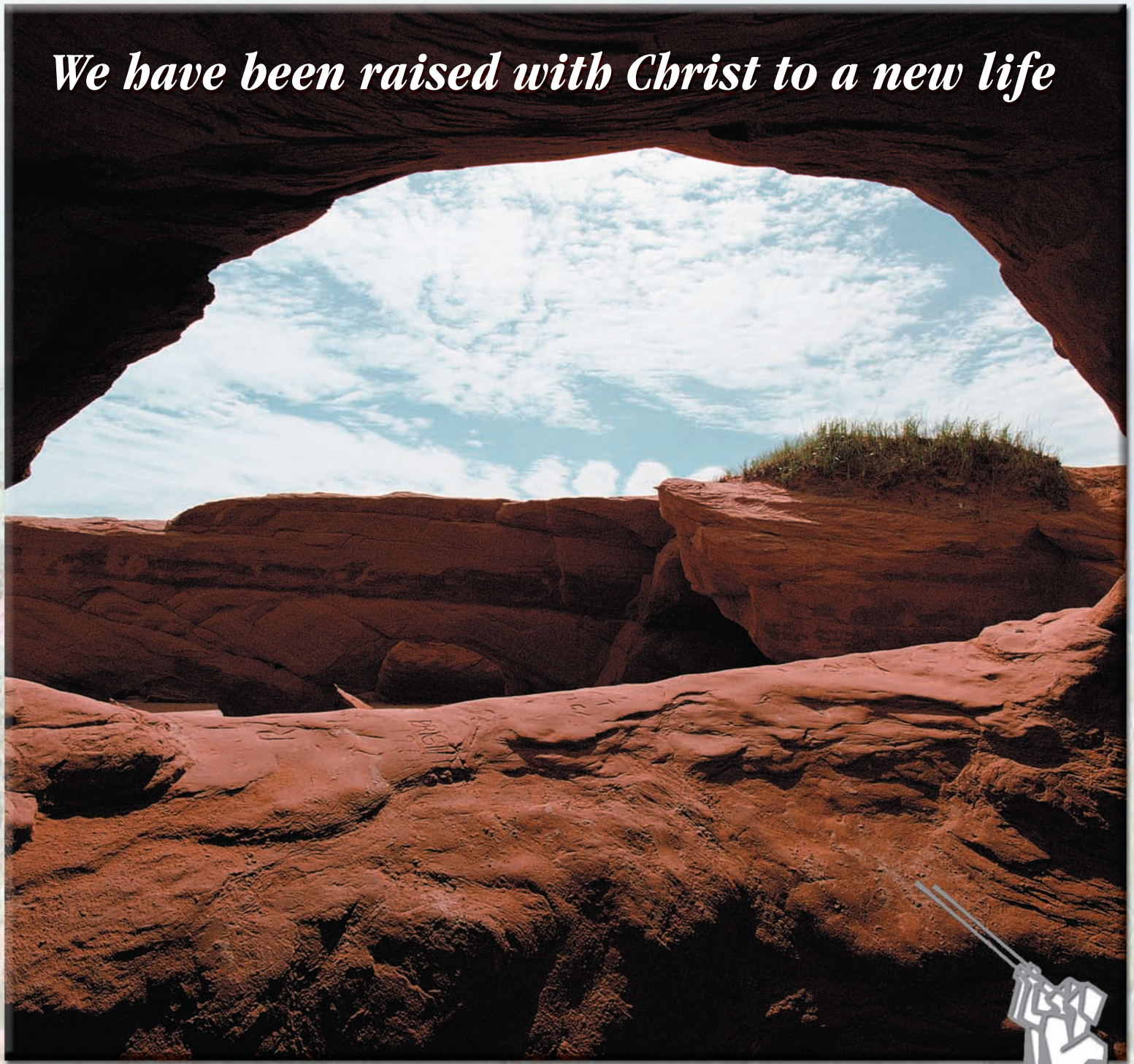


# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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*We have been raised with Christ to a new life*



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- Raised to a New Life
- Graduation at ECHS







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# Relax Max!

*Is the criticism justified, or not?*

During the past months I renewed my acquaintance with some of the works of Max Lucado. I did this because I have almost always enjoyed the publications of Max. The man surely knows how to write. He is able to focus on the issues of daily life and to come with pertinent scriptural passages. His examples are sometimes amazing. I can understand it that Max is often called "America's leading inspirational author."

But whoever writes and publishes will be criticized. That's the hard law of the ecclesiastical jungle. Last year Max became the victim of some devastating criticism. It's a good thing that Max is a cool fellow. Still, I thought that there is some reason to encourage pastor Lucado. Hence the title of my editorial "Relax Max."

## Blasphemy?

The criticism was reported in an article in *Nederlands Dagblad* (July 18, 2008). The title of the report is: "The Books of Max Lucado Contain Blasphemy." The article was first written in a magazine called *De Waarheidsvriend*, which is the publication of the orthodox wing of the Dutch Protestant church. A similar accusation was levelled against Max Lucado in *De Saambinder*, a magazine of the Reformed Congregations in The Netherlands. Both articles were written by prominent pastors in these churches, Rev. H. Veldhuizen (DRC) and Rev. J.M.D. de Heer (RCN).

I am adding the names of the magazines and ministers so that you can be assured of the fact that I did not invent this stuff. If you want, you can check it out.

Now if I was Max, I would be quite bothered by all this. It is not pleasant when you are branded as a

blasphemer or a heretic. Since Lucado's books are read also in our churches, I thought it wise to pay some attention to this criticism. Is it justified, or not?

## Cutting edge

It is true that Max writes in a very bold style. It is cutting edge journalism. Sometimes Max goes too far in his examples and formulations. I understand this, for I too like cutting edge stuff.

Rev. Veldhuizen feels that Max's style is too popular and often in conflict with the *holiness of God*. As example Veldhuizen quotes passages about our Lord Jesus in which Max suggests that Christ floated in the womb of Mary, spilled milk at supper, had a ten on his report card, and if he was still around would help you with the barbecue. Veldhuizen writes, "Whoever speaks in this manner about the person and the work of Christ has little understanding of the miracle of Christ's coming." I must say that I tend to agree with Rev. Veldhuizen on this point. Sometimes Lucado takes it to the max.

I am bothered more, however, by Max's tendency to *invent* stories in which our Lord is the lead actor. I have to think of Lucado's story about Jesse Carpenter who appears on a television talk show because the real guest has not shown up. You guessed it, Jesse Carpenter is Jesus Christ. For me this goes too far. The point is that there are too many Jesse Carpenter stories in Max Lucado's books.

But I would not call this blasphemy. Relax Max. Blasphemy is a deliberate abuse of God's Holy Name. I think that this is *far* from Max's mind. Still, some of the stories and characterizations do give rise to this accusation. Perhaps Max should take this concern into account in future publications. Sometimes the connections are sensational but dangerous. Max



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compares us to Mary because Christ is *in us*. He writes, "You are a modern-day Mary." Of course Max means this is a spiritual manner. He writes, "You, like Mary, will deliver Christ into the world. Every place you live will be a Bethlehem, and every day you live will be a Christmas. . . ." (*Next Door Savior*, page 551). I am afraid that the historical event of the virgin birth is applied too quickly to us in a glib manner. I am not like Mary, nor do I have a similar task. The point is too profound.

**Does God love everybody?**

The critics I quoted strongly object to Lucado's belief that "God loves everyone." Max would not be giving enough attention to the need for reconciliation and the call to sanctification. "In its generality," writes Veldhuizen, "the statement that God loves everyone is rather untrue." Max would be guilty of presenting a "general offer of grace," writes Rev. de Heer. God offers and we must/can accept this offer. De Heer feels that too much emphasis is placed by Max on human decision and not on God's omnipotence.

Now there has been much debate, also among Reformed people, about the so-called *offer of grace*. Some Orthodox Reformed do not like to hear of such a general offer of grace. They insist that God does not love everyone, but loves only the elect.

I rather stick with the fine formulation of the *Canons of Dort*, "The promise of the Gospel is that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have everlasting life. This promise ought to be announced and proclaimed universally and without discrimination to all peoples and to all men, to whom God in His good pleasure sends the Gospel, together with the command to repent and believe" (II / 5). God's love for this world is evident in the giving of his Son and in the Great Commission.

When people do come to faith and surrender to Christ, "this comes only through God's grace, given to them from eternity in Christ. God owes this grace to no one" (II / 7). Max Lucado does not write with this foundation in mind and that makes his writings, though very appealing, sometimes rather shallow.

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God's love goes to his children who cling in faith to Christ. He hates haughty unbelievers who ignore Him. "The Lord watches over all who love him, but the wicked he will destroy" (Psalm 145: 20). That same Psalm says, "The Lord is loving toward all that he has made." Is there room for God's wrath and judgment?

### Lucado and holy baptism

I noticed that Lucado writes very little about the sacraments, especially baptism. The teaching on (infant) baptism often reveals a lot about someone's doctrinal position and practical Christianity. I was baptized as an infant and my baptismal name is Klaas.

Max was pastor for many years of the Oak Hills Church and recently retired to devote more time to writing. The doctrinal statement of this church is clear and strong on baptism. Only believing adults are baptized and this must be done by immersion.

Baptism is seen as a sign of our commitment to God and not as a seal on God's promises to us and our children. This is the classic Anabaptist position: baptism is our pledge, not God's promise. What happens with infants? They are dedicated to God in the hope that God will lead them to faith so that they can be baptized. Should children die in infancy, we must accept that God would never turn away a sincere person.

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*The teaching on baptism often reveals a lot about someone's doctrinal position and practical Christianity*

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I'll write it again: the decision for or against infant baptism is a central matter for an individual or a church. Those who reject infant baptism must necessarily work on the basis of some "general offer" of grace. They must also in some way necessarily accept the notion of the free will of man. Christ comes to me with his offer of grace; I will decide if I will accept this offer. It becomes a topsy-turvy gospel in which God's sovereignty is set adrift.

There are the best of intentions. Relax Max. But sometimes he gets my goat. Then I have to say: relax, Klaas.

P.s.: This editorial was also sent to Max. We will publish any reply from him. His website: [www.maxlucado.com](http://www.maxlucado.com).

### Special Event Submissions

Submissions covering special events should be sent to the Copy Manager within two months of the event's date; there is a maximum length of 1000 words. If pictures of the event are available, please submit them (with a recommended digital size of 1200 x 1500 pixels or larger) with the article.



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# Raised to a New Life



MATTHEW 13:52

*"We will certainly also be united with Him in his resurrection."*

Romans 6:5b

Jesus Christ was not the only one who arose on Easter morning. That is Paul's emphatic argument in Romans 6: when Christ died on the cross, the Christian died with Him, died *to sin*, became dead-with-respect-to-sin. The dead no longer listen to instructions and those who have died-to-sin no longer listen to what sin tells them to do.

Then Paul continues: "If we have been united with [Christ]. . . in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Rom 6:5). Paul's argument is that these two go together. When God through Christ causes someone to "die to sin," to become dead-with-respect-to-sin, then God does not leave that person in limbo. Rather, God sees to it that the person who has died to sin with Christ is also raised with Christ to a new life.

So, if having died to sin is a fixed reality for every Christian (and it is!), so is the fact that every Christian has been raised to a new life. Anyone who shares in the benefits Christ obtained on the cross is no longer the person he once was – dead in sin; rather, he has become what he was not – alive to God. God, after all, is God not of the dead but of the living. If God is indeed your God, then you are no longer dead; you have been made alive again. That is Paul's

argument in Romans 6 and that is what we confess with these words of the Catechism, "by [Christ's] power we too are raised up to a new life" (LD 17).

But if being dead in sin implied a lifestyle, so also being raised with Christ implies a lifestyle. Consider Paul's words: "Our old self was crucified with him" (i.e., was put to death with Christ) "so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Rom 6:6). Those are the realities that lead Paul to tell the Romans to no longer "let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires" (v. 12). Again, "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life" (v. 13). It's obvious: Easter implies a lifestyle.

We need the matter fixed in our minds. Being dead with respect to sin is a basic fact for the child of God; it's not wishful thinking. That counts also for the concept of being raised to a new life. Again, it is not wishful thinking but reality. You and I have been raised to a new life – if indeed we are in Jesus Christ.

And if we are new creatures in Christ, if in faith we share in the righteousness Christ earned on the cross, then – says the Lord – you

cannot help but demonstrate that reality! Just as much as Jesus Christ, once raised, could not stay in the grave, so also the child of God, once raised to a new life, cannot remain in the grave of sin. If being dead in sin implies that we'll act dead in sin, then being raised to a new life implies that we will act raised to a new life.

Easter has come and gone and with it a so-called long weekend. With good reason the police were out, watching for transgressions of the speed limit, watching for transgressions of the alcohol limit too. Did they give you a fine? Did you, like those still dead in sin, obey the urges of the flesh? Or did you find time to surf the net and investigate sites you wouldn't want your wife (or husband or parent or child) to know about? Did you watch a video or program you'd rather not have Jesus know you watched?

Why do I ask these questions? Because being raised to a new life implies that we will act raised to a new life. And if you deliberately continue to act as those who don't know Christ, you are not raised to a new life. That in turn requires repentance, turning from sin, and embracing in faith the Christ who arose from the dead – so that God declared righteous both Christ Himself *and* all who belong to Him!





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# I Can Lie to Myself: Self-Deception and Apologetics (Part 2 of 2)

This two-part series of articles was originally a presentation for the Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church. In preparing this material, I made grateful use of Greg Bahnsen's article *The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception in Presuppositional Apologetics* (*Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995): 1-31) – available on-line here: <http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/PA207.htm> Readers interested in a more technical treatment on this subject should consult Bahnsen's article and his dissertation on the same subject, *A Conditional Resolution of the Apparent Paradox of Self-Deception, Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1978.*

In the first part, we noted that Scripture provides much data with regards to self-deception. One of the crucial passages is Romans 1:18-32. In that passage, we discover that unbelievers "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." They know God, they know about God, they know of his righteous decrees, and yet they refuse to submit to Him in faith. They rebelliously deceive themselves.

## The Reformed confessions

Since these vital truths are found in Scripture, we shouldn't be surprised to find them echoed in our confessions. In Belgic Confession Article 2, for instance, we find a direct quote from part of Romans 1:20 and a paraphrase of the other part. The Confession speaks about convicting people with this revelation of the invisible things of God. Of course, the idea of conviction goes hand in hand with judgment. Unbelievers will be judged with respect to what they have known and believed, but yet suppressed in unrighteousness. They are without excuse, without a foot to stand on before God's face.

Chapter III/IV of the Canons of Dort also speaks about this self-deception in Article 4. The Canons are speaking there about the so-called light of nature, what Calvin called the seed of religion (*semen religionis*) or the sense of divinity (*sensus divinitatis*). Unbelievers have some notions about God, but they do not have a saving knowledge of God – in fact, they're far from that. Instead, this light is polluted and suppressed by man's wickedness and the result is the same as what we find in Romans

1:18-32: "He renders himself without excuse before God."

Now imagine that cancer patient I mentioned last time. He was dying. But he did not believe it and did not want to talk about it. Would a good doctor allow him to go on with that self-deception? Obviously not. If the cancer had been detected on time, he would tell him that there is hope. He needs to have surgery to deal with the tumour, he needs chemo or radiation therapy to destroy the cancer in his body. A good doctor would never allow the self-deception to continue, he would not facilitate it or encourage it, but he would confront it.

Or take the situation with Hurricane Ike. There were people who denied that the hurricane was coming or that it would be severe. The authorities would not encourage or facilitate the self-deception of those who decided to stay. They couldn't force them to leave, but they were warned that they would face certain death by staying. Some of them did stay. One woman was interviewed on the news afterwards and they asked her whether she would do it again or what advice she would give to those who would stay

through a hurricane. Her advice was one word: "Run."

The self-deception of our unbelieving friends, family, neighbours, co-workers, and fellow students cannot be countenanced. It cannot be facilitated or encouraged. Rather, if we take the Scriptures seriously, we discover that unbelief, that self-deception, has to be challenged and exposed for what it is, foolishness and rebellion against God which will be judged. We have to be good doctors who tell the truth about the terminal disease and its miraculous cure, good weather forecasters who tell the truth about the coming storm and the Person with whom to find shelter.

### **The content of self-deception**

Unbelievers are self-deceived about God. They may deny his existence or assert that this existence is unproven, or they may have their own home-grown ideas about God. For instance, they may believe that God is basically like Santa Claus – He knows if you've been good or bad, but in the end just about everybody gets the presents. We need to engage our unbelieving friends on what they believe about God, we need to point out their inconsistencies and rationalizations and then expose it all as self-deception.

Unbelievers are self-deceived about themselves. They may believe themselves to be basically good people, they may believe that they are the masters of their own destiny, a law unto themselves. We need to bring these thoughts out in the open and then reveal them as being self-deception.

Unbelievers are self-deceived about the world. They may believe that the world is a product of chance, they may believe that everything that exists is material only (materialism), that things like moral laws and the laws of logic are merely social conventions, that reality is an illusion or any number of other delusions. Here too, we need to engage our friends and unmask these self-deceptions.

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*Our task is to expose the sinful self-deception and foolishness of unbelief, so that we can also present the gospel as the only hope that we have*

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### **Confronting self-deception**

But then we need to ask the question: how? How do we confront this self-deception? On our way to answering that, I want to briefly consider the alternatives to a Reformed answer. There are basically two alternatives out there: Roman Catholic and Arminian. Both teach to one degree or another the doctrine of man's free will. They teach that unbelieving man actually is a law unto himself or autonomous in some sense. Unbelieving people can reason quite well, they can even make consistent rational conclusions with God's assistance. Both Roman Catholics and Arminians flatter the natural man. They don't see the root problem of

unbelief and so they don't really address it.

The method of Roman Catholic apologetics is primarily to use rational arguments to prove God's existence and the truth of the Christian faith as they understand it. Arminian apologetics will take the same approach, but there the emphasis is often placed on evidence – that's why it's often called evidential apologetics. However, using these methods is like weeding a field and only taking out what's on the surface. It's the roots that are giving the problem and it's the roots that the believer who's defending his or her faith needs to get at.

The Reformed churches have always strongly rejected the notion that unbelieving man's will is free. We know that salvation is a gift of God which comes entirely by grace through faith alone. When it comes to salvation, we reject free will and autonomy. Obviously, it wouldn't make any sense to welcome this idea into how we defend the faith. If we reject Arminian thinking about how salvation comes to us, then how could we turn around and use those same doctrines in apologetics? We need consistency.

Consistency demands that we scratch the unbeliever where he or she truly itches. Not where they *think* they're itching, but where we know from God's Word that they truly itch. Our task is to expose the sinful self-deception and foolishness of unbelief, so that we can also present the gospel as the only hope that we have. We do this by undermining the presuppositions or fundamental beliefs of the unbeliever. Presuppositions are our most

fundamental, unquestioned beliefs; taken together all our presuppositions make up the way we view the world, our worldview. We recognize that every person has presuppositions. For instance, at a basic level, every one assumes the truth of basic arithmetic like  $2 + 2 = 4$ . No one questions that in a real, meaningful way. These presuppositions extend to all areas of life. People have presuppositions about science, the uniformity of nature, morality, communication and reality.

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*Respect the dignity of the person who is engaging us about the faith*

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When we engage unbelievers regarding the faith, we need to place some of their most crucial presuppositions under a critical microscope, examining them for consistency. We also allow our own presuppositions about ultimate things to be placed under that same microscope. Whose presuppositions are the most consistent with the way the world really is? This method (what we can call a presuppositional method) is geared towards exposing the self-deception of unbelievers. It's suggested to us by Proverbs 26:4, 5. "Do not answer a fool according to his folly" – that means, present the truth (the wisdom) of Scripture, have the unbeliever step into your shoes so that he can see the way in which the biblical worldview makes sense of everything. "Answer a fool according to his folly" – that means, expose the foolishness and falsity of unbelief by stepping into the unbeliever's presuppositions (his self-deception) and showing how it fails to arrive at any degree of consistency.

We need to argue from the impossibility of the contrary. The Christian faith, the Christian worldview is true because of the impossibility of the contrary. We need to demonstrate that, as Bahnsen put it, "Only Christianity provides the preconditions of intelligibility for man's experience and reasoning. If Christianity were not true, the unbeliever could not prove or understand anything." This is a biblical argument developed out of passages such as Acts 17:28, Romans 11:36, and Colossians 1:17. At first glance, it sounds complicated, but it really isn't. All we're saying is that the world is exactly the way the Christian worldview says it is, the way that God says it is in Scripture – and not the way the unbeliever says it is.

### **Concluding observations from 1 Peter 3:15**

I want to conclude with a couple of practical points from 1 Peter 3:15, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. . . ."

Gentleness is one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. It can also be translated as "meekness." Meekness is the complete opposite of having a violent character and blowing your top all the time at the most insignificant annoyances. A meek person is not easily excited, but is rather humble, level-headed, subdued. But that doesn't mean being a push-over. It implies being both firm and friendly. So, when it comes to giving an answer, we keep our cool and we don't blow up in fits of anger or frustration when someone asks why we're believers in Christ and his Word.

Peter also speaks about respect as we defend our faith. Here we're exhorted to respect the dignity of

## **Church News**

Accepted the call to Ancaster, Ontario:

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the person who is engaging us about the faith. In practical terms, this means that we never belittle or insult an unbeliever. Even though God's Word says that they deceive themselves, we're not to degrade or patronize them – particularly since we ourselves are so often guilty of exactly the same thing! We should never treat them as if they're intellectually stupid or dull

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*Apologetics by itself will not bring anyone to faith in Jesus Christ*

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because they don't believe. Though the Bible says that those who deny God's existence are fools, we should keep in mind that this is not name-calling but a moral judgment from God. Our calling is to expose the foolishness of self-deception and unbelief, not to engage in name-calling. We respect unbelievers, recognizing that that



they are also people created in God's image. When it comes down to it, without the grace of God in our lives, without the gospel, we're exactly like them. We're not better, just redeemed. The defence of our faith begins with an attitude of humility. This is not a time to flex our intellectual muscles so that others will fall down before us and fawn over us. Rather, we're interested in seeing people fall before the Lord of lords and that path is paved with a gentle and respectful manner.

Biblical or Reformed apologetics by itself will not bring anyone to faith in Jesus Christ. For that, we need the sovereign and gracious work of the Holy Spirit. One should never get the idea that apologetics is a way to argue people into the kingdom of heaven. Apologetics can only be truly biblical, and therefore Reformed, when the person using it acknowledges the work of the Spirit in converting sinners and when the person realizes that he is only a very small instrument in God's hands. God can use apologetics and us to bring in those whom he has chosen from before the foundation of the world. Conversely, he can also use biblical apologetics to harden the hearts of unbelievers even further, magnifying his glory through his just judgment on them (Prov 16:4). Like the Word upon which it relies, apologetics is a two-edged sword, leading some to the gospel and to repentance, belief and salvation, while others are left under God's just judgment and condemnation.

I'm glad there is increased interest in apologetics as of late. However, there is a danger that we fail to see the necessity of a consistently Reformed, a *biblical* approach and instead we treat it like a buffet, taking some from the Roman Catholics, some from the Arminians, and then maybe some from wherever else. Then in twenty or thirty years someone comes along and says "the emperor has

no clothes. We have Reformed theology, but we don't have Reformed apologetics. There's no consistency." That would be a tragedy. It would be compounded by the fact that a Reformed approach has *already* been developed by Cornelius VanTil, Greg Bahnsen, and others. There's no need to reinvent the wheel. Yes, there is room for improvement, but the basic parameters are already in place.

This notion of self-deception that we've been looking at is at the heart of Reformed apologetics. No school of apologetics which ignores or minimizes these biblical truths about self-deception can be called Reformed. If you read a book about apologetics and it doesn't deal with the self-deception of unbelief, it's simply not a Reformed book. There may still be something helpful there, but you have to recognize that there is a fundamental difference of approach. Let me conclude with a quote from VanTil. It comes from the introduction to his book, *The Defense of the Faith*:

Nothing short of the Christ of the Scriptures, as presented in historic Reformed theology, can challenge men to forsake their sin and establish them in truth and life. If only Reformed theologians were true to their own principles and ideas! How often does it not prove true that Arminian Christians are, in practice, more truly biblical and Reformed than are those who speak of Calvin as their leader? If only the present writer, in presuming to differ from Reformed thinkers of the past and present, were true to his principles and ideals! Truly, with Augustine, our prayer should ever be for humility and more humility. Even so, necessity is laid upon us. The gospel must be heard without compromise. The whole world lies in darkness.







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## What's New???

It is time once again to pass on some of the items gleaned from the various bulletins. A number of things caught my attention. Not all items are truly new in the sense that they have never been dealt with before. Just the same, they will be in the category of "new to you." By reviewing these items, this column aims not only to be informative but also instructive.

We begin in Burlington Fellowship where they tried something new in the New Year's Eve service. In the bulletin previous to that service it read, "On New Year's Eve we will submit ourselves to the Law of the Lord with a responsive reading. The minister will read the commandment, and the congregation will respond with the scripture text as a response as it is in the bold print." It would be interesting to know how that went. There is a challenge to a congregation speaking in unison. It is always easier to sing together. Just the same, I have visited congregations where they recited the creed rather than sing it and it went very well.

The council of the church at Guelph has been busy with various matters pertaining to the next general synod. That is nothing new

in itself. What is new, as far as I can tell, is that they decided to publish their submissions to General Synod 2010 as well as to various committees in their local bulletin. In most cases, congregations will only know what their councils submitted to a general synod by reading summary statements in the *Acts*. All this is long after the fact. It takes up a bit of space in the local bulletins, but it is a good way to inform the congregation of the council's views on various matters.

The consistory of the church at Aldergrove decided to implement a monthly sermon discussion on a trial basis for four months. This discussion is to take place on the third Sunday of the month after the second service. As grounds for adopting this concept, the consistory offered the following:

1. Discussion of the sermon following the service will help to consolidate the message in the minds and hearts of those who heard it.
2. Discussion will allow church members to bring up points they didn't fully understand or would like to hear more about.
3. Discussion will allow the minister to better understand how well the congregation is

receiving and understanding the sermons which he delivers.

4. A few congregational members have requested this over the last few months.

The consistory also added, "When sermons are discussed, it needs to be kept in mind that preaching has a unique dignity and authority since it is Christ Himself who addresses the congregation in this medium. The unique nature of preaching requires discussion to be at all times respectful of the message that has been given. The Consistory trusts that these times of discussion will be used in a responsible way for building each other up in the knowledge of Christ. May the Lord bless this initiative."

It may be of interest to note that something similar was done in the Dutch refugee congregations in the city of London in the time of the Reformation. In the first period, which ended with the reign of Queen Mary, beside the Sunday worship services there would be a meeting on Thursday morning where there was a time for "prophesying." At this time, elders could ask ministers to clarify points. This practice, however, was discontinued in the second period (1559-1579). The reason for ending it



was that the people had been scarred by the experiences of persecution in the intervening years and did not have the proper spiritual demeanour to have a good discussion. Thankfully we don't have to face similar circumstances. It appears that the experiment started out well in Aldergrove. Rev. Schouten wrote in the bulletin after the first session, "Last Sunday afternoon, we had our first ever sermon discussion following the second service. I think those who attended would agree that it was time well spent. As minister, I was thankful for the interaction with the congregation about the message of the Word."

From a Canadian Reformed perspective, there has always been a gap in the Western provinces in terms of a faithful Reformed witness in the province of Saskatchewan. In light of this, an item in the church news from Manitoba caught my eye. The *Manitoba Church News* includes news from the Providence URC in Winnipeg. In the congregational column it read, "This past Sunday Rev. Donovan filled the pulpit at Grace Presbyterian Church in Regina. This congregation is considering joining the URCNA. His weekend consisted of meeting with a few members of the congregation including an Elder and their wives. This was an informal evening talking on such subjects as who the URCNA is. Steps needed to take in joining the URCNA. What might be the best ways in getting the congregation educated on our confessions, church orders, three forms of unity, and Liturgical forms that are used in our worship services?"

It is encouraging to know of efforts to establish a faithful Reformed witness in the province of Saskatchewan. Perhaps this information will be helpful to those who end up in Regina on a Sunday as they seek a place to worship.

With this we conclude our column. Till next time.

#### **Post Script**

In my previous "What's New???" column I concluded with an invitation to respond. As can be seen in a letter to the editor, one person responded to my comments about audio/visual enhancement. I also received a personal email in which a brother interacted with my

remarks regarding interim ministers. He indicated that my words "perhaps it is the spirit of the age where employers try to reduce costs and obligations to their employees by contracting out their labour. One wonders if the next step, etc" were neither helpful nor brotherly. He assured me that Smithville was not trying to avoid responsibility but was providing honourably for their minister and that the arrangement was by mutual agreement. Reading over the paragraphs in the column once more, the point would have been made sufficiently by leaving out the last two sentences, thus avoiding causing offence.





# Being that Sore Thumb: Fighting Comfortable Christianity

**Jenn Harink**

is from Grassie, ON

"Hey Jenn – how was your weekend?"

I glance up, "Hey. Ah, it was pretty good."

"Hey – that new movie opens up on Sunday and a bunch of us are going to go see it – want to come too?"

"Uh no, sorry I can't. I . . . ah . . . I go to church on Sundays."

She looks surprised for a second, then her eyes light up, "Oh, you're religious then?"

I cringe at being shoved under that religious umbrella yet again and struggle to meet her gaze, "Yeah, something like that."

## Different? Not so much

Throughout the course of the day it was her surprise that really hit me. She actually had no idea that I was a Christian. Someone I saw every day knew absolutely nothing about what was supposed to be the key defining characteristic of my life? She didn't

notice anything different about the way I went about my life or the way I talked? Something was wrong here.

Let's face it – our world thrives on conformity. Take a look at any school. How many Hannah Montanas and David Beckhams can't you see walking around? How many people aren't serving as walking billboards for Hollister, Aéropostale, or Abercrombie and Fitch? After all, different is weird. Different is that kid with the Giant Tiger jeans. Different is that girl who refuses to get trashed on Friday night when all the cool kids are. Different is difficult.

Unfortunately, conformity seems to be as prevalent in our circles as outside of them. So it raises the question: how different does the world really see us as? When we are honest with ourselves and each other, our answers to this question could pose a problem in the light of God's Word.

## The call to be holy

Throughout the Old Testament, we hear how God chose Israel as his nation and guided their history towards the culmination of the salvation story with the birth of Jesus Christ. He said, "You will be my people and I will be your God." A line of continuity can be followed with regards to God's jealousy for his people. He always insists that they serve Him alone and remain separate from the nations around them. They were to be holy. They were to be different. Indeed, this was their *identity*, as it also is ours.

Jesus continued this theme in many of his teachings. He told his disciples – and so also us – how we are to be the salt of this world, being careful not to lose our saltiness by conforming to the ways of the world (Matt 5:13). Further in this chapter, He made the comparison of us being a light in this dark world. Obviously, no



one would put this light under a bushel, since that would eliminate its purpose. So what good do fearful Christians do when they are afraid to let their light shine? We see that Jesus commands us to a life clearly different from those around us – a life centred solely on Him. And, like lights, our unique lives are to be visible.

The apostles also write extensively about this idea. Peter says it plainly – “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet 2:9). He goes on in this chapter about how we are sojourners in this world. While the world may think this life is the destination, we know that it is merely the road to something much greater – true life.

### **A battle? Not so much**

Let's take a look at Psalms 52-59. In these chapters, David is beseeching God to deliver him from the foes that are constantly at his throat. We know that these psalms, as all of Scripture, are as applicable to us today as they were to David. But wait – are they really? When was the last time you couldn't handle the pressure anymore from a world at your throat? When was the last time you pleaded (or felt the need to plead) with God to deliver you from “ravenous beasts – men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords” (Ps 57:4)?

We know from Paul's letter to the Romans that Satan is as a roaring lion, prowling and searching for more of the faithful to devour. He never rests from his persecuting. He knows his time is short and is getting more desperate to bring as many down with him as possible. A scary thought, no?

But are we actually feeling this as Reformed young people in 2009? Where is the manifestation of the Genesis antithesis seen in our lives? Are we even noticing the struggle between the seed of the woman and that of the serpent? In Ephesians 6, Paul tells us to put on the full armour of God: the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit. But is this heavy armour something we actually find necessary in our day-to-day lives? Or does it seem that we are doing just fine in our flip-flops and beach wear?

### **So what's the problem?**

We've discovered that we are called to be holy – set apart by God for fighting the good fight of the faith despite “countless assaults on every side.” If we don't really see this persecution, we need some self-examination – how different are we really? Are we truly lights in this world? Think about it – we are the possessors of the most amazing treasure ever. But are we even letting the light of God's Holy Spirit shine through at all? Or have we become expert Scrooges – hoarding the gospel to ourselves?

This might be a good time for a bit of a “disclaimer.” Living where we are, enjoying relative freedom of religion and expression, puts us in a different situation. The difference between us and the world will not be as stark and obvious as that of David and the nation of Israel versus their surrounding nations, or even current situations like Christians experiencing persecution. Yet, the fact remains that there is to be something both clearly visible and tangible of our calling as God's children.

I am not going to pretend that I have an easy remedy for the dim,

flickering light that we give off. But let's go through our lives and honestly evaluate ourselves. Starting with the practical things like the music we listen to, or the TV shows listed as favourites on our Facebook profiles. How about the way we talk about our families? What about what we do with our spare time, or how we spend our money? Even more importantly, what do we show about our attitudes toward life in general? And what do our hopes for the future consist of? After all, shouldn't every sphere of life be a shining example of how we are set apart from the rest of those in this world? Our lives should cause the world to wonder, to question, to probe deeper. With God's grace, the distinct differences that we show may be used as a catalyst in the conversion of others.

By nature, we strive to avoid confrontation and conflict. Life is just easier if we don't cause any ripples.

And it's true – being obviously different is hard. It's much easier not to draw those dreaded lines in the sand. It's uncomfortable. It may result in some weird looks or cold shoulders, but honestly, how serious is this, especially in the light of a passage like Philippians 3:8?

Being that sore thumb is exactly our calling. It's our job to stick out in this “world with devils filled,” though we may get bruised in the process. Just remember the One who was far more than bruised for us.

“We've got to stop hiding behind our relevance, blending in so well that people can't see the difference, and it's the difference that sets the world free” – Casting Crowns, “What this World Needs.”

# Graduation at ECHS: Unite My Heart to Fear Your Name

On a balmy October evening, parents, grandparents, teachers, friends and relatives gathered into the spacious Guelph church building to celebrate a momentous evening with twenty-six Grade 12 graduates of Emmanuel Christian High School.

Various artsy students, under the skillful direction of the art teacher, Miss Rachel Oosdyk, decorated the foyer and the fellowship hall with sheaves, mums, pumpkins, pictures, maroon tablecloths, centre pieces, candles, and sparkles. The decorations transformed the place into a cozy, vibrant, festive hall. Once parents, board members, and staff took their assigned places, the honoured guests of the evening strutted in, allowing the festivities to begin.

While the Chairman of the Board welcomed everyone and opened the meal, moms and the eleventh grade students put the finishing touches on the various dishes to be brought out: first the appetizers, then various main course dishes, and finally an array of desserts. Well dressed waiters and waitresses, as well as those privileged to eat all this food, were entertained by some staff members who ran a jeopardy game that highlighted various characteristics

of the graduands or events of the 2008 year. After the meal, the principal instructed the graduands in the fineries of official conduct, parents drove home to pick up siblings, and many friends, grandparents, and other relatives flocked to the church to witness the official ceremonies of Grad 2008. The auditorium was filled to near capacity.

The keynote speaker, Rev. Agema of Fergus Maranatha church, shared the theme "Unite My Heart to Fear Your Name" taken from Psalm 111. Students were assured that the one true God, who lives and reigns forever, hears believers all the time and thus there is nothing to fear. Fearing God means no fear. In Him we need not fear the idols or powers of this world, but in God we must fully trust. Our heart must be wholly directed to Him; every decision, every action and every thought must be united to show our awe, praise, and thanks. Rev. Agema urged the graduands to realize how essential it is for all his children to keep praying that prayer: Unite my heart to fear Your Name.

After the keynote speech, the principal shared his address which focused on Ephesians 4:2, 3: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another



*Rev. Agema delivering his keynote address*

in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace." Mr. Henk Nobel spoke against the individualism of our society and highlighted the necessity for students to seek each other so that "together we reach unity in faith." The graduates may have already moved on to different schools (colleges and universities) or into different careers, but the unity of faith remains. All graduates were urged to humbly love one another, "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."



The chairman, Mr. John Meijaard, then joined the principal in handing out diplomas and Bibles to all graduates. What a blessing to see twenty-seven young people successfully complete twelve years of education!

After the awards ceremonies (see side bar), Tineke Bijlsma took to the podium and presented the valedictorian address. She reviewed the years of education briefly and spent most of the speech providing future careers to each fellow classmate – careers that depended on unique characteristics/behaviours/events that each student exhibited or partook in during their ECHS years.

Graduation is truly a celebratory event. Not only may we enjoy dinners, applaud speeches, and congratulate students with diplomas and awards, but we should also become reflective and notice God at work: He is at work among the board and committee



*Valedictorian, Tineke Bijlsma*

members, among parents, among staff, and among all the students. He provides students with growth in knowledge, skills, understanding, and maturity. He grants talents and gifts in varying degrees. May all glory and praise be directed to this loving and caring God.

### **Honours Achievement Award**

Melissa Brouwer  
Carina DeJong  
Lauren Flach  
Linda Holtland  
Alyssa Jonker  
Ryan Kamphuis  
Cara Lodder  
Chelsea Lodder  
Fallon Nijenhuis  
Colleen VanTol  
Dianthe VanWeerden

### **Post Farm Structures Award**

Derek Agema

### **The Royal LePage RCR Business Excellence Award**

Breanne Hulst

### **Queen Elizabeth II Aiming for the Top Scholarship**

Melissa Brouwer

### **Governor General's Award**

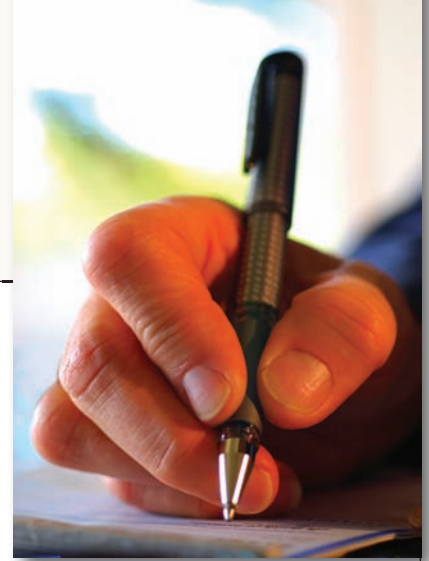
Melissa Brouwer

### **Jordan Hutchinson Memorial Academic Proficiency Award**

Linda Holtland



*Basking in the moment*



**Dear Editor:**

**Re: The frequency of the Lord's Supper celebration**

I very much appreciate the articles written by Rev. Lodder on the above topic. Food for thought!

Rev. Lodder writes, and I quote: "Whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper by faith, then our communion with God is strengthened." Further: "In this sacrament we enjoy intimate fellowship with Christ our Saviour." I agree with these statements, of course.

However, this begs the following question: why is it then, that when we are receiving visitors in our midst, some do not celebrate the Lord's Supper with us? Over the years I've asked several visitors about this. The reply quite often is: "I think once every two months is enough" or "I celebrated in another sister church last week," etc.

With the summer season upon us and the holiday season approaching, we would perhaps do well to ask ourselves whether our thinking is correct in this matter.

After all, which one of us would want to miss a celebration?

*With Christian Greetings:  
Bill Vogelzang  
Barrhead, AB*

**Dear Editor,**

I read with interest the exchange between Br. Hoogland and Dr. Oosterhoff in the February 27 *Clarion*. If I may make some observations it seems to me that some elements of importance were not considered in the exchange. First, it is evidently assumed as a given by both correspondents that musical instruments belong in public worship. It should be remembered that our Reformed fathers

thought quite the opposite way.

Calvin viewed them, as is well known, as the childish rudiments of Old Testament worship which had no place in New Testament worship. It is a fact of history that the primitive New Testament church did not employ them. And our own Synod of Dordrecht (1574) so maintained that "the playing of organs in the church. . . should be completely discontinued."

But even assuming that it is permitted to have musical instruments in worship, there seems to be in Dr. Oosterhoff's response the line of reasoning that if the traditional instrument – the organ – is alright then all other musical instruments would be alright. But this, in my view, ignores the fact that even if we take the ground that organs are permitted in worship, it does not follow that all other instruments are equally valid. A key element in true biblical worship is an attitude of awe, reverence, a quiet contemplative spirit in the worshipper. Not all musical instruments promote this. In fact, some promote exactly the opposite. Some lead to levity, for example.

Dr. Oosterhoff speaks of "biblically justified contextualization." I would only point out the church is not called to imitate, import, or use contemporary cultural practices in her worship. Always and ever the church is called to be against the culture, for all the culture fallen man produces is utterly corrupted by his depravity. Instead the church is called to shine as a light in the midst of a naughty and crooked culture (Phil 2:15) – also in her worship.

*Yours in Christ,  
Mark Brooks  
Sauk Village, Illinois*

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*



**Press Release of Classis Pacific West, March 3, 2009 in Willoughby Heights, B.C.**

1. Opening

On behalf of the convening church at Willoughby Heights, Rev. A. Souman opened the meeting with the reading of 1 Peter 4:1-19, requested the singing of Psalm 144:1, 4, and led in prayer.

2. Constitution of Classis

The delegates from the church at Surrey-Maranatha examined the credentials and found them to be in good order. All the primary delegates were present, with the exception of the church at Willoughby Heights, with Br. C. Flokstra seated as an alternate. It was noted that instructions from two churches were received and Classis was then declared constituted. Following the rotation, Rev. W. Bredenhof was appointed as chairman, Rev. H. Alkema as vice-chairman, and Rev. J. Slaa as clerk.

3. Memorabilia

The chairman takes note of the temporary appointment of Rev. J. VanVliet to serve as instructor of Dogmatics at the Theological College, resulting in the potential upcoming vacancy of the church at Surrey-Maranatha. The chairman also makes mention of the continuing furlough of Rev. K. Wieske. In connection with Article 44 of the Church Order, Rev. F. Dong was seated as an advisor. After a minor addition, the agenda was adopted.

4. Correspondence Received

*Letter from Surrey-Maranatha:* Classis passed a motion to adjust the mandate of the Committee for Theological

Students, allowing the churches to prepare their annual budgets with increased accuracy.

*Letter from the Committee for Theological Students:* Advice was given by Classis to the Committee to meet the budgetary needs for 2009.

5. Reports

a. *Classical Treasurer* – The treasurer, Br. K. Bulthuis, reports that sufficient funds were received for all the necessary expenses. The treasurer is discharged from his responsibilities for the year ending December 31, 2008.

b. *Church for auditing the books of the Treasurer* – An audit of the books is received from the church at Cloverdale. The books were in good order.

c. *Church for inspection of the archives* – The church at Houston reports that the classical archives, as kept by the church at Smithers, are in order.

d. *Church visitation reports* – Visits to the church at Houston and the church at Smithers are reported on by Rev. Souman. These reports are received with gratitude for the Lord's continuing care over his congregations in those places.

6. Question Period (Article 44)

The chairman asks the delegates the questions from Article 44 (CO) and the delegates answered in turn. Under the provisions of this article, advice was requested by one church and granted by Classis concerning a situation of discipline. In connection with their anticipated upcoming vacancy, the church at Surrey-Maranatha asked and received

advice in regards to pulpit supply and the appointment of a church counselor.

7. Appointments

a. *Next Classis* – Convening church: Cloverdale; place: Cloverdale; date: June 9/09 (alternate October 6/09). Suggested officers: Rev. Alkema (chairman), Rev. Slaa (vice-chairman), Rev. Souman (clerk).

b. *Examinations* – Coordinating deputies: Revs. Souman and J. Visscher; OT – Rev. Alkema; NT – Rev. Souman; Doctrine and Creeds – Rev. Slaa; Knowledge of Scripture – Rev. Alkema; Church History – Rev. Visscher; Church Polity – Rev. Bredenhof; Ethics – Rev. Bredenhof; Diaconology – Rev. T. Lodder.

c. *Church Visitors* – Revs. Visscher (convener), Lodder, Slaa, Souman.

d. *Church for taking care of the archives* – Smithers.

e. *Church to inspect the archives* – Houston.

f. *Treasurer* – Br. K. Bulthuis, 17383 60A Ave, Surrey, BC V3S 6X9.

g. *Church to audit the books of the treasurer* – Cloverdale.

h. *Committee for Theological Students* – Rev. Bredenhof (2011), Br. G. Gunnink (2011), Rev. Souman (2013), Br. A. Vanderheide (2013).

i. *Committee for Financial Aid to the Needy Churches* – Brs. H. Leyenhorst, P. Vandergugten (convener), R. Van Oene.

j. *Deputy for preaching arrangements in vacant Churches* – To be appointed at the next Classis.

k. *Deputy for coordinating ecclesiastical contacts* – Rev. Visscher.

## 8. Adjournment

Personal question period was made use of. Censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order was not deemed necessary. The Acts were read and adopted and the Press Release was read and approved. The chairman requested the singing of Hymn 65:1, 2, 3 and closed Classis with prayer.

*For Classis  
Pacific West, H. Alkema  
(vice-chairman at that time)*

## Press Release from the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise

As all the other synodically appointed committees, the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* is preparing its report for the upcoming General Synod Burlington to be held, Lord willing, in May 2010. As the report must be sent out to the churches six months before synod, we are working towards November 1, 2009, as the date for our report to be complete.

In this press release, we wish to update the churches on the work we have been doing and are planning.

The committee has, recently, undergone a change in membership. This past February, Prof. N.H. Gootjes stepped down from the committee. We are very grateful for the work Prof. Gootjes could do for the *Book of Praise* during the past eight years. His advice on matters relating to the confessions, the liturgical forms, the forms of subscription, as well as the psalms and hymns, was always highly valued by the rest of the committee. May the Lord crown with his blessing all the faithful work this brother has done for our

*Book of Praise*. We are thankful that we may continue to call on Prof. Gootjes as a special advisor on matters concerning the creeds and confessions.

Since we now had two vacancies on the committee, Dr. John Smith having left us for Australia some time ago, we decided to exercise the option committees have to appoint new members between synods (see *Acts GS 1989, Art 167*). The committee appointed Prof. A.J. de Visser. Our brother has both theological and musical abilities which will be great assets for the work.

The main items in the report will relate to the psalms and the hymns.

For some time now, all 150 revised psalms have been available for viewing and use at [www.bookofpraise.ca](http://www.bookofpraise.ca). We thank the churches who met the March 1 deadline and have sent us their very valuable comments. This spring the committee will be going through all the psalms a second time, taking into account the comments of the churches and Dr. W. Helder's responses to the comments generated by the first time through. The revised Psalter will be included in the report. At that time, the online version will be co-ordinated with the proposal sent to synod.

When one compares the present (1984) version of the Psalter with the proposed revision, he will see that the revision can be divided into thirds: one-third of the psalms are unchanged or slightly changed; one-third have been corrected or improved to a greater extent; one-third have been reworked. The aim is always to bring the psalms we sing into closer harmony with the actual text of the biblical book of Psalms and to present them in the most stylistically beautiful and

pleasing form possible. The psalms were well done, but there were some (especially the ones written in the 1930s) that were crying out to be reworked.

Another major component of the report will be the proposal regarding the *Augment*. For some two years now the churches have been testing and using the little booklet of twenty-eight hymns the committee published by order of Synod Smithers 2007. We have received much feedback from the churches and we thank them for their insight and advice. Since the committee wanted an unbiased review of the input for the churches, an *ad hoc* committee of several brothers and sisters of Winnipeg was struck to assess the comments of the churches in light of the synodically adopted principles and guidelines (see pages 2 & 3 of *Augment*). The *ad hoc* committee's report will be attached to the main report and will serve as the basis for the committee's proposal as to which, if any, of the twenty-eight hymns to include.

The committee also has a mandate to work together with the *Psalter Hymnal* Committee of the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) to produce a common songbook for a future federation of merged churches. Synod 2007 of the URCNA instructed its committee to focus more on a distinctively United Reformed songbook than a common songbook; hence, our work together as the Joint Songbook Committee has slowed significantly.

We thank the churches for their involvement in the work of furthering and improving the church's song. We ask for continued prayer for the work of the committee.

*Committee  
March 5, 2009*

