

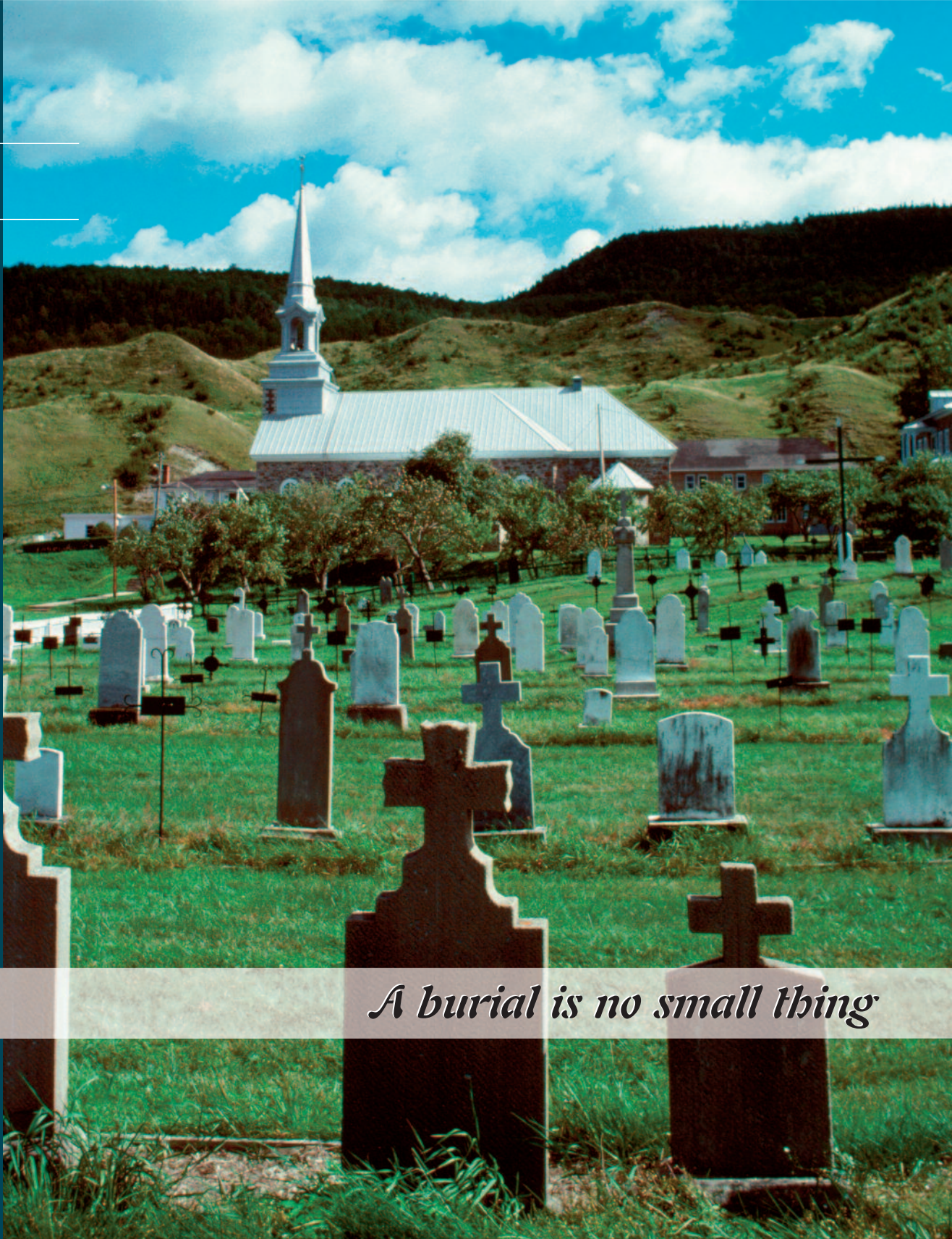
*To Bury  
or to Burn?*

---

*Spiritual Battle*

---

*Stand or Fall?  
Contemporary  
Challenges to  
the Reformed  
Doctrine of  
Justification*



*A burial is no small thing*





Dr. C. Van Dam is professor of Old Testament at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario  
[cvandam@canrc.org](mailto:cvandam@canrc.org)

# To Bury or to Burn?

*The last way an Old Testament believer would want to be treated after dying is to be cremated*

When a loved one dies, is it proper for a Christian to arrange for his or her cremation, rather than burial? If preplanning a funeral, is cremation an option? Is the question of whether to bury or burn simply a matter of preference, determined by factors such as cost? These and related questions arise more and more, also in our circles, as evidenced by the fact that *Clarion* received a request to address this topic.

## The normal way

There is no doubt that Scripture presents the burial of the deceased in a grave as the normal way. Examples abound. Let me only mention the following. The first and only piece of real estate that Abraham owned was the grave for his wife and later for himself (Gen 23; 25:9-10). The other patriarchs were buried there as well (Gen 49:29-33; 50:13). When Moses died on Mount Nebo, it was the Lord Himself who buried him, showing that this is the way to take care of the dead (Deut 34:6). Indeed, in his law, the Lord mandated that even those guilty of a capital offence be given a proper burial (Deut 21:22-23). Moving to the New Testament, when Lazarus died, he was buried (John 11:17), not cremated, even though this was the preferred Roman and Greek way of dealing with a corpse in those days. Finally, it is significant that after the Lord Jesus died, He was buried (Matt 27:59-60). This was according to his own expectation. When a woman anointed Him with expensive perfume in Bethany, then He met objections by saying: "She has done a beautiful thing to me. . . when she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial" (Matt 26:10, 12).

So burial was the normal way. This is not surprising when one remembers that the Lord God had formed the first man from the dust of the ground

(Gen 2:7) and after the fall into sin had decreed that "by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen 3:19). This is the pattern until the return of Christ. Burial is an integral part of this pattern.

## Burning as punishment

Although burying the dead is the norm, yet we do also read in Scripture of the Lord mandating the burning of humans in certain situations. We read in God's law that "if a man marries both a woman and her mother, it is wicked. Both he and they must be burned in the fire, so that no wickedness will be among you" (Lev 20:14). Similarly, "If a priest's daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, she disgraces her father; she must be burned in the fire" (Lev 21:9; cf. Gen 38:24). It is obvious that the burning and reducing to ashes was an extreme punishment for a heinous offence. It meant that the body could not be given a proper burial. It marked the person involved as one accursed by God. Similarly, after the defeat of Israel at Ai, God commanded that "he who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the Lord and has done a disgraceful thing in Israel!" (Josh 7:15). Achan had stolen from the spoils of Jericho which God had claimed for Himself and so he and his family were burned with fire (Josh 7:26). Again, this extreme penalty shows God's curse resting on them.

There is another example of burning but this case is exceptional due to circumstances and not mandated by God. I am referring to the burning of King Saul and his sons to prevent further abuse by the Philistines (1 Sam 31:10-12). This was a specific act in

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

**EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:**

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal  
Coeditors: R. Aasman, E. Kampen, Cl. Stam, C. Van Dam

**ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:**

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2  
E-Mail: [veenendaal@shaw.ca](mailto:veenendaal@shaw.ca)

**ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:**

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.  
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5  
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202  
Subscriptions: [clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca](mailto:clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca)  
Advertisements: [clarionads@premierpublishing.ca](mailto:clarionads@premierpublishing.ca)  
Website: [www.premierpublishing.ca](http://www.premierpublishing.ca)

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


Subscription Rates for 2007	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$47.00*	\$ 77.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$57.00	\$ 72.00
International	\$84.00	\$123.00

\*Including 6% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$14.00 per column inch

Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$20.00 per column inch

We reserve the right to refuse ads.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada,  through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

**Cancellation Agreement**

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date. Agreement No. 40063293; PAP Registration No. 9907; ISSN 0383-0438

**Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.**

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

**Useful Link:** [www.canrc.org](http://www.canrc.org)

an exceptional circumstance. It is also noteworthy that “they took their bones and buried them” (1 Sam 31:13). There was a burial, for the bones were buried.

In certain cases, God also directly punished with burning people to death, thereby depriving them of a normal burial. Thus when Nadab and Abihu offered “unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command, fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord” (Lev 10:1-2). The Lord also punished with fire Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their followers who were grasping for the priesthood: “And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense” (Num 16:35).

In view of the above, it is clear that the last way an Old Testament believer would want to be treated after dying is to be cremated. Not burning but burial was the honourable way. Why was that? In addition to what has been noted above, we need to briefly consider the place of the body in burial.

**The body in burial**

A burial is no small thing. A corpse is not just a nameless piece of matter that is put into the ground, as materialists suggest. Rather, it is the body of a particular person which is interred. Indeed, at a funeral, one has buried a loved one. Although the soul is with Christ (Phil 1:23), the body is still the body of the person who is buried. When our Saviour raised Lazarus from the dead, He did not say to the dead body, “Corpse arise,” but He called out “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43). When the Lord Jesus died, it was not just his body, but He Himself who was buried. It was not just a corpse that came to life, but Christ Himself rose to life (Matt 28:6; 1 Cor 15:4).

The body is a very important part of our identity. When God made the first person, then “the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). First the body was made and then life was given. Body and soul belong together. It is not normal for a soul to be without the body. In heaven, the souls are in a sense naked, awaiting the day when the heavenly glorified body will be given to them (2 Cor 5:1-10). But this glorified body is the resurrection body that will be raised from the grave, just as Christ, the first fruits of those who are alive, was raised from the grave (1 Cor 15:1-34).

**In This Issue**

Editorial – To Bury or to Burn?  
— C. Van Dam .....542

Treasures, New and Old – Spiritual Battle  
— J. Van Spronsen.....545

An Outward Piety (3) — C. Bouwman .....546

Stand or Fall? Contemporary Challenges to the Reformed  
Doctrine of Justification — W.L. Bredenhof .....550

Farewell Evening for Rev. C. Vermeulen.....553

Education Matters – Christ, School, and family? (1)  
— K. Sikkema .....555

Press Releases – Classis Pacific East,  
Classis Manitoba .....558



As those who confess the resurrection of the body, we dispose of the body carefully in burial. Unless the Lord returns soon, the body will turn to dust. But we sow it for the day of the resurrection! To cremate and utterly destroy the body is not consistent with the hope of the resurrection. Death has been overcome. A new body will be raised incorruptible!

## Cremation

The mindset that informs cremation is totally different. Historically cremation is rooted in pagan thinking. The idea is that burning of the body aids in the release of the soul. It is not by chance that as Christianity spread in the Roman Empire, the common practice of cremation ceased to be the prevailing choice. In the eighth century, Charlemagne forbade cremation in the Holy Roman Empire.

---

*To cremate and utterly destroy the body is not consistent with the hope of the resurrection*

---

In subsequent history, cremation was only practised in extraordinary circumstances such as during the time of the deadly plagues that devastated much of Europe in the Middle Ages.

Today as Christian influence on our society is waning and secularist and neo-pagan thinking affects more and more people, cremation is steadily gaining in popularity. Indeed, trends suggest that about fifty

percent of deaths in Canada are now cremated. In urban areas the rate goes up to about sixty to eighty percent. We need to be careful that we are not influenced by worldly thinking when deciding on how a funeral should be conducted.

## On that great day

On the great day of Jesus Christ, all those who have died will appear before the throne of God. Even the sea will give up its dead and so will death (Rev 20:13). Those raised will also include the martyrs who perished in the flames of persecution while tied to a stake. It will also include those children of God who expired in fiery accidents and whose remains were incinerated. The believers will all be raised incorruptible in a glorified body on that great day. Our God is not hindered by the manner of death or of the deposition of the body.

The Bible does not specifically mandate a certain method of burial, nor does Scripture condemn cremation as a sin. Yet it is clear from what the Bible does tell us that the burial of the body, and not cremation, is consistent with the biblical perspective. The body once carefully made by God from the dust of the earth, now redeemed by Christ, and used by Him as a temple of the Holy Spirit is not something to be destroyed. Rather it is to be carefully laid to rest with respect and dignity for the day of the resurrection. As Scripture so beautifully teaches us: "The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:42-44).



Julius VanSpronsen



Rev. J. M. VanSpronsen is a missionary to Brazil for the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey  
[julius.vanspronsen@canrc.org](mailto:julius.vanspronsen@canrc.org)

## Spiritual Battle



MATTHEW 13:52

*“Your words were heard and I have come in response to them. . . .”*

Daniel 10:12

Though his hands could not lift the heavy stones of the temple wall, though his fingers did not clasp a sword to fight off the enemies hounding his brothers and sisters in Judah, Daniel humbled himself before the Lord to pray for his people who were rebuilding their lives in the beautiful land. After several weeks of persistent prayer, an angel appeared and said to Daniel: “Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them . . .” (v 12). There is a connection between the believer’s prayer and the coming of the angel. The power of prayer is so immense that it can even call angels down to the earth to help God’s people.

But interestingly in Daniel 10 we read that there was a delay in time before the angel of the Lord came in answer to Daniel’s prayer. Almost as if it is an apology, the angel explains why he took so long: “But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia” (v 13).

Who was it that could hinder an angel from coming to Daniel’s side immediately? Two words are used here: “prince” and “king.” There is the “king of Persia” who

is Cyrus (as we see in Daniel 10:1) but there is also the “prince of the Persian kingdom” and the “prince of the Greek kingdom” (v 20). Michael, who helped the messenger, is also called a prince (cf. also Dan. 12:1). Who were all these princes? They were angels! Some of these “princes” who were attempting to influence and deceive the kingdoms given into their power were fallen angels. They opposed God and tried to hinder the furtherance of God’s kingdom and the coming of Christ. But the angels of God are busy too. Michael, who is specifically referred to as the chief of princes, helped the messenger visiting Daniel by warding off the fallen angel who was poisoning the mind of king Cyrus. So we see that although Daniel experienced a delay of twenty-one days before he saw an answer, the prayers he offered up were actually answered long before that in an unseen spiritual battle. It was because the angel was busy working according to the prayer of Daniel that it took him three weeks to get to him.

Do you see what this all means? Your heavenly allies are engaged in ongoing battle on your behalf. What a beautiful encouragement, especially when we consider that the fallen angels are able to infiltrate the minds and plans of mankind on earth. While

some fallen angels are trying to ruin the work of the Lord and his church, to keep their subjects in darkness and deception – others are fighting to protect and defend you from this onslaught. This means that you are necessarily engaged in combat yourself – Paul’s words in Ephesians 6:12 makes this so clear: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” And then he sums up our need to put on the full armour of God with the conclusion: “With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” Pray because it is powerful and effective. Pray because God’s help is near. Pray because you have the victory in Jesus Christ who has put all his enemies under his feet. And when you pray, may God open your minds like He opened the eyes of Elisha’s servant (2 Kings 6) so that you may realize and believe the thousands and thousands of angels who are on your side. While you are here on earth fighting spiritual battles . . . while you are trying to resist temptation and serve God faithfully . . . you can know in faith that your words of prayer are heard and God is able to send mighty angels to respond to them.



# An Outward Piety (Part 3 of 3)

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

The voice of the Lord from on the throne asked the penetrating question: "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah's response is immediate. Up goes his hand; "Here am I," he volunteered. "Send me!"

Intriguing. Why did Isaiah not ask a couple of questions first? The obvious question would be: Lord, where to? Another would be: Lord, to do what? Why didn't Isaiah ask? Why didn't he consider whether he had the necessary gifts for the task, or what's to become of his family and his daily work, or whether the assignment would take long or be difficult? Why didn't he negotiate pay or holidays, or other benefits? Why the eager: "send me"?

We've had a couple of weeks to think on the answer. And on the answer we might have given. . . .

## Eagerness

Dear reader, Isaiah has seen God! Though accustomed to a culture of nominalism, this sinner was shown *who God is*; and coming face to face with the identity of the God of the whole earth *turned on his zeal for God* to such an extent that things like pay and mandate and benefits and sacrifices disappeared totally from his perspective. Angels continuously call out God's *otherness*, God's *holiness*, they

instantly obey any command this God gives (and all the while keep their faces covered before this God in humble acknowledgement of their creatureliness). Shall the creature Isaiah, the sinner Isaiah, do less? Shall the man of unclean lips volunteer in half-hearted manner, complete with demands and expectations; would such an impertinent creature not be instantly destroyed by the overwhelming holiness of this exalted God on the throne?

Anyone taken by the identity of holy God cannot help but be eager to serve; Lord, here I am, what can I do?

## Assignment

This God of great holiness made his dwelling place on earth in the temple of Jerusalem. He dwelt among a people of unclean lips – those covenant people who called upon the name of the Lord but not with their hearts. Given God's identity, this people must come to know well this God who dwells among them!

This becomes Isaiah's assignment. The "Holy One of Israel" instructs Isaiah to "go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving'" (v 9). The prophet must relate the

unending songs he's heard the seraphs sing in the presence of God Most High, how "holy, holy, holy" this majestic God is. He must also paint for the people a picture of God's grandeur, must make them see what he has seen – the Lord, so high and exalted upon his throne, and the evidence of majesty that surrounds Him. The mandate is clear: Isaiah in the past had already reminded this people, guilty of nominalism, that their God was the Holy One of Israel (see 2:11, 17, 19, 21), but as they'd rejected his instruction in the past he must underline now in more detail, in more colour, in more depth, *who the God of Israel actually is*. But the task would be frustrating. As God's people by covenant had in the past rejected the prophets' warnings (cf 5:19), so they would continue to reject the identity of God. They'd hear Isaiah's words about the angels' songs but never understand, they'd see the picture Isaiah would portray but never perceive its punch, for their hearts were hard and would become more calloused still. They'd keep on bringing sacrifices to the temple (1:11ff), but would never be taken by the holiness of the God to whom they sacrifice; despite the prophet's labours they would not humble



themselves on account of their sins, they'd keep on serving God in a manner pleasing to the self – and never join the angels in their endless song of admiration.

Truth be said, we'd find such an assignment too difficult, too frustrating, and a waste of time and energy; we'd be greatly tempted to request release from such a commission. But Isaiah utters no complaint, seeks no release. He's seen God's majesty, he's understood a little bit of how much God He is; Isaiah understands that there is no place to back away from service to Him.

---

*Isaiah understands that there is no place to back away from service to Him*

---

His only question is this: "For how long, O Lord?" And no, that's not a reference to how long his assignment shall last (as if he's looking for an out); his question is a reference to how long Israel's callousness will last. God's answer is this: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken" (v 11f). Israel's hardness of heart will last till they bring upon themselves the curse holy God had promised in his covenant with Israel – exile (see Lev 26; Deut 28). Yet even then God would preserve a remnant, a seed – and this seed would be impressed by the holiness of God; this seed would be holy.

## Reaction

In response to the commission Isaiah received, he made a point of passing on his vision to the people of the land. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit he also wrote it down in his prophecies for the benefit of the people of Israel. These observations generate a number of questions, largely rhetorical.

1. Back in the books of Moses, the Lord had specified who were to function as leaders in Israel. There were priests and Levites who were to teach the people the law and in so doing proclaim the gospel (cf Lev 10:10f; Deut 30:10). There were elders who were to ensure that the people lived according to their identity as children of God (Exod 18:21ff; Deut 21:2f; 18ff; 22:13ff; 25:7ff). The Lord even gave room for a king amongst his people (Deut 17:18ff). In the days of Isaiah there were men in Israel commissioned by the Lord God to these specific offices. In their culture of nominalism, how ought they to respond to Isaiah's vision? Given what they learned from Isaiah about the Godness of the Lord God, how ought they concretely to fulfill their mandate as office bearers in Israel?
2. The people of Israel heard the preaching of the prophet Isaiah concerning the identity of God and its implicit criticism on their lifestyle. How, concretely, ought their lives to have changed as a result of having God's greatness impressed upon them?

3. Isaiah laboured in Israel for many years. As God foretold in the vision Isaiah saw, the prophet witnessed much hardness of heart among the people (6:9f). Was there space for Isaiah to get discouraged at the shallowness of the people's service to God? Was the people's long-term reaction justifiable incentive for Isaiah to lose his drive in the Lord's service? For that matter, would it be permissible for Isaiah to harp less on God's identity and simply be satisfied with the people's mediocre service to this God?

I shall not pause to answer these questions. Every reader who has gained some sense of the Lord's Godness knows the answers.

## The holy seed

Seven centuries after Isaiah saw the vision of God as recorded in chapter six, a seed arose in Israel that was duly taken by the holiness of God. The context of Jesus' labour was again one of nominalism, with much outward show of religiosity but little power and drive in the Lord's service.

---

*Your thoughts of God are too small*

---

Our Lord Jesus Christ could have been content with the status quo, or could perhaps have spurred the people to pull up their socks an inch or two, and left it at that. It would certainly have been the easier way for Him and

unquestionably the more "politically correct."

As it is, this office bearer did not let the sloppiness of the people detract Him from God's service. Day after day He obeyed the commands of his holy sender, spoke the words God gave Him to speak, performed the signs God gave Him to perform. He knew his God, knew Him perfectly in all his holiness, knew – for He dwelt in glory with the Father from all eternity – that the angels ceaselessly sang their "Holy, holy, holy" in the presence of this God – and so on earth the Son of God took God's holiness seriously too. There was with Him no sloppiness in the Lord's service, nothing of mediocrity, no relaxing of God's demands on the people, no emptying of God's promises to make them more palatable for sinners. Even when the people rejected his message, He did not turn to the right or to the left and did not get discouraged either; He carried on, resolutely, to fulfill the mandate He'd received from that God of infinite majesty – that God in heaven who bound Himself to sinners on earth. Christ Jesus laid down his life for the sheep entrusted to his care, went to the cross to ransom sinners.

As a result this God of infinite holiness in whose presence angels hide their faces took Jesus from this earth into his glorious presence! This same Jesus now enthroned in heaven beside the God of Isaiah 6 once prayed: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:24). In the certainty that the God of

glory would hear Jesus' petition, the Apostle Peter encourages elders to stay on task in shepherding God's flock: "When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will not fade away" (1 Pet 5:4).

*He said, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."*

*Then I said, "For how long, O Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."*

Isaiah 6:1-8

## The office bearer today

Our culture today has very small thoughts of God, to the point that many Canadians would maintain that God simply doesn't exist. To be more specific: there are many Christians on our continent whose thoughts of God are much, much smaller than that portrayed in Isaiah 6. Luther once said to Erasmus: your thoughts of God are too small. Jacob Arminius, faithful disciple of Erasmus as he was, equally had thoughts of God that were too small – and the Lord God in his providence granted the churches a confession that set straight Arminius' diminutive understanding of God. Today's North American evangelicalism largely embraces the same perception of God as Arminius portrayed; God is the perfect gentleman who would never force Himself upon you, He's your buddy, is a grandfather in the sky who wishes you well but lets you find your own way. It is no wonder that North American Christianity strikes the rest of the world as powerless.

In this culture the holy God of heaven calls particular men to be office bearers over the people of God. We, modern people, are permitted to listen in on Isaiah's instruction to the people of Israel. More, we're allowed to see with John what He saw 800 years after Isaiah's vision, how the same song Isaiah heard continues to resound in the presence of holy God. John saw living creatures in heaven, each with six wings, and "day and night they never stop saying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty'" (Rev 4:8f) – the same song still resounds in heaven after



the triumph of Jesus Christ! There's this difference: John sees "twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and worship Him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say, 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power'" (4:10f).

---

### *How ought the office bearers on earth to respond?*

---

Say what one will about the identity of the twenty-four elders, it's clear that they are *office bearers*! They're so taken by the greatness of God that they respond in eager worship. Brothers, if the office bearers of heaven respond that way, how ought the office bearers on earth to respond?

The point is this: we shall not overcome nominalism in the churches today unless the congregations see their office bearers possessed by the glorious identity of their God. If they see us content with fulfilling our office to outward satisfaction, they will not catch from us who God really is – no matter how we describe God – and they will not learn from us to volunteer for eager service to the Lord. If they see us being content (as the elders of Israel were) with outward obedience to God but little passion for his service, if they see us as satisfied that the congregation comes to church, attends Bible study, and meets the church budget, but is not on fire for the Lord, we can expect no spiritual

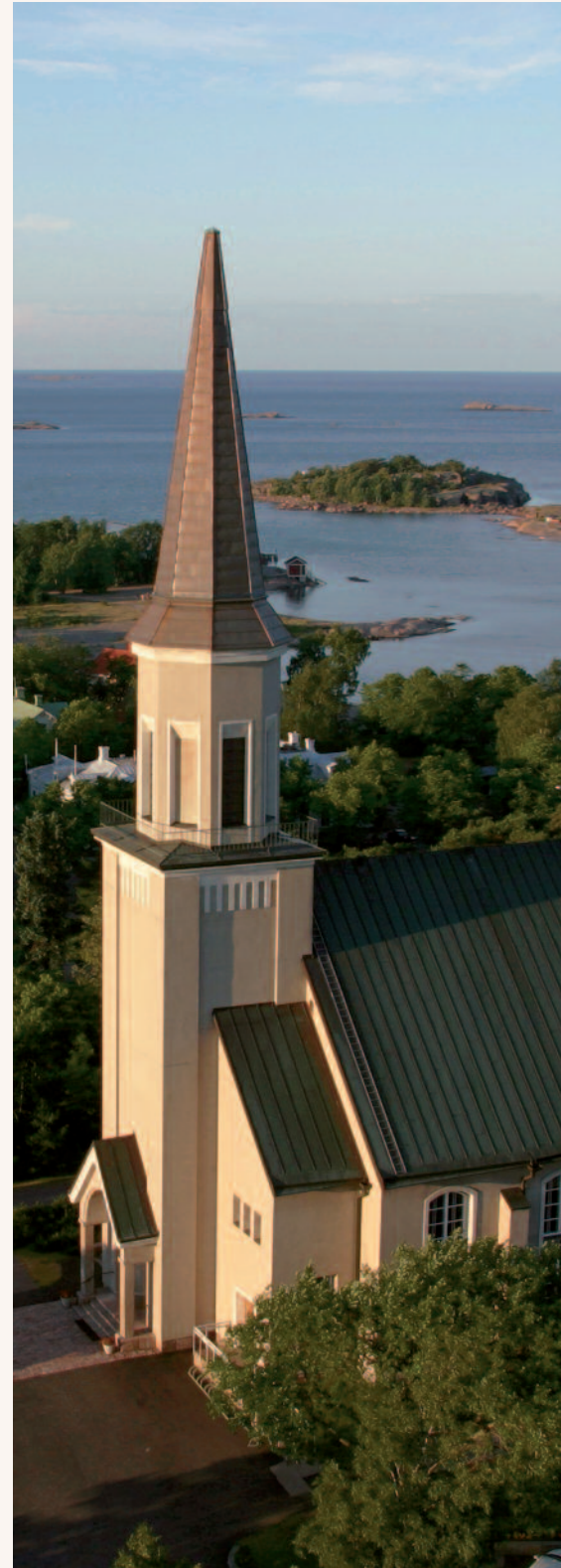
growth in the churches. The Holy Spirit has put Isaiah 1-6 in our Bibles so that we understand God's response to the nominalism of Isaiah's day: *preach the glorious identity of a Most Holy God!* Office bearers' walk and talk in daily life, in home visits, and in the preaching must be a living demonstration to the congregation of what drives the angels around the throne of God in heaven.

### **In conclusion**

I'd like to leave you with a couple of questions to think about. Consider the following:

- Why could men as Augustine and Calvin speak in such glowing and reverent terms of God? Why is there nothing in their writings of God being their "friend" or buddy? Why did they give up comforts and reputation in the service of this God?
- Why could Luther get so excited about the doctrine of justification and be willing to die for it – and DeBres too?
- Why could the fathers write prayers as they did in the *Book of Praise* (see pages 641ff)? Why is there nothing in those prayers that sounds like, "We just wanna thank you, Lord. . .", but instead a sense of personal wretchedness and complete devotion to the Lord: "O eternal and merciful God and Father, we humble ourselves before Your great majesty."

I put to you that each of these brothers tasted something of God's holiness, his Godness, his incomparable otherness. That's the treasure of the church.



Rev. W.L. Bredenhof is  
co-pastor of the Canadian  
Reformed Church at Langley,  
British Columbia  
[wbredenh@telus.net](mailto:wbredenh@telus.net)

# Stand or Fall? Contemporary Challenges to the Reformed Doctrine of Justification

Though you may not have heard of it, the CBA is a strong force in your life, particularly if you are an avid reader of popular Christian books. The Christian Booksellers Association is the trade organization of Christian retailers in North America. Each year, the CBA holds a convention in the United States which brings publishers and retailers together. At this convention are found the men and women who are the major league gatekeepers who essentially get to decide what appears on the shelves of mainstream Christian bookstores, in their flyers and on-line advertising.

Some years ago, the White Horse Inn radio program did a survey at one of those conventions where a number of questions pertaining to the doctrine of justification were put forward. The results were extremely disappointing. For instance, seventy-one percent agreed with the Roman Catholic notion that justification is the process by which we become holy. However, only fifty-four percent agreed with the teaching of Romans 4:5, namely

that "salvation is for those who do absolutely nothing to help save themselves, but simply trust in a God who justifies sinful people." If we go by these survey results, we shouldn't be surprised that the doctrine of justification is so often ignored, forgotten, or misunderstood by Christians in our day.

---

*We shouldn't be surprised  
that the doctrine of  
justification is so often  
ignored, forgotten, or  
misunderstood by  
Christians in our day*

---

But what about us? Are we any better? Do we have a firm grasp on this biblical doctrine? Martin Luther rightly called this doctrine the one by which the church stands or falls. Therefore, in what follows, I will briefly sketch this doctrine and then we'll look at two contemporary challenges.

## **Justification described**

At its heart, justification is about how a person gets right with God. Naturally, the implication is that we start off with a person who is in the wrong before God. This person is in a courtroom facing God the judge. Justification basically means that the judge of heaven and earth declares that we are right with Him on the basis of what Christ has done for us. Justification is not a process (as the Roman Catholics teach), but a one-time declaration. Once we have been declared justified, we are always justified.

So, it is an acquittal, but it is also more than that. Not only does the judge pronounce us "not guilty," He also goes one step further and says that we are positively righteous. Everything that Christ has done is given to us and so God looks at us as He looks at his own Son – He sees men and women who have kept his perfect and holy law.

This justification is necessary because we're sinners. Since we are sinners, the basis of this justification must be entirely and



solely in Christ. The only instrument or means by which we receive this justification is faith, trusting and resting in Christ. This is why we say that we believe that justification is by grace alone, through faith alone, and on the basis of Christ's suffering and obedience alone.

---

*This is a matter of Christians becoming too much like the culture around them*

---

Finally, though it is not properly part of justification, we also have the wonderful truth that after declaring us righteous, the judge adopts us for his children and heirs. In other words, this is the sort of courtroom you will never find on earth with earthly judges and judicial systems. God's courtroom and the justification that takes place there is entirely unique. For all who believe in Christ, this is all part of the biblical good news.

### **Narcissism**

There are a number of challenges to this doctrine that could be mentioned. Many of them are patently theological in nature and are being discussed in other Reformed circles. However, I would like to focus on cultural challenges that are directly facing us. We began by noting that this doctrine is not well understood or well accepted in broader Christian circles. The reasons for this may be theological in nature, but my reading of the situation is that it may have more to do with

worldliness. In other words, this is a matter of Christians becoming too much like the culture around them. By calling attention to some of these challenges, my hope is that we can guard ourselves against losing the precious good news of the doctrine of justification.

The first contemporary cultural challenge is narcissism. Perhaps you've heard or read about the Greek myth of Narcissus. He was a Greek hero famous for being a very attractive man. There are several versions of the myth, but in one of them he had an identical twin sister with whom he would hunt. They dressed similarly and did everything together. Narcissus fell into an incestuous relationship with his sister and then, for some reason, she died. Afterwards, Narcissus saw her reflection in a pool of water and became obsessed with it. He only realized that it was his own image after he tried to kiss it. Narcissism is named after this Greek hero and is simply defined as an obsession with self.

In many ways, our culture promotes and exalts narcissism. *Time Magazine's* person of the year for 2007 was "You." Through the phenomenon of YouTube and other things on and off the Internet, the individual self was crowned person of the year. The July/August 2007 issue of *the Atlantic* reported on a recent university study which showed that narcissism is on the rise and is especially acute among those born after 1982. The researchers speculated that technology, especially that which is based on the Internet, has a lot to do with this trend. They also warned that narcissists "have trouble forming meaningful relationships, tend to be

materialistic, and are prone to higher levels of infidelity, substance abuse, and violence."

But how does our contemporary turn to narcissism challenge the doctrine of justification? Justification involves what the Reformers called an "alien righteousness." In other words, the righteousness we have before God belongs to another; it belongs to Christ. We have to look outside of ourselves to be right with God. Narcissism, on the other hand, directs us to keep looking inside ourselves for everything. When we think about it carefully, that kind of naked narcissism is just another variation on the original lie told to Adam and Eve: "You shall be as God."

But it can be more subtle than that. For narcissism also teaches us that there is value in others – we have to look for the value in others so that we can exploit and manipulate them for our own benefit. With all their selfishness, narcissists can still be (and often are) very sociable people. Other people are the means that they use to serve themselves and their interests.

---

*Narcissism directs us to keep looking inside ourselves for everything*

---

For believers, this can become highly problematic. We say that it is Christ's righteousness which brings us into a right relationship with God. However, we can embrace that in a narcissistic and entirely self-serving way. We need to ask ourselves some hard questions: do we serve God only

because of what we can get out of it? Do we embrace Christ merely because we think we can manipulate and exploit Him like we do other people? Or do we serve God because we earnestly desire his praise and glory to be magnified? Martin Luther once reflected on these questions. He pondered whether he would still continue to serve and glorify God if he knew that God was going to condemn him anyway. That's something to think about. Narcissism tells us to serve God merely because of what we can get from Him – to manipulate and exploit God out of pure self-interest. The Bible tells us to serve God because it's the thing we were created for – we were created for his glory.

### **Busyness**

Today, everybody is busy. In fact, if you are not busy (so the thinking goes), you must be lazy or perhaps retired – but even retired people should be busy. Our culture, inside and outside the church, demands that we have a plate full of things to do and not enough time in which to do them. For many today, busyness is a badge of honour, a measure of one's status. Every week, our local newspaper features a story about a prominent business person. In a side bar, you can read about how many e-mails this person gets each day and other such indicators of their busyness. In our culture, and this includes the church, people are defined by what they do and what they accomplish.

This challenges the gospel of justification because that gospel says that there is nothing *you can*

*do* to earn favour with God. You will never make God owe you anything. As a believer, there is nothing you can do to make God love you more or less. We have to be careful because when we define ourselves in terms of what we do and when we find our identity in our accomplishments, we're not far from denying the gospel. One author has called it "justification by busyness." Though we would never say it, the mindset works something like this: if I can work just a bit harder, then I will be successful – God will regard me positively and love me more. That only gets complicated by a desire to impress others with our busyness. In that case, God is being idolatrously re-worked into the image of the people around us.

---

### *Busyness is a badge of honour; a measure of one's status*

---

Meanwhile, the biblical gospel of justification tells us that there is nothing we can do to earn favour with the true and living God revealed in the Bible. It's only when we are weak and powerless that we are strong. We're only saved because we have a Saviour who has come down to us. Now more than likely we don't connect our obsession with busyness to a denial of the gospel, but let's be aware that this could be our ultimate destination. We have to find our identity and the basis of our relationship with God, not in what we *do*, in who Christ is and

## **Church News**

Accepted the call to Taber, Alberta:

**Rev. M. Jagt**

of Ottawa, Ontario.

Declined the call to the church of Winnipeg (Grace), Manitoba:

**Rev. D. VandeBurgt**

of Glanbrook, Ontario.

Declined the call to Owen Sound, Ontario:

**Rev. J. de Gelder**

of Flamborough, Ontario.

what *He has* done for us apart from us.

The biblical gospel of justification is counter-cultural in every day and age. It goes against the grain of our fallen human nature. That nature always gravitates towards the exaltation of self. Therefore, it takes not only the divine gift of faith to embrace this doctrine, but also its close cousin, humility. We need to pray that God would give us these gifts and continue giving them to us and our children so that, embracing our justification in Christ alone, the church would continue to stand.

---

The White Horse Inn survey statistics can be found in *Modern Reformation* May/June 2006, p.28. The expression "justification by busyness" and some of the other thoughts on this subject come from Charles A. Anderson, "The Business of Busyness: Or, What Should We Make of Martha?" in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, edited by Kevin J. VanHoozer, Charles A. Anderson and Michael J. Slesman (Baker Academic, 2007).





# Farewell Evening for Rev. C. Vermeulen

On Friday, June 22, the congregation of the Canadian Reformed Church at Elora gathered together for an evening of fellowship to wish Rev. Carl Vermeulen and his family a fond farewell. After serving in Elora for over five years, Rev. Vermeulen had accepted a call to Darling Downs, Australia, and would be departing in short order for the land down under. The location for this occasion was the gym of the Maranatha Christian School in Fergus, where the event was capably led by master of ceremonies Mark Veenman. After opening in the usual Christian manner with singing, Bible reading, and prayer, we proceeded directly to the potluck dinner that had been organized. After dessert and coffee, the MC spoke additional words of greeting and then various groups in the congregation presented gifts, skits, or both for the group's enjoyment.

The Young People's Society gave the Vermeulen family a typical Canadian gift – a Canadian National team hockey jersey, signed by all the current young peoples. Following that they asked for audience volunteers to answer questions which tested our knowledge of the Vermeulen family. In addition, they asked three members to draw quick sketches of the minister, which were then judged by him as to

which he thought had the best likeness.

The Ladies Societies had created pictures representing the last name of each family in the congregation. These were put up on the overhead for the minister and his family to guess at. Some of them had to be quite creative, but in the end (with a little help from the audience), the Vermeulen family was able to correctly answer them all. Following this, a couple in the congregation with family connections to Australia gave a very humorous re-introduction to Australian lingo for the Vermeulens. This had the congregation confused at times, but had the Vermeulens in stitches.

Rev. Geurts spoke on behalf of Classis Northern Ontario and the neighbouring church of Fergus North. He also remembered the

time several years earlier when he had to fill the Elora pulpit in short notice due to a delay in Rev. Vermeulen's installation when his work permit did not come through.

Henk Nobel then spoke some words of thanks and appreciation from the consistory and presented a gift of two paintings of local winter landscapes to the Vermeulens.

Rev. Vermeulen thanked the congregation for the love and support shown to him and his family over the time he served us a pastor. He spoke of how much he had learned about farming and about how amazed he was that the weather could come up in just about every conversation. He left his cricket set to be used at the church picnic, noting that he could easily get another in Australia. He also spoke of looking forward to



his task in Australia, but also to meeting the members again – either here on earth or in eternity. The evening was then closed with singing and prayer.

On Sunday, June 24, the congregation gathered in the afternoon service for Rev. Vermeulen's final sermon as pastor in her midst. He chose as text for this sermon Hebrews 13:20, 21. "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you what is

well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." The theme of the sermon was "The Spirit teaches us to pray to God that for Christ's sake He will continue to equip us to do his will." While it was a day of parting, he prayed as the writer did in the book of Hebrews, that God would continue to do his work even though his specific task there was completed. It is instructive to us that God is addressed as a God of peace – He has a relationship of peace with us. Because of what God did to their Shepherd, the sheep know that God will certainly

hear them. Even though the under-shepherd is departing, the Great Shepherd will always be there and will certainly hear our petitions, as He has an eternal covenant with us. We were asked where we stood – did we live reverently before the Lord? Were we filled with brotherly love? The bar has not been raised too high, as the author of Hebrews prays that God Himself equip us with what we need to know and do his will. These words are full of comfort in that we are taught to seek and expect these things from the Lord, to look to Him to equip us to live as He wants us to. Our Saviour's work is very important here, as it is Christ who works in us to do what is pleasing to the Lord. We must be covered in Christ's righteousness and holiness. We cannot make ourselves better people, therefore we must study his word and seek and expect these things from Him. "Through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." The prayer ends with a doxology of praise to Christ. The request is that God continue to equip his people to do his will and that our works be acceptable to God and bring glory and praise to Christ. We cannot ignore the covenant relationship, so that Christ might continue to receive the glory. There are comforting words in this doxology, in that God will certainly do these things for us so that his Son receives the glory. The service then concluded with the youngest member of the congregation receiving the sign and seal of the covenant through the sacrament of baptism.

Thus ended five years of faithful service by Rev. Vermeulen in the congregation of Elora. We heartily thank him for his service and pray for the Lord's blessing for him and his family as he takes up his task in Darling Downs.





Keith Sikkema

Mr. Keith Sikkema is principal of Dufferin Area Christian School in Orangeville, Ontario  
[ksikkema@istop.com](mailto:ksikkema@istop.com)

# Christ, School, and family? (Part 1 of 2)



Our sister churches across the Atlantic, the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) (GKNv), experience many changes. Before the 1980s, many social and political organizations established by GKNv members typically incorporated a protective shield by restricting membership to GKNv members, but then started to loosen this up. For example, *Gereformeerd Gezinsblad*, now *Nederlands Dagblad*, began to accept articles by people from outside the GKNv. Some saw this change as a loss; others hailed it as gain. The churches have since also developed a closer relationship with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (CGK; in our context, the Free Reformed Churches), not unlike ours with United Reformed Churches.

Despite efforts for more openness, the Reformed GKNv schools remained unaffected by this trend for a long time. These schools and their identity were so closely associated with GKNv church membership, that they qualified for government recognition and funding if numerical and quality criteria were met. Because of the close ecclesiastical relationship between GKNv and CGK, this was not jeopardized when, in recent years, members of the latter were welcomed as members of the school societies. At the International Conference for Reformed Education in 2004, however, it became clear that there was an ongoing

discussion about church membership and the character of Reformed education. Could Reformed schools maintain their unique identity if they opened up to students from other churches? In two articles, I address recent developments around this question, and reflect on how the answers might affect us in North America.

## Other developments

Not all Reformed parents in The Netherlands send their children to a Reformed school, as has been documented in several publications. For some, quality and distance issues outweigh the question of Reformed identity. Some people no longer see a strong need for a link between the true church (as in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession) and Reformed education. Some even express an aversion to distinctly Reformed education, placing Reformed schools in direct competition for students with differently defined Christian schools.

Demographically, certain areas of the country also experience a general population decline. As a

result of all this, some schools struggle with dwindling student numbers or even have had to close their doors.

At the same time, there are both external and internal political and social pressures on the schools to be more inclusive. Politically, schools are nudged to take a fair share of students from visible immigrant minorities. Some schools respond positively to requests for admission from outside the Reformed churches, without necessarily wanting to broaden their formal basis of Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity, but others resist such notions. Some school societies actively recruit students from a broader range of backgrounds. Even the most open schools in this regard, however, such as the *Veerkracht* school in Amsterdam, with students from some thirty different denominations, insist that members, board-members, and teachers must be members of the GKNv or of the CGK.

In yet another development, groups of centrally administered schools have been formed during the last several years, largely to manage increasing government imposed administrative requirements. As of January 1, 2007, five of these groups formed the now largest such umbrella entity in the country, *Gereformeerd Primair Onderwijs West Nederland* (GPO-WN; Reformed Elementary Education Western Netherlands),



with twenty-three member schools. According to its website, support for this amalgamation includes ensuring survival, strengthening the quality and identity of Reformed education, and associated human resource, administrative, and buying power advantages.

## Conference

To walk in the *klompen* of our brothers and sisters across the ocean, consider what sums up the unique identity of your local Reformed school. What makes it Reformed? Is it Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity and the school's Constitution and Statement of Purpose? Is it the membership, parental input, or admission and hiring policies? Is it the school's staff, who act as the school's agents in close contact with the students? What role do the school's code of conduct, atmosphere, and quality of education play?

GPO-WN is, quite laudably, looking for ways to *enhance* the Reformed identity of its twenty-three member schools, while staying within nationally adopted parameters. To flesh this out, it has adopted the following four identity goals after extensive discussions with its member schools: It aims to strengthen the substance of these identity policies, to develop and expand structural and substantial spiritual support for its teachers, to strengthen the policy regarding the schools' image in the community, and to sustain a foundational discussion about Reformed identity.

Interestingly, GPO-WN distinguishes between identity and culture. It defines its *identity* as centred in Christ, and accepting the Word of God as the only authoritative source for one's faith. Its identity spells out that Reformed people are redeemed by God through Christ, which has implications for the norms and values it upholds. In its slogan, GPO-WN sums up its identity as

"Christ alone and Christ all the way," posing that its direction has been established in the Reformed past and that it is moving to a future in Christ. On the other hand, GPO-WN defines *culture* in terms of the atmosphere in which people associate and deal with each other and how they actually apply the norms and values. Its identity is its theory and its culture is its practice.

---

## *Teachers will have to be able to radiate the school's identity as committed Christians*

---

In January of 2007, GPO-WN organized a conference to discuss the policy goals with all stakeholders. A report in *Nederlands Dagblad* suggested that GPO-WN schools will no longer admit students only on the basis of church membership, but also on the basis of a "conscious choice for Reformed education and a bond with Jesus Christ." The identity of the schools would now be determined by the way teachers give shape to Reformed education. It would be a shift from an identity defined by the school's foundational documents and restricted membership to an identity as practiced in the school's culture. In line with a traditional identity position, teachers from Axel assumed to be teaching covenant children only, but Rev. Jacob Glas of Maastricht recommended that girls with a *hijab* should be welcome as well, "as God's love is for everyone." A *Veerkracht* teacher found it difficult to establish when parents actually choose consciously for Reformed education: "Should they go to church twice and read from the Bible everyday? And what if they don't know the Three Forms of Unity?" Rev. Jos Douma of Haarlem held that a Reformed school should

present its identity by giving "a taste of who Jesus is," and added that not every school may be ready for this. "I would plead for a pastor who speaks with teachers at the level of their souls, a spiritual leader; one who asks whether they still find their identity in Jesus Christ," he said. Elsbeth Vonkeman of the national association of Reformed school societies encouraged people to stand for their choice, stressing that developments give Reformed education a new role, and that being Reformed is less restrictive than many people think.

## Commotion

The report led to some national and even international commotion. People in The Netherlands, Canada, and Australia expressed fear that fundamental characteristics of Reformed education are at risk. Some quickly labelled the event as a goodbye to the old triangle of home, church, and school, as a transformation of the school into an institution for evangelism, or as trashing the birth certificate of Reformed education.

One somewhat inflammatory response was offered by Jaap Peters on the web site of *Een in Waarheid* ([www.eeninwaarheid.nl](http://www.eeninwaarheid.nl)), in an article entitled "From Triangle to Paperclip." He observed that shifting the onus for the schools' identity from the parents and the children to the teachers warps and breaks the triangle of church, school, and family. He perceived that undue tension had been created between the love of Christ and the necessarily associated norms and standards for our response to his love in church and school. The "bond with Christ" slogan ignores the church as the way to come to Christ to whom it belongs, as it turns to another triangle of Christ, school, and family. The slogan and the newly minted triangle smack of



ecumenism, sound evangelical, are too simplistic and subjective, and remove the solid basis of Scripture and confession. The new policy would negate the communion of saints, the call to join the true church of Christ, and the fullness of what we confess. Rather than finding strength in Christ and his Word, it would make admission decisions hinge on the boards' choice and on the strength of the staff that must execute the policy. Peters concluded that the Confession in the GPO-WN constitution is no longer functional for its admission policy and expected that the new policy would cause the schools' Reformed identity to decline, together with the conviction to send one's children there. The schools may very well lose their unique spiritual identity and their associated government funding. He also suggested bending the triangle into a paperclip, so it could be used to clean out one's ears to better listen to what is truly Reformed.

## Defence

GPO-WN central administrator René Tromp and board chairman Marnix van Bruggen defended their cause in an interview (see [www.gpown.nl](http://www.gpown.nl)). They explained that the identity of the school societies and the schools continues to be anchored in the unchangeable basis of Scripture and the confessions. The relationship with the parents will not only be maintained, as they must still actively agree with this basis, but will actually be enriched by more diversity, as schools share the rich pearl of Reformed education with others. Membership in and employment by the school society continues to be restricted by church membership and children still get a Christian upbringing at the three levels of home, church, and school. As the church restriction is removed, the triangle only *sounds*

different now: *Christ*, school, and family, instead of *church*, school, and family. GPO-WN emphatically does not want a new triangle and does not narrow the substance of the school's identity to a bond with Jesus Christ.

To minimize local variances in the application of the policy, GPO-WN adopted a well-defined procedure for admission interviews. In these interviews, a central role is given to one's values and norms for a Christian school and the family and the parents' acceptance of Scripture and willingness to echo the confessions. "We are schools for children of (1) *parents, who opt* (on the basis of a Christian conviction), (2) *consciously for*, (3) *Reformed education*. This conscious choice is a very important item. Only if parents meet these criteria will they be welcome." Administrator Tromp identified the key question as, "How do they see Jesus Christ and how do we recognize each other in Him?"

GPO-WN finds that people are unnecessarily worried that the Reformed heritage is abandoned. Evangelical parents who reject infant baptism and try to convince teachers of their position would not be welcome. The school would also not seek to fulfill an evangelistic purpose, although it may now play such a role as a good side-effect, as "it shares the pearl of the gospel of God's love." After all, one's identity affects his associating with others, what one teaches, how one understands people, children, growing up, learning, and teaching, and how parents experience that as partners of the teachers.

The spokesmen would rather present the changes as broadening the view of the schools. While schools used to define and fence their identity in static words or documents and with a restrictive admission and membership policy, identity should now be regarded as a dynamic movement. The identity emphasis shifts from static

documents to what actually happens within the fences and what message that gives to the neighbourhood. The staff's attitude and daily execution of the policy become important: "They carry the school's identity in radiating God's love to the children." This would demand more of the teachers, which helps understand the call for spiritual support. Teachers who belong to either of the accepted church federations will have to be able to radiate the school's identity as committed Christians. This will be an important element in staffing policy and performance reviews.

The gentlemen also pointed to challenges outside the schools that led to the new emphasis in identity. They referred to the political pressure to be socially engaged and to enroll visible minorities, to the diminished understanding of the GKNv as the true church, and to the shift of emphasis from the institution to its message that Christ is the gate to heaven, not the church. They maintain that God's Word is the only authoritative source of faith and Christ is the only way. Many Reformed parents also don't know anymore what they miss when they do not send their children to a Reformed school and a more clearly defined identity will help them understand that again. They find it interesting that, in a changing environment, people have sought security in church and school and worry that this is now getting lost.

In a subsequent article, I will reflect on the significance of this debate for Canada.

---

*The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman*  
[obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us](mailto:obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us)

### **Press Release of Classis Pacific East, September 13, 2007, Chilliwack**

The chairman of the consistory of the convening church requested the assembled delegates to sing Psalm 99:1, 2, 6. He read Philippians 2:1-11 and led the meeting in prayer. Words of welcome were extended to all delegates, with a special word of welcome to Rev. R. IJbema, minister-designate of the church of Chilliwack, present for a colloquium at this classis.

Delegates from the church of Aldergrove checked the credentials and reported that they were in good order. There were no proposals or instructions from the churches. The officers suggested by previous classis took their seats. After perusing the agenda and the requests from the churches, an agenda for the meeting was adopted.

At the request of the church of Chilliwack, the colloquium for Rev. IJbema was scheduled for 7 pm.

The following reports were presented:

The church of Yarrow has inspected the archives of Classis Pacific East and found them to be in good order.

The church of Vernon has audited the books of the treasurer for 2006 and found them to be in good order.

A delegate from the Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry reported that the committee had no meeting, and hence has nothing to report.

The Committee for Needy Churches submitted no report, since there is no church in the classis requiring support. This was noted with gratitude.

The chairman asked the questions required by Art. 44 CO. It was noted with gratitude that in the churches of Classis the ministry of the office bearers is being continued, all decisions of the major

assemblies were being honoured, and no consistory needed the assistance of Classis for the proper government of their church.

The church of Lynden was appointed to convene the next classis in Lynden on December 6, 2007, with alternate date set for March 13, 2008. Classis also appointed officers for the next classis and made arrangements for counsellors and preaching supply to vacant churches.

Delegates for Regional Synod West 2007 in Carman East were appointed as follows: Elders: Brs. C. Leyenhorst and P. vanWoudenberg; alternates, D. Schouten and A. vanderGaag, in that order. Ministers: Brs. C. Bouwman and R. Schouten; alternates, J. Moesker and W. Wielenga, in that order.

Question Period was made use of.

The documents pertaining to Rev. IJbema's colloquium were presented according to Art. 5B and C of the CO and found to be in good order. After supper a colloquium was conducted with Rev. IJbema. After dialoguing with Rev. IJbema for an hour, Classis in closed session concluded with gratitude that Rev. IJbema can be received into the ministry of the Word. In open session this conclusion was imparted to Rev. IJbema and to the appreciative audience from the Chilliwack congregation. With this conclusion, Rev. IJbema's call to the church of Chilliwack was also approved, according to Art. 5, CO Convening church for the next classis was instructed to ensure that the Subscription Form be present next time for Rev. IJbema to sign. Rev. Bouwman was appointed to represent classis at the welcome evening of Rev. IJbema.

The chairman ruled that no censure was needed as per Art. 34 CO Acts of Classis were read and adopted. Press release was read and approved. The chairman requested Classis to sing together

Hymn 64:1-4, after which he closed the meeting in prayer.

*On behalf of Classis,  
C. Bouwman, vice chairman*

### **Press Release of Classis Manitoba of the Canadian Reformed Churches held on September 14, AD 2007 in Winnipeg, MB**

#### **1. Opening on behalf of the convening Church at Denver**

On behalf of the convening church at Denver, Rev. D. M. Boersma opened the meeting by reading Psalm 14 and requesting the delegates to sing Psalm 14:2, 4, 5. He then led in prayer.

#### **2. Report on the examination of the credentials by the delegates of Denver**

Rev. Boersma offers words of welcome to all, especially to Rev. J. Poppe who is present for the first time. He makes mention of the following memorabilia: Rev. Boersma has accepted the call to Pretoria, South Africa for work in the mission field while Rev. A.J. Pol has declined the call to the church at Lincoln. Grace congregation has presently extended a call to Rev. D.W. Vandeburgt of Glanbrook, ON. It is also remembered that the Lord has called home Rev. E. Huntington of the OPC in Bismarck, ND. He had been present at the March, 2007 classis.

The credentials were examined and all primi delegates were present with proper credentials. Classis was then declared constituted.

#### **3. Appointment of officers**

The following brothers assumed their positions as agreed to by the body: Chairman: Rev. Pol, Vice-chairman: Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, Clerk: Rev. Boersma.



Rev. Pol thanks the convening church for all their preparations as well as the church at Redeemer for their hospitality in hosting Classis. He then makes mention of the following additional memorabilia: since the last classis, Rev. Boersma has entered into the married state with sr. Rinnette Werkman. He wishes them the Lord's blessing as they enter a new phase of life in South Africa.

#### 4. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as received.

#### 5. Seating of Fraternal Delegates

Br. Bernie Bakker of Providence URC is welcomed to the meeting and seated as a fraternal delegate. It is decided to welcome and seat Rev. J. Poppe as advisor to Classis.

#### 6. Examination of Documentation Pertaining to Rev. J. Poppe (Art 5 C)

All the appropriate papers as required by Art. 5 CO are presented and found to be in good order. The colloquium is convened and for one hour the various questioners from Classis engage in discussion with Rev. Poppe as per Art. 5.B.2 CO. Classis enters into closed session and concludes with thanksgiving that Rev. Poppe successfully sustained the colloquium. The subscription form is read aloud by the chairman and signed by Rev. J. Poppe. A prayer of thanksgiving is offered, a song of praise sung, and opportunity is given to congratulate Rev. Poppe and his wife Sharon.

#### 7. Reports

##### a) *Committee for Aid to Needy Churches.*

The report from the Committee recommends the level of support to be at \$48 per communicant member in the churches for the benefit of the church at Denver. This is lower than in previous years due in part to a favourable exchange rate. The elder from Denver indicates that

with the pending vacancy, this request may need to be adjusted at a future classis. Classis grants this request and thanks the Committee for its work.

##### b) *Church for Auditing the Books of the Committee for Aid to Needy Churches*

The church at Winnipeg Redeemer reports that the books for the Committee for Aid to Needy Churches are in good order. This is received with gratitude.

##### c) *Church for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry as per Art. 20 CO*

A recommendation is received from the Committee indicating that some support was provided for a theological student. The Committee is also granted its request to assess the churches \$2 per communicant member to support this brother in the near future.

##### d) *Church for Auditing the Books of the Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry*

The church at Winnipeg Grace reports that the books for the Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry are in good order.

##### e) *Church Visitation reports*

The church visitors report on a regular visitation to the church at Denver. Classis receives this report with thanksgiving.

##### f) *Report from Delegates to Ecclesiastical Assemblies of Sister Churches*

A copy of the letter of greeting sent by Rev. Jonker to the Classis Central of the URCNA June 10, 2007 is received with thankfulness. Rev. Boersma reports on a visit made to the Presbytery of the Dakotas on April 03-04, 2007 in Castle Rock near Denver. He experienced good contact with the brothers and could see ample evidence that the Lord is blessing the work in those churches. Br. F. Baker offers thanksgiving and intercessory prayer for these two federations of churches.

#### 8. Proposals and Instructions from the Churches

No proposals or instructions were received.

#### 9. Question Period according to Article 44, C.O.

All churches answer yes, yes, and no to the questions of Article 44 posed by the chairman with the exception of the churches at Denver and Grace. Denver requests that Rev. Holtvlüwer serve as counselor for the church at Denver during her vacancy. Classis grants this request. Grace requests the continuation of monthly pulpit supply during her vacancy and this is granted.

#### 10. Address by Fraternal Delegate

Br. Bakker of Providence Reformed Church of Winnipeg (URC) extended Christian greetings to the churches of Classis. Rev. Holtvlüwer responded with words of encouragement and prayer of thanksgiving and intercession for both Providence church and Classis Central US of the URC.

#### 11. Correspondence

Two letters are received from Rev. K. Jonker. These letters are taken for information.

#### 12. Appointments

##### a) *Convening church for the next Classis, place and date*

The next Classis is scheduled for Dec. 14, 2007 at 3:00 pm to be convened by the church at Winnipeg Grace. The alternate date for classis is March 14, 2008, 3:00 pm.

##### b) *Suggested officers for the next classis*

Chairman: Rev. Poppe,  
Vice-chairman: Rev. Pol, Clerk:  
Rev. Holtvlüwer.

##### c) *Standing Committees and/or Classical Deputies/Church Visitors*

The various committees of Classis are appointed for the next year. The church visitors are

appointed as follows: Rev. Pol (convener); Rev. Holtvlüwer and Rev. Poppe. Rev. Poppe is appointed fraternal delegate to the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC, Rev. Pol to the Northern Plains Classis of the RCUS, and Rev. Holtvlüwer to the Classis Central US of the URCNA.

*d) Delegates to Regional Synod West Nov 06, 2007*

Classis delegates the following ministers: Rev. Holtvlüwer and Rev. Pol with Rev. Poppe as alternate. Classis delegates the following elders: Brs. W. Raap and G. van Dijk, with first alternate br. K.

Vanderveen and C. Vanderpol as second alternate.

### 13. Personal Question Period

Personal question period was made use of. Rev. Boersma expresses on behalf of Denver church much thanks for the continued financial support of the churches in Classis Manitoba. He also expresses words of thanks for his personal support in working among the churches of Classis.

### 14. Censure according to Article 34, C.O.

It was noted with thankfulness that censure was not needed.

### 15. Adoption of the Acts of Classis

The Acts were read and adopted.

### 16. Approval of the Press Release

The press release was read and approved.

17. Closing

The chairman asks Classis to sing Psalm 108:1, led the meeting in prayer, and closed the assembly.

*For Classis Manitoba  
September 14, 2007*

*P. H. Holtvlüwer  
(vice-chair at that time)*



#### Advertisements:

Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (with Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.

## BIRTHS

*Know that the LORD is God. It is He who made us and we are His.  
Psalm 100:3*

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father we announce the birth of our third child

**ALEXIS MARVEL**

Born July 25, 2007

A daughter to **Russell and Vanessa Taekema (nee Dejong)**

A new sister for *Brayden* and *Trinity*  
15th grandchild for Pieter and Anna Dejong  
5th grandchild for John and Marvel Taekema

Our address is:

#9 52125, RR 275, Spruce Grove, AB T7X 3T9



*Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children are a reward from Him.  
Psalm 127:3*

The Lord has blessed us with a healthy boy whom we named

**HENRY TROY**

Born August 11, 2007

to **Henry and Katrina Barendregt (nee Dejong)**

Troy's excited siblings are *Jamie*, *Wade*, *Jewel* and *Kiahna*

16th grandchild for Pieter and Anna Dejong  
69th grandchild for Heddy Barendregt

Our address is:

Box 250, Neerlandia, AB T0G 1R0

*Psalm 150 (Praise the Lord)*

With thankfulness unto our heavenly Father who made all things well, He has entrusted to us another of His children, a daughter

**AMY TAMARA**

Born October 6, 2007

to **John and Tamara Breukelman (nee Dejong)**

A little sister for *Blaine* and *Ashton*  
17th grandchild for Pieter and Anna Dejong  
7th grandchild for Anne Breukelman  
Our address is: Box 99, Vega, AB T0G 2H0



With joy and thankfulness to the Lord we announce the birth of our daughter and sister

**EDEN GRACE**

Born June 21, 2007

**Doug and Karen Vandeburgt**

*Leah, Joel, Seth and Levi*

13th grandchild for Len and Hennie Stam  
18th grandchild for Gerry and Alice Vandeburgt  
800 Haldimand Road 66, Caledonia, ON N3W 1P5



With joy and thankfulness to God, we announce the birth of our daughter

**JASMINE ELYSE**

Born August 25, 2007

**David and Geraldine VanRaalte**

Little sister for *Leah* and *Daniel*  
dgvr@sympatico.ca