

Clarion

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Mass Choir Concert



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- God's Flower Power





Dr. James Visscher is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia
jvisscher@telus.net

The Preaching of the Law

This is a necessary part of the Catechism

I have lost track of just how many times I have preached on the Heidelberg Catechism (or as the purists would want me to put it: "on the Holy Scriptures as summarized in the Catechism") during my almost forty years in the ministry. Let's just say that I have covered the same ground again and again.

Be that as it may, I want to share with you something that cropped up recently as I was preparing myself to preach on the subject matter covered in Lord's Day 47. Specifically, it had to do with Q & A 115.

Many of you will be familiar with it. For it goes like this: Question – "If in this life no one can keep the Ten Commandments perfectly, why does God have them preached so strictly?" The answer that follows is this: "First, so that throughout our life we may more and more become aware of our sinful nature, and therefore seek more eagerly the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ. Second, so that, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach the goal of perfection."

Not a favourite

Now, this is certainly not everyone's favourite question and answer. As a matter of fact, on more than one occasion over the years I have had parishioners express their displeasure, and sometimes even their disagreement, with it. Admittedly a number of them started out with a built-in bias against the law. Their displeasure increased when the Catechism tied the preaching to it. As well they resented the inclusion of the words "so strictly." As far as some of them were concerned Q & A 115 is unnecessary and does little else but pour salt into festering wounds.

I disagree. While it may be true that this is not a popular part of the Catechism, I maintain that this is a necessary part of the Catechism. The strict preaching

of the law is a wholesome thing. Indeed, it is an essential component when it comes to living a healthy, vibrant Christian life.

Now, why do I say that? Even more, how dare I say that? It's such a counter cultural statement. Who loves the law today? Who identifies with Psalm 119? The current cry is "bring on the gospel, out with the law."

Nevertheless, a closer look at Answer 115 gives ample reason to resist such a bias. For what this answer teaches us is that the strict preaching of the law produces four benefits in our lives.

Looking inward

First, the strict preaching of the law forces us to look inward. Answer 115 begins "First, so that throughout our life we may more and more become aware of our sinful nature."

These are days in which many people spend a considerable time looking inward. They are doing so because they have been told that a lot of hidden treasure lurks on the inside. The optimists tell us that all manner of gifts, abilities, talents, and potential lives within and that these things are just waiting to be discovered and unleashed. Look inside and you will strike gold.

Yet that is not the teaching of the Scriptures and hence not of the Catechism either. It stresses that what lurks within is not treasure but dross. What lives there is our sinful nature. The Lord Jesus says that our "uncleanness" is not a matter of the outside but of the inside. All sorts of evil and foul stuff comes from our hearts (Mark 7:21).

Is this good news? Of course not! In and of itself it is depressing. And that is what happens to a great many believers who stop here and become pre-occupied with this news. They grow despondent. They feel hopeless. They become fatalistic. They succumb to depression.

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P. Holtvüwer, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2
E-Mail: veenendaal@shaw.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

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Only such is never the intention of the Scriptures nor the Catechism. They do not teach these things in order to drive God’s people into a permanent state of sadness. No, they teach this as a precursor and a spring board to much better things. You will never know how great a blessing salvation is if you have never come to grips with your desperate need and your sinful state. The Lord Jesus once wisely remarked that it is not the healthy who need a doctor. It is the sick, and that’s us. All people suffer by nature from a sinful nature. All people need help. They need to be told this and they need to acknowledge this. Ignoring one’s fallen nature makes one unprepared for salvation. The preaching of the law is meant to address this deficiency.

Looking outward

Yet that is not all that it is meant to do, for Answer 115 points us in another direction as well, and that direction is outward. Take note of these words: “That throughout our life we. . . seek more eagerly the

What’s Inside

Issue 14 begins with an editorial from Dr. James Visscher on the topic of “Preaching the Law.” Some may feel that the strict preaching of the Ten Commandments to sinful people who can not possible keep the law is hurtful rather than helpful. Dr. Visscher shows that the preaching of the law is essential and beneficial.

Dr. Wes Bredenhof expands on the theme of God’s justice. What does it mean that God is just? And how do we spread the message of God’s justice in a loving Christian way?

With Orthodox Presbyterian Church celebrating its seventy-fifth anniversary, *Clarion* will be featuring several short surveys on the OPC’s history. This issue highlights home missions and church planting. We also include a report on the mass choir concert held in Hamilton in May to benefit Ambassadors Christian School in Ottawa.

We have our regular columns Treasures New and Old and Ray of Sunshine. Readers will also find a CD Review and a Press Release.

Laura Veenendaal

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forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ." These things are not found by looking inward. Both forgiveness and righteousness are external qualities. They are qualities that you will only find when you turn to Jesus Christ in faith.

Who has the power to forgive sin? God the Father does, but so does Christ. On more than one occasion in the gospels he is depicted as the Great Forgiver. Consider only that moving episode described in Mark 2 which has to do with the paralyzed man. His friends are determined to get him healed by Jesus. They refuse to take "No!" for an answer. They are persistent and it would appear that the man they are carrying around with them is equally persistent.

You will never know how great a blessing salvation is if you have never come to grips with your desperate need and your sinful state

Finally, they find a way to catch the attention of our Lord. With royal authority, he says to the man on the mat, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (v. 5). Forgiveness is ours to seek but his to dispense.

And the same applies to righteousness. Those who believe in Jesus Christ not only long to have their sins forgiven, they also long to have their status changed. They want to see their unrighteousness washed away and they are eager to have a new righteousness take its place. They also know where to find this glorious new identity. It lies with Christ. "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Rom 3:22).

Yes, and here the strict preaching of the law pays dividends. It reminds all of us over and over again that the answer to our fallen condition is not to be found by only looking inward. No, we also need to look outward. We need to look outside of ourselves to Jesus Christ. Only he has the answer and is the answer.

Looking upward

Now, the Catechism could have stopped here, but it goes on to tell us about yet another direction that this law preaching has to include. It needs to remind and teach us to look not just inward and outward, but also upward. This becomes apparent when we take a close look at the next expression, "while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit."

Praying is a vertical matter. A common posture of prayer may be to bow our heads; however, while doing so we need to be thinking up and looking up. Why up? Because help always comes to us from above. Ancient believers used to look to the hills for rescue and relief. Why to the hills? Because beyond them lay Jerusalem, the city of God, and in it was the temple of God, and in that temple was the altar of God. The place of atonement and reconciliation was there.

Since then, however, everything has changed. Jesus Christ has come as the final temple and he has offered that one, perfect and complete sacrifice for sin. The proof of his successful sacrifice lies in his resurrection and ascension. A less than perfect offering would have produced no victory over death, much less a triumphant procession into heaven (Ps 68).

Today he lives above. He is seated there and he is reigning from there. As a result, our prayers need to be directed there as well. They need to be aimed at him who sits on the throne.

In addition, they need to ask him to be mindful of the needs of us who live below. And what is the best way that he can help us here? It is by filling us with "the grace of the Holy Spirit." Strictly speaking this is not a biblical expression, but it does express a biblical truth most wonderfully. There is such a thing as "the grace of the Holy Spirit." The fact that God should send the Spirit upon his people is all grace. It has nothing to do with merit or desert. It is nothing else than divine, unearned favour.

True law preaching will not allow us to rest, to become self-satisfied, to turn complacent, or to coast

Yet there is not just "grace" in the giving, there is also "grace" in the gift. What a blessing this gift of that other Counsellor represents! For who regenerates us, renews us, abides in us, supplies us, helps us, and supports us? No one else but the Holy Spirit. He alone is able to fill the shoes of that other Counsellor and thus fill our lives too with grace, mercy, truth and love.

True law preaching always directs the saints to look inward and outward but also upward to God and to the gifts that only God possesses.

Looking onward

Still, this preaching does not stop there either. There is one more thing that it seeks to accomplish

and it has everything to do with looking onward. The Catechism echoing the Scriptures says that we should “never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God’s image, until after this life we reach the goal of perfection.” In this connection it is the duty of the preaching of the law to push and prod us onward.

True law preaching will not allow us to rest, to become self-satisfied, to turn complacent, or to coast. No, it will remind us to keep on working out our “salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). It will encourage us not to give up in our quest for perfection.

When I preached on this Lord’s Day I reminded my hearers that among other things a believer is in some ways like a golfer. In the game of golf there is no such thing as a perfect game. In that sense it is unlike baseball. For in that sport if you strike out all twenty-seven batters or if you get them out without a hit, you have played the perfect game. That is not possible in golf. Perhaps if you are able to hit eighteen holes in one game, you have attained it, but who has ever or can ever achieve that? Perfection in golf is impossible.

Does this mean that people cease to play it? Hardly! Not if I look at how many people are chasing little white balls on all of the golf courses in my neighbourhood. They are filled with striving. They represent a crowd of would-be but never-arriving perfectionists.

Well, Christians are like that. They strive and they strive. The preaching of the law even urges them to strive. Living a life full of new obedience and daily thankfulness never stops. Listen to Paul: “I press on toward the goal to win the prize...” (Phil 3:14).

He presses on and we should press on too; but unlike golf, we will one day reach the goal of perfection. “After this life” it will be reached and realized. Indeed, God will one day crown all of our feeble efforts. Through his Son he will “transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil 3:21). One day “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Perfection is coming. The preaching of the law will help us to get there.

As a result, do not be too quick to ridicule and reject this type of preaching. Of course, if it is legalistic preaching you are right to punt it as far away as you can. But that is not what the Catechism is teaching you here. It is teaching you about a type of preaching that is full of realism (inward), expectation (outward), direction (upward), and hope (onward). Long live such preaching!

C





Rev. Hendrik Alkema is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Houston, British Columbia
hendrik.alkema@canrc.org



MATTHEW 13:52

"The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom. . . ."

Isaiah 35:1-2a

God's Flower Power

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic sleuth once quipped: "Our highest assurance of the goodness of Providence seems to me to rest in the flowers. All other things, our powers, our desires, our food, are really necessary for our existence in the first instance. But this rose is an extra. Its smell and its colour are an embellishment of life, not a condition of it. It is only goodness which gives extras, and so I say again that we have much to hope from the flowers."

Sherlock Holmes may have been clueless in his theology, but I think he was on the right track when he connected hope with flowers. Flowers have the almost unfailing ability to encourage an ailing patient in a hospital room, or to cheer up a discouraged soul. They are received with great appreciation by a girlfriend or a wife, at least when given at the appropriate time. They brighten up a room, and when planted thoughtfully and cared for lovingly they make any landscape look truly beautiful.

Seen from a distance, flowers impress; seen up close, they are truly magnificent in their beauty. The colours are exquisite. The scents are lovely. The craftsmanship that the Lord has utilised in designing flowers is something wonderful to behold. What a gift for us to enjoy! I could go on and on – after all, I used to sell flowers for a living, and growing them has long

been a proud part of the Alkema family tradition.

In Isaiah 35:1-2 the Holy Spirit utilizes the imagery of flowers in a very powerful way. The previous chapter described God's righteous judgment poured out in a day of vengeance and a year of retribution, with devastating effect. The land of Edom, which had been bountiful and rich, was transformed into a place of desolation. God's wrath had made it a dry and hot wilderness, inhabited by desert owls, jackals, hyenas, wild goats, and birds of prey. It is a dreadful image of stark barrenness.

And yet verse one tells us that the desert and the parched land will be glad! How is this possible? Life in the desert struggles to survive, eking out an existence. How can it rejoice? Isaiah prophesies that this land will be radically transformed: "The wilderness will rejoice and blossom." Where once there was gloom and despair, now there will be a new creation. The land will be dramatically altered, and a new and wonderful existence will be created. The waters of life will come, and beauty will once again be seen and experienced by all who live there.

"Like the crocus," says Isaiah, "it will burst into bloom." In the original language the sense is that of abundant and profuse blooming. There will be new colour, new beauty, new hope everywhere! The

picture painted here by Isaiah is of a radical transformation from God's wrath to his love, from devastation to peace and great blessing.

These are words of incredible hope for God's people. Who could ever expect a desert to be transformed in such a fashion? Only God has the power to effect such change. Our sin is what transforms life into a barren and harsh existence. We are powerless to do anything about it. But the Lord restores his people and gives them joy in the renewal of life. That's what Isaiah is prophesying about. In Jesus Christ we find the assurance of God's powerful work for us and in us. Apart from him there is the emptiness of the wilderness. But in him there is new life: the beauty and the wonder of living in a relationship of love with the Lord.

The Apostle Paul would later write to the Ephesians that we are God's workmanship. What a picture! We are a work of art and we may blossom in him. Where once there was hardness of heart, and a bitter existence, now there can be the beauty of serving the Lord and more and more resembling him in our lives.

The next time you see a flower, take a moment to really admire the beauty, the elegance, and the stunning workmanship that the Lord has created. We have much to hope from the flowers.





Dr. Wes Bredenhof is pastor of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario
wbredenhof@bell.net

God's Justice: Love Tells the Truth

The revised text of a chapel message for Providence Reformed Collegiate, London, ON, April 6, 2011.

Let's say you had a deadly illness of some sort, but didn't know it. You didn't feel well. You were tired all the time and so finally, after some time, you go to your doctor. He orders some tests to try and determine what's wrong with you. After some weeks you go back for a follow-up appointment and you expect the doctor to tell you the problem. You expect him to tell you the truth. Sometimes there are people who don't want the doctor to tell the truth; they'd rather be in the dark and they deceive themselves into thinking everything is okay when it isn't. But if the doctor is a good doctor who takes his oath seriously, he'll tell the truth. In fact, we could say that it would be the most loving thing for a doctor to do.

Think of Proverbs 27:6. The NIV reads "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Older translations read something like: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Friends speak the truth in love, even when it hurts in the short-term. Friends care and so will tell you what you need to hear. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." This is all the more true when we speak about God's justice. Today we want to consider what the Bible says about this. When we speak with unbelievers or when we speak with one another, we have to be clear that God is just and that he administers justice. To be open about that truth is loving because it exposes a serious problem and ultimately drives us to a comforting solution.

God's justice is controversial today. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, there is a mega-church called Mars Hill Bible Church. The pastor's name is Rob Bell. He recently wrote a book entitled *Love Wins*. Bell argues that everyone goes to heaven because of Jesus. There is no place called hell where people



Rob Bell

experience eternal conscious torment, where they receive the just wrath of God. Everyone goes to heaven. Now for those who don't believe, heaven is like hell. But eventually, there in heaven, God's love wins them over and everyone lives happily ever after.

What does it mean that God is just?

However, the truth is God is just. The Bible teaches that in

places like Psalm 11. Psalm 11:7 tells us that the LORD (Yahweh) is righteous. It's also in Deuteronomy 32:4, in the song of Moses. Moses says, "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he." But what does it mean that God is just? It means that God is always right in his judgments and assessments of what he sees. He always gives what is exactly deserved and displays no favoritism. He always acquits the righteous and always condemns those who are guilty. All of this comes out of God's own righteous character. He is just and therefore he does justice.

When we speak about God's justice, we have to realize that this is something different from what we see in the world around us. Here in Canada, we have something called a criminal justice system. When crimes are committed, the crowds want justice. So, the federal government has a justice minister who takes care of that. But if you look closer, you'll see that Canada's criminal justice system is not really about justice, at least not in the biblical sense of the word. What's the name of the federal agency that oversees

our nation's prisons? The Correctional Service of Canada. Criminal justice in Canada is about rehabilitation and restoration – it's obviously based on a very positive view of human nature.

Scripture is counter-cultural on this score. In the Bible, God's justice is not about rehabilitating and restoring the sinner, but about punishing him with a just judgment both now and eternally. In the Bible, God's justice is about punishing sins committed against the most high majesty of God with the most severe punishment, one that lasts forever and involves both body and soul. Justice is about receiving exactly what you deserve.

The testimony of Psalm 7

God's justice is clearly brought into focus in Psalm 7, especially in verses 11-13. Let's take a closer look at those verses. Verse 10 says that God is a shield. Most people are good with that because shields are passive. A shield just sits there and absorbs all the force of whatever gets thrown at it. Many people have more of a problem with a God who is a warrior, a God who is active and who fights back at the wicked. That's one of the images that this Psalm uses to describe God. We'll look at that a bit more in a moment. But verse 11 begins with another image of God: God as a judge.

To be open about that truth is loving because it exposes a serious problem and ultimately drives us to a comforting solution

This psalm tells us that "God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day." When we read this verse, we need to keep in mind a basic feature of Hebrew poetry called parallelism. Many times in Hebrew poetry, when you have two lines they parallel each other and often times the second line is simply expressing the thought of the first line in a slightly different way. Sometimes the second line is building on the first line. That's what's happening in Psalm 7:11. God's expressing his wrath is parallel to his being a righteous judge. Righteous judges can be expected to do exactly this sort of thing. This is even more obvious when we dig a little deeper into the words used in the second part of verse 11. The verb for

"expressing wrath" has the sense of a legal judgment, actually a legal curse. There is a strong level of intensity here, but we're still in the courtroom before the judge.

"He expresses his wrath every day." What this means is that God is not a part-time judge. In some remote parts of Canada you'll still find circuit judges. Especially in the Arctic, there are remote villages where a judge and his legal entourage fly in and show up once per month. God is not like that sort of judge. God is always behind the bench and he is always dispensing his judgments. God doesn't take coffee breaks and he doesn't take holidays. God regularly deals out justice to the wicked; he gives them exactly what's coming to them.

If the wicked do not repent, then the judge removes his robe and reveals his battle fatigues. He goes after them as a warrior. That's what we find in verses 12 and 13 of Psalm 7. The man who doesn't repent should know that God will be sharpening his sword – the sword is a well-known symbol of divine judgment and justice in the Bible. The sword was used for close combat. In close combat, you see the whites of the eyes of your enemy and you feel the intensity and adrenaline. God may come after his enemies in that fashion. But he can also use a different approach. David also portrays God as an archer bending his bow, stringing it, and getting it ready to send flaming arrows through the air. The bow and arrow was a terrifying weapon of war because arrows were silent, sudden and swift. You might not even see them coming. The fact that the arrows in this Psalm are flaming intensifies the fear one should feel in contemplating this. You do not want to mess with this Divine Warrior. Judgment might come sooner or it might come later, but it will come.

He isn't Santa Claus

So Psalm 7 gives us a powerful picture of a just God who will mete out just desserts. This is not the picture of God most people want to hear about. For many people today, even many who claim to be Christians, they would rather have a God who looks more like Santa Claus. No one thinks of Santa as a just judge. He knows what you've been up to, but he still gives presents to just about everybody. You have to be really bad before Santa doesn't show up. Even then Santa just forgets about you and leaves you to your own devices, he doesn't actually come after you with a sword and flaming arrows. The way people



think about Santa is almost exactly the way that most people in our context think about God. But it is not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible teaches us the fear of God. God is not someone to be trifled with, but to be revered. Hebrews 10:31 says that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." It is a fearful thing to be given over to God's justice. Moreover, in Hebrews 12, after encouraging us to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, the author of Hebrews tells us why: because our God is a consuming fire. The Word of God cultivates in us the fear of God – a reverent sense that God is awesome, majestic, powerful and extremely dangerous to his enemies.

The Scriptures portray to us a God who is just, who apart from Christ always gives his enemies what they deserve. God's justice must be taken seriously. Let's now briefly reflect together on three aspects of God's justice, that it is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

Infinite, eternal, and unchangeable justice

First, God's justice is *infinite*. In other words, it knows no bounds. In the Canadian justice system, the police are limited in the number of infractions of the law they can detect and they're limited in the number of offenders they can arrest. The police can't be everywhere at once and even if they could, they wouldn't see everything. In God's justice, no one gets away – God is the one about whom it can truly be said: "He always gets his man." In the Canadian justice system, the crown is limited in the number of charges it can press and prosecute. They have limited resources at their disposal. In God's justice, everyone who is guilty gets charged and gets brought before the judge. In the Canadian justice system, the courts are limited in the number of cases they can hear per day. God has no such limits. In the Canadian justice system, the prisons are limited in the number of prisoners they can hold. The hell where God's just wrath is expressed has no such limits. God's wrath, the expression of his justice, knows no bounds.

Second, God's justice is *eternal*. That means that God has always been just and always will be. He has administered justice in the past and he will always administer justice into the future. At the very end of Isaiah, the prophet passes on the declaration of Yahweh regarding the wicked and their future. They will go to a place where their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched. This is a picture of hell,

the place where God's wrath has been administered in times past and will be into an eternal future. Sometimes people speak about hell as a place where God is not present. They say hell is the absence of God. But that's not what the Bible says. As far as I'm aware there's no place in the Bible that teaches that hell is the absence of God. Please think about it for a minute: whose wrath is expressed in hell? Isn't hell the place of God's wrath? God is there in his wrath to administer justice eternally. Even on the cross, when our Lord Jesus cried out that he had been forsaken by God, that did not mean that God had disappeared. Rather, God had poured out his fierce wrath against sin and sinners upon Jesus. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 puts it, Christ became sin for us on the cross. As he did so, God attacked him. That was the nature of the forsakenness that he experienced – the full measure of hell.

*Judgment might come sooner or
it might come later, but it will come*

Finally, God's justice is also *unchangeable*. It is immutable. Nothing and no one can change God's character in any way, let alone his justice. Balaam said it in Numbers 23:19, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" In relation to his justice, God has always hated sin and punished it and he always will. He will never swerve from his justice.

God's justice satisfied!

God's justice is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. God will not allow human disobedience and apostasy to go unpunished. Something must be done with sin and sinners. We have our original sin, the guilt and corruption passed on from Adam, but we also have our actual sins – sins in thought, word, and deed. We sin against God and against our neighbour. We sin in what we do and in what we leave undone. According to James, if we break even one commandment, we've broken the whole lot. According to Galatians 3:10, if we do not abide by all things written in the law, we're under a curse. In God's courtroom, we're as guilty as sin. What we deserve is everlasting punishment of body and soul. There's no way out. . . unless somehow God makes a way.

Scripture instructs us to speak the truth out of love, in a loving way

Unless somehow God makes a way for his justice to be satisfied. If his justice can be satisfied, then there is a way for us to leave the courtroom with relief and joy. There is a way and it is found with God's mercy. We hear of that mercy in passages like Ezekiel 18:23, "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" But God's mercy will never be shown at the expense of his justice. There can be no contradiction in God and so his attributes can never be played off against one another. He must be just – infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably so.

How is it that God can be just and we can be saved? The answer has everything to do with Jesus Christ doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. It has to do with the gospel, the good news of Christ's redemption. At the cross, God laid our sins on Christ and violently attacked him for it. That was a display of justice. We can therefore say that we are redeemed by God's justice. But there's more. Because that same display of justice towards Christ was also a display of mercy towards us. God poured out his mercy, he showed goodness and kindness to the undeserving at Golgotha. Through Christ's sacrifice, the wrath of God has been turned away from us and his Fatherly favour has been inclined towards us.

We call it good news. Yet we can easily forget why it is so good. It's good precisely because without

it, we would have to face God's infinite, eternal, and unchangeable justice alone. Without the gospel, we would spend an eternity learning that that justice cannot be satisfied by mere human beings. The gospel is the good news that because of Christ we will not have to go to the school of hell and damnation. The gospel frees us from the fear of condemnation.

Love tells the truth

Love tells the truth about all this. It is not loving to skate around God's justice and pretend that it doesn't exist or that it's something different than what the Bible says. Think about this question for a minute: who was the one person who spoke the most about hell in the Bible? It was the Lord Jesus Christ. Why did he speak so much about the wrath to come? Wasn't it because he was compelled by love to tell the truth? Exactly because of that. He said in John 15:15, ". . . I have called you friends, for everything that I have learned from my Father I have made known to you." Love tells the truth, including the truth about God's justice. Our Lord Jesus did it and those who are united to him by faith and the Holy Spirit will go and do likewise. True biblical love sees a neighbour under the threat of God's justice and speaks up and warns that neighbour and offers the only way out in Jesus Christ. It's a cruel love that seals its lips.

How is it that God can be just and we can be saved?

One last point: love is compelled to tell the truth about God's justice *in a loving way*. Scripture instructs us to speak the truth in love. Not only speak the truth out of love, but *in a loving way*. So if you're going to speak about God's justice frankly and openly with anyone, you'll want to do so in a way that reflects your Saviour. This is where prayer again is so crucial. Pray that God would truly break your heart for those who are still under the spectre of his justice. Pray that God would give you the gift of tears for those who are still wandering in darkness. Pray that God would give you a true love for those on the broad road which leads to destruction – and not that we would love them as potential converts, but to love them as people no matter what happens to them spiritually. God will use those prayers to mould our hearts and help us to speak in loving ways – and that will be used to advance the gospel for his glory. That's what we're here for.



Let Your Voices Shake the Ground!

And shake the ground we did! Imagine one of Hamilton's largest churches filled to capacity with over 1200 people standing to sing Psalm 150, accompanied by a mighty pipe organ and the trumpet blast. The venerable walls of Centenary United may have never heard such a joyful noise. Imagine all the people, praising the LORD with one accord.

That was the scene on the evening of May 14, 2011: after months of careful planning, many hours of rehearsal and travel from all over Ontario, the largest adult mass choir in the history of the Canadian Reformed Churches assembled to benefit Ambassadors Christian School in Ottawa. In the four hours leading up to the concert, no fewer than four directors each took their turn conducting this very large group, totaling some 325 voices from eleven different choirs. . . and managing to achieve a cohesive and harmonious sound. No small task indeed! Directors Steven deBoer, Marg Schoon, Grace Smid, and Ottawa's own Elizabeth Smith did a magnificent job as did the pianist, Jon Kingma and the organist, John van Iperen.

Praise him for his deeds so mighty

The Master of Ceremonies for the evening was Pastor George van Popta who welcomed the large audience totalling over 900 people and led in opening devotions with the reading of Psalm 23 and prayer.

The musical theme for the evening was *Songs of Heaven*. This theme comes from the book of Revelation. In this life, among other tasks, we have the task of getting ready for heaven where, apparently, we will be singing some pretty spectacular music. That's also part of the task of a Christian school: at such a school, we train children for this life and for the next. We want to train our children to be ambassadors for Christ who live, work, speak, and think in anticipation of the coming of Christ and everlasting life with him in the kingdom of heaven. In keeping with this theme, the concert was divided into three parts:

Part 1 *O Rest in the Lord* – focusing on our reliance on the Lord as our shepherd while we walk here on earth in what is often a vale of tears;



Part 2 *For Thine is the Kingdom and the Glory*

– performing our acts of obedience in joyful thankfulness and anticipation;

Part 3 *And They Sang a New Song* – highlighting the victory of Christ that ultimately will be celebrated by the heavenly choir. Most of the texts used in the third part come from the book of Revelation.

Throughout the evening, considerable musical variety was achieved by the participation of several highly skilled soloists who displayed their talents in song, whether individually or as a duet, quartet, or octet. Each piece had its own special charm and was rewarded with enthusiastic applause. The depth of musical talent in our circles was evidenced by the performance of several original compositions including John Van Iperen's virtuosic improvisation on Psalm 68, three works by Jon Kingma including his evocative Concerto in C-minor and the sublime "The Lord is



Photo credit: Rich and Ange VanderBoom

My Shepherd," as well as André Schutten's choral arrangement of a Corelli concerto with words by our very own Pastor G. van Popta. As this event was associated with a new elementary Christian day school in Ottawa, the involvement of youthful musicians, notably a string ensemble, two flautists and two of three trumpeters was very appropriate.

A fitting climax to the evening was the surprise appearance by five bagpipers from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise's), a Scottish Highland Regiment in Hamilton. The pipers led by Pipe Major Balinson marched onto the balcony and led us in a stirring rendition of Amazing Grace. . . . Oh yes, we did shake the ground!

Praise his name with jubilation

To begin the closing ceremonies, Pastor George van Popta introduced the chairman of the Ambassadors Christian School Board, Mr. Chris van Popta, who acknowledged God's abundant grace in granting us this wonderful evening. Children of Ottawa's Jubilee Church presented the four directors and two accompanists with a bouquet of flowers as tokens of appreciation. Chris went on to thank the choir and soloists in generously sharing their amazing musical talents with us, the many volunteers who helped make the concert run so smoothly, and the audience in supporting ACS. Mr. André Schutten was singled out for his indefatigable efforts in guiding this project from start to finish. In addition, ACS's very first teacher, Mrs. Heidi Feenstra, was introduced. Pastor George then read Revelation 22:1-5 and offered words of thanksgiving in prayer. To end the evening, the audience was treated to a final musical offering – a benediction composed by Jonathan Kingma sung by the choir and one of our soloists, Amber Ruthart.

Praise the LORD! Sing Hallelujah!

By all accounts, the Ambassadors Christian School Benefit Concert was a huge success. Words fail to properly thank all of you who came out and supported us with your presence. After fifty plus years, under the blessed guidance of God, Jubilee Church has grown sufficiently to allow the establishment of an elementary day school. We are scheduled to begin operation in September of this year. It is our prayer that more people will be attracted to Canada's capital and share in this Kingdom building work. For more information on the purchase of a concert CD and other ways to support Ambassadors Christian School, please visit www.AmbassadorsChristianSchool.ca or call the chairman at 613-839-0374. For more general news on the latest church activities, do consult our website, www.jubileechurch.ca.

Let Your Voices
Shake
the Ground

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over 1200 voices
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Selections of Mendelssohn's Elijah to G. van Popta's Canticles
and everything in between.
A concert in which voices truly shook the ground in
praises to our one LORD God!

Ambassadors
Christian School

The OPC at Seventy-Five: Home Missions and Church Planting

At its General Assembly in June, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding. Besides completing the regular tasks of its annual assembly, the OPC took the opportunity to thank God for his many blessings, including the planting of new churches throughout the years. By means of an audio-visual presentation and reflections by current church planters, the Home Missions Committee provided a historical survey of home ministry, stressing the OPC's "godly passion for establishing new churches."

Already in the first year of its founding in 1936, the church established a Committee for Home Missions and Church Extension. Its mandate was to collect and distribute funds that would be used to send men to help organize new congregations. The first phase of this committee's work, from 1936 to 1950, was called the "Early Years," when men who previously worked as foreign missionaries served to develop the home missions program.

The second phase, from 1950-1960, was characterized by growing prosperity, resulting in the construction of new church buildings; this lent greater stability to the congregations of this body of churches. A "Church Extension Fund" was created to function as a kind of savings-and-loans arm of the committee. Also during this phase several publications summarizing the principles and practices of the committee's mandate appeared, including *Biblical Evangelism Today* (1960). These years witnessed growth in the membership of more than forty percent.


The third phase in the history of the committee's work was from 1971 to 1990; it was described as a



period of "Reflection," when the committee was required to respond to the church growth movement and evangelical influences throughout North America. This caused the committee to articulate a more explicitly Reformed approach to church planting. During the 1980s, inner-city mission work and outreach to ethnic communities were undertaken. The "missionary-at-large" position was created at this time also; his task was to respond to calls from presbyteries to assist in the formation of new church groups.

The years from 1991 to 2011 form the phase of the "Church at Work," when rapid growth took place. The publication, *Planting an OPC Church*, summarized the basis, methods, and goals of the OPC's church planting activities. Together with the supervision of the Home Missions Committee, this book promoted more unified collaboration in outreach and church planting.

Not content with reflecting on decades of church planting efforts, the committee also presented three ministers currently involved in church-plant projects. In this way the nature of current evangelism and home mission efforts were highlighted. The survey concluded by restating the OPC's biblically-grounded and confessionally accountable passion for establishing new churches.

*On behalf of the Committee for Contact with
Churches in North America
Dr. Riemer Faber (convener)
Rev. Doug vandeBurgt (secretary)* 



Bible Study with Rev. John Hilbelink in 1983

Ray of Sunshine

by Corinne Gelms and
Patricia Gelms

Here is wonderful contribution from Mr. James Buikema, who will be celebrating his birthday on July 4. We would like to express our congratulations to all who are celebrating a birthday in the month of July. May God bless you in this new year, and grant you all an enjoyable day together with your family and friends.

James Buikema



Hi everyone! I have now been living at the Beacon Home in Dunnville for the past year. That was a big change for me and I have now settled into this community and am enjoying the church here as well as my job at Canadian Tire. This is going to be a big year for me as I am turning the BIG 50!! I am really looking forward to it!! I am expecting to have an enormous party at my home – the Beacon Home – so come out and celebrate with me if you happen to be in Dunnville on July 4th!

I also will be going to Anchor Camp June 27 to July 2 and I take care of getting rid of all the garbage and keeping things clean.

I also really enjoy the cards people send me for my birthday every year as well and thanks to the Ray of Sunshine for letting people know when our birthdays are!



Birthdays in July:

- 4 **James Buikema will be 50**
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

- 14 **Sarah Vandergugten will be 16**
23 Jane Street
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

- 20 **Charlie Beintema will be 36**
29 Wilson Avenue
Chatham, ON N7L 1K8

- 29 **Janine Kamstra will be 26**
532 Moxley Road N
RR2, Dundas, ON L9H 5E2

- 29 **Tom VanderZwaag will be 58**
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road
RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

A note to all parents and caregivers

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of please let us know as soon as possible.

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms
8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
Phone: 905-957-0380
Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



George van Popta



Rev. George van Popta is minister of the Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church at Ottawa, Ontario
gvanpopta@gmail.com

Great Hymns of Faith & Other Favourites

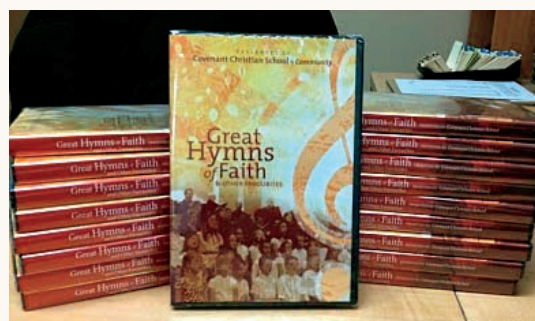
Additional information

- Cost, \$20.00, cheques payable to "CCS PTA."
- Order by email: covenantchristianschool@bellnet.ca or regular post, Covenant Christian School, 497 Millgrove Side Road, Millgrove, Ont., L0R 1V0.
- Production by Semantic Design and Audiocraft and recorded at Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church, Burlington.
- CD includes a booklet containing the words of the songs and various reflections.

The Covenant Christian School Community, under the direction of Joanne Hordyk and Tracy Jelsma, has produced an outstanding CD of eighteen ancient, traditional, and new songs.

The ancient is "O Sacred Head Now Wounded," a translation of a Latin poem, written either by Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) or the medieval poet Arnulf of Louvain (1200-1250). An example of the traditional is "It is Well with my Soul" by Spafford and Bliss, c. 1873. The credit for the newest hymn, "In that Day I'll Sing Praises to You, Lord," 2008, goes to Tim Nijenhuis.

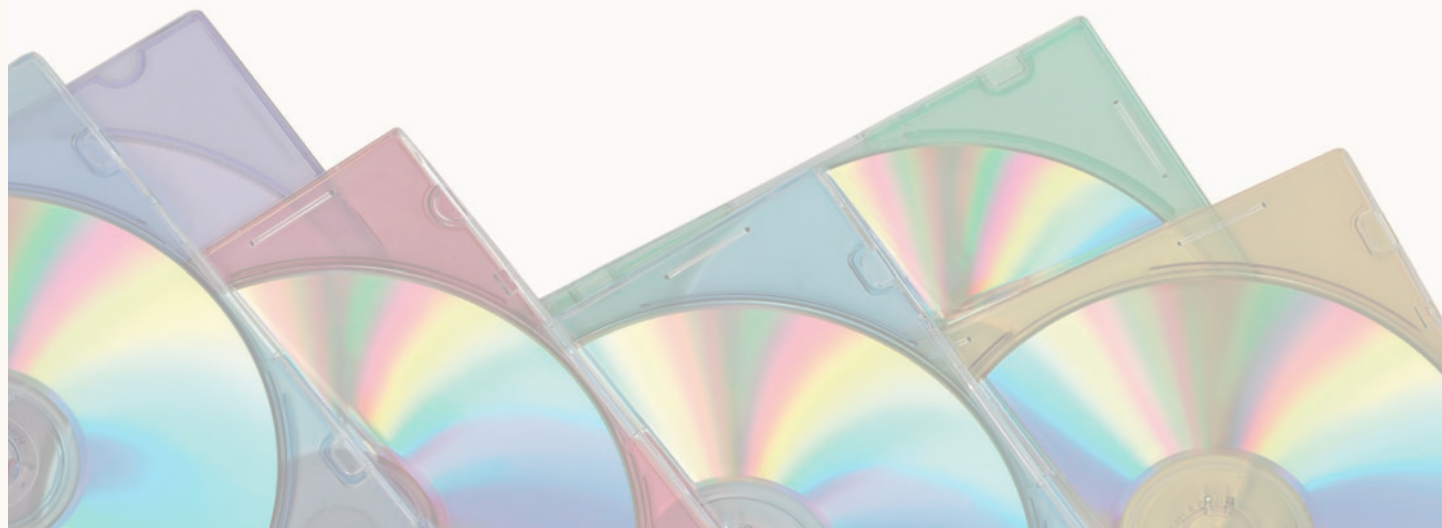
The main choir is made up of the children of CCS. Mrs. Hordyk, the school's music director, clearly knows how to bring the best out of the students. They sing with gladness and exultation. The school choir is backed up



by a mature adult community choir and six young women with soaring voices. The songs are accompanied beautifully by several accomplished pianists and a lovely orchestra of strings, brass, and woodwinds.

Each song is delightful. If I were to declare my favourite, it would be the new (1997) rendition of "Holy, Holy, Holy," written and composed by Michael Card.

This is a very professionally produced CD that old and young will listen to repeatedly with joy and delight. To preview some of the sound tracks, please go to <http://ccschoir.blogspot.com/>.



Press Release for the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches [Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary] for a meeting held on April 26, 2011

The Board of Governors met at the Seminary Facilities in Hamilton, Ontario on April 26, 2011. Present at the meeting were Archie J. Bax, Hank Kampen (Treasurer), Rev. R. Aasman (Chairman), Barry Hordyk, Dr. Andrew J. Pol (Secretary), Rev. Willem B. Slomp, Rev. Eric Kampen, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, Lammert Jagt, Rev. John Ludwig and Karl J. Veldkamp (Vice-Chairman/Corresponding Clerk). Regrets: None. The Principal, Dr. G.H. Visscher also was present. The meeting was opened by Rev. R. Aasman with the reading of Luke 24:1-12 and prayer.

Minutes and agenda

- a. The minutes of the Board meeting held on March 24, 2011 were, with amendments, adopted. The agenda for the meeting was settled.

Correspondence of note

- a. The finalization and publication of the press release for the March 24, 2011 meeting was confirmed. No other incoming or outgoing correspondence since the last meeting.

Meeting with Dr. Lester Ruiz of the Association of Theological Schools

In connection with determining the readiness of the Seminary to continue its self study and complete the candidacy requirements of the Seminary to become a member of the Association of Theological Schools ("ATS"), the Board received Dr. Lester Ruiz of the ATS. Dr. Ruiz was visiting the Seminary as follow up to the delivery of a readiness report previously submitted by the Seminary. His visit included separate discussions with the Faculty, students, support staff, and the Board. In an open conversation with the board the following elements were canvassed and discussed:

- i. The "economic equilibrium" of the seminary: the model of its funding, its reliability and its sustainability. It was evident that the federational model and support was atypical amongst the members of ATS and the faithful and regular

- support of the supporting member churches was gratefully described and noted;
- ii. Future challenges foreseen for the seminary: Whatever future challenges may lay in store for the seminary, it was recognized that the challenge of maintaining clear and consistent adherence to the reformed confessions, i.e. the three forms of unity, is not diminishing;
- iii. Evaluation and assessment: the process of working with ATS will include frank assessment as to the articulation of clearly defined "learning outcomes." The intention is to describe conclusively the intended learning outcomes for courses being offered. The focus is on educational effectiveness and not on bureaucratic success;
- iv. Mutual benefits: it was recognized that the process would provide self discipline and structure to an overall review of the seminary's operations and governance. Concurrently Dr. Ruiz noted that the Seminary could also be a helpful and respected member of ATS due to its distinctive nature, theological basis and history; and
- v. Policies and Procedures: the existing governance material by way of the bylaws, the policies and the handbook, was seen as very good substantive start to ensuring that our governance and procedures were properly documented and procedures were in place to ensure compliance.

Receipt of reports-material agenda items:

- a. **Finance and Property Committee** – from the bequests received from estates over the past year, \$30,000.00 has been allocated to capital improvements. As the operating costs are well and properly funded by both the Canadian and Australian churches, following due consideration it was determined that such funds would be held and designated for "Institutional Development," with needs identified in due time. Such bequests are very gratefully acknowledged.
- b. **Senate** – Upon the recommendation of the Senate, the Board agrees to switch the academic program into two semesters of equal length: the first semester commencing in September and ending in late December and the second semester beginning in early February and continuing to the end of April, early May. There would be a short January semester which will allow for concentrated or elective type courses.

- c. **Principal** – in connection with relief of the Principal relating to his tasks, and recognizing the added responsibilities brought on by the ATS accreditation process, it was agreed that Josh Walker, a Ph. D. student at McMaster University and a member of the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, would be retained as a teaching assistant to teach freshman Greek for the 2011-2012 academic year.
- d. **Conference Report** – Dr. A.J. de Visser provided a written report on his attendance at the 2011 Gospel Coalition Conference held in Chicago, IL area. It was considered and reported to be a most worthwhile attendance.
- e. **Governance Committee** – It was noted and recognized that there was a need for a suitable form for Professors who are installed as ministers of the Word, and are from outside of Canada. This will be considered by the committee. A clarification with respect to the language of the operating bylaw as it relates to the duties of the Senate was reviewed and clarified. This will require submission for approval at the Synod to be convened in 2013, D.V.
- f. **Review and Accreditation Committee** – The readiness report was confirmed as being delivered to ATS. The Board considered various matters

that may need focused attention during the final steps of accreditation. It was affirmed that the ATS accreditation was intended to assist and strengthen the Seminary and will not be at any cost or compromise to the basis and purpose of the Seminary as set out in its incorporating statute and bylaws.

- g. **Church Polity Instructor** – It was apparent that an instructor in church polity would be required for the 2011-2012 Academic year due the unavailability of Dr. N. Kloosterman. The Senate will, in discussion with the Principal, make a proposal to the Board to enlist a local minister for this task. Next meeting of the Board is tentatively scheduled for September 8, 2011 d.v.

Press release and closing

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

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches,

Karl J. Veldkamp,
Vice Chairman/Corresponding Clerk 

