

Clarion

The Canadian Reformed Magazine | YEAR-END 2009

*The darkness is passing away
and the true light is
already shining.*

1 JOHN 2:8



*Best wishes
and the Lord's blessings
in the year 2010
to all our readers*

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 **Clarion**
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

The Birth of the Second Adam



There are always those who deny the existence of the *first* Adam. But according to Genesis 1 and 2 this real person Adam was created by God and placed in the Garden of Eden. There, also, the first Adam and his wife Eve fell into sin. In this way mankind was utterly corrupted and we are all conceived and born in sin. These are biblical facts.

End of story? Not at all! It is important to note that on Christmas we celebrate the birth of the *second* Adam. Actually it is rather important that the Bible lays such a close connection between the first and the second Adam. This means that our Lord Jesus Christ is not the result of a long process of evolution, but is a direct descendent of the first Adam. It also means that He did what the first Adam did not do: fulfill the law of God and defeat the devil. Christmas is about monumental events.

The origin of the name “second Adam”

I did not myself invent the name “second Adam.” We find in 1 Corinthians 15:40, “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam a life-giving spirit.” We read that “the first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.” We read here about the first Adam and the last Adam, the first Adam and the second Adam. Surely the two are closely connected.

The origin of the name “the second Adam” is biblical. The Apostle Paul speaks in the same terms in Romans 5, where he again contrasts and connects the first and the second Adam. Sin entered the world through one man, the first Adam. With sin came death, even to all mankind because all have sinned. But God’s gift and grace came through one man, Jesus Christ, who is the second Adam. Paul does not mention Eve here because Adam is to be the head of his wife. When he takes and eats, the fall is a *fait accompli*.

The first Adam *lost* life and destroyed it. The second Adam *gives* life and restores it. The effects of the fall of the first Adam are taken away by the obedience of the second Adam. On Christmas Day we remember that the second Adam came into this world to undo the sin and remove the curse of the first Adam.

The genealogy of the second Adam

It is important to note that the Bible shows us a clear line from the first Adam to the second Adam. Without knowing the first Adam, you cannot understand and embrace the second Adam. We must see the clear line from Adam to Christ, otherwise we do not really understand Christmas. Therefore the Bible gives us a genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We find this genealogy of the Lord Jesus in Luke 3:23-38. It says there that Jesus was the son, *so it was thought*, of Joseph. Perhaps it is better to translate *according to the law*. Jesus was the lawful son of Joseph. The genealogy then takes us through the generations of Israel. Towards the end of this genealogy we read “. . .the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, *the Son of Adam*, the son of God.”

Some explainers make a hey-day out of the fact that Adam is called *the son of God*. But the expression here does not mean to say that Adam was divine. It means simply that Adam was created directly by God and in that sense is uniquely a son of God. There is no one else before Adam, except God. There are no “pre-Adamites,” as is sometimes suggested. The first Adam finds his origin in God. The second Adam was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The first Adam is a “living being,” suited for fellowship with God. The second Adam is a “life-giving spirit,” who renews and restores us. Christ is greater than Adam.

But the line that starts with Jesus, the true Son of God, ends with Adam, uniquely a son of God. The genealogy of Adam leads straight to Jesus Christ. The history of the first Adam leads us directly to the ministry of the second Adam. This means that *mankind* is restored through Jesus Christ. Our sin is atoned for and our curse is removed.

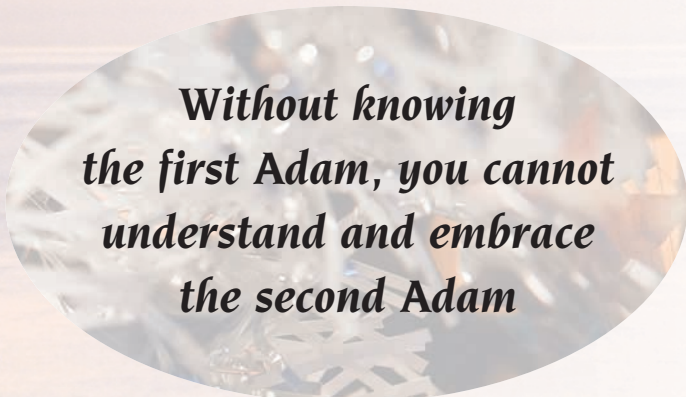
The New Testament also makes clear that to share in the blessing of the second Adam, we require faith. But that is not the point of my editorial. The point is that we can never understand Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John without Moses and Genesis. Take the first Adam away and you lose the second Adam. There is no gospel without Genesis 1 and 2. On Christmas Day we need to know that the theory of evolution cuts out the very heart of our celebration.



On Christmas Day

On Christmas Day I'll probably rise early in the morning. I need some time to take inventory. My inventory is simple. It goes like this:

1. In the first Adam, I was plunged into ruin. In the second Adam I am delivered from sin and death.
2. The first Adam rebelled against God and became a slave of Satan. In the second Adam Satan was defeated and cast out. Jesus even withstood the agony of Golgotha; I am free at last.
3. The first Adam brought death into this world. In the second Adam I have life eternal. On a clear winter's day I can see forever.
4. The first Adam placed me on a dead-end road. The second Adam set me on a highway to Jerusalem.



*Without knowing
the first Adam, you cannot
understand and embrace
the second Adam*

On Christmas Day we ought to look at the big picture which comes so close to our homes. On Christmas Day I will sing of my Redeemer.





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Christ's Coming: God's Proclamation of Peace!

*"He came and preached to you who were far away and
peace to those who were near."*

Ephesians 2:17

Leading up to Christmas Day, many people sing of baby Jesus having come into the world and bringing peace on earth. Do we know what that really means? The Apostle Paul speaks in Ephesians 2 about Christmas, or better, about Christ's coming into the world and what it means.

In this chapter Paul has spoken about a dividing wall of hostility. Before the coming of Jesus Christ, it was symbolized in two ways. The walls of Jerusalem would keep unholy feet from entering Jerusalem. That wall separated two worlds: Jew and Gentile.

But the Jews were also separated by a wall. The curtain of the tabernacle was the separation between the Holy Place and the world of sin. No eyes could gaze into the tabernacle without first having gone through the cleansing of the sacrifice for sins. And so it was in the Jerusalem temple as well. The Law prevented sinners from getting access – just as Adam was prevented from re-entering Paradise so long ago. Even Abraham, the father of

many nations, had to wait. In fact, all the nations had to wait.

But then there is the coming of Christ. The Apostle speaks about the truth of Christmas when he says: "He came" (Eph 2:17). That is a summary of the coming of Christ in this world. It is the incarnation!

Such is foretold already in Genesis 3:15, when a male descendant is promised to Adam and his wife. The coming of Christ is shown in the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law and it is also foretold in the words of the patriarchs and prophets. For example, the prophet Isaiah calls Him "the Prince of Peace," the one who will bring light to the people who walked in darkness (9:2). We also hear that Christ will come to bring justice to the nations (Isa 42:3-4), and that all mankind together will see it (Isa 40:5). And in Isaiah 49:9, it is prophesied that the Lord will "say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'"

Now all this happens when the Christ comes. He brings light, as on that first night in the fields of

Ephrathah. He is the one of whom Simeon spoke when he said: "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32).

The birth of Christ is that long-awaited turning point in history. The spotlight that was on Israel brought into view the place where the Saviour of the world would be born. And now that Christ has come, there is a new situation. For now even the Gentiles, who were once "excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12), have been brought into the congregation of the Lord.

And it's because the wall of hostility, that wall of separation, has been destroyed. Christ did so when He came to break it down through the work He accomplished on the cross. The law with all its commandments and implications did not bring anyone any closer to God, neither Jews nor Gentiles. But the



Matthew 13:52

work of Christ is the gospel of true peace with God.

It is interesting to note that Paul mentions the coming and the proclamation in one breath: “He came and preached” (v. 17). For that’s exactly how it is: Christ’s arrival and his presence in this world were like a sermon, for He was the image of the invisible God (John 1:14; Heb 1:3).

And so Jesus Christ went around during the time He was on earth, making peace and proclaiming peace. As was prophesied by Isaiah, He also included the Gentiles at various occasions. He went to those who were “far away,” like to the Samaritan woman (John 4), and to the Roman centurion (Luke 7).

But now much more has happened. For the Great Commission clearly speaks of how the whole world is on God’s mind: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). This is because of what we read in Hebrews 10:19, that we now have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. Since Christ has come there is direct access to God, for both Jews and Gentiles. That is the proclamation of Christ’s coming into the world. It reaches wide and it reaches high!





The Glory of the Lord in Ephrathah's Fields

“. . .and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.”

Luke 2:9b

On Christmas Day, as our text says, “The glory of the Lord” shone round about the shepherds in the field of Ephrathah. I cannot see this “glory” as being anything else than a brilliant light. God is light, says the Bible. He dwells in an impregnable light, and therefore his “glory” is also manifested in terms of “light,” an incomparable, majestic brilliance that makes everything in it glow and shine.

The darkness of the night was suddenly removed by the brightness of the glory of God. There was no gradual transition from dark to light, as in the early morning or evening, no dawn or dusk, but it was as if someone had suddenly switched on mighty floodlights. Dark one moment, light the next!

I suggest that the appearing of this light was an altogether unique and special event. It never happened in this way before Christmas, and it never happened in this way afterward.

The burning bush and other manifestations

Certainly, the glory of the LORD was seen before on this earth. We can think, for example, of the time when the Angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exod

3:2). That was also a manifestation of light, a fire burning by itself, without consuming any fuel. Fire too is light.

Think of other appearances of God, for example the one at Mount Sinai, when Israel had been led out of the house of bondage. In Exodus 19:18 you can read how the LORD descended on Mount Sinai “in fire.” That fire was wrapped in smoke, contained as it were “in a kiln,” an oven. The glory of the LORD in the bush and on the mountain was limited and obscured, because people could not bear to see the full light of God.

At that time, after Moses had ascended the mountain to receive the Law, he came down and “the skin of his face shone,” because he had been so close to God, and the people were afraid to come near him (Exod 34). The light was so bright that Moses required a veil over his face whenever he spoke with the people!

And when God’s glory descended into the tabernacle, upon the ark, we read in Exodus 40:35 that even Moses was not able to enter, because “the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” Even Moses could not stand in the light of this glory!

Are you beginning to get the picture? Never before have any

persons, not even Moses, been so taken up in the glory of God as these shepherds were! It says in our text: the glory of the Lord shone around them, and that means: God’s glory, God’s brilliant light completely enveloped and surrounded them. All around them was this light, like a wall of fire, and they were standing right in the middle of it.

Compare again the situation of these shepherds with that of Moses at the burning bush. Here is Moses, and there is the bush. Here is Moses, and a little farther off is the light. Moses is not standing in the light at all, but outside it. Indeed, the Lord even warns Moses not to come closer. Moses may not come near the fire, let alone be taken up in it. And he is reminded that he is a sinful man who cannot stand in the presence of a holy God: “Take off your shoes from your feet.” We see in Exodus 3 a remarkable distance between Moses and the light of God’s presence. God is still far, even though He is close.

But in the fields of Ephrathah it is different. Here are the shepherds and here is also the light! There is no longer any distance between the presence of men and the manifestation of God’s glory. God’s glory illuminates the shepherds. God

has come so close that men are for the first time fully taken up in his glory. They are not even told to take off their shoes or sandals. They are taken up in the glory of God just as they are, where they stand.

As you see, the history of redemption never repeats itself. There is always progression in the work of God. The LORD God has made another mighty leap in the history of salvation. God has come closer to his people; He is closer than was ever seen before.

And let us not say now: but God Himself was not present there in the fields of Ephrathah as He was in the burning bush; it was only an angel, not God Himself. For this is not true. The expression “the glory of the Lord” denotes the majesty with which God Himself appears on this earth. God is indeed seated on the throne of heaven, but He is also present in the fields of Ephrathah with his glory, majesty, grace, and power! Where the glory of God appears, there God Himself is manifest.

Megaphobia

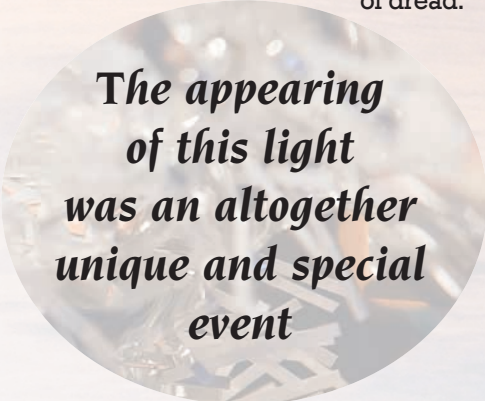
The shepherds are taken up, suddenly, in nothing less than the glory of God. In one instant they stand in the presence of almighty God and share in the heavenly glory that normally is seen only by angels. There is no cloud of smoke to obscure the brilliance of that glory, there is no veil given to block out its penetrating power; they see it as it is, and it surrounds them. Can you understand that it is said of these men, “They were filled with fear”? Literally it says: they feared with a great fear! Two Greek words are used which we also know in English: megaphobia!

All the young people know the word “mega.” There’s even a rock

group called “Megadeath.” When someone makes a lot of money, we say that he makes mega-bucks.

Megaphobia: a fear that is so great that it grips you to the core of your existence, so that you cannot so much as move. Phobia, also in our language, is a fear that controls you, so that you are virtually paralysed and cannot function as you should.

We sing “Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright.” It’s bright all right, but not very calm. Who can be calm when he suffers from megaphobia? Christmas is not some kind of peaceful “interlude” when even perpetually warring factions have a brief ceasefire. The first Noel led to great fear, to hearts that pounded with an all-pervading sense of dread.



*The appearing
of this light
was an altogether
unique and special
event*

Why this megaphobia? How would you have felt if you had stood in the shoes or sandals of these shepherds? If you experienced the sudden switch from pitch dark to brilliant light? If you saw the luminous figure of an angel suddenly before you, and the whole area lit up, with everything around you appearing like a surreal landscape? And it happened without any warning. It was not as if a far-away light had caught the shepherds’ attention and they watched it come closer. The angel, it says, appeared, that is, he materialized out of nowhere. Suddenly he stands before


you, and with him comes the splendour of heavenly light never seen before. How would you react?

Why such megaphobia? There is, of course, the element of surprise, the sudden happening of the unknown. But I think that we must go a step further to understand this fear. The shepherds were perhaps not gifted or learned men, but they knew all about light and dark, sunshine and moonshine. They knew when they saw something that was not “of this world.” For them this brilliant light could mean only one thing: it was the manifestation of the living God. And that being so, they feared that they now stood face to face with their doom. Every Israelite knew: no one can see God and survive. Their megaphobia is a matter of knowing that they cannot live, for all flesh must wilt before the fire of God’s presence. It is the fear of God that fills them with this unspeakable dread. For God is the Judge, who can sweep them into eternal darkness.

A sign of celebration

They experience this light as a sign of condemnation, and therefore cannot understand that it is in fact a sign of celebration! They do not yet see that the “glory of God” which envelopes them is evidence that God has come to dwell with mankind in a way never seen before. They do not yet see that God here starts a new chapter in the relationship with his people and that this chapter begins with the birth of Jesus Christ.


For there is only one explanation for this pouring out of the glory of God. God has come down to us, to dwell with us, rich in mercy and in love. The heavenly light does not consume the shepherds but illumines them. They are not destroyed by it; they are taken up in it. This manifestation of God’s glory is a



celebration of the work of salvation in the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord. When the Son of God comes into the flesh, the glory of God does not stay behind, but spills out of the heavens over the fields of Ephrathah, and in its rising tide takes up the shepherds. One angel appears, but soon more follow: suddenly (v. 13) there is with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God! It's almost as if the distance between heaven and earth, between God and creature, between men and angels is wiped out altogether. The earth may share in the glory of heaven, and men may hear the song of angels.

Mega-joy

For God has come down to deliver his people through Him who is greater than Moses, from an enemy mightier than Pharaoh, and now the light of heaven will decisively break through the darkness of this earth. For unto us a Son is born, unto us a child is given,



God here starts a new chapter in the relationship with his people

and the government shall be upon his shoulders! God has come down to man, in the flesh; and the glory of God shines around simple men. This has never happened before. God has decisively broken through the darkness with the light of heaven.

Therefore the angel can also say: fear not! Do not let this heavenly light fill you with dread! For I bring you good news of a great joy! Instead of megaphobia, let there be mega-joy! Instead of mega-death, let there be mega-life! This glory, this light, is not the ominous sign of eternal condemnation, but the glorious dawn of the era of salvation. To you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ, the Lord. Now is the time, not to flee from the light, but to stand in the Light. Savour the moment, bask in the warmth, draw near to the burning bush, for the day of salvation has come. The people who in darkness walked have seen a glorious Light!

There is darkness. . .

Yes, but what about sin and death? How can sinful men stand in this light and live? Notice that there is darkness on Christmas Day. There's no light at the manger. The Son of God has cast off his glory, which He had when He was at the bosom of the Father, and has entered into our darkness. The weight of our sins is already pressing upon Him and the curse of God is taking its effect on Him.

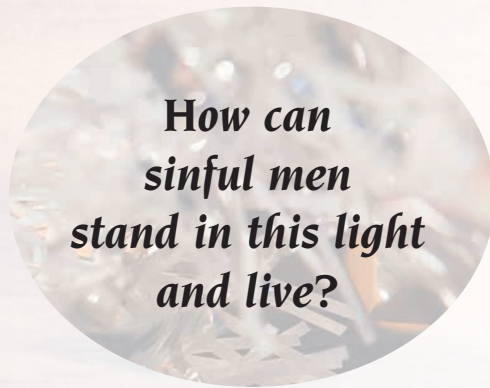
The light and glory are not where they should have been, there where the Son of God is. For the Son has become a servant, and has emptied Himself, and will be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Darkness will cover Him all his days, and ultimately, on the cross of Golgotha, the darkness will enshroud Him and swallow Him up. He will face mega-fear and mega-death so that we may experience mega-joy!

The glory of God which shone around the shepherds is something that we have not seen. It is only

described to us. It did not last, either. When the angel choirs withdraw and retreat to heaven, the fields of Ephrathah are dark again. Once more the glory of God is shrouded behind the clouds, contained as in a kiln in the confines of heaven.

Glimpses of glory

The glory of God that appeared on Christmas Day was never again seen in the same manner. When the people saw Jesus walking, they saw no glory. I know, on the Mount of Transfiguration, a few disciples,



How can sinful men stand in this light and live?

Peter, James, and John, saw a remarkable change in Jesus' outward appearance. It says in Matthew 17:2, "And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light." It was again a brief glimpse of things to come. And when Stephen later stood before the Jewish council, we read (Acts 6:15) that "all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel." Another brief glimpse of things to come. And when Stephen had finished speaking, we read that "gazing into heaven. . . he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). Here we have a glimpse of a tremendous reality: Jesus appears in glory!

These glimpses are reminders to us that the glory is still there. But never did it shine so brightly on earth as in that night, when Christ was born.

God does not tell us of this light so that we may concentrate on what once was, but to encourage us to look forward. The glory of the Lord shone around them. Yes, it did. But something greater is about to happen. The glory of the Lord will shine around you. One day you will see this light. One day you will hear these angels. For we are children of light. We have been called out of the darkness, writes Peter, into his marvellous light. This light is our destination! And its powerful effect must now already be seen in our lives. The light that is from heaven must now be reflected in our hearts, in our deeds.

It is not without significance that the glory of God was again withdrawn. Even after Christ's resurrection, God's glory was not seen by men. The glory is still contained within the kiln of heaven. There is much darkness here below.

On Christmas Day we often are struck more by the existing darkness than by the light that once shone. There is the darkness of war, sickness, loneliness, sorrow, and death. For some, maybe even some of us, Christmas time is filled with unspeakable sadness because of the brokenness of life. During these times, more than at other times perhaps, we miss those taken from us. Where is the light and the glory that once illuminated the shepherds?

I'll be home for Christmas

But we must understand that this text is not nostalgic, but prophetic. People wax nostalgic, "I'll be home

for Christmas, if only in my dreams." But God's Word is prophetic! You will be home for Christmas and it won't be in your dreams!

Where is home? There is a city, a paradise, of which it is written, "And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their Light, and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev 22:5).

The glory of the Lord will shine around you and you will be filled with mega-joy! Mega, a nice word for Christians! As long as you connect it properly. As I mentioned, Megadeath is the name of a worldly rock-group. It is a well-chosen name, really. They may not know it, but that's precisely where they are headed, unless they repent. Without Christ, it's mega-death. Eternal death. Mega-phobia. Eternal despair. Praise God that you are not a member of that cult of doom.

For we celebrate mega-joy! That's what makes Christmas so wonderful, every year again. That is

why we can hang in, even in dark days, for the Light just won't disappear. It's there, and one day the glory of the Lord will shine around us, we'll be taken up in it, fully, eternally, because Jesus Christ lived and died here for our sake. And the shepherds will tell you: this is even better than Ephrathah!

Ephrathah, they will say, you should have seen that light, man, we were so scared! It came so unexpectedly. Jesus was then still in a manger. What did we know? Man, we had megaphobia! But this is greater, for Jesus is now on the throne in glory, for ever. This is better than Ephrathah. We expect the light of Him who sits on the throne. We'll be so close to the Lord we can actually see Him, touch Him, walk with Him. In the brilliant light of the new earth.

That is our real joy on Christmas Day.

*He sent His Son with power to save.
From guilt, and darkness – see that word?
– and the grave.
He through this world will guide His own,
And lead us to His holy throne!
His mercies ever shall endure
When this dark world shall be no more!"*

(Hymn 61, *Book of Praise*).



Raising Up the Booth of David

*"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen
and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins,
and rebuilt it as in the days of old."*

Amos 9:11 RSV

Amos was a prophet of judgement and his whole book is full of prophecy concerning the impending judgement over the house of Israel. Yet amidst all the judgement there suddenly breaks through a ray of light, a breakthrough of the sun, highlighting a return of the people of Israel. The day the temple is destroyed (9:1) is also the day that it will be rebuilt (9:11). That means that despite the impending judgement, the Lord will not forsake his people, but He will preserve a remnant to Himself.

The people had brought the judgment of God upon themselves. For Amos preached in a time of relative prosperity, a time in which Israel enjoyed peace and general economic well-being. But instead of showing their thankfulness to the Lord, the people forsook his ways and engaged in all kinds of vile practices. The needy were crushed, the poor were oppressed, and the people danced and drank and did not care about anything. Their religious practices had become a dead ritual. They hated the temple service and wallowed in luxury, living a life of pleasure and ease.

That means that the glorious house of David, the temple of

Solomon, was now a fallen house, a makeshift booth that had sagged to pieces and toppled over. The Lord had said to his servant David, "The Lord will make you a house. . . and your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; and your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:11, 16). But now this house is broken, fallen, a booth in ruins. And the picture given here is not just one of destruction, but also of age and decay. The house was rotten, the breaches were in a sorry state. That's why it was sagging down. That means that the church at that time was rotten and in decay.

But the Lord still could not forget his promise to his servant David. Even though total destruction was what Israel deserved, yet the Lord still wanted to show kindness and mercy. The fallen booth that has been broken and destroyed – that booth will be rebuilt. The Lord will repair its breaches, the Lord will raise it up as in days of old. On the day of wrath the temple would be rebuilt, the breaches repaired. The sifting was at the same time a restoring: the rips, tears and cracks in the walls would be bound up, what was divided would be joined together again.

The prophet does not just look back to the great Davidic Empire when he says this. He also looks ahead to the coming of Jesus Christ, the great King, the descendant of David. For in whom did the Old Testament tabernacle find its fulfilment? In Him. True, this prophesy was fulfilled when the people were released from exile and were allowed to build the temple again. But that was not the final fulfilment. The final fulfilment came with the dawn of the Messianic age. He was the New Testament tabernacle, the holy and divine temple of God, the meeting point between God and man. He said, "If you destroy this temple I will rebuild it in three days" (John 2:19). And what did He mean? The temple in Jerusalem? No, the temple of his body, says John. That temple would be destroyed in ignorance by the people of God, but the Lord Himself would rebuild it again in three days. In three days, the grave was opened, the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead, as a surety for us.

So Amos does not just foretell the coming of the Lord and Saviour but also his death and especially his resurrection from the dead. When the Lord says, "I will raise up the booth

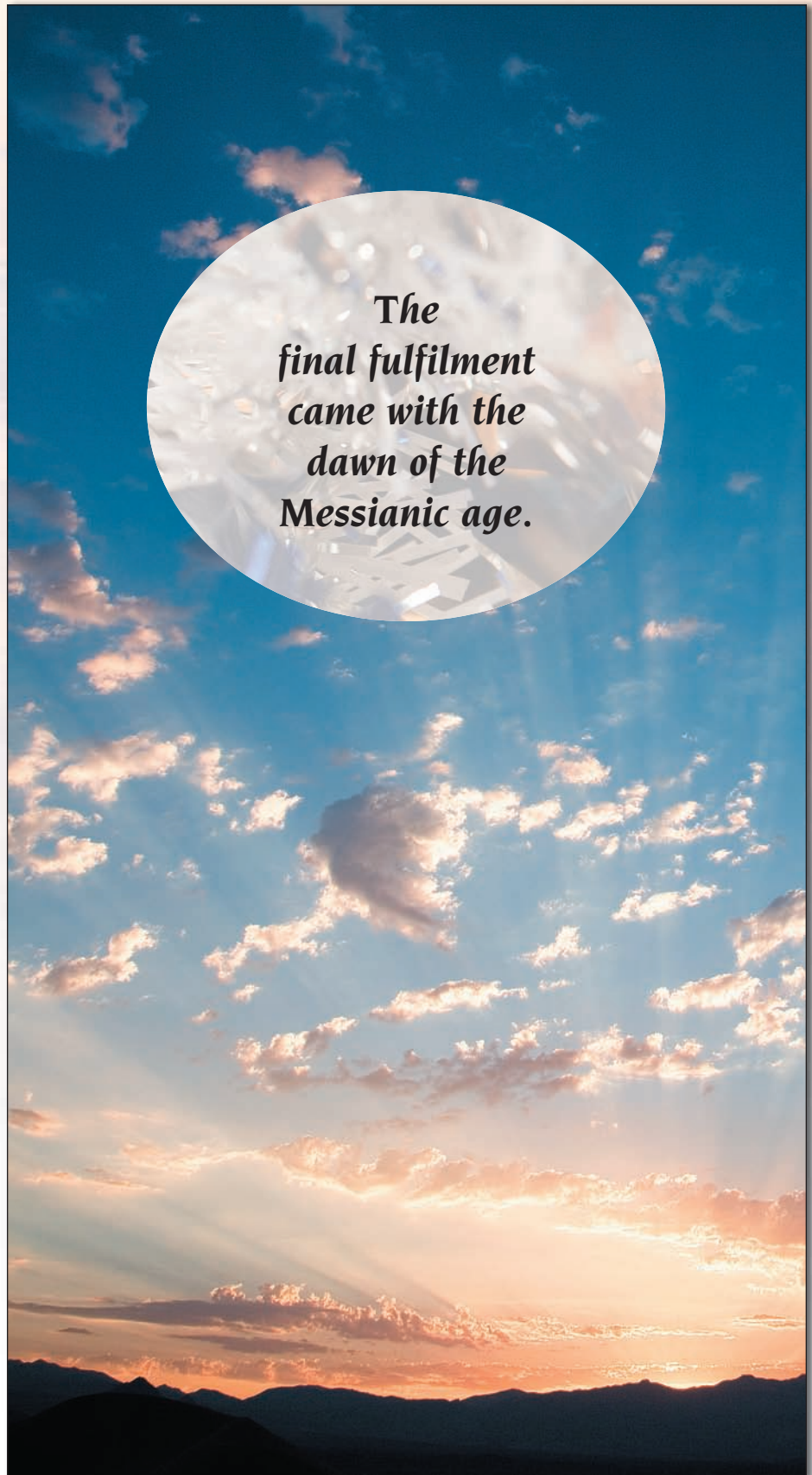
of David that is fallen," this word finds its chief fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the temple that was raised from the dead for us. And the Lord says here: I will raise up my chosen one from the power of death.

In the inter-testamental period, the Messiah was called the "Son of the fallen" on the basis of this text. He was David's son and David's house was now fallen. Yet it would have been better if the Jews had seen Him as the Fallen, the One who was broken for our sins, the One whose blood was shed for our trespasses. He rebuilds the walls of Israel by becoming the Fallen One who rises again.

And his resurrection is a sure guarantee of our blessed resurrection. His walk on earth and its fulfillment means that He also raised us and puts together what we by sin so easily break apart: the church, the temple of the Holy Spirit. In Him and by his precious sacrifice, "I will raise up the booth of David" also means "I will build my church" and unite it again. In the New Testament dispensation the church is repaired again, united in Him. He gathers a people, one people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

The greatness and completeness of his work is a sure guarantee that its effects will be fulfilled in us. He will work, building his church until He returns to call his people to Himself. We should, therefore, willingly work with Him for the up-building of the church, for its unification until the day of his appearing, for the honour and glory of his name.

This article was originally printed in Clarion Volume 28, 1979.



*The
final fulfilment
came with the
dawn of the
Messianic age.*



Canticles

Luke 1 and 2 contain four songs that anticipate, herald, or reflect upon the birth of Christ. They are the songs of Mary (Luke 1:46-55), Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79), the angels (Luke 2:10-14), and Simeon (Luke 2:29-32). They are represented in the *Book of Praise* by Hymns 13, 14, 17, and 18. Three of them are in the Genevan style whereas 17 (the song of the angels) is not; rather, 17 is set to the very charming tune known as "Winchester Old." Herewith is a new versification of the angels' song set to a Genevan tune.

The tune of Psalm 96 was chosen since it has a fanfare quality to it. The entrance of royalty is often accompanied by a fanfare of trumpet music. The angels announced the entrance of royalty – the coming of the Almighty King Jesus of the house of King David.

We also know that angels blow trumpets. Matthew 24:31 says that Christ "...will send his angels with a loud trumpet call." In the Revelation, angels are often heard blasting on trumpets (see throughout ch. 8): "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets" (v. 2).

May the Lord bless us all as we celebrate the incarnation of the Son of God and the arrival of our King. *Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

The Angels' Song

1. "Be not a-fraid," so said the an - gel -
"I bring good news for all the peo - ple.
The Christ was born in Da - vid's town.
As Lord He'll res - cue all His own.
The news I bring is ve - ry joy - ful.

2. "This is the sign you will have found Him,
as you go to the town of Beth'lem:
You'll find Him in a manger laid -
not as a king should be displayed -
in cloths in which His mother bound Him."
3. Then, suddenly, the mighty army
of heav'n appeared and sang God's glory.
They praised the Lord for what He'd done
in sending Christ, His only Son.
This is the song they sang so clearly:
4. "Glory to God in highest heaven;
let praise and honour Him be given.
May peace on earth reside on those
whom God in His good favour chose.
Glory to God for His salvation."



Church Music in Calvin's Tradition

(Part 3 of 3)

This is the expanded version of a speech that was given at the Convocation evening of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, September 11, 2009.

Our churches come from a tradition that respected the church organ highly as an instrument of congregational worship. Since the eighteenth century Reformed church leaders have praised the positive effect of the church organ on congregational singing. In a book on worship published in 1911, Dr. Abraham Kuyper stated that there is “nothing objectionable about organ music, provided that the church council makes sure that the organists do not try to push themselves to the fore. Their task is to lead, support, regulate, and promote the singing. The organ should never assume the right to let itself be heard. It has to serve the singing of the congregation” (*Our Worship*).

Dr. Klaas Schilder was an accomplished organist himself. He believed that the organ can really enhance the quality of worship, provided the organist plays well and has a good understanding of liturgical principles. The older generation among us will remember how Schilder admired the skills of organists such as Jan Zwart. Schilder

famously described Zwart's playing as “prophesying from the organ bench.”

It may be good to point out that Kuyper and Schilder were prepared to give instrumental music a broader role than just the accompaniment of congregational singing. Kuyper believed that there is no biblical rule in this respect and that the church may use its spiritual discretion to decide whether there is room for independent instrumental music and choir singing. As long as church arrives at such decisions by using “spiritual motives” it will be well, he said.


Kuyper and Schilder supported the independent role of musical instruments during worship as long as it served and enhanced the congregation's fellowship with the Lord. Practically speaking, this would be organ playing before and after the service, during the collection, and during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Schilder even suggested that the organ could be used to allow for a moment of congregational meditation after the sermon: “I would be much in favour of a brief and tender piece of organ playing after the sermon” (*Om Woord en Kerk*, Vol. 2, p. 36).

Conclusions and suggestions

In previous articles I have described and evaluated Calvin's principles for music in worship. I conclude with a number of conclusions and suggestions regarding the use of musical instruments in worship.

First, it is helpful to remember Calvin's distinction between music for the worship service and music for other occasions. The special character of the worship service as a meeting between God and his people leads to an emphasis on the *congregational singing* of God's praises. This is based on biblical guidelines, such as given by the Apostle Paul: “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16). In the letter to the Hebrews the whole congregation is encouraged to “continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb 13:15). Whatever we do in worship, we need to follow Calvin's lead and maintain the priority of congregational singing.

This puts a certain restriction on the use of musical instruments and choirs in worship. There is no such restriction, however, for concerts and other meetings. It is great that we



have a rich tradition of choir singing and that there are many well-trained musicians among us. Let us continue to cultivate this tradition. It is a strong support basis for our worship on Sundays.

We need to follow Calvin's lead and maintain the priority of congregational singing

Second, Calvin thought it wise to abandon choirs and musical instruments from the worship service. This is understandable given the situation in the church in his time but it is not something that necessarily follows from biblical principles. We agree with men like Kuyper and Schilder that instrumental music can be used to stimulate congregational singing. But then we should strive for quality playing. It is important that accompanists are sufficiently skilled so that their playing will facilitate (not frustrate) congregational singing. Parents, stimulate your children to take music lessons and encourage them to learn to play such instruments that can be used to accompany congregational singing!

Third, if the churches expect musicians to accompany the singing of the congregation, the churches should also support liturgical training for accompanists. It is great if someone can play a musical instrument but there is a difference between playing and accompanying. In order to accompany

congregational singing a musician needs a good understanding of liturgical principles (what is a worship service, what is the function of congregation singing within the service, what is the specific function of the opening Psalm, the Psalm that is sung after the reading of the law, etc.). Our sister churches in The Netherlands have a society of church musicians which offers courses for aspiring accompanists (Society of Reformed Church Musicians, <http://www.eredienst.com/de-vereniging.html>). It would be good if we could have such courses here in Canada as well.

Fourth, we should be mindful of Calvin's concern that the preaching of the gospel is the primary means of grace. The Holy Spirit works faith primarily through the proclamation of God's Word. It has always been a characteristic of Reformed church buildings that the pulpit occupies centre stage. I mention this specifically because in many churches around us we see a trend towards "musification of worship." A large part of the worship service is led by the worship band and its leader. Sometimes the assumption seems to be that the ministry of praise is a tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit to create faith. An Australian theologian has commented that music has almost become "a new means of grace" (Dr. Barry Chant, "Retuning the Church"). This is illustrated by what you see in church: if there is a pulpit on stage, it is a lectern that is dwarfed by the drum set and other instruments of the worship band. Let's not move in that direction.

Fifth, we need to take into account that cultural aspects play a role in determining what is appropriate in worship. Calvin was

aware of the fact that different times and different cultures will lead to different traditions of worship. In his *Institutes* he wrote that the Lord has revealed to us his will with respect to appropriate worship but that "He did not prescribe in detail what we ought to do." In Calvin's opinion the Lord "did not deem one form suitable for all ages." Hence, "Because He has taught nothing specifically, and because these things are not necessary to salvation, and for the upbuilding of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones."

In order to accompany congregational singing a musician needs a good understanding of liturgical principles

Calvin was not afraid to introduce something new into the worship service. The Genevan Psalter was something new, even revolutionary. As much as Calvin was convinced that he was doing the right thing, he did not think that the Genevan way was the only way. He expected that new times and different cultural settings would lead to the development of different liturgical forms.

Thus, there is nothing wrong with the situation that churches in different cultures have different practices. We do not need to be concerned if Christians in South America prefer the guitar while we in North America are used to organs and pianos. We should also recognize that there is a cultural aspect to the Genevan melodies. Try to teach African people to sing these melodies and you will find that it does not work. These melodies are too foreign to them. This is not a problem as long as African people use African melodies that are fitting for worship. Calvin would probably have said: I don't care what melodies you use, as long as you use worthy melodies that convey the sense of dignity that characterizes the worship service.

Sixth, the principle that singing is a congregational activity can help us to find direction with respect to the question what instruments are suitable for worship. In this context it may be helpful to reaffirm that the church organ is an excellent instrument for the accompaniment of congregational singing. One does not have to be Reformed to say this. Professor Harold M. Best, an evangelical theologian and musicologist, recently stated that "the organ is the most naturally supportive instrument for singing that Western culture knows of. Its very design and its intelligent use in hymn singing are meant to accomplish one purpose: to support singing by the intelligent use of registers to fill in the cracks – to provide both an underpinning and a blossom to the work of the congregational voices. The result is a synergy: the whole is

greater than the sum of the parts. People are moved to heartier song without being overpowered or displaced, and their natural untrained voices are significantly validated and enhanced" ("Traditional Hymn-Based Worship" in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum. Six Views.*)

There is no need to idolize the organ but it is also short-sighted to say that the organ is outdated and needs to be replaced by other instruments

Let us work responsibly with the organ tradition which we have. There is no need to idolize the organ but it is also short-sighted to say that the organ is outdated and needs to be replaced by other instruments. The sustained sound of the organ provides a strong foundation for congregational singing.

This does not mean that the organ is the only instrument that can be used to accompany congregational singing. Pianos and guitars can be used profitably as well, especially now that we have the technological means to amplify the sound of such instruments. Other instruments tend to have their

limitations. Flutes and trumpets can play the melody of a song but they do not offer a harmonic foundation upon which the singing of the congregation can rest. Percussion instruments enhance rhythm and excitement but they do not offer support for melody and harmony.

An additional problem with using other instruments than organ or piano is that you need more instruments to acquire the same effect. You will need an ensemble of musicians or a worship band to get the job done. Soon you will have a group of people on stage with – almost inevitably – the risk that the emphasis on the *congregation singing* is replaced by an emphasis on the *ensemble/band performing*.

Seventh, we will do well to remember Calvin's principle that singing is a form of praying. The singing congregation directs its thoughts to our Father in heaven and to the Lord Jesus Christ who is seated at his right hand. Anything that might distract from this activity should be avoided and resisted – even if that means restrictions on the use of musical instruments.

We would honour Calvin's concerns best if we remember the biblical exhortation to the congregation to "continually offer to God a sacrament of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb 13:15). What a blessing it is that the whole congregation can take part in this ministry of praise! It is beautiful if musical instruments can support and stimulate the congregation in this ministry of praise.





A Bit of Church History

John Calvin – Agent for Change

“The light Calvin brought to society made the world a fundamentally different place after his life’s work began to be displayed.” Those, obviously, are big words, yet that is how David Hall typifies Calvin in his recent book *The Legacy of John Calvin* (P & R, 2008). More precisely, Hall insists that “Calvin was a change agent – and one whose influence was for the better.” One wonders: how could this man – who features so prominently in our own heritage – make the world a fundamentally better place?

Development

John Calvin was born precisely 500 years ago last July 10. The Europe into which he was born was firmly in the grasp of Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholicism of the time was marked by two principle characteristics, namely, corruption in practices and corruption in doctrine. As an example of the corruption in practice, one can mention the fact that Calvin’s father obtained for his eleven-year-old son John a position as chaplain of a church some distance from where young Calvin lived – a position that required no obligations from young John but guaranteed him an income. As to

doctrine, young Calvin was taught that reconciliation with God came about through your good works. Calvin’s father wanted his son (who was exceptionally gifted) to study for the priesthood, and from the money his chaplaincy provided the young lad set about doing precisely that.

In the course of the young lad’s studies, he was introduced to a wave of learning that had recently spread through Europe, an approach to learning known as “humanism.” This humanism had a distinct weakness, for it thought very highly of man’s ability. It had a redeeming quality, though, and that was the notion that people are able to say things plainly so that others can understand them clearly (an item, by the way, that today’s postmodernism rejects). Why that’s striking? In Calvin’s day the Bible was seen as too hard for the common people to read, and priests who studied Scripture were taught to read Scripture allegorically – that is, the text doesn’t mean what it seems to say. Humanist scholars took the writings of ancient Greek and Roman times at face value and so explained them with logical rules of reading. Calvin was trained in this manner and in 1532 (at age twenty-three) had completed a commentary on *De Clementia* by Seneca the Younger,

an ancient stoic philosopher of Rome. In this commentary Calvin demonstrated that he had learned well this straight-forward manner of reading and so hoped to establish himself as a reputed humanist scholar. But the Lord had different plans; He intended to use the reading lessons Calvin learned from the humanists to reform his church.

When Calvin was but eight years old, Martin Luther had nailed his ninety-five Theses on that door in Wittenburg. That event, of course, got the ball of the Reformation rolling through Europe. Several of Calvin’s teachers, humanists as they were, were keen to follow the developments resulting from Luther’s activities and so their young student stayed up to date. Yet the Reformation movement did not catch Calvin’s imagination till he experienced a “sudden conversion” (Calvin’s words) sometime in 1532 or 1533. Calvin never shared the details, but it appears that Calvin was in some way confronted with the majesty of God. So taken was he by the greatness of his Maker that Calvin henceforth never wavered from seeking to serve his Master with every ounce of strength he had, every talent he possessed, every moment of his life.

Institutes

Around the time of Calvin's conversion King Francis I of France undertook to persecute the followers of the Reformation. Though Calvin himself managed to escape France, many of his countrymen lost their lives for the sake of the gospel. Calvin was convinced that the king did wrong in persecuting those who held to the new teachings and set out to show (using the skills he'd been taught by humanist teachers) that the new teachings were neither new nor unscriptural; they were in fact the thinking of the ancient church. He appealed to the straightforward meaning of Scripture and plundered the works of forgotten church fathers from 1200 years earlier to make his case, then put his argument to paper in a masterpiece initially published in March 1536 under the title *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This work contained an exposition of the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the two Sacraments (plus an explanation of why the other five sacraments of Rome are not sacraments), and a section on Christian Liberty. It was prefaced by a letter to King Francis I himself, pleading with him to note that the faith of people he was persecuting was nothing other than the faith of the Bible and of the ancient church.

This first edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* did not persuade Francis to give up his persecution, let alone join the Reformation. It did, however, catapult Calvin into the leadership role of the growing Reformation movement. Though other reformers had pointed out Rome's errors on various points in the past and shown the biblical teaching on the point in question, Calvin was the first to take all the different aspects of biblical thinking and bring them together into one

system of thought. Here, for the first time, was an up-to-date manual of Christian thinking, expertly put together. Its many references to Scripture and the church fathers gave it added authority and clout. The result was that the book was quickly and eagerly received throughout the Protestant movement of the time.

Geneva – in, out, in

By the providence of God, Calvin passed one day through the city of Geneva on his way from here to there. William Farel, the minister of this Protestant town (for city council had earlier voted to join the Reformation) pressed upon Calvin the urgent need of the city and insisted that God Himself wanted Calvin to labour in this city.


***In Calvin's day
the Bible was seen
as too hard for the
common people
to read***

We ought to note that Calvin had no desire to become a preacher of the gospel; he wished to be left alone to study privately and quietly and then publish books at his leisure. But such was Calvin's respect for the greatness of God that once he was persuaded God called him to Geneva, he did everything in his power to answer that call faithfully. In July 1536 he became teacher of the gospel in town. By his plain and straight forward explanation of Scripture, he quickly established a reputation that enabled him to pursue changes in how church life was run,

what authority city council had, etc. But no scriptural work progresses without opposition and that happened in Geneva too. The moment came when the city council ordered Calvin (and Farel) to offer the Lord's Supper to all the citizens of town, something Calvin refused to do because of the known ungodliness of some of the citizens. As a result, city council ordered Calvin and Farel out of town (April 1538).

Calvin ended up in Strassburg as the pastor of a church of French refugees. The work here met much less resistance than his work met in Geneva and so Calvin could find time, besides his preaching and teaching, to prepare a second edition of his *Institutes* – this edition being three times as long as his first edition. In the three years he was in Strassburg he found time too to write his second commentary, this time on a book of the Bible, Paul's letter to the Romans. He took the plain sense of what the Greek text said (of course, in context of all Scripture) and set its meaning forth in terms that the people of the street could understand. And the commentary, as well as the expanded edition of the *Institutes*, was well received.

Meanwhile, back in Geneva a letter had come to the city council from a certain Cardinal Sadoletto, a staunch Roman Catholic, applauding Geneva's decision to expel Calvin and inviting the people of the city back into the Roman Catholic fold. The city council and the citizenry were not willing to grant the letter's request and decided instead to prepare a reply. After much indecision as to who should write the reply, the council came, cap in hand, to Calvin with the request that he please pen a reply to Sadoletto. And Calvin obliged. His reply was a masterpiece of biblically faithful writing, showing – as his *Institutes*



did – that Reformed convictions were faithful both to Scripture itself and to the understanding of the early church. Specifically, Calvin made clear that the final authority for all matters of faith and life is the Word of God and not the (Roman Catholic) Church. He drew out too that one becomes right with God not through one's works but only through the atoning work Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross, a work made one's own through faith. There was, then, no reason for the people of Geneva to return to the Roman Catholic fold; on the contrary, there was every reason for the work of Reformation to continue. In part because of this solid reply, the city of Geneva requested Calvin to return to his place in the city. Calvin was loathe to give up the opportunities he had in Strassburg for studying and writing, but recognized the call of God in Geneva's request, and so returned in September 1541.

Work

In the years that followed, Calvin maintained a busy schedule of preaching and teaching, at times preaching twenty sermons in a month. Over the years he produced commentaries on every book of the New Testament except 2 and 3 John and Revelation, as well as on the books of Moses, the Psalms, and all the prophets of the Old Testament.¹ His commentaries are marked by excellent exegesis, a skill he learned from the humanists who taught him to take seriously what the text actually says. He also wrote numerous tracts and articles on topics of the day, seeking to shed the light of God's Word on issues of importance. Furthermore, he dictated some 4000 letters over the years to various contacts across Europe. More still,

he remained actively involved in ensuring that the gospel of Jesus Christ be not just preached in Geneva but *lived*, and so he sought to establish a biblically founded model of civil government as well as biblically faithful church government. He encouraged the establishment of schools and saw to it that deacons cared for the poor of the city. His esteem for God and his desire to have Him receive the glory that was his due drove Calvin to do all in his power to have the people of Geneva live God-centred lives in all they did.

Calvin made clear that the final authority for all matters of faith and life is the Word of God

Yet without doubt his most influential work remained his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. A third and a fourth edition appeared over the years and in 1559 Calvin published the fifth and final edition. This last edition is five times the length of the first edition and covers the entire body of Christian doctrine and life. It is divided into four books (the first of God the Father and our Creation, the second of God the Son and our Redemption, the third of God the Holy Spirit and our Sanctification, and the fourth – by far the largest – concerning the church) and comes altogether to some eighty chapters.² It is striking that though Calvin wrote the first edition when he was but twenty-seven years old, he never had

to rewrite the material in the sense that he disagreed with what he wrote earlier. All his changes fall within the category of saying it more clear or adding new material or expanding on what was already there. It is remarkable and shows that from the time of his conversion Calvin had a clear understanding of what the Bible is all about. And perhaps that's not surprising, for once one appreciates the greatness of God and the finiteness of man, once one confesses what God has done in Jesus Christ to reconcile unworthy sinners to Himself, the rest falls into place. Calvin's final edition of the *Institutes* was welcomed with the same enthusiasm as the first and has been hailed as the best theological work of the entire Reformation period, in a class on its own. Here, in truth, is a book that belongs in every home – and not just to decorate the shelf.

Purpose?

Why, precisely, did Calvin write the *Institutes*? In his note to his reader in the 1559 edition, Calvin explained his reason like this:

It has been my purpose in this labour to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may be able both to have easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling. For I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have arranged it in such an order, that if anyone rightly grasps it, it will not be difficult for him to determine what he ought especially to seek in Scripture, and to what end he ought to relate its contents.

Calvin wanted to give his reader a broad overview of Scripture's

Church News

The Grand Valley church has grown beyond the capacity of its building, especially for special occasions such as Lord's Supper services on the second Sunday morning of odd-numbered months.

Until construction of a larger auditorium is complete, the Lord's Supper will be celebrated in the gym of Dufferin Area Christian School at 394016, County Road 12, Laurel, 10-15 minutes east of Grand Valley.

Accepted the call to Smithville, Ontario:

**Candidate
Ken Bergsma**

Called by the church of Vernon, British Columbia:

Rev. J.D. Louwerse
of Neerlandia,
Alberta.

teaching so that one can understand Scripture better, both in its direct teaching and in its actual application in daily living.

Given this purpose, it's perhaps desirable that we dust off our copies of Calvin's *Institutes* and read his book again. A number of chapters at a time could even serve as good discussion material for a Bible study evening.

One more thing

Perhaps you're familiar with Calvin's signet: a heart held in a huge hand, bearing the (Latin) words *prompte et sincere in opere Dei* ("promptly and sincerely in the work of God"). This was Calvin to the core: so taken was he by God's identity and the resulting wealth of

the gospel that he gave his entire self readily and whole-heartedly to the service of this God. He slept but four hours a night and kept on working even when he was sick (which he often was). When he was once encouraged to take time off, he rebuked his well-meaning advisor with this question: shall my God find me idle?! Such was his devotion to the cause of the Lord. Zeal for his God consumed him, so that he received from his Master the crown of glory at the relatively young age of fifty-five. No one today knows where he was buried and that's exactly the way Calvin wanted it. For it wasn't about Calvin; it was all about the God who used Calvin so marvellously for his church-gathering work in Europe five centuries ago – and around the world ever since. It's indeed fact: the Lord God has blessed Calvin's work enormously, to the point that Calvin's work has truly been foundational to western culture as we know it today.

Why it was foundational? Because Calvin took the Word of God so seriously and received from the Lord the privilege to understand its plain sense and communicate this sense to the people of the street through his preaching and his writing. That's

why, in this 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth, it is fitting that we reacquaint ourselves with the work of the man who looms so large in our heritage – both as Canadians as well as Canadian Reformed people in Canada. To be a force for change in our land, we do well to follow Calvin as he followed the light God has given for man's path – his Word.

¹Available in this anniversary year for \$119 for 22 volumes (Christian Book Distributors) – truly a bargain! Highly recommended for every household.

²A number of English translations exist. The translation prepared by Henry Beveridge (1846) is the most common, but its English is 150 years old. The \$119 set of Calvin's Commentaries available from Christian Book Distributors includes a copy of the Beveridge translation of the *Institutes*. The translation prepared by Ford Lewis Battles (1960) is more readable, but you'd have to buy it as a separate purchase.

NOTE: "A Bit of Church History" is going to be a series of a number of articles from Rev. Bouwman over the coming few months; I won't give them numbers as I don't know for sure how many are coming.

*But when the time had fully come,
God sent forth His Son,
born of woman,
born under the law,
to redeem those who
were under the law, so that
we might receive adoption as sons.*



Galatians 4:4, 5

PRELUDE TO CHRISTMAS CAROL (2)

Peter M. Koning

9 Adagio

13

17

21

CHRISTMAS CAROL

Adagio

Peter M. Koning

1. For God so loved the world He gave His on - - ly Son; For
 2. Christ left His high a - - - bode Showed Fa - - - ther's sa - - ving grace; Born
 3. Christ born in Beth - - le - - hem, Came down to free us all From
 4. Tho' Christ a thou - - sand times In Beth - - le - - hem be born, If

5

all who do be - - lieve He has the vic - - - t'ry won.
 of a mai - den pure Ran - - - somed the fal - - - len race.
 sin and mi - - se - - ry, Brought on by A - - - dam's fall.
 He's not born in Thee, Thy soul is still for - - - lorn.

The last stanza of this Christmas Song was written, ages ago, by Angelus Silesius.
 The content in old-English style appealed to us (Peter and Tina Koning).
 So we wrote three complimentary stanza's to complete the Carol.
 Then Peter wrote the music for 4-part harmony.



Jim Fluit

The Christmas Peace

A narrative built around the details of the actual event

The harvest had never happened that year. It had only been six months since everything had fallen apart, but the once-tidy fields and hedgerows were already overgrown and abused. The trees had lost their leaves *and* most of their branches. The landscape was plagued with their remains – stripped, burnt, and tilted at awkward angles.

The farmhouses dotting the scene had all been boarded up and abandoned. The bustle of hens and geese, cows, dogs, and the laughter of children had all faded away. That winter it seemed the very fabric of life had been torn. And no one really knew when or even if it would be woven again. The men who remained, crouching in the mud, were the ones creating this mess. But perhaps they also had the potential for a solution.

The only sound in the early morning mist was an occasional plop in the flooded trench of the London Rifle Brigade. Lance Corporal Roger S. Coulson sat slouching on a makeshift platform, boots hanging over the rank water. He stared blankly at the opposite side of the

trench, absent-mindedly popping pebbles in the air with a flick from his right thumb.

Christmas. . . peace on earth and goodwill to men. . . Yes, he believed in peace – of course he did. Christ had come for the atonement of sin, for the healing of a broken humanity, and with the promise of real, lasting peace. Roger truly believed it. He didn't want to fight here any longer than he had to. But there could be no peace now – not while the Germans ravaged the French countryside and threatened the entire continent. Justice had to be served. After all, peace doesn't come freely. It takes the blood and sweat of thousands of men.

And that's exactly what he was doing – he was *creating* peace, so that the people of France and England, and his own wife and children, would be able to eat their Christmas dinners and sing their carols about joy and goodwill to men. These soldiers were making it all possible.

Why couldn't his men understand that?

A raven suddenly cried and he jumped to his feet, turning to peer over the log stockade. The drifting mist and rolls of barbed wire

remained silent. Roger propped his rifle up on the logs, and sat down again, lost in thought.

He shook his head and sighed. They were only boys, after all, and they had gone through a lot already. They had all expected that the whole thing would be over by now; that they'd have returned as victorious heroes to the homes of the ones they loved. That's what Roger had told them.

But here they remained, huddled in muddy holes and creeping through ditches in the rain, still nursing wounds from the fierce fighting that had raged a week earlier. Some of his men had been shot down on no-man's land and lay there still.

Roger leaned forward, massaging his forehead with his fingers and turning the events of the night before over and over in his head. He couldn't blame his men for wanting some Christmas celebrations, but it had gone too far, and he really should have stopped it.

The afternoon of the previous day, the Germans opposite them had dragged in small spruce trees from behind their lines and set them up on the parapets of their trenches. Used food-ration tins and colourful rags

were adopted as decorations and, unbelievably, they even brought in a small military band to play hymns and Christmas carols. The London Rifles, peering over their own earthworks, initially laughed in disbelief, but soon they were singing along to *God Save the King* and *Onward, Christian Soldiers*.

Roger had cautiously joined in, but when he thought about the meaning of the song, the words died on his tongue. He backed away from the rest of his men. He loved singing and celebrating as much as any of his men, but when it was *done* with the Germans, something felt very uncomfortable. They were losing sight of the reason they had come here in the first place. This talk of peace and goodwill to enemies wasn't just an innocent, happy thought – it was downright dangerous. This is *war*. The enemy *cannot* be trusted and lives *cannot* be risked for the sake of morale. Roger was responsible for the discipline and the very lives of these boys. And he had been the one, too many times already, to answer for the return of their cold bodies.

“Corporal!” Roger’s thoughts were cut off by a cry from a scout. “We have some visitors!”

Roger grabbed his rifle in his right hand and splashed through the mud to the observation post. The scout was standing at the edge of the trench, looking through a porthole in the raised log barricade.

Roger hauled himself up and peered through the gap in the barricade. Through the drifting mist and coils of barbed wire, two men were walking towards the British lines. They held no weapons, not even helmets, but they were clearly German from their heavy overcoats. They held their hands up in the mist and picked their way through the mud, around a pile of rusting equipment.

“Hold it right there!” Roger yelled. The Germans, hardly fifty yards away, stopped and called out

with heavy accents, “Merry Christmas!” The scout laughed, hand to his forehead. Roger snorted in disbelief, then raised his weapon and took aim.

The scout looked uncomfortable. “Sir, the truce is on until tonight at midnight, you –” “Thank you, I realize that,” Roger retorted, “But I won’t allow the enemy to come this close –” He was distracted by a commotion rising farther down the line and peered up over the barricade for a better look, his rifle still trained on the German visitors. The British infantry were already waking up and beginning to talk with excitement. Some had climbed up over the front of their trenches, fully exposed, and calling back to the Germans.

Roger stepped back down, muttering to himself, but he could hear no-man’s land erupting in cheers and laughter. The fog was clearing and he watched as groups of men from both sides of the trenches began to fill the scarred mud flats that had separated them.

That Christmas Day of 1914, temporary truces were made all along the Western Front. At a number of points on the British/German lines, soldiers from both sides spontaneously climbed out of their trenches and met in the middle. They introduced themselves, traded rations, brandy, and cigarettes, and passed around pictures of their families. They joked about their common problems, complained about the war in general, and even played a few friendly games of soccer.

The London Brigade met with their German counterparts for a burial of the soldiers who had been shot in no-man’s land and had been left to die there. Lance Corporal Coulson attended the service. One of the soldiers of the London Brigade described the scene in this excerpt from a letter he sent home, dated January 6, 1915.

Christmas has come and gone – certainly the most extraordinary celebration of it any of us will ever experience ... When I got out I found a large crowd of officers and men, English and German, grouped around the bodies, which had already been gathered together, and laid out in rows. I went along these dreadful ranks and scanned the faces, fearing at every step to recognise one I knew. It was a ghastly sight. They lay stiffly in contorted attitudes, dirty with frozen mud and powdered with rime.

The digging completed, the shallow graves were filled in and the German officers remained to pay their tribute of respect while our chaplain read a short service.

It was one of the most impressive things I have ever witnessed. Friend and foe stood side by side, bare headed, watching the tall, grave figure of the padre outlined against the frosty landscape as he blessed the poor broken bodies at his feet. Then, with more formal salutes, we turned and made our way back to our respective ruts.

At midnight, shots were fired all along the Western Front to signal that the war had resumed. After the famous Christmas truce of 1914, commanding officers on both sides took measures to prevent embarrassing fraternization. They ensured that their troops would be moved around more frequently and that communication between the trenches would be strictly limited, especially during the Christmas season.

The First World War continued for almost four more years. Over nine million soldiers lost their lives. But that one time, a celebration of the birth of Christ had offered a vision of peace amid the horrors of war. And that story is still being told.



What's New???

When we speak of something being new, often it is the case that we are really speaking of something as “new to me.” In my task of perusing the bulletins faithfully sent my way, I repeatedly come across terms, phrases, and practices that persistently sound strange to my ears. Though these terms, phrases, and practices may have been around for a number of years by now, they continue to sound novel to me. This time I have collected a number of them so that we can reflect together whether these novelties are an improvement. Since the intent is not to embarrass any church but to stimulate some thought and discussion on these matters, no mention will be made of the churches from whose press releases the information was gleaned.

Article 73

First, there is the way some churches use Article 73 of the Church Order. At times one reads something cryptic like, “Opportunity was given for Christian censure according to Article 73 C.O.” It may also say, “Was not made use of.” Or, and this really teases the congregation, “was made use of.” This is not very useful from an interested reader’s point of view and as such it can only raise a question in

the mind of the reader in terms of relevance.

In the end, this cryptic reference is nothing new. What would be classified as something new is when one reads something like this, “Mutual advice, encouragement, and /or admonition as per Article 73 C.O. is not made use of.” What is new is the adding of “mutual advice/encouragement. . .” in connection with Article 73 of the Church Order.

One can appreciate the desire to offer mutual advice and encouragement, but that is not the point of Article 73. The relevant article in the Church Order reads as follows: “The ministers, elders, and deacons shall mutually exercise Christian censure and shall exhort and kindly admonish one another with regard to the execution of their office.” Mutual advice and encouragement can be offered when various difficult cases are discussed. The concern of Article 73, however, is censure, which is necessary when an office bearer is negligent in the execution of the duties of his office. The very word “censure,” found in the heading of the article, implies admonition. It should not be overlooked that this article is in the section on Christian discipline, and follows right after two articles dealing with the discipline of office

bearers. This article can be seen as serving as preventative medicine in that something can be nipped in the bud before the full blown process of discipline kicks in.

While on the topic of Article 73, it appears mainly near the end of the meeting, when office bearers are ready to go home. This can make it a rushed affair, or words that are said will be received by a brother who is just as tired as the rest and not able to accept it in the proper spirit. Generally, if admonition was needed, that will have taken place during the meeting. For example, an elder may not have been as diligent as he should have been in visiting straying members or other members in his ward needing special care. Perhaps what is needed is for someone to come up with a new way that would make this article function earlier in the meeting, in a meaningful way. Or, perhaps there is a need to come to the realization that it does not need special mention on the agenda but it is done during the course of the meeting where needed. Article 73 simply impresses on the office bearers that they are not above correction.

Eligible for call

The second “novelty” pertains not so much to what is found in council or consistory reports but in

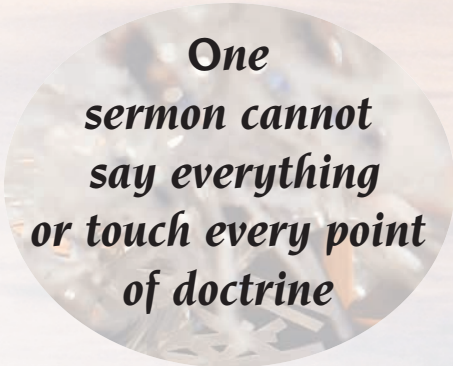
the press releases from classes. Somewhere in the age of having a web-presence, classes began to post notices that read something like the following: "Examined by Classis Saskatchewan on August 30, 2006 and declared eligible for ordination: Candidate V. D. Minister. The ordination will take place on Oct. 2, 2006, D.V., in Swift Current, SK."

Every time I read an announcement like that the novelty of the words, "declared eligible for ordination" strike me as odd. The article in the Church Order that speaks of eligibility is Article 4, "Eligibility for the Ministry." It speaks of being eligible *for call*. It spells out the proper process to be followed. Nowhere in the Church Order, however, do we read of being declared eligible for ordination. Article 5, which speaks of "Ordination and Installation of Ministers of the Word," uses neither the word "eligibility" nor the word "eligible." Rather, Classis has to approve the call, which involves a satisfactory testimony concerning soundness of doctrine and conduct and "a peremptory examination ...with satisfactory results." Classis does not declare eligible but Classis approves the call. By analogy, Classis does not declare ministers who are serving in the ministry and move to another place "eligible for installation." Rather, a classis simply approves the call. If a classis deems it necessary to publish something, all it should say is: "Upon presentation of proper documents and satisfactory results upon a peremptory examination, the call extended by the Church at Swift Current to Br. V.D. Minister was approved." It would be up to the church to publish, if it so

desired, when the ordination was to take place.

Preaching review

The third novelty pertains to the practice of having "preaching review." In itself, this has been around a long time and is a good practice. I have noticed, however, that some consistories have turned this review into a review of one particular sermon. In one case, a minister submitted a copy of a sermon he preached some weeks ago to be the basis for a review. In another case the consistory agreed to have a sermon review based on a sermon to be preached at a specific date in the future.



***One
sermon cannot
say everything
or touch every point
of doctrine***

My understanding of preaching review is that the elders are looking first of all for faithfulness in the preaching. This is determined not by looking at one sermon but by listening to the sermons week after week. After all, one sermon cannot say everything or touch every point of doctrine. One sermon, taken in isolation, may give the appearance the minister is Arminian because he stressed the importance of faith or warned the congregation about the danger of apostasy. Another sermon may give the appearance the minister is a hyper-Calvinist because he speaks of God's sovereign grace

and election which makes clear our salvation is one hundred percent the work of God. Further, in the case of the plan to evaluate a sermon yet to be preached, one can sense the pressure on the minister. Under that pressure, he may suffer a case of sermon-writing block.

Sermon review has to look for patterns. As was mentioned, the key thing to look for is faithfulness. To be sure, some sermons will be better than others. Sometimes things will be said a little awkwardly. The question is whether the minister covers the whole counsel of God, preaching the promises and the demands of the covenant, not shying away from any doctrines but covering them all. Further, the question is whether he does it according to the best of his abilities. It is not fair to measure one minister by the way another minister does things. Each has his own gifts and style. The prophecies of the farmer Amos did not match the style of the prophet Isaiah, but both were prophets of the Lord. For that reason, I have found over the years that a biannual preaching review, usually around December, after the minister has been back from holidays for a while, and around May, before the change-over of office bearers was most beneficial.

In the style of most sermons with three points, it is time to wrap things up. To sum it up, these matters may be worthy of review as they are either not true to original intent or no real improvement.

I trust that the points raised will be taken in the spirit of this column as being for mutual edification, food for thought, and perhaps action. May they lead to some good discussion! Till next time.



Heart, Soul and Mind: Deroche College Retreat 2009

All of life is a spiritual battlefield. But some places seem to be particularly hostile to the public expression of our faith. Secular colleges and universities can be challenging places for Reformed young adults. After growing up in the relative safety of solid homes and Christian schools, entering a secular post-secondary institution can be a shock to the system.

The Reformed Bible College and the “Deroche Retreat” Reformed Conference Society of the Fraser Valley co-sponsored the first ever Deroche College Retreat with the purpose of helping students to not only survive in this post-secondary secular context but to thrive as well.

In the week prior to the first semester of the new school year, twenty-seven students from Western Canada gathered on the grounds of the gorgeous Deroche Retreat, not far from Mission BC. They enjoyed a packed schedule of worldview learning and recreation. Dr. Ben Faber from Redeemer University College was the lead instructor during the retreat. Reverend Rob Schouten from Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church also led the

students in an extensive devotion each day. My wife and I also provided a “Pro-Life 101” session with the purpose of teaching students how to defend the unborn on campuses that are rife with sexual immorality and abortion. Combined, these sessions rang true to the retreat’s motto of being confessionally-grounded, academically-sound, and apologetically-oriented.

The sessions addressed many theoretical and practical aspects of life on campus, from understanding our identity in Christ, to dealing with gender, to defending our faith against the many “isms” and religions. One theme that tied all of these sessions together was the emphasis on getting rid of the dualism that so often dominates life and instead placing everything under the Lordship of Christ. Dualism refers to the notion that life should be divided into two parts; the physical and the spiritual (the worldly and the godly). This understanding has been around in Western society for over two thousand years, going all the way back to Plato and Aristotle. Many Christians are tempted to think of life in these terms as well and live one way on Sunday and a different way the rest of the week. Put another way, we are tempted to live one way in our sheltered Reformed community and a completely different way when we are on a secular campus.

As Christ’s ambassadors, we are called to reject this dualism and live for Him everywhere and at all times. That means standing up for truth and righteousness in the midst of the secular academic world as well. This isn’t easy. Not only are we challenged by the free-living of our student peers who are celebrating the new-found freedom and the absence of morals, we also will undoubtedly face the opposition from professors who are hostile to the Christian faith. Equipping Christian students





with worldview education that allows them to respond to these challenges is critical.

The retreat wasn't entirely about study. When surrounded by the beautiful creation in Deroche it is hard not to get outside and enjoy the outdoors. The students tried their hand at "geocaching," enjoyed volleyball and the slip n' slide, and battled each other with cardboard boat races and a spaghetti bridge building contest.

By all accounts the retreat was a hit and was enjoyed by everyone. It was impressive to see how many students came out. They came from as far as Carman, Calgary,

Edmonton, Smithers, and Houston and represented first through third year levels and many different disciplines. Not only did they have to cover the cost of the retreat, they also forfeited a week of summer holidays which many students tend to rely on to save enough money for the upcoming school year.

Given the interest and how well it went, there is already talk of expanding it next year to allow for more students to attend. If this sounds like something that would interest you or someone you know, stay tuned to www.derochecollegeretreat.com or call Bert Vane (604-856-1992) for details about next year's retreat.



Guido de Brès Christian High School, Commencement 2009

For just a few brief hours on Saturday, September 26, 2009, this year's graduating class paused from their regular life to commemorate the accomplishments that they achieved during their years at Guido de Brès High School. The event began with a luncheon in the gymnasium at the school. Some students hadn't seen each other for a couple of months, and there was a little apprehension in the air at first, as small groups of students quietly chatted in the halls. As the numbers increased parents and graduands spilled into the gym and the slight apprehension quickly faded away. Before long the gym was filled with people and energy. Mr. VanDooren officially opened the luncheon with the reading of a portion from Hebrews 10. He used this text to encourage everyone present to continue to encourage each other to live our lives in the Lord. We all then proceeded to enjoy a wonderfully prepared meal before heading to Hamilton Place for the official graduation ceremony.

As you entered the auditorium at Hamilton Place you were treated to the musical talents of Tristan Jans, welcoming everyone on the piano. At 2:00 pm Mr. Tim Nijenhuis led the students into the auditorium with the processional "An Important Event,"



by Robert Schumann. The Guido de Brès band then led us in the singing of Hymn 40:1, 2.

The board chairman Mr. N.W. VandenOever officially began the ceremony with the reading of Song of Songs 1-2:7. This was the passage that Rev. VanLuik used to prepare his address to the graduating class. He welcomed everyone and gave the graduands some words of encouragement. He said that at times in life we lose sight of the forest for the trees. This may have been the case at Guido for some of the students during their time there. However, God continues to give us the means to carry on, to complete our goals. He gives us the resources to achieve. He ended by telling the students to pray constantly, and be faithful, because He is faithful.

Mr. J.G. VanDooren, the principal of Guido de Brès High School, was the next speaker to address the graduands. He began by saying that this celebration can be viewed from two perspectives. It can be seen as a graduation, where we focus on things from the past, things that were achieved. It can also be seen as a commencement, a time of new beginnings, where you leave something behind. He said that indeed the graduands did leave a legacy behind at Guido: they left us remembering their leadership in many areas, as well as the way that they built up the school during their time there. He then asked them what legacy Guido has left with them. His prayer is that Guido has given them the gift of light. Light is the gift the Lord began with in the beginning.

Light is something that He gave us also through Christ. And eternal light is something that we look forward to having with Him in heaven. He quoted from Ephesians 5, where the Apostle Paul talks about Christ being the light in our life and how we are not to hide this light but to let it shine in the world or darkness. Light was the gift the Lord was able to give to the graduates through Guido de Brès High School.

After Mr. VanDooren's principal's address we enjoyed the performance of Tim Nijenhuis's song *Metamorphosis*, performed by the BACK2U band from Guido de Brès High School.

This led to the guest speaker's address to the graduands. Rev. M.H. VanLuik, as mentioned before, used Song of Songs 1-2:7 for his address, under the following theme: "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys." He started by telling the grads that they needed to know their identity. The young woman speaking in the text doesn't start as a confident person, sure of her identity. By the end of the passage, she is very confident who she is, confident in her identity. Why the change? She now has a young man who loves her, who praises her beauty. Self consciousness has grown into self confidence. She sees herself in the eyes of the one who loves her. She now doesn't have an identity problem.

What does this mean for the four years at Guido de Brès High School? Rev. VanLuik said that it had to do with their identity. The graduands identity as a child of the Lord. At Guido de Brès High School they learned about this identity. They learned how to determine their identity in this world. "What are your roots?" he asked them. "You must have roots to proceed with confidence." The young woman gained confidence being rooted in her identity, knowing she was loved by her lover. We can be rooted as well, knowing that we are loved by our heavenly Father,



and our Lord Jesus Christ. We are not lovable in and of ourselves. Jesus Christ loves us because He died for us. Rev. VanLuik's prayer was that the grads could speak of Christ's love for them as confidently as the young woman in the text could speak. In the eyes of Christ we can say with confidence, "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys." Knowing this we can meet the challenges of this life with confidence.

After Rev. VanLuik's address the Guido band led us in the singing of Psalm 84:1, 2, and 6.

This was followed by the graduands receiving their Ontario Secondary School Diplomas.

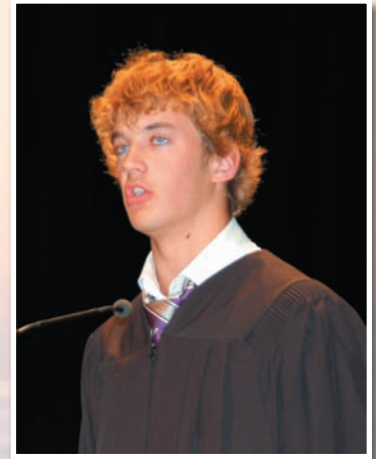
Another performance by the BACK2U band was next. This time they performed "Be Unto Your Name" by Lynn DeShazo and Gary Sadler.

Time was then taken to share in some individual accomplishments with the presentation of various scholarships and awards.

Just before the valedictory address, the wonderful musical gifts of several graduates was displayed for all to enjoy. Michelle VanderVelde sang the song "Encouraged End," and was accompanied by Alissa Post on the flute, Melissa Oosterhoff and the violin, and Jason Mans on guitar. This song was written by Karen Helder and Jason Mans.

Jon Kamstra was the graduate who gave the valedictory address. He began with a word of thanks to our heavenly Father, board members, and the supporting community for the years of education at Guido de Brès High School. He said that the years at Guido taught them all things like being able to formulate an opinion and back it up, respecting others as God respects us, and seeking the greater good. Relationships that were formed at school were essential to help each of them move on. He ended by reassuring his fellow graduates that they need not fear the future because God is always right beside us.

Mr. H. Faber ended the ceremony with prayer, after we sang Hymn 54. This hymn was a good conclusion as it speaks about our identity with our God: "Behold the amazing gift of love, the Father has bestowed on us, the sinful sons of men, to call us sons of God."



Awards

The Harry Aasman and George DeBoer Memorial Scholarships

Kristen Smeding
Wesley van Barneveld
Kyle VanderVeen

The Guido de Brès Proficiency Scholarships

Tracey Boeringa
Chris Bosch
Calvin Bouwman
Stephen DeJong
Carina DeJong
Don Evink
Darren Feenstra
Joel Gritter
Jon Kamstra
Kira Lodder
Andrew Ouwersloot
Cassie Post
Darren Schutten
Michael Strating
Brent Vanderwoude
Angela VanGoolen
Nicholas VanLuik

The Governor General's Academic Medal

Kristen Smeding

The Guido de Brès Christian High School Participation Awards

Sarah Boot
Cynthia deBoersap
Mark Faber
Christi Hoeksema
David Kok
Kira Lodder
Kayla Riesebosch
Darren Schutten
Kaitlyn Schuurman
Kyle VanderVeen
Roslyn VanderWoude

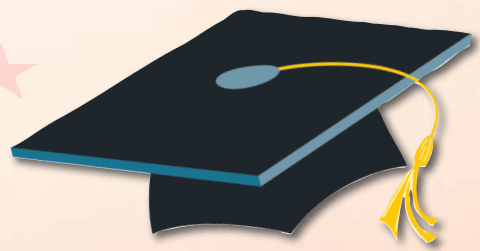
The Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award for Students

James Woudenberg

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

Kyle VanderVeen





Adam Aasman
Ana Barros
Marc Beintema
Allan Bethlehem
Tracey Boeringa
Sarah Boot
Christopher Bosch
Derek Bosscher
Matthew Bosscher
Ryan Bosscher
Thomas Bosscher
Calvin Bouwman
Randy Breukelman
Kaitlin Buitenwerf
David DeBoer
Janell DeBoer
Kelly DeBoer
Cynthia DeBoersap
Carina DeJong
Stephen DeJong
Kaitlin DeVries
Donald Evink
Mark Faber
Corinna Feenstra
Daniel Feenstra
Darren Feenstra
Joshua Feenstra
Daniel Frebold
David Gracey
Joel Gritter
Melody Heemskerk
Karin Helder
Christine Hoeksema

Geoffrey Hofsink
Rebecca Hordyk
Jeffrey Hordyk
Jenna Hordyk
Philip Hummel
Michael Hutten
Sophia Jansema
Wesley Jansema
Kristopher Jongsema
Herman Kamstra
Colin Kasper
Ruth Kelly
Chadwick Knegt
David Kok
Chevon Komdeur
Tyler Komdeur
Kelly Linde
Kailee Lodder
Kira Lodder
Andrew Lootens
Jonathan Ludwig
Kaitlyn Malda
Jason Mans
Dylan Marchese
Amber Muis
Justin Nicholson
Brandon Nieuwenhuis
Alexander Olij
Melissa Oosterhoff
Andrew Ouwersloot
Rebecca Pilon
Robert Poort
Cassandra Post

Alissa Post
Kayla Riesebosch
Jason Schulenberg
Darren Schutten
Laura Schutten
Rachel Schutten
Kaitlyn Schuurman
Kristen Smeding
Christine Spriensma
Michael Strating
Lauren Tamminga
Elizabeth Terpstra
Jessica Torenvliet
Wesley van Barneveld
Braden VanAndel
David Vandenbos
Adrienne VanderBruggen
Kyle VanderVeen
Carrie VanderVelde
Kendra VanderVelde
Michelle VanderVelde
Emma Vandervliet
Brent Vanderwoude
Rosalyn Vanderwoude
Angela VanGoolen
Gregory VanHengstum
Darren VanLuik
Nicholas VanLuik
Nathan VanPykeren
Russell VanVeen
Catherine Venema
James Woudenberg

Camp Yak'isda Bik'ah July 2009



"Every moment at camp was another moment that we counsellors had the privilege to turn a little heart toward the Father in heaven, to share the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ." – Calvin V

Follow the Leader

"Jesus calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When He has brought out all his own, He goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow Him because they know his voice."

(John 10:3b-4)

From the Board

There are so many tasks to run a successful camp each year, and time after time 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 from our community. We thank all those who helped with these camps, from those who put their donations in the collection bags, to those who dedicated a week of their time to be counsellors, and all those in between. We appreciate your commitment to these camps and your continued support of this outreach effort!

Please pray for the volunteers who will continue the ongoing 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. To God be the glory!

Currently, we are raising funds to replace the floating dock at camp which had become an extreme safety hazard. We are fundraising with Mabel's Labels, a company with all types of labels that are colourful, indestructible, easy-to-use, and fun! Visit www.cyb.mabel.ca to check out their great products and to place your order.

Musings from the Camp Coordinator

Do I know my Shepherd's voice? When He calls me, can I recognize his voice? On our final day at youth camp we listened to a sermon prepared by Pastor Jim Witteveen based on our camp theme John 10:3b-4. Pastor Jim pointed out that we recognize our Shepherd because we know the Word that He has given to us. It is only in God's Word that we can get to know Him better; we need to immerse ourselves in the truth so we can grow in faith and knowledge, so we can tell the truth from the lie, so we can recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd when He calls to us. This knowledge is not based on emotions, feelings or on some voice within us; rather, it comes from his



"Thankfulness and praise to God for allowing me to be a child of his and a small tool in his hand." – C.

perfect Word. He has given us what we need to be able to recognize his voice. We are also called to follow. We need to follow the Shepherd, for without a shepherd we are lost and hopeless.

As I thought over the weeks filled with counselor devotions, Bible lessons, mealtime devotions and individual moments of worship, I was struck by two things. First, by how hopeless life really is without the Shepherd. Listening to children talk about their home life and the abuse and violence that occurs there. Trying to find the words to encourage teens in the face of statements like "I hate my life," "I wish I was dead," and "Nobody cares." Holding the wrist that is scarred from continued cutting or easing the swollen knuckles where a child repeatedly punched a bench, because "that is the only way I can get through the pain." And second, that even with this



"But above all what is amazing is to see how God is working in their hearts. They are so thirsty for the gospel and they really understand what you're talking about." – Megan V.

glory and honour to our Great Shepherd. May we all recognize his voice and follow Him!

Closing thoughts

It is now November. Camp now seems a distant, fond memory that brings smiles to my heart. The current upheaval in the lives of so many of the campers brings tears. Strife and discord, drugs and alcohol, promiscuity and abuse – life without Christ is no life at all. It seems so unfair that the little ones are caught up in it all and pay the heaviest price, growing another generation that seems destined to follow the same cycle.

I know that the Word of God does not return empty – please pray that God's Word may continue to go out and that it might bear much good fruit and that these children will be snatched from the grip of Satan and instead join us in singing praises to our God and Saviour.

Denise V.



"It was great to be able to teach these kids about God and to spend some time with them and show them God's love." – Alyssa D.

knowledge, how easily I am prone to stray from my Shepherd. How often I get caught up in daily events and let my Bible reading, devotions, or prayer slip to the wayside. How often I become selfish, putting my needs before the needs of those around me. How often I am tempted.

Thankfully, the sermon did not end there, but rather with this good news: The Good Shepherd knows his sheep and gives us the strength to follow Him. We also have the Holy Spirit as our comforter and guide.

Yes, I can find hope for these lost children. I know that God's love is far greater than ours and that He is a gracious and compassionate God. He knows his sheep and He will search until He finds them. We can sow the seed of the gospel, knowing that it is the Spirit who will cause it to grow and to bear a good harvest. We can rest in this knowledge and trust in our Saviour. All praise and



"I will always remember the acronym that Reid told me about: Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth." – Jocelyn V.



Western Ministerial Conference

What a conference! On Tuesday, November 3, 2009, twenty four Canadian Reformed ministers, three United Reformed ministers and one Reformed Church in the US minister, along with seventeen of their wives, met at the beautiful facilities of Cedar Springs Christian Retreat Center in Sumas, Washington, USA.

Most of the guests arrived in the afternoon. The rest came later. Some had been delegated to the Regional Synod in Abbotsford, BC and arrived once the Synod had completed its work.

One of the unique features of this conference was the presence of a great many ministerial wives. The previous year the churches had been polled about whether or not they thought it a good idea to have their

minister's wife present, also seeing the added costs. Overwhelmingly they deemed this to be a good idea and the participants thank their consistories for their understanding and generosity.

The conference was opened by the Rev. Clarence Bouwman, one of the organizers. He, along with the Rev. Rinze IJbema, had made all of the necessary arrangements. After his opening remarks the ladies went upstairs to discuss an introduction by Inge Pol entitled "Family Life in the Manse." They would later discuss a topic dealing with the book of Proverbs. (Although they were by themselves for these two presentations, they also joined the men for a number of their sessions.)

Meanwhile, the men listened to Rev. Joe Poppe as he presented an exegesis paper on 1 Samuel 17. This was followed by a helpful discussion.

The following morning Rev. Joe Poppe led a workshop on the topic "From Text to Sermon." He had the ministers gather together in groups to deal with how they would preach on 1 Samuel 17 when it comes to text selection, introduction, theme and points, illustrations, and Christology. One and all deemed this workshop approach to be very beneficial and recommended it for future conferences.

In the afternoon the Rev. Rob Schouten gently critiqued three anonymous sermons on 1 Samuel 17. Once again a stimulating discussion followed.

Over the years something called "Book Notes/Tool Talk" has become a regular feature of these conferences. What this means is that every minister is expected to introduce briefly a book that he has read recently and that comes with his special recommendation. In addition, if he has come across a particular tool that makes his work easier, be it a computer program or an informative website, he shares that too with his colleagues.

On Wednesday evening, November 4, the Rev. Ted VanRaalte, who is currently on





ministerial leave pursuing graduate studies under Dr. Richard Muller at Calvin Seminary, spoke on “Immutable Divine Justice, the Demands of the Covenant and Justification.” A vigorous discussion followed in which not only terms and concepts from the sixteenth and seventeenth century were explained, but also connections were made to the current debates swirling around Federal Vision and Norman Shepherd.

On Thursday morning, November 5, the newly minted Doctor Andrew Pol received the floor. Recently he had received his DMin degree based in part on a dissertation called “Primus Inter Pares: Leading Fellow Elders in Shepherding the Flock.” He introduced it to his colleagues and their wives, as well as fielded questions about it.

That afternoon the final presentation took place and it had to do with teaching the Catechism to the younger generation. A panel of three, namely the Revs. Clarence Bouwman, Peter Holtvluwer, and Ralph Pontier,

each explained their approach and responded to questions.

Thereafter things began to wind down. Some discussion followed on the time, place, topics, and organizers of the next conference. Seeing that the conference is held in conjunction with the Regional Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Western Canada and seeing that the Immanuel Church at Edmonton

will be the convening church, it may be held there. On the other hand, there were also numerous suggestions for it to be held again at Cedar Springs. After all, it is a most beautiful and suitable place with fine facilities, excellent meals, and great walking trails. It also happens to be in an area where one finds the greatest concentration of ministers. In any case the new organizers, the Revs. Karlo Jansen and Steve Swets, will have to figure it all out and come up with a suitable solution.

All in all, the conference proved to be a very positive experience. It was a great time of learning, sharing, renewing old ties, and encouraging one another in the service of the Lord. Many thanks go out to the Cedar Springs staff, the organizers, and the speakers.



From the Publisher

World Government

***For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given, and the government
will be on his shoulders.***

Isaiah 9:6b

There's no question that after the Second World War doors to the entire globe opened for many, not only to travel and visit other countries, but also to emigrate and settle in different parts of the world. Technology has made it possible to fly in any direction for shorter or longer periods of time. We have become globally connected. In Europe borders have practically fallen away. Many nations in Europe have come together to form one parliament for the regulation of common issues.

Lately, in certain quarters, there is more and more talk of forming one world government. The secular world government that is in view is very concerning for Christians. It's reminiscent of the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11, where the people appropriated the authority that belongs to God.

The text above gives us comfort. It assures us that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). All things are in His hand and nothing happens without His will. Psalm 24:1, 2 expresses it this way: ***The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.*** Satan's drive to usurp God's authority has come to naught, for ***Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ*** (Revelation 12:10). While threatening clouds still hang over us, the dawn will arise when the Prince of Peace, our mighty Lord and Saviour, will destroy all those who have opposed Him, and He will reign forever.

Gratitude

We are thankful that we may speak of Christ's authority in the pages of **Clarion**. Our editorial team works to fill the pages with upbuilding articles. Our thanks goes to: Dr. J. Visscher, Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. K. Stam, and Dr. C. Van Dam. And, as always, our copy manager, Mrs. Laura Veenendaal is her punctual self and a joy to work with.

Thank you, too, to our regular contributors: Rev. C. Bouwman, Rev. W. Bredenhof, Dr. A.J. de Visser, Dr. G.H. Visscher, Rev. R. Bredenhof (the coordinator of the "Treasures New and Old" column), the Education columnists, the Ray of Sunshine team, and many others, for their efforts to make **Clarion** a regular visitor in your homes.

All our faithful subscribers and advertisers are the backbone of our existence as a magazine, and we thank you heartily. You make it possible for the Word of God to receive attention in our general reading as well.

Greetings

As you reflect, in the coming days, on the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for us, know that ***of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end*** (Isaiah 9:7a). We send you our joyful greetings now and for the coming year.

Bill Gortemaker

Ray of Sunshine

By Corinne Gelms and Patricia Gelms

As many of us are trading our calendars for a new one, we remember that for some of us this change of calendar means a change of year. We give a happy birthday wish to all who celebrate their birthday during the month of January. We wish you a great day with your family and friends. May our heavenly Father bless you and keep you in his care.

For this month, we can share a bit of the daily life activities of Edwin Schutte.



We are writing this on behalf of our brother Edwin Schutte. Edwin was born on January 19, 1984. Edwin comes from a family of nine children, four brothers and four sisters. His dad and sister recently passed on to the Lord.

Edwin is diagnosed with Autism and Bipolar. He still lives at home but spends most of his day time hours at his new "Bethesda home." This is a new group home. Among his helpers, he likes to spend his time with Jonathan who has worked with Edwin for many years. One of his favourite things to do together with Jonathan is going on a long road trip. They can be gone for a whole long day.

Some of his day-to-day activities include distributing newspapers and door knob hanger packages. At home he has the responsibility of looking after his home by cleaning and making his bed.

Family time is something Edwin looks forward to. For music there is a genuine love and appreciation and it is thoroughly enjoyed. But most of all Edwin likes his quiet time by relaxing in bed and taking many showers.

It is truly beautiful to see how Edwin knows the importance of beginning and ending the day with the Lord. He really enjoys his devotionals.

Much thanks to the Schutte family for sharing a bit about their brother Edwin. We hope you have a nice birthday on the nineteenth, Edwin.

We will be looking forward in this new year D.V., for some more contributions from those who are celebrating their birthdays. So if you are able to make a poem, or write a letter or any other special contribution; please contact us. For any address changes please update us as soon as possible.

We would also like to take this opportunity to wish everyone happy holidays, as we look forward to celebrating the great gift we have received through the birth of our Lord and Saviour; Jesus Christ. Let us make every effort to cherish this gift each day anew.

Birthdays in January

2 Liz Koning will be 49

9905 152nd Street, Edmonton, AB T5P 1X4

7 Christine Breukelman will be 38

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

14 Stephen Dykstra will be 27

Box 3573, Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0

17 Henry Driegen will be 54

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

17 Grace Homan will be 54

Anchor Home

361 Thirty Road S., RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

19 Edwin Schutte will be 26

844 Bowman Road, Abbotsford, BC V3G 1S9

19 Janine Smid will be 40

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

30 Tyler Hoeksema will be 21

6755 Lorne Drive, Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

If you have somebody to add to our birthday list or contact information needs to be changed, please let us know:

8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

Phone: (905) 957-0380. Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca

Press Release of the International Conference of Reformed Churches

The seventh meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) was held in Christchurch, New Zealand from October 15 to 22, 2009. A prayer service preceded the official meeting. This service was under the leadership of the Rev. John Goris. The Rev. Dirk van Garderen delivered a fitting sermon on the second beatitude (Matthew 5:4). Several brothers from different parts of the world thanked the Lord for the preparations, the upcoming sessions, and the results of the gathering.

The Conference was held during the day at the Holiday Inn in the centre of the city and in the evening at the Bishopdale Church. This church is part of the Reformed Churches in New Zealand and together this federation and its members in the Christchurch area took exemplary care of the needs of the delegates. Their keen organizational skills, their appetizing meals, and their warm hospitality will long be remembered with fondness.

The Conference opened with words of greetings from the hosting church, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Upon the recommendation of the Interim Committee, the Executive was appointed. It was composed of the Rev. Bruce Hoyt (RCNZ) as Chairman, the Rev. Richard Holst (EPCEW) as Vice-chairman, the Rev. Cornelius Van Spronsen (CanRC) as Corresponding Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Peter Naylor (EPCEW) as

Recording Secretary, and Mr. Henk Berends (CanRC) as Treasurer. The Rev. Bort de Graaf (CGKN), the retiring Chairman, was thanked for his services to the Conference over the past four years.

Member churches

When the Conference opened it consisted of the following members:

- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)
- Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia (Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis di Indonesia NTT) (CRCI, was GGRC)
- Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)
- Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland) (CRCN, was CGKN)
- Confessing Reformed Church in Congo (Eglise Reformee Confessante au Congo) (CRCC, was ERCC)
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW)
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (EPCI)
- Free Church of Scotland (FCS)
- Free Church in Southern Africa (FCSA)
- Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)
- Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerken in Suid Afrika) (FRCSA, was VGKSA)
- Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

- Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)
- Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) (PCKK)
- Presbyterian Free Church of India (PFCI) previously called the Free Church of Central India
- Reformed Churches in Indonesia – NTT (Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia NTT) (RCI, was GGRI)
- Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland – vrijgemaakt) (RCN, was GKN(v))
- Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ)
- Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA, was GKSA)
- Reformed Churches of Spain (Iglesias Reformadas de Espana) (RCS, was IRE)
- Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCIre)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India (RPCNEI)
- United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA)

New member churches

During the Conference the following churches were received as new members:

- Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC)
- Independent Reformed Church in Korea (IRCK)

- Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)
- Reformed Churches of Brazil (Igrejas Reformadas de Brasil) (RCB, was IRB)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCInd)

Papers

The theme of the Conference was “The Vitality of the Reformed Faith.” This theme was explored by means of four papers. Each paper was delivered in the evening at the Bishopdale Church in order that the members of that church and neighbouring churches could also be present. Discussion followed and the next day it continued at the Holiday Inn in a number of workshops and a plenary session.

The first paper was delivered by Dr. George W. Knight III (OPC) and had as title: “The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge of the Charismatic Movement.” Dr. Knight began by analyzing four episodes in the book of Acts (Acts 2:1-41; 8:4-25; 10:1-11:18; 19:1-7) related to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He went on to deal with the filling and fulfillment of the Spirit, paying special attention to the gifts of prophecy, signs and wonders, speaking in tongues, and healing. He also made some suggestions about how to interact with those deemed to be “charismatics.”

The second paper was delivered by Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman (URCNA) and had as title: “The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge of Individualism in Church Life.” Dr. Kloosterman first described the nature of the challenge that individualism poses for the church and the Christian faith. He then moved on to a diagnosis of the matter identifying a number of causes relating to a loss of transcendence, evangelicalism, and the psychologizing of the self. Finally, he outlined a response to the problem that related to the church’s worship and confession.

The third paper was delivered by the Rev. Frank van Dalen (ARPC) and had as title: “The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge from Islam.” The Rev. Van Dalen gave an update on the work that his churches are doing in Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan. He spoke about Muslim distinctives and also gave numerous suggestions as to how to minister to them.

The fourth paper was delivered by Dr. Mohan Chacko (RPCInd) and had as title: “The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge of the Asian Context.” Dr. Chacko opened his address by identifying three challenges facing the churches in the Asian-Pacific region: the charismatic movement, individualism, and Islam. He then proceeded to delineate four paradigms in relation to Pentecostalism. This in turn was followed by an examination of individualism. It was concluded by a number of observations on Asian missions.

Introductions

A number of churches applied for membership in the ICRC. They introduced themselves during the meeting.

Other churches sent observers or visitors to the Conference, several of which introduced themselves or updated the meeting on current work: the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, and the Reformed Church in Japan.

Missions

The missionary mandate of the church has had the attention of the member churches of the ICRC since its inception. The 2009 meeting was no different.

The Mission Committee presented its report and it highlighted the fact that regional mission conferences are growing in number. These conferences were held in Europe (2007 and 2008),

Africa (2008), and Asia-Pacific (2008). A newsletter has been published on a more or less regular basis. Contact was also made with the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF) and more contact will be pursued.

Furthermore, it was decided to arrange a meeting of representatives of the world mission agencies of the ICRC member churches to exchange information and explore ways for possible multilateral cooperation. Information (names, qualifications, areas of expertise, and contact details) will be compiled on short-term theological teachers in order that member churches may be made aware of existing resources and be able to make use of them. Protocols on how members may deal with major disasters and persecuted Christians were adopted.

Other significant actions


It was decided to accept a proposal from one of the churches to appoint a committee to review all aspects of the Conference. A proposed amendment to the Constitution was also passed along to the Review Committee for its study and evaluation.

Budgetary matters

An income and expense statement was received and adopted. It showed that the Conference spent \$136,638.09 (USD) from 2006 - 2009. A four year budget for 2010 -2013 in the amount of \$140,000.00 (USD), or \$35,000.00 per annum, was adopted.

Next meeting of the Conference

The next meeting is scheduled, the Lord willing, for September of 2013 in Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom, hosted by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW).

Mark T. Bube,
James Visscher 



Year End Review

Another year is almost over and there are many signs of this. One has to do with the shortness of our daylight hours. Another may well be the presence of snow on the ground. What about the sparkling lights and glitzy decorations? Still another obvious sign is the sudden profusion of fancy dinners. Then too, there is music in the air, a certain kind of music that only sounds forth at this time of year.

Oh, and if all of these signs are not enough, there is one more. It is the arrival of this magazine in a more colourful, weightier, and decorative format than usual. When it lands with a thud on your family room table you know that Issue 25 has come, another volume has been completed and the year is almost over.

Time – how swiftly does it pass! The years – how quickly do they flow! The year 2009 is about to become a thing of the past.

Calvin year

Before that happens, however, it is good to reflect on what has all transpired. Perhaps the main thing that set 2009 apart from a religious perspective is the fact that this year has been Calvin's year. No matter where one looked, whether in Europe, North America, and even in Africa and Asia, churches, scholars, historians, and ordinary people set aside some time to consider that this year marked the 500th year since the birth of the great French Reformer. Conferences – both small and great, articles – both popular and scientific, speeches – both brief and lengthy, were held in many places. One might say that Calvin's life and work was thoroughly inspected, if not dissected, throughout the year.

In the midst of it there may have been some who are led to wonder about its appropriateness. After all, here is a man, who craved no acclaim and who wanted no fuss and bother attached to his burial, being elevated to the level of Protestant sainthood. Oh well, I suppose some excesses cannot be avoided.

Church year

Still, as important as John Calvin was, and still is, the focus of this Year End Review is not on things French or Swiss, but on things Canadian and American. Specifically, it is on church life in Canada and the United States. Even more specifically, it is on church life within the Canadian (American) Reformed Churches.

Turning to the churches in both countries that together form in one federation, there is no shortage of people, places, and points to ponder. Where to begin? Last year we dwelt first on the missionary and evangelistic efforts mushrooming in our churches. This year let me begin in a more predictable fashion with churches and pastors.

Churches and pastors

Moving from East to West, we begin with Ontario where most of our churches are situated. The church at Ancaster received a new pastor in the person of the Rev. John Ludwig who came from Grand Rapids. The Providence church at Hamilton, the newest church in the federation, welcomed the Rev. Wes Bredenhof who came from BC. The Glanbrook church saw the departure of its minister, the Rev. Doug Vandeburgt and his family, and the arrival of Candidate Rodney Vermeulen and his family. The nearby church at Smithville also extended a call to a candidate, namely Mr. Ken Bergsma. When this was being written no decision about his call was known. The church at Tintern or Spring Creek (formerly Rockway) witnessed the departure of the Rev. Clarence VanderVelde early on in the year. Thus far their calling work has not yielded the desired results.

Going further north in Ontario, the church at Waterdown saw its vacancy end with the arrival of the Rev. Doug Vandeburgt. The same happened to the more northerly church at Elora which witnessed the arrival of the Rev. Clarence VanderVelde and his family. A little later in the year the church at Owen Sound had a new face to look at and a new voice to hear almost every Lord's Day when the Rev. Jack Moesker accepted its call.

Turning west the church at London said “farewell” to the Rev. Richard Pot and his family as he accepted a call to the Free Reformed Church of West Albany, Australia. After serving the Canadian churches of Orangeville and London, it was deemed time for him and his wife, together with their children, to go back to their homeland. Thanks, Richard and Monica, for your contribution to church life in Canada! Since then the Rev. Reuben Bredenhof and his family have arrived and taken over the pastoral work in London.

Next door to London, the church at Chatham also became vacant. Its minister, the Rev. Henry Versteeg and his wife Rita, decided to follow their hearts, now that their children were grown, and return to the mission field. The call from the sending church at Toronto for mission work in Papua New Guinea was accepted. Thus far Chatham’s attempts at filling the vacancy have not met with success, but a new year looms, and along with it, new hope.

Going across the border into Michigan, the church at Grand Rapids became vacant with the departure of the Rev. John Ludwig for Ancaster. Their calling work continues and will hopefully see good results in 2010.

Seeing that we are in the USA anyway, we may as well continue on to Denver. Last year they experienced the departure for South Africa of their minister, the Rev. Dirk Boersma and his new wife. Since then they have called several ministers and candidates but without success. Meanwhile, they continue to benefit from the services of the Rev. George Horner, a minister of the Reformed Church in the United States.

Going north and moving across the border back into Canada, it would appear that all of the ministers in Manitoba and a good number in Alberta are on long-term contracts. The only pastor to move in those two provinces was the Rev. Reuben Bredenhof who exchanged St. Albert, Alberta, for London, Ontario. This means that at the moment there is only one vacancy on the prairie.

Travelling over the Rockies into British Columbia brings one to the church at Vernon, which is now vacant after the departure of the Rev. Jack Moesker. Its calling work, however, continues unabated. In the Fraser Valley there was more activity than usual. The church at Abbotsford could at last welcome the Rev. R.C. (Karlo) Janssen. He came from The Netherlands and, as always, the immigration process took a considerable amount of time and paperwork. Almost next door, the church at Langley, which said “good-bye” to the Rev. Wes Bredenhof in July, could welcome Candidate Ryan deJonge in September and congratulate him as the Rev. Ryan deJonge in October. Finally, the church at Surrey



(Maranatha) surrendered yet another pastor to the Theological College in Hamilton with his temporary appointment as teacher in Dogmatics (which is expected to become more permanent in May 2010 – perhaps the worst kept secret in the federation). In his place the church at Surrey called and received a positive response from the Rev. Ted Van Raalte. He had been a minister of the Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg but had been released from active ministry in that congregation in order to pursue graduate studies.

It should be apparent, as we look over the above list, that there is still no shortage of movement in the federation. At times complaints can be heard to the effect that ministers should move more often. Some would even like to see some legislation in place that would “force” a minister to move on every five years or so. Of course, that is not going to happen, but going by what occurs in most churches, neither does it need to happen.

If ministerial movement is a topic that is often discussed among us, so is the matter of ministerial vacancy. As 2009 comes to a close seven churches are still without a pastor and at least two churches are considering adding a second pastor. In addition, while no retirements are expected in 2010, there could be two in 2011, three in 2012, one in 2013, one in 2014 and one in 2015. Together vacancies, retirements, and church plants should continue to cause demand to exceed supply for quite a few years.

Churches and buildings

I realize that churches are not buildings, but they do need buildings in which to worship, and that makes them newsworthy. Although I live a great distance from there and thus cannot be absolutely certain, I have heard it said by more than one mouth that the church at Smithville has decided to demolish its existing nave and put a new one in its place. I hope that this is true seeing that when I have been there in the past the feeling existed that somehow Smithville was always on the short end of the stick. New



churches would come out of Smithville and build nice new buildings; whereas, Smithville always had to put up with the old, the remodelled, and the cramped. Well, no longer it would appear. Smithville has decided that the time has come to get rid of not just its old worship space but also, excuse me for saying it, the most challenging pews in the country.

I was also informed that the church at Brampton had worked out a deal with a local mega builder in the area to exchange its building and property for a new building and piece of property. Economic conditions, however, appear to have put the plan on hold.

In Washington State, the church at Lynden added to both ends of its building and renovated everything in-between. The results are a pleasure to behold and to worship in. In addition, while I generally think that churches with basements are bad ideas, the beautiful work done on the Lynden basement is a true exception.

Finally, the church at Aldergrove is hard at work on its building. It will not be finished until sometime in the new year, but already it is becoming obvious that a fine, flexible, and fitting facility is rising out of the ground.

Pastors, degrees, and publications

Seeing that we are on the subject of pastors anyway, it may be good to draw your attention to the fact that a number of pastors were awarded advance theological degrees during the year. The Rev. Andrew Pol was awarded a Doctor of Ministry degree from Providence Theological Seminary in Manitoba and wrote a dissertation called, "A Noble Task: The Work of Elders in the Canadian Reformed Churches in Manitoba." The Rev. R. C. (Karlo) Janssen received a Doctor of Theology degree from the Theological University in Kampen and wrote a thesis called "By This Our Subscription: Confessional Subscription within the Dutch Reformed Tradition Since 1816." The Rev. Jason Van Vliet received his Th.D. from the Theological University in Apeldoorn and his thesis is titled, "Children of God: The Imago Dei in John Calvin and His Context."

In addition, the Rev. Reuben Bredenhof was awarded a Master of Theology degree from St. Stephen's College (University of Alberta). His dissertation is called "I Speak As to My Children: 2 Corinthians and Paul's Relationship with the Church at Corinth."

Congratulations to you each and every one of you, as well as to your wives and children! It is a wonderful thing to see that the Lord has crowned the hard work of so many years with success.

In addition to the above brothers, a number of others who are currently in the ministry in the Canadian Reformed Churches are working on degrees. All of this has and will continue to benefit the churches either directly or indirectly. It will also stand our Theological College in good stead when it comes to appointing new professors.

The Theological College

Speaking of the College, the year 2009 was especially memorable for the Theological College in that it celebrated its fortieth anniversary. This means that the College has been in existence for four decades. In those decades it has become a source of rich blessing to the churches in Canada, Australia and elsewhere.

When General Synod Orangeville 1968 took the bold step of setting up the College it caused no little debate and disagreement in the churches. Could the churches really support and maintain such an institution? Was this not a classic case of over-reaching ourselves? Would it not be better for prospective students to go to The Netherlands or to the United States for their studies? Synod Orangeville said "no" and its decision has proven to be a pivotal one in the life of our churches. Praise God for men of vision!

This year also saw three men graduate from the College. Together Ken Bergsma, Ryan deJonge, and Rodney Vermeulen form the Class of '09. In their place the College could welcome six new students into various programs. With respect to programs, the College has also decided to introduce a new three year Bachelor of Theology program. The main difference between it and the four year Master of Divinity program is that the requirement to learn Greek, Hebrew, and Latin has been removed.

Moving on to the faculty, Drs. A.J. de Visser, C. Van Dam and G.H. Visscher continued to teach on a regular basis in 2008-2009. The illness of Dr. N.H. Gootjes required some adjustments in the area of dogmatics with both Dr. J. W. Maris and the then Rev. J. Van Vliet filling in for him. It will be the task of Synod 2010 to appoint a new professor of Dogmatics for the ailing Dr. Gootjes, as well as a new professor of OT for the retiring Dr. C. Van Dam.

In addition to their regular teaching loads, the professors were also active in visiting the churches both in the east and in the west. They managed to attend a number of academic conferences, as well as to accept a number of speaking engagements.

In the area of publication, the newly minted Drs. G.H. Visscher and J.P. Van Vliet have both managed to have their dissertations printed with very prestigious international publishers in Germany. Such a development will do much to raise the academic profile of our College in the world of theological studies.

The same applies to Dr. C. Van Dam, whose book entitled *"The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in all the Scriptures"* (P&R Publishing) was slated to appear in November. Already prior to publication it had garnered a number of very positive reviews and endorsements.

Before we leave the College, I may add that for whatever reason the little contest that was started some years ago in this column regarding a "real" name for the College has borne fruit. The Report of the Board of Governors to General Synod 2010 (am I allowed to reveal this?) recommends that the operative name of the College become "The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary" (CRTS).

Ecumenical efforts

Turning to a different front, the past year was also one filled with ecumenical pursuits. Currently the Canadian Reformed Churches maintain "ecclesiastical fellowship" (EF, or popularly called "sister church relations") with churches in Australia, Brazil, Korea, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, as well as in the United States. In addition, contact is ongoing with a number of churches in Indonesia, Korea, Scotland, and the USA who may be added to the list of EF churches. Needless to say, all of these churches require the attention of various committees. From time to time visits are also made to their major assemblies.



Speaking of visiting, that task has been made somewhat simpler due to the fact that most of our fellowship churches are also members of either The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) and/or The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). The latter organization meets annually; whereas, the former meets once every four years.

In that respect the year 2009 was an ICRC year as the seventh meeting of the Conference was held in Christchurch, New Zealand. At that meeting five new churches were admitted to membership bringing the total to thirty churches from around the world. As always speeches were held, papers were delivered, and discussions, both group and plenary, were organized. The ICRC spent a considerable amount of time dealing with mission matters. It also decided to appoint a Committee of Review which will look at ways of improving the functioning of the Conference. Besides all of that, the Christchurch meeting also proved to be a handy venue for all sorts of separate meetings between member church delegations. In this way extra travel could be avoided and direct contacts could be made or renewed.

In many ways what the ICRC does internationally, NAPARC does continentally. For there too papers, presentations and discussions are the order of the day. As well, time is set aside for delegates from different churches to meet together, to discuss common matters of concern and to explore avenues of further co-operation.

The past year also proved to be a busy year for several of the committees dealing with merger talks with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA). Whereas the Song Book and Forms Committees ran stuck due either to mandate or meeting problems, the Church Order and Theological Educations Committees met several times. All in all, it is now beginning to look as if 2010, a synod year for both churches, will be the crucial year wherein either further progress will be made or further obstacles will be raised. Many are praying for the former, but fear the latter. Thankfully, it is not we but the Lord who ultimately determines the future of his church in this world.

Evangelism and missions in the West

The year 2009 has once again proven to be a busy year on the evangelism and mission front. The church at Surrey (Maranatha), the sending church for mission work in Brazil, welcomed the Rev. Julius VanSpronsen and his family home for a well deserved furlough. After some time with family and friends, they boarded a motorhome and managed to visit all of the supporting churches in Western Canada.

These churches quickly learned that there is a lot of activity happening in Brazil. Both the Revs. Julius VanSpronsen and Ken Wieske are very busy preaching, teaching, and advising the Reformed Churches in Brazil. In addition, they are also working with a number of churches that have expressed an interest in the Reformed faith. Several of these churches are in the process of joining the federation.

It may also be reported that a number of supporting churches have taken on more than just a passive role in Brazil. One of them supports a local minister. Another church has taken a special interest in the Aldeia Training Center. More churches are being asked to band together and make possible the calling of a much needed mission aid worker.

Next door to Surrey, the churches at Cloverdale and Langley are supporting the work of the Rev. Frank Dong as he continues to bring the gospel to the Chinese population of Greater Vancouver. Locally the Chinese Reformed Church (un-instituted) continues to grow. An ever expanding website helps him in his work. As well, the work is making great inroads elsewhere.

In addition to supporting the work of the Rev. Frank Dong, the church at Langley is also involved in a work of mercy and outreach in Mexico. Currently four of its members are living there and three are involved in directing and building the Dulce Refugio orphanage. Teams of volunteers from Langley and the Fraser Valley head south on a regular basis and also help with the work. This past year a team of members who are all over fifty and who want to do more than golf decided to contribute some of their time, talents, and resources to this work. Their efforts were so rewarding that they are planning to do the same in the new year. Discussions are also going on with several of our churches in the West to see whether one or two of them might be interested in calling a missionary to work in Aguascalientes, Mexico.

To the east of the church at Langley one finds the church at Aldergrove. This church is very involved in supporting and gathering support for the Feunekes family who are living in Indonesia where father Hugo works as an aviation engineer.

Far to the north of the Fraser Valley the Rev. Jim Witteveen, who has been sent out by the church at Smithers, is hard at work in the city of Prince George. His original mandate was to plant a church among the native peoples of the area. What has happened in the meantime is that his preaching and teaching are making inroads among the regular population. The result is that in the



future we may see a church composed of Prince George inhabitants who in turn have a heart for mission among the native people. At present the former is moving along much faster than the latter. Perhaps that is to be expected and no doubt that is the Lord's way too.

In Alberta, the church at Coaldale is in the process of becoming more involved in helping out the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. These churches are very involved in mission and mercy work in the black townships of South Africa, as well as in Aids hospice work, and they need help. It is the intention of the church at Coaldale to spearhead that help for them in Canada.

Elsewhere in Alberta and Manitoba, the churches are busy supporting the churches at Smithers and Surrey and the work that is being done among the native peoples of Canada and the Brazilian population of northeastern Brazil. Several of the churches are also investigating the possibility of involving themselves in additional missionary efforts abroad.

Evangelism and missions in the East

In Ontario, the church at Toronto continues to be the sending church for work in Papua New Guinea. The Rev. Stephen 't Hart, who has worked there for more than ten years, received a call in 2008 from the Free Reformed Church at Baldivis, Western Australia. He accepted that call and has since moved to the land down under. In the meantime, as previously mentioned, the Rev. Henry Versteeg, together with his wife Rita, have decided to return to foreign mission work and will be replacing the 't Harts.

Mention should also be made of the fact that the church at Toronto, together with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, continues to support the work of the Rev. Jorge Barros who is busy with outreach work among the Portuguese population of Toronto.

To the northwest of Toronto the church at Owen Sound continues to be involved with the Reformed Churches in Quebec. In particular they are active in assisting the Rev. Paulin Bedard, who is pastor of the Church at St. Georges, Quebec.

To the southwest of Toronto the churches at Ancaster, Burlington, and Hamilton initiated the work of Streetlight Ministries, an inner city work in Hamilton, and are busy supporting it with their prayers, offerings, and manpower. The Rev. Paul Aasman and Mr. Hilco deHaan are providing much leadership, the former as pastor/evangelist and the latter as mission worker.

A different type of mission work is also being done by the Burlington churches as they support the work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) and form the Canadian branch of that organization. As such this organization is centered in Cyprus and is busy spreading the Reformed faith to the Islamic populations of the Middle East, Africa and Asia. MERF presently has a radio broadcasting arm, a teaching arm and a mission aid arm all working to advance the gospel.

The church at Hamilton has been involved in mission work in Brazil for many years. Its missionary, the Rev. Bram de Graaf, continues to work in Maceio to the south of the churches connected to the church at Surrey. He is hopeful that a church can be instituted soon in his area and that it will be recognized as a full-fledged church within the federation of the Reformed Churches in Brazil.

To the southeast of Hamilton, one finds the church at Smithville. It, together with a number of other Niagara area churches, is very involved in the mission efforts in West Timor, Indonesia. It called the Rev. Edwer Dethan in 2003 and he is hard at work there. His efforts have been blessed in such a way that there is now a thriving church and theological college in the place where he lives.

Other evangelistic efforts

The year 2009 was again a good year for the various Bible camps in our midst. Out West the Stepping Stones Bible Camp located at Deroche, BC hosted a number of weeks of camp for the younger members of the churches and the community. Up north in Smithers, Camp Yak'isda Bik'ah is held every year for the native children of the area. In Ontario Campfire Summer Bible Camp continues to organize a great number of camping weeks during the summer at Markdale.

Needless to say, all of these efforts depend on a few organizers, a great many volunteers, and numerous donors. Thankfully every year they step forward and the work goes on. And what a work it is! Indeed, what is becoming more and more apparent is that the leaders of tomorrow are being shaped and moulded by these efforts of today.

Across the continent many churches continue to organize a summer Vacation Bible School, and in some places it attracts a large number of children and volunteers. Still, there are challenges when it comes to finding the right material. Thankfully Great Commissions Publications helps out here. As well local committees are often very adept at revising and revamping existing material.


Radio also continues to be used as a medium for outreach. For years the Voice of the Church has been active in spreading the gospel on the airwaves. Several years ago it was joined by Gospel Talk, a daily fifteen minute broadcast by the Rev. Wes Bredenhof. This broadcast originated in the Fraser Valley and is still supported a number of the churches there, although Pastor Bredenhof has since moved east. It is hoped that churches in Ontario will also see fit to support this program.

Besides youth camps, VBS, and broadcasting, a number of churches are also involved in outreach to care homes, hospitals, and prisons. Members take regular turns visiting care homes in their area in order to visit, pray, sing, explain Scripture, and share in fellowship with the seniors who live there. Local hospitals too ask for volunteers and in some places there is great deal of response and interaction. In BC there is an organization called M2/W2 that links Christian men and women to inmates in minimum, medium, and maximum security prisons. Church members serve as both board members and volunteers.

Mercy work

Mission work and mercy work often go hand in hand. Previously mention was made of the mission work being done in Brazil and of efforts towards the appointment of a mission aid worker. This effort is being led by Mission Aid Brazil which is based in the Surrey-Langley area. For many years already this organization has been supporting a Christian school in Marigogi. Recently it also decided to support a school in Recife. In addition, work is being done in the slums of Recife, a seniors program has been started in various areas, as well various enterprises are also being supported to supply work and income to the needy. In short, there is a lot that needs doing and more helping hands are needed.

In Indonesia mercy work is also being done by the church at Smithville through its missionary the Rev. Edwer Dethan and his wife. The Children of Light organization, centered in Spruce Grove, Alberta, is busy helping



people to sponsor children and giving support to an orphanage and other worthwhile projects in Timor.

Mention should also be made of Coram Deo International Aid. This organization does mercy work in Haiti, one of the poorest nations on the face of the earth. Currently it supports the efforts of Randy and Karen Lodder who work at the Adoration School. In addition it is also involved in medical relief efforts.

The Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (CRWRF), a well-known and much supported effort in our midst, was also very active in 2009. It continued to give monies to a number of regular and worthwhile causes in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It also directed some of the funds it received to disaster relief in places such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Education

Although not under church control, the network of Christian schools organized and operated by Canadian Reformed parents across the land continued to thrive. I have not heard about any new schools being built; however, I do know that conferences, seminars, and retreats are being held on a regular basis to keep our teachers up on the latest educational developments, as well as to promote the work of curriculum development.

In this connection the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College in Hamilton, Ontario, continues to supply a new crop of teachers to the schools each year. Currently efforts are ongoing to improve the staffing situation, as well as to pursue the matter of accreditation for its courses and program.

Unfortunately the lacking of public funding in Ontario continues to strain the resources of many families. Not only does a considerable share of their taxes go to support the public school system, but they also need to keep their local Christian schools operating. Elsewhere in Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba, the schools do receive varying degrees of government funding. This helps greatly but it also requires ongoing vigilance as along with public money often comes public strings.

Mention may also be made of the fact that in various places parents have opted to home school their children. In addition, in some places parents send their children to an inter-denominational Christian school; whereas, in other places parents from various conservative Reformed churches operate a school together.

Political action

Over the last year the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) experienced a revival. The

appointment of Br. Mark Penninga as the Canadian Director has managed to infuse new life into what was a dying body. He traveled widely and rallied the troops. He organized a rally and a meeting on Parliament Hill where Dr. C. Van Dam gave a keynote address. He even managed to write a book called *Building on Sand: Human Dignity in Canadian Law* which explores the Supreme Court of Canada's decisions relating to human dignity and the value of life. Thankfully his efforts and the efforts of many others are creating a name for ARPA and bringing renewed attention to Christian values in the public square.

Special homes

An ever growing number of special homes for the aged, as well as for the handicapped are springing up across the land. In Ontario Anchors Homes in Dunnville, Fergus, and Niagara are doing their best to meet the needs of our handicapped members. The same is true for Rehoboth in Alberta and Bethesda in BC.

Homes in Brampton, Burlington, Grimsby, Hamilton, and elsewhere in Ontario are providing quality care for seniors. In Manitoba Greenview Manor, in Edmonton Emmanuel Home, and in BC Elim Christian Homes and Manoah Manor are doing the same. It may also be reported that Manoah Manor celebrated a twenty-fifth anniversary in November.

Publications

Publications of many different types continued to appear on a regular basis. *Clarion*, which deals mostly with church related matters, appeared on a regular bi-monthly basis. *Reformed Perspective*, which covers all manner of economic, political and social news, showed up once a month. *Diakonia*, a magazine for office bearers, appeared quarterly. *Roadside Assistance*, a youth periodical, *Evangel*, an evangelistic magazine, *Horizon*, a ladies league publication, and more, all made regular appearances. In short, there is no shortage of reading materials, but is it all being read?

In conclusion

It should be apparent by now that the year 2009 has been a busy year in and around Canadian Reformed church life. What the year 2010 will bring is beyond our preview; nevertheless, several things are sure, namely that more calls will be extended, new challenges will arise and the Lord will remain faithful to his church gathering work. May He in particular continue to be gracious to us as Canadian (American) Reformed Churches.



CABOT TRAIL,
CAPE BRETON, NS

*For with you is the fountain of life;
In your light we see light.
Continue your love to those who know you,
Your righteousness to the upright in heart.*

Psalm 36:9, 10

Photo courtesy
Pamela Shpak

*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said,
"I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life."*

John 8:12

