

Clarion

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*The
Reformation
is dear to
Reformed
people*

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- Ecumena: Commentary on News and Trends in the International Church

LYTHER



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Christ versus the Qur'an

The key difference between Christians and Muslims is the person of Jesus Christ

Muslim neighbours

In our multicultural society, we increasingly encounter Muslims. If we live in a city, we may have a Muslim neighbour. Through our daily work, we may interact with them as well. Those who attend university are also bound to be exposed to them.

While this may seem a relatively new experience brought about through immigration from countries where the Muslim faith is the dominant faith, believers have had to live with a Muslim presence for some fourteen hundred years. The official founding date of Islam is usually set at 622 AD. When the Muslim faith, also known as Islam, first appeared on the scene in the seventh century, it posed a threat because it was linked with military conquest. In just over one hundred years, Islam had spread from its base in Arabia, reaching east into Persia and west into southern France. Its western advance was stopped at a battle near Tours, in central France, in 732 AD. Only by the end of the fifteenth century was it finally pushed out of Spain. It remained a threat, however, especially from the east, as is evident in the fall of Constantinople to the Muslim Turks in 1453 AD. There were repeated attempts by Muslim rulers to conquer Austria. The presence of Islam in the age of the Reformation is evident in the Belgic Confession when it specifically mentions the Muslims in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity (BC 9). It is interesting that the symbol of Islam is a crescent. The way it encircled Christian Europe, it can be pictured as a giant pincer.

Key difference

The key difference between Christians and Muslims has to do with the person of Jesus Christ.

Muslims acknowledge he existed and that he was a prophet. They deny, however, that Jesus is true God. Muslims ascribe more honour to Mohammad than to Jesus. This makes us realize the Muslim god is not the Christian God, even in modified form, because the Muslim god is not seen as the Father of Jesus Christ. The Muslim god is not one who saves out of grace through faith, but who rewards those who submit to him. Salvation is by submission, which is captured in the very name "Islam," which means "submission." A Muslim is one who submits.

This key difference with respect to the person of Jesus Christ comes out also in how the Muslims look at what they call their "holy book," the Qur'an. We need to be aware of this not only so that we might have meaningful conversations with our Muslim neighbours, but also because at times this view is wrongly applied to the Bible, with a variety of consequences.

The Muslim view compared to the Christian view

For the Muslims, the Qur'an is the final revelation of God to man through Mohammad. It is said to have been given to him beginning in 610 AD and coming to completion in 632 AD. The word "Qur'an" literally means "recitation." In effect, Mohammad functioned like a secretary, writing down the words given to him. As such, the Qur'an is said to be the direct and final word of Allah to man. It is believed that these words, as originally given in the Arabic language, have been unaltered for fourteen hundred years.

While there are translations of the Qur'an, it is believed that only in Arabic are they the true words of Allah. On a website containing a translation of



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the Qur’an, it is stated by way of introduction, “One thing to note is that this is the English translation of the meaning of the Quran. . . not the Quran itself. The Quran is in its original, pristine Arabic as it was revealed from Allah.”¹ The importance of the Arabic original also comes out in the introduction to the translation of the Qur’an in the Oxford World’s Classics Series when it is stated, “The first *sura* (or section) of the Qur’an, *al-Fatiha*, which is an essential part of the ritual prayers, is learned and read in Arabic by Muslims in all parts of the world, and many other verses and phrases in Arabic are also incorporated into the lives of non-Arabic-speaking Muslims.”² This confining of the Qur’an to the Arabic language shows up even in the way write-ups in English at times speak of “al Qur’an,” not even deeming it appropriate to use the English definite article “the” before the Arabic word “Qur’an.”³

*The biblical authors were real authors,
not mere secretaries*

In this we can see the difference from the Christian view of Scripture. Paul wrote that Scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16). Peter wrote, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20, 21). There are places where we have words directly spoken by the LORD, such as the Ten Commandments, but generally, the Scriptures were not dictated, with men acting merely as secretaries. The first verses of Luke, for example, show how the writing of that book called for the full involvement of Luke in the research and writing of his gospel account. The letters of Paul were shaped by the issues in the congregations he was addressing. Unlike the Qur’an, Scripture is not the record of a recitation by God but the fruit of his inspiration. This makes us realize that when we use a term like “verbal inspiration,” we do not mean the same thing as the Muslims do. The biblical authors were real authors, not mere secretaries.⁴

There is also the matter of language. The Qur’an is limited to the Arabic language. The Scriptures were written in two languages but they were not locked up in those languages. This is evident in the way the NT authors freely quoted the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Muslim stress on Arabic tied

the Muslim faith to both Arabic language and culture. The gospel message, by being revealed in Hebrew and Greek, showed it was not limited to one culture. As the events on the day of Pentecost indicated, the message could be communicated in all the languages of the world. To this day, believers are not expected to be able to recite any parts of the Bible in the original languages.

*Muslim theologians have asserted
that the Qur'an is uncreated and
co-eternal with God*

The key difference, however, which ties it to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, is in the way, for Muslims, the Qur'an is the great, final revelation from Allah to man. Muslim theologians have asserted that the Qur'an is uncreated and co-eternal with God.⁵ This is not how Christians look at the Scriptures. To be sure, Scripture is confessed to be the Word of God, the ultimate rule of faith where we can learn all that we need to know for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of faith. However, the greatest and final revelation is Jesus Christ. He is uncreated and co-eternal with the Father. We read in the first verses of the letter to the Hebrews, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Heb 1:1-3). Of particular importance are the words of the Lord Jesus as found in John 5:39, 40, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."⁶ Salvation is not found by believing in the written Word but by believing in the Word become flesh, that is, Jesus Christ. We may believe the message of the Scripture but we don't believe in the Scripture. Salvation is not through the Scriptures but through Christ.

Implications

The above makes clear that one cannot compare the role of Scripture in the lives of Christians to the role of the Qur'an in the lives of Muslims. Rather, the role Muslims ascribe to the Qur'an shows the point of comparison is with Christ.

This fundamental difference explains why the Christian faith is not hindered by the fact that we no longer have the original copies of these Scriptures. There are large numbers of manuscripts with minor variations. These variations, however, never touch the substance. The emphasis on Christ also has meant that the Christian Scriptures are open to being translated into the languages of the world.

Furthermore, putting the focus on God speaking in Christ also has meant that Christians have not needed to learn either Hebrew or Greek to understand the gospel. Neither has it been necessary to use Hebrew and Greek in worship in order for it to be true worship. This is not to diminish the value of studying the original languages, but one can learn about God and the gift of salvation in his Son in one's mother tongue. Whereas for Muslims, only the Arabic original is the word of Allah, for Christians, the translated Word is fully the Word of God. Hebrew and Greek may be the languages of revelation but unlike the Muslim view of Arabic, they are not sacred languages. This is an important point to remember when studying Scripture or evaluating Bible translations. In this respect, overly literal translations are in danger of giving the impression that the message is locked up in the original languages.

In sum, the key difference between Christians and Muslims is the person of Jesus Christ. This shows up also in the Muslim view of the Qur'an. For the Muslims, the Qur'an is Allah's final revelation, his final word, and they believe that by that book they possess eternal life. For us as Christians, God's final revelation is Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh. All Scripture points to him and is fulfilled in him.


¹ <http://www.jannah.org/qurantrans/>

² The Qur'an, a new translation by M.A.S Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

³ See for example <http://www.quraninenglish.com/cgi-local/pages.pl?/quran>

⁴ For those interested, there is an interesting discussion of the rise of the idea of verbal inspiration and inerrancy in the early nineteenth century in *Evangelicalism in Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989) 86-91.

⁵ David L. Johnson, *A Reasoned Look at Asian Religions*. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), 150.

⁶ A helpful discussion and analysis of this matter is found in Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996) 22-27, 47. 



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MATTHEW 13:52

Mere Grace

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. . ."
Ephesians 2:8a

Why does God love you? Why does God accept you? Why does God save you? The answer is *mere grace*. The expression "mere grace" cannot be found in the Bible, although you will no doubt recognize it as coming from the Catechism. So why then does the Catechism use that expression? What is up with the adjective "mere"?

A quick look in the dictionary reveals the following definition for the word: "that and nothing more." So when the Catechism speaks about mere grace, it is saying that salvation is by grace and nothing more than grace. Just grace, or as the old Latin expression goes, *sola gratia*.

And now back to the question: What is up with the adjective "mere"? Why does the church specify that salvation is by grace and nothing more than grace? Because historically the Christian church has had to counter the teaching of those who claimed that salvation is not by grace alone. In his day Paul had to deal with the claims of some of his fellow Jews that works such as circumcision and kosher eating and Sabbath observance were necessary for salvation. In the days of the Reformers the Roman church was claiming the necessity of works for salvation. In our own day the church struggles with the dangers of legalism, which teaches believers to think that God accepts them on the basis of what they do.

Consequently, the church has learned to speak of *mere grace*.

In each generation it is good to be reminded that salvation is by grace and nothing more than grace. In this month of October in which we remember God's reformation of his church, it is good to take out of the storehouse of Scripture the treasure of mere grace.

So we turn our attention to Ephesians 2:8 where Paul writes, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. . . ." This is the second time in Ephesians 2 that Paul has stated it is by grace that you have been saved. He did so earlier, at the end of verses 4-5, which read, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."

In these words you discover what grace is. Grace is God making you alive with Christ even when you were dead in transgressions. Being dead makes doing something impossible, doesn't it? It is kind of like being broke but having debts of millions of dollars. Payment is impossible, isn't it? So what do you call it when the broke person who is millions of dollars in debt has their debt cancelled? What do you call it when the dead person suddenly comes alive? You call it grace and nothing more than grace. It is mere grace, for you were dead but now you are alive, even though you did nothing. It is mere grace, for your debt was cancelled without one penny in payment from you.

But why? Why do you receive such grace? Because of Christ Jesus. Paul in Ephesians 2:7 writes of the incomparable riches of God's grace "expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." It is for the sake of Christ Jesus that you receive grace. He paid your debts. He died for your transgressions. Without his payment there is no cancelling of your debt. Without his death and resurrection you are still dead in your transgressions. Without Christ grace does not exist. Without Christ you are not saved.

Paul goes on in Ephesians 2:8 to indicate how you receive God's saving grace in Christ Jesus. It is "through faith." Here too, the Reformers were quick to add a *sola*. It is through faith, and faith alone, that you receive God's saving grace in Christ Jesus. Works do not factor in, as Paul will say later in verse 9. It is through faith and only through faith that you receive the saving work of Christ Jesus as your own. However, even that faith is a gift. After all, you were dead in your transgressions. So how could you, dead in your transgressions, exercise faith? Only because of mere grace.

It is grace and nothing more than grace that you are saved through faith. God doesn't accept you because of what you do. He doesn't love you more or less depending on what you do. He accepts you and he loves you out of mere grace. *Soli Deo Gloria!*





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Ecumena: Commentary on News and Trends in the International Church Mother Church

In September 2010, the Bishop of Rome, Benedict XVI, came to London, to visit the Queen, the head of the Church of England. Some 500 years earlier, the King of England, Henry VIII, had broken with Rome and declared himself head of the new Church of England. Since then, the British Monarchs have been titular head of the Anglican Church. In the years that followed Henry's break, the Anglican Church joined the Reformation. Under the direction of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and with the ascendancy of Elizabeth I to the throne, Calvinism came to London and Westminster. Since then, the Anglican Church has been part of the Protestant world.

Benedict addressed the combined houses of Westminster, the "Mother of all Parliaments." It used to be a beheading crime to vow allegiance to Rome in Westminster Hall, but relations, it seems, are better now. (Although Tony Blair left the Anglican Church for the Roman Church only after he left No. 10 Downing Street: no British Prime Minister could be allied with Rome, after all!) Later that same day Benedict joined Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in Westminster Abbey. There no Pope had ever set foot in its 1000-year history. The Anglican Church had invited many, and in the congregation were official representatives of the many branches of British Protestantism: Methodists, Baptists, Reformed, Presbyterian. And so, in Westminster Abbey, the "Coronation Church" of the British throne, Archbishop Williams the Protestant, and Pope Benedict of Rome, greeted each other with the hand of fellowship and with a kiss at "the passing of the peace" and the congregation broke out in spontaneous applause. Benedict's wry smile betrayed his pleasure at the

moment! During his discourses that day, at both Westminster Hall – to the Parliament – and at Westminster Abbey – to the church – he did not shy away from reminding the audience that he was the successor to the bishopric of Peter. In other words, "I am head of the church, not Rowan Williams; not Elizabeth II. Rome is the 'Mother Church'."

His visit to London is a remarkable moment in the history of England, Britain, the Commonwealth and the world, but more so in the history of the church. One of the great Protestant churches of the world makes peace with Rome, but does not speak of their differences.

Closer to home, however, something different happened this year. The GKNv, our sister churches in The Netherlands (in a certain way, our "mother church") has for the past decades sought to extend the hand of fellowship to many Reformed churches around the world. They were instrumental in the founding of the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches). They have investigated various churches, and recognized and declared them true churches, and desired to have ecclesiastical fellowship with them. Recently they invited the OPC (Orthodox Presbyterian Church) to enter into a closer relationship; full ecclesiastical fellowship. (In our older vocabulary, they asked the OPC to formalize a "sister church relationship.") The OPC would find their history not in The Netherlands, but in Westminster. 100 years after Cranmer, the English churches met at Westminster Abbey, and drafted the Westminster Confessions (WCF). Via Scotland, these confessions became the standard of English Presbyterianism, also in North America.

Church News

Called by the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville, Ontario:

Rev. J. Louwerse
of Neerlandia, Alberta.

Sustained his ordination exam at the Classis Pacific East of September 23, 2010:

Candidate Arend Witten

Sustained his ordination exam at the Classis Alberta of September 23, 2010:

Candidate Tony Roukema

Called by the American Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI:

Candidate Ryan Kampen

Students of our own church history will know that it took nearly forty years for us to move to that full relationship with the OPC. One of the obstacles we had was the "sister church" relationship the OPC had with the CRCNA (Christian Reformed Church). We had doubts about the faithfulness of the CRC and its trends concerning the truths of Scripture.

Remarkably, the OPC has declined the invitation of the GKNv. At their General Assembly, in June 2010, they made (in part) the following decision.

However, the Assembly believes that, given the serious nature of the obligations undertaken in the sister church relationship, such relationships should not be entered into in situations where the Assembly finds itself unable to affirm, without reservation, that the other church is indeed Reformed in its confessional standards, church order, or life. It is our prayer that the Lord would be merciful to our GKNv brothers and grant them grace to work through the weighty issues facing them – particularly those touching upon the sufficiency (WCF 1.6), interpretation (WCF 1.9), and authority (WCF 1.10) of Scripture, that seem to be currently troubling the GKNv – in a manner that is in full obedience to and accord with Scripture (Article VII of the Belgic Confession).

Two strands of the English church: both look to continental Europe. One looks to Rome approvingly; the

other looks to the Dutch Reformed, and finds it lacking. Perhaps we too need to look to our "mother church" and warn them seriously of encroaching error. Our Presbyterian "Westminster" brothers and sisters are hailing the first serious warning: "We are unable to affirm, without reservation, that the [GKNv] is indeed Reformed."

We must yet extend the right hand of fellowship to our "mother" and be willing to give a kiss in peace – but not at the expense of the truth!

C

*Buckingham Palace,
London, England*





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Peregrine Survey

The government in BC recently reduced the operating grant for independent schools. It varies by school district, but one school cites an amount of forty-five dollars per student per year; this translates into a higher than usual increase in tuition fees. Schools in Ontario continue to operate without any government support at all and at several elementary schools fees are now in the \$700 per month range. When, back in the 1800s, our forebears became convinced they needed free (i.e. independent of government control) Christian education, they also paid for it themselves. Rev. Dr. Willem vandenBergh, who worked hard to help establish *Schools with the Bible* in the time of the Doleantie, had this to say:

The free Christian school should be paid fully from gifts of love, for we would be chained to the power of the state if we would accept its subsidy. Know that all we have has been given us as a loan from the Lord to make a profit for His Kingdom... Let us sacrifice our gold and silver, our earthly jewels, in order to establish a place where the spiritual jewels may be proclaimed to our children, and the glory of the Word of God may be spread out on education, history, and science. May our faithful covenant God give us that. (In: A.E. VanEeden, *Twee kerken, maar geen school*, pp. 45-46)

To help support Christian education, in July and October, a choir festival with Dutch and Canadian male and children's choirs was organized in several locations in Ontario. Twenty percent of each ticket sold was forwarded to a Christian school of the purchaser's choice. More information is available at www.canadachoir.ca.

Freedom and identity

Full freedom of education for Christian schools (including full funding and the right to establish one's own directors, human resource, and admission policies) has been in place in The Netherlands since 1920. After last June's elections, concerns were voiced about whether or not the schools would keep these cherished freedoms. *Nederlands Dagblad* opined that,

Freedom of education will be reduced, no matter what. Christian schools will remain, but will have to accept any students for enrolment. It may be that schools with a distinct identity may be (temporarily) exempt from this, so as to avoid constitutional challenges. One political party proposes to reduce the schools' freedom to execute their own human resource policy. This may be a symbolic discussion at this point, but a prohibition to make distinctions based on lifestyle, for instance, does affect the freedom of education.

Harry Lamberink, CEO of the Dutch League of Reformed School Societies (LVGS), commented on the acceptance requirement, which requires schools to accept all students who respect (without necessarily embracing) the school's philosophical foundation:

The risk an acceptance requirement has for the identity of a school is especially large if the school itself does not know for sure what makes it Reformed, or Christian. This is not about having a Christmas Assembly and reading the Bible, but especially about how this identity has taken root and shape in daily practice. If the school's identity is thoroughly integrated in even the tiniest aspects of education and relationships, the public itself will make a proper selection. (<http://www.lvgs.nl/weblog/>, June 16, 2010.)

On a similar note, the principal of Guido de Brès Christian High School (Hamilton) wondered whether we would be convicted in a court of law, if charged with being a Christian. After reflecting on the need for discernment and developing a Christian mind, he pointed to the school's task to deliberately equip students with a life line with the Reformed Confessions.

The Reformed way of being in the world is not just doctrinal, but also spiritual. The students' view of the world is shaped by the Holy Spirit through God's Word in the body of believers. . . . Within our church and school communities we have well-developed discernment skills to detect what is not appropriate, and to communicate this to our consistories and

school boards. Righteous indignation often occurs if the criticism is not responded to quickly enough. We need to do more. We need to be models to our young people and apply the skill of discernment and public witness to issues outside of our community that cry out for a Christian perspective. Being a light to the world is for young and old alike.

Prof. Noel Weeks (University of Sydney), a member of the Australian Reformed Church, in a speech in Faith Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Vancouver, identified two factors that contributed to the failure of Christian schools in Australia:

1. The generations that followed those who founded the schools were happy to send their children to the Christian schools, but gradually became less involved. As a result, it was more and more difficult to find people to serve on the school boards.

2. The teaching staff began to believe that they were the educational experts and that they should be in control of the education. They were often educated in secular institutions and were not willing to take seriously the concerns of parents.

He also argued that the Christian school does not exist to provide the right peer group. Don't believe that the peer group has more influence than the home! The truth is: the home is what matters! It is the fundamental influence on children. If you send your kids to a Christian school and don't follow up at home, you are wasting your money.

The question becomes: Whose task it is to "promote the growth of commitment to an understanding of Christian education among the next generation of parents and supporters of the school?" The 2007 survey in the Christian Reformed Church showed that among CRC households only twenty percent send their children to a Christian school (*Christian Renewal*, July 28, 2010). One chairman reflected on their school's evaluation report and observed that "the board could be involved in the promotion of this commitment, but, in reality, we need to make this a matter of wider concern and make this a communal effort, starting in the home, having this preached from the pulpit, and, of course, worked out and made evident in the schools."

Other little bits

Volume 3 of *"The Flame of the Word"* went to the printers this fall, while the teacher's manual is being worked on. This completes a project started in the 1990s, when the Fraser Valley's Reformed Curriculum Development Committee (RCDC) committed itself, among others, to preparing Church History material for the upper elementary grades. Ontario's Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Education (CARE) completed

material for Grade 1-4 last year. Both projects were massive undertakings, and it is our prayer that the material produced may be a blessing to our schools, our teachers, and especially our children.

Owen Sound Canadian Reformed School said farewell to its entire staff in June, and wished all departing staff members the Lord's blessings in their new positions as mother, teacher, or vice-principal. After sixteen years under the leadership of Diane Jonker, this certainly will be a big change. The new staff, along with the community, has taken up the task with vigour, enthusiasm, and great support. We wish the new staff and the whole school also the Lord's blessings as it reinvents itself.

In Fergus, Maranatha Christian School bade farewell not only to its graduates (which returned in the fall to the other side of the building, joining new classmates from Owen Sound and Laurel), but also to the "Guelphites," who are now attending (the new) Cornerstone Christian School in Guelph. An Ad-Hoc Committee completed a massive report on how to best meet the ongoing educational needs and use the current grounds, facilities, and community resources. As it is, both Maranatha (elementary) and Emmanuel (high) schools have significantly outgrown the current joint building, and their respective boards have prepared a proposal to their (partly overlapping) supportive communities. The finance committee of Maranatha also studied "the task of the Church deaconry and the school in regards to financial assistance."

Timothy Christian School in Hamilton bought a new-to-them surplus public school building half a dozen or so years ago. Some were not too keen on the purchase, since the building was too large for the student body. How quickly things change: a Vision Paper is currently being prepared that addresses how to handle continued growth in the near future, since the building has already become too small. Growth is great, but it does pose challenges as well.

Whether we get government support for our schools or not, the Lord continues to bless us with the freedom to have our own schools. Let us cherish that freedom and keep putting our shoulders under it, seeking to face the challenges it poses. We can look back on a long history of divine blessing on faithfulness in educating the next generation.

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





roadside assistance

the magazine for Reformed young people

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word. Ps 119:9

roadsideassistancemagazine.com

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Why We Pray

By Heidi Vanderveen

Often our prayers take the form of a grocery list. We name off our desires and complaints and wait impatiently for God to fulfill these requests. Our prayers can be selfish and centred on our wants, caught up in what we think we deserve or what we think God should do for us. But prayer is not, and was never intended to be, a means for us to use to “get things” from God.

So why, exactly, do we pray?

Have you ever hiked to the top of a mountain and stood looking out over breathtakingly majestic views, with silver-blue and white peaks reaching to the heavens? Or maybe you’ve stood on the shores of a lake and watched the setting sun gild the ripples with the purest gold. Sights like these remind us of how awesome God is. Have you stopped to consider the depth of your sin and God’s grace displayed in the sacrifice of Christ for you on the cross? Thoughts like these remind us of how richly blessed we are. And our first response to these reminders should be prayer.

We should pray because we are overwhelmingly filled with praise for our Almighty Creator.

In 1 Samuel 2, after the birth of her son, Hannah could not restrain the joy she felt. And so she prayed. Her entire prayer is focused on God and his greatness, without mentioning her needs or desires in that moment. David’s lips offered words of praise to God, as did Jacob’s, Hezekiah’s, and Elijah’s. All these men, no matter how great their needs were at that time, focused on God first and gave him the glory. When we consider the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, praise comes

first: Hallowed be Thy name. So in our own prayers we should firstly praise God.

We should also pray out of thankfulness.

Psalms 116:12-13 asks, “How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?” and then responds, “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.” The beautiful sights we see, the relationships we have, and the opportunities that are available to us – all these are blessings from God. And when we recognize this, our thankfulness should be evident when we pray.

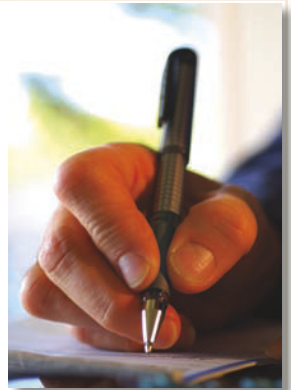
We should pray because it is one of the great comforts we as Christians have.

Our lives will not be perfect. We will face trials – the Bible tells us to expect sorrow and persecution in our life. But we have the greatest assurance of all – a Heavenly Father who hears our prayers and watches over us. And when we continually pray to our Father in heaven, then we are also continually reminded that our lives are in God’s hands. What a comfort this is!

We should pray to acknowledge where our help comes from.

All of this is not to say that we shouldn’t pray to God for our needs. But when we pray, it should not be out of selfish desire for our wants, but for our needs, out of deep faith and trust that, “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights” (James 1:17). Everything we need and have comes from God’s almighty hand. Without God we have nothing. So praise him. Give him thanks. Pray.





Friends? Okay. . . But don't come too close!

It was interesting to read Dr. G.H. Visscher's personal reflections on how matters unfolded at the URC Synod in London regarding the relationship between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches (*Clarion*, vol. 59, no.18, August 27, 2010).

I appreciate Dr. Visscher's efforts to turn a disappointing development into something positive. Perhaps this is the kind of damage control that is needed at this point in time. But I am not convinced that we should leave it at that. I believe that more needs to be said.

The churches in both federations, and thus both synods, were facing a number of questions in connection with how the relationship was developing. Everyone was fully aware that it would most likely take a long time to come to full merger. I don't think that this was or is or would be a point of contention, neither for the United Reformed Churches nor for the Canadian Reformed Churches. No one is ready to push this possible merger of the two federations.

But the basic question that needed to be answered was: Are we willing to continue walking on the same road and in the same direction?

In May this year the Canadian Reformed Synod of Burlington wrote a letter directly to the United Reformed Synod of London in July, signed by all the members of Synod. This unusual step was taken to emphasize our deep conviction that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, requires us to continue the process of pursuing the unity of these two faithful churches of Christ, a process that has started more than ten years ago.

In his eloquent speech as Canadian Reformed fraternal delegate to Synod London, Rev. W. den Hollander stressed the same conviction and urged the URC brothers to maintain the same commitment. The speech was also published in *Clarion* (same issue). Again, the question was: Are we willing to continue walking in the same direction? The Canadian Reformed Synod of Burlington said, loud and clear: "Yes, we want to." The United Reformed Synod of London said: "No, we don't want to."

O, I know – many fine words were written and spoken. Dr. Visscher quotes extensively from the positive passages in the documents at Synod London, especially Overture 13, which had many good things to say about the contacts with the Canadian Reformed Churches. But what is the value of fine words when decisions and deeds say the opposite?

It hurts when that comes from brothers in the Lord.

And what happened to the letter from Synod Burlington? Was this appeal acknowledged by Synod London and did it play a role in the discussion? Has it been distributed so that all the delegates were fully informed? Or was it taken for information and basically ignored? If the latter has been the case, it would hurt even more.

So, what is next?

Dr. Visscher comes with a list of suggestions, things we can do, hoping that one day the climate will change and we can pick up the pieces and move forward again towards unity. That's all nice, interesting, and well-meant, but the problem is that the framework, the structure in which these and other matters could be pursued and discussed has been effectively removed. Today's reality is that there is no incentive to continue communicating and prayerfully move forward.

We can both conveniently crawl back in our own denominational box and just do our own thing. We are not going to challenge each other with the Word of God, because there is no structure in which we talk and listen to each other. I am afraid that this is too threatening for our comfort-zone. And we don't like that, because it makes us feel uncomfortable.

Well, in light of the scriptural command that God's children be one, I believe that the shameful fragmentation of the body of Christ should indeed make us feel uncomfortable, very uncomfortable! Because it grieves the Father in heaven and it confronts us with our own disobedience.

It has been said that the decisions of the Synods in 2001 (the Canadian Reformed Synod was held in Neerlandia and the United Reformed Synod in Escondido) to adopt the Statements of Agreement and to move into Phase 2, came with a sense of euphoria and unrealistic expectations at that time. I don't think so. I remember from 2001 that these decisions came with a sense of deep gratitude towards the Lord and with the humble but strong desire to move forward in obedience to Jesus Christ.

All this seems to be gone. It looks like we have adopted a businesslike approach. Is the merger of company A with company B going to be good or bad for the shareholders? If we think it is bad we won't do it. Is that how the Head of the church wants us to operate?

At the same time – Jesus Christ gathers, defends, and preserves his church. And he will continue to

do so. My own stubbornness and disobedience and also our collective stubbornness and disobedience will not be able to stop him. Now, that is good news!

J. DeGelder

Response

I thank my colleague for his comments and would like to make only a few in response.

Rather than intending to "turn a disappointing development into something positive," it was my intention to reflect the situation as accurately as possible in the awareness that overreactions on our part will only lead us further apart. It seems to me that the last two URC synods have been concerned that from their side this relationship was proceeding too fast and that this pace would only lead to their own fragmentation - a fragmentation that Rev. DeGelder does not want either. While this is regrettable, we do have to respect it as a valid concern.

I appreciate the questions my colleague poses and do not feel called to answer them all. It seems to me that these are questions that our respective synodical committees for unity need to address. There is a very real danger that our two federations drift further apart. What can be done to avoid that? Along with these kinds of questions, it would seem to me that we need to ask what the criteria are for such unity talks. On what basis exactly do we feel compelled to press for unity with the URCNA while we appear to be quite comfortable with living side by side the OPC, RCUS, ERQ and others?

As to the answer that we expected to the letter of our Synod, I suspect that the matter got lost in the intense and fast-paced business of a four day synod. While a formal letter was not sent to us to my knowledge, the URCNA certainly wrestled for a large part of those days with what to do with the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Their decisions will have to serve as our answer.

I wish the brothers in our respective committees much wisdom from above.

Gerhard H. Visscher

Dear Editor,

In his article "Let's Just Be Friends for Now," Dr. G.H. Visscher writes with regards to the Nine Points of Schererville:

First, it is necessary to understand that while I think the nine points should be have been more carefully considered and presented by Schererville, I have no significant objection to them. There was considerable concern raised about them initially when they were first published because many Canadian Reformed

persons understood them as a critique of the theological positions they had learned from K. Schilder and others. When one reads them against the backdrop of what is being said among Federal Vision proponents, however, they become clearer and even quite acceptable to us.

Statement six of the Nine Points reads as follows:

Synod rejects the errors of those who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC 21, 60, BC 29).

I wonder, is the phrase "have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace" biblical language? Further, do we find this terminology in the Three Forms of Unity?

It would be helpful to have Dr. Visscher clarify why Statement Six is "quite acceptable to us."

Sincerely,

Bob Lodder, Lynden, WA

Response

Thanks for the request for clarification. While it is true that the phrases you quote are not directly from the Bible or the confessions, some would argue that they are still both biblical and confessional.

While your and my initial response to Point Six probably was "all our children are in the covenant in the same way, regardless of whether they are faithful to it or not. Unbelief and unfaithfulness are not due to God or the nature of his promise but due to sinful human beings." That most certainly is the biblical, confessional position which we learned from K. Schilder and others. However, Point Six takes on somewhat of a different meaning when read as it was intended, namely, as refuting a Federal Vision position. Persons adhering to this view are believed to be saying that all baptized children are united to Christ and receive all his benefits at baptism. To such a position, Point Six is saying that within the covenant, there is a difference between those who respond in faith and those who respond in unbelief. While the language of the sixth statement is somewhat problematic and far from preferable, its substance is not unacceptable when this context is noted. Readers can read more about this in an earlier *Clarion* article authored by myself and Dr. J. Van Vliet, "CanRC Answers to URC Questions" (which can also be found at <http://www.pupilsforchrist.com>).

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify.

Gerhard H. Visscher

Dear Editor:

I read with interest Rev. James Visscher's recent editorial entitled "Open Communion" in the July 2, 2010 issue of *Clarion* (Vol. 59, No. 14). We would all support his conclusion that "it falls within the task of the elders to safeguard the sacrament." He recognizes the responsibility of the elders "to see to it that the guests who are welcomed and received profess the Reformed faith and lead a godly life" (see second last paragraph).

While we can endorse Rev. Visscher's conclusions, we should question a number of statements that we find in this editorial.

At the beginning of his editorial, Rev. Visscher provides us with a number of definitions. According to him a "closed communion" approach restricts admission to the Lord's Supper only to members of the church that is administering it. At the same time an "open communion" approach admits to the Lord's Supper all those who consider themselves to be believers or Christians.

Rev. Visscher then describes a third approach, which he calls "restricted" or "close communion." Within this third approach he describes three Lord's Supper admission practices: the provision of a stern verbal warning, the use of an interview method, and the use of written attestations or letters of testimony as the basis for the admission of guests. Within this "restricted" approach I would like to examine these three admission practices.

I note again that Rev. Visscher stresses the responsibility of the elders of the church, and he also cites three Scripture references to support this, namely Acts 20:28, 1 Timothy 5:17 and Hebrews 13:17. He asserts that the elders "have been called to play a vital role in all the affairs of the church and that surely must include the sacrament of the Lord's Supper."

Rev. Visscher considers that the use of a "stern verbal warning" is a restriction. Although in his editorial he questions whether such a restriction is sufficient, he does not deal any further with this. With this method, how are the elders involved in admitting only those who have professed the Reformed faith and lead a godly life? Subsequent to hearing the "stern verbal warning," the final decision on whether to partake of the Lord's Supper is still made by the guest! Does not this practice then fall within Rev. Visscher's definition of "open communion"?

Rev. Visscher also considers that the use of an "interview method" is a restriction. With this method we would expect some involvement by the elders of the church administering the Lord's Supper. But how can elders elicit a credible "profession of the Reformed faith? Can the elders determine from an interview

whether a guest fully adheres to the doctrine that is summarized in the confessions and taught in the church that is administering the Lord's Supper? How much time is required to do this? Should not the elders have the same standard for guests as they would for members of the congregation?

And further, how are the elders to determine whether a guest is indeed living a godly life? Is it not clear that here, too, the final decision on whether to admit the guest to the Lord's Supper depends entirely on the answers given by the guest, who may or may not be truthful? When utilizing this method, how are the elders to properly fulfil their task to supervise the Lord's Supper, when they in the end have insufficient knowledge concerning the guests that attend? I can only conclude that this practice also falls within Rev. Visscher's definition of "open communion!"

Rev. Visscher maintains that the Lord's Supper is "a dangerous supper." He rightly points to Corinthians 10 and 11. Elders must fulfil their responsibility to only admit guests who, they know, have professed the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Based on these scriptural principles (see also Acts 18:27, Romans 16:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 16:3) the method that enables them to fulfil this responsibility is to require the use of attestations or letters of testimony from the office bearers charged with their supervision (his third example of "restricted" communion).

How else can elders truly function as overseers of the church of Christ?

*Yours in his service,
Ed Helder, Wellandport*

Response

The letter of br. Ed Helder responding to my editorial is filled with a lot of questions. I can understand that he asks them but it should be noted:

a) The main point of my editorial had to do with the question of whether or not open communion, which is so common in North America, is a proper approach when it comes to admission to the Lord's Supper;

b) A related issue has to do with proper procedures for the admission of guests and br. Helder would like a lot of answers here; however, it was never my intention to address that particular issue in this editorial;

c) You might say that I was looking outside of our circles and defending our practice of restricted or close communion; whereas, br. Helder is looking inside our churches and wants me to deal with his questions about internal procedures relating to guests and attestations. Now that is a topic for another editorial, or perhaps two or three. We shall see.

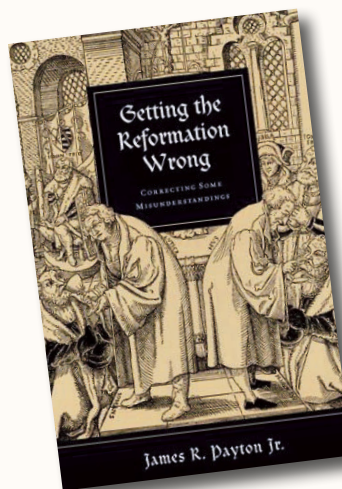
Blessings, JV

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

Wes Bredenhof



Dr. Wes Bredenhof is pastor of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario
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Getting the Reformation Wrong: Correcting Some Misunderstandings, James R. Payton Jr., Downers Grove: IVP, 2010

Additional Information: Paperback, 240 pages, \$23.00 USD

The Reformation is dear to Reformed people – after all, it contains our historical and theological heritage. However, it is possible to hold misguided notions about this significant sixteenth-century event. The purpose of this book is to address some of those misguided notions.

The author, James R. Payton, is a professor of history at Redeemer University College in Hamilton, Ontario. He writes out of many years of teaching and research, so I came to this volume with high expectations. In the introduction, the author promises to present his corrections on the basis of “bedrock” Reformation scholarship. The results are mixed.

Positive contributions

Let’s begin with the book’s positive contributions. The chapter dealing with *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone) is excellent. Payton argues that the Reformers never intended to disengage the interpretation of Scripture from tradition, especially from the ancient church. He points out, for instance, how Martin Bucer emphasized the necessity for ministerial candidates to be familiar with the authorities of the early church (153). Yes, the Reformers placed Scripture above all, but that did not mean throwing out the early church fathers and Christian tradition. Where it was in agreement with Scripture and built on Scripture, the early church was to be respected highly.

I can also commend the chapter regarding *sola fide* (by faith alone). The Reformers unanimously taught that we are justified by faith alone. However, as Payton points out, that does not mean that works are unimportant. All the Reformers taught that justifying faith produces the fruit of good deeds. Of course, the chapter is predicated on the assumption that there are those who argue that *sola fide* means that Christians need not be concerned about good works. Unfortunately, Payton does not present any solid evidence that those who argue in this manner actually appeal to the Reformation. In this case, as in several others in the book, I would argue that it’s not so much about getting the Reformation wrong as not even knowing that the Reformation exists or especially not caring about what the Reformation taught.

There is also a fine chapter on the Renaissance and its relation to the Reformation. Here Payton does give some concrete evidence of someone who gets this relationship wrong. He mentions Francis Schaeffer in his film series and book, *How Should We Then Live?* (53). Schaeffer had argued that the Reformation and Renaissance were fundamentally opposed to one another. Payton makes the case that Renaissance humanism was largely a friend to the Reformation. While one might wish for more nuance, this conclusion seems to be on the right track.

I appreciated many things about this book, but unfortunately, there are also some key points at which Payton himself has gotten the Reformation wrong. I’ll mention four of them.

Still getting the Reformation wrong

In chapter 4, Payton addresses the matter of “Conflict Among the Reformers.” Here he’s addressing the misunderstanding that all the Reformers agreed with one another on every point. As an aside, as before it would be helpful to have an example or two of this misunderstanding. As one of the key points of difference among the Reformers, Payton mentions Luther’s view of the law. He says that Luther agreed with the first two uses of the law, the so-called pedagogical use (the law is meant to expose sin and guide us to Christ) and the civil use (the law is meant to structure civil society). However, he argues that Luther repudiated the third use of the law, the law as a guide for thankful, loving Christian living (96). Unfortunately, Payton provides no evidence that this was Luther’s position. Furthermore, Luther does adopt the third use of the law in his Large and Small Catechisms. In these catechisms, Luther clearly presents the law as a guideline for the Christian life. It would appear that Payton has gotten Luther wrong.

Chapter 7 finds the author arguing against contemporary misportrayals of the Anabaptists. He

gives an appropriate warning that there was diversity among the Anabaptists and they shouldn't all be tarred with the same brush. He rightly corrects attempts to draw a straight line between modern day Baptists and Reformation-era Anabaptists. However, one thing that was missing in this chapter is another substantial way in which many people today get the Reformation wrong: portraying the main issue with the Anabaptists as being baptism. When Guido de Brès wrote his magnum opus refuting the errors of the Anabaptists of his time (*La racine, source et fondement des Anabaptistes*), the lengthiest chapter was not about baptism, but about erroneous Anabaptist formulations of the doctrine of Christ. The Reformers were concerned about the Anabaptist error regarding baptism, but they were far more concerned about Anabaptist heresies regarding Christology. I use the word "heresy" advisedly here to refer to errors which conflict with the ecumenical creeds. Among those heresies was the heavenly-flesh Christology of Menno Simons and Melchior Hoffmann. They believed that Christ received his human flesh from heaven, and not from Mary. This was recognized by the Reformers and the Roman Catholics alike as being a heresy, a position which contradicted the Athanasian Creed. But we hear nothing about this from Payton and that's regrettable. For us to avoid getting the Reformation wrong, we need to understand the full picture of why there was such strong opposition to the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century.

However, the most significant problem in this book is found in chapter 9. Here Payton argues that post-Reformation Protestant scholasticism represented "a significant shift" from the Reformation, not only in terms of method, but also in content. As mentioned earlier, he wrote that he was going to proceed on the "bedrock" of the latest Reformation scholarship. Yet the growing consensus in Reformation studies does not support his case in this chapter at all. In fact, Payton here reverts to a sort of "Calvin versus the Calvinists" way of approaching history that was far more common fifty years ago. In that way of writing history (or historiography), Calvin was the pristine Reformation theologian. The next generation lapsed into (or as Payton puts it, "rushed to") Aristotelian reason and scholastic methodology. In this historiography, Calvin would not approve of these later developments. Of course, the implicit argument is that we must look to Calvin. With this kind of historiography, the word "scholastic" is almost always used in a negative and pejorative sense. In the last few decades, Reformation historians have largely abandoned the "Calvin

vs. the Calvinists" approach. Through the work of influential scholars such as Heiko Oberman, David Steinmetz, and Richard Muller, many historians have come to see that there are both discontinuities and continuities between the Reformation and medieval scholasticism, and between the Reformation and post-Reformation scholasticism. In his chapter on the Renaissance, Payton argued for a more nuanced view of its relationship to the Reformation. However, he fails to apply that same method and approach to Protestant scholasticism.

Let me give just two examples of how his approach is problematic and "gets the Reformation wrong." When arguing that the post-Reformation changed the content of Reformed theology, he presents two instances that supposedly prove his case. The first is a Lutheran, Johann Gerhard, and his development of the doctrine of the incarnation. Gerhard uses the language of Aristotle in speaking about material, efficient, final, and instrumental causes (204). The second instance is that of Johannes Wollebius, a Reformed theologian. Wollebius uses Aristotle's categories to explain the doctrine of justification (204-205). Payton claims that this is different than the Reformers, particularly John Calvin. However, it does not take much digging to find Calvin using Aristotle's causal categories in his *Institutes* (e.g. 2.17.2, 3.14.17). Payton therefore overstates his case. He ought to explain how Calvin made use of Aristotle, while yet still failing to be impressed with much of the scholastic methodology employed by his contemporaries, particularly at the Sorbonne. Oddly, Payton has a footnote to an essay by David Steinmetz which he calls "an excellent, nuanced summation of Calvin's attitude towards scholastic theological methodology" (197). But then why didn't he make use of Steinmetz' insights? To imply that Calvin had no meaningful positive relationship to scholasticism is surely to "get the Reformation wrong."

The second example is that Payton argues that the Protestant scholastics depersonalized the Christian faith (208). He asserts that Scripture, sin, and faith were all depersonalized. So, with regards to sin, he says that the Protestant scholastics argued that "sin is a violation of divine law, which renders the offending sinner guilty." The emphasis was not on unfaithfulness to God and estrangement from him, as it had been in the Reformation. This sounds persuasive, but the reader should note that Payton gives no evidence from primary sources. When he defines sin in his influential *Loci Communes Theologici*, the Reformer Philip Melancthon writes, "Sin is a depraved affection,

a depraved activity of the heart against the law of God." That sounds a lot like the post-Reformation doesn't it? But it comes from Melancthon in 1555. Further, Payton alleges that Protestant scholasticism depersonalized faith "to the acceptance of right doctrine" (208). But all the Protestant scholastics that I have read define faith as not only accepting right doctrine, but also personally embracing Christ with confidence. Read what William Ames said about faith:

As for "faith" we do not understand it properly as assent or some act of the intellect, nor as confidence in the sense of the expectation of the will, which our hope and confidence are designated, but as the act of the will or heart that is properly called "choice" (*electio*), by which we lean back, settle into, or repose on Christ, clinging to Him as to a suitable and sufficient mediator, so that through Him we may be saved. (*A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, 40).

Ames was a Reformed scholastic theologian. Does that sound like someone who has depersonalized the faith? I have to conclude that here Payton gets both the Reformation and the post-Reformation wrong.

Finally, I need to comment on the last chapter. Payton rightly insists that the Reformation was a success in that it involved a recovery of the biblical gospel. But at the same time, he wants to argue

that the existence of numerous denominations also points to a tragedy engendered by the Reformation. Regrettably his analysis of this situation reflects a doctrine of the church foreign to the Reformation. He alleges that "we heirs of the Protestant Reformation have dropped layer of denominational clutter over layer of doctrinal distinctiveness in so many strata on the apostolic foundation that the gospel itself has been cluttered over" (255). But what if some of these divisions are necessary to preserve the gospel? What if the Reformation taught us from Scripture that there are true churches who hold to pure preaching of the gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline? What if the Reformation taught us from Scripture that there are also false churches, as well as sects? Would it be a triumph or a tragedy for God's people to be faithful to his Word?

There are many more things in this volume on which I could comment, both good and bad. I wish that I could recommend it; after all, we need more solid and accessible Reformation literature. As noted above, there are some good chapters and some excellent insights scattered throughout. On the whole, however, the book is evidence that old ways of writing Reformation and post-Reformation history die hard. Using this volume as a guide, many will continue to get the Reformation wrong on some key points. **C**



Reformation Wall
Geneva, Switzerland

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

General Synod Burlington, 2010, instructed the Committee to publish an Authorized Provisional Version of the *Book of Praise*.

Synod decided that this version will be the *authorized* version for use in the worship services once it is released (cf. Church Order Article 55). At the same time, this version will be *provisional* in that the next synod, 2013, will, hopefully, adopt the definitive version which will serve our churches for many years. Synod requested the churches to use the upcoming 2010 version in their worship services and to alert the committee to any errors in it so that a pristine edition can be presented to Synod 2013. The committee expects that the differences between the 2010 and the 2013 versions will be minimal.

Synod forwarded to the committee all the letters Synod received relating to the committee's report to Synod, the revised psalms, the revised hymns, and the augment hymns. The committee has carefully gone through all the comments from the churches, incorporating what was appropriate, and expects that the 2010 version should be available to the churches by early December. The committee will endeavour to keep the churches posted.

What will this version look like?

The psalms will have been revised. The committee reminds the reader that about fifty psalms needed no or little improvement while about fifty needed significant improvement and the remaining fifty were completely redone. We acknowledge the fine work of Dr. William Helder in this endeavour.

Many of the hymns will have been improved as well. Furthermore, Synod added nineteen from the Augment for a new total of eighty-five hymns. The following were added from the Augment: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 22, 24, 25, 26, and 28. Since the "new" hymns had to be inserted here and there according to theme, it necessitated a change in many of the hymn numbers.

Synod also instructed the committee to bring all pronouns referring to God, in song and prose sections, to lower case in keeping with the most common translations used in the churches.

The *Book of Praise* in its current small format would be rather bulky with the addition of more hymns and the overleaf notation. Therefore this next edition's format will be a bit larger (5 ½ x 8 ½ rather than the current 4 ½ x 6 ½). This will make for a more appealing look to the book.

Synod directed the committee to communicate to the churches that they determine for themselves how to purchase and distribute the copies of this provisional *Book of Praise*. Although not set in stone, it is expected that the retail price will be twenty-two to twenty-four dollars per book. Churches and schools do well to note that the publisher has informed the committee that if churches and schools submit bulk orders, they will receive a twenty-five percent discount, resulting in an expected net price of about sixteen to eighteen dollars per copy.

The Authorized Provisional Version will, in time, be available on the committee's website, www.bookofpraise.ca. This site is graciously hosted by Bernie Harsevoort of Adverdea Advertising/Web Design.

Synod considered that the church is never finished with the work of writing hymns, and so it instructed the committee "to seek, receive, evaluate, and recommend additional hymns to be compiled and proposed at a future date for testing by the churches, and for possible recommendation to a future synod." The committee will be writing the churches about this at a future date.

Some churches had asked whether the *Book of Praise* could be set to four-part harmony. Synod instructed the committee to take up the matter of harmonization of the psalms and hymns, and to make a specific proposal to Synod 2013 as to how this can best be addressed. The committee was also encouraged to develop and promote materials for the musical accompaniment in the worship services.

Synod directed the committee to maintain good contact with Deputies for the *Book of Praise* in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. As well, the committee is mandated to continue promoting the *Book of Praise* worldwide.

From time to time the committee receives communications from near or far suggesting that the Canadian Reformed Churches have a great treasure in the *Book of Praise*. We agree. It is a unique songbook in that all 150 psalms can be sung on the authentic Genevan tunes. The *Book of Praise* is a catholic songbook since the Genevan Psalter can be found in many languages throughout the world. We acknowledge with deep gratitude the work that our fathers, under the blessing of God, undertook only a few years after the founding of the first Canadian Reformed Churches.

May the Lord bless the worship of the Canadian Reformed Churches and may he bless the song book we love and cherish.

Committee

Press Release of Classis Manitoba held on September 17, 2010 in the Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg

Opening

On behalf of the convening church of Winnipeg Redeemer, Rev. J. Poppe opened the meeting by welcoming all present, requesting the singing of Psalm 66:1, 2, reading Eph. 1:1-14, and leading in prayer.

Examination of credentials and constitution of Classis

The credentials were examined by the convening church and found to be in good order. It is noted that all the *primi* delegates are present. Upon the examination of the credentials, Classis was declared constituted.

Appointment of executive officers

The suggestions for officers from Classis Manitoba March, 2010 were received and were duly appointed. Dr. A.J. Pol served as chairman, Rev. R.J. den Hollander as Vice-chairman, and Rev. J. Poppe as clerk. The chairman thanked the convening church for the organization of Classis. As memorabilia it is mentioned that Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer received and accepted a call to the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church at Tintern. Encouragement was offered to the church at Carman East in their search for a new pastor and teacher. Denver extended a call to candidate Ryan Kampen. The church at Denver was offered words of support during this time of the candidate's deliberations.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as received at Classis.

Seating of fraternal delegates

Br. Henry Nagtegaal from the Providence Reformed Church at Winnipeg was welcomed and seated as fraternal delegate. The Deputies for Contact with Neighbouring Classes/Presbyteries were also welcomed and seated at the table.

Reports

Br. Art Poppe had submitted written reports on behalf of the Deputies for Contact with Neighbouring Classes/Presbyteries. He noted with thankfulness that Rev. Phil Poe, formerly of the PCA, sustained his examination in connection with his call to Minot, North Dakota of the RCUS. It was also noted that Rev. Ted Gray, together with his congregation, was filled with gratitude for joining the URC from the CRC. Br. Art Poppe also gave an oral report on his visit to a classis meeting of the URC Classis Central USA in Iowa. Br. David Gortemaker led in intercessory prayer for

these neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries. Words of thanks were also expressed to the Deputies for their hard work.

The Committee for Aid to Needy Churches delivered their report in the form of a letter addressed to the brothers at Classis. Clarification was requested and received regarding some concern expressed in the Committee report. Their recommendation that the churches of Classis Manitoba be assessed at \$CDN 28.00 per communicant member is adopted.

The church at Winnipeg (Redeemer) reported that they have audited the books of the Committee for Aid to Needy Churches and have found them to be well kept, up to date, and all accounting in good order. They further suggested that Classis also request the needy church to provide a report of funds received to ensure that funds sent also correspond to funds received. This suggestion was duly noted.

The report from the Committee for Students of Theology was received in letter form. During the academic year 2009/10 they financially supported two students. For the year 2010/11 there are three in need of financial assistance. With the recent appointment by General Synod Burlington 2010 of the church at Grassie as the church to manage the Needy Students Fund, the current committee sought some direction. After some discussion, in connection with the letter received from the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church at Grassie, a proposal was made regarding a suitable transition process between the two Committees. The proposal was seconded and adopted. The Committee, on behalf of Classis Manitoba, will also further communicate with the new Committee at Grassie to assist in establishing guidelines for the support of theological students in need. The Committee for Students of Theology in Manitoba will share their current mandate as example of fitting guidelines, emphasizing the concern that the centralization of support not lessen the responsibility of the students providing for themselves. Lastly, the Committee for Students of Theology is instructed to bring proposals to the next Classis regarding its future existence, structure and mandate.

The church at Winnipeg (Grace) reported that they have audited the books of the Committee for Students of Theology and have found them to be in good order.

Question period (Art.44 CO)

The chairman asked the questions according to Art. 44 of the Church Order. Each of the churches indicated that the ministry of the office-bearers was being continued and the decisions of the major assemblies were being honoured. The church at Denver requested

the appointment of a counsellor. Rev. J. Poppe was appointed. None of the other churches requested the judgement and help of Classis for the proper government of their church.

Address by Fraternal Delegate

Br. Henry Nagtegaal from the Providence Reformed Church at Winnipeg addressed the meeting. He expressed deep gratitude for the support received during their period of vacancy and for the increasingly close relationship. He asked for patience during the process of unity between the two federations and gave suggestions for how we may pursue that further on a local or classical level. Br. Les Vanderveen responded with fitting words, grown out of the words of Psalm 133, giving thanks for the unity we enjoy and praying that it could continue.

Correspondence

Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer requested a certificate of honourable release according to Art. 5 of the Church Order. The following documents were provided:

1. Letter of call from Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church at Tintern
2. Letter of acceptance of call from Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer
3. Letter from Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church at Tintern affirming acceptance of responsibility
4. Certificate of honourable release and ecclesiastical attestation from the Canadian Reformed Church at Carman East.

After the documents were examined and found to be in good order, Classis issued a Certificate of Honourable Release for Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer. The chairman thanked him for his work in Carman East and Classis Manitoba and encouraged him in his future work in the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church at Tintern. Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer received and took the opportunity to say a few words in response.

A letter of greeting from Classis Central U.S. of the United Reformed Churches was received. As stated clerk, on behalf of that Classis, Rev. Doug Barnes expressed their regret that they could not be in attendance due to their own meeting of classis. Nevertheless, they sent their assurance of brotherly love and an expression of their desire for a deepening relationship between the respective classes. This letter was received with thankfulness.

The Maranatha Mission Board requested to hold a delegates meeting in conjunction with the next meeting of the churches in Classis Manitoba. The convening church of the next classis will communicate with the Mission Board the final date for that meeting.

The church at Carman East requested the appointment of a counsellor and pulpit supply. Dr. Pol was appointed and pulpit supply was granted for the last Sunday of the month. Arrangements for Lord's Supper should be coordinated via the local consistories.

Appointments

The church of Carman East will serve as the convening church for the next Classis. It will be convened, D.V., on Dec. 10, 2010 (or if deemed not necessary then, Mar. 25, 2011). The suggested officers for next classis are chairman Rev. R.J. den Hollander, vice-chairman Rev. J. Poppe, and clerk Dr. A.J. Pol.

Classis made various appointments as necessary for the standing committees, classical deputies, and church visitors.

The following delegates were appointed to Regional Synod West, Nov. 2, 2010: As ministers, Rev. R.J. den Hollander and Rev. J. Poppe with Dr. A.J. Pol as alternate; as elders brothers Talbot Bergsma and Jakob Kuik with brothers Lawrence Toet and Gerry Van Dijk as first and second alternates respectively.

Personal question period

The church at Carman East requested a representative of Classis to be present at the farewell evening. Rev. R.J. den Hollander was appointed. Denver took the opportunity to express their appreciation to Classis for the support received financially and spiritually and to Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer for his work as counsellor.

Brotherly censure (Art.34 CO)

With gratitude it was deemed not necessary.

Adoption of the Acts and approval of the Press Release

The Acts were read and adopted and the Press Release approved for publication.

Closing

The chairman closed the meeting by requesting the singing of Psalm 89:1 and leading in prayer.

*For Classis Manitoba,
R.J. den Hollander
Vice-chairman at that time* 