and to bring back a brother or sister from a life of gambling is not only something that our Lord Jesus Christ expects of us, but it is deeply satisfying to be allowed to help a brother or sister in such deep need.





R. Bredenhof

# Thesis #1: Repent

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**MATTHEW 13:52**

*“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’.”*

*Matthew 4:17*

When we commemorate Reformation Day, our thoughts often turn to the familiar scene of October 31, 1517. There comes Martin Luther, walking with determination to the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Hammer and nails in hand, he arrives at the door, takes a couple folded sheets of paper from inside his overcoat, and then sets at once to nailing these sheets onto the church’s wooden door.

In our minds there’s of course little doubt about what was written on those sheets: These were Luther’s ninety-five theses. Church history textbooks and teachers have long paused at this moment to carefully tell it and to explain it.

Whether Luther knew the potential impact of this action – the international councils, the church divisions, the wars – is a question for debate. What’s clear is that within a few weeks of being posted, these ninety-five theses were being translated and copied and carried to all parts of Europe, unleashing a storm of controversy wherever they were read.

We know this story well, and also its world-changing consequences. But we may be less familiar with what exactly those ninety-five theses were. Now, this is a devotional column and not a church history review, but in looking at thesis #1, these two worthwhile purposes nicely intersect. For after a short preamble, Luther begins with this thesis (or statement): “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ

said, ‘Repent,’ He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

With his first thesis, Luther alludes to a passage from Matthew’s gospel, 4:17. There Jesus has just begun his ministry in Galilee, having heard that John the Baptist had been put in prison (v. 12). And Jesus begins his preaching with the same message as John: Repent!

Luther had good reason to start with the command conveyed in Matthew 4:17. For, contrary to what is sometimes thought, his ninety-five theses were not random grievances against the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, with each of these connected statements, Luther focuses on one particular issue: the matter of indulgences.

An indulgence was said to be the full forgiveness of a sinner, and a canceling of his punishment. Such forgiveness was gained through the purchasing of tokens of indulgence. This cancelation of punishment could extend even beyond the grave, freeing the souls of loved ones from their suffering in purgatory.

In his own struggles over the doctrine of justification, Luther had come to emphasize the full and complete forgiveness of man’s sin through God’s grace in Christ. This amazing, free gift could be received by faith alone. Luther’s scriptural conviction on this matter led him to question and then condemn the practice of selling indulgences. For the church was taking ownership of and then selling God’s

forgiveness! The church was turning grace into something that was far from free! And all this had terrible effects on the minds and hearts of the average, sinful Christian. It bred a trust in the outward acts of religion and it bred a false sense of eternal security.

And so Luther called the church to return to the simple, biblical truth of what it means to be a penitent sinner. Repentance is not a prefabricated, elaborate ritual. Repentance is not something that can be bought at one time for all time. No, says Luther in thesis #1, repentance is a life-long project for all believers. It must be personal, it must be sincere, and it must take place throughout our lives. And our true repentance is, by God’s grace, enough for Him to forgive all our sins.

“Repent,” preached Jesus as He began his ministry. “Turn away from sin, and turn to God through me in faith!” If you repented yesterday, you must do so again today. If you repent today, you must do so again tomorrow. “[Christ] willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

Daily repentance is at the heart of the Christian life. It takes humility – to recognize and to grieve for your horrible sins each new day. And it takes faith – to constantly love and embrace Christ’s amazing atoning work. In an age of excess ritual and showy religion, Martin Luther returned the basics, just as John and just as Jesus had done centuries before. Let us do the same.



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

# Lord's Day 4.7

*Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.*



This time we are focusing on the first petition of the Lord's Prayer: Hallowed be your name.

Your mother is a good parent; she does many nice things for you, she takes care of you, she helps you when you need help,



and she listens to you when you want to tell her something. How do you think she would feel if you never tell her how much you really like her? What if she never sees that you would gladly do something for her? That would make her sad.

Thankfully, that is not how you are! People know that you really love your mother a lot and they can see it, too.

Now let's talk about God. There is no end to what you can say about Him. He is our heavenly Father; He loves us; He is almighty, for He can do what He wants; He is good toward us, and He takes care of us; He is willing to forgive our sins; He is patient with us; He keeps his promises.

Because of all these good gifts, God's name must be hallowed. We should honour God when we listen about the great things He has done and when we read about Him in the Bible.

Now, how would God like it if He never heard from us? If He never heard that we are happy and thankful for all the good things He does? That would make Him sad. His name would not be hallowed.

Thankfully, we really try to be his joyful and thankful children. And we should also live in such a way that people around us notice that.

Imagine a child of God who does evil and nasty things. Imagine that this child of God is so mad that he even swears. Do you know what people would say? They would wonder why they see this person go to church with a pious face but on Monday he is a different man. They would say that in the church it is just as bad as anywhere else.

You had better make sure that no one can speak evil about the Lord because of you. It should be the other way around. When you hear in prayer "hallowed by your name," then you should add: "I should do that, too."



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# Overcoming Discord in the Communion of Saints

## (Part 4 of 5)

*In the third installment I identified the danger of raising the application of a principle to a principle in itself. I did so with reference to the sociologist Emile Durkheim, who declared that society is god. Within the church, traditions may be adhered to as a preference, but may not be made into a durkheimian god: God sets the norms, and some things (which Trigland and Rutherford called indifferent) we are free to change or do differently. However, Christian liberty should not lead to individualism and isolation but rather spur people on to love their neighbour and do what is best for him or her.*

The rise of home schooling in our society may be understood in part by the societal shift in which people seek to do their own thing, with or without like-minded others. That, however, is certainly a much too general notion to help understand the discord in our own communities. I must now elaborate on the rise of home schooling and the associated discord, as it challenges our tradition and as it generates need to revisit the reasons for having our own schools.

### Rise of home schooling

At the time that our parents established Reformed schools, John Holt and Ivan Illich introduced de-schooling as an alternative to the failing American public schools. Philosophically distinct, both de-schoolers and home schoolers keep their children at home. At the time,

Christians had widely accepted the public system (Fairchild & Wynn, *Families in the Church*, pp. 34-35). The removal of Christian content from the curriculum changed this, and “an increasing number of North American families turned. . .

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*I had chosen to study tension in the communion of saints, but was not prepared for how ugly it was.*

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to home schooling in an attempt to rescue their children from the cynicism, disillusionment, and delinquency [of public schools]” (MacMullen, *Home Schooling*, p. 88). Authors like Moore and Moore (*Home grown kids*) and Pride (*The way home*), the market, and organizations like the HSLDA (Home School Legal Defense Association) helped establish legal and social acceptance of and support for home schooling. It is also financially more attractive than Christian day schools, and technological progress made home schooling more manageable. Norman DeJong concedes that “the battle for acceptance has been won. But the battle about quality will go on and on. Just because a school is small is no guarantee that it is good.” He describes a principal’s objections to a pastor’s

“defiant, unconscionable, school authority-rejecting, chaos-inviting, tuition-avoiding, too-proud-to-ask-the-deacons” decision to home school and advised him to sit aside and watch for the outcome (*Teaching for a change*, pp. 123-124).

Here, then, is the controversy. Home schoolers are seen to transgress the social norm of supporting the Reformed day school. They reject the labour, sacrifice, and commitment of the previous generation. They do not pull their weight in supporting the school. They do their own thing. They generate chaos and division. They are too proud to ask for assistance. They undermine the communion of saints and withdraw their talents from it. They are snobs. They imply that the school is not good enough. They generate envy. They talk on the other side of the parking lot and sit together on their own side in the church. They. . . but hold it! Has it ever occurred to you why they do this? Have you cried because the Body of Christ was in discord? This was the context for my study, of which I will highlight a few things next.

I asked home schoolers (HS) and current and former school board members (SR) from two different communities (N and T) a number of relevant questions. N stands for Niagara and T for “The other community,” which had a reputation, for some reason, of not experiencing the same level of discord. I had a total of six interviews, each lasting

from about two to three hours, in October and November, 2002. Locally, there were four separate interviews with individual home schooling couples, and one focus group interview with school representatives. In the other community, I had one focus group interview with both school representatives and home schoolers. My participants were honest. What follows is a summary of my findings.<sup>1</sup>

**NOTE: Table at the end of this document**

## Why to start and why to continue

I first asked the participants in my study why they started home schooling, or why they thought people did. People responded in a variety of ways and with different specifics that it would be better for the child and better for the family, that they had objections to school policy, and that it was cheaper. Contrary to common perception, financial reasons were *not* the most prevalent reasons to start home schooling. While home schoolers often cited social, psychological, pedagogical, policy, program, personal, and personnel stressors as triggers, school representatives (who collectively recognized most of the reasons) tended to think more of (often selfish) benefits as triggers. A number of disputes (between parents and agents of the school) surfaced that should have been resolved a long time ago but never were. It is a common dynamic that unresolved disputes fester and encourage giving up (flight) and doing one's own thing.

My second question was about justifications for *continuing* to home school. I found that people had principle and practical justifications and some other considerations. School

representatives did not clearly distinguish between reasons to start and reasons to continue home schooling and were less aware in this context of practical benefits the home schoolers observed. School representatives resisted what they perceived to be individualism on the part of home schoolers and tended to stress the immediate concern for the communion of saints. Home schoolers, on the other hand, tended to stress the benefits for their families and their children and expected long term benefits for the church. Here another common dynamic surfaced: people who disagree with each other stop communicating, drift apart, and start to make (usually wrong) assumptions that lay blame with the wrong party.

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*To know what to do and then to do it are two different things.*

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## Tension

My next set of questions searched for perspectives on *what generated tensions* in the community around this issue. When I organized the answers in a table (see Table 1), I was shocked. People had not only stopped communicating with each other but developed coherent perceptions of how wrong or how stupid the others were. Look at how little agreement there is: the views are radically diverse. Look at what they think of each other and how strongly those perceptions are represented. See how simple preferences were raised to principles and how the dynamic leads to gossip, slander, mis-attribution, exclusion, and further distress. It is no wonder that

people spoke of disappointment, jealousy, resentment, frustration, anger, offence, grief, irritation, and fear. Here the migraines, the ulcers, and the sleepless nights came clearly in view: discord.

This was a grievous observation. I had chosen to study tension in the communion of saints, but was not prepared for how ugly it was. Were these people who could sit at the Lord's Table together people who examined their consciences whether it was their sincere desire to show true thankfulness to God with their entire life and, laying aside all enmity, hatred, and envy, to live with their neighbour in true love and unity? Quite aptly, one participant referred to the social dynamic as a satanic division among God's people. Is it a surprise that well-intentioned pastoral and open letters, explanations, and even sermons generated a flare-up of emotions, new accusations, and a deepening of the rift? The dynamic of a personal dispute took on new and ugly dimensions when it became a group dispute.

## Resolution

All participants in my study agreed that something needed to be done about it – that was, in fact, an integral part of their motivation to participate in my study. My remaining question wondered: *what should we do to get out of this?* The findings constitute hope, because there is broad, although not full or unanimous, agreement on applicable principles. On both sides I heard moderate and conciliatory voices, even though tension and distrust prevailed. Participants identified elements of restoring love, harmony, and unity similar to Ken Sande's Christian conciliation elements: *Go Back to Scripture* (1 Cor 1:31), *Show Your Brother His Fault* (Matt 18:15), *Examine Yourself*



(1 Cor 11:28), and *Care for One Another* (1 Cor 12:25). They also realized that they had to explain things to each other and that it would take time. Still, practical ideas diverged about how to address the tension.

To know what to do and then to do it are two different things. I may return to Scripture, but if my eyes are closed to what it says, it will be of little use. I may show my brother his fault, but if we resist listening, there is no communication. I may examine myself, but if I only find justification for my former position, I will gain no communion. I may care for my brother, but if I believe that this requires him to become like me, we gain nothing. Paul points out that

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing (1 Cor 13:1-3).

It is well to listen to other things Paul has to say. The final installment of this series will reflect on his direction and end with some concluding reflections.

*I. Considering the nature of Clarion, I include only one table out of several that illustrate respondents' answers. People interested in seeing the others may email me for other summary tables.*

HSs' views		ISSUES THAT GENERATE TENSION	SRs' views	
<b>N</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>EMOTIONS AND OFFENCES</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>T</b>
✓✓✓	✓	Thoughtless opposition and adherence to tradition		
✓✓✓	✓	People hide behind others, too afraid to broach the topic		
✓✓✓	✓	Home schooling seen as a serious threat to, or as negative about school	✓✓	
✓✓✓	✓	Unfairness in financial advantage evokes emotions and resentment	✓	✓
✓✓✓	✓	The school claims home schoolers' money and support		
		The school is expensive, and home schoolers offend by being aloof to the effect of non-support for the communion of saints	✓✓✓	✓✓
✓✓✓		People are offended by defences or justifications of home schooling and home schoolers' parenting choices		
✓✓✓	✓	Home schoolers unfairly treated as isolationist, elitist, generating guilt		
<b>UNMET OR OVERSTATED EXPECTATIONS</b>				
✓✓✓		Church, not school is covenant community		
✓		Withdrawal from the blessings and the calling to share talents in JCS	✓✓✓	
✓✓✓	✓✓	Perceived implications of (not) sending children and support		
		Home schooler support in prayer and Winterfest Bazaar is easy	✓	
✓✓		School may be too large, or stress finances too much	✓	
<b>ACTIONS (OR LACK THEREOF)</b>				
✓✓✓		PTA and Board tried to persuade people to reject home schooling		
		Home schoolers' joining of para-church-like organization and avoidance of reconciliation about differences divisive, weakens unity	✓✓✓	
		Exclusion of home schoolers from church office leaves others stressed	✓	✓
		Church leadership avoids dealing with controversy or calls home schooling an acceptable and viable alternative	✓✓	
✓✓✓		Home schoolers conscientiously support causes others can't		
✓ indicates singularly stated or implied support; ✓✓ indicates repeated support; and ✓✓✓ indicates strong support. For T, ✓✓ indicates significant support. N = Niagara; T = The other community; HS = Home Schoolers; SR = School Representatives.				



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## Introducing the *Emmaus* Growth materials

Welcome to the growth stage of *Emmaus: The Way of Faith*. *Emmaus* has been inspired by the recent renewal of interest in the Catechumenate as an accompanied journey into faith. The Catechumenate is a process of enquiry, instruction, and transformation as an individual encounters the living Christ through his body, the Church.

*Emmaus* has three stages: *Contact* – a simple booklet about contact for church members and leaders exploring this way of beginning evangelism through listening and building relationships. *Nurture* – a flexible fifteen-session course for evangelism and nurture which can be used with groups or individuals and which can form the core for outreach and mission in any local congregation. *Growth* – fifteen (short) courses for groups concerning different aspects of the faith and how to live faithfully in the world.

### What are the Growth materials?

The *Emmaus* Growth courses are published in four books. Each book contains four or five short courses on aspects of Christian living.

### What is the purpose of the Growth materials?

The *Emmaus* Growth materials are intended to offer Christians an opportunity to deepen their understanding of Christian living and discipleship. They may be used as follow-on from a nurture course – whether you've already used *Emmaus* or not.

The materials may be used with new Christians to enable them to lay firm foundations and to help more mature Christians take a fresh look at familiar topics.

What follows is a summary of the four Growth books:

### **Knowing God (four courses)**

#### 1. *Living the gospel (4 lessons)*

This is a simple course on sharing our faith with others who make up our own network of relationships. The lessons are: (1) Understanding your *oikos* (network of relationships); (2) Praying for your *oikos*; (3) Serving your *oikos*; (4) Building stepping stones to faith.

#### 2. *Knowing the Father (4 lessons)*

This is a course showing how our experience of God leads to an appreciation of God as Holy Trinity. The lessons are: (1) God, the Father of creation; (2) God, the Father of Jesus Christ; (3) God, the Father of the kingdom; (4) God, the Holy Trinity.

#### 3. *Knowing Jesus (4 lessons)*

This course deals with the person of Jesus and our relationship with Him as Lord. The lessons are: (1) Who is Jesus; (2) What did Jesus teach? (3) Why did Jesus die? (4) The difference Jesus makes.

#### 4. *Come, Holy Spirit (4 lessons)*

This course deals with the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of individual Christians, in the church, and in the world. The lessons are: (1) The story of the Holy Spirit; (2) The indwelling Holy Spirit; (3) The transforming Holy Spirit; (4) The empowering Holy Spirit.

### **Growing as a Christian (5 courses)**

#### 1. *Growing in prayer (4 lessons)*

This course deals with different methods and understandings of prayer, including practical help and encouragement. The course is based around the Lord's Prayer. The lessons are: (1) Our Father in heaven; (2) Your kingdom come; (3) Give us this day; (4) Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.

#### 2. *Growing in the Scriptures (5 lessons)*

This course deals with the nature and the meaning of the Scriptures and practical help in understanding and reading the Bible. The lessons are: (1) From Abraham to Joshua; (2) From Joshua to the exile; (3) From the exile to John the Baptist; (4) Understanding the New Testament; (5) Reading the Bible today.

#### 3. *Being church (4 lessons)*

What does it mean to belong? This course shows different models and understandings of the church. The lessons are: (1) What is church? (2) What does the church do? (3) We believe... the church; (4) The body of Christ.

#### 4. *Growing in worship – understanding the sacraments (5 lessons)*

This course offers an exploration of Christian worship as an unfolding celebration of the Easter mystery and of the sacraments as communion with the risen Lord. The lessons are: (1) The worship of the church; (2) The sacramental life; (3) The Lord's Supper: entering into the Easter mystery;

(4) Healing and reconciliation; (5) The worshipping community.

**5. Life, death, and Christian hope (3 lessons)**

This course offers an exploration of the Christian hope, the last things, and the Christian attitude to death. The lessons are: (1) Death and resurrection; (2) Judgment and eternal life; (3) The coming of Christ.

**Christian Lifestyle (four courses)**

**1. Living images (4 lessons)**

There is a search for meaning in life in today's society and a longing to live life to the fullest. But what does it mean to do that? How can we be fully human? This course explores these themes through the following lessons: (1) What a wonderful world! (2) Enjoying God's world; (3) Creating with God; (4) Living with God.

**2. Overcoming evil (5 lessons)**

As soon as we seek to be fully human we discover problems. People are not perfect and life is not fair. There is defect in the whole of creation. The reality, which the Christian tradition calls sin, is understood as being like gravity. How do we understand and address this aspect of life? This course explores the questions of evil through the following lessons: (1) Sin: living with gravity; (2) Idols and addictions; (3) Remote control; (4) The true self and the false self; (5) Global warning.

**3. Personal identity (5 lessons)**

How do we understand ourselves so we can love others? This course explores how that true self can be rightly affirmed, nourished, and expressed in life. The lessons are: (1) The search for identity; (2) The gift of identity; (3) The model of identity; (4) The battle for identity; (5) Living beyond the search for identity.

**4. Called into life (4 lessons)**

This course is intended to help every believer know more about what it

means to have a vocation – not just for the work we do, if we are employed, but for who we are and how we live our lives before God. The lessons are: (1) Called by God; (2) Called to conversion; (3) Called into community; (4) Called into mission.

**Your Kingdom Come (two courses)**

**1. The Beatitudes: Your kingdom come among us (six lessons)**

This course offers an explanation of the Beatitudes and an examination of the values by which Christians are called to live and shape their lifestyles. Such values call us to 'live the kingdom – now.' It is a costly calling to live life differently from the culture in which we are set. The lessons are: (1) Introducing the Beatitudes; (2) Open to God: poor in spirit and those who mourn; (3) Seeking God's kingdom: the meek and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; (4) Living in love: the merciful and the pure in heart; (5) Overcoming evil with good: the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; (6) Summary lesson: walking in the way of Christ.

**2. The kingdom: Your kingdom come through us (ten lessons)**

This course offers an exploration of the kingdom and a look at the actions Christians are called to take in seeking to be part of God's compassionate concern to bring all human experience and all creation to their fulfillment in and through Christ. The kingdom is explored by considering three Old Testament themes on which Jesus' teaching about the kingdom is founded: Sabbath, Jubilee, and Shalom. The lessons are: (1) Practical service in Christian discipleship; (2) Sabbath 1: What is it all about? (3) Sabbath 2: Living it; (4) Sabbath 3: Giving it; (5) Jubilee 1: What is it all about? (6) Jubilee 2: Receiving it;

# Church News

## MAILING ADDRESS CHANGE:

Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church of Guelph  
8037 Hwy. 7 East, RR 2,  
Guelph, ON N1H 6H8

Called by the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithers, British Columbia to serve as missionary among the natives in northwestern BC:

**Rev. C. Macleod**

minister of the Free Church of Scotland, North Uist, Scotland.

The Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church now worships in their new church building on 3981 Spring Creek Road, situated in the village of Tintern. Take Victoria Avenue (Regional Road 24) for three km south of Vineland, then go west on Spring Creek Road for 2 km.

Called by the Church of Calgary, Alberta:

**Rev. J.P. Kalkman**

of the Reformed Church in the United States of Menno, South Dakota.

Called by the Church of Taber, Alberta:

**Rev. J.P. Kalkman**

of the Reformed Church in the United States of Menno, South Dakota.

(7) Jubilee 3: Giving it; (8) Shalom 1: What is it all about? (9) Shalom 2: Living it; (10) Shalom 3: Giving it.

Next time we will introduce the first lesson of *Knowing God*. The lesson is called "Understanding your *oikos*."



Rev. C. Bouwman is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Yarrow, British Columbia .  
[cbouwman@canrc.org](mailto:cbouwman@canrc.org)

# The Need for Bible Study: Why Must I Do Bible Study? (Part 1 of 2)

After the Lord God created the world, He did not have to tell Adam and Eve what He had done. Yet He did. After the fall into sin, when the curse of God reached into every area of human existence, the Lord did not have to come with his plan of salvation, nor did He have to tell anyone about it. Yet He did. That He spoke to man and revealed his plan is God's mercy.

Again, after the Lord had revealed Himself to Adam and Eve, and also told them of the salvation He would work through the seed of the woman, He did not have to cause all following generations to know of his word to Adam. But He did. We confess our delight at God's mercy: "In his special care for us and our salvation, God commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit his revealed Word to writing" (BC, Art 3). It's because of "his special care for us" that we know today what God said to Adam – and to Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Paul, and Peter. He had (among other generations and peoples) also us in mind when He caused his Word to be written down and preserved over the centuries. How marvelous this God is!

God's action in giving his Word requires a response. Those who believe that the Bible actually is God's holy revelation could respond by paging through that Word from time to time; however, that is hardly a response befitting anyone who marvels at the fact that God actually spoke to men. To be more precise, the Lord requires a radically different response. That better response is what I want to elaborate on today.

## The king of Israel

In days long before computers were invented, or even Gutenberg's printing press, the God who had already revealed much about Himself to Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Israel gave a most peculiar command. Through Moses He told Israel that any man who would become king in Israel must "write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law" (Deut 17:18). Note well: pen and paper did not exist. With primitive tools the (new) king had to write out in full a personal copy of the books of Genesis,

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## *God's action in giving his Word requires a response.*

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Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. (And as the Scriptures expanded the amount the king had to write out increased accordingly.) The king's personal, hand-written copy of the Word of God was not to be a display piece; rather (said God), "It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life" (v. 19). Those two phrases make plain that the king of Israel was not to leave his Bible home when he went on a field trip to see the troops or when he went to visit a neighbouring king or when he entered a cabinet meeting. His personal copy of the Bible was to "be with him" and he was to read it faithfully.

The Lord also explained the reason for this command. "All the days of his life" the king was to read his personal

copy of God's Word "so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees" (v. 19). A king in Israel necessarily was king *under God*, and so had to rule as God would rule his people. No king could do so unless He knew God well. That's why any king in Israel had to have his personal copy of holy Scripture and read it faithfully.

## The command understood

We would say: Genesis and the first part of Exodus and parts of Numbers may be exciting enough to read and read again and again (though after a while those stories get so well known), but all those laws of Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy: they're tedious! If the king has to read those laws "all the days of his life," he's going to get bored out of his mind reading those pages so often; he'll soon know them inside out and backwards and they won't *mean* anything to him anymore. . . .

How striking, then, that Israel's second king spoke so highly of the Word of God! As a man after God's heart, David would have written out his personal copy of the Bible and read it day by day. Says David about that Word: "Oh, how I love your law!" (Ps 119:97) and "I delight in your commands because I love them" (v. 47). David kept himself busy with God's Word day after day. He says, "I meditate on [your law] all day long" (v. 97). The word translated here as "meditate" describes the notion of reflecting on, thinking on that law. In the course of the day David's mind was busy mulling over Scripture. And no, we're not

to conclude that David was present in body only during cabinet meetings, that his thoughts were far removed from his work; rather, as he was considering kingly questions of taxation or where to send soldiers or how to defeat that enemy, he was busy in his mind with what the will of God was on those questions of taxation or military strategy. The word of God was a lamp to David's feet as he walked the road to his enemy's city and it was a light on his path as he contemplated issues of taxation (v. 105). The close connection David saw between the Bible and the questions of his daily life was precisely what God wanted: the God who controls all of life (LD 10) gave his Word to guide his people in the specific questions that invariably arise as God leads them down paths of his choosing.

In fact, David explains for us something of how he is busy with God's Word. David says in Psalm 1 that the man is blessed who takes "delight in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night" (v. 2). The term "meditates" in this psalm translates a different word than David used in Psalm 119. In Psalm 1 this term actually describes making a low sound, as the moaning of a dove (Is 38:14) or the growling of a lion over its prey (Is 31:4). Used in relation to Scripture, the point appears to be that someone is reading the Bible half out loud. He's getting the message of Scripture in his head (again) not just through his eyes but also through his ears – didactically very sound. In fact, he delights so much in the Word – and in David's days that's at most the Bible books from Genesis to Ruth – that he reads those eight books half out loud "day and night." No, not all day and all night (for there's more for a righteous man to do), but each day and each night. He's continually *busy* with God's Word in the big and little questions of daily living. We can see that David was engaged daily in personal Bible study.

## Fulfilled

Our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament office of king. The Scriptures do not relate anywhere

whether Jesus wrote out for Himself a copy of the Bible as it existed in his day – the entire Old Testament. The Holy Spirit has made plain, though, that the Lord Jesus was most familiar with the revelation of God in Scripture. At the tender age of twelve Jesus had such command of God's Word that He could ask questions and give answers that stunned his listeners (Luke 2:46, 47). Day and night Jesus was busy with the things of his Father (Luke 2:49i). So He also came to know the will of God for Him, including that He "must" suffer and die. God's Word was not something that Jesus kept at arm's length from the questions of his daily living; He knew the Word to be a light on his path and so He sought God's will for Him in that Word. In the words of Psalm 1: Jesus delighted in the law of the Lord and read it and reflected on it day and night.

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*God's Word guides his people in the specific questions that invariably arise as He leads them down paths of his choosing.*

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## Kings today

Why have I drawn out God's command to the kings of Israel? Simply, dear reader, because God's people today are kings. The Apostle Peter describes those redeemed by Jesus' blood as "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9). Lord's Day 12 echoes God's Word with the confession that we are anointed to be kings. But if we are kings, the principle of Deuteronomy 17 – though the passage is fulfilled in Christ, the perfect King – is valid for each of us today. No, not that we need to write out for ourselves a complete copy of the Word of God; now that Bibles are as cheap and as readily available as they are, we can spare ourselves and our children that mammoth task. But being busy with Scripture is imperative for every king in

God's creation today – and that's you and me! God's Word is so much larger today than it was in David's day; so much so that no one can claim to know it perfectly. Those sixty-six books of God's Old and New Testament revelation must be the delight of today's kings as much as it was the delight of Israel's king David. We are kings in our homes and kings in the office, kings at school and in the factory; how to take care of God's world and tackle the questions God puts on our path requires that we're daily busy in reading and thought with the revealed will of the King of kings.

## A problem

One might say that the Bible is so dusty, it speaks of events of so long ago and of people of different culture and race than we today. The Bible is out of touch with modern people and modern problems. . . .

But who, pray tell, is the author of the Bible? Is the author not the same God who controls history? He was able to have Abraham live in the computer age. He was able to have a cell phone available for the Apostle Paul. But He didn't direct things that way. He caused them to live in *their* culture and us in *our* culture. He revealed Himself to them as well as to us, so that they in their culture and we in ours might know the same God. Despite all the changes God has allowed in the development of the world since Noah's days, *He has not changed*. He remains King, who controls all. The Word He gave is about *Him*; through what He said long ago the kings of today get to know *Him* in the midst of life's questions.

Is Bible study necessary? The fact that the Bible is God's Word makes the need for Bible study self evident for all who take God seriously. Kings-under-God in God's world cannot leave the revelation of the King of kings on the shelf.

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<sup>i</sup>Numerous translations have Jesus saying that He had to be "in my Father's house." The original says "in my Father's things." That includes being busy with his Father's Word.

# Help Denver Grow: Discovering a new vision for a small church

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## Welcome to a small church

What is the minimum number of members for a church? The church you are a member of probably has 200-300 members. Emmanuel Church in Denver, however, has twenty-five members and is the smallest church in our federation.

Since this church started it has seen its ups and downs. Initially growth came from members who left the Christian Reformed Church. Over the years, however, the numbers have dwindled. Several families have left for work reasons.

This summer the congregation discussed its future. Should the church continue? If so, do we need a different approach? Several things made us decide to go forward in faith and pursue new plans for the congregation, the Lord willing.

1. We have seen new interest from people outside the church during the past years. When the church started, many members had a Dutch background. However, several Americans have joined in the past years and changed the composition of the congregation. Thus, the Lord has encouraged us by bringing in new people who show an interest in the Reformed faith. Some are currently being taught.
2. Reformed churches in Colorado are few and small. Closing the doors of our church would only diminish the already limited opportunities for spreading the Christian faith.

3. It is no longer realistic to expect growth from immigration of members from sister churches.
4. The current members remain committed to the work of the Lord and want to be obedient to his will. We are beginning to make a more concerted effort to bring the gospel to the unbelievers and to seek to gather other true believers. In this respect there is a new vitality and willingness in the congregation. The need for evangelism has been emphasized in the preaching during the past two years. Weekly prayer meetings are being held to seek God's strength and to remind each other of his will.
5. The other churches in Classis Manitoba have encouraged Denver

with their ongoing support. Classis recently reviewed Denver's plans and gave us advice to move forward, regarding our situation to be similar to a church plant.

## A new vision

A small church can quickly switch to "survival mode": focusing all its energy within and acting mostly out of fear. However, trust in the Lord should characterize the church, and we should not be satisfied with hearing the gospel for ourselves only. It needs to go out and reach more people. In the past this has been done, but not systematically. As you can conclude from the above, we have now decided to spend more time and effort on evangelism. We call this "a new vision!"



*The current building*





*Even the youngest members are involved in outreach activities.*

Our future challenges are twofold: to maintain a church life that is distinctly Reformed and to equip the members for their personal role in evangelism.

You may say, "Well, the Church of Denver better do this or they will cease to exist!" However, study of the will of God for the church leads us to a different motive. The Lordship of Christ and the salvation of sinners should be our deepest motivation to spread the gospel. We believe that every church should work at evangelism; it is just more urgent for a small church.

### **On the move**

This brings us to an important fork in the road. The church building we have been using the past fifteen years has served us well but is not compatible with our new needs. It was originally chosen to accommodate both the school and the church at a low rent. The landlord has given us notice that soon we may not be able to rent it. Moreover, the area around it has dramatically changed from residential to industrial. There is no longer much of a neighbourhood nearby for us to reach with the gospel. As things

stand, the majority of the people of Westminster (the suburb of Denver where we are located) never see our sign or building.

The congregation has already taken steps to make itself more noticeable. Our website has been online since March this year ([www.emmanuelarc.org](http://www.emmanuelarc.org)) and we have begun to participate in community activities where we can

present ourselves and make the church better known.

The next step would be to find a building in a different neighbourhood, where we can make a fresh start. A building committee has been looking at several options during the past year. Rental properties are few. In addition, most are too expensive. Buying a building of our own seemed to be a stretch, but recently a suitable building has been found. Situated in the middle of an established neighbourhood, it is currently in use as a day care and therefore well-known among the residents. It is for sale for a reasonable price. The owners would like to sell the building before mid-2006, but are not yet actively marketing it. This gives us the time to raise funds.

We believe that this building meets the needs of the congregation and may be a great help for us to spread the gospel in our city.



*The proposed new building*



Emmanuel Church at a recent outreach activity.

### What's next?

We are excited about the opportunities the Lord is giving us. We continue to pray for the Lord's guidance, asking Him that we may follow his will and that He may provide us with the faith, energy, and funds that we will need.

The congregation has begun a fund drive for the building, an estimated total of \$275,000 (US), which includes modifications to make the building ready for worship services and other activities. If the building happens to be sold before we have raised the money we will find a similar building that meets our needs for approximately the same price.

With the size of the congregation it is difficult to raise the money we need. Our building fund currently contains \$30,000. In order to get a mortgage for the full amount we need a bigger down payment. Our goal is to raise as much of the total sum as possible in order to limit the amount needed for on-going monthly payments.

We therefore ask you, our brothers and sisters in our federation, to help us. Your contributions will help the Church of Denver not just to survive, but to fulfill its mission to bring the Reformed faith to those who don't know Christ.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

We request your prayers, that we may listen to the will of the Lord and that He will open doors for us to continue our ministry to the people of Westminster.

WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR BUILDING FUND IN DIFFERENT WAYS:

- Personal contributions in the form of a cheque.  
*For tax deduction purposes, your gift will be acknowledged promptly by a receipt confirming the non-profit status of Emmanuel American Reformed Church.*
- Pledges from individuals for low-interest or interest-free loans, to be paid back within 5-10 years
  - Collections from churches
- Creative drives by youth groups to raise funds in their churches and neighbourhoods

*For more information, please visit our website and/or contact pastor Boersma at (303) 439-0403 or [pastor@emmanuelarc.org](mailto:pastor@emmanuelarc.org), or Karen Ashcraft (building committee) at (303) 469-6607.*

Gifts may be made by cheque to

**“Emmanuel ARC Building Fund”**  
and mailed to:

Emmanuel American Reformed Church  
Attn: Mr. Gerrit Brintjes  
P. O. Box 597, Westminster, CO 80038, USA



J. Moesker

Rev. J. Moesker is minister of  
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# Public Prayer

I regularly receive the church news bulletins from some of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa by e-mail. They contain a lot of interesting and valuable information that we can learn from as Reformed sister churches. In the June, 2005 bulletin of one of the two churches in Pretoria, called the *Mededelingsblad van die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerk Pretoria*, the minister, Rev. C. Kleijn, wrote the following about public prayer in the Sunday worship services:

The public prayer is a wonderful means given by God to exercise the communion of saints. It's exactly in the chapter in which Paul typifies the unity of the congregation as body of Christ that he also writes: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor 12:26). What Paul observes here is elsewhere given as a command: "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." This is how we carry each other's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ, as stated in Galatians 6:2. The word "burdens" here includes things which weigh heavily on us, which cause pain or give sorrow or involve difficult problems. Christ requires us to show care and love for each other.

This is also something that needs to come to expression in the public prayer in the worship services. When we experience difficulties or have much reason for thankfulness, it should be expressed in our prayers to the Lord. It should be done personally, in the families, but on occasion also in the public prayer. God has given us brothers and sisters (a congregation) who can go with us to God's throne.

The question is, though, what should we bring before the Lord in public prayer, when should that take place? Of course, we don't need to mention everything in public prayer. Take, for instance, prayer for members who travel overseas. These days people travel a lot, and we can't pray to the Lord for every person who goes overseas. However, it would be fitting to include in the public intercessions someone who had to travel overseas because of a distressing event (or give thanks for their safe return). But the circumstances are completely different in the case of a businessman who regularly travels overseas.

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*God has given us  
brothers and sisters, a  
congregation, who can go  
with us to God's throne.*

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Where do we draw the line? Which people should we mention, and which not? How long does someone have to be away before we mention them? Sometimes we don't even know when someone is going overseas. We don't want to create the impression that some people are favoured and therefore mentioned in public prayer, whereas others are simply ignored.

The consistory of Pretoria discussed these kinds of questions and came up with some guidelines which were presented in the *Mededelingsblad*. Rev. Kleijn explained:

In order to better regulate public prayers, the consistory wants to establish as general rule that members of the congregation approach an elder or the minister themselves to request something to be included in the public prayer. We want to emphasize again the responsibility of the members themselves. This by analogy with James 5:14, "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him. . . ." This passage is, of course, in the first place about visitation and prayer at the sickbed. But note that even in such a situation, the initiative is left to the patient or the family. They are the ones who call on the elder so that he may make intercessions. The decision lies with the members. By analogy it would seem proper that the members themselves take the initiative to request intercession in the public prayer.

This does not mean, however, that it is always and only up to the members themselves to take the initiative. The consistory has also



ruled that the persons and events which are mentioned in the public announcements (e.g. births, deaths, members who depart or arrive with attestation) will also be mentioned in the public prayers. This is the responsibility of whoever is conducting the worship service.

There may also be situations in which the office bearers themselves suggest the possibility of including something in the public prayer. If the member involved agrees to that, it can freely be included. If the member would rather not have it mentioned, then we need to respect that.

If intercession in public prayer is going to be requested, then as a rule it ought to be passed on to the person who is conducting the worship service (either by the member himself or by an elder), with a clear description of the specific

problem or blessing for intercession or thanksgiving.

Rev. Kleijn then also included a number of excellent principles about what should or should not be included public prayer as put forward by Dr. K. Schilder in an article included (pages 69-72) in the book *Om Woord en Kerk* Volume 2 (Oosterbaan, 1949):

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*Prayer doesn't have magical powers just because it was offered up from a pulpit.*

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1. Do not ask for public intercession if you have not prayed or thanked about it yourself.
2. Do not use the pulpit as a public announcement board.

3. Remember that a prayer doesn't have magical powers just because it was offered up from a pulpit.
  4. Keep in mind that the congregation should be able to empathize with the intercession you desire.
  5. In the request for public prayer, always keep in mind that such a prayer should only include things which are of great significance for your life as well as your spiritual life.
- Finally, Rev. Kleijn added the following thoughtful remark:

With reference to that last statement (of Schilder) it would be good to consider what really is of great significance for our lives. Intercessions are often requested for physical troubles or for joyful things (e.g. sickness, surgery, birth, anniversary) – and that's good – but do we also remember troubles like unemployment or the spiritual struggles, which members sometimes suffer?



## Letters to the Editor

### Letter to the Editor

Rev. Cl. Stam writes, "And this government (of the church) is never given into the hands of sinful mortals." Are the elders and deacons not sinful mortals after they are ordained in their respective offices? They are! Only the Bible is written by holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In 1 Timothy 3:15 the church is described as the pillar and ground of truth. That was true of the church of Philadelphia but also includes Laodicea. They were all ruled by sinful mortals.

Further, Rev. Stam likes to talk of privileges in contrast to rights. I would put it this way: male confessing members have the privilege and therefore the right and duty to vote. No doubt that has grown historically; the church has become more and more mature and knowledgeable. By a vote male members (including council) elect the one they deem most suitable for the office. And the council has the obligation to honour these results unless during the time of approbation something comes to light that prohibits them to be ordained.

To me voting is a measure of government that we can put man into office. For the future decisions taken by these men

is important for the welfare of the church and ultimately for the honour of God. Further, Rev. Stam writes that headship is not an inalienable right. Really? By virtue of marriage man becomes the head of the woman as Christ is the head of the church.

And that headship besides love includes authority (power). As I read Ephesians 5 the husband is first instructed to love his wife, for we are sinful mortals and so easily use our authority in a chauvinistic and uncharitable manner. The wives are instructed first to submit to their husbands and then to revere (which includes love, KJV) their husbands. For sinful mortals by nature do not easily subject to authority either.

That heads of families and potential future heads of families have the right to vote is a good practice derived from Scripture.

Yours in Christ,  
Ron Bosman



## Dear Editor,

In Issue 15 of *Clarion* (July 22, 2005), Rev. Cl. Stam presents an argument for the allowance for women's voting in our churches. After reading the article several times, I have several concerns about his logic, his quoting of Scripture, and some of his doctrinal assertions.

Rev. Stam starts with this foundation for his arguments: "I don't think anyone has the *right* to vote, for the church is governed by Christ." By this logic we don't have the right to vote because voting is government and only Christ governs. This contradicts his arguments that voting is not governing; his further statement that "I sense that by now nobody really sees voting as a form of governing. That is, really, an untenable position" seems contradictory to his main premise which implies that voting is indeed an act of government.

There is no argument that Christ is King of the church. What remains to be determined is how He physically perfects this government. Scripture commands that the church is to be ruled by office bearers, as his representatives. But is there any clear and direct command how such an office bearer is to be lawfully chosen and appointed?

Article 3 of our church order implies that the congregation decides who is chosen to office. The consistory does not have to ask the congregation for nominations, but the article does give that allowance. When nominations exceed the number of offices to be filled, "the congregation shall choose as many as are needed." Next it states, "Those elected *shall be* appointed by the council..." I do not see any allowance for the discretion of the council to appoint any other person other than ones elected by the congregation. Finally, no brother may be ordained without the approbation of the congregation.

This all seems to be in accordance with Scripture. In Acts 1 the believers proposed two men for office and cast lots. In Acts 6 the congregation chose seven deacons and the apostles prayed and laid hands on the ones the congregation had chosen. Later Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders in every town. Unless Titus had an intimate knowledge of every person in every place, he could not have appointed the right men without the advice of the congregation. And in Acts 15 the apostles, elders, and the whole church chose some of their own men to send with Paul and Barnabus."

With all this, it is my belief that God desires that the whole congregation physically governs itself by appointing office bearers to represent Christ as the supreme ruler. Once chosen, appointed, and installed, office bearers have the task of ruling by performing the tasks that Christ the King

has given his church in a manner that recognizes Christ's rule. No one will deny that office bearers are yet subject to the Scriptures. Even if the church order does give allowance for the council to be a self-perpetuating governing body, appointing brothers at its own discretion without any election or regard to the voice of the congregation, this has never happened in my recollection in our churches. Therefore, if our churches are not technically a democracy, they are effectively a democracy. And if there is any allowance for the consistory to choose and appoint office bearers without consulting the congregation, is there any biblical support or examples for it? In consideration of all this, I suggest that voting is an act of government, and if women vote they would have an equal voice in which brothers shall "rule" the congregation.

It seems to me that Rev. Stam neglects several texts that are absolutely critical to the discussion of headship. His arguments and references seem to imply that this matter is confined to the home. But Scripture says that "women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the Law says. If they want to *inquire about something*, they should ask their husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church" (1 Cor. 14). This seems to me to be very comprehensive and emphatic. And if an exception was to be made for women without husbands, would the Lord have not stated that instead of being so emphatic?

Finally, I strongly fear Rev. Stam's comment that "Christ governs his church through lawfully chosen and appointed office bearers who rule by his Spirit in accordance with his Word, and this government is never given into the hand of sinful mortals." This implies a concept that has plagued the church over the years, that office bearers, by virtue of their appointment, become something greater or a little more righteous than "sinful mortals." As far as I know there is no biblical foundation for this concept. In contrast, there are many biblical and historical examples where office bearers were found to be diverging from biblical truths and had to be rebuked or corrected, in some instances by the laity. I understand that we, as Reformed believers, are amazed that Christ allows for the physical rule of his people by "sinful mortals." And I am convinced that Rev. Stam also agrees with this and that the statement as appeared in his editorial is but a "slip of the pen."

Your brother in Christ,  
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# Synod 2005 of the RPCNA

## A long overdue visit

From June 27-30, 2005, I visited the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). This is not the first time there has been any contact between our church federation and this body of churches. Already in 1983, the Canadian Reformed Church of Ottawa sent an overture with very favourable information about the RPCNA to the CanRC Synod convened in Cloverdale. Synod Cloverdale advised the church at Ottawa to bring the matter to a subsequent Synod through classes and Regional Synod. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons this did not happen.

Years later, after the RPCNA joined the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), Rev. J. VanRietschoten focused attention on this group of churches in a series of articles in the "Observation Deck" of *Clarion*. He noted that the RPCNA had discontinued



*Dr. Gamble, the new professor.*

its relation with the Christian Reformed Church. He also pointed out some differences between us and the RPCNA. Its congregations are characterized by adherence to the Westminster Confession. In parallel columns together with the Westminster Confession, the RPCNA has a testimony<sup>2</sup> by means of which it has sought to apply Scripture to contemporary issues that were unknown in the seventeenth century. In its worship services the congregations sing only Psalms, without musical accompaniment. Rev. VanRietschoten also mentioned the National Reformed Association, a political organization in which the membership and executive largely come from the RPCNA. This organization is dedicated to exerting a Reformed influence on politics. Rev. VanRietschoten concluded: "All in all there is much kinship between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the life and practice in and around the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. The differences that exist are worthy of further study."

The general mandate given by the CanRC to its Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA) includes the following: "Respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend assemblies, synods, or meetings of other churches in the Americas" (Acts General Synod Neerlandia, p. 87; Acts General Synod Chatham, p. 27). As a result, when an invitation was received from the RPCNA to send a visitor delegate to attend its Synod 2005, a decision was taken to respond to this positively. It really is time to get to know this federation of churches better.



*Opening address by Rev. R.E. Joseph.*

## A warm welcome

Synod 2005 was convened on the campus of Geneva College, an institution belonging to the RPCNA. Delegates were met at the airport in Pittsburgh and brought to the campus. It turned out I was not the only visitor or fraternal delegate. Among those present were Rev. George Syms of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) and Rev. Harry Zekveld of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

The Synod was attended by more than 100 delegates representing congregations of the RPCNA. Nevertheless, the large number of delegates did not seem to negatively affect the quality of the discussions in the process of decision making. The items on the agenda were dealt with efficiently and with sufficient thoroughness.

I was well received at Synod and warmly welcomed personally by many



delegates who expressed their great appreciation at having a visitor from the CanRC in their midst. It was remarkable that various ministers were also somewhat familiar with the history of the CanRC and had various questions about us. I asked Rev. Tom Reid about this, since he is the librarian at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary and also teaches there. He responded that when he teaches church history he also covers the history of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated), showing the connection with the CanRC.

It was not entirely surprising to hear about Rev. Reid's interest in the history of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. My first contact with him dates back to more than twenty-five years ago, when I visited the *Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée*, a Reformed Seminary in Aix-en-Provence, France, during the time that he was a student there. Subsequent to that he visited me while I served as a pastor in The Hague, The Netherlands and we have kept in touch since then. It was good to meet again face to face at Synod.

On Tuesday evening, June 28, I was invited to address Synod on behalf of the CanRC. I highlighted our commitment to uphold the infallible Word of God as summarized in our Three Forms of Unity and our desire to reach out to other Reformed churches that confess and maintain the Reformed faith. In this connection I referred to our unity talks with the URCNA, our founding role in the ICRC, and our more recent presence as observers at the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). I also mentioned that our Theological College has served to educate students from Canada as well as abroad. Other points that I emphasized were our commitment to strengthening the church through consistent catechetical instruction of the youth and our efforts in missions and evangelism. Since the RPCNA is quite active in this regard, the CanRC would welcome insights that we could benefit from. In conclusion I expressed the desire that our contacts will serve to encourage and strengthen us in the faith to the glory of Jesus Christ, the head of the church.



*Dr. W. Spear speaking on the three offices of Christ.*

## Commitment

Throughout the proceedings I was struck by evidence of a strong, conscious commitment to the Reformed faith on the part of the delegates and the congregations they were representing. This was not only evident among the older pastors but also among the younger delegates, who showed themselves to be articulate and knowledgeable. What also struck me was that a number of delegates expressed appreciation for the writings of various Canadian Reformed authors and some were also familiar with *Clarion* and *Reformed Perspective*.

On the floor of Synod the atmosphere was characterized by the awareness that the discussions and decisions had to take place in the light of Scripture. This was also emphasized during the opening address by the Retiring Moderator of the previous Synod, Rev. Ralph E. Joseph. He focused on Psalm 1, highlighting the difference between godly and ungodly decision-making. On each subsequent day of Synod, Dr. Wayne Spear preached a series of devotional messages on "The Offices of Christ," dealing with his offices as prophet, priest, and king.

Throughout Synod there was also a strong emphasis on prayer. This was not only something that took place at the opening and closing of sessions, but throughout the proceedings. As various items were dealt with, there was frequent intercessory prayer. Before the



*RPCNA delegates singing a Psalm.*



*Dr. Gamble answering questions.*

adjournment of the session on Wednesday evening, an hour was devoted to intercessory prayer in small groups, twenty minutes each being devoted to the family, church, and nation, each theme being separated from the next by the singing of selections respectively from Psalms 127, 48, and 45 as well as Scripture readings from Genesis 18:19, Ephesians 5:22-33, and 1 Timothy 2:1-7.

Like CanRC synods, this Synod addressed matters pertaining to the life of all the churches in common. However, it also devoted time to listening to reports from each Presbytery (consisting of what we would call churches of a particular “classis”) on highlights in church life and challenges being faced by its congregations. This was followed by intercessory prayer by an elder for each Presbytery. Reports from the Foreign and Home Mission boards as well as other agenda items were dealt with in a similar fashion.

### **Further impressions**

The Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary,<sup>3</sup> which trains candidates for ministry in the RPCNA as well as elsewhere, has a vacancy in the chair of Systematic Theology. Dr. Richard C. Gamble was nominated by the Seminary to fill this vacancy and was interviewed at Synod on a wide variety of issues for about forty minutes. Following his interview he also presented a very interesting guest lecture on the subject of “Postmodernism and the

‘demise’ of Truth.” The process involved in selecting a new professor for the Seminary highlights the fact that this institution is supported by the churches and also operates under the authority of the RPCNA. A vote took place toward the end of Synod and Dr. Gamble was elected for the position of Professor of Systematic Theology.

One of the items that was different from what the CanRC has on their agenda was a report called “Understanding the Times,” which was a document intended to help office bearers and church members to discern the trends of the times in order to interact with them in a critical way in their ministry. This report was not simply accepted for information, but was discussed as to its merits and also received some constructive criticism.

As mentioned earlier, Geneva College belongs to the RPCNA. At Synod, the Geneva College Board of Corporators brought forward “the need for more Reformed Presbyterian professors and especially administrators on the staff as an expression of the church’s ownership of the college.”

It was also interesting that the Board of Education & Publication reported on a request for 1000 complete Psalters received from a Presbyterian congregation in Singapore. In the meantime, work continues on a revision of the Psalter in order to make it as faithful as possible to the original text of Scripture and to ensure that the wording is accessible and not antiquated.

Even though the RPCNA has its own melodies for singing the Psalms, attention was also paid to singing some of the Psalms with a Genevan setting. How nice it would be if a publication of our Anglo-Genevan psalms could be made available with four-part harmony for the benefit of interested individuals and churches. The hymns that we sing can be found in various hymn books, but our psalms are truly unique and worth sharing with others. A publication of the Anglo-Genevan psalms could also be of benefit for those wishing to sing the melodies of the psalms in harmony or hear them played on an organ or piano. If an official

“book” publication in four-part harmony would be too costly for the end-user, perhaps we as Canadian Reformed Churches should consider publishing such an edition as a PDF file for distribution on the Internet through our CanRC website. If this generates enough interest, a later publication in book form could be contemplated.

### **Meeting with the Interchurch Committee**

During Synod I received the opportunity of having a lunchtime meeting with the Interchurch Committee of the RPCNA. I had prepared a list of questions to gain some insight into the history of the RPCNA and its commitment to Scripture and the Reformed faith. Some of the items discussed were the history of the RPCNA, its confessions and subscription to those confessions, its church life, conditions for membership, supervision of the Lord’s Table, order of worship, exclusive psalmody, the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, ecclesiastical fellowship with other churches, and church order. Rev. George Syms of the RCUS and Rev. Harry Zekveld of the URCNA joined me and also provided extra input during the meeting. It was a good team effort which helped provide material for a report for the CCCA concerning the RPCNA. In due time, through the CCCA, the CanRC will therefore receive a further opportunity to get to know the RPCNA better.

<sup>1</sup> For further information see the website: <http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Documentation concerning the faith and practice of the RPCNA is available in their “Constitution” on the internet at:

[http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/cony\\_constitution.html](http://www.reformedpresbyterian.org/cony_constitution.html) and can be downloaded.

<sup>3</sup> This institution was established in 1810 and therefore hopes to celebrate its 200th anniversary five years from now. It is remarkable that an institution that has been in existence for so long continues to be committed to upholding the Word of God as expressed in Reformed confessions.





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***The Reformed Church in Dutch Brazil (1630-1654), Dr. F.L. Schalkwijk (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1998).***

Additional Information: Paperback, 356 pages, \$29.95, only available from [www.godutch.com](http://www.godutch.com) (1-800-881-0705).

If we're to believe most English-speaking writers on the subject, the age of Protestant missions did not really begin until Pietism and William Carey. Before then, they say, Protestants did not do missions on any meaningful scale – and this was especially true of the Reformed churches. Among other things, this book proves that “they” are quite wrong!

Using careful research and a readable style, Schalkwijk (a long time Reformed missionary and professor in Brazil) gives a vivid picture of religious life in a Dutch colony in the seventeenth century. Along the way, he makes it clear that Reformed believers of this era saw their missionary

mandate very clearly. For instance, Reformed missionaries were working among the South American Indians – at least seven of them in this period, one of whom was a former Augustinian monk. The Reformed church was also active in mission to the Jews, the Africans, as well as the Dutch and Portuguese nationals in Brazil. In short, there was intense, active evangelistic activity in this period, giving attention to every people group in north eastern Brazil.

But this book is also noteworthy for other reasons. For example, Schalkwijk gives a fascinating account of the history of confessions and catechisms in Reformed Brazil. Who knew that a Huguenot confession had been written in Rio de Janeiro in 1558?! The author outlines the degrees to which the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism were used. The matter of a suitable catechism was especially a hot issue in Brazil during this period. Because the Heidelberg Catechism in its original form was not considered helpful for missions, a new, trilingual Catechism was prepared – in the Tupi (a South American Indian

language), Portuguese, and Dutch tongues. The author (David a Dorselaer) meant to prepare a faithful summary of the Heidelberg Catechism, but the product of his work was met with suspicion and controversy. The whole account makes for engaging reading and it holds many lessons for those willing to learn from history.

In its original Portuguese edition this book was a bestseller. It's easy to understand why. It's highly readable and addresses an eventful period of Brazilian history. However, I'm excited about it because, without a doubt, this is one of the most important books on the history of Reformed missions. It deserves to be read and studied by everyone who cares about the glory of God among the nations then and now. Before ending, I would note that the English edition of this book is very difficult to come by; [godutch.com](http://godutch.com) has a limited number of copies available. I recommend that you don't put off buying this gem – it may soon be gone (it's been out of print for several years already).

