

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Year-End
Issue



*“Whoever drinks
the water I give him
will never thirst.”*

John 4:14.

*Best wishes
and the
Lord's blessings
in the year 2008
to all our readers*

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How Warm is Your Church?

Some believers absolutely dread this time of year

This last *Clarion* issue of the year always lands on your family room table just before or during the Christmas season. In other words, it comes to you at a time that is considered by many to be the most inviting, warm, and magical time of the year. Let's admit that there is something special about this season. Many look forward to it with a great degree of anticipation.

Why the warmth?

What accounts for this? No doubt a combination of factors come into play here. The main one lies in the fact that around this time of year we celebrate together a very special birth, an utterly unique birth. The birth of the Son of God! Our Saviour is born! That alone is sufficient reason for special music in our churches, our homes, our schools, and, I might even add, the malls, the businesses, and the concert halls of the nation. The church in turn augments this with advent worship services and a special service on December 25.

In addition, our homes also take on a different aura at this time of year. Not all are into special decorations, but it is hard to find a home among us that does not sport some of the trappings of the season. And what about the turkey? Rare is the home that does not organize a meal to which family and friends are invited. After all, this is a time for get-togethers, for gatherings, for fellowship. It's a time for singing, giving, sharing, and lots of love.

Cold in the church

And yet, while there is warmth in many of our homes, there is not always warmth in the church. As a matter of fact, there are some believers who absolutely dread that time of year called "Christmas and New Year's Eve." They dread it because they have nowhere to go. No one invites them. No one

thinks of them. No one shows them any compassion. They are alone. It's cold in the church.

Yes, and that brings me to the larger issue. It is an issue that I have written about before and it has to do with the atmosphere and behaviour in some of our churches. Some complain that our churches are not warm, that they are devoid of a true sense of welcome, that it is hard to get in, that there are a lot of cliques, that large families dominate and are so busy only with themselves, that pleasantries may be exchanged after the worship service but it is all so superficial and rarely leads to the formation of lasting relationships of friendship and fellowship.


So, is this true? Have you measured the temperature lately in your local church? Have you ever bothered to put yourself in the shoes of a visitor or a new comer? Have you even once taken the time to discuss this with family and friends? Just how inviting are we? What sort of a spiritual oasis are we? What kind of an image do we project?

Is this biblical?

But even more important, how faithful are we today to the biblical model of the church? For what is the church? Of course, it is the people of God, the people who have had their sins bought, paid for, and forgiven by God through the great work of his Son.

Now, you might say that this is putting it generally. To be complete we would have to go into all sorts of biblical and dogmatic definitions and distinctions as to what is the church. But that is not my aim in this editorial. My aim is simply to remind you that the church is more than a gathering, assembly, or congregation. It is also a fellowship. It is a community of believers who together share the most precious things in all of the world. It is a community that constantly looks up to the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

At the same time, however, it is also a community that looks sideways, that sees its neighbours and fellow saints in a new light and with a new responsibility. Together we confess the communion of saints. Together we have communion with the Triune God and together we says "Yes and Amen" to the words "everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit of other members" (LD 21, Q/A 55).



*Look for ways
to love
and serve them*

Now these are good biblical summarizing words. They are based on what the Spirit says to the churches through the Apostle Paul. In Romans 12 he uses body language to describe the church and tells us pointedly that "in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others." In 1 Corinthians 12 he reminds us that "if one part suffers, every part suffers with it." In the next chapter he stresses that love is the greatest of all virtues and qualities. And then he is not speaking about self-love either. No, he is referring to neighbour love. In Philippians 2 the same apostle uses the humility of Christ to teach the church and its members that "each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Need I go on? Surely, the message of the Scriptures is clear. The church of Jesus Christ is called upon to be a real and genuine fellowship of the Spirit, in the Spirit, and by the Spirit. To ignore one's fellow believer is a sin! To greet them with fine sounding words but to leave it there is a disservice. To nod at a distance and plant a smile on your face but never to extend the right hand of fellowship is little more than formalism.

Excuses, excuses!

Naturally, there will be some who remark, "But I'm not good at going up to people that I do not know" or "I'm just not comfortable inviting these people to my house" or "I have no time because I'm so busy already with all the family and friends that I currently have." Well, let's call these what they are, that is, "excuses, poor and pathetic excuses!" They are unworthy of those who have been bought by the blood of the Lamb and welcomed into the fellowship of the Triune God.


In Article 29 of our Belgic Confession we come face-to-face with the three marks of the true church: biblical preaching, right sacraments, and earnest discipline. One of the mistakes that we make with these marks is that we often think that they are exhaustive. In other words, there are three, and no more. Wrong! Read the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul, Peter, and especially John, and you will discover a fourth mark and it is called "the exercise of the fellowship of the saints."

A challenge to you all

In light of all of the above, I would like to throw out a challenge to all of our readers and it is this: dare to examine the state of fellowship in your local church and dare to do something about it. Consider the newcomers and regular visitors and do more than just look at them from a distance. Approach them, invite them over, get to know them and look for ways to love and serve them. Quite simply, do for them what your Saviour has done for you.

If you do this you will accomplish a number of things. For one, you will drive up the temperature in your church. Secondly, you will be living up to your calling to look out for the "benefit and well-being" of others. Thirdly, you will bring glory to your God. After all, do you really think that God is served well by churches that claim to be true but are actually cold?

May this festive season be a time of true rejoicing and may it give evidence that true, deep and warm fellowship is alive among us. May everyone who belongs to your local church be able to say sincerely, "it may be cold out there, but it's warm in here – warm with the love, care, and compassion of Jesus Christ."





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MATTHEW 13:52

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Who is this Jesus?

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ. . . ”

Colossians 2:9, 10a

Paul writes in verse 9, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity [that is, God] lives in bodily form.” These words of Paul are important as we reflect on the birth of Jesus Christ. Who is the child that is born on Christmas Day to Joseph and Mary in the town of Bethlehem? The way you answer that question will also determine everything in your life. The central question for all mankind is, who is this Jesus who was born in Bethlehem? Paul gives a clear answer to that question which will have great effect on the life of the world.

Among biblical scholars there has been much debate about whether Paul is referring to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Generally modern scholars are of the opinion that Paul is not directly concerned here with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Paul’s greater concern in this text is to understand who Jesus Christ really is. Earlier, in 1:15, Paul says about Jesus that “his is the image of the invisible God.” There Paul is indeed referring to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, God came to this world in a visible way. The child who was born to Joseph and Mary is the image of the invisible God. He is our “Immanuel,” that is, God with us.

Today mankind is looking for some proof of the living God. Modern philosophers are looking for some point of contact with the invisible God to prove that He really exists. Many today have come to the conclusion that it is impossible to find such a point of contact and therefore there is no proof that God really exists. God is just a figment of man’s imagination. Man has just created an image of God in his own mind and uses that image as a crutch to deal with the struggles and troubles of this life.

Mankind has closed their eyes to the true nature of the one who was born in Bethlehem. While the world knows the story about Joseph and Mary and the child Jesus, their eyes are closed to the fact that this child is the true image of the invisible God. The Lord God in heaven does not remain a God high above his creation, but He enters into the life of his creatures. He comes in his Son to dwell in our midst. He comes in the flesh to walk on this earth. But He came to the world not just to reveal Himself in visible form, but as the Saviour of the world. That is the point that Paul emphasizes in 2:9-10.

In refuting the ideas of the false teachers in Colossae, Paul emphasizes who Christ really is. Paul’s concern here is not about

the incarnation as such, but who Christ is, before, during, and after his incarnation. This is who He is, “He is the fullness of the Deity in whom the fullness of God lives in bodily form.” Many understand what is translated as “bodily form” to mean “in reality” or “not symbolically.” In other words this Jesus whom you look to as your Saviour is the real and true embodiment of the invisible God. This Jesus always has been from eternity and always will be to eternity, true God. In Christ you find the fullness of God.


When Paul speaks about the fullness of Christ, he is saying that everything God has and is dwells in our Saviour Jesus Christ. The invisible God has fully revealed Himself in his Son Jesus Christ. Therefore, if the fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ, why would anyone allow himself to be taken captive by the philosophies of this world that say Christ is not enough to be saved? If the full essence of God is concentrated in Christ, why would you look anywhere else for your help or salvation? If you have Christ Jesus as your Saviour, then you have no need to add anything to what He has done for you on the cross. His work of salvation is perfect and absolutely sufficient to save you.

But Paul says something even more profound in verse 10, “And

you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” These words become more meaningful when you remember that human philosophy says that Christ is not enough, but that you must complete what Christ has done. Christ has only given you part of your salvation; the rest is up to you. Paul says this is nonsense – don’t you know that

you have been given fullness in Christ? Don’t you know that Christ has given you the full measure of your salvation? When Christ comes into your life, He fills you with everything that you need for your salvation. He is the complete Saviour.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas, it is important that you believe that in this Jesus the fullness of God is

wonderfully revealed and that in childlike trust you look to Christ as your complete Saviour. It is in Jesus Christ that you receive the fullness of God’s gifts in order that you may live for the Lord forever. Christ Jesus is the never failing fountain from whom all the blessings of God flow into your life for eternity. A true understanding of Christmas is the source of your eternal joy. 



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One of a Thousand

“One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.”

Ecclesiastes 7:28b

“. . .she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew 1:18b

It's a somber conclusion that Qoheleth, the teacher of wisdom in Israel, comes to after a long process of investigation. And it's one that seems highly questionable at that. He does not seem to have a good word for women. His words run counter to the mood of our time. What are we to do with such a passage? Does not such a passage dampen our sense of festivity?

This saying of Qoheleth must be seen in its context. The Preacher lived late in Israel's history and he sums up the end result of this history at various places in his book. He looks at events from the point of view of human actions with God's promises. And his conclusion is: men always go from bad to worse. All is vanity! (1:14). Here again he concludes, "Adding one thing to another to find the sum" (7:27) that true wisdom cannot be found among men. He searched everywhere, without relenting, but found only folly and madness.

There was one thing he came across in his search and this concerned not women in general, but the *loose woman*, the one who makes it her profession and aim to lure men into wanton deeds.

Here the Preacher echoes the language of Solomon, who said that the loose woman was "as bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword" (Prov 5:4). Solomon would know!



The discovery concerning the loose woman colours his concluding remarks. He does not say that men are better than women, nor does he want to accentuate a certain difference between men and women. His words do allude to a relative difference between men and women and so link up with the biblical teaching that sin originates first of all in the woman (Genesis 3:6). But at most this is only a relative difference

and one that is certainly not emphasized in the passage. For men are pictured as falling into snares and temptations here, too. In fact, Qoheleth wants to say that no one is trustworthy or stable among men. Among mankind as a whole, there is no one who stands firm in faith, who is fully reliable, trustworthy, and faithful in his dealings. It is a conclusion that runs throughout Scripture! "We all like sheep have gone astray. . ." (Isaiah 53:6).

Yet we may say that the Holy Spirit has a deeper intention with these words. For Qoheleth's words still give a positive ring to his somber conclusion. His language represents a form of hyperbole, but one that is open for a double meaning. A new layer of meaning springs forward when we compare his language with that of Elihu in Job 33:23. There Elihu describes the search of the suffering man for the *one in a thousand*, who is described as a *mediator*, an interpreter, a messenger who provides true and solid instruction from heaven. But Elihu intimates that such a one can be found! The one in a thousand is accessible, if only we look heavenward!

That is the glorious gospel hidden by the Holy Spirit in the hyperbole of the Preacher! If one looks among men, and if one brings Israel's history to its summation, the only conclusion can be: vanity and vexation. And there can only be sorrow because of the avalanche of injustice, cruelty, and hatred evident among men. But the world is not hopeless! God on high answers its need.

Where the complete inability of men to bring any change in their own condition has become self-evident, there the Lord shows that He brings the desired change. Where Qoheleth cannot find one man in a thousand, God gives Him. And because He was in the process of giving Him to the world also in the day of the Qoheleth, He cannot but let the

testimony to his existence be heard also in the language of this seeker of wisdom. The one man in a thousand is coming!

Indeed, it was for his sake and for the sake of his coming that God brings a change among men. All change in the hearts of men comes through Him and for his sake. Qoheleth could not find a woman among mankind. But for the sake of the coming Saviour – God found her! For when his time had come, the angel appeared to Mary and said, "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28). And Matthew testifies to God's glorious work in her. In the day of Qoheleth she could not be found. But in the hour of God's mercy, at the dawn of redemption, "she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:18).

This is the gospel of the Saviour's birth. Outside of Him, there is no one that can be righteous or find favour with God. But in Him, not just one but many are made righteous. For He is the one in a thousand, the Man who at the same time is unique, above all others, the Head of the new mankind, Jesus the Saviour! He is distinct from all other prophets and all other interpreters or mediators. His coming is the divine breach into the cycle of a broken and lost humanity. It represents a new beginning and renewed hope for men and women! For in Him sin can be taken away! Therefore, we may rise up to join the chorus of praise to God who long ago had appointed Him in order that we may be saved!



*May the God who gives endurance
and encouragement give you a
spirit of unity among yourselves
as you follow Christ Jesus,
so that with one heart and mouth
you may glorify the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Romans 15:5, 6



Merry Christmas?

Before us lies the Christmas season. We live in the Canada of 2007 and so the temptation for us is to treat the Christmas season in the same way as the people around us treat it. That's to say: it's the season for gift giving, the season for partying – in short, the time of year to enjoy the good life with family and friends. Merry Christmas. . . .

Herewith, though, the true meaning of Christmas has been lost. Any God-pleasing celebration of Christmas today must pick up its cue from the first Christmas. And the essence of that first Christmas is caught in Scripture's well-known words: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16a).

"The world." That's the creation God made. More specifically, this is the creation that fell into sin, the creation that rebelled against God, slapped Him in the face, went off to worship and follow the devil. "The world": that's the people who offended God with the fall into sin, the people who continue to offend God day by day with their continuing unbelief and rebellion against Him.

This is what God loved! Why? Pure grace! There was nothing attractive about the world, nothing desirable, nothing within the world that could prompt any other emotion in God than rage – righteous anger. But God had compassion on the undeserving, such mercy that He did the most surprising thing imaginable, a deed the heart of fallen man could not conceive – and even the regenerated struggle to appreciate the wealth of this deed.

What it was? "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." The one and only Son He had, dearly loved, who enjoyed the bosom of the Father, who shared eternity in glory with the Father. But this dearest possession of all God gavel He sent Him out of the presence of the Father and his holy angels, sent Him into the company of sinners – those who had once rejected God and daily continue in rebellion against Him! Instead of bursting out in wrath against these sinners – and they certainly deserved it! – God smothered them in love! Such was his compassion for the lost, such was his mercy for the cursed, that He gave, that He emptied Himself, surrendered what was dearest to Him – so that He might save the unholy, the unworthy, the damnable. How? By having the sins of the unholy transferred from these unholy people and laid on the shoulders of his holy Son – so that in turn Jesus Christ might suffer the terrible justice of God that we had to face! Truly, with whom did God take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him the path of justice?! The way of the Lord is past finding out, infinitely beyond human comprehension!

But this is Christmas, this is what the season is all about. An unbelieving society has commercialized it, an unbelieving society makes Christmas a horizontal thing: people giving gifts – to whom? – to those whom you want to keep as your friends, to those who have earned it. Such gift giving happens amongst Christians too, but in the process the essence of Christmas is lost.

For Christmas is about giving, oh yes, is about God giving! More, it's about God giving not to friends or to those who earned it; it's about God giving to his enemies (Romans 5:8), to those who distinctly did not earn it.

We may wish it otherwise, but the fact is that in the hype of Christmas shopping and wrapping of gifts, and in the hype of getting the parties together, the reality of God emptying Himself gets forgotten. Further, in the hype of Christmas shopping and Christmas partying, the fact that we were damned before God, lost, cursed, is forgotten also; where does the reality of our sins and misery receive a place in today's Christmas season? And if our sins and misery are placed in the background, if we don't understand the loading of that awful word "world" in John 3:16, how shall we ever marvel at the miracle of God's compassion, of his act of mercy in that He gave his only begotten Son?

God gave; never ever may that glorious reality be lost in the wrappings and trappings of our Christmas celebration. God gave his dearest and gratitude for such a gift must characterize our conduct this month. God gave his dearest for the damned, for you, for me: awe for such amazing grace must be written with large letters on the way we speak about Christmas, the way we prepare for Christmas, the way we celebrate Christmas. Anything that takes attention away from God's self-emptying for the unworthy has no place in the Christian Christmas.



A Guide to Reformed Worship (Part 3) –

The Law, Confession of Sin, Assurance of Pardon

Isaiah 6 is one of the most remarkable and powerful passages in Scripture. The prophet Isaiah was somehow able to look into the throne room of the Holy God. He saw angelic creatures (seraphim) crying out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" The place was shaken and filled with smoke. Isaiah had come into the presence of God. When he recognized this, his reaction was one of fear and trembling – he was acutely aware of his own sins and the sins of his people and he confessed this before God.

When we come into the presence of the holy God today, we are not all that impressed with the visuals that accompany this experience. Perhaps we have a nice church building, but we certainly don't see seraphim, the earth doesn't shake, and there is definitely no smoke. Yet, we are in the presence of the holy God just as Isaiah was. Consequently, we need to adopt the same posture as Isaiah: one of humility and reverent fear in recognition of God's holiness and our innate lack thereof.

In their book, "With Reverence and Awe," D.G. Hart and John Muether note that the worship of Reformed believers ought to embody their confessional

commitments. One example that they give is that of the Creator/creature distinction. They write, "The vast gulf separating God from his creation means that God alone is infinite and independent, and that we are finite and dependent. This will restrain the notions of individualism,



self-confidence, and assertiveness that our culture privileges. Instead, humility and self-denial will characterize our comportment" (p.14). That was Isaiah's posture in God's throne room and it needs to be ours as well.

The reading of the Law

God brings us to this posture through his Word, particularly through his law. We confess in the Catechism (Lord's Day 2) that we know our sin and misery "from the

law of God." The law is given to humble us before God, that we would know our sin and misery and our great need for a Saviour in Jesus Christ. This need is not just there at the beginning of the Christian life, but it remains for as long as we have life and breath on this earth. We have a constant need to be brought to our knees, recognizing our sin and therefore our complete dependence on the gracious salvation of God.

For this reason, after the introductory block of elements, we have the reading of the Ten Commandments. This is done either with Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5. The Ten Commandments have always had a special place, so using other "law" passages in their place should only be done irregularly. However, in most of our congregations, the words of Matthew 22:37-40 are often appended, showing both the depth and the simplicity of God's law. Other passages that might be used in the same way include Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Luke 10:25-28, or Matthew 5:48. Whatever the passage or passages chosen, the goal is the same: to have the congregation despair of their own righteousness and look to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The song after the reading of the law should complement that passage. Because a prayer typically follows the song, we're actually looking at a two-part response to the law. Here there is some room for flexibility and creativity on the part of the minister. The song could be an expression of praise for the beauty of God's law (e.g. Psalm 19:3) and then the prayer could be a confession of sin and a supplication for God's blessing on the reading and preaching of the Word. Or the song could be a confession of sin (e.g. Psalm 51) and the prayer could be an expression of praise for God and a request for his blessing. At any rate, the song will complement the reading of the law in some way and formulate part of the congregation's response to it.

Confession of sin

Furthermore, at some point there does need to be confession of sin in response to the reading of the law, whether in song or in prayer. We see numerous examples of such confessions throughout Scripture and they have always historically been a part of the worship of the church. The prayer of confession is another element that the Reformers held on to from the medieval and patristic church. They recognized it not only as traditional, but as a sound biblical practice.

One thing often forgotten about the confession of sin in public worship is that it is not

first and foremost an individual activity. Rather, this confession of sin is *corporate*. This is what distinguishes our daily prayers wherein we confess our sins and seek God's forgiveness (as the Lord's Prayer teaches us to do) from the prayer of confession on Sundays. When we gather on Sundays, the confession is done as a congregation. We confess our sins as a body and we seek God's forgiveness as a body –



after all, we have come to worship Him as a body. There is an individual aspect as well, but the emphasis is on the body.

Assurance of pardon

Following the prayer of confession, in most of our congregations the minister goes directly to the reading of Scripture in preparation for the sermon. Especially if the confession of sin is taken seriously and done in a meaningful way, this creates a liturgical dissonance. There is a gap.

Looking back to the Reformation, this gap was filled with reading a brief Scripture passage through which the minister declared that the sins of the congregation were indeed forgiven. He did not forgive the sins himself, but declared (as a minister of Christ) that those sins were forgiven by God. We call this the "assurance of pardon" and it is worth recovering, particularly if we do take the confession of sin seriously. How wonderful it is to be disarmed of your own righteousness, flee to the cross, and then hear the comforting promise of the gospel each Sunday again and again! There are so many different passages of Scripture that are appropriate for this purpose – just to name a few: 1 John 1:9, Acts 10:43, and Hebrews 7:24-25.

Whenever we gather for worship, we need the holiness of God impressed on us repeatedly. Without an understanding of God's holiness, our worship runs the danger of becoming irreverent or mechanical. The block of elements wherein we hear God's law, confess our sins, and are comforted with the gospel, ensures that we never become flippant about worshipping the great and mighty Yahweh.

Recommended Resource

For more on the reading of the law, the confession of sin, and assurance of pardon, see *Fulfill Your Ministry*, K. Deddens (Premier, 1990), pp.71-85.



“In Wisdom You Made Them All. . .” (Part 2 of 2)

Is there intelligent life in other parts of the universe? People have for centuries considered the possibility, dreamt about it, and written stories about it. They did not seriously start looking for such life, however, until the astronomical advances of the twentieth century. Since then, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) has become big business. Many scientists are involved in it and some millions of amateurs have joined the quest. This continues in our days, in spite of the fact that today the chance of success does not appear to be nearly as great as was once thought.

SETI

The search for intelligent life beyond the earth has, as we noted, received a boost from the Copernican Principle of mediocrity. According to that principle the earth, the solar system, and we ourselves are not exceptional but typical, run-of-the-mill, and the product of an unplanned, evolutionary process. Since the laws of nature are generally held to be the same throughout the cosmos, it follows that developments which have taken place on earth are likely to have taken place also elsewhere. All that is needed for the

development of intelligent life like ours, scientists reasoned, is an earth-like planet orbiting a sun-like star and SETI enthusiasts expected that there were millions of these in our galaxy alone. The only problem was to locate such planets and make contact.

The search focused initially on planets in our own solar system, with Mars as the favourite. It was unsuccessful and subsequent space exploration made clear that extra-terrestrial intelligence, if it does exist, must be sought elsewhere in the galaxy, or even beyond it. This means that actual visits to inhabited planets are out of the question. The distances are too great for human beings with their limited lifespan. Contact has to be established by means of radio signals. Science journalist Fred Heeren writes that scientists believed that signals sent into space since the middle of the last century, for example by television and FM broadcasts, should have served the purpose. As one expert suggested, programs like *Jack Parr* and *I Love Lucy* will have been among the first to spread into space. “Within thirty light-years,” that scientist remarked in the 1990s, “there are some dozens of stars. And if they got the word thirty years ago, they would be sending a reply back to us. And

those who are only fifteen light-years away will have sent a message back fifteen years ago, which should just about be reaching us today.”

Why is there no message?

Only, it did not happen. The world is still waiting for replies and today scientists are considerably more cautious in their predictions. They admit that the Milky Way may not be quite as full of intelligent life as they had expected. They also remember that civilizations do not last forever. Much like organic life, they tend to flourish, decline, and die; and one has to wonder what may have happened to possible civilizations in our galaxy during the ten billion years of its existence. Would not the overwhelming majority have disappeared? Would any survive? There is also the fact that inhabitable planets in our galaxy may be thousands of light-years away, so that earth-dwellers must wait for millennia before an answer can be expected. And if we go outside the Milky Way, we are talking of planets that are millions and even billions of light years removed in space and time. Even if we received radio signals from them, could we assume that the civilizations still exist today?

Another problem for SETI enthusiasts is that space civilizations have not made contact with our planet, or even colonized it. If older, more mature and longer-lived civilizations indeed exist, one may assume that their science is well advanced, that their technology has progressed beyond ours, and that their engineers have developed propulsion techniques that come closer to reaching the speed of light. "Figuring on a cruising speed of 10 percent that of light," Heeren writes, "... astronomers say it would take just five million years for one colonizing group to reach every star system across the Milky Way's 100,000 light-years." The question is, of course, whether such propulsion systems are physically possible. Not nearly every expert believes so. And in any event, there are no signs of visits or colonizations by space aliens.

The religious factor

In spite of the accumulating evidence that extra-terrestrial intelligence may be hard to find, enthusiasm for the enterprise remains great and ever more advanced technology is being used in the search for radio signals. The cause of this perseverance is not just the desire for scientific advances, although that element is present. But there are other motivations. Some hope to find a habitable planet that we can escape to if and when the earth freezes up, or is hit by a meteorite, or if we ourselves blow up our planet or destroy our environment. Colonization in space might be the way to prolong our species' life. There is also the hope that aliens can teach us a thing or two about the art of living. Some SETI enthusiasts assume that older civilizations will be

ahead of us not just in technology but also in practical wisdom. They like to think of extra-terrestrials as benevolent and morally superior to us and therefore willing and able to help us deal with the type of thing that can make life on earth so miserable: crime, terrorism, war, as well as illness and poverty.



And then there is the matter of cosmic loneliness. The late Carl Sagan, one of the best-known SETI astronomers, famously described our planet as "a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark." It is an echo of the complaint by the seventeenth-century mathematician Blaise Pascal, who in contemplating the new model of the universe exclaimed, "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me." Pascal was a Christian, who knew that God exists, even though it was no longer possible to locate his dwelling place. The feeling of being abandoned is much stronger among moderns who have lost that faith. It is sad but not surprising that they seek for father-figures in cosmic space, the only unexplored area left in the universe.

Meanwhile the bankruptcy of Christianity is assumed. Those who are searching for space divinities are sure that the

discovery of intelligent aliens will have a devastating effect on the Christian faith. For one thing, they reason, it will manifest the untrustworthiness of the Bible, since Scripture does not speak of intelligent life beyond the earth. It will also show Christian arrogance in believing in a God who has offered a plan of salvation to humanity alone and not to other intelligent species.

These types of argument bother some Christians as well. Christian apologist C. S. Lewis dealt with them already half a century ago. He answered the taunt of Christian arrogance by remarking that Christ's incarnation does not imply particular merit or excellence in humanity. "Christ died for men precisely because men are *not* worth dying for; to make them worth it." Lewis did not expect that extra-terrestrial life will be found, but neither did he want to set limits to God's power. Should intelligent life indeed be discovered on other planets, he writes, we should consider the following: 1) unlike humans, aliens may not have fallen into sin; and 2) if extra-terrestrials, or some of them, have fallen, God may have used different remedies for them. In this connection Lewis refers to Romans 8:21, where we read that "creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay." This would include intelligent beings beyond the earth, if there are any.

A fine-tuned universe

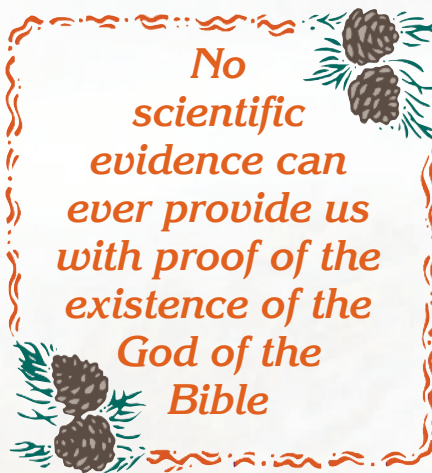
Confidence in the existence of earth-like planets harbouring intelligent life has declined since Lewis's time. The problem is not only the disappointing results of the search itself. More ominous is the accumulating scientific evidence (provided by both

Christian and non-Christian scientists) against the all-important Copernican Principle. More and more it appears that the earth is exceptional after all and exceptionally fitted for life; that it even seems to have been designed for it. And what goes for the earth goes for the solar system, the galaxy, the universe itself. None of them appears to be the result of an unplanned process.

The discoveries began in the twentieth century and the evidence against the Copernican Principle is by now overwhelming. There is first of all the exceptional "fine-tuning" of the universe: the fact that the laws of nature appear to be designed for the purpose of accommodating life. Should the laws and other features be altered even to the smallest degree, a life-sustaining universe would be impossible. Giving only a few examples out of many, physicist Karl Giberson writes: "Make gravity one percent stronger or weaker and the sun won't shine properly; change the electrical force just a bit and organic molecules won't form; make the universe expand just a little faster and there won't be any solar systems. And so on. All of the various features of this universe appear to have been optimized for life." He adds, "All this would occasion no surprise if it turned out that the laws of nature somehow have to have their current form, if there were some reason why gravity has its particular strength, electrons their mass, the photon its energy, and so on. But, as nearly as anyone can tell – and they seem to be able to tell quite nearly – there is no reason why the various features of our universe are the way they are, and not some other, equally plausible, way."

And a rare planet

A similar type of fine-tuning can be observed locally, that is, on the level of the earth and its solar system. There is, for example, the nearness of the moon, as well as its exceptional size and gravity. It is large and heavy enough to stabilize the earth's rotation and prevent its axis from tilting too far into the direction of the sun or giant planet Jupiter. The earth's axis is tilted at 23.5 degrees, which gives us our seasons, assuring a relatively limited range in temperatures. The moon also helps raising ocean tides and currents, which again play a role in regulating climate. In these and in various other respects the moon's life-supporting function is exceptional compared to other planet-moon systems that have been observed.



The earth's situation appears optimal for the existence of life also because the planet enjoys protection from asteroids, comets, and other "near earth objects" from space. There are large numbers of such objects threatening us and depending on their size their impact could be devastating. Although the danger remains, other planets, including Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars, form a

protective shield around the earth, safeguarding our planet from ongoing bombardments. They serve as "cosmic vacuum sweepers," drawing killer rockets to themselves and so diverting them from planet earth. Fred Heeren quotes a scientist as saying that without a giant neighbour like Jupiter, for example, "comets would strike Earth between 100 and 10,000 times more frequently than they do, meaning 'that we wouldn't be here.'"

There are various other data supporting the "rare-earth hypothesis." For example, the earth is located at the proper distance from the sun. If it were further away, its temperature would be closer to that of Mars with its perpetual deepfreeze; if it were closer, it might suffer the scorching heat of Venus. In either case, complex life would be impossible. Other necessities of life which the earth provides (unlike other planets in our system) are liquid water, an oxygen-rich atmosphere, and a protective magnetic field. Our sun, in turn, is at the right distance from the overcrowded centre of the galaxy, where cosmic radiation is too high for life to exist. The sun also has the proper mass, making it possible for its planets to orbit at a safe distance – neither too close to their star nor too far away from it. Although more massive than many other stars, the sun is not so massive that it would produce excessive amounts of radiation and thereby make life impossible. It is also a very steady source of energy. If energy output was not constant – if there were great increases or decreases – the consequences could again be deadly for the existence of complex life. In brief,

the earth's sun is far from being an "average star."

Astronomy and the Bible

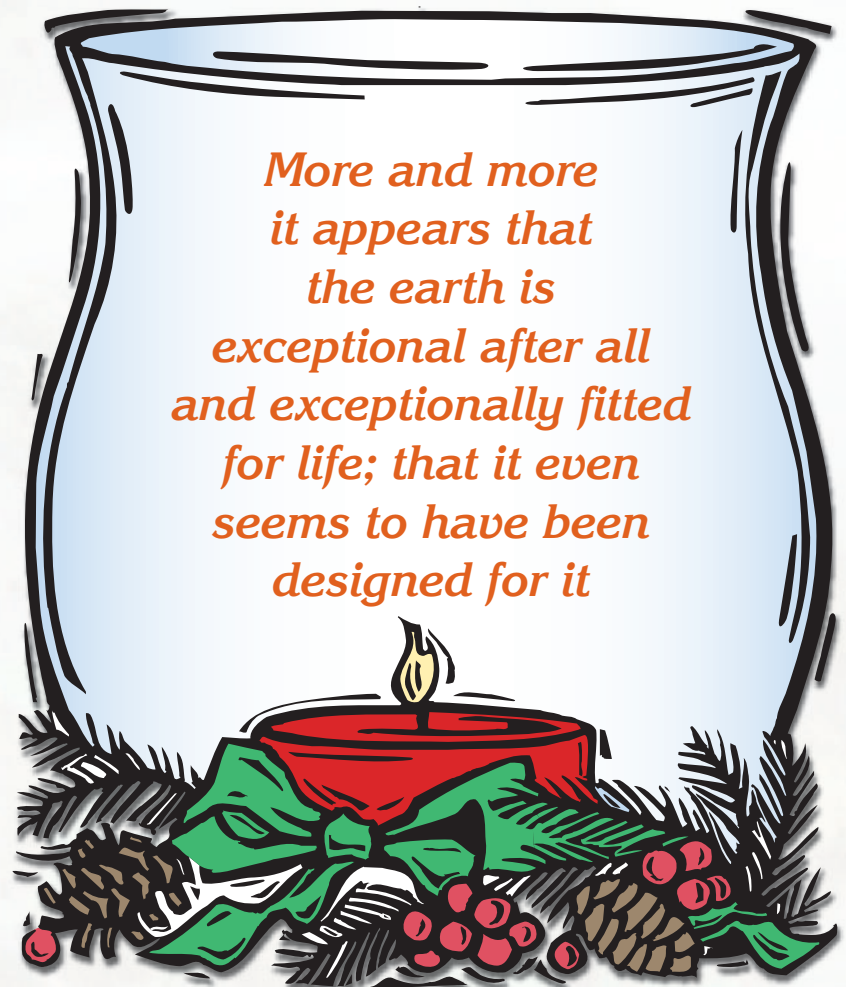
Astronomers refer to these various factors as "anthropic coincidences" (from *anthropos*, Greek for "human being"), since they suggest the "human-friendliness" of the earth, the solar system, the galaxy, and the cosmos itself. Going directly against the Copernican Principle, the discoveries have caused considerable embarrassment among many scientists. Some try to disprove them, but others agree that the evidence is too strong to be ignored. In his *A Brief History of Time* Stephen Hawkins admits, "It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us." And Nobel prize-winning scientist Arno Penzias writes, "The best data we have are exactly what I would have predicted, had I nothing to go on but the five Books of Moses, the Psalms, the Bible as a whole."

Christian scientist Francis S. Collins, who quotes these men, suggests that Penzias may have been thinking of Psalm 8: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?" It is true, as Collins also reminds us, that we should not overestimate the religious significance of the recent findings. Scientific theories are subject to change, and in any case, no scientific evidence can ever provide us with proof of the existence of the God of the Bible. Nevertheless, in an age where

these theories are so frequently used against the Christian religion, it is good to be reminded of the need to distinguish between science proper and its ideological uses. The case of the rise and threatening demise of the Copernican Principle is as good an example as any.

Note: I have written this series at the suggestion of some of our principals, who expressed concern about the growing influence of a radicalized environmentalist movement nurtured by the assumptions of the Copernican

Principle. For further reading on the topic I suggest the following: Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God*, 2006; Michael J. Denton, *Nature's Destiny*, 1998; Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, 2004 (note also the DVD under the same title); Owen Gingerich, *God's Universe*, 2006; Fred Heeren, "Home Alone in the Universe?", 2002; C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 1964; *Idem*, "Religion and Rocketry," 1958; Peter D. Ward and Donald Brownlee, *Rare Earth*, 2000. (Most but not all of these works are by Christian authors.)



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Passchendaele

Not often you read about a movie review here. This is about a new movie "Passchendaele" by Paul Gross. I have no idea at all if it's a "watchable" movie for us as Christians. I found the November 11, 2007 review in *The Toronto Star* entitled "The Forgotten Battle of Passchendaele" by Andrew Chung quite intriguing from a Christian point of view. Chung begins his Remembrance Day review as follows:

Like that old axiom about riddles, enigmas and mysteries, perhaps some of the soldiers bogged down in the World War I fight for Passchendaele saw in the battle futility, wrapped in recklessness, wrapped in death. At least that's how the hindsight of history remembers it.

The drive for the tiny, already burnt-out Belgian village, which would offer little in the way of a prized capture, had already annihilated entire divisions of exhausted Britons, Australians and New Zealanders. Morale was sinking as troops watched their comrades fall into giant craters in the earth, and drown in the muddy water.

Perhaps this is one reason why so few Canadians know about the battle for Passchendaele, which finished 90 years ago yesterday, and carries such a frustrating dual legacy. Like a serpent's forked tongue, Passchendaele was a victory; the Canadians

succeeded where others failed. But, at the same time, it was the Great War's low point for the Allies, clouded in controversy and mired in seemingly useless death.

Passchendaele, nevertheless, deserves a more prominent place in our collective consciousness, many argue, not simply because of the wrenching fact that 16,000 Canadians were cut down, but for the thousands who fought in spite of the toll.

Further on the review, Chung mentions the bravery of the Canadian troops:

Nine members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force at Passchendaele received Victoria Crosses, the highest award in the Commonwealth for military bravery. That's more than in all of World War II.

He describes the battle and compares it with the Canadian effort in Afghanistan today:

On Oct. 26, they began. Four Canadian divisions repeatedly launched assaults, only to be pushed back by heavy German fire. All around them it was the scene of horror: "A few yards away were three green scummed pools," Will Bird wrote in his memoir, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*. "White chalky hands reached out of one, and from the farther one a knee stuck up above the filthy water. In another bit of old trench ... a soldier stood rigidly,

feet braced apart. He had been killed by concussion, and his body was split as if sliced by a great knife."

Individual feats of bravery carried them forward. And given the high casualties, a sense of fatalism: "They assumed they were going to die," Christie says, "so they had the courage of death pushing them."

Notwithstanding the battle's futility, (British General) Haig needed us and the Canadians were there, says Morton, professor emeritus at McGill University. There are parallels to today, he adds. "Why do we do the heavy lifting in Afghanistan? If you want your side to win, somebody has to do the dirty work."

Still, it's hard to believe the public could countenance as much death in Afghanistan as occurred at Passchendaele. There were 16,000 casualties, and 5,000 dead, in two weeks. There have been 71 deaths over six years in Afghanistan. "I think we'd be going through a real gut wrenching discussion in this country," Cook says.

Back then, the Passchendaele deaths still convulsed Canadians, but they were inured to mass death coming out of previous battles, such as at the Somme and Vimy – where nearly 3,600 soldiers died in four days.


And this is where Chung's article becomes very interesting for us as Christians in Canada today. He ends with a very telling reflection:

And Morton notes that people were more religious in those days; so death would be less traumatic because it wouldn't have seemed so "final" as it does in a secular society. At least you'd see your loved one again in heaven.

Gross says by remembering Passchendaele we can put our history, and Afghanistan, in context. "Not that the (current) deaths are acceptable," he says, "but public reaction to it is disproportionate to our history. That's why it's

important to know where we come from."

Chung touches on what I believe is a very real point here. Chung and the writers he quotes are correct in concluding that a great deal of this "disproportionate reaction" to military deaths in Afghanistan is because our secular society doesn't deal with death very well. Death is always hard to accept, but if you don't believe in life after death in Christ and you figure this life is all there is, it's basically impossible to accept. That's why the outcry of so many when there are military or other public deaths today and also the increasing ceremony as far as the funerals go. That's also why, I believe, you see more and

more crosses to commemorate traffic deaths along our nation's highways. It's at least partly due to an increasing inability of our increasingly secular society to deal with death. As Christians we still see death as a last enemy too and the casualties in such battles as Passchendaele are also horrible to us. We also grieve when confronted by death. But we do not grieve as others do who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Our grief is tempered, for because of Christ's resurrection, that enemy death has lost its victory and its sting (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). Death isn't so final for us at all, but is an entrance into eternal life (LD 16, Q/A 42). 



*And we have seen and testify that
the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.
If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God,
God lives in Him and He in God.
And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.
God is love.
Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.*

1 John 4:14-16

Ray of Sunshine

C. Gelms and E. Nordeman

“An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’”

Matthew 1:20b, 21

Jesus is the reason for the season! When we hear this familiar expression we know that we are drawing near to the close of another year of our Lord. This is also a time when we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour. We must ask the question though; do we really take time to realize what a rich blessing He has given us through his Son?

The name Jesus means “The Lord saves.” Jesus came to earth to save us from our sins and its consequences. No matter what we do, we cannot eliminate the sinful nature which is in all of us. Only Jesus can do that. He came to be our Saviour, to free us from the power and penalty of sin.

All around us people are busy making the birth of Jesus in a manger into a nativity scene. This is not where the life of Christ ends. He grew up as a man who withstood much shame and curse on this earth. He then died for us and ascended into heaven and will come back to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Do you look forward to meeting your Lord and Saviour in prayer and in his Word each day? Or are we all too concerned and busy muttering about our earthly problems? Take time to focus on the true meaning of Christmas. Meditate on what He has given us in his Son, Jesus Christ. Being true man and true God, He fully understands our experiences and struggles. Hebrews 4:14-16 confirms this.

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.” Let us then lay everything in humble prayer before God’s throne of mercy. He is

God and has the power and authority to deliver us from sin. He was born to redeem us sinful people; seek your deliverance in Him. We are here to give Him all honour and glory.

May we all celebrate the true meaning of the birth of Jesus and so sing with the heavenly host, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14).

May God’s love and mercy be wrapped around us all and may we delight in his atoning work for us. May all our praise and thanks be directed to Him alone! May his blessings continue in the New Year 2008 D.V.

*For unto us a Child is born,
To us a Son is given,
And on His shoulders He shall bear
All power in earth and heaven.
The Wonderful, the Counsellor,
The Mighty God is He;
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace
His holy Name shall be!*

Hymn 15:3





Birthdays in January:

- 2 LIZ KONING will be 47**
9905-152 Street
Edmonton, AB T5P 1X4
- 7 CHRISTINE BREUKELMAN will be 36**
2225-19th Street
Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4
- 14 STEPHEN DYKSTRA will be 25**
Box 3573
Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0
- 17 HENRY DRIEGEN will be 52**
#19-31450 Spur Avenue
Abbotsford, BC V2T 5M3
- 17 GRACE HOMAN will be 52**
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road S.
RR 2 Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
- 19 EDWIN SCHUTTE will be 24**
844 Bowman Road
Abbotsford, BC V3G 1S9
- 19 JANINE SMID will be 38**
510 2nd Street
RR 7, Strathroy, ON N7T 3H8
- 27 HANK ORSEL will be 77**
Maple Villa, Room #217
441 Maple Avenue
Burlington, ON L7S 1L8
- 30 TYLER HOEKSEMA will be 19**
6755 Lorne Drive
Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

Congratulations to you all who will be celebrating a birthday in the New Year. May our heavenly Father bless you and grant you all an enjoyable day together with your family and friends. Till next time,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East
RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
Phone: 905-563-0380
email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



Guido de Brès Christian High School Hamilton, Ontario Commencement 2007

*T*he sun shone brilliantly the morning of September 22, 2007. The air was crisp; another beautiful Ontario fall day. The graduates began their commencement day at the Guido gymnasium. The gym was filled to capacity with the excited buzz of teachers, students, and parents milling about in the gym catching up on a summer gone by over a light lunch. Hugs, high fives, and handshakes were plenty as some graduates hadn't seen each other since June. Cameras flashed, laughter and giggles were heard everywhere. After the delightful lunch the grads made their way over to Hamilton Place for the official ceremony. Friends and family rose as all eighty-four of them filed their way into the Great Hall while Mr. Tim Nijenhuis played the processional, "Everything in Christ." The audience joined the graduates in singing Hymn 3, a hymn praising God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Mr. N.W. VandenOever, on behalf of the board, opened the ceremony with a portion of Matthew 25 which dealt with the parable of the talents. This was in preparation for Rev. DeBoer's message. Mr. VandenOever stressed that although many of us have different reasons for being at this ceremony and many of us have different emotions and feelings about this day we can all rejoice in the Lord how He has brought these eighty-four graduates to this point in their lives.

Mr. J. G. VanDooren then came forward to offer the Principal's word of welcome. In his address Mr. VanDooren reminded the grads of their remarkable achievement and encouraged each of them to look back and reflect on their journey at Guido. Reference was also made to the book of Ecclesiastes in that "much study wearies the body"; a statement no students or teachers would ever disagree with. The question was asked, "Why study?" And the answer was given—to gain understanding of God through



Rev. D. DeBoer



Mr. J.G. VanDooren



Mr. N.W. VandenOever



his Word and through his works. Mr. VanDooren also highlighted another key verse in Ecclesiastes which spoke volumes to the graduates this past school year. There's "a time to be born and a time to die. . . a time to weep and a time to laugh." This past year both Matt Bos and Dan VanSpronsen were called home to be with the Lord. Mr. VanDooren urged the grads to remember their creator in the days of their youth and to fear God and keep his commands.

Before Rev. DeBoer came up to deliver his address, the audience was treated to an orchestral performance by the Guido orchestra. Under the capable direction of Mr. Nijenhuis, they performed "Palladio" by Karl Jenkins, a song more commonly known as The Diamond Song. The theme of Rev. D. DeBoer's address was "Giving humble thanks to

God." He urged the graduates to be proud of achieving this milestone in their lives but yet to be humble and to give credit where credit was due. Connecting this thought back to the parable of the talents, Rev. DeBoer encouraged the graduates to live thankful lives through God's blessings and to strive to hear the words of the Master, "Well done, good and faithful servant." He stressed that the only boasting we can do is through the Lord and not through our own strength. With those thoughts he implored the grads to move forward in life relying on God for everything. The audience responded to this address by singing two verses from Psalm 20; "Some boast of chariots, some of horses, but we boast in the Name / Of Him who rules all heaven's forces."

After this song the graduates filed up on stage to receive their Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Once assembled on stage and after a rousing ovation, the Guido orchestra played another selection, "The Church's One Foundation," by Samuel S. Wesley. Once seated, many of the grads were called up again on stage to receive scholarships, participation awards, the Lieutenant Governor's community volunteer award, the Governor General's bronze medallion, and the student-of-the-year award. After these various presentations, the audience was treated to another musical selection. This time Rosalynn Kelly, accompanied by Leah Burns (violin), Emily Venema (guitar), and Mr. Nijenhuis (piano), sang "A Place in This World," by Michael W. Smith.



Finally, the class valedictorian, Neil Olij, stepped forward to give his speech. He began by reminiscing how life at Guido had been much simpler than life was now. The dress code took care of choosing what to wear in the morning and the day began and ended at 8:55 and 3:12 respectively. He also commented on how some things at Guido will never change: pizza will always be a buck a slice, no student will ever enjoy the twelve minute run, and Mr. L. will continue to make math fun by asking questions about Mr. T.'s pet ostrich. On a more serious note, Neil recognized the positive influence Guido had on their class' lives; through the Christ-centred teaching they had become different people, better people. The deaths of their classmates brought them closer as they all sought comfort in the

Comforter. Neil wrapped up his speech by thanking the teachers for their diligence and intelligence and their parents for the persistent nagging and many sacrifices. Neil then reminded his fellow grads that although the world out there may be frightening and exciting, the One who knows us best is always watching over us.

The audience responded with the words of Psalm 138: "God shall fulfill His plan for me; / His promise He will keep forever." Dr. N. H. Gootjes, a parent of one of the grads, came forward to close the ceremony in prayer. The audience rose after the prayer for the singing of our national anthem, followed by the recessional "Sonata Pathétique" by Ludwig van Beethoven. Congratulations, graduating class of 2007!



Commencement Awards

The Harry Aasman and George DeBoer Memorial Scholarships

Jennifer Harink
Matthew Kok
Neil Olij
Cassandra Vandebos
Brent VanderVeen

The Guido de Brès Proficiency Scholarships

Amber Aasman
Jodi Bosscher
Melissa Breukelman
Michael Krikke
Jodi Smeding
Courtney Wieske

The Governor General's Academic Medal

Cassandra Vandebos

The Guido de Brès Christian High School Participation Awards

Caroline Boot
Matthew Kok
Heather Ruggi
Brent VanderVeen
Heather Werkman

The Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award for Students

Katrina Tenhage

The Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award

Leah Burns



Camp Yak'isda Bik'ah



July 2007



From the Board

*P*raise God from whom all blessings flow." Once again, God has showered his blessings upon Camp Yak'isda Bik'ah. This year we were again able to run two camps: a seven day youth camp attended by forty campers and a four day teen camp with sixteen teens. The camps were a great success with no serious incidents and many opportunities to proclaim the gospel, through formal Bible lessons, mealtime devotions, and "teachable moments."

We thank the willing and able volunteers who dedicated time to fill the positions of counsellors, cooks, and other support staff – from cooks or cookie bakers to night supervisors. There are so

many tasks to run a successful camp each year and each year again we see the communion of saints in action as we use this opportunity to proclaim the gospel in word and action to the young native children at the camps. It is our prayer that God will use these camps to touch the lives of those who do not yet know Him as well as build up his church in the faith and knowledge of Christ our Saviour.

While I was considering an appropriate theme for youth camp, a mother of one of our Sunday school students said to me that she was concerned for her son's safety at camp this year. When I asked why, she explained that she had had a minor altercation with a woman and her daughter two years ago. Now the son and brother of these ladies was going

to be at camp and she was concerned that they would urge this boy to hurt her son in retaliation for this previous mishap of two years ago. I looked at her with surprise and said surely that would not happen – she had explained the altercation and it was very insignificant in my estimation. Her response was "that's the way it works with us" – grudges are a way of life and they are held long after the original reason for the grudge is forgotten. It is hard to imagine living a life where the concept of forgiveness is so foreign – how difficult it must be to accept a gospel based on forgiveness when you are raised in an environment of holding grudges. What a rich blessing to know that we have been forgiven – and now, through Christ and his Spirit, we in turn can forgive.

Please pray that our summer campers may remember what was taught about being kind and compassionate with one another and about forgiving each other. Pray that they will remember that God will forgive us for our sins, no matter what they are. Help them to know that if one comes to God in repentance, that He will forgive and save us. Pray that God will soften their hearts and open their minds to the gospel. Finally, pray for the volunteers who will continue the outreach work through the yearly Sunday school and teen evenings. Pray that they may have an enthusiasm for teaching, proclaiming, and living the gospel – and that God will use these outreach programs to bring many to confess and praise his Name.

Denise Van Raalte

From our counsellors

Yak'isda Bik'ah (Youth Camp) was quite an overwhelming experience for me, because it was both very encouraging and disheartening at the same time. It was encouraging in the sense that I could share some small beginning of the good news of peace with inquisitive young minds and it was encouraging to see the kids trying to apply the teachings of Christ in even some small way during their stay at camp.

However, it was also very disheartening to see such brokenness in the lives of many of the children. The very real and destructive power of sin was readily apparent and it dispelled many of the notions about the nature of the world that have arisen because of the sheltered and privileged lives most of us have.

Yak'isda Bik'ah also showed me how the gospel has so transformed us so that even our culture, though abandoning the gospel, still has some semblance of normalcy because of its effects.

It showed me that the only way to correct the human condition is to cling to Christ. I sincerely hope that we can continue to interact with the kids who came to camp, so that what started out as a one week camp will grow into a life-long commitment to Christ. My prayer is that the work undertaken by all of the volunteers, from the organizers to the counsellors to the cooks, will be used by God to the eternal benefit of these young children.

Doug Schouten

One of the moments at camp that most sticks out in my mind is with Taylor. Jared had thrown water on her when she was in the outhouse and she was very upset. A while later I saw her with water going to the cabin to get Jared back. I pulled her aside and asked her not to do it and remember the camp theme. It took a few minutes, but she poured out the water and walked back to her cabin. The week went by so fast. I couldn't believe it was over already. During the week you feel like you really can make a difference in these kids' lives. I loved my kids and still think about them every day. Seeing these kids who were happy the entire week in tears on Sunday makes you just want to

take each of them home. I want to keep coming back to camp to be a counsellor for as long as I can. Camp was amazing this year and I'm glad I made the decision to do camp rather than other vacations I could have taken.

Lisa Kieneker

Our theme for this year's (teen) camp was comfort, a theme that is applicable to every one of our lives. The comfort that comes through knowing that we belong to Jesus Christ is something that we tried to teach the campers not only through the devotions, but also through our everyday attitudes. This camp was not only about planned devotions, but also was an activity-packed four days that allow the campers to have experiences they might not otherwise have. Horse-back riding, hiking, tubing, swimming, fishing, card-making, beading, and daily chores filled our days. Often we found time in these activities to minister God's Word on a more personal level. It is my prayer that the message of comfort planted a seed in the campers' hearts that will grow and will help them in their lives.

Alika Dykstra



Counsellors presenting a drama as part of the study time





Teen camp, rest at top of Malkow lookout



Kathryn Schouten and Lisa Kieneker with their cabin group, Brandy, Mavis, Ariel, and Taylor (L to R)

As a counsellor of teen camp, it was great to be able to have deep discussions with the teens about God and how He comforts his people. I felt like many of them learned to see how they needed God in tough situations that they have in their lives. Not only was a seed hopefully planted in their hearts, but Yak'isda Bik'ah also helped to strengthen the faith of counsellors and the Smithers community!

Sue DeHaas



Teen group photo

I have been helping out for over ten years now and can honestly see God's hand in the progress and response. The parents seem to appreciate the programs more, the children do remember the great camps and therefore are happy to come to teen camp. These are many reasons for thanks-giving. God is a true comfort and an ever present help.

We have left the teens with a challenge: to read the good news found in the book of John and to write down a few specific prayer requests and to pray for those things over the next month or two. These challenges are so important for two reasons; first, the Lord promises to give faith to those who read his Word and second, the Lord hears and answers prayers. What more can we do but to worship God in these ways. I have made it my goal to try and remind each of the campers of this challenge each time I see them. I have taken the challenge and am already seeing the Lord strengthen my faith and answer my prayers!! To God be the praise.

Jeremy Penninga



Annemarie Vandergriendt with her cabin group during Bible lesson



Long-time campers Roberta Morris and Kristie George (L to R)

If you would like more information about our programs please contact Denise or Paul Van Raalte at denisevr@telus.net





The wind blows wherever it pleases

*The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound,
but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.
So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*

John 3:8

Have you ever wondered about the Lord's mysterious ways in the lives of His children?

You may have seen it in your congregation – a brother or sister, after rejecting the Lord for a long time, amazingly becomes one of the most active and living members.

Or it may be a close neighbour who for years thwarted your approach to acquaint him or her with the gospel unto salvation, but now seeks to attend the worship services.

Or it may be one of your children who, though he or she grew up with siblings in the same covenant family, turns away from the Lord and His service; after many years he or she repents of evil ways and returns to the good Shepherd and His sheepfold.

What we as human beings deem impossible, is possible with the Lord. The Lord's Spirit moves in mysterious ways, ways we cannot fathom or comprehend, but we stand in awe of the results He effects in the believer. So often we stand ashamed of our little faith in His wondrous ways. "Be still, and know that I am God." This is the Lord's revealed will: His Spirit moves throughout the world and effects changes wherever it pleases Him. And . . . He uses as His instruments: "Go out into this world, at home and abroad, and proclaim in word and deed that I am the Lord. I, the Lord, will work in the hearts of those who hear My Word, as I have purposed it."

Thanks, team

The articles in *Clarion* are written to help you understand the Scriptures in all its facets so that they may be of benefit for your daily walk of faith. Heading our team is chief editor, Dr. J. Visscher, who peruses the submissions for publication. Thank you, Dr. Visscher, for guiding our *Clarion* efforts for so many years. In close consultation with him our copy manager, Mrs. L. Veenendaal, does her lioness's share by readying the material for publication. A great team they are. Thank you for your punctuality, Laura.

A very important part of the team are our coeditors: Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. E. Kampen,

Rev. Cl. Stam, and Dr. C. Van Dam. The cooperation we receive from them makes us thankful to have them on board. Rev. E. Kampen continues to provide the "What's New" column. Rev. W. Slomp has coordinated the "Treasures, New and Old" column for the past year. Thank you, Rev. Slomp, for this behind-the-scenes work. Beginning in January the new coordinator for this column will be Rev. R. Bredenhof. Thank you, Rev. Bredenhof, for helping us.

Our team is assisted by a number of regular contributors: Rev. C. Bouwman, Rev. W. Bredenhof, Rev. J. Moesker, Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff, Mr. O. Bouwman and Mr. K. Sikkema, Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman.

Their pens never stop flowing, and we are grateful for that. It makes the load lighter.

Thank you also to all who provide us with reports and pictures of interesting happenings in the churches. These submissions help keep our readers informed, allowing them to share in each other's joy.

As you know the written word on paper is being squeezed by a multitude of Internet options. We are therefore thankful to our loyal subscribers who support the magazine via subscriptions and advertising. Our collective aim is to spread the Word. We pray that the seed may fall into good soil and bear much fruit and so bring glory to our great and awesome God!

Greetings

Receive our greetings at this festive time of year. Celebrate the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ: *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.* Ephesians 1:7-9

What's New???

While eagerly scanning the many church bulletins faithfully emailed to see "What's New?" the conclusion often was, "not much." It probably was a reflection of the more relaxed pace of the summer months. With the resumption of the regular pace of life in late August and early September, items worthy of broader mention began to reappear.

The first item is not necessarily new, but is worth mentioning because it reminds us of a danger easily overlooked. The Committee of Management of the Bethel Church at Toronto wrote, "A few weeks ago a senior lady of Bethel was going to back up her car and at the very last moment noticed THREE little children sitting on the curb behind her car. PARENTS: children are not allowed to run unsupervised on the parking lot, the lawn: yes, but the traffic area: NO. Kindly read this with your children at the supper table and ask each one of them which part of NO they do not understand. . . ." These are words that apply to the situation in many church parking lots. For the safety of the children, parents in many other congregations may wish to read these words at the supper table.

The Council of the Fellowship Church in Burlington indicated a desire to do more justice to the proclamation of the Word also during a communion service. To that end they informed the congregation that they "decided

that for a one year test period, we will use the shorter form for Lord's Supper two out of three times." It was explained that:

The shorter form was used regularly in the past, when churches celebrated the Lord's Supper only three or four times per year. There was often "a table" in the afternoon service as well, at which the abbreviated form was read. This "table" was for those who were unable to attend the morning service because of family (or work) circumstances. Both forms were read every Lord's Supper Sunday. When churches moved to more frequent communion Sundays (six times per year), the afternoon communion services were discontinued. With more frequent communion (and the development of better baby-sitting facilities in our churches) councils decided that if family or work situations still would interfere with Lord's Supper attendance, families could work that out in an alternating way. (One time mom could stay home with the babies; next time dad: both could still participate in the Lord's Supper every four months.) Under our new protocol, the long form will be read twice per year: the abbreviated form, four times."

One can appreciate the effort to give sufficient room for the proclamation of the Word also during a service where the Lord's

Supper is celebrated. Going by memory, just around the time the churches adopted a short version of the Form, congregations that had a celebration of the Lord's Supper for the few who were not able to do it in the morning ceased doing that because they increased the number of celebrations per year. As such, the shorter form never functioned too much in the churches. Perhaps here is an opportunity to give this shorter form new life in the churches, although it may become necessary to change the title to "Alternate Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper." Of course it is also possible to reflect on a practice found within our Dutch ecclesiastical history of the congregation being served the bread and wine while sitting in the pews, as is done presently in some congregations. It would lead to a longer worship service than most are accustomed to, but probably not longer than present worship services where the Lord's Supper is celebrated.

In the Attercliffe Congregational News something caught my attention. It read:

The home-visits are normally read off the pulpit before the worship service; that will continue, but some visits will also be arranged via the phone, so that we do not have a long list for visiting ministers desperately trying to pronounce "P.K.S. Vanherdmaswier" and five families after the

Church News

Called by the church of Abbotsford, British Columbia:

Rev. D. VandeBurgt
of Glanbrook, Ontario.

Called by the church of Smithers, British Columbia:

Rev. J. Slaa
of Kerwood, Ontario.

Examined by Classis Pacific West on November 20, 2007 and declared eligible for ordination:

Candidate J. Witteveen

The ordination to the ministry as missionary for the church at Smithers took place on December 16, 2007, D.V.

announcement saying "Was that us?" Granted, a little overdone, but you get the idea. As elders, we are thankful for the good co-operation from the congregation in regards to arranging these visits. May the Lord continue to bless this important work.

Upon reading this, elders who have to call a number of families before they succeed in setting up a visit may say to themselves, "That is remarkable. How do they manage to make that work?" In the end, no matter what method is used, it is to be hoped that families make an effort to receive the elders when they call for a visit.

It was remarkable that after all the years of talking about the health and financial aspect of smoking it was necessary in two congregations for the ministers to write some words about it. In the Smithville "Family Post," the minister wrote:

While we will be talking about plans for a new church building on Wednesday, we still need to be careful with our existing building. Unfortunately, this reminder is necessary: two Sundays in a row, a fire was discovered at the south side of the annex. The first time it had just started and cigarette butts were found at the place. The week thereafter it took some more time before the fire was discovered, at the same place, and some damage was done, although not much yet. We can be thankful that we found it in time to prevent further damage, but it raises concerns about the safety of the church buildings and the manse. The fire was most likely caused by

someone carelessly throwing away a cigarette. Therefore this urgent plea, brothers and sisters: PLEASE DON'T SMOKE AT ALL, AND CERTAINLY NOT ANYWHERE ON THE CHURCH PROPERTY!

On the under side of the world, Rev. Rupke of the church at Bunbury wrote that the

Consistory has considered a request from some members of Bunbury to no longer allow smoking in the church building. After some discussion the consistory agreed to the request. The Lord God instructs us in 1 Corinthians 6 that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. It is beyond doubt that smoking is harmful for the smoker, for the people around him/her, and even for unborn children. It is therefore untruthful for the church to preach that Christians should live healthy lives, and then after the worship service see brs and srs turn around to light up another cigarette. Smoking sets a bad example for the brs and srs and most definitely for the youth of the church. Besides this it is a very bad witness to the world. The church of Jesus Christ should practice what she preaches. For these reasons, as of now, smoking is no longer allowed on the church grounds, at any time. Consistory hopes that this measure will also encourage and help those who are addicted to smoking, to give it up.

Finally, another little item from the churches Down Under that should encourage us in our efforts to express our thoughts about issues to our elected

representatives. In the Albany Congregational News it was mentioned that the Consistory had received a letter from their MLA Peter Watson in which he wished

To pass on his thanks to the congregation for helping him form a decision on a bill that recently came before Parliament, namely Human Reproductive Technology Amendment Bill 2007. He writes, "When the bill first came before the house, I did not have a strong view about it either way but the more I researched it and talked about it with people in Albany, the more I became concerned about the consequences of it. In the end it was a very simple issue for me. I voted against the bill on the grounds that embryos are human life and that these embryos are destroyed in the process of therapeutic cloning."

With this encouraging item we conclude our "What's New?"

build write express reflect love sing pray relate inspire encourage contribute write express reflect love sing pray relate inspire

roadside assistance

the magazine for Reformed young people

How can a young man keep his way pure?

By living according to your word. Ps 119:9

Roadside Assistance is a bimonthly magazine for and by Reformed youth. It aims to provide a forum for stimulating discussion about faith issues, encouraging each other in the fight of faith, passing on Bible knowledge, building and expressing identity as Christians, sharpening hearts and minds through Biblical reflection, stimulating reading on Biblical issues, and educating one another. As a way of spreading the excitement around the world, we will occasionally be publishing one of our articles as a column in Clarion. We hope you'll enjoy the magazine, and perhaps you'll even consider contributing.

www.roadsideassistancemagazine.com

Rewards from God: Do the Things I Do Really Matter?

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."

2 Corinthians 5:10

How easily we forget that everything matters, every thought, action, attitude, and every "careless word." They will all be taken into account in the next life. We need to remember that everything we do has eternal consequences. God promises rewards as well as judgment. What we need is an eternal perspective.

In the Beatitudes Jesus teaches that when you face persecution you are to "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." In Matthew 6, with reference to our finances, Jesus commands us to "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not

break in and steal." This applies to simple acts of kindness as well. Jesus teaches us in Mark 9, "Anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not



lose his reward." We need to know that the reward God will give on the day of judgment far surpasses the cost of doing good here.

However, the opposite does not hold true. We are not held accountable for the wrong we do. As children of God we are free from having to make payment.

However, we could possibly be missing out on the rewards that God promises to lavish on us for the good we do. We have to know that the future reward for obedience and the present joy of spiritual fellowship with God is greater than the pleasure of committing an act of sin. This is made very evident in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 where it says,

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

This is supported again in Ephesians 6:7 and 8, "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free," and Revelation 22:12, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done." This is not referring to levels in heaven; rather it is speaking of undisclosed gifts and rewards. Heaven, where God dwells, is for all who look to Him now. All his children will have fellowship with Him. However, within this relationship God will give us new bodies, a new earth, a new home, and new responsibilities and positions. The potential for God to reward within a restored fellowship with Him is infinite. After all, an infinitely powerful God is capable of infinite gift giving.

This knowledge of God's promise to reward us plays out everyday, moment to moment. Every time we are hurt or criticized, we are given the chance

to forgive and bless and receive eternal recognition. When we suffer, we are given the chance to bear-up, conscious of the refining work of God and receive eternal glory. If we help someone who cannot pay us back, be it an elderly parent with Alzheimer's,



an absent boss, or an ungrateful child, we will receive a reward many times over in the life beyond. When we diligently go about our day job, obey the laws of land, or empathize for a hurting friend, the Gift-Giver remains aware of our actions and our feelings. As we read in Hebrews

4:13, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." Similarly in Jeremiah 17:10 God says, "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." We need to live a life conscious of his watching.

For the unbeliever who rejects God, there is no possible reward. Even the good he does is as dirty rags because it fails to recognize God. Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Since faith is inherently connected to the Spirit, we see this reiterated in Romans 8:8-9, "Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." We see that the good God works in us through faith and the Holy Spirit is the only true good that pleases God and that which He will reward. Matthew 25:28-29 says, "Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." Therefore, we do not have room to be complacent. Rather, through prayer and petition, call on Him to shower you with his Spirit and join in the good works which we are created to do and so reap an eternal reward.



International Conference for Reformed Education II



Mr. Otto Bouwman is principal of Cornerstone Christian School in Lynden, Washington
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Despite the nervousness about getting across the border into America, everyone was assembled on time for the opening activities on Monday morning, September 24, at the picturesque Cedar Springs Christian Retreat in Sumas, WA. About twenty-five principals from most Canadian (and an American) Reformed schools had gathered for their biannual conference and this time there were many guests from outside North America as well: four attendees from Australia and over thirty from The Netherlands. After the necessary coffee had been consumed, hands had been shaken, expressions of surprise had been made at how little colleagues from other parts of the country/world had aged, and some new acquaintances had been introduced, it was time for the real work to begin.

Apko Nap, retired principal (William of Orange, Cloverdale), was in charge of the proceedings and pleasantly made sure that all events began and ended in a timely fashion. His self-restraint was evident; his stories were few. During his opening remarks, he

made reference to the first International Conference for Reformed Education held a few years ago in The Netherlands. There the focus had been on reflecting on the character, identity, and purpose of Reformed education. Here the focus would be on the how of intersecting faith and learning. The first speaker to whom Nap handed the podium was well-suited for the challenge of addressing this question.

Keynote #1: VanderArk

Dan VanderArk, who until two years ago was the Executive Director of Christian Schools International, is a retired teacher and principal who still has an amazing ability to passionately present the information that he wishes to share. Because the topic of his keynote address was "Faith and Life at the Intersection," area ministers had been invited to join us for the day and several were in attendance. A summary of his presentation can hardly do it justice, but the following represent a few of the key points he sought to focus on in his presentation. After he had

observed that there appeared to be insufficient correlation amongst many of today's people between their faith and the rest of their life, he sought to describe Christian day school education that would help our children to see and to live life wholly. He used the metaphor of driving a car down one road (secular life) and coming to an intersection with another road (piety). Our life is to be lived at this crossroads so that we are deliberately integrating our Christian piety with every area of our life. Then he also sought to briefly describe some teaching strategies that would help our students see life in that united manner. Some of the strategies he mentioned included direct instruction (just teach it!), telling stories, challenging staff members and students to practice the Christian life, connecting classroom teaching to the "real world," showing connections to students between theory and practice, and testing to see if students have picked up the connections that teachers have attempted to teach. Because of his passion in presentation and


straightforwardness of content, this address “struck a chord.”

Several people had the opportunity to provide a formal response to this first presentation. Dr. Pieter Vos, one of the educators from The Netherlands, responded rather surprisingly critically. Though appreciative of the overall goals of VanderArk, he had several objections. He was much more favorably disposed towards Kuyper’s sphere sovereignty concept than VanderArk had been. He furthermore cautioned against a too literal interpretation of Scriptures, instead advocating viewing the Bible as a meta-narrative, so that we no longer just focus “on the sum of revealed words of knowledge, but on God’s story with people.” Lastly, he suggested that the scientific revolution had “caused many domains to have become independent and no longer directly related to religion;” current classrooms therefore need to grapple with that reality.

The other responders – Christine VanHalen-Faber and Tim DeVos (from Australia) – used the opportunity to echo the main points made by VanderArk, appreciative of connections between home, church, and school and appealing for that to continue. VanHalen-Faber did question the metaphor of an intersection and suggested an alternative metaphor instead: as the individual threads in weaving cloth are completely intertwined with each other, so our faith must be intertwined with every area of our lives. Both speakers reminded all in attendance how important it is that we model integration of faith in all areas of our life, in the classroom and outside of it. After all, our students and parents watch us every day.

Keynote #2: Oosterhoff

The second keynote speaker on the first day was Dr. Freda Oosterhoff. She has written numerous times regarding educationally-related topics, so the bulk of her presentation covered relatively familiar territory. Nonetheless, she challenged us to take stock of what we are doing and to ask ourselves some hard questions. For example, do our high schools treat science and the challenges connected to evolutionary thinking sufficiently seriously? Do we adequately prepare our graduates to cope with the attacks they will face in secular institutions of higher learning?

*Do we
adequately 
prepare our
graduates to
serve God in their
respective areas
of work and study
– responsibly
and
responsively?*

In light of that, she pleaded that we get busy with teaching apologetics in our schools, “as a defensive strategy, a means of helping students deal with the attacks upon the faith by a materialistic scientism and other secular forces.” Additionally, she reminded us, apologetics is also an offensive strategy in order to

spread the faith. She views the lack of apologetics as a weakness in our schools; graduates need to be more equipped to articulate their reformed Christian views over against the spirits of our age.

The responders to Oosterhoff’s speech were kind. Rev. James Visscher, Pete Witten (Australia), and Huib VanLeeuwen (The Netherlands) all underlined various aspects of her presentation, including her passion for more deliberate teaching of worldview in the classrooms and the development of an apologetics course at the senior high school level. Reminders were given that the work with the youth of the covenant be not only in theory, but also in practice, a combined activity between the homes, the church, and the school.

Other activities

On Monday evening, there was an organized discussion related to the day’s presentations. Despite the impediments that arose because of the language issues – after all, it is a challenge to not only speak about some of the philosophical/big picture aspects of education in a foreign language, but it can also be a challenge to understand someone else attempting to do that – a good dialogue could be had. The consensus was that VanderArk and Oosterhoff had taught us well and again reminded us of many essentials related to Christian education. There was even a specific outcome to the day: an international committee was formed to explore the role of apologetics in our Reformed high schools, including developing and providing resources and support to teachers in all subject areas.

During the next two days, there were a series of workshops presented that were also related to the integration of faith and learning. Some workshops were led by Dutch instructors, others by Canadian Reformed teachers, and a few by some other invited guests to the conference, including Dr. Arnold Sikkema (Trinity Western) and Dr. John VanDyke (Dordt). Attendees selected portions from this smorgasbord of opportunities and in all likelihood had a variety of responses: confirmed that some things happening in our schools are great, challenged that other things need to be modified, that much more aware of how much we still have to learn, and grateful for God's blessings in all of life.

By conference end on Wednesday afternoon, gratitude and exhaustion were evident amongst all. The idyllic setting at Cedar Springs, the Pacific North West's weather, the food, and the fellowship had all served to enhance the conference activities. The conference organizers, John Roukema and Piet Torenvliet,

were thanked for the excellent work they had done. Because the conference had been a successful one, voices expressed the hope that a third international educational conference could be held three years from now, in The Netherlands, where the dialogue could continue about how the integration of faith and learning can best take place.

Comparisons

I cannot speak for the Dutch delegates and summarize what they thought about it all. Nor can my assessment be considered as the combined assessment of all North Americans/Australians in attendance. But nonetheless, a few realities became very apparent to me during the time we spent together. We were united by a common bond of faith. During the regular devotions, we sang numerous Psalms and hymns. Dan VanderArk commented on the reality that it had been a long time since he had heard such enthusiastic singing. (In that connection, he also shared this

truism with us: "Show me the songs you sing with your children and I will tell you what doctrine they will have when they are forty.") Since there was a common appeal to Scriptures and to the heritage we have received, there was an immediate comfort level with each other.

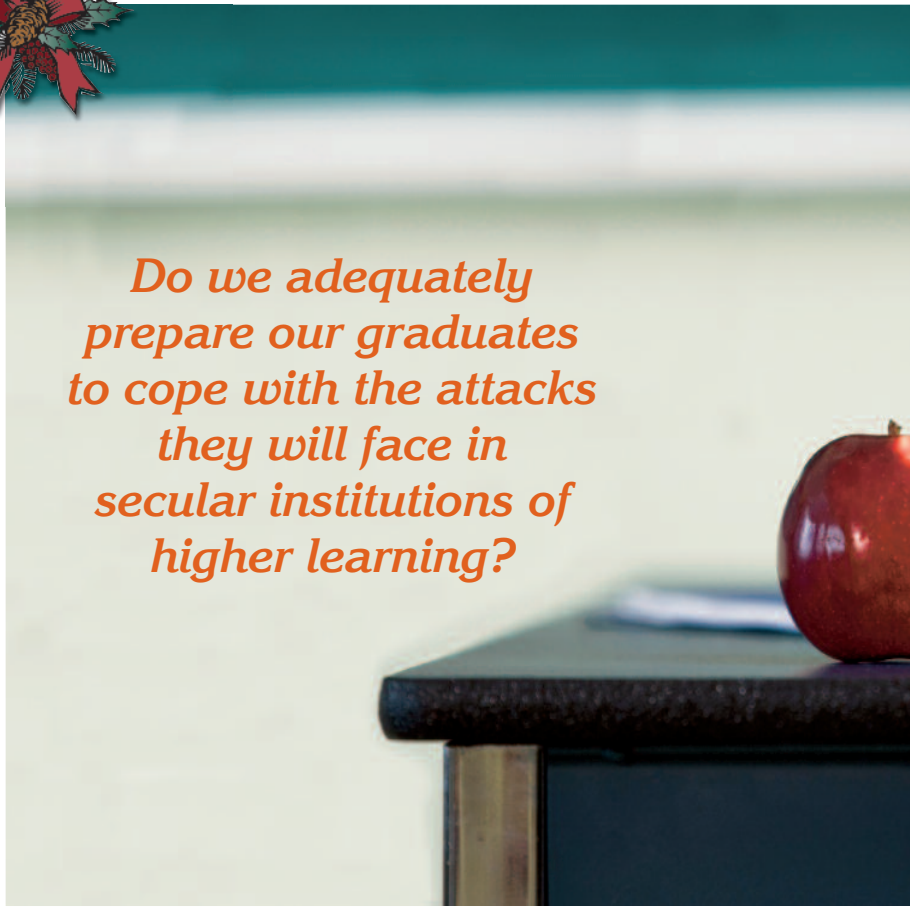
But the differences between cultures and school systems also became evident. Because of the very different context in which the Dutch teach, with their huge regional high schools with thousands of children, numerous teachers there feel like they operate almost entirely without any parental involvement. Several of them passionately advised us to continue to cultivate the home/school connections, because they had lost them, and were much poorer with that development. My appreciation for the North American context, with smaller school communities and significant amounts of parental involvement in the governance and operation of the school, only increased.





Another difference also became very clear. In The Netherlands a lot of attention is paid to the context in which the education functions, including the culture and the digital media that leads and is reflective of it. In North America and Australia, though, much more attention is paid to the active relationship between church and school. The latter is more and more difficult to achieve in The Netherlands because of the influence of all kinds of Reformed and non-Reformed churches and societies that the children come from. Participants are not automatically in sync with each other anymore. As a matter of fact, some of the Dutch delegates conceded that there is no use trying to breathe new life into the home/church/school triangle concept, or to use that model to reawaken a Reformed identity in their schools; the unity of purpose between home, church, and school simply is no longer a reality. Again, my appreciation for the unity of purpose that we experience between church and school was reinforced.

Several people suggested that in another decade or two North American schools are likely to face the same challenges the Dutch have today. I am not sure about that. If parents maintain ownership of schools here, then many problems faced there will not necessarily be duplicated here. After all, because of full government support, Dutch



*Do we adequately
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to cope with the attacks
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higher learning?*

parents have not made a financial investment in the school, and hence feel far less ownership of the institution than we enjoy here.

Though today there are, and tomorrow will be, problems in our schools, I believe linkages between homes, churches, and schools will go a long way to helping our schools stay "on track."

Numerous times during the conference, the following verse from Deuteronomy 32 was quoted: "Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as the droplets on the fresh grass and as the showers on the herb." Teachers, like everyone else, need God's blessing on their work. We were also reminded we need to enjoy our work: Teachers need to have

several characteristics to be successful: love of God, love of students, love of subject area, and an ability to communicate these loves. May this conference have served to equip educational leaders from around the world to do their work joyfully and fruitfully, so that the next generation is taught the deeds of the Lord, so that they too, in turn, can pass on that heritage to their children.

*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
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Getting the Gospel Right: Assessing the Reformation and New Perspectives on Paul

Cornelis P. Venema (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006).

Additional Information:
Paperback, 92 pages, \$6.00 US.

This is a short little book dealing with an important, relevant topic. Though not really in the Canadian Reformed churches, the doctrine of justification is under debate elsewhere in the Reformed/Presbyterian community. Most of this debate takes place in connection with the so-called Federal Vision. However, it seems to have roots in what has been called the New Perspective(s) on Paul (NPP).

This book is an entry-level introduction to the NPP from a Reformed perspective. The author is a United Reformed minister, a professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary and also president of that institution. *Getting the Gospel Right* is a shorter, popular version of another book recently published by Banner of Truth, *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ*.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first section, Venema outlines "the Reformation perspective on Paul." This perspective essentially boils down to five key features: 1) Justification is a principal theme of the gospel; 2) Justification is primarily a theological and soteriological (having to do with the doctrine of salvation) theme; 3) the Reformation claimed that the

medieval Roman Catholic doctrine of justification emphasized obedience to the law as a partial, meritorious basis for justification; 4) the Reformers insisted that "works of the law" in Paul refer to any acts of obedience to the law which are then regarded as a ground for acceptance with God; 5) the righteousness of God is something that God freely grants and imputes to believers.

In the next section, Venema outlines the "New Perspective on Paul." He does this by laying out the views of three scholars: E.P. Sanders, D.G. Dunn, and N.T. Wright. The NPP has been critical of the Reformation perspective on Paul. I think Venema fairly lays out their views in this chapter. Because of his influence, Venema spends the most time with Wright. He notes that Wright is unclear and obscure on certain important issues such as his understanding about the work of Christ. When speaking about what the gospel is, Wright emphasizes the Lordship of Christ. Venema notes that this emphasis "suggests that his view has more affinity with what historians of doctrine term the 'classic' or 'victory over the powers' conception than the penal-satisfaction emphasis of the Reformation" (p. 56). Because of his emphasis on the question of who belongs to the covenant (as being the question that justification seeks to answer in Paul's writings), "He does not articulate a doctrine of the atonement along the lines of classic Protestant theology" (p. 57).

The last substantial section features a longer critique of the views of Sanders, Dunn, and Wright. He believes (rightly) that the rejection of the Reformation

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof



perspective is partly based on confusion between Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism. The Reformers never said that the Roman Catholic doctrine was Pelagian or (speaking anachronistically) that the Judaists of Paul's day taught Pelagianism. Rather the charge was one of semi-Pelagianism. This is just one problem among several that Venema highlights in this chapter.

Venema concludes, "Though it may be admitted that the new perspective has illumined some significant aspects of Paul's understanding of the gospel, its claims to offer a more satisfying interpretation of Paul's gospel than that of the Reformation seem at best overstated, and at worst clearly wrong (p. 91)." I'm looking forward to reading the longer version of this book. I can certainly recommend this one to those looking for a place to start in trying to understand the controversies rocking many North American Reformed churches.

If I have just one small beef, it's the use of Internet sources in some of the footnotes. Though this book was published last year (2006), some of the links no longer work. Since authors like N. T. Wright have a wide following, one can Google the titles and find them, but it is a bit of a nuisance. I'm not sure how a problem like that can be solved.

**Press Release of Classis
Central Ontario, September
21, 2007**

1. On behalf of the convening church of Flamborough the Rev. J. DeGelder opened the meeting with Scripture reading and prayer.
2. The credentials were examined by the delegates of Burlington-Waterdown and were found to be in good order. There were no instructions.
3. Classis was declared constituted and the officers suggested by the previous classis were appointed: Chairman: Rev. J.L. van Popta; Vice-chairman: Rev. G. Nederveen; Clerk: Rev. M.R. Jagt.
4. In his memorabilia the chairman mentioned that Rev. Jagt had received a call to the church at Taber and Rev. DeGelder received a call to the church at Owen Sound and wished them wisdom in their deliberations. He also remembered the four retired ministers of the churches in the classis: C. Bosch, J. Mulder, J. DeJong, and D. DeJong and noted that, with the exception of Dr. DeJong's health concern, they were doing well.
5. The proposed agenda was adopted with an addition of some incoming mail.
6. Reports:
 - 6.1 Burlington-South reported on the inspection of the archives and noted several discrepancies. Some parts were clarified and a trace will be placed on the one missing item.
 - 6.2 The treasurer, Br. H. J. Sloots, reported on the financial situation of the classis. He indicated that there were sufficient funds in the past year. He suggested that the

assessment for the next year remain at \$2.00 per communicant member. The assessment for Regional Synod East was also \$2.00.

- 6.3 Burlington-Waterdown presented its audit of the books of the treasurer and reported that the books were found to be in good order. The treasurer was discharged from his responsibility for the previous year.

- 6.4 Flamborough presented its report on the Fund for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry. There are sufficient funds. The bank balance at the time of the report was around \$5,900. No requests for funds were made in the past year. Flamborough recommended that for 2008 the assessment be \$2.00 per communicant member. This recommendation was not adopted since the fund has not been used and the buffer of \$5000 has been reached. There will be no assessment for the coming year.

- 6.5 Burlington-Waterdown submitted its audit of the Fund for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry and stated that the books were found to be in good order. The church of Flamborough was discharged of its duties with respect to the previous year.

- 6.6 The report from the Committee for Needy Churches indicated that the church at Ottawa is seeking continued support. This support was granted and the churches are assessed \$15.00 per communicant

member. This is a decrease from the previous year.

- 6.7 Burlington-Waterdown submitted its audit of the books of the Fund for Needy Churches and reported that the books were found to be in good order. The bank balance was approximately \$7,200 at the time of the report. The treasurer of the Fund was discharged of his duties with respect to the previous year.

All the reports were received with thankfulness. The chairman thanked the churches and the individuals for their faithfulness in their service to Classis.

7. Question period according to Article 44 CO:
In reply to the questions asked by the chairman "whether the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured, and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of Classis for the proper government of their church," all the churches answered the first two questions in the affirmative and none of the churches sought the help or judgment of Classis. The chairman expressed gratitude to the Lord that the work in the churches continues unhindered.
8. Correspondence received: an appeal from a brother and sister was dealt with in closed session.
9. Appointments:
 - 9.1 For the next classis:
Convening church: Ottawa;
date: Dec. 14, 2007.
Suggested officers:
Chairman: J. DeGelder;

Vice-chairman: J.L. van Popta; Clerk: G. Nederveen

9.2 Appointments per Article 7 of the Classical Regulations:

- a. Committee of Examiners
 - Coordinators: W. den Hollander and J. Huijgen
 - Exegesis O.T.: G. Nederveen
 - Exegesis N.T.: M.R. Jagt
 - Knowledge of Scripture: J.L. van Popta
 - Doctrine and Creeds: J. DeGelder
 - Church History: W. den Hollander
 - Ethics: J. DeGelder
- Church Polity: G. Nederveen
- Diaconiology: J. Huijgen
- b. Church Visitors: J. DeGelder, W. den Hollander, J. Huijgen, and G. Nederveen.
- c. Church for taking care of the Archives: Burlington Ebenezer
- d. Church to inspect the Archives: Burlington Fellowship
- e. Treasurer: H. J. Sloots, 568 Dynes Rd, Burlington, ON L7N 2V2 905-637-7109
- f. Alternate: G. J. Nordeman (Burlington Ebenezer)
- g. Church to audit the Books of Classical Treasurer: Burlington-Waterdown
- h. Church for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry: Flamborough
- i. Church for auditing the Books of Fund Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry: Burlington-Waterdown
- j. Committee for Needy Churches: Harry Sloots (Ebenezer – 2010) as treasurer Earl Schouten (Flamborough – 2008) Albert VanTol (Fellowship – 2009)

k. Church to audit the Books of the Fund Needy Churches: Burlington-Waterdown

l. Observers Free Church of Scotland: G. Nederveen.

9.3 Delegates to the Regional Synod East to be convened on November 14, 2007:

- a. Ministers: J. DeGelder and J.L. van Popta
 - b. Alternates: G. Nederveen and W. den Hollander (in that order)
 - c. Elders: J.H. Harsevoort and L. Jagt
 - d. Alternates: C. Van Dam and W. VanHuisstede (in that order)
10. Question period was used. It was noted that Rev. W. den Hollanders is currently in PNG visiting the mission field.
11. Censure according to Art. 34 CO was not necessary.
12. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved.
13. The chairman requested the brothers to sing Psalm 127:1 and led in closing prayer.
- For Classis Central Ontario,
September 21, 2007
G. Nederveen*

Press Release of Classis Northern Ontario, September 21, 2007, Orangeville

Rev. E. Kampen, on behalf of the convening church, called the meeting of the delegates to order. He requested the singing of Psalm 146:1, 3, read from Hebrews 13, spoke some words about this passage, and led in prayer. He then mentioned some memorabilia:

- 1. Rev. C. Vermeulen has left the church of Elora to take up his call in Darling Downs, Western Australia. The church of Elora has since extended a call to Rev. D. Vandeburgt of Glanbrook, but this call was declined.

2. The church of Owen Sound is now vacant and the church of Grand Valley is no longer vacant since Rev. P. Feenstra has taken up his calling in Grand Valley. The church of Owen Sound has since extended a call to Rev. J. DeGelder.

3. Rev. J. VanWoudenberg has declined a call from the church of Grace-Winnipeg and Smithers.

After the credentials were found to be in good order, the moderamen took their place: Rev. Feenstra as chairman, Rev. D.G.J. Agema as clerk, and Rev. VanWoudenberg as vice-chairman. The agenda was adopted.

Reports were received regarding the following:

- 1. Church visitations to the churches of Brampton, Elora, Guelph, and Orangeville. These were all received with gratitude.
- 2. Inspection of the classical archives (Orangeville): it was noted that some items are missing. The archivist church was asked to look after this. It was also noted that in the Acts of Classis the agenda should be included.
- 3. Treasurer (Br. F. Hoekstra): the current balance is \$2,819.47. Classis approved the assessment of 2.00 per communicant member.
- 4. Audit of the treasurer's books (Owen Sound): the treasurer's books are in good order.
- 5. Fund for financial aid to students for the ministry (Guelph): the fund balance is \$5,627.78; there have been no requests for assistance in the past year. Classis approved the recommendation that no further funds be collected at this time.
- 6. Audit of the fund for financial aid to students for the ministry (Fergus Maranatha): the fund is in good order.

7. Audit of the fund for needy churches (Fergus Maranatha): the fund is in good order.

All the churches affirmed that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued and that the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. Two churches requested advice in matters of discipline.

Rev. B. Westerveld sent his regrets that he could not attend as an observer from the l'Église Réformée du Quebec. Rev. A. Merwin, fraternal delegate from Classis Southern Ontario of the URCNA, spoke words of greeting and encouragement, addressing also some matters that arose from Synod Schererville of the URCNA.

The following appointments were made regarding the next classis: convening church: Owen Sound. Suggested date: Dec. 21, 2007 at 9:00 am. Suggested officers: chairman: Rev. W. Geurts, clerk: Rev. Feenstra, vice-chairman: Rev. Agema.

The following yearly appointments were made:

1. Examination of students:
 - a. Committee of examiners: Rev. Feenstra, Rev. Van Woudenberg
 - b. Examiner on Old Testament exegesis: Rev. M. VanLuik


- c. Examiner on New Testament exegesis: Rev. VanWoudenberg
 - d. Examiner on Doctrine and Creeds: Rev. Feenstra
 - e. Examiner on Knowledge of Scripture: Rev. Geurts
 - f. Examiner on Church History: Rev. Kampen
 - g. Examiner on Ethics: Rev. Kampen
 - h. Examiner on Church Polity: Rev. Geurts
 - i. Examiner on Diaconology: Rev. Agema.
2. Church Visitors: Rev. Agema, Rev. Feenstra (convener), Rev. VanLuik, Rev. VanWoudenberg, Rev. Kampen, Rev. Geurts
 3. Church for taking care of the archives: Owen Sound
 4. Treasurer: Br. F. Hoekstra, 885 30th Street West, R.R. 7, Owen Sound, ON N4K 6V5
 5. Church to audit the records of the treasurer: Owen Sound
 6. Church for financial aid to students for the ministry: Guelph
 7. Church for auditing the books of the fund for financial aid to students for the ministry: Fergus Maranatha
 8. Committee for Needy Churches: Br. F. Westrik (2008), Br. C. VanRaalte (2009), Br. J. Hutten (2010)

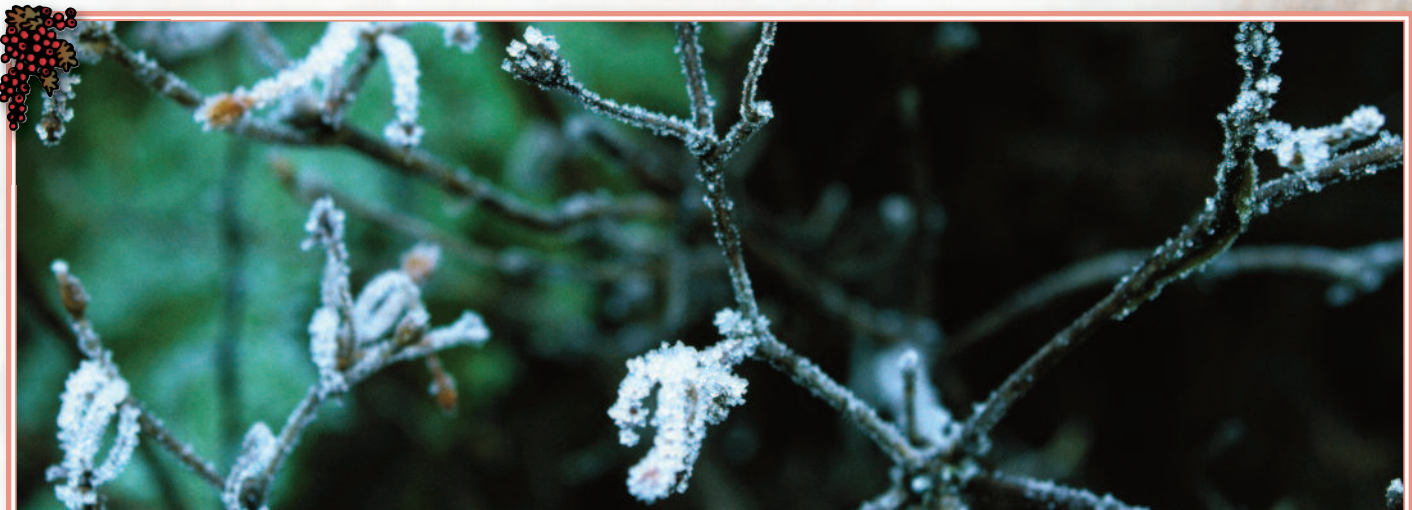
9. Church for auditing the books of the fund for needy churches: Fergus Maranatha
10. Church – Neighbour: Brampton – Guelph, Grand Valley – Orangeville, Elora – Fergus North, Guelph – Fergus Maranatha, Fergus North – Owen Sound, Orangeville – Brampton, Fergus Maranatha – Elora, Owen Sound – Grand Valley

The following were delegated to Regional Synod East Nov 14, 2007. Ministers: Rev. Geurts, Rev. VanLuik; Alternate Delegates (in order): Rev. Feenstra; Rev. Agema. Elders: Br. M. Brouwer, Br. J. Jonker; Alternate Delegates (in order): Br. B. Kottelenberg, Br. K. Sikkema.

Regarding observers, the convening church for next classis was instructed to:

1. Invite observers to the next classis from Classis Southern Ontario of the URCNA and from the ERQ
2. Send a delegation to classis Southern Ontario of the URCNA. After the Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved, the chairman requested the singing of Hymn 43:1, 3 and led in prayer. Classis was closed.

*Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
(clerk, e.t.)* 



Year-End Review 2007

Living in uncertain times

*I*t is customary in this last issue of the year of our Lord 2007 that we spend some time looking back over what has transpired in our churches over the last twelve months. Before we proceed to do that, however, it is necessary to place this recent history within a larger framework.

The first framework is the country and world in which we live. Thus far 2007 has supplied us with an ample dose of instability, distress, and uncertainty. Take the economic picture as an example. As this is being written the Canadian dollar is climbing to new heights, as are gold and oil. Parts of the economy, especially those having to do with natural resources, are doing very well. On the other hand, manufacturing is in trouble. South of the border there is major difficulty as the practice of sub-prime mortgage lending is proving to be an exceedingly bad approach to house financing. Massive government debt load connected to the war in Iraq is also doing its damage. In short, as 2007 winds down and we move into 2008, there is every indication that financial turbulence will continue and that economic downturn has arrived.

And then there is the environmental front, where the defenders and detractors of global warming continue to duke it out. No matter who wins the fight, there is no denying that something is wrong with our climate: abnormal fall temperatures in Ontario, a rapidly receding arctic ice cap, huge wild fires in California, severe drought in the south eastern USA and south western Australia. The list of abnormalities is growing.

On another front too there is growing concern. Almost all of the western nations are in the midst of moral meltdown. Marriage as an institution is being supplanted by common law and live-in arrangements. Children are increasingly being conceived outside of a stable home structure. Drugs and alcohol are cutting a wide swath of death and destruction through our society.

All in all, it is neither a pretty nor comforting picture. And then I have touched on only a few concerns. A deeper and wider look would cause us all to enter a new year in a depressed state of mind.

Thankfully though, there is another framework in the lives of believers. It is bigger than either country or world. It is the framework of God and of his universal rule. Economic uncertainties, environmental crisis, and widespread moral decay are all huge subjects but they are not bigger than our God. He continues to direct and govern all things through his Son and by his Spirit. Hence, even though our fears may be many, they are countered by our faith and confidence in the Lord. The conviction that He knows what He is doing gives peace to our fragile souls and hope to our daily lives.

Yes, and then there is also the awareness that He continues to sustain and direct us. In both Canada and the United States, our churches have many reasons to be thankful for blessings received.

Synod Smithers 2007

The year 2007 was a general synod year. In May of this year delegates traveled by airplane, car, and motor home to the remote, beautiful, northern British Columbia town of Smithers. They also did so in larger numbers than ever before as the previous synod had decided that the number of delegates would be increased from sixteen to twenty-four.

Once there it did not take long for the delegates to get down to work in the spacious, new facilities of the Smithers church building. Decisions were made on a wide variety of matters. New sister church relations were entered into with churches in Quebec and New Zealand. Others were declined or postponed. Current relationships with churches in Australia, Brazil, Korea, Scotland, South Africa, The Netherlands, and United States were reviewed and continued, as well as blessed with the presence of a large number of visiting delegates from at home and abroad. The work of the various committees dealing



with the United Reformed Churches was scrutinized and new mandates were given. Our membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) had the attention of the brothers. It was decided to apply for membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). Decisions were made relating to the Theological College and the *Book of Praise*. Any number of appeals from churches and individuals were heard, discussed and answered.

In the meantime the *Acts* have appeared and many churches are busy reading, discussing, and weighing the decisions made. No doubt some will be challenged and appealed, but there is little doubt that also through the decisions of Synod Smithers 2007 our churches will continue to move forward under the blessing of the Lord.

Churches and ministers

Every year there is also movement in the churches as members and ministers continue to shift from here to there. Of course it is not possible to mention all of member movements here, but the ministerial movements are manageable.

In Ontario the church at Ottawa will soon be vacant as its minister, the Rev. M. Jagt and his family, make plans to move to Taber, Alberta. Rev. C. Vermeulen went back to the land of his birth, as he and his family left Elora and moved to Australia. Rev. P. Feenstra did not want to go that far so he shifted from Owen Sound to Grand Valley. Meanwhile, the Fellowship Church at Burlington received a new pastor in the person of the Rev. J. van Popta.

In Manitoba, Grace Canadian Reformed Church became vacant when the Rev. K. Jonker was granted early retirement. The Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church saw its vacancy filled when the Rev. J. Poppe and his family arrived from Albany, Western Australia.

Further south and across the line, the church at Denver learned that it too will be dealing with vacancy as the Rev. D. Boersma decided to accept a call to do mission work in South Africa.

In Alberta, except for one church, all of the churches currently have ministers and the status of that one church, the church at Taber, is about to change when Rev. Jagt arrives. Then the score will be 8 – 0 (8 filled, 0 vacancies).

In BC the situation is not quite so rosy. The church at Smithers saw its minister accept a call to the mission work in Brazil and hence had to bid farewell to the Rev. J. VanSpronsen and his family. Their sadness, however, was somewhat offset by the news that Candidate J. Witteveen had decided to accept the call that Smithers had extended to him to work among the native population in Prince George.

Further to the south, the first day of 2007 confronted the church at Abbotsford with a new reality as the Rev. R. Schouten left and it was now vacant. Abbotsford's loss, however, proved to its neighbour's gain, as Rev. Schouten became the pastor and teacher of the nearby church at Aldergrove. Further to the east, the church at Chilliwack saw its long wait, as well as its vacancy, come to an end with the arrival of the Rev. R. Ijbema from The Netherlands.

By the time all of the dust had settled towards the end of the year, the federation was left with vacancies in the following churches: Abbotsford, Attercliffe, Denver, Elora, Hamilton, Lincoln, Ottawa, Owen Sound, Smithers, Willoughby Heights, and Winnipeg (Grace). Almost all of these churches either continued or commenced the challenging work of calling a new minister.

One other vacancy should be added to the list as the federation was blessed with the arrival and institution of the new Providence Church between Ancaster and Hamilton. We welcome this new congregation to the federation. It brings the total number of churches in the federation to fifty-four.

Anniversaries, sickness, and death

2007 also proved to be a special year in the ministry for a number of pastors and teachers. Rev. C. Bouwman of Yarrow celebrated his twenty-fifth year in the ministry, Rev. H. Versteeg of Chatham his thirtieth, the Revs. Cl. Stam of Hamilton and J. Visscher of Langley their thirty-fifth, Prof. J. Geertsema, emeritus professor of the Theological College, his

fortieth, and the Rev. M. van Beveren of Edmonton (Providence) his fiftieth. Congratulations to you all and may the Lord bless your labours of the past and in the future!

A quiz question: who has been in the Canadian Reformed ministry, both active and retired, the longest? It is the Rev. W.W.J. VanOene who in 2007 reached his sixty-fourth year, with fifty-five of those years being in Canada.

During the year the churches also continued to pray for sick ministers, professors, their wives, and families. Special mention goes to the Rev. Cl. Stam in Hamilton and Prof. J. De Jong, also in Hamilton. Especially the De Jong family is faced with a heavy burden as they continue to care for a seriously ill husband and father. Thankfully, they receive a lot of support both from below and above. As this is being written there continue to be concerns as well for Sr. A. Geertsema, the wife of Prof. Geertsema, as she hovered for days near death's door but at last word appears to be rallying. No doubt the many prayers for her will be heard but may the Lord also answer them with a return to health.

You will understand that I could well add to this list of the ailing; however, most of them would not want me to mention them. Still, the Lord and their congregations know them, and that's really what matters.

Finally, it should also be mentioned that 2007 saw the passing of Sr. N. van Popta in Langley, BC. She was the wife of the late Rev. J.T. van Popta and was widowed in 1968. During her widowhood she raised a large family and will be remembered by them and all who knew her as a lady full of faith, grace and class, as well as many memorable and humorous slips of the tongue.

Gatherings and travels

This year now rapidly drawing to a close also saw its share of gatherings and travels. In Ontario there was a large gathering of Canadian Reformed and United Reformed ministers and professors to discuss the state of our relations as well as some synodical decisions, along with their interpretation and ramifications. The month of November saw a Western Canada Ministerial Conference in Edmonton. Topics included: Islam, how to exegete a certain biblical passage, as well as preach on another, ministerial burnout and depression, ministerial finances, book talks, and a lot of relationship building.

Increasingly our emeritus ministers are seeing the world, especially the world down under as the Revs. B. Berends and J. Van Rietschoten helped out churches in Australia. Rev. C. VanSpronsen and his wife were in South Africa again. Profs. Geertsema and C. van Dam, along with the Revs. F. Dong and J. Visscher, spent time in another country that most of you know about. The latter two also visited the sister churches in Western Australia. Rev. A. Souman was also on the move this year as he went to visit churches in Timor. Around the time you receive this issue in the mail, Profs. A. J. de Visser and C. Van Dam will be in Africa teaching and advising. In short, the world is becoming smaller and the requests for our pastors and professors to assist churches elsewhere continue to grow.

The Theological College in Hamilton

Our Theological College moves closer and closer to its fortieth year of existence and during that time it has served the churches exceedingly well. What many back in 1968 regarded as a premature decision, namely to establish a college, has proven to be a wise one indeed.

This year four students graduated (Dmitry Kiselev from St. Petersburg, Dave De Jong from Hamilton, Jim Witteveen from Abbotsford, and Jaeman Choi from Korea). Also five students were admitted (Brian Bosscher from Grassie, Abel Pol from Carman, Justin Roukema from Langley, Steve Van de Velde from Houston, and Ted VanSpronsen from Calgary). At present the student body consists of eighteen students.

In addition to teaching their regular courses, the professors were also out and about. Prof. N.H. Gootjes visited the churches in BC. Prof. G. Visscher went to Winnipeg and spoke at a conference dealing with the Federal Vision and New Perspectives on



Paul. Prof. C. Van Dam was in Edmonton speaking on the elder in the OT. Also, Profs. Gootjes and Van Dam traveled to Chicago and attended a conference dealing with justification and faith.

Various decisions of Synod Smithers also had a bearing on the College. One had to do with the Pastoral Training Program and the creation of a national fund to assist the students. Another delayed action on a proposal to appoint a fifth professor and instead mandated the Board of Governors to initiate a comprehensive review of the College in order to identify future needs. Such a periodic review has become a standard practice in other theological institutions on this continent.

Foreign mission

The mission work of the churches in various parts of the world continues to be richly blessed. In Brazil the Rev. K. Wieske, missionary of the Church at Surrey, remains hard at work in the city of Recife and spends much time on assisting the fledgling federation of Reformed churches. An ever-increasing number of contacts continue to keep him busy too and he is looking forward to the arrival of Rev. VanSpronsen and his family.

In the meantime a large conference property has been purchased as a place for the missionaries to live and also as a place for the Recife churches to gather. In very quick order the funds for the property were raised and the latest word is that it has been completely paid for. Many thanks to all of you donors in Canada, the United States, Australia, and elsewhere for your generosity!

Further south, the churches of Marigogi and Sao Jose continue to let their light shine. The large and excellent Christian school there, under the able leadership of Br. Moizes, is a major force drawing attention to the existence and vitality of the Reformed faith.

Going even more south, we come to Maceio where the Rev. B. de Graaf, missionary of the Church at Hamilton, labours. By all accounts the work there is progressing and the foundation for a sound Reformed church is being laid. Also, a Christian school has been established and keeps on growing. It includes both children from the church and from the community and serves a real need as local schools are often not able to offer quality education.

Moving to another part of the world, we come to Papua New Guinea where the Church at Toronto is



very active through its missionary, the Rev. S. 't Hart and his Mission Worker, Br. W. Vanderheide. From their reports it would appear that more and more of their time is being spent on the work of missionary training. As such this represents not just a local trend but a global one as sending churches everywhere realize that the work of planting new churches is best done by the people native to the area. After all, they know the culture and the language and the cost to support them is considerably less than of Western missionaries who eventually need to be repatriated. As well, the reluctance of more and more governments to grant visas to foreign missionaries plays a role.

To the west of Papua New Guinea lies the island of Timor, Indonesia. Here the church at Smithville is active through its missionary, the Rev. E. Dethan. Synod Smithers received a request to enter into evangelical fellowship with the church there; however, it decided that a final decision could not be made at this time due to a number of obstacles being present. More can be learned about this from the *Acts of Synod 2007* and from reports in *Mission News*. In the meantime the work of evangelism and training goes on in Timor and is being blessed.

Far to the north of Indonesia lies the nation of China, a powerhouse in terms of population and economic activity. In it there is a very large but unknown number of growing underground house churches. Many of these churches were formerly part of the government recognized and approved Three-Self Church but left because of liberal teachings and practices. Through actual visitation, word of mouth and electronic means word has gotten out about our churches and the Reformed faith. The result is that currently the Urban Mission Board (UMB) of churches of Cloverdale and Langley is being overwhelmed with requests for help.

Under the leadership of a very special missionary and with the assistance of others, these requests are being addressed as best as possible. Currently, under the auspices of the UMB, a member of our sister churches in Australia is living and teaching in China. Also this past summer a retired professor and his wife were there for two months to teach and advise. Finally, the minister mentioned above was there several times meeting with house churches and house church leaders, giving advice and direction.

Unfortunately security concerns prevent the UMB from passing along to you all of the wonderful and miraculous stories of what the Lord is doing in China, but be aware that the gospel is making great inroads everywhere in that vast, mysterious and beautiful land. Also, you should realize that the word "Reformed," which really does have negative connotations in the Chinese language, is increasingly being used and worn as a badge of honour. At present there are budding Reformed churches in the north, center, south, and east of China, and more are in the works. If you want to know more about this, you should contact the UMB.

In addition, to missionaries being sent out by the churches at Cloverdale, Hamilton, Langley, and Surrey, with the support of the supporting churches of east and west, other local churches in our federation are also stepping up their efforts. The Edmonton churches have been exploring missionary possibilities in Russia. The church at Abbotsford has been weighing the needs of Haiti and Mexico and appears to be heading in the former direction. The church at Lynden is "adopting" one of the local churches in our Brazilian sister churches. The church at Langley is in the process of reaching out to Mexico and hopes that another church in the federation might be found willing to help and perhaps even call a missionary.

Mission aid

Mention of Mexico brings us also to the matter of mission aid. At present the church at Langley has two members who are living and working at two orphanages there. These members are in the process of becoming Mission Aid Workers for the Langley church and would provide great support and assistance to any future missionary.



Meanwhile Mission Aid Brazil continues to support the school in Marigogi, as well as being involved in any number of ventures in the Recife area that aim to improve the lives of members and neighbours. In Papua New Guinea Wayne VanderHeide spearheads the work of mercy and poor relief. In Timor the Children of Light are heavily into the support of Christian education.

On a wider scale the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund also continues to collect and disburse funds for orphanages in various parts of the world, aids prevention programs, developmental projects, as well as disaster areas.

The latest development concerns the sister churches in South Africa who are looking for support for Christian education, for dealing with the AIDS pandemic, and for other forms of assistance. Deacons who are looking for worthy causes to support that have good financial oversight in place should strongly consider getting involved in some of these South African causes and projects. For more information, please contact Rev. Keith Kleijn at dskleijn@iburst.co.za.

In addition to the above, there are a host of other organizations and causes being supported by our churches and members. These include Worldwide Christian Schools, Coram Deo – Haiti, Mission Aviation Fellowship, Children of Hope, and so forth. Some of these organizations also employ Canadian Reformed members such as the N. Boersema family (WWCS in Nicaragua), the R. Lodders (Coram Deo - H), the H. Feunekes and the C. Toegeretz families in Papua, Indonesia (MAF).

Home mission or evangelism

Still, the foreign front is not the only area where our churches are increasingly active. Also the home front is receiving more and more attention. Almost

all of our churches have evangelism or home mission committees involved in summer vacation Bible schools, literature distribution, Coffee Break and Story Hour, Gems and Cadets, prison ministries, soup kitchens, radio broadcasts, Christmas hampers, Kits for Kids, Emmaus, or Exploring Christianity programs.

In addition to local efforts, there are co-operative efforts. One example is Streetlight Ministries, a downtown Hamilton outreach program which has the Rev. P. Aasman as home missionary and Br. R. Bultje as mission worker. Its work, which is supported by local Canadian Reformed churches, focuses especially on turning around lives that have been ruined by alcohol addiction and different forms of abuse.

On the other end of the country there is another form of outreach, namely to the Chinese population of the greater Vancouver area. This work is being done by the Rev. F. Dong, who is assisted in this work by his wife Jen-hui and by Sr. M. Zeng, a mission worker specializing in translation and website work. This outreach work is being blessed by the Lord and currently there is a group of around thirty believers who make up the Chinese Reformed Church, un-instituted. It is hoped that in due time as the numbers keep increasing and the office bearers in training make progress that this church can be instituted and become part of Classis Pacific West.

Far in the north of BC, there is another mission effort that also deserves our attention. It is being done under the auspices of the church at Smithers. As mentioned above, Candidate J. Witteveen has accepted the call of this church. Hopefully, by now he has passed his exam and is officially Rev. J. Witteveen. I have been told that he will be working in the Prince George area among the native people in that community and throughout the north western part of the province. May the Lord equip and strengthen him as he takes up this very demanding work.

Summer camps

Another evangelism venture that should not be forgotten is summer camps. At present there is Campfire! in the east, which is located near Owen Sound and runs a series of youth camps all through

the summer. Those who attend include both members from local Canadian Reformed churches, as well as a percentage of non-churched youth from local communities.

In the west there is another camp that is run along the same lines. It is called Camp Stepping Stones and it is located in the mountains near the little town of Deroche in the eastern end of the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. This year it ran for three weeks and next year the goal is to run it for five weeks. There is also a plan to run a teen camp.

Needless to say, both camps could not run without some very dedicated people being at the helm and without an army of volunteers to do the cooking, transporting, life guarding, nursing, and other tasks.

Christian education

Our overview would not be complete if I was to ignore something else that is very much Canadian Reformed, even if it is not directly connected to the church, and that is the work of Christian education. Across this land of ours and in every province and a number of American states where our churches are located, there are Christian elementary and, in some cases, Christian high schools.

Educational conferences are also a regular fact of life for our teachers. This year there was an additional treat as principals and supervisors from Australia, Canada, and The Netherlands met in Sumas, Washington and enjoyed a week filled with memorable speeches, workshops, and personal interaction.



What a blessing our schools represent! They have been instrumental in helping Christians parent raise and equip their children for a life of service in God's church and kingdom. Surely, one of the reasons why our churches continue to grow and are blessed with so much youth has to do with their education.

Some years ago when I was visiting Scotland a minister there asked about our churches and our schools. After I told him what the situation was, he lamented what had happened in his country. At one time there were also Christian schools in Scotland, but then the cost became too great and all of these schools were turned over to the state and they became public schools. The result? The church has been in decline ever since as more and more of the youth were taught in ways that alienated them from the Lord.

At present I am not aware of any new schools opening (please notify me if I am wrong), although I do keep hearing about schools needing to upgrade their facilities or expand them. In some places this can add an additional amount to school fees which are already very high.

Thankfully in some of the provinces like Alberta, BC and Manitoba, our schools receive a certain percentage of financial support. Only Ontario remains the odd man out. For a time this year there was a glimmer of hope that this might change if a new government was voted in; however, it was not to be. Scare tactics, distortions, fear mongering, and plain old lies took over and ignited all sorts of groundless fear in the public at large which resulted in a victory for educational bigotry. How sad! In the meantime Christian parents in Ontario continue to pay twice, once for a public education system that they do not use and once for a Christian education system that they deem essential for the well being of their covenant children. May God bless their sacrifices and bring about a better day!

Special needs

Another area not to be overlooked is the special care given to the special members in our churches. In Ontario Anchor Home does a wonderful job as it operates homes for the mentally challenged in various communities. Again, it is to be regretted

that there is no government financial support for this work.

In Alberta there is a Christian organization called Rehoboth that continues to address, advocate, and provide for the needs of any number of our members. In BC there is Bethesda which has become a large organization looking after special needs people in the community. It has been blessed with financial support from the provincial government.

Seniors homes

Across this nation of ours there is also a growing number of Christian care homes. Some are operated by Canadian Reformed societies, others are run by associations made up of members from a variety of churches. Hence, in one way or another the elderly are receiving the care and attention that they need.

Starting with Ontario, one can mention Marantha Home (Burlington), Mount Nemo (Burlington), Trinity Towers (Brampton), Shalom (Grimsby), and Ebenezer Villa (Hamilton).

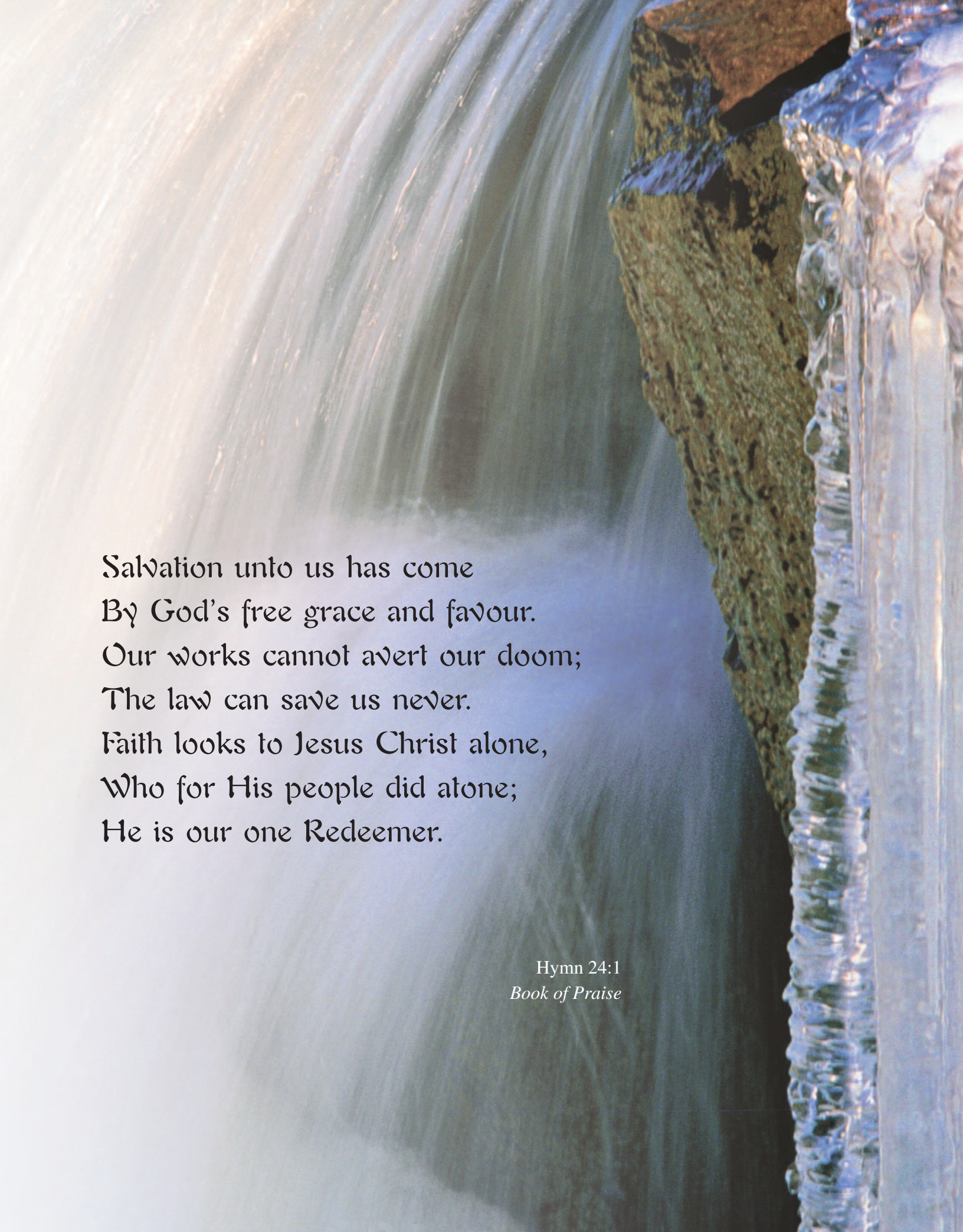
In Manitoba there is Greenview Villa (Carman). In Edmonton there is Emmanuel Home. In BC there are Manoah Manor (Langley) and Elim Village (Surrey).

In conclusion

The time has come to wrap up this Year-End Review. No doubt I have overlooked some events and neglected to mention certain names and happenings. My apologies, if such is the case. This country and continent is large and it is not possible to know everything about the churches everywhere. In light of this, corrections and additional information are always welcome. Just drop me a line.

In spite of its shortcomings and oversights, I hope that this overview has given you some idea as to what lives in our churches. Overall, I think that we can be immensely thankful for all that the Lord has given and continues to give to us. No, we are not a perfect church by any stretch of the imagination. Nevertheless, there remains a true desire to be faithful to the Word of the Lord, as well as a solid commitment to the Reformed confessions that summarize the teachings of that Word. May the Lord continue to bless both that desire and commitment and keep our churches healthy and expanding as we enter into the year of our Lord 2008.





Salvation unto us has come
By God's free grace and favour.
Our works cannot avert our doom;
The law can save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,
Who for His people did atone;
He is our one Redeemer.

Hymn 24:1
Book of Praise

Season's
Greetings

