



Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

**Year-End
Issue**

*The path of the righteous
is like the first gleam of dawn
shining ever brighter till the full
light of day.*

Proverbs 4:18

Wishing all our readers
the Lord's blessings
for 2009

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Cover photo courtesy Darryl Shpak

R. Aasman

God So Loved the World

Bethlehem leads to Golgotha



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Christmas can stir up many pleasant emotions. There are the memories of family gatherings and dinners at Christmas time. The Christmas morning church service followed by hymn singing and coffee in the fellowship hall was always a happy time. And perhaps most memorable of all is the telling of Jesus Christ's birth in Bethlehem's stall. Unfortunately, all of this can become somewhat jaded because of the harsh interruption by commercialism that accompanies the Christmas season. Christmas advertising and shopping, office parties, the excessive light displays and pageantries can become a real turn-off for those who wish to enjoy a simple Christmas with Jesus Christ in the centre. The tragedy with the commercialism and partying of our world is that the real message of Christmas can be lost.

What happened on Christmas?

On the first page of the New Testament we read that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him not to be afraid to take Mary home as his wife. The angel explained: "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."

In very simple but clear terms we are told that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary for the express purpose of saving us from our sins. In Luke 1 we read that the angel Gabriel came to Mary and said to her:

Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.

Gabriel went on to explain that by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit this holy child "will be called the Son of God."

We call this the incarnation of the Son of God. The Son of God entered Mary's womb through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and he took upon himself her flesh and blood. Therefore Jesus Christ was true man and true God. He was Immanuel, "God with us."

Significance of Christmas

Later, in John 3, Jesus Christ would explain to Nicodemus how God would do the impossible. What is impossible for man is to be born again. Jesus Christ was not talking about a literal rebirth from a mother's womb. He was talking about the radical transformation of a person that would die to sin and come to life with a new nature that would live to the praise and glory of God. Man cannot effect such a rebirth no matter how hard or how long he tries. However, this is possible with God. Through the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ people are justified and sanctified: their sins are washed away and they are born again.

So loved the world

Jesus Christ then explains to Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." It is remarkable that God loves the world. It is true that God created the world and made it perfect. But man corrupted it by the fall into sin. So how can God love it? And why would He want to save man and take him back as his sons and daughters? It seems a mystery. But Paul addresses this in Romans 5 where he writes: "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

God's love is utterly unique. It has no earthly parallel. Even though we were sinners, God's love led Him to give up his Son to come into this world and to die for the ungodly.

Gave his Son

The incarnation of the Son of God is not a small matter. The image of the baby Jesus lying in a manger can lull a person into idyllic emotions without any real substance. We cannot afford to do that. Listen to Paul's explanation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ in Philippians 2:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Bethlehem leads to Golgotha. Jesus Christ came from heaven and He would return to heaven. But it would be a journey during which He would take the sins and curse of his people on Himself. He would go to the cross, entering the darkness of the eternal death, suffering the full justice of God, experiencing an agony in his heart and soul that would make Him cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

*For God
so loved the world
that He gave his
one and only Son,
that whoever believes in Him
shall not perish
but have eternal life."*

God did the unthinkable. God did the unimaginable. Who of us would give up a son to die for those who hated us and hurt us? But so deep is the Father's love for us that He gave up his Son to die for us. And the Son willingly went to the cross for us. Why? It was God's will to save us even at this incredible cost so that He might restore us as his children and have us for eternity.

Whoever believes

Jesus Christ not only said that the love of God led to giving up his Son as the Saviour of the world, but, "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Clearly,



salvation in Jesus Christ is not an automatic thing. For instance, church membership does not save a person. There needs to be a very real, living, personal faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved.

These are the thoughts that need to be going through our minds at Christmas time. In fact, this should always be on our minds. Right now we might be having a lot of festivities

and celebrations as family and friends. But let us cling to the real reason for our celebration. As we get together with family and friends, let's take time to read the Bible, to talk and pray, to sing psalms and hymns, and to reflect on the awesome gift of God to us: He gave his Son to die for us so that we may have life with Him eternally. Have a true and merry Christmas.



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W. Geurts

Bethlehem: A New Beginning



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"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

(Micah 5:2)

The town of Bethlehem, about ten kilometres southwest of the city Jerusalem, is an important part of the Christmas story. Anyone who knows anything about the first Christmas has heard about Bethlehem.

Already centuries before the birth of Christ, the connection between Bethlehem and the event that became known as Christmas was revealed to God's people. They were told through the prophet Micah that from Bethlehem a king would be born and that through Him God would rule over them and bless them.

In Matthew 2, when the Magi or wise men came to see the newborn king of the Jews, Herod asked the leaders of the people where the Christ was going to be born. Together with a clear reference to our text, they answered him by saying: "In Bethlehem in Judea" (v. 5).

This new king was going to fulfill the promise that God had made to David about his family. God had told David that one of his descendants would reign eternally on his throne. However, his sons had been unfaithful and Jerusalem, as the capital,

represented their failure. So God was going to go back to Bethlehem, back to where the kingship had begun. He was going to make a new beginning in the house of David.

The region around Bethlehem was called Ephrathah and the whole area was considered to be rather humble and insignificant. Yet it was from there that God had taken a humble and insignificant shepherd boy and made him king over his people.

The Christmas story tells us that the life of the Lord Jesus on earth also had a very humble beginning. At the same time, He was a special king whose "origins are from of old, from ancient times." As the Lord's disciples learned what this meant, the riches that God had promised in the prophecy of Micah 5:2 became so much clearer to them. Christ may have been humble, but He was also divinely glorious, and by God's grace He was going to share that glory with his people.

To bring his prophecy to fulfillment, God used the census of Caesar Augustus to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem at the time that He had chosen. Nothing happens by

chance and God rules over all creation for his own glory and for the benefit of his people!

The new king born in Bethlehem would be like his forefather David. Yet even more than David was, the Lord Jesus would be a man after God's own heart and would be faithful to the office that He had received. Christ did his work in order to bring glory to his Father and to fulfill his Father's promises and plans.

Like David, the Lord's office would involve being a shepherd. In John 10 He described Himself as the good shepherd who would selflessly sacrifice Himself for his sheep. He takes care of us, He feeds us, and He gives us what we need the most, for through Him we have peace with God.

The peace that He provides is very different from what many of the Jews hoped for and it also goes far beyond the kind of peace on earth that people today still hope for at Christmas time. The real peace that we need – the kind that has to come before we can even begin to hope for peace here on earth – is first of all peace through the forgiveness of our sins.



Matthew 13:52

We only understand the real meaning and blessing of Christmas when we look at it from the perspective of the Lord's whole life. It's not enough to think only about a baby who was laid in a manger in Bethlehem. His birth was just the beginning of what would be finished when He offered Himself for us on the

cross. He was not only born to rule but also to suffer and to die in our place. It's through faith in all that He came to do that we have real joy in our salvation and our hope for future blessing.

The angels who appeared to the shepherds outside Bethlehem in Luke 2 proclaimed peace on earth for those

with whom God is pleased. By our faith in his Son, God is pleased to accept us as his own and to share with us the real peace of Christmas.

As the people of Micah's time also did, we through faith in God's promises can look forward to sharing in the full blessings of the eternal kingdom of the King once born in Bethlehem!



De Brès vs. Simons: A Sixteenth Century Debate that Still Matters



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As we commemorate the incarnation of the Son of God, we do well to remember that this event has been hotly debated in the history of the church. During the first centuries after Christ's ministry on earth, numerous heretics questioned or rejected what lies at the heart of the incarnation, the biblical understanding of the two natures of Christ. The rise of these heresies were instrumental in bringing the church to carefully define the natures of Christ in the Chalcedonian Definition, and later, the Athanasian Creed. However, such documents did not put an end to heresies and errors regarding the incarnation. During the sixteenth century, old errors were revived and found a certain degree of acceptance, particularly among those known as Anabaptists.

This explains the stance of the Belgic Confession in Article 18, "Contrary to the heresy of the Anabaptists, who deny that Christ assumed human flesh of his mother, we therefore confess that Christ partook of the flesh and blood of the children." Our confession insists that the Anabaptists hold to *heresy* on the matter of Christ's incarnation. In the context of the sixteenth century, this means that the Reformed regarded

the Anabaptists as holding a doctrine which jeopardizes one's salvation. This was not a minor error or a slight departure from orthodoxy, but a matter of heaven or hell. How and where did the Anabaptists go so wrong on this doctrine? How did Reformed believers of the sixteenth century respond? What can we learn from this debate? Those are questions that we'll explore in this article.

An Anabaptist departure from Orthodoxy

During the Reformation, the position and role of Mary was being re-evaluated by many ex-Roman Catholics. To explain the sinlessness of the Lord Jesus, the Roman church had resorted to the doctrine of the immaculate conception. That doctrine states that not only was the Lord Jesus free from original sin, but also his mother. The conception of Mary *in her mother* was immaculate. Melchior Hoffman (1495-1543), an early Anabaptist, believed that Jesus was born sinless, but he could not agree that this was because of the sinlessness of his mother. So, Hoffmann taught instead that Jesus was born from Mary, but that Mary did not contribute anything to Jesus'

being or substance. She was simply the "container" in which the heavenly Jesus came to earth in the form of a man.

Menno Simons (1496-1561) shared Hoffman's concern for an explanation of Jesus' sinlessness that would not resort to an immaculate conception of Mary. Like Hoffmann, Simons argued that Christ's person (divine and human) had been implanted in the virgin Mary and she had made no material contribution to his being whatsoever. She was simply the field in which the seed had been sown. To support his position, Simons appealed to Scripture. However, even contemporary Anabaptist scholarship recognizes that Simons' view was also influenced by the Greek philosopher Aristotle who held that the woman is entirely passive in the normal reproductive process. According to Aristotle, the father has the seed of life and implants that seed in the woman, who then nourishes it to the time of birth. If Scripture taught the same thing, Simons reasoned, then Mary could not have contributed anything to the person of Jesus. Then Jesus did not assume human flesh from his mother, but from heaven.

Contributing to Simons' thought on this point was his interpretation of Hebrews 11:11, "By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed. . ." (NKJV). Menno Simons could not read Greek, but being a former priest he could read Latin. The Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible seemed to support his position: *Fide et ipsa Sara sterilis virtutem in conceptionem seminis accepit* (By faith also Sarah, though sterile, received strength to take in seed). In the Latin, this text says that Sarah received the seed from Abraham, but she did not contribute anything material to the conception of Isaac. Simons therefore used Hebrews 11:11 as one of the texts from Scripture that supported his doctrine of the heavenly flesh – the idea that the humanity of Christ came from heaven, and not from Mary.

A Reformed response

Guido de Brès is most well known as the author of the Belgic Confession. However, he wrote more than just the Confession. He wrote a substantial work showing how the Bible and the church fathers are opposed to Roman Catholicism. He wrote many letters, some of which were later published. He contributed to Jean Crespin's book of martyrs – and more. But his greatest work, his *magnum opus*, is his book dealing with the Anabaptists. *La racine, source, et fondement des Anabaptistes* (The Root, Source, and Foundation of the Anabaptists) was first published in 1565. A Dutch translation was first published in 1570 and a much-abridged version of the first part was published in English in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1668.

La racine is a huge book of 903 pages. It consists of six parts. In the first, de Brès gives an overview of the

history of the Anabaptist movement. The second part deals with the Anabaptist beliefs about Jesus Christ and his incarnation. In Book Three, de Brès refutes the Anabaptists on the issue of infant baptism. The fourth part discusses the authority of the civil government. Fifth, de Brès takes on the Anabaptist teaching about the swearing of oaths. The last section discusses the immortality of the soul.

Given their name, one might be inclined to think that the major point of dispute with the Anabaptists was infant baptism – after all Anabaptist means "re-baptizer." The section on infant baptism takes up 306 of the 903 pages in *La racine*, thirty-four percent of the book. It was a significant issue for de Brès. However, if we go by the number of pages given, an even bigger issue was the Anabaptist doctrine of the incarnation. This section takes up 370 pages, forty-one percent of *La racine*.

Salvation was at stake

De Brès specifically engaged Menno Simons on the question of the origin and character of the human nature of Jesus Christ. He dealt with him on two levels. The first and most important was the biblical. For instance, de Brès discussed Genesis 1:28 and noted that when God said "Be fruitful and multiply," the command was addressed to both the man and the woman. De Brès could read Hebrew and he rightly noted that the commands in this verse are in the plural. From this, he concluded that both husband and wife

contributed something materially to the reproductive process. Thus, when the Lord Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary, she also contributed something materially: human flesh. He also discussed Genesis 3:15, what de Brès called "the evangelical promise." He noted that it was to be the seed of the woman that would bruise the head of the seed of the serpent. Thus, this foundational text insists that the Messiah to come had to take his flesh from his mother. He had to be a true man with human flesh like any other human being. According to de Brès, Genesis 3:15 leaves no room for the heavenly flesh doctrine of Simons and other Anabaptists.

One of the clincher texts for de Brès was Hebrews 11:11, the foundational text for Simons' position. As mentioned, Simons did not read Greek. However, de Brès did and he rightly insisted that the Vulgate was wrong in its translation of this text. He translated it: "By faith Sarah received strength to cast seed." In other words, Sarah (and all women with her) had seed within her. De Brès noted that this was not only a better translation of the Greek, but it was also found in other Latin translations of the Bible and with some of the church fathers. De Brès concludes, "Since, then, the Apostle says Sarah received power to cast seed, what madness is this to want to deny it?" (*La racine*, p. 200)

There are many more arguments that de Brès brings forward from the Scriptures to refute the Anabaptist position, but passing those over we can note that he also takes another line of attack. While he was reluctant to get into the scientific side of the question, he did so nonetheless. He argued not only that Simons had misconstrued Aristotle (who allowed a minimal

contribution from the woman, even a contribution of substance), but also that Simons was out of touch with sixteenth century science. The Roman physician Galen had first observed that women do in fact actively contribute to the reproductive process. In the sixteenth century, these observations were recovered and confirmed. For instance, the Italian anatomist Gabriele Falloppio (Fallopius) had carefully observed the tubes (oviducts) which today bear his name. De Brès wrote, “We see that all those who have ever done anatomy on the female body, with all those who do it still today, show visibly to our eyes the spermatid tubes in the woman, as in the man, just as they show us the veins and arteries by which the seed is sent to the man just as to the woman” (*La racine*, p. 209).

While today we may quibble over some of the details, it is well recognized that de Brès, following Galen, Falloppio and other anatomists, was closer to the truth than Simons on the question of female anatomy and its role in reproduction.

But why did all this matter so much to de Brès? For him, what was at stake in this debate? De Brès believed that Simons and other Anabaptists had compromised the true human nature of Christ and violated the clear teaching of Scripture. If Christ had a heavenly human flesh, then it was not a truly human flesh. He was no longer the seed of the woman promised in Genesis 3:15. He was disqualified from being the Mediator and consequently, salvation was at stake. While the Roman church had departed from God’s truth with its formulation of the doctrine of the immaculate conception

of Mary, de Brès looked back and could see an unbroken line of teaching asserting that Jesus Christ was truly human and truly divine. Those who departed from this line were always regarded as heretics whose very salvation was in jeopardy. The exact means by which Jesus took our human flesh without our sinfulness is a mystery, to be explained neither by an immaculate conception nor by a heavenly flesh doctrine. The most we can say is that it happened “through the working of the Holy Spirit” (HC, Q/A 35).

*This is the
essence of what
it means to be
Reformed –
to keep
going back to
the Bible*

Lessons to learn

As we look back to this debate from long ago, there are some instructive elements. One of those is the role of Scripture. In his response to Simons, de Brès demonstrated his adherence to the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone). Related to that was the importance of going back to the original texts in Hebrew and Greek. This is the essence of what it means to be Reformed – to keep going back to

the Bible. For all of us, we must constantly be searching the Scriptures like the Bereans in Acts 17. At the same time, those of us who, like Guido de Brès, have been called to be ministers of the Word, must aim for high levels of competence in the original languages of Scripture. As a church federation, we should never take it for granted that our seminary insists on such high standards in Greek and Hebrew – we should expect that and demand it. The defence of the orthodox faith oftentimes depends on it.

Second, it’s worth noting the manner in which de Brès freely used the scientific insights of his day in this debate. As he wrote in Article 7 of the Belgic Confession, everything we need for our salvation is revealed for us in Holy Scripture. Nothing is of equal value with the truth of God revealed in the Bible. Nevertheless, we should not be surprised when careful observations from the natural world (made by scientists) are in agreement with what the Bible teaches – in fact, this is what we should expect to see. There is a lot more that could be said on the relationship between theology and science in the debate between de Brès and Simons, but suffice it to say that de Brès gave more attention to verified scientific observation than his Anabaptist opponent (who was instead influenced by the unverified theories of a philosopher).

A third lesson to be learned is with respect to the worth that de Brès placed on this doctrine. He regarded Simons’ teaching on this point as heresy – a false teaching with disastrous consequences. Our Confession takes the same perspective. In the days of the

Reformation, only some Anabaptists held to the position of Hoffmann and Simons. Today, too, there is no single Anabaptist or even Mennonite position on the incarnation of Christ.

Nevertheless, there are at least *some* Mennonite sects that continue to teach the position of Menno Simons. Like de Brès we should recognize this false teaching for what it is and engage our contemporary Mennonite friends on this heresy and its dangers.

Finally, this debate reminds us that we must become so much more aware of the logs in our own eyes. Sometimes without even realizing it we are just as guilty of compromising the human nature of Christ as Menno Simons and his followers. Thinking about this time of year in particular, you could think of the popular Christmas carol, "Away in a Manger." Despite being a perennial favourite, this song undermines the humanity of the Saviour when it speaks of Jesus as a baby, saying, "no crying he makes." That is *wrong*. If we're to believe that romantic idea, then it's as if Jesus was not truly a human child who would not cry to let his mother

know that he was hungry or wet or colicky. If "Away in a Manger" is right, then he only *appeared* to be human, and we call that Docetism, an ancient heresy along the same lines as what some of the sixteenth century Anabaptists were teaching.

From the Scriptures, we confess in the Three Forms of Unity that our Lord Jesus was truly man and truly God. There is a lot at stake with that confession. Our Lord Jesus was born in and lived in poverty. During his three years of ministry, his family thought he was deranged. He experienced loneliness, deep sorrow, exhaustion, and grief at the loss of a loved one. He was attacked both verbally and physically. He was mocked and spat on. His friends turned their backs on him at his lowest point. When He was on the cross, He bled and died. For all believers who suffer today, we can be encouraged by the humanity of our Saviour. We can go to Him for grace in time of need, because we know that He knows – He is an understanding and sympathetic friend. Praise God

Church News



Called by the church of Burlington-Waterdown, Ontario:

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
of Guelph, Ontario.

Accepted the call to the Free Reformed Church of West Albany, Australia:

Rev. R.E. Pot
of London, Ontario.

Declined the call to the church of Smithville, Ontario:

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
of Guelph, Ontario.

Called by the church of Owen Sound, Ontario:

Rev. R. Bredenhof
of St. Albert, Alberta.

Called by the church of Ancaster, Ontario:

Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer
of Carman (East) Manitoba.



Glory to God
in the highest, and
on earth peace to men
on whom his favour rests.

Luke 2:14

that He took on our human flesh, qualifying Him not only to be our friend, but also our Redeemer!

For this article I used the 1565 edition of La racine, source et fondement des Anabaptistes, published by Abel Clemence of Rouen. I also acknowledge two helpful articles by Joyce Irwin, "Embryology and the Incarnation: A Sixteenth Century Debate," in Sixteenth Century Journal IX, 3 (1978), 93-104; "The Use of Hebrews 11:11 as Embryological Proof-Text," in Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 71, No. 3/4 (Jul. - Oct., 1978), 312-316.

A Holy Book is not Enough

In an age of many holy books and many religions accompanying those holy books, what makes the Bible and Christianity special? How do we respond when people ask how our holy book differs from the Koran, the Vedas and the Upanishads, or the Book of Mormon? We could certainly respond by explaining the inspiration of Holy Scripture, but we may have a far greater impact by simply responding that a holy book – even the Bible – is not enough. This season of special remembrance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ – the God-man – challenges us to ponder this thought.

The Old Testament: previews of coming attractions

God Himself dwells in unapproachable light. While the heavens declare his glory and the firmament shows his handiwork (Ps 19:1), He – as He is in Himself – is the invisible God. In his essence, He is too high, too great, and too wonderful for us to comprehend. Our puny minds quickly exhaust themselves trying to contemplate what is infinite, eternal, immense, and unchangeable. And even if we could, we would end up condemning ourselves as unholy beings before this awesome, holy Being. When Isaiah had a vision of the Lord sitting on his throne, his response was, “Woe

is me, for I am undone!” (Isa 6:5) To try to know God in Himself is like the mythical Icarus, who flew too high with his wax wings; the sun melted his wings and he fell into the sea. Soon the wax wings of our minds and our hearts melt, and we fall back to earth. This is the essence of all religions that speculate about God.

Yet the theme of the covenants, as the Old Testament unfolds, is “God *with us*.” God Himself visited men, during that time, in what are called theophanies, or appearances of God. For example, God appeared to Abraham and Sarah (Gen 18), to Jacob (Gen 32:24–30), to Manoah and his wife (Judg 13:1–23), and to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (Dan 3:25). God’s glory – the very presence of God Himself – was manifested in both the tabernacle and the first temple (Exod 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10–13). God Himself promises – in ways that are unique to the revelation given in Holy Scripture – that He will come to man. He is and will be called “Immanuel” (Isa 7:14), which means “God with us” (see Matthew 1:23). His name is “Wonderful” because He is the “Mighty God” (Isa 9:6). Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, peeks at what is to come when he promises that “the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple” (Mal 3:1). These are so many “previews of coming

attractions” in the Old Testament. They tell us that this holy book is not enough. Something far greater is to come. The Lord Himself will come into human history to be the Saviour of his people (Isa 45:15–25).

The New Testament: God with us!

In the fullness of time, God brought forth his only begotten son, born of a woman, born under the Law (Gal 4:4). In a story more amazing than any story in any other holy book, God speaks to a virgin named Mary and tells her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her. The power of God Himself will overshadow her, such that the Holy One to be born of her will be called both Jesus and the Son of God (Luke 1:31, 35). Without controversy, this is “the mystery of godliness,” that is, how God revealed to man the truth about Himself: “God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). The New Testament of our holy book, the Bible, is unmistakably clear that the child born to Mary was nothing less than God Himself. Not infrequently, the various books of the New Testament begin with an account of this fulfillment of what was promised in the books of the Old Testament:

“In the beginning was the Word [i.e., the self-expression of God], and the Word was with God, and the Word

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was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt [i.e., tabernacled] among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared [i.e., exegeted] Him” (John 1:1, 14, 18). The God whose glory dwelt among his people under the old covenant and was declared by the words of their covenant books came to this world in the flesh of the one called Jesus. There is no way that the divine Being can come closer to his creation than this! No other holy book declares anything like it.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist [i.e., hold together]. . . . For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 1:15-17; 2:9). All of the Old Testament shadows of God’s glory dwelling among his people now pass away before the substance, that is, the body, which is Christ (Col 2:17). The invisible God, whose nature our highest imaginations cannot grasp, is exhibited to man in the incarnate Son.

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”

(Heb 1:1-3). God, indeed, spoke by the prophets, but He did more! He came into history and spoke through the Word made flesh – his Son. And, what is more, He *acted* in history to do what no words of any holy book alone can do: He Himself became the Saviour of his people by taking away their sins. Immanuel – “God with us” – is named Jesus because “He will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). By Him, God Himself purchased his church with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

The holy book of the Old Testament was not enough. The fulfillment of all the promises, types, and figures of God appearing to man had come: God was manifested in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. The ministry of the new covenant calls people to behold the glory of the Lord Jesus in all of Scripture and thereby to be transformed into his image from glory to glory (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

For all ages of the church: behold your God!

He who beholds Jesus beholds the Father (John 14:9). In the words of John Owen, “The Eternal was made in time, the Infinite became finite, the Immortal [became] mortal, yet continuing eternal, infinite, and immortal is that singular expression of divine wisdom, goodness, and power wherein God will be admired and glorified unto all eternity.”

Behold in the God-man – the theanthropic Person – the love, mercy, goodness, and kindness of God! Behold in Him the repository of all of the truth of God (John 1:17)! To attempt to grasp the truth of God from the Bible without reference to Christ is like trying to drink from a spring that is cut off from its source.

We see here the resolution of the great dilemma faced by all humankind:

to attempt to know God in Himself is to be destroyed; to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is to find life. Jesus prayed to the Father, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). By the *crucified* God-man, justice is satisfied at the cross, so that mercy might flow from the sacrificed Immanuel (see 1 John 1:7, 9). By the *resurrected* God-man, life is bestowed upon dead sinners (see Ephesians 1:19-20; 2:5). By the *ascended and reigning* God-man, a kingdom for eternity is being established from people of every tongue and tribe and nation (see Revelation 5:9-10; 7:9). Other “holy” books may declare things that flow, ultimately, from human imaginations, but the Bible declares the truths of the God who came into human history so that we might know Him and be saved by Him for his glory.

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the root of the Christian faith. It is the foundation of everything else that we believe about God and his ways with humanity. It is a call to everyone to behold the true and living God in Jesus Christ.

To the atheist: What C.S. Lewis said about Jesus Christ is true. Either He was a liar, or he was a lunatic (on the order of a man who calls himself a poached egg!), or He was what He claimed to be: “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30; cf. 8:58). There is no place for saying that there is no God when the only begotten Son has demonstrated Him and seen fit that this demonstration be recorded in Holy Scripture for all to view. Behold the God before whom you will stand when he judges the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31)!

To the agnostic: You cannot say that we *cannot* know the truth for sure when Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to

you. . .” There is no doubt – that is, it is “without controversy” – that God was manifested in the flesh (1 Tim 3:16). Behold the God whose very life, as recorded in the four gospels, must dispel your claim to be unable to know God.

To the Christian: Let all the lines of Holy Scripture lead you to Jesus Christ, the God-man, so that you may derive all of the comfort that God has provided for you in the gospel (see Isa

40:1-5). As surely as the God-man Jesus granted forgiveness, hope, compassion, strength, and life itself during his earthly ministry, He does the same today, for “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). Behold your God!

Whether or not you celebrate Christmas, be sure to take time to contemplate, draw comfort from, and celebrate the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Even the holy book, the

Bible, is not enough for you! Do not be like the Pharisees, who searched the Scriptures, thinking that in them they had eternal life, but who missed the fact that the Scriptures speak of Christ (John 5:39). Behold your God in the face of Jesus Christ, and in so doing you will be affected in a way that no other holy book can affect you: you will be transformed more and more into the image of Christ by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18). Behold your God!

Book Review

G.Ph. van Popta

***The Shack*
by Willam P. Young**

**(Los Angeles: Windblown
Media, 2007)**

**Additional Information:
248pages, \$14.99**

The Shack, the sensational book by William P. Young, has been on the New York Time’s Best Sellers list for almost a half year now. Well over a million copies are in print. It has been praised by none other than Regent College theologian Eugene Peterson and recording artist Michael W. Smith.

The Shack is a gripping story. Mack’s little daughter, Missy, is kidnapped and murdered while Mack is on a camping trip with his three children. The place where she was killed, a shack in the mountains, is discovered, though Missy’s body and the killer are not found.

Some time later, Mack receives a letter from God, “Papa,” inviting him back to “the shack.” Mack goes to the shack and meets the Trinity there. God the Father is an Afro-American woman; Jesus is a mildly clumsy blue jeans-

wearing man; the Holy Spirit is an ethereal woman called Sarayu.

In unique sessions with each of the Trinity, Mack struggles with anger against his abusive father and his hatred against Missy’s killer. After he forgives his father, God the Father appears to him—and for the rest of the story—as a man. After Mack forgives the murderer, God leads Mack to Missy’s body and the four of them bury her. Mack, then, returns home to his wife Nan and his other two children.

It is a very imaginative story, but contains some serious theological difficulties.

Young runs into trouble with the second commandment which says that we are not to make an image of God in any way and that God cannot and may not be visibly portrayed in any way. When Young “paints a picture” of God with words, he bumps up against the second commandment. Arguably, one could portray Jesus, since He is a true man, but one may not portray the Father or the Holy Spirit. “You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become

corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman. . .” (Deut 4:15, 16).

Young’s view of the Trinity is not right. God the Father, at one point in the book, says that He is truly human in Jesus, and He has scars on his wrists to prove it. The wrong teaching that Young subscribes to at this point is likely patripassionism, the teaching that the Father also suffered. Young confuses the persons of the Father and the Son. The ancient Athanasian Creed warns against this.

Young also espouses a wrong view of the extent of the atonement. Whereas Scripture teaches that Christ died for the forgiveness of the sins of his people, Young says that God has forgiven all sin in Christ and that it is up to the human individual to choose relationship with the Father. His view of the atonement is Arminian (see Chapter II, Canons of Dort); his view of man’s unregenerate will is Pelagian (see Chapter III/IV, Canons of Dort).

Although it’s a nice story to read, I cannot recommend *The Shack* because of its many doctrinal errors.

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J. Moesker

Will We Recognize Each Other?

A question I have encountered time and again in pastoral work: “Will we recognize each other after this life?” That question becomes especially poignant at the death of a loved one, when there’s much sorrow and there are many questions. According to “Gert” in the *“Gereformeerde Kerkbode”* (of Groningen, Fryslan, and Drenthe, The Netherlands), there is a lot of information about that issue in the Bible. This is my translation from the Dutch of the information “Gert” presents in issue number 48 (Dec.21, 2007):

In Mark 9:2-13 as well as in Matthew and Luke we read about the transfiguration on the mount. Jesus was on the mountain to pray. Peter, John, and James saw Jesus’ appearance change and his clothes became dazzling white. He spoke to two men there, who obviously were Moses and Elijah. Jesus and the disciples knew who they were and Moses and Elijah knew each other. There was no need to get acquainted with each other. They simply spoke with each other. Glorified saints apparently interact with each other! It doesn’t seem to make any difference when you lived in this life, for Moses and Elijah lived in completely different times.

The men on the way to Emmaus didn’t recognize Jesus right away, but suddenly, because of a word or gesture, they knew: “It’s Jesus!” Later, Jesus entered the house where the disciples were and they recognized Him. Mary recognized Him at the tomb, by his voice, by his manner of addressing her. After he died, the rich

man (Luke 16:14-31) saw poor Lazarus at Abraham’s side. He recognized both of them. He knew what he was seeing and there was no uncertainty.

What will we look like in the life to come? Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15:44 about a spiritual body. What is that, a spirit without a body? No, for it clearly states “body.” Not more nor any less than now. As the flesh of people is different than that of animals and the glory of the sun is different from that of the moon, so it will be with the body before and after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:35-49). A plant produces a seed and a new plant grows out of that seed. So it will be with our bodies. We sow a natural, perishable body, but a spiritual, imperishable body is raised up. A body which comes from the Spirit of God. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

After his resurrection, Jesus was the same, recognizable to those who knew Him. But He was also different. It was Jesus, his wounds were visible and his voice recognizable. Yet He also did things which He had not done before. He suddenly appeared in a closed house. Doors and locks were no obstacle to Him any longer (John 20:19). He appeared to the men on the way to Emmaus suddenly and He disappeared again just as suddenly. The glorified body is capable of things we can only dream of now.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He picked up where He had left off before. His life continued, even though it was also different. Mary

was not allowed to hold Him, things would not go back to the way they were before. But even an agreement made previously was remembered. Jesus reminds disciples of words He had spoken to them before his death (Mark 16:7). Life continues!

In the future we won’t just stand around, singing Psalms with palm branches in hand. It will be new life on a renewed earth. Then there will be no break between heaven and earth. We’ll build houses, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit (Isa 65:17-25). We’ll drink wine with Christ (Matt 26:29). Yes, we’ll recognize others and be recognized by them. Only it’ll be of different importance from what that recognition was here on earth. Then everything will be different, also the matter of recognizing each other. The family relationships won’t be important (Matt 22:23-33). We can’t fathom this with our sinful, limited understanding here. A world without sinners and sin in every aspect. Then God is all in all (1 Cor 15:28).

Are you allowed to visualize what it’ll be like? A promise about which you can’t visualize is a dead promise. The Bible even encourages us to imagine what the future will be like. Many people did that in the form of poetry or art. . . . Imagine what it’ll be like. It’s worth the effort.

I would agree with most of what “Gert” writes. The thing is, in the life to come you’ll still be you and I’ll still be me. That’s because Christ has redeemed us body and soul (Lord’s Day 22 of the Heidelberg Catechism).



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Ray of Sunshine

*We wait in hope
for the LORD, He is our
help and our shield,
In Him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name,
May your unfailing love
rest upon us, O LORD,
even as we put our hope in you."*

Psalm 33:20-22

As we are approaching another year, many of us take time to reflect on what has happened during the past year. It is refreshing to see the Lord's goodness and unfailing love toward us in our lives. He has provided for us in so many ways, giving us all things we need for body and soul, just as He has promised in his Word.

For some of us the year flew by and everything went well. We feel God's presence in our lives and we are very joyful as we go about our daily work. We may feel very blessed by all what God has given us. For others, this past year was not what we expected. We may have had quite a heavy cross to bear. The Lord may have put trials in our lives and as a result our faith was tested. Our faith may have wavered and many questions could come to the foreground. Yet our heavenly Father knows all our thoughts. Even in our deepest sorrow we may cling to our Saviour. His love for us stands firm forever.

This time of the year, when we celebrate Christ's birth, let us remain faithful. He gave us his Son so we can have eternal life. His love for us was made so clear when his only Son died for us. We may have started this year joyfully, with praise to God on our lips, and yet how quickly our joy can be taken away when hardships come. But when we turn to God, we can find joy again. Having the comfort of his presence leaves us with great peace in our hearts. The world tries to find peace at this time of year. The malls are busy with people shopping and trying to find some happiness in this chaotic world. They may know about the birth of Christ, but the real meaning of Christmas is long gone. They do not know the peace that we have. We have been given peace in knowing that whatever happens in the coming year, our God is in control, and will take care of those who trustingly wait for Him.

Through faith our eyes will be opened to see his goodness and love. Let us continue to be strong in the Lord. Through joyful and sad times we trust in our covenant God, who guides and comforts us. Let us continue to hold fast to the promises of God in the coming year. The world may begin this year not acknowledging God in any way, but our hearts should be filled with peace, knowing our God and faithful Saviour. Praise be to our God who never fails us!

*Our soul awaits the great Redeemer;
Our help and shield, Him we acclaim.
Our hearts rejoice in Him and glory,
For we trust in His holy Name.
So we humbly pray Thee,
Let Thy steadfast mercy,
Lord, upon us be,
And in love deliver
Us, Thy flock, forever,
As we hope in Thee.*

Psalm 33:6

Birthdays in January

2 LIZ KONING will be 48

9905 152nd Street, Edmonton, AB T5P 1X4

7 CHRISTINE BREUKELMAN will be 37

2225-19th Street, Coadale, AB T1M 1G4

14 STEPHEN DYKSTRA will be 26

Box 3573, Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0

17 HENRY DRIEGEN will be 53

#19-31450 Spur Avenue, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5M3

17 GRACE HOMAN will be 53

Anchor Home

361 Thirty Rd South, RR 2 Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

19 EDWIN SCHUTTE will be 25

844 Bowman Road, Abbotsford, BC V3G 1S9

19 JANINE SMID will be 39

510 2nd Street, RR 7, Strathroy, ON N7T 3H8

30 TYLER HOEKSEMA will be 20

6755 Lorne Drive, Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

Congratulations to all of you celebrating a birthday in this month. We hope you have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends. Rejoice in Him and trust his sure promises for your life. Till next month,

Corinne Gelms and Patricia Gelms

548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

Phone: 905.563.0380 • Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca

Guido de Brès Christian High School, Commencement 2008

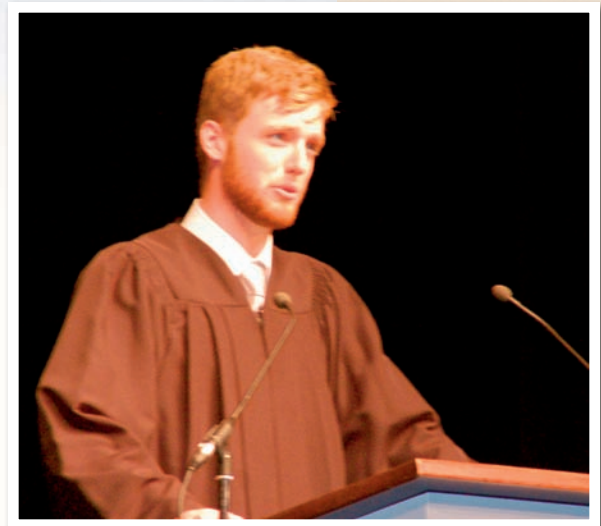
Although the rain was drizzling outside, the atmosphere was warm and welcoming in the Guido gymnasium, beautifully decorated in fall colours. On the morning of September 27, 2008, the graduates and their families gathered along with the Guido staff to begin their celebration. The large class size of 117 graduates made for a packed house. The graduates made their way around taking photos and talking to their classmates. The morning was officially opened by the principal, Mr. J.G. VanDooren, who read from Psalm 100 and talked about how the Lord is our Shepherd. Then it was time to enjoy the luncheon provided before heading off to Hamilton Place.

When all those in attendance were seated, the graduates entered the hall to the music of *Pomp and Circumstance*, written by Edward Elgar and performed by the Guido orchestra. Following the singing of Hymn 35, accompanied by Mr. T. Nijenhuis on the piano, the ceremony was opened by Mr. N. H. VandenOever, Chairman of the Board. He read several passages looking at two men from the New Testament, Mark and Demas. He welcomed the graduates, and wished them congratulations from the Board and the Education Committee.

After this, Mr. J. G. VanDooren stepped forward to offer the Principle's word of welcome. He mentioned that all the students graduating would have different expectations for their future and that God would give them growth. During their times at Guido, the students changed outside and also on the inside, because of the tests they had endured. These tests were not the educational tests during classes, but the tests the Lord has given us to shape us (Psalm 26, 1 Corinthians 3, and James 1) and also the tests that they have to perform to discern the spirits (Romans 12 and 1 Thessalonians 5). He encouraged the graduates to continue to test everything, to find the things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and praiseworthy (Phillipians 4).



Rev. J. van Popta (top)
Zac Aasman (bottom)



Following a performance by the Guido orchestra of *A Toi La Gloire*, by George Fr. Handel, Rev. J. van Popta addressed the graduates on the topic of “Mark or Demas: Who Will You Be.” He discussed the two men in reference to their work with Paul and Barnabas. Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. In this example, we can sometimes see ourselves: when the going gets tough, we could quit. Mark later goes with Barnabas on a missionary trip, after realizing that his abandonment of the gospel was a mistake. Demas, on the other hand, is first mentioned in Colossians 3 and Philemon as being faithful. However, in the end Paul mentions that he wants Timothy to bring Mark to him, because he is useful and to come quickly because Demas has deserted him. Rev. van Popta encouraged the graduates to think of what Jesus would want them to be, and to not abandon their walk of faith for love of the world as Demas had done.

The audience joined in the singing of Psalm 1 and then the graduates were called forward one by one to receive their Ontario Secondary School Diplomas. After all 117 graduates had received their diplomas, applause resounded in Hamilton Place and the graduates filed back off the stage to the music of *French Suite No. 5: Allemande* by J.S. Bach. Several of the graduating students received special awards for their academic achievements, contributions to the school, and volunteer experiences. A list of award winners can be found elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. Then, Jen Heemskerk came forward and sang *Go Light Your Word* by Chris Rice, while

accompanied by Madeline Stieva on the viola and Mr. T. Nijenhuis on the piano.

The valedictory address for 2008 was delivered by Zac Aasman. He emphasized that Guido de Brés is a small high school, compared to others, so that the students were not only a number or a name, but a real person to their teachers. On behalf of the graduates, he recognized the fact that this was a blessing and that strong bonds were made at school. He also mentioned that, during their time at Guido, their talents in music, art, academics, and sports were recognized and commended by teachers and that they also may have gotten in a little bit of trouble. The realization four years in the making, he said, was that the tight knit community made the experience a good one, and that thanks should go to God, and also to their parents and teachers. He concluded by congratulating his fellow graduates.

The conclusion of the program came with the parent of one of the graduates, Mr. D. Aasman, closing in prayer. He praised God for the blessings granted to the graduating class. The audience rose to sing two stanzas of our National Anthem, followed by the recessional, *Medley of Step by Step* (Rich Mullins) and *Wedding Day at Troldhaugen* (Edward Grieg) performed by Mr. Nijenhuis.

May we all continue in a spirit of thankfulness to our Heavenly Father for allowing the Christian education of our students and for allowing these 117 graduates to complete their studies in the fear of the Lord and under the school motto: *Everything in Christ*. Congratulations graduates of 2008!

AWARDS

The Harry Aasman and George DeBoer Memorial Award

Bernice Boerema
Leanne Kamstra

Christiaan Bouwman
Trevor Linde

Michelle DeBoer
Eric Schouten

Andrew Hutchinson

The Guido de Brés Proficiency Scholarships

Wayne Bartels
Meagan Bremer
Jessica Groenwold
Bryan Kieft
Emma VanderMooren

Chris Bartels
Jolene Breukelman
Calvin Hutchinson
Melissa Schoon
Cameron VanderVeen

Diedre Beintema
Marise de Visser
Katie Jager
Matt Schuurman
Melanie VanDyk

Dan Bosscher
Maria Geertsema
Mike Joesse
Sean Tiggelaar
Vanessa Zwaagstra

The Governor General's Academic Medal

Christiaan Bouwman

The Guido de Brés Christian High School Participation Awards

Ben Aasman
Andrew Kamstra
Emma VanderMooren

Michelle DeBoer
Rachel Linde
Chad VanMiddelkoop

Kevin DeJonge
Ashley Schutten
Jordan Winkel

Katie Jager
Matt Schuurman

The Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award for Students

Nicoline Wiersma

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

Matthew Schuurman



Benjamin Aasman
Zachary Aasman
Christopher Bartels
Stephanie Bartels
Wayne Bartels
Diedre Beintema
Frederick Beintema
Jessica Bethlehem
Dwayne Blokker
Joshua Blokker
Bernice Boerema
Kathryn Boeringa
Kyle Boersema
Marcus Bol
Alexandra Bosma
Maygan Bosma
Daniel Bosscher
Gregory Bosscher
Amber Bouwman
Christiaan Bouwman
Meagan Bremer
Jolene Breukelman
Kimberly Breukelman
Timothy Breukelman
Michael Broekema
Ryan Buist
Kara Burns
Chung Hwan Cho
Michelle DeBoer
Kevin deJonge

Marise de Visser
Ryan Dokter
Christopher Feenstra
Joanne Feenstra
Vanessa Feenstra
Maria Geertsema
Tyler Gelderman
Jessica Groenwold
Jonathan Haining
Andrew Harink
Mark Havenaar
Jennifer Heemskerk
Dana Hoeksema
Kevin Hoeksema
Christopher Hopman
Catherine Hordyk
Rosemarie Hordyk
Andrew Hutchinson
Calvin Hutchinson
Janelle Hutten
Katherine Jager
Michael Joosse
Andrew Kamstra
Leanne Kamstra
Trevor Kamstra
Bryan Kieft
Juditha Kingma
Timothy Knegt
Rachel Linde
Trevor Linde

Meghan Lodder
Mitchel Muis
Nadine Muis
Christiaan Nobels
Gregory Nordeman
Paulson Oliveira
Jeffrey Oosterhoff
Natalie Plantinga
Hendrick Post
Stephanie Ravensbergen
Elisabeth Redwood
Melissa Schoon
Peter Schoon
Rachel Schoon
Eric Schouten
Ashley Schutten
Brittany Schutten
Matthew Schuurman
Nicole Schwantz
Thomas Skinne
Calvin Smeding
Madeline Stieva
Kyle Sutherland
Ashley Tamminga
Nicholas Tenhage
Sean Tiggelaar
Ian VanAndel
Nathan VanAndel
Nicole VanAndel
Michael Vandenbos

Sebastian VanderBruggen
Emma VanderMooren
Cameron VanderVeen
Rachelle VanderVegte
Nadine VanderVelde
Melanie VanDyk
Peter VanDyk
David VanGoolen
Janelle VanIperen
Jo-anne Van Iperen
Matthew VanLuik
Chad VanMiddelkoop
Kayla VanSpronsen
Bethany Venema
Justin Vis
Christopher Visser
Nicole Visser
Jennifer Watson
Nicoline Wiersma
Alyssa Wieske
Dustin Wieske
Kayla Wieske
Thomas Wildeboer
Alexander Williams
Jordan Winkel
Lawren Woudenberg
Vanessa Zwaagstra



Camp Yak'isda Bik'ah July 2008

Live in the Light

*I have come
into the world
as a light,
so that no one
who believes
in me
should stay in
darkness.*

John 12:46



From the Board

“We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done” (Ps 78:4). Once again, God has provided us with opportunity to proclaim his praiseworthy deeds at Camp Yak'isda Bik'ah. With over fifty campers attending two camps this past summer, the light of the world was proclaimed to those who still live in darkness. Please pray for these young campers, from the little day campers to the older teens that the seeds planted in their hearts may grow and they may find their hope in the Light.

The Board would like to thank Pastor Jim Witteveen and his wife Nallely for their involvement at camp. They both worked hard to prepare lesson material, devotions, and activities. It was a great blessing from God that they were able to take time away from their missionary duties in Prince George to supervise at the camps. Thank you Pastor Jim and Nallely – your time, effort, and dedication to the camps were much appreciated. Thanks are due to Denise Van Raalte, our camp coordinator, who organized camp, to Jeremy Penninga, who was critical in doing many tasks

during camps to make them run smoothly, Hennie Leffers and Tina Vandergaag, the kitchen coordinators, as well as the volunteer counsellors who put in long days and late nights. We also thank the willing and able volunteers who helped with many tasks – from laundry helpers or cookie bakers to night supervisors. There are so many tasks to run a successful camp 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.

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.

Musings from the counsellors

I really did not know what I was getting myself into when the first day

of camp rolled around. I knew that it was going to be a lot of hard work, emotionally, physically, and spiritually, but I did not know how much support would be available and if I was going to have fun as a counsellor. I am happy to say that my fears never came true! The fellow counsellors are wonderful people and we shared so many enjoyable evenings, stories, and experiences. There was a lot of support when emotions were raw and, of course, morning devotions and daily Bible reading helped a lot.

The kids were amazing. There were a lot of funny tales to be rehashed in the cook shack when the kids were in bed! I couldn't believe that the majority of the children there were water rats. To me, the water was freezing and days were definitely not warm enough to even dip a toe in the water, but those kids were in the water so often and it was probably the most enjoyed activity (hmm, food actually had competition at camp!). Speaking of food, the cooks were fabulous people and their food was amazing! We were so well fed at camp.

To sum up my experience: I'm hoping to come back next year. If that doesn't tell all, I don't know what will.

Rhonda Wiersma

Youth camp, older boys

*Jeremy Penninga,
Terrel Naziel, and
Josh Bazil fossil
hunting at
Driftwood Canyon*



*What it's all about:
Patrick reading his
new Bible*

When I first became a part of camp as a counsellor in July 2007, I was quite apprehensive about the whole thing. But those worries rapidly dissolved in the course of the first day. Camp is so much more than just an experience as many would like to believe. It is a place where not just the campers learn about the Lord, but the Lord uses the children to help us young adults mature as children of God and advocates of the Word. Camp Yak 2008 was very different than the previous year for me, with new authorities in place (Pastor Jim and many new counsellors). It meant stepping up to a new plate and helping out in a new capacity, but I loved it. I watched over the group of

oldest boys for the second year in a row and enjoyed it immensely. Most of the time it is challenging, but the smallest victory is a huge reward.

Most of my favourite moments include those boys: Devon, Kalyn, Breyden, Jared, Eric. Going to the provincial park for our picnic lunch with Megan, myself, and the boys was definitely one of the best moments. On the way home in the middle of the lake, paddling in a canoe with Eric and Devon, suddenly I was the only one paddling, and I heard Devon paging through my Bible. He asked if he could read in the middle of the lake, so he did! He read the abominations of the temple in Ezekiel and was so excited

about it I couldn't help but laugh. He made sure that Eric and I were listening with both ears and there was to be no other talking. After that he asked if he could pray and I obliged and so in the middle of the lake we folded our hands and closed our eyes and we prayed.

Another of the defining moments of camp that stands out in my mind was when Eric read in our cabin devotions, he picked the plagues and we read through all of them, most of the boys were sleeping by the time we had finished but Eric was still going strong. He said that he didn't ever read out loud, so when he made it through with a huge smile on his face I was bursting with pride.

It is the last day that makes us realize how important camp is, when the kids don't want to go and it only takes one boy crying to make us all lose control of our own emotions, when we see how camp has helped us grow even though it isn't about us or initially for us. It's meant for those kids, who each have their own quirks and are loveable in their own way and who the Lord has put into our hands, using us as his instruments in his work.

Jolene Schouten

"It was incredible! The experience of my life and I can't wait to do it again next year!"

Fred Struik



Teen campers in dragon boat



Youth camp volunteer counsellors

I had a great time at Yak'isda Bik'ah! The boys and girls that came to this youth camp made it so incredible! While being around them, you really notice that these Aboriginal children miss the Christian upbringing that we so soon take for granted. It was great that the parents allowed their kids to attend this camp and learn more about God and his love for them all. John 12:46 was a perfect memory verse for a week at camp and I'm sure that the campers will never forget it. My fellow counsellors and I experienced our relationship with God growing as we told the Bible stories and taught and explained the lessons about the theme "Living in the Light." I will *never* forget the songs that we sang around the campfires. Those kids were full of energy, and sang the songs they liked the most, at the top of their lungs (for example, "The B-I-B-L-E"). I'm thankful that the Lord allowed me to be a part of this camp and I hope and pray that I may go again next year.

Jocelyn Vanderlinde

Yak'isda Bik'ah went really well this year, despite the absence of Denise, camp coordinator and usually camp leader. Pastor Jim stepped in and with his booming voice the children quickly respected him and loved his ready sense of humour. His wife, Nallely, was also a huge asset. She was very organized with her lessons for the young day-campers and expertly kept them in line while ensuring that everyone had fun at the same time.

This was my third summer as a counsellor at Yak'isda Bik'ah's youth camp and for once, no one had to be sent home for misbehaviour. The weather was not warm, but that did not deter the kids from swimming every day, insisting through blue lips, "I'm n-not c-c-cold." So many of these children come from such unstable and broken homes. Particularly at the beginning of the week there are usually some difficulties with discipline and getting the children to bed and it is not uncommon for extra portions of food to be taken and hidden in their cabins.

They look forward to the camp all year long and thrive under the consistent meals, sleep patterns, and discipline at the camp. Most importantly, at Yak'isda Bik'ah the children are regularly taught about the Living Bread, which does not spoil or run out. This year the lessons were about Jesus Christ and his ministry on the earth, with the theme text: "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who remains in me should stay in darkness" (John 12:46). This theme was carried out in all the lessons, with the emphasis on living in the light. This camp is such a wonderful blessing and I thank God that He gave me the opportunity to be used as his tool in this ministry. Please pray for the Sunday School being taught in Smithers and for these children, that God may work faith in their hearts. Pray also for Pastor Jim Witteveen's ministry in Prince George, so that the Light of Christ may shine brightly in many there.

Annemarie Vandergriendt

It was four years since I had last been at camp. Some things had changed but many had not. What comes first to my mind as what hasn't changed is the need those kids have. The faces and names may have changed, but their need for hugs and the need to know that someone cares remains. Our goal in camp is to show them that there is a God who cares. The lessons, activities, and our own actions are all purposed towards that. Yes, we have a lot of fun while we are there, but everything we do has the same goal. It is a week when other things of our lives are forgotten and all our focus is centered on the kids.

My cabin group was the middle girls, the nine and ten year olds. These were the four campers that I spent most of my time with. Daily lessons and crafts, afternoon activities, cabin pack devotions, and bedtime stories kept our days busy. Even our bedtime stories were Bible lessons. We were always trying to emphasize that God is a loving Father and that He wants us to follow his light and shine like lights for Him.

Camp is always hard to leave. Even though it is just a week we connect with the kids on a deep level. It is hard to say good-bye, not knowing if or when we'll see them again. We can only pray to God that the seeds He let us plant will grow in their lives and that they will carry the lessons we taught wherever they go.

Meagan Vandergriendt

Camp was an experience for me and also a chance for me to feel like I was a living Christian in God's creation. The kids were adorable, troublesome, affectionate, and rude at times but they were the reason my experience at camp was so precious. They loved camp and didn't fail to tell us that they wished that camp could last forever and those words, with the fact that they were greatly enjoying themselves while learning about the light of God shining in the darkness, was worth all the dish washing, preparing and cleaning. One of my favourite parts of camp was all the outdoor activities. The children could fish, swim, and canoe all day if allowed and it was great spending some one-on-two time with the children in the canoes. I also loved the night devotions when reading about the creation and the flood and

other parts of the Bible astounded the children as they begged us to read more over and over. The bus rides will forever be remembered for their noise and singing while taking us destinations such as the fossil beds, the hiking trip, and public swimming. Each child was special in their own way and it was most difficult to say goodbye to the children. It was hard knowing that some of them had no desire to return to their home of stresses and turmoil. The setting of the camp was magnificent in all God's awesomeness and splendour and served as the perfect place to host our camp. I greatly enjoyed camp and looking back I know there were things I wish I did differently, yet the grace and mercy of God was shown in this camp to kids that needed it spiritually and emotionally.

Christina Vane

I enjoyed the work with the teen campers and was touched by how starved some of the teens were for the Word. One night after a misunderstanding I read a Bible story to the girls. I had chosen to read them the story of Rahab and told them that

she is one of the five women mentioned in the genealogy of Christ and had some great discussion about people's worth to God. We spoke about how God could use someone who had sinned as Rahab had and allow them to take such an important part of God's plan. The girls were especially interested in the fact that Rahab was still loved by someone who was "pure" and questioned whether they could be loved that way too. Being able to tell them yes and see the looks on their faces was well worth going to this camp, even if that was the only reinforcement I got, which it was not.

Over all I think that camp went well, personally I was able to expand my knowledge of the Bible by looking at it from the point of view of these children. They have a completely different way of looking at the Bible, needing, it seems, to hear not only about how God can save them, but also how He has saved others such as Rahab. I was very enriched by my experience at the camp and would like to go back as a counsellor again if I can make it work.

Cheri Brien



Farewell to the Soumans

Farewell evening

On Wednesday, June 18, 2008 the members of Smithville Canadian Reformed Church gathered in the gymnasium of John Calvin School to enjoy dessert while bidding their pastor and his family a fond farewell. After serving the congregation in Smithville for five and a half years, Rev. Souman and his family would be departing westward for the congregation of Willoughby Heights.

We opened the evening with singing of Psalm 92 and our MC, br. Jason Heemskerk, led us in reading and prayer. He then spoke some opening words of welcome, remarking that the evening was one of mixed emotions. We rejoice and celebrate that God provided a pastor for us these last years, but it is sad to say farewell.

Musical talents on the piano, flute, and guitar as well as those who sang were all appreciated. Then the Soumans were challenged to some trivia pertaining to the family tree of Smithville's largest family. The Soumans were also presented with gifts from the Men's, Women's, and Young Peoples societies as well as a print of the Smithville Train Station from the congregation.



Rev. Souman thanked the congregation for the evening, the gifts, their time in Smithville, and for helping them feel at home. They truly did feel the communion of saints in Smithville, especially of late with the birth of their son Timothy. Our pastor then read Ephesians 3:14-21. Rev. Souman remarked on the importance of being in the Word of God and how it was a joy for him to be able to preach God's Word in Smithville every Sunday. He also encouraged us to remain faithful in Bible study, for the

Word of God is the only way we learn to live as children of God.

Br. Al Schutten closed the evening with Psalm 121. This song was sung by Israel on the way to Jerusalem for Passover. They recognized the danger they faced along the way, but confessed that their help comes from the Lord. We as congregation face the prospect of being without a pastor and teacher, but we too know that our Heavenly Father will continue to watch over the Soumans and us as we go on from here.

Farewell sermon

The following Sunday, Rev. Souman gave us his farewell sermon. He had read us the text, Ephesians 3:14-21, just a few days earlier. We are blessed with the ability to come together to worship God. He has revealed Himself through his prophets and apostles and now we have God's Word proclaimed by pastors and teachers. But the worship services do not depend on one person. The Spirit of God works faith in our hearts by using the Word of God. The more we study the Word, the closer we will come to understanding how wide, long, high and deep the love of Christ is. Glorify God all the days of your life. Every Sunday we have the privilege of hearing God's Word, so continue

steadfastly in his Word and never cease to bring Him your praise.

After the service, Br. Schutten read a number of letters from area congregations and representatives from other congregations and classis also gave the Soumans and the church of Smithville their best wishes. Br. Schutten also thanked Rev. Souman for his efforts in the congregation for the last five and a half years. For bringing God's Word faithfully every Sunday, catechism teaching, work involving Mission Timor, constant encouragement to study God's Word, and the list could go on.

On behalf of his family, Rev. Souman took the pulpit one last time to thank everyone for the many kind words. He also expressed his thanks for the time they spent in Smithville. It



truly felt like home and it was an honour to proclaim God's Word from this pulpit. Above all, Rev Souman gave thanks to God, who gathers and defends his church also, here in Smithville. Rev. Souman was also thankful that God gave him strength to do his work faithfully. May we all be able to grasp the love of God in Christ Jesus. To Him be the glory!



*A great and mighty wonder
Upon the earth was done
When Mary, virgin mother,
Gave birth to God's own Son. . .*

Hymn 16, *Book of Praise*



Eternity is a Long, Long Time

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (Eccl 3:11)

Everyone experiences moments when time seems to crawl: when we have to wait for a bad haircut to grow back, when we're at a stand-still in rush hour traffic, or when we're waiting for Mr. or Mrs. Right. When such a moment of clock-watching comes along, we can use the opportunity to think about God's gift of time.

Time is a valuable commodity and it must be spent wisely. This fact struck me the other day when I bought a new package of car air fresheners scented with a fragrance called "Eternity." What a bargain! You can well imagine how my Dutch blood pumped quicker as I pulled a package off the store shelf. Had I discovered an air freshener that lasts for eternity? Of course not. I was just the victim of a slick marketing campaign. An air freshener could never last forever. Nothing does.

As Christians, we know that the life we live now is just temporary. We're here today and gone tomorrow. As far as we can see, everything returns to dust. Yet the Teacher of Ecclesiastes teaches that we have eternity in our hearts.

What does he mean? He means that we have the *desire* to understand the meaning and purpose of life, from beginning to end and everything in between. However, sin has clouded our sight so that our finite minds are not capable of grasping all of this.

Is this something that should worry us? Not at all. Like the Teacher, we should place our trust in the hands of God the Creator, who has been working steadily throughout the course of time. God is in control. No one but God knows the eternal plan for all things. The Teacher realizes that our ability to discern the pattern of events in this life is hidden from us. Paul echoes this fact when he says, "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor 13:12).

We forfeited eternity through the fall into sin. Yet God, who is rich in grace, did not wish to withhold eternal life from us forever. So He sent his Son, to open up the way for us to enjoy *endless, everlasting* fellowship with Him again. That is why John says, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:12).

Let's pause and ponder this. Our sovereign God had a plan, from before all time, to reveal his marvelous glory by granting *sinner*s admittance into *eternal* life by means of the great cost of the

suffering and death of Jesus Christ. And Christ's resurrection is the promise we have that, as death could not hold Him, so also death will not triumph over us. Through belief in Jesus Christ, we who deserved to die for our sins will now get to live with Him *forever* – only by the grace of God. That is truly amazing.

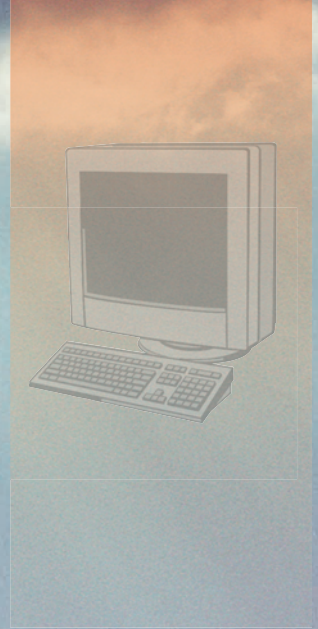
This also has significance for us today. It means that many things which we young people value are simply not worth the time we spend on them. For instance, when our life here on earth is over it won't *matter* what our tan looks like. It won't *matter* if we've kept up with the latest fashion trends. It won't *matter* how much money we have in our bank account. We should not be obsessed with such things, because they will all pass away (1 John 2:17). No one invests in a falling stock and no one makes their bed on a sinking ship. What *really* matters is if our heart is truly devoted to loving the Lord, spending time reading his Word and praying, and giving glory and honour to our Lord Christ Jesus. After all, eternity rests on these things.

Isn't that why God set eternity in our hearts? So that we would live for eternity *today*. After all, when it comes to praising God for all his great and awesome works, even eternity won't be long enough. ●

Our Unchangeable God

*Every good and perfect gift is from above,
coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights,
who does not change like shifting shadows.*

James 1:17



Most everyone is aware by now, through the media, of the enormous economic changes taking place in the world. Natural resources, once high in price, have fallen dramatically in value. Seemingly almighty enterprises are scrambling to stay alive. Many things, once deemed unchangeable, are poised to be overturned. People were ever optimistic about the progress of the good life. But the seemingly unchangeable has changed. Some are now recognizing the unethical and sinful behaviour in businesses and homes alike.

This is not so with our God. He is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, **immutable**, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good! (Belgic Confession, Article 1). God is good. His gifts are perfect. And He is immutable, unchangeable. He cannot change; it is not in his being to change his counsel. Through his revealed Word of truth we also know and may rely on his unchangeable promises in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The mess we are in is of our own making, but God, in his goodness, will turn also this trouble to our good, as He has promised us in Christ, our Immanuel. All thanks and praise be to Him!

Thank You

It is this unchangeable Word of truth that our editor and co-editors are busy with. They provide us regularly with articles for you to learn from

and enjoy. We thank our team – Dr. J. Visscher, Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. Cl. Stam, and Dr. C. Van Dam – for their hard and consistent work. It's a team that performs well together, making the tasks lighter. Our copy manager, Mrs. Laura Veenendaal, is punctual as always and is a pleasure to deal with in our frequent communications.

We are grateful, too, for our regular contributors – Rev. C. Bouwman, Rev. W. Bredenhof, Rev. J. Moesker, Dr. F.G. Oosterhof, the Treasures New and Old coordinator – Rev. R. Bredenhof, the Treasures New and Old writers, the Education columnists, the Ray of Sunshine team, as well as others – who help *Clarion* make a regular appearance at your door.

To our faithful subscribers and advertisers we say: thank you for your unwavering support. Without you, it would not be possible to continue publishing *Clarion*. May the Word of truth be a constant in our families.

Greetings

In closing we send you our greetings at this time of remembering the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and celebrating his work of redemption from the bondage of sin. May our faithful, immutable God bless and keep each one of you as you serve Him in the coming year.

Inge deVisser

Teaching: More than Knowledge and Skills



This article consists largely of notes for a speech presented at an Ontario teachers conference. It has been edited somewhat, but the speech-like characteristics have been maintained.

You are all teachers. What does that take? It takes not only a warm heart, but also an awareness of what a privilege it is to work with developing young people! What a responsibility, too! When we think about Christian education in our Reformed schools we need to sit at the feet of our Lord Jesus. We have to learn his ways. His words must shape our mindset and our heart, because we are teaching the children that are baptized in his name. They must meet with Him through our teaching.

To know the Lord, and to learn what is in his heart, it is necessary to study the history of Israel. In Judges 2 we discover the secret behind God's actions: He is compassionate with his children (v. 18). We will never be able to fathom how great his love is for his people. (At the same time, we are in danger when we just take it for granted.) As teachers, we need the constant awareness that God's love surrounds us everywhere and always. Starting the day at school with thanksgiving for his compassion will have us view our students in a different

way and our teaching will really make a difference.

However, teaching is more than knowledge and skills. We also have to be aware of the changes that have occurred in our students and our schools. Let us think about a few aspects.

Changed students

Decades, or at least years ago, we knew exactly who the students were who were studying in Christian schools. We had their profile straight; we knew their background. Coming from Holland, their grandparents had settled in Canada and they had the desire to bring a new generation of Reformed believers to a new country. Reformed schools were established and, although it was expensive, our brothers and sisters were full of love for the Lord and willing to make sacrifices. Schools and churches were built and there was a clear vision by which to make proper choices for good and useful expenses. Young people were involved and experienced themselves how the Lord blessed obedience.

Nowadays, young people know from hear-say that times were hard and that there was a lot of love for the Reformed cause. But, as happens in a natural process, if you do not experience the hardship yourself, you

value the gained treasures differently. Today, students are able to have their own world. They have summer jobs and spending money. They can afford a car, beer, and the clothes they like, and they enjoy their life together with their own movies and music. Sometimes they enjoy these things in ways that have parents and grandparents worried. How is it possible that the young people have such a worldly lifestyle, even though they had such beautiful Bible programs in Reformed schools?

We can find one of the answers to this question in Lord's Day 52: the devil, the world, and our own flesh are active in our lives. Maybe we do not always admit it, but TV and its commercials evoke in all of us desires that go against a God-pleasing life. It is possible that we enjoy the daily Bible studies at school and still do not make them really a part of our thinking and feeling. Our mindset can be totally off the mark of pleasing our Lord. Many students are spending hours in front of TV, Facebook, or Internet games. Do we think about the possible effects on their wills and their desires? We would be shocked when listening in to the stories told on the school bus. Are we really honest about the impact of the sexual appeal of certain pictures or movies? What impact do we allow them to have in our schools and homes? Do we allow

students to share their grand stories (of a worldly lifestyle) during class time? If there were no TVs in the house, there are other ways to be affected with the spirit of an easy life that is centred around our leisure and pleasure time. Children will notice the ads everywhere in the shops and on the streets. It is attractive for all of us to be caught in the mindset that it is all about me, myself, and I. We will only be delivered from this evil when it becomes our desire to please God (Ephesians 5:10).

My question is: how do we as school reckon with the influences from the world when we fulfill our teaching task? Will young people be able to understand the meaning of the word “compassion” if they are not deeply taught to take the temptation to sin seriously in their lives? Students at our schools are sometimes incredibly mean to each other. They know from the Bible teachings at home, in school,

Are we sure that we see every student?

and at church, that we have to be loving and caring. But a lot of young people experience the total opposite in our schools. Maybe we did not really fight the ways of the evil one if we do not have rules in place whereby the weaker students are protected in our schools. We and the students are in need of the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that we discover our own and each other's weaknesses. The spiritual growth of every student, weak or strong, is an important goal throughout the school education, and

teachers should feel responsible to address this aspect of the students' lives. How else can students grow in love and compassion?

Changed teachers

Quintilianus (AD 35-95) wrote that the crucial part of the teaching-learning process is the spotless character of the teacher. “He is to be a father to his students, aware that he is taking the place of the parents: *in loco parentis*.”

It is a very good thing that the quality of school education is being measured, even by institutions outside the Reformed schools. We together should aim for the best we can offer, because we want to serve the Lord and the coming of his Kingdom. In the meantime, we should be aware of a danger: the emphasis can shift from how to guide a *student* to how to teach a *subject*. Our teachers are equipped by their studies at universities. The subject they teach is mastered at a high level. The higher the level of teaching, the less personal care for the student is required and that is a natural process.

Teachers still can be a blessing in the personal life for the individual student. However, some teachers may think that if there is a problem in the personal life of a student, we have our specialists, our counsellors. They also may shrug it off as a problem of the home. To become somewhat involved in the lives of students may be the privilege of the Phys Ed teachers. It is not always easy to view the students as “younger brothers and sisters” who need to be introduced to life in the covenant. And yet, it is so important to embrace the vision that “teaching is more than knowledge or skills.” Professional development includes spiritual development. Principals and board members should pay attention to this

aspect of the quality of their school education and talk to every individual teacher about this growth in the Lord. Teachers who are spiritually mature in their willingness to serve the Lord can do more. They can become role models and inspire students to really serve the Lord with all their gifts. Even during class, they can develop special ties with students, and build them up for a life of growing dedication to the Lord.

Do we eagerly pray for our students?

But how can we be a blessing if we do not really know our students? Here are a few things to think about.

- How eager are we to do *outside yard duty* in summer and winter? This leisure time for the students and teachers is the time when we can get to know our students better. Show interest in their well-being and reach out to them as “more than a teacher.” Students are sometimes so much in need of a positive word!
- Are we sure that we *see* every student? We write in our school curriculum that we acknowledge every student as a unique personality, created by our God. Yet, are we sure that we practice what we preach in this area? Are we mindful of lonely, depressed, or even suicidal students? We could record in our journal to whom we talked and notice that we did not really “see” some of the students for a long time.

Communication is highly important and our smile or friendly nod may be the only nice gesture some students receive on a given day. We may expect from each other that we encourage this professional behaviour in our Reformed school society if we are to deserve the name of being “in Christ.”

- Do we *eagerly pray* for our students? Sometimes we look for improvement of the quality of school education through the courses and workshops we take and a rewriting of our curriculum. Should we write down that daily prayer for our students is also a requirement for the teachers whom we allow to teach the baptized generation?
- When we *enter* a school as a teacher, we expect that the curriculum is in place and that we just have to apply what others wrote down before us. However, if we have to write part of the curriculum ourselves, we develop some ownership and become more aware of the treasures we have to pass on to the next generation. As a result, being a teacher becomes a way of life in which we embody what we teach.

Changed families

There was a time that everything about lifestyle of Reformed families was clear: we did not go to the movies, we did not drink, and we did not wear spaghetti straps. However, a lot of the unwritten rules of former days are disappearing. Families now often decide for themselves how they show their Reformed convictions and opinions in life. In school and church societies this can cause real problems

and sadness. For young people, it has become difficult to see what is right or wrong. We are afraid to call something “sin” nowadays. Families that are more traditional can have a really hard time to stay conservative and to not push their children into isolation.

A lot of the unwritten rules of former days are disappearing.

Changes in opinions are an urgent reason for ongoing communication between families and schools. We want to stay focused on devotion to the Lord and the willingness to obey his laws with gladness. How can we keep the



consciences of the youth receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings us to repentance or conversion? Under God’s guidance and with his compassion, they will be “the people of kings, priests, and prophets” before the face of the Lord. We cannot give the young people faith, but we are responsible for our actions and decisions as leaders.

The quality of teaching in the homes and the schools is greatly served by, and should be grounded in, the teachings in the church. Responsible leaders in the Reformed community need to come together to help each other to handle the changes that occurred in the past decades. It is not helpful to deny those changes. As God’s chosen people we all know the well loved verses written in 1 Peter 2:9, where Peter quotes Exodus 19:6 and other places which speak about God’s goal for our life and the church. I would like to pass on the following reading suggestions for teachers:

- For our personal growth: the Book of Proverbs, to gain Godly wisdom for the practical situations of every day in school.
- We all should read the letter to the Romans on a regular basis. In that way, we may not forget where we came from and what sacrifices it took the Lord Jesus to save us and to give us his new destination.
- Another source of wisdom and encouragement could be Harro van Brummelen’s *Walking with God in the Classroom*.

May God’s compassion for us, sinners, stimulate us to look with compassion at our students, so that we will see more than just results that are measured in terms of knowledge and skills.

Press Release of the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches

The *Book of Praise* committee's mandate is to take care of all things related to the *Book of Praise*. As well, the committee is a subcommittee of the Committee for Church Unity. In this latter capacity it is known as the Common Songbook Subcommittee. As such it is charged by General Synod to work with its United Reformed counterpart in the production of a songbook for the federation of churches which will emerge from the merger of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches of North America, should the Lord grant the merger.

This press release will cover four issues with which the committee is busy: Psalm revisions, the Augment to our hymnary, the next edition of the *Book of Praise*, and the committee's work with its United Reformed counterpart.

1. General Synod instructed the committee to work on revising our psalter. Synod mandated the committee to engage Dr. W. Helder of Hamilton in this work. Dr. Helder has been busy with the Psalms for decades and is now revising the whole psalter. We are very thankful for his labours and dedication. The committee spends hours poring over his work, word by word, line by line, stanza by stanza. Suggestions are made to Dr. Helder for his consideration. The goal of this work is to present to the churches versions of

the Psalms that are ever more faithful to the text of Scripture in contemporary English, to replace obscure words, and so to enhance the singing of Psalms in our churches and homes. Mostly the 1984 psalter (the present one) was very well done but there were some songs that were not. E.g., let the reader compare Psalms 47 and 141 in the present *Book of Praise* with the text of Scripture and he will see that there are some problems. The new versions are much closer to the biblical text. At present, 110 revised Psalms are posted at www.bookofpraise.ca. Many of our churches are using them in worship. The committee encourages the reader to become familiar with the revised Psalms. It is our hope that the complete revised Psalter will be in the committee report going to General Synod 2010 (and to the churches six months prior to Synod).

2. Synod 2007 mandated the committee to publish a booklet of twenty-eight hymns ("the Augment") for the churches. Every congregation received one for every member. Most, if not all, the churches have been using these hymns. The committee is mandated to solicit feedback from the consistories on the hymns. Recently the committee sent a survey to all the consistories and is looking forward to receiving them back. The committee will appoint an *ad hoc* committee to summarize the results. This *ad hoc* committee will also be asked to evaluate the letters churches had already sent Synod 2007 and any other letters received from consistories

relating to the "Augment" hymns. The *ad hoc* committee will compare the feedback carefully in the light of the synod-adopted principles and guidelines which the reader can find on pages two and three of the Augment. The committee has decided to appoint an *ad hoc* committee to do this work because it wants an unbiased assessment. The *Book of Praise* committee, being the body that proposed the twenty-eight hymns to Synod 2007, may be somewhat prejudiced when evaluating the surveys and letters. The committee reminds the reader that Synod 2007 said that comment on the hymns is to come from the consistories rather than individuals. At the same time, the committee reminds the consistories that they do not necessarily need to endorse every letter received from members of their congregations. It may be that they receive a letter which, while not agreeing with it all, is yet considered worthwhile to pass on to the committee. The *ad hoc* committee will be instructed to submit its report to the *Book of Praise* committee by mid-June 2009.

3. Synod 2007 adopted the updated prose section (confession, liturgical forms, and prayers) with the NIV Bible references and the consequent linguistic changes. This is something the churches have been waiting for since Synod Fergus, 1998. The next edition of the *Book of Praise*, to be published this fall, will contain the revised prose section. The question may be asked: "Why not wait until the revised Psalms are ready to be published and we are finished

with the question of the hymns?" It would not be good to wait. It was Synod 1998 which mandated the committee "to prepare the prose section of the *Book of Praise* with NIV Bible references." We are now a decade later and all is now approved by Synod 2007 and ready to print. No one will need to buy this edition as the 1984 version will still be adequate when following along with the liturgical readings from the prose section. The edition which will include the revised psalter and hymnary still needs to be approved and ordered by a general synod.

4. Synod Schererville, 2007 of the URCNA put the brakes on the work of our joint United Reformed/Canadian Reformed Songbook Committee. We had been working well together as a joint committee for six years and were nearing the point where the joint committee was going to propose the hymnary part of the songbook to both General Synods 2010. Unfortunately, the 2007 URCNA Synod altered their songbook committee's mandate to work first on an exclusively URCNA Psalter Hymnal. The common songbook was put on a back burner. At present, the *Book of Praise* committee is seeking clarity and advice from its URCNA counterpart as to how we can continue to work together as a joint committee in light of the facts that while the United Reformed mandate has changed, the Canadian Reformed has remained the same since 2001.

The committee humbly requests your prayers and the prayers of the congregations for this important work. May the Lord bless our labours and may He be enthroned on the praises of his people.

*On behalf of the Book of Praise
committee,
Rev. George van Popta*

Press Release for the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches for a meeting held on September 4, 2008

The Board of Governors met at the College facilities in Hamilton, Ontario on September 4, 2008. Present at the meeting were Archie J. Bax, Lammert Jagt, Hank C. Kampen (Treasurer), Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen (Chairman), Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. Andrew J. Pol, Rev. Robert A. Schouten (Secretary), Rev. Willem B. Slomp, Rev. Eric Kampen, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, and Karl J. Veldkamp (Vice-Chairman). All board members were present. The Principal, Dr. G. H. Visscher was also in attendance, as was Mr. Murray Plug who was present as a representative of the Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The meeting was opened by Dr. G. Nederveen with the reading of Scripture and prayer.

Minutes and agenda

The minutes of the Board meeting held on April 21, 2008 were approved as written and the agenda for the meeting is settled.

Correspondence of note

- a. Correspondence was received from several of the churches relating to the appointment of Dr. J. Maris and their concerns, comments, objections, and support relating to such appointment.
- b. A number of letters were received from the Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Church of Australia relating to their concern for Dr. Gootjes, the attendance of Mr. Murray Plug at our meeting, possibilities relating to distance learning, and a guest lecturer for Australia in 2010.

- c. Letter of acceptance of Rev. J. Van Vliet wherein he accepts his appointment as temporary lecturer in dogmatics for the second term of the 2008-2009 academic year.

Receipt of reports-material items

- a. *Academic Committee Report:* This committee provides their considerations and recommendations regarding the desire of the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to have the College explore and institute online web-based distance learning. The Australian churches would see a model of this nature of great assistance to the men in Australia considering theological training, but are deterred by the distance and the resultant costs. Based upon the significant costs and management involved in such initiatives and having a strong emphasis on the classic "in class" interactive learning model, the Academic Committee recommends against going in this direction, which is accepted by the Board. The committee also reports on positive interviews with Timothy Schouten, Robert Van Middelkoop, and David Winkel, all of whom are starting at the College as freshmen.
- b. *Finance & Property Committee:* The audited financial statements of the College for the fiscal period ending December 31, 2007 were presented to the Board and were approved and received with thankfulness. The budget for the calendar year 2009 was presented to and approved by the Board, with the assessment per communicant member remaining at \$69.00. Upon the advice of the Senate and upon the recommendation of the finance and property committee, tuition fees for the

- academic years 2008 to 2011 were increased from \$2000.00 per year to \$2200.00 per year.
- c. *Visits to the Lectures:* Positive reports were received from Rev. A.J. Pol and Rev. R. Schouten with respect to visits to lectures conducted in the second term of the 2007-2008 academic year.
 - d. *Senate:* The Senate advises that the program of instruction as adopted in the curriculum has been fully implemented and in particular reported on the instruction given at the end of the 2007-2008 academic year by Rev. P. Feenstra, Rev. E. Kampen, and Prof. J. Geertsema (in the context of the sick leave of Dr. Gootjes).
 - e. *Librarian:* A wide ranging report was received regarding the collection, periodicals, cataloguing software, conferences, website, archives, and the like from M. Van der Velde, the College Librarian.
 - f. *Registrar:* With three freshmen students admitted, it brought the full student body over all years to seventeen registered students.
 - g. *Governance:* As a result of Synod Smithers 2007's direction to review the appointment procedure for new professors to ensure greater transparency, a detailed proposal was tabled for the Board's review. This comprehensive proposal was considered at length by the Board. The Governance Committee was directed to continue work on such proposal for subsequent review and approval by the Board.
 - h. *Pastoral Training Program:* A positive and comprehensive report on this program was received from Dr. De Visser, who advised that the program is well received by the churches and a very positive practicum for the students. A "Catechism Teaching Practicum"

- was received and adopted as an addition to the program guidelines.
- i. *Accreditation:* The process with the Association of Theological Schools is ongoing and comprehensive. The Board affirmed its view that changes to programs and processes can be effected and seriously considered and implemented in advance of the completion of the accreditation process.
 - j. *Dr. Gootjes:* Dr. Gootjes continues to be on indefinite sick leave and his current health status is uncertain, with no anticipation of any further certainty for some time yet. It was agreed that a decision as to his ability to teach for the 2009-2010 academic year will be made at the December 2008 meeting of the board. A subcommittee of three board members was appointed to assist the Board with this.

Next meeting of the Board is scheduled for December 11, 2008 d.v..

Press Release and closing

The completion of the Press Release is delegated to the Vice Chairman in consultation with the Executive and the meeting was closed with prayer and thanksgiving.

*On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches ,
Karl J. Veldkamp, Vice Chairman*

Press Release of Classis Northern Ontario September 19, 2008, held at Elora, Ontario

On behalf of the convening church of Elora Brother Peter Scharringa called the meeting to order and requested the singing of Hymn 64:1, 2. He then read 1 Timothy 2 and led in prayer. He welcomed the delegates and gave a special welcome to Rev. Folkerts of Listowel URC. A number of points of

memorabilia were mentioned. Both Owen Sound and Elora are still vacant. Rev. VanWoudenberg has received calls to both Smithville and Elora. Rev. Versteeg has accepted the call extended to him from the church in Toronto for mission work in PNG.

The delegates from Brampton examined the credentials and found them to be in order. Classis was declared constituted and the officers proposed by the last classis took their places, Rev. VanLuik as chairman, Rev. Geurts as vice-chairman, and Rev. Kampen as clerk. The agenda was adopted with a few additions.

Reports were received with thankfulness for church visitations made to Brampton, Elora, Fergus North, Fergus Maranatha, Grand Valley, Guelph, Orangeville, and Owen Sound. The Lord was thanked in prayer for all the blessings that He has given to his churches and was asked for his continuing care and guidance.

A report was received from the church at Orangeville regarding the inspection of the archives of Classis Northern Ontario. The archives are in good order.

A report was received from the church at Guelph regarding the Fund for Financial Aid to Students of the Ministry. The Fund balance is \$5,770.61 and there have been no requests for assistance over the past year. The recommendation that there be no assessment for 2009 was adopted.

A report was received from the church of Fergus Maranatha regarding the audit of the books for the Fund for Financial Aid to Students of the Ministry. The books are in good order.

A report was received from the Committee for Needy Churches. The Fund balance is \$14,109 and there have been no requests for assistance over the past year.

The recommendation that there be no assessment for 2009 was adopted.

A report was received from the church of Fergus Maranatha regarding the audit of the books of the Fund for Needy Churches. The books are 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. Fergus Maranatha asked for advice and it was given. Guelph asked for advice on a matter of discipline. In closed session concurring advice was given to proceed with the second announcement.

Elora asked for continuing pulpit supply. They were reminded that the last classis granted this for the duration of their current vacancy.

An appeal was received from two brothers and a sister and was dealt with in closed session.

Rev. Folkerts was given the opportunity to address Classis. He extended the greetings of the URC churches in southern Ontario and he gave words of encouragement, also for the process of church unity.

Letters were received from the Theological College indicating that brothers Ken Bergsma and Ryan Dejonge have completed the third year of their studies.

The church of Fergus-Maranatha was appointed to convene the next classis on Friday December 12, 2008 at 9:00 am. It was proposed that Rev. VanWoudenberg serve as chairman, Rev. Kampen as vice-chairman, and Rev. VanLuik as clerk.

The following appointments were made:

1. Examination of students:
 - a. Committee of examiners: Rev. Feenstra, Rev. VanWoudenberg

- b. Examiner on Old Testament exegesis: Rev. 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 Diaconiology: Rev. Agema
2. Church Visitors: Rev. Agema, Rev. Feenstra (coordinator), Rev. VanLuik, Rev. VanWoudenberg, Rev. Kampen, Rev. Geurts
 3. Church for taking care of the archives: Owen Sound
 4. Treasurer: 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: C. VanRaalte (2009), J. Hutten (2010), and F. Westrik (2011)
 9. Church for auditing the books of the Fund for Needy Churches: Fergus-Maranatha
 10. Neighbouring Churches:
 - for Brampton: Guelph

- for Fergus Maranatha: Elora
- for Fergus North: Owen Sound
- for Grand Valley: Orangeville
- for Guelph: Fergus Maranatha
- for Orangeville: Brampton
- for Owen Sound: Grand Valley

The following ministers were appointed as delegates to Regional Synod East November 12, 2008: D. Agema and P. Feenstra. As alternates: M. VanLuik and W. Geurts (in that order). The following elders were also appointed as delegates: C. Poppe and J. Post. As alternates: A. Kingma and G. Nordeman (in that order).


The convening church of the next classis was instructed to invite observers from the URCNA, the OPC, and the ERQ and if possible to send a delegation to their assemblies.

Question period was made use of. Censure according to Article 34 C.O. was not necessary. The Acts of Classis were adopted. The Press Release was approved.

The chairman requested that Classis sing Psalm 111:1, 2, led in prayer, and then declared Classis closed.

*For Classis,
Rev. W. Geurts,
vice-chairman at that time*

NOTE TO READERS:

Beginning in January 2009, *Clarion* will no longer be publishing all submitted press releases. Selected items may appear from time to time. Press releases can be read at www.canrc.org. 



Year End Review 2008



Dr. J. Visscher is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia
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Many things signal the end of another year and the arrival of this issue of *Clarion* is one of them. It comes together with the approach of winter, the appearance of many lights and decorations in neighbourhood streets, shopping malls and homes, the proliferation of company parties, the hosting of many concerts, the planning of family functions, and the advent of special worship services. All in all, the end of another year is filled with busyness, warmth, celebration, and fellowship.

Looking back

Still, this is not all that happens. For along with all of these things the last month of a year also brings with it a good deal of reflection. It is that time when we most often look back, comment on days gone by, consider what has been and what perhaps will be.

This means that there is a lot to consider. Each year presents us with numerous events and developments. In our personal and family lives there may have been births, baptisms, engagements, weddings, graduations, anniversaries, deaths, as well as a host of other things.

Looking further the year 2008 has been a year busy with elections in Canada and the United States. It has also seen its share of scandals, crimes, war news from Afghanistan and Iraq, disaster news from China, Burma, and other places. But perhaps more than anything else what has come to dominate, especially in the last six months, has been the economic news. Oil prices skyrocketed and then declined, stocks markets plunged and then went into rollercoaster mode, homes were re-possessed, and savings vanished. Indeed, as the old year closes out and a new year dawns, the most pressing questions appear to be financial ones. There is a great deal of nervousness as we move together into 2009. Many are worried about a return to 1929, the opening year of the Great Depression.

A paradigm shift?

With regard to life in our church federation, the year 2008 has also produced a lot of news. Usually when we review it, we start with looking at local churches and their highlights. This time, however, I will take a different approach. I do so because in September of this year I attended the Second International Mission Conference in Ancaster, Ontario, hosted by the Theological College. While there it became apparent to any number of us that a shift has been taking place in our church life. Some would even call it a paradigm shift.

What do I mean? It has to do with the fact that so many churches are now directing their energies, prayers, and efforts outward. For decades our church life was all about getting established. Churches were planted, buildings were erected, schools were constructed, and societies of one kind or another were created. The efforts were prodigious but they were also largely internal.

Out West

But no longer, for consider the following developments. Beginning in the Western part of Canada, we see in the Bulkley Valley of northern British Columbia that the Smithers church has been busy both with local outreach to the native population, as well as with overseeing the church planting work being done by the Rev. J. Witteveen in Prince George. In the south of BC, we see the Surrey church continuing to lead an ever-expanding missionary endeavour in Brazil. We note that the Cloverdale church and the Langley church together keep spearheading the work of outreach among the Chinese, both locally and internationally. In addition, the Langley church has also become more involved in Mexico with orphanage work. Next door, the Aldergrove church organizes support for the Feunekes family working for MAF in Indonesia. Across the line the Lynden church has committed itself to more direct support for one of the local

churches in Brazil. The Abbotsford church has also been casting about for a project to which it can give its support. As for the other local churches, they too are putting their shoulders behind these efforts in one form or another.

On the Prairies, the story is much the same. The Edmonton-Providence church has been assisting one of our College's graduates who is working in St. Petersburg, Russia. The Neerlandia church has been considering getting involved in a foreign project. The Coaldale church is investigating deeper involvement in Brazil. The Winnipeg churches are talking about starting some sort of downtown outreach program. These churches, together with all of the churches in the West, are also continuing to support the work of the Surrey church in northeast Brazil.

In the East

In Ontario, the Toronto church has been and continues to be involved with local Korean and Portuguese communities, as well as being a sending church for mission work in Papua New Guinea. The Owen Sound church has for some time already been organizing help for the Reformed Churches in Quebec. Several of the Burlington churches are actively involved in the work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF). As well the Burlington-Fellowship church does work among Sudanese refugees and it, together with the Ancaster church and the Hamilton church, is busy with Streetlight Ministries in downtown Hamilton. The Hamilton church also continues to lead the efforts of mission work done in Brazil. The Smithville church supports the work of Rev. E. Dethan in Timor, Indonesia.

Now these are only the efforts that I am aware of. I am sure that more things are happening and I would appreciate an email if your church is reaching out in one way or another.

Still, while all of these efforts are to be applauded and while they testify to the spiritual health of our churches, several dangers should be noted. In the first place, the drive to get involved in new causes and projects should not come at the cost of the long-time work that has been going on in Brazil, Indonesia/PNG, and Quebec. Also, local churches need to do their homework really well before they commit themselves to a new project. Finally, the churches should not spread themselves too thin and as much as possible they need to support one another and work together.



Missionaries, workers, and teams

Seeing that we are dealing with mission efforts, it seems appropriate to turn our attention next to missionaries. In that regard Rev. J. VanSpronsen and his family began the process of settling into Brazilian life. Matters of housing, schooling and work appear to be falling into place. The same is the case with language as Rev. VanSpronsen is making excellent progress in learning Portuguese. It should also be mentioned that both the Revs. B. deGraaf and K. Wieske also visited the home front during the year and met with their sending churches. Rev. K. Wieske is slated to begin a furlough early in the new year.

In Papua New Guinea the biggest news of 2008 was that Rev. S. 't Hart accepted a call to pastor the Free Reformed Church at Baldivis, Western Australia. I have not heard about the date of his departure but most likely it will happen in or around the new year. In his place the church at Toronto issued a successful call to former missionary, Rev. H. Versteeg. The latter has been going back to that part of the world on a regular basis to assist the churches in Irian, Indonesia. Now, in the future he hopes to work with the churches on the eastern side of the island of New Guinea.

At Streetlight Ministries in Hamilton, Mission Worker Richard Bultje departed to pursue further studies and his place was taken by Hilco DeHaan. In the past he worked among the native people around Smithers but now he works together with the Rev. P. Aasman.

In BC there are currently two missionaries at work. Rev. J. Witteveen is attempting to plant a church in Prince George. The aim is for this church to be composed especially of native people. In the southern part of the province the Rev. F. Dong continues to occupy himself with the Chinese Reformed Church (un-instituted as yet but still growing), as well as with website work and foreign theological training.

The Langley church as previously mentioned is working in Mexico and supports three members who are working and living there: Duane Visscher, as well as Jeremy and Ana

VanBeelen. They are involved with building and operating the Dulcio Refugio Orphanage in Aguascalientes.

It should also be mentioned that teams of volunteers from any number of our churches have gone out this past year to various places: Mexico, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Haiti, the United States (Kentucky), and elsewhere. The work that they do varies from assisting in orphanages to helping out on construction projects. A new trend may also be starting as a dozen members of the Langley church who are all over fifty went off to Mexico in November. In this group there were a good number of experienced carpenters and builders who decided that instead of taking a cruise down south they would opt for a working mission trip instead.

Evangelism efforts

Locally many churches were busy with a wide variety of evangelism projects in 2008. These included such things as: literature distribution, a stand at the local fair, an annual Vacation Bible School, a weekly Coffee Break and Story Hour program, involvement in prison ministry, a Saturday Bible Camp, a Gems and Cadets program, volunteering at a soup kitchen, and so forth.

On a broader scope radio broadcasting continued to be done in Eastern and Western parts of Canada under the auspices of the Voice of the Church. As the old year wound down efforts were underway to launch a new radio program in the greater Vancouver area. Currently Pastor W. Bredenhof helps a United Reformed colleague south of the border on Fridays and the intention is to expand this to a five day effort north of the border.

Church camps also ran successful programs during the summer. Campfire!, a long standing camp with fine facilities near Owen Sound, Ontario, hosted youthful campers from different age groups throughout the summer months. Camp Stepping Stones in Deroche, BC, a more recent effort, continued to find its legs and even expanded its program to five weeks. Both camps continued to receive rave reviews from children and parents alike.

Another thing that needs to be noted is that in Ontario a new generation of church leaders has arisen and many of them have been involved with and shaped by the Campfire! experience. We can only be thankful for this and pray that this trend will continue there and elsewhere.

Mercy work abroad and at home

The step from missions and evangelism to mercy work is not huge so we shall take it next. In this regard it can once again be reported that regular collections were held in the

churches for a large number of needy causes both at home and abroad. A good deal of the monies collected was sent to the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (CRWRF). This organization in turn supports a large number of worthwhile causes and organizations in Bangladesh, Burma, Guatemala, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Sudan, South Africa, and the United States. For more information on this support, you are encouraged to read their very attractive annual report (or else visit their website at www.crwrf.ca).

Mission Aid Brazil, an organization based in Cloverdale, BC, also continued to do good work in that South American nation. The bulk of its support goes to aid Christian education, especially in Marigogi, but it is also active among seniors in the Sao Jose area and believers in the slums of the large city of Recife.

More specialized work was done this past year by the brs. Hugo Feunekes and Clarence Togeretz, who are working for Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) and living with their families in Indonesia. If I have it right then the former brother is busy with aircraft maintenance and the latter devotes his time to flying and pilot training.

On the home front mercy work also continues to be done. In this regard any number of our churches sponsored Christian refugees from such places as Burma, Liberia, Sudan, and other lands where their lives became intolerable due to persecution. They also assisted them in various ways as they made the transition to life in a whole new country.

Finally, it should also be mentioned that several churches decided to look into giving assistance to the various mercy works organized by members of our sister churches in South Africa. Hopefully something concrete and positive will come from this development.

Churches and ministers

Having looked at the missionary and outreach efforts in our churches, we should also review a number of other highlights. Beginning in the East it may be noted that the Attercliffe church received a new minister in the person of Rev. J. Huijgen. The Smithville church became vacant with the departure of Rev. A. Souman. The Lincoln church welcomed the Rev. R. Wynia and said "good bye" to their long vacancy. The Hamilton church received the Rev. B. DeJong. Both Revs. DeJong and Wynia came to us from the United Reformed Churches of North America. The Kerwood church witnessed the departure of Rev. J. Slaa and called Candidate C. Kleyn, who accepted and was ordained. Next door in London, the Rev. R. E. Pot accepted a call to West Albany, Australia, and thus will be returning to the land of his birth.

Elsewhere in Ontario, mention has been made of the fact that Rev. H. Versteeg is going back to the mission field and this means that the Chatham church will become vacant sometime in the new year. The church at Ancaster also joined the ranks of the vacant as the Rev. G. van Popta accepted a call to the Ottawa church. The same can be noted of the Waterdown church, formerly served by Rev. Huijgen.

In addition, the Hamilton-Providence church and the Owen Sound church, as well as the Elora church, called ministers, but without success thus far.

Further west the Winnipeg-Grace church was thankful as the call that it extended to Candidate R. den Hollander received a positive response. He has since been examined and ordained. To the south the Denver church became vacant as its minister, the Rev. D. Boersma accepted a call to do mission work in South Africa. It has since secured the services of the Rev. G. Horner, a minister of one of our sister churches, the Reformed Church in the US.

Among our churches in Alberta, the Rev. M. Jagt came from Ottawa and was installed as minister of the Taber church. For the rest all is quiet on the calling and vacancy front. The only thing that one really hears there is the sound of oil flowing through the pipelines.

In British Columbia the Abbotsford church called the Rev. R. C. Janssen from The Netherlands and since his acceptance they have been waiting for his immigration papers to be finalized. He and his family are expected to arrive some time in 2009. At the same time the Smithers church and the Willoughby Heights church were thankful that they did not have to wait as long for the Revs. J. Slaa and A. Souman and their families to arrive respectively from Kerwood and Smithville.

Before we leave the ministers behind, attention has to be paid to a certain ministerial highlight. In November the Rev. and Mrs. W. W. J. VanOene celebrated their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary and a few days later Rev. VanOene reached sixty-five years in the pastoral ministry! Needless to say, both are exceptional milestones and we wish to extend hearty congratulations to them. Rare is the couple who receive so many years together and rarer yet is the minister who can be in the Lord's service for so many years. Praise the Lord for his abundant mercies.

Church buildings

On the building front I do not have a great deal to report to you, although I have been made aware of the fact that the Yarrow church is looking into expanding its facilities and adding more meeting rooms. The Aldergrove church is going through the process of acquiring a building

permit in order that it can begin construction of its new facility. The Lynden church moved out of its house of worship in October and into the school gym while its building is undergoing a major overhaul and expansion. The Edmonton-Immanuel church completed the first phase of a three-phase renovation program. The Brampton church is also looking forward to a new place of worship as a deal has been struck with a local builder.

Music

A new heading called "Music" needs to be added this year because 2008 gave rise to several developments on this front. First, a very successful Strings Camp was held this past summer in Ontario. What is a String Camp? It is a camp in which young, aspiring and talented musicians from our churches come together and improve on their ability to play various stringed instruments. In 2007 this camp was held for the first time in Langley, BC, under the very capable leadership of Kent and Roxie Dykstra. They gave of their talents again this past year and, if the grapevine is reliable, another camp is planned for 2009 in Langley.

Speaking of the Langley church, the month of September was highlighted by the arrival of its new Casavant organ. For many years the congregational singing was led by an organ made up of parts from other dismantled and discarded organs, but time and usage took their toll. A search for a good quality used instrument proved futile due to the structural design of the building and so a decision was made to order a new, tailor-made instrument from one of Canada's oldest and most well-known organ builders.

In addition to Langley, also the Yarrow church saw its organ completed and put to good use. As well the Edmonton-Providence church, the Aldergrove church, and the Lynden church are looking forward to the pipe organs that will be or are being installed in their buildings.

The year 2008 was also a year in which many of the churches were busy trying out a number of new hymns for possible inclusion in the *Book of Praise*. Some churches decided to test them before the worship service, while others used them both before and in the service. At the moment comments and reactions are being gathered and submitted to the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*. As this was happening new versifications of the Psalms also began to appear at a speedy rate and some churches proceeded to put them to the test as well.

Finally, mention needs to be made of the fact that across North America many of church members also participate in choirs that practice weekly and perform regularly. The music that they sing varies widely from ancient to modern, from

traditional to contemporary and from classical to popular. Through their performances these choirs make a real contribution to the rich cultural fabric of our communities.

The Theological College

From life in the churches we turn to the College of the churches. The past year witnessed the graduation of another class composed this time of the students: R. den Hollander, S. Harsevoort, and C. Kleyn. It also saw the arrival of a new class of students: Tim Schouten, Rob van Middelkoop, and David Winkel.

Faculty-wise, the year was highlighted by the fact that Prof. G. H. Visscher successfully defended his Ph.D. thesis at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. His thesis is entitled, "Abraham, Faith, and Works: The Role of Romans 4 in the Discussion Concerning the New Perspective on Paul."

On a less than joyful note, the lingering illness of Prof. J. DeJong and the health concerns surrounding Prof. N.H. Gootjes continued to cast a shadow over the College. The churches were and continue to be diligent in prayer on behalf of them and their families.

In the absence of Prof. Gootjes, the College was so blessed as to be able to secure the services of a very noted and highly respected Reformed theologian from The Netherlands, Prof. Dr. J.W. Maris. In the New Year, the Rev. J. VanVliet from the Surrey church will take over the teaching load from January to May.

Finally, it remains a lamentable fact that our Theological College is still lacking a proper name. To call it simply "Theological College," as we have been doing since its inception, is just so generic and lacking in personality, as well as out of step with the past and prevailing trend in similar North American institutions. Some time ago there was a suggestion to call it "Timothy Theological Seminary" but that name seems to have garnered very little support. So what about "Hamilton Theological Seminary" or "Bavinck" or

"Paul" or "Augustine" or "Hope"? Please send your suggestions to: 110 West 27th Street, Hamilton, Ontario, L9C 5A1 marked "Theological College Name Contest."

Inter-church relations

The General Synod of Smithers gave the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) a more aggressive mandate. This resulted in the Revs. J. Moesker and J. Visscher being delegated to visit the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, the brothers H. Leyenhorst and J. VanderStoep, committee members, being delegated to the Presbyterian Church in Korea, and the Rev. W. Wielenga being delegated to the Reformed Churches in New Zealand. The last visit was especially noteworthy in that it formalized the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship between our respective churches.

In connection with these relationships it should be noted that there appears to remain some confusion about the terms used. The only official relationship that our churches enter into with other churches is called "Ecclesiastical Fellowship." In the past it was called "Correspondence." As for the designation "sister churches," it does not describe a different and still closer relationship. It is simply a popular, unofficial expression, taken originally from the Dutch language that is sometimes used to describe those churches with which we maintain "Ecclesiastical Fellowship."

This past year also saw a considerable amount of traffic between "Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship" in North America. Representatives from various classes in our federation visited classes and presbyteries in the OPC, the RCUS, and the URCNA, as well as vice versa. With respect to the United Reformed Churches, the various committees dealing with merger continued to meet and do their work. Special mention may be made of the Church Order Committee that visited the western provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba in the fall meeting with local churches and soliciting their reactions to the proposed Church Order.

Christian education

Across the continent Christian education at both the elementary and secondary levels continued in 2008. Here and there school staffing changed, new programs were introduced and older ones were revamped, buildings were updated and, in some cases, renovated.

In several provinces our schools had to make adjustments to the curriculum because of changing government demands. In particular the rise of obesity levels among children has caused the governing authorities in some provinces to demand changes to physical education



programs. The result is that in some places schools now begin earlier to accommodate the changes.

The Teachers College in Hamilton continued its vital work of training teachers. At the same time the board remained committed to seeking ways in which the institution may be accredited and its graduates recognized in an official capacity.

Worldwide Christian Schools also remained part of the education scene as it seeks to assist fledgling Christian schools in the more impoverished countries of the world. Teams of volunteers have been sent to Nicaragua and other lands to construct and renovate schools. Teachers also shared their expertise.

Special needs

A number of organizations take care of the needs of the handicapped among us: Anchor, Bethesda, and Rehoboth can be mentioned. The first mentioned organization also opened up a new home in Fergus, Ontario area.

Homes of a different kind have been set up in many places to supply care and fellowship for seniors. In Ontario one finds members living in homes called Ebenezer, Maranatha, Mount Nemo, Trinity, Elim, and Shalom. In Manitoba there is Greenview Villa. In Edmonton there is Emmanuel Home. In BC Manoah Manor and Elim (a different one) are prime places of living, caring, and sharing.

Publications

Although the Canadian Reformed Churches have no church controlled publishing arm this has not hindered the proliferation of all sorts of magazines. *Clarion* continues to appear twenty-five times a year and to take care of the church and theological news. *Reformed Perspective*, a monthly, specializes more in social and cultural commentary. *Roadside Assistance* seeks to stimulate and inform the younger generation. *Evangel* publishes articles that present the good news of our Saviour to the un-churched. *Diakonia* is geared to the work of the office bearers and seeks to train and sharpen their skills.

To this list needs to be added a large number of school publications, church bulletins, study society magazines, and other printed media.

Summing-up

This review has been long but it has not been exhaustive. I have no doubt missed important events and developments in your church so I ask for your forgiveness. Living at one end

of the continent means that it is often difficult to keep track of everything that happens in other parts of the continent.

Still, what has been reported here shows us once again that there is a great deal happening in our churches. No doubt as we move into a new year more things will happen, and some of them will prove to be challenging, especially those that are of an economic nature. The comfort that we have, however, is that while our circumstances and situations may change, there is One who does not change. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." He does not change. His promises do not change. His salvation does not change. His care does not change. Hence if your life hangs in the balance – spiritually, health-wise, or financially – as you move into the New Year, do not despair. Keeping on trusting in Him and praying to Him. He is faithful. He will carry you through. He will carry our churches as well. Praise be to Him!



A 45th Anniversary

The Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches would like to share with the churches a milestone in the life of

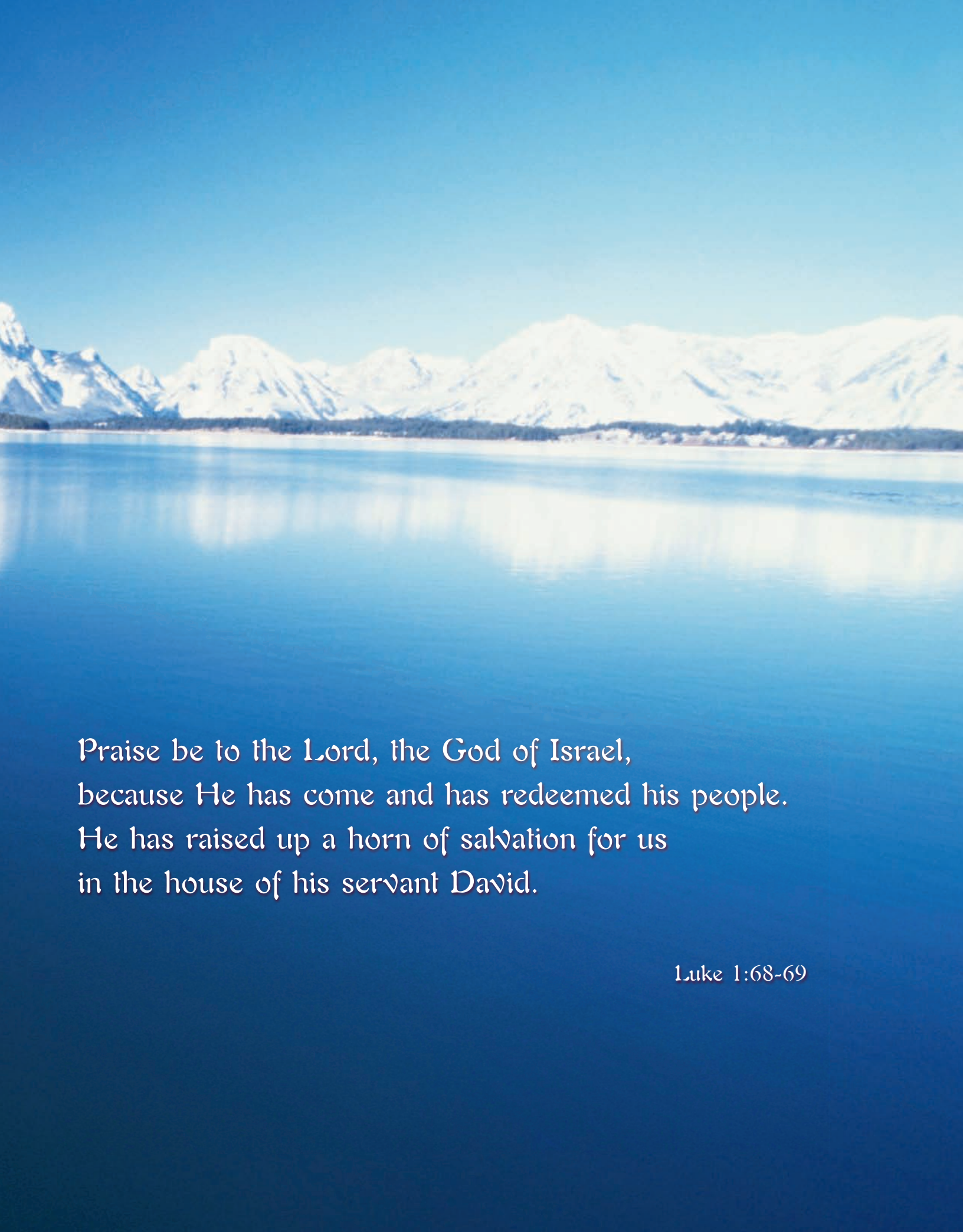
Prof. J. Geertsema

On December 15, 2008, he will be able, the Lord willing, to mark a 45th anniversary in the ministry of the Word.

We are grateful for his faithful service among the churches and for the last twenty-two years as a professor and professor-emeritus of the College.

He has done his work with unfailing enthusiasm and tremendous dedication.

May the Lord bless his continued retirement.



Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because He has come and has redeemed his people.
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David.

Luke 1:68-69

