


# Clarion



THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
Volume 60, No. 17 • August 12, 2011



*In moving from old to new  
covenant, the Lord did not change  
the structure of the covenant*

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# Infant Baptism: Should We Agree to Disagree?

*Many people resist infant baptism because they are afraid that these baptized babies will grow up to be spiritually sloppy individuals*

Once, after a worship service, a brother in the Lord was speaking to me about Reformed Baptists. I don't remember the whole conversation, but one thing sticks in my mind. The brother said, "Basically, Reformed Baptist is a contradiction in terms." Is he correct?

Of course, you can understand where this brother was coming from. For example, the Belgic Confession is a Reformed confession. No one doubts or disputes that. Moreover, in Article 34 this Reformed confession of ours speaks about infant baptism in a rather straightforward way: "For that reason we reject the error of the Anabaptists, who are not content with a single baptism received only once, and who also condemn the baptism of the little children of believers." The Heidelberg Catechism also insists that "by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, they [infants] must be grafted into the Christian church" (LD 27). So infant baptism, also called paedobaptism, is not a *may*, or a *maybe*, but a *must*. With these confessions in mind, the aforementioned brother said what he said. Either you're Reformed and you maintain infant baptism, or you're Baptist and you wait with baptism until someone has publicly professed their faith. But never the twain shall meet.

There's only one problem. The twain have not only met each other, and courted, they've also gone right ahead and got married. There are numerous Reformed Baptist churches around the world. In 1997 the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America was formed. As of this year over seventy churches belong to this association, some of them from Canada as well. Since 2004 there's also been a scholarly journal called *The Reformed Baptist Theological Review*. Reformed Baptist may be a contradiction, but it's a contradiction that is alive and well.

One influential theologian, Wayne Grudem, has even suggested that "one way forward could be for paedobaptists and advocates of believers' baptism both to come to a common admission that baptism is not a major doctrine of the faith, and that they are willing to live with each other's views on this matter and not allow differences over baptism to be a cause for division within the body of Christ."<sup>1</sup> So, should we follow Grudem's advice and agree to disagree over infant baptism?

## What's in a name?

So what exactly does a Reformed Baptist believe? As you might expect, there are different varieties of Reformed Baptists, but they all agree that only those who sincerely profess faith in, and submission to, Jesus Christ should be baptized. This is also called credobaptism. Since babies cannot yet make such a profession, Reformed Baptists teach that they should not be baptized. This is based on Mark 16:16: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." The sequence of words in that verse determines their practice: first profession of faith, then baptism. This accounts for the "Baptist" half of their name.

At the same time, Reformed Baptists do not want to be Pelagian or Arminian in their theology. In fact, they love the same five solas that we cherish: *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *soli Deo gloria* (by Scripture alone, by faith alone, by grace alone, Christ alone, and to the glory of God alone). This explains the Reformed part of their name.

Many Reformed Baptist churches make use of, or even subscribe to, the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689). In structure and content this confession is similar to the Westminster Confession of



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

**Subscriptions:** clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

**Advertisements:** clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

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U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$67.00	\$ 90.00
International	\$95.00	\$145.00

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Faith (1648). The most obvious difference is, of course, in the article about baptism (Chap. 29). Still, a pertinent question remains: is it permissible to substitute in credobaptism for paedobaptism, all the while leaving the rest of Reformed theology unaltered? We need a solid, scriptural answer to that question. However, first there are a few other matters that need attention.

**Before we go any farther**

There are at least three factors that deserve mention. For lack of a better term, we'll call the first one the *Spurgeon-factor*. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a gifted and influential British preacher in the nineteenth century. He preached over three thousand sermons, often to thousands of people at a time. His sermons are still widely read and quoted today. Spurgeon was also a Reformed Baptist, or Particular Baptist, as they were known at that time. We have some contemporary Spurgeons as well: men such as John Piper and John MacArthur. Like Spurgeon, these men are popular preachers. They have websites with hundreds of sermons. Like Spurgeon, they have some familiar sounding, Reformed themes in their preaching. Like Spurgeon, they reject infant baptism. So, the argument

**What's Inside**

Our issue begins with a guest editorial. Dr. Jason Van Vliet examines how a Reformed Baptist views baptism and poses the question: when we uphold such similar confessions with the one difference being infant versus adult baptism, can we just simply agree to disagree?

In the first of two instalments, Rev. Karlo Janssen discusses the importance of a clear church order in the matter of women voting.

Issue 17 brings readers a report on the retirement evening and farewell sermon of Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar after thirty-four years in the ministry. We also have a report from the Seventy-Eighth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

In this issue you will find regular columns Treasures New and Old, Education Matters and Roadside Assistance as well as a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

**In This Issue**

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runs like this: is rejecting infant baptism really so bad if these preachers are so good? The simple response is this: even good preachers can make serious mistakes. When that happens, we ought to address it, not overlook it. That's the approach that the Apostle Paul took with Peter (Gal 2:11-16). We should do the same.

Next there is the *show-me-the-verse-factor*. If you've ever had to defend infant baptism, you likely had someone say to you, "Just show me the verse in the Bible where God commands us to baptize infants." Well, there is no verse in the Bible which says, "Baptize babies." So, the underlying yet overarching implication is that paedobaptism must be wrong. However, this show-me-the-verse shoe pinches just as much on the other foot. For some two millennia, ever since the days of Abraham, the LORD made it abundantly clear that children were included in his covenant (Gen 17:7). Therefore, the challenge could also be launched: "Just show me the verse in the Bible where God commands us to stop including infants in his covenant." Well, there is no verse in the Bible which says that either. So, we need to step beyond this show-me-the-verse mentality and start looking carefully at what the LORD does actually say.

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*In the old covenant, the LORD left  
no room for agreeing to disagree  
over circumcision*

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Finally, there is the *infant-baptism-breeds-laxity* factor. Many people resist infant baptism because they are afraid that these baptized babies will grow up to be spiritually sloppy individuals. They're concerned that baptized youth (or adults!) will feel rather comfortable with immoral, worldly lifestyles since, after all, they're baptized and, in the end, all will be well and forgiven. However, baptism is a sign of the covenant and God's covenant does not give anyone a license to indulge in the ways of the world. Behold, God's covenant has two parts: promise *and* obligation (Rom 6:1-4). Beware, God's covenant has two pronouncements: blessings *and* curses (Heb 10:26-31). Therefore, abandon laxity and embrace holiness.

### **Now let's turn to Scripture**

When the Holy Spirit converts someone, turning him from rebellion and unbelief to repentance and faith, then that person should also be baptized. The Lord Jesus Christ clearly teaches this in Matthew 28:19

and Mark 16:16. That's also why we have a Form for the Baptism of Adults, which incorporates the Form for Profession of Faith, in the back of our *Book of Praise*. Defined and understood properly, credobaptism has always been maintained by the Reformed church.

However, what does the Lord say about the children of baptized believers? Should they, too, be baptized? *That* is the critical question. As mentioned earlier, in the days of Abraham, the LORD explicitly included the children of believing parents in his covenant. In fact, the LORD was so strong on this point that if anyone failed to administer the sign of the covenant, that is, circumcision, to his infant son, he would be guilty of breaking the covenant (Gen 17:14). Clearly, this was a major doctrine with enormous implications, not a minor point of ecclesiastical practice. In the old covenant, the LORD left no room for agreeing to disagree over circumcision.

However, does that change in the new covenant? Reformed Baptists would argue that it does. Often they will say that the genealogical aspect of the old covenant was needed in order to bring Christ, the Mediator, into the world; however, after that, the new covenant is made with regenerate individuals, not the households of believers.

Now, it is true that there was something wrong with the first covenant. The Holy Spirit himself says, "If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another" (Heb 8:7). Yet please note the next verse: "But God found fault *with the people* and said, 'The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant'" (Heb 8:8). Moreover, the following verses, quoting from Jeremiah 31:31-34, indicate that it was the stubborn sinfulness of the people which was "the fault." In the old covenant, the blood of bulls and goats could never deal effectively with that iniquity (Heb 10:4). Therefore, the LORD ushered in the new covenant with the long foreshadowed solution. The promised blood and Spirit of Christ achieved what animals sacrifices could never accomplish. In other words, in moving from old to new, the LORD did not change the structure of the covenant. With the coming of Christ he did not begin excluding the previously included children. Rather, he changed the sacrifice for sin from shadows to substance, from livestock to the Lord Jesus Christ.

That young children are still included in the new covenant can be demonstrated by familiar passages like Luke 18:16 ("Let the little children come to me"), Acts 2:39 ("the promise is for you and your children"), and 1 Cor 7:14 ("your children. . . are holy"). We should also

remember the household baptisms recorded in the New Testament (Acts 16:15, 31-33; 1 Cor 1:16), as well as the connection between circumcision and baptism (Col 2:9-11).

However, there is another passage which is often overlooked: 1 Corinthians 10:2. In this passage the Apostle Paul teaches us about the baptism into ... no, not Christ, but Moses! But, you say, baptism is a new covenant sacrament, and Moses is the mediator of the old covenant. Indeed, but the new sacrament was already foreshadowed in the old dispensation, at the Red Sea. "They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." A cloud contains water. According to Exodus 14:19, the special glory cloud of the LORD, which to that point had gone in front of the people, moved and stood behind the people, separating the Egyptians from the Israelites. Thus God's holy people and their enemies were distinguished by a wall of water, and "throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side" (Exod 14:20). And if that was not dramatic enough, next the LORD miraculously used the water of the Red Sea to both save his people and defeat their enemies (Exod 14:22, 28). These waters of separation and salvation were the baptism into Moses.

### *Baptism is a major doctrine*

Who, then, was baptized into Moses? All of God's people were baptized into Moses, male and female, older and younger, including the little infants, being carried in the arms of eager parents who were race walking to safety on the opposite shore of the Sea. Therefore, since the babies were baptized into Moses, surely they should also be baptized into Christ, for Moses was faithful as a servant, but Christ is faithful as Son (Heb 4:5-6).

So, yes, we baptize adults whom the Lord, in his grace, converts. And yes, we also baptize the children of believing parents, with whom the Lord, in his grace, covenants. Why? Precisely because this is what the Lord teaches us in his Word.

### **Where do we go from here?**

To begin with, agreeing to disagree over baptism is not the way forward. Contra Grudem, baptism is a major doctrine. At baptism a minister pronounces



someone's name and says, "I baptize you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Surely, since the holy name of our Triune God is directly involved, it must, of necessity, be major.

The doctrine of infant baptism is also intricately related to many other doctrines. Baptized children receive, and need, the promise of forgiveness because they inherit a sinful nature from their parents (BC 15). The doctrine of original sin is linked to the sinless conception of our incarnate Saviour (LD 14). Baptism is also entwined with the doctrine of the covenant which is inextricably connected to the doctrine of the church (LD 27). And, lest we forget, there is the sensitive matter of children who die in infancy (CoD 1:17). Baptism, original sin, incarnation, covenant, church, and the life hereafter: there's a lot at stake here.

The way forward, then, is to keep teaching and defending the baptism of covenant children. We can be thankful that Reformed Baptists embrace the five solas, for they are scriptural. At the same time, we must be resolute in upholding infant baptism since it is equally scriptural. It's a matter of obedience, not options.

<sup>1</sup> Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1997), 982







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MATTHEW 13:52

# Attention for Ages

*"Joseph, a young man of seventeen. . ."* Genesis 37:2

*"Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt"* Genesis 41:46

*"And Jacob said to Pharaoh, 'The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty'."* Genesis 47:9

How do you picture Jacob dreaming in Bethel? How do you imagine the bridal couple, Jacob and Rachel? How astonishing was it that Joseph seated his brothers in order of their age? I always imagined it to be a certain way. Then I paid closer attention to the ages mentioned in the accounts of Genesis. And realized the picture I had was incorrect.

As the picture was corrected other things changed, too. There were elements to the account of Jacob, already amazing, that became even more amazing. The sins were worse than I'd thought. God's grace shone all the more brightly. Let's pay some attention to ages, to appreciate all the more God's work during the life of Jacob.

Joseph was thirty when he entered the service of Pharaoh. This was followed by seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. During the second year of the famine Joseph makes himself known to his family (Gen 45:6). He would then have been about thirty-nine years old.

When Jacob comes to Egypt, he is 130 years old. This means (here is surprise number one) Jacob would have been around ninety-one years old when Joseph was born. Now Joseph was born seven years after Jacob married Rachel, so Jacob was eighty-four when he married. Prior to marrying, Jacob had lived seven years in Haran. When he arrived

in Haran, Jacob would have been around seventy-seven. The Jacob dreaming in Bethel was not the young man he's often pictured to be!

This is more than just an interesting fact. There's a lot of attention for the seventy-five year-old Abraham leaving Haran with a sixty-five year-old Sarah. Now think of Jacob at Bethel. And note, Abraham had a wife, Jacob did not. The promise of God to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) is hard to believe; the promise made to Jacob would have been even harder to believe.

There's also something special about Jacob's first eleven sons. Jacob (age eighty-four) marries Leah and Rachel in the space of two weeks. After seven years, Jacob is the father of eleven sons (Gen 30:25; it is possible that Dinah was born later). The youngest of the sons is Joseph, Rachel's only child. Four other sons were born to Bilhah and Zilpah; six sons were born to Leah. Leah had at least six children in the space of seven years. Leah was also barren for a period (Gen 29:35; 30:9). Do the math and you discover Leah must have been pregnant almost all the time, with one time gap. No wonder Rachel was so frustrated (Gen 30:1)!

We turn to Genesis 38, the account of Judah and Tamar. Verse 1 connects it loosely to the time when Joseph was sold into Egypt. Joseph was seventeen; Judah, at most four years older, twenty-one. Joseph was

thirty-nine when he made himself known to Judah. Judah would have been forty-three. In the twenty-two years in between, Judah has three sons by his first wife. One wonders, how old were Er and Onan when they were married to Tamar? And when did Tamar give birth to Perez and Zerah? It can't have been all that long before Judah foreshadows the Messiah of God by being willing to substitute himself for Benjamin. It says something about how radical the conversion of Judah was.

We go to another scene, that of the brothers visiting Joseph when Joseph was governor in Egypt. Joseph himself was thirty-nine. The ten older brothers would all have been in their early to mid-forties. During a banquet, Joseph had them seated in the order of their age (Gen 43:33). To the brothers, this was astonishing. The probability of seating ten half-brothers in their early to mid-forties in the order of age without knowing who is the oldest or the youngest is one in over 3.5 million. No wonder the brothers stood in awe of Joseph. And then they are accused of stealing the cup used for divination. . . .

God has left us details that may seem innocent. But factor them into the exegesis, and appreciation for what God has accomplished grows. Careful study of the Scriptures will have even the smallest jewels shine brightly.





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# Those Elected Shall Be Appointed (Part 1 of 2)

Individual Canadian Reformed Churches may decide whether to allow female communicant members to participate in the election of office bearers. That, it is commonly thought, is the implication of the decision taken by Synod Burlington-Ebenezer 2010, Article 176. It certainly would seem to have been the intention of that decision. But does it indeed imply that?

## Purpose

The focus of this article, to be published in two instalments, is not the scriptural arguments in favour of or against females voting. The focus of this article is on church political aspects. Synod 2010 adopted the following recommendation: "That any arrangement for the election of office bearers that goes beyond what has been agreed upon by the churches in Article 3 CO is a matter of the local regulations, adopted for that purpose by the consistory with the deacons" (Art. 176). Given the aim of this decision – to grant local churches the freedom to allow females to vote – this decision implies that Article 3 CO does not determine anything in regards to females voting. The purpose of this two-part article is to indicate that it probably does, and will suggest how this might be remedied.

## Why bother?

No doubt many will read this with the question in mind, why bother? It is clear what Synod 2010 intended and some churches already allow female communicant members to vote. Is it worth looking at this?

I believe it is. For allowing female communicant members to vote is not just a question of hermeneutics and exegesis. It also touches the use of the church order. The church order has been adopted with common consent. It functions as the constitutional document for how churches operate internally and relate to each other. If one seeks peace and order in the churches

of God, there needs to be respect for what has been prescribed for all the churches by all the churches. Such respect is undermined when churches permit themselves and each other liberties with respect to the church order. If we do not take our church order strictly, all sorts of explanations need to be given when church visitors ask local consistories with deacons, whether "the adopted order is being observed and maintained in every respect" (Article 46 CO). Churches too are to keep their commitments made before God (Eccl 5:4-7).

Peace and order are facilitated by a set of agreements among the churches that not only is in keeping with Scripture and within the bounds of our confessions but also reflects our desired practice. A disconnect between our church order and our practice will likely lead to ecclesiastical licentiousness and disunity. My impression is that the Christian Reformed Churches in our continent are experiencing this, and my own experience is that this is also one of the root causes of what is troubling our sister churches in The Netherlands.

Hence, what follows in this article ought not to be brushed off as being legalistic. There is a time and place for due attention to the letter of the law. Our Lord criticized the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, not for their attention to details of the law. For our Lord said to the Pharisees: "You should have practised the latter [weightier matters of the law, e.g. justice] without neglecting the former [lighter matters of the law, e.g. tithing spices]" (Matt 23:23). The churches have together agreed that "they shall endeavour diligently to observe the articles of this Church Order as long as they have not been changed by a general synod" (Article 76 CO).

If it be true that the Church Order as currently phrased does not clearly allow female communicant members to participate in voting for office bearers, Article 3 should be changed before such a practice is introduced.

## Scrutiny required

Article 3 CO states: "Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons in accordance with the adopted regulations." (For the sake of space, "the consistory with the deacons" will, hereafter, be referred to as the "council.") The auxiliary verb "shall" indicates the council has an obligation it must meet. The council is here being bound to the outcome of the election. This implies that those who elect exercise a form of authority over those who appoint. For those who appoint shall do what those who voted have indicated. Now women are not to exercise authority over men (1 Tim 2:12). As those who appoint are exclusively men, indeed, the leaders in the congregation, those who vote are not to be women. For the plain reading of Article 3 CO suggests voting is here defined as an act of authority.

This issue was raised at Synod 2010. For one, the church at Carman-East pointed it out (Art. 175 obs. 2.12.8). Moreover, the Minority Report spoke of authority being delegated to the congregation.

Synod 2010 addressed this matter, among others, when it considered: "In the congregation only the consistory has governing authority to lead and make all decisions. The congregational meeting is not a second governing authority besides or over the consistory, but the consistory voluntarily agrees to respect the voice of the congregation, as expressed in Article 3 CO with the phrase that 'those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons. . .'" (Art. 176 cons. 3.9). This, however, does not address the point being made. Regardless of how the congregation's vote becomes authoritative, the fact remains that the Church Order adopted with common consent prescribes the appointment by the council of those elected by the congregation.

Synod 2010 also considered the following. "The Minority Report does not prove that the consistory with the deacons delegates a responsibility, or its authority when it gives the congregation the opportunity to elect men from those nominated for office. The statement in the Minority Report: 'Authority may be delegated by involving the congregation yet remains with the council of the congregation at all times,' is puzzling and confusing. The Minority Report does not give evidence that it is even possible for a consistory (with or without deacons) to delegate its God-given authority. It is at least foreign to Reformed church polity" (Art. 176 cons. 3.9).

Not only the statement in the Minority Report is puzzling and confusing, I find this consideration to be so as well. First of all, the idea of councils delegating God-given authority is not foreign to Reformed church polity, it is the foundation beneath broader assemblies.

However, given the remainder of consideration 3.9, what this consideration seems to want to say is that it is foreign to Reformed church polity for the congregation to have authority over the council. That too, is puzzling. For, if that is true, then Article 3 CO, when stating "those elected shall be appointed by the council. . .," itself states something foreign to Reformed church polity.

Clearly, Article 3 CO warrants closer scrutiny.

## The origins of Article 3 CO

Article 3 of the Canadian Reformed Church Order has its roots in four articles of the original Church Order of Dort, 1619 (hereafter: CO 1619). These four articles express the position held by the Dutch Reformed Churches in the early seventeenth century after some sixty years of Reformed church life in The Netherlands, Flanders, France, various places in Germany, and London.

Article 4 CO 1619 deals with the calling of a candidate to serve as a minister of the Word, and Article 5 with the calling of a minister of the Word already serving as such elsewhere. Neither article makes any reference to an election involving the congregation. The practice in those days was that congregation did not become involved until approbation (approval) for the ordination or installation was sought.

Article 22 CO 1619 deals with the calling to office of elders. It stipulates the following: "The elders shall be chosen by the judgment of the consistory and the deacons, so that every church shall be at liberty, according to its circumstances, to present to the congregation as many elders as are needed, that they may be ordained with public prayers and stipulations after being approved by and with the assent of the congregation, unless any obstacle arise; – or twice the number of elders needed may be presented, half of them to be chosen by the congregation, and ordained to office in the same manner, according to the [liturgical] form for this purpose."<sup>1</sup> Article 24 CO indicates that the same procedure is to be followed for calling deacons to office. The simple reading of this article would suggest that, if an election is held – and we note that an election is optional, not mandatory – the council would ordain those chosen by the congregation. However, it is worth noting that the council is not explicitly bound to the outcome of the election. Dr. F.L. Rutgers, a respected authority on Reformed church polity, is claimed to have said: "The consistory does not need to follow the choice of the congregation."<sup>2</sup>

In conclusion, CO 1619 does suggest the council appoint those chosen by the congregation if an election is held, but does not explicitly bind the council to this choice.



### Three approaches regulated

After the formation of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands with the Union of 1892, it was decided to thoroughly revise the church order. The revised church order was adopted by Synod Utrecht 1905, and is thus known as CO 1905. In North America, the Christian Reformed Churches adopted a revised church order in 1914, in content almost identical to CO 1905. Both these church orders have played a role in the drafting of our own church order.

With regard to Article 22 CO Dort, two revisions require attention. The first relates to the procedure for calling a person to office. CO 1619 does not mention the fact that the congregation be invited to submit to the council the names of brothers deemed suitable to serve in office. This was introduced into CO 1905. Thus a procedure of maximally six steps was created: (1) recommendations from within the congregation; (2) presentation by the council; (3) election by the congregation; (4) appointment by the council; (5) approbation by the congregation; and (6) ordination during a worship service. Article 22 CO 1905 indicates that steps (1), (2), and (3) are optional, while steps (4), (5), and (6) are mandatory.

A second revision is the wording of step (3). It now read: "or present a double number to the congregation and thereupon ordain the one-half chosen by it, in the aforesaid manner." Originally, election and ordination were referred to in two separate phrases. CO 1905 placed them in one single phrase. This slightly tighter formulation suggests that the council was considered bound to the outcome of the election.

In his 1923 commentary on the church order J. Jansen<sup>3</sup> explains the background to the first revision just mentioned. He indicates it was introduced "under the influence of the more democratic current of our time" (p. 97). He explains how in the history of the Dutch Reformed churches there have been three approaches to the procedure of calling to office.

The "more aristocratic approach" has the council appointing, the congregation approbating, and then the ordination. It was commonly practiced by the French churches.

The "more aristocratic-democratic approach" has the council presenting, the congregation electing, the council appointing, the congregation approbating, and then the ordination. It was commonly practiced by the churches in the southern Netherlands (Flanders and Zeeland).

The "more democratic approach" had the congregation recommending, the council electing and appointing, the congregation approbating, and then the ordination. It was practiced by the refugee congregation in London.

The "more democratic approach" bound the council to those recommended from within the congregation. Jansen notes that this approach was as much part and parcel of the Reformed tradition as the other two approaches. Hence it was used to legitimize the introduction of a more democratic approach into the procedure for calling brothers to office. As such, the second revision noted above would probably have been considered to be no more than a linguistic revision. For allowing the congregation to recommend names has its roots in a Reformed tradition in which the congregation exercises a measure of authority over the council.

When discussing the matter of women voting, Jansen sees voting as the exercising of general power to rule, in line with Voetius, a member of the Synod of Dort 1618-1619 and considered the father of Dort church polity. Because power is being exercised, it is an exercise of authority and the sisters are excluded from participation in the voting, Jansen explains.

Noteworthy is yet the following comment of Jansen in regards to the revised Article 22 CO: "The unity and clarity of this article has suffered from this [revision], but its intention can be understood. It begins with the more aristocratic ground pattern ... and then follow the more democratic manner, the more aristocratic manner, and the more aristocratic-democratic manner." (p. 97)

It would seem to me that in the existence of these three approaches we find the seeds for the present-day confusion on whether the Church Order allows females to participate in the voting for office bearers.

### Article 3 CO created

The next major revision of the Church Order undertaken in our church history is that which led to the adoption of CO 1978 in the "Liberated" Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and CO 1983 in our own churches. Though the two products are not as closely related as CO 1905 and CO 1914 are, the Dutch revision did influence the Canadian revision.

CO 1978 merged the election of elders and deacons into a single article, which became Article 20. With regards to the issue we are looking at, it stipulates: "The consistory shall allow the congregation to choose from a double number, and next appoint those chosen. . . . Alternatively the consistory shall present as many people as there are vacancies to be filled."

Two things are to be noted here. First, the order of mentioning "the more aristocratic-democratic approach" and "the more aristocratic approach" is reversed, indicating a preference for the former.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the council is bound to appointing those chosen. The sentence here reads, "The consistory shall

let the congregation choose from a double number and next appointed those chosen.”

In 1983 the Canadian Reformed Churches revised the church order to suit their needs. CO 1983 contains just one article on the calling to office, it applies to ministers, elders, and deacons. Here, the appointment to office is no longer a phrase or secondary sentence, but a sentence on its own, indeed, a separate paragraph: “Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons in accordance with the adopted regulations.” The phrase “in accordance with the adopted regulations” is an addition.

### In closing

The debate on women voting is heated, in part because of the stipulations of Article 3 CO. We have seen that having a clear church order is important, and reviewed the textual history of this article to

understand its intent. In the following instalment we will be looking at various aspects to the sentence in question, and suggest how it might be revised.

<sup>1</sup> Slightly revised translation of that found in C. Bouwman, *Spiritual Order in the Church*.

<sup>2</sup> Unauthorized lecture notes. Online via [www.kerkrecht.nl](http://www.kerkrecht.nl).

<sup>3</sup> Jansen has written several commentaries on the church order. In going from one commentary to the next, the commentaries become increasingly “synodical” (centralized). The 1923 commentary (red cover) is still free from “synodical” influence. Following the Liberation, it was so popular that it was reprinted in 1976. Interestingly, the same is true for the Church Order Commentary written by Van Dellen and Monsma. The first edition (red cover) has recently been republished to meet renewed demand.

<sup>4</sup> For documentation on the move from CO 1905 to CO 1978, see: [www.kerkrecht.nl](http://www.kerkrecht.nl) > bibliotheek > documentatie > Velde, M. te, ... Documentatieboek... > Artikel 20.



## Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

# CONVOCATION 2011

**September 9, 2011 at 8:00 p.m.**

You are invited to our 2011 convocation evening celebrating God's faithfulness in enabling us to commence a new academic year.

### Highlights of the program:

#### Speaker:

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam

*“The Gospel of the Priestly Blessing”*



#### M.Div. Graduates:

Abel Pol  
Justin Roukema  
Steven VandeVelde  
Ted VanSpronsen

#### Venue:

Auditorium of  
Redeemer University College  
Ancaster, Ontario

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### Open House:

An Open House to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> ministerial anniversary and retirement of Dr. C. Van Dam will be held Saturday, September 10, 2011 from 2:00 to 4:00 pm.

Venue: Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

# Retirement of Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar

## Retirement evening

The evening of June 17 found the Barrhead congregation and guests gathered to celebrate the retirement of Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar. Rev. R. Aasman opened the evening with the reading of Psalm 33 and then led in prayer. All those gathered then enjoyed a delicious dinner followed by an assortment of wonderful desserts. On behalf of Council, Br. C. Hamoen thanked Rev. Tiggelaar for his years of service and spoke of God's plan and hand in our lives and his purpose and calling for us in all stages of life.

A number of representatives from neighbouring congregations then came up to say a few words, complimenting Rev. Tiggelaar on his calm demeanor, unflappable ways, hospitality, excellent pastoral care, gift as peacekeeper, and even his ever-perfectly coifed hairstyle. The audience was also entertained with several humorous anecdotes. A couple of young members performed on the piano and Rev. Tiggelaar later praised their talent encouraging all young people to pursue musical study (perhaps even an organist or two?). The theme song from a pilot TV show called "The Tiggelaars" was performed, but this show was



*Getting there, Retiring, Retired.*

unfortunately edged out by a slightly more popular program called "The Brady Bunch." Rev. Aasman, Rev. Tiggelaar, and Rev. G. Wieske then took part in a Jeopardy-esque competition in the categories of "Hairstyles, The Four Horseman, Miscellaneous, History, and Music."

The Living Waters study group presented Rev. Tiggelaar with a beautiful painting depicting the former and present church buildings. They thanked him for his integral role within the congregation and wished him many blessings on his retirement. The congregation then presented Rev. Tiggelaar and his wife an AMA gift certificate and a few books on travel and cruises.

Rev. Tiggelaar took the podium and reflected on how his four years in Chilliwack and his soon-to-be thirty years in Barrhead passed so swiftly. He quoted the psalmist in saying that we are here today and then we are no more. He thanked the Lord for blessing him in his tasks, and for keeping him in good health throughout the years. He mentioned what







a blessing it was to see the growth in the Barrhead congregation and thanked all those who had spoken or performed and everyone for the love expressed. Mrs. Tiggelaar briefly spoke of Barrhead becoming their home and thanked the congregation for the love shown to them.

### Farewell sermon

On the afternoon of June 26, Rev. Tiggelaar preached his farewell sermon on Malachi 4 verse 2A: "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings." This verse is visually represented behind the pulpit. He

spoke of being in the Spirit's service; of not taking his strength from men's wisdom but from God's power. He encouraged the congregation to revere the Lord, prepare constantly for Christ's return, and live a life of thankfulness in the knowledge that our salvation comes only through him. Just as the earth cannot do without the literal sun, so our souls cannot do without the sun of righteousness. When living without faith, in arrogance and without "roots," the sun will strike down and man will wither. But those with faith and roots in God will grow and flourish. His rays will cover us with healing, redemption, and everlasting peace. Rev. Tiggelaar closed his sermon wishing the congregation strength and courage in the Lord as we await eternal life with him.

Rev. Louwse then spoke on behalf of Classis Alberta, thanking Rev. Tiggelaar for the tasks he has carried out, and his calm and reasoned manner. He wished the Reverend God's blessing on his retirement and quoted Hebrews 13 verse 20-21: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever."

The Barrhead congregation thanks Rev. and Mrs. Tiggelaar for their many years of service to the congregation and wishes them the Lord's blessings on Rev. Tiggelaar's retirement.

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# Orthodox Presbyterian Church Holds Seventy-Eighth General Assembly

From June 8-14, 2011 the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in conjunction with its Seventy-Eighth General Assembly, celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary at the Sandy Cove Conference Center in North East, Maryland. Since the CCCNA has previously reported on the special presentations for the seventy-fifth anniversary we share with you the following highlights of the assembly:

- The OPC grew by 1.51% in 2010 so that there are now 29,842 members.
- The online journal for office-bearers *Ordained Servant* is now in its twentieth year of publication.
- The Assembly approved the recommendation of the Psalter-Hymnal Special Committee to work with the URCNA Songbook Committee to produce a joint Psalter-Hymnal. The URCNA Songbook Committee had made this request of the OPC and it will be making the same request to their upcoming synod.
- The Home Mission Committee reported that while only four new churches were started in 2010, ten new works have already begun in 2011.
- The Foreign Missions Committee brought an update to the work the OPC is undertaking in the following countries: China, Ethiopia, Haiti, Japan, Uganda, Ukraine, and Uruguay. The work in Eritrea remains on hold after the missionaries were expelled from that country. Missionary work is also beginning to develop in North Korea. The Committee also supports the work of Rev. Ben Westerveld in the ERQ.
- The Committee on Diaconal Ministries brought an update on the diaconal disaster relief for the earthquake/tsunami disaster in Japan which brought new opportunities to advance the gospel. This committee reported that it has begun providing summits for the deacons of the OPC. It also hired its first Short-Term Missions Co-ordinator.
- The Committee for Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations reported on the state of relations it has with other churches through ecumenical contact, corresponding relationship or ecclesiastical fellowship. The Canadian Reformed Churches are among fifteen churches with which the OPC has ecclesiastical fellowship. Rev. Jack Sawyer spoke fondly of our relationship of the past decade as one



marked by "great rejoicing" over the progress we have made together. The OPC was saddened to hear that the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands (Liberated) have withdrawn their standing offer of ecclesiastical fellowship after the Seventy-eighth Assembly of the OPC decided not to accept that standing offer. The OPC remains committed to working towards EF with the RCN.

- The Report on the Committee of Appeals and Complaints was able to report with thankfulness that there were no appeals or complaints to the Seventy-eighth GA.
- The Report of the Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel reported that in the context of the repeal of "Don't Ask – Don't Tell" the OPC chaplains and personnel need prayer that they might humbly fear God rather than man.
- There was one overture before the assembly in which a presbytery asked for the assembly to send a special committee to help them work through a serious division. The assembly appointed such a committee.
- The Seventy-ninth General Assembly will be held, the Lord willing, at Wheaton College from June 6-12, 2012.

The above are but a few highlights of the Seventy-eighth General Assembly. We are thankful for the opportunity to share in the seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations, to have been present at this assembly, and to bring greetings on behalf of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. Please continue to keep the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in your prayers.

*On behalf of the CCCNA, Riemer Faber, convenor  
Doug Vandeburgt, secretary*







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# Technology - Blessing or Challenge?

What an exciting world in which to live! The gadgets and gizmos we have at our disposal to make our lives easier and minimize the distances between people around the world increases rapidly. Furthermore, many of them are a pleasure to learn to use and work with.

Years ago in the university classroom, a university professor shared his conviction that change would be a constant theme in our lives. The more years I spend in the classroom, the more convinced I am that such a perspective has indeed been accurate. One area in particular in which the pace and extent of change that we have had to face is technology. This article explores a number of questions surrounding the impact of technological change in our school's classrooms.

## Changing expectations

In any society, it has been and continues to be essential for children to learn skills relevant to the world in which they live. Years ago, a child growing up on a farm, as many children did, needed to know how to feed a calf or milk a cow, how to split wood or make a fire, how to collect eggs or make a meal from scratch. While learning and appreciating the importance of these lessons, these children also learned to read, to write, and to develop mathematical literacy. Critical skills that they needed to master included developing neat penmanship and accurate spelling, memorizing sizeable portions of literature, organizing information in binders and books, expressing thoughts clearly and fluently orally and in writing, and listening attentively to and understanding lengthy presentations (think of political debates, sermons, and hours-long speeches that were common). But today, it would seem that many skills that students were previously taught in the educational system are no longer quite as relevant as they once were.

## Consequences

Life has changed; the world of yesterday is quickly disappearing and is being replaced with a world in which technological developments have made a profound impact. The consequences of technological progress for today's youth are far more profound than might initially meet the eye. Consider the following examples of areas in which change is very evident.

How long can people maintain focus? It appears that in general the ability to focus on a particular task has significantly diminished in the last few decades. This is evident in the advertising industry: there has been a relentless increase in the number of different images that are presented in a single commercial on television. It is also evident in the corporate boardroom or the school classroom: PowerPoint presentations need to be increasingly high-powered in order to retain people's interest. There is hardly time any more for a quiet and sustained focus on something that takes time to absorb; today people are used to being bombarded with highly stimulating and ever-changing images. Students share how they do their homework: they read their textbook, text their friends, analyze what they have read, Facebook with acquaintances near and far, write a few sentences about what they have read, play an online game like Angry Birds, and then consider their homework complete. Multi-tasking happens more and more frequently, with the consequence that the skill of focusing for a set period of time on a particular task is not being developed. Multi-tasking is considered a very valuable skill to have. Give the trend we have been observing in the last few decades a bit more time, and where will this lead? Will most people still be able to focus as necessary on tasks requiring sustained focus?

Previously students were expected to memorize content. But that has changed as well: information



retention is rapidly become significantly less important than previously; what matters now is someone's ability to retrieve or discover information. We do not need to have all the facts stored in our heads as long as we are able to access it quickly. That is true not just for students in the classroom; people in the work force operate the same way. A doctor, for example, in practice might no longer need to have hundreds of drugs memorized as the right solution to a particular problem; his smart phone or equivalent will confirm his best guess or provide a responsible alternative. How many people do not search for answers on their phone or computer by Googling it, or asking Cha-Cha? The convenience of these types of search engines ensures that they will remain with us for a long time to come.

Societal expectations regarding spelling and grammar are rapidly changing. Schools are left with the unenviable task of trying to convince skeptical audiences that spelling and grammar really matters, even though regular forms of communication have been pushing downwards any expectations in these regards. The texting (can you believe it: my spell-checker did not recognize that word!) phenomenon is the quintessential example that highlights the irrelevance of spelling and grammar conventions. It is indeed difficult to peer into the future to see what will be the implications of this phenomenon in other areas of the written word.

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*We cannot look in the rearview mirror  
for guidance as we prioritize  
curriculum needs and other tasks in  
the coming years for our schools*

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Remember those projects that were normal in school just twenty short years ago? Sometimes they involved literal cutting and pasting, sometimes they demanded coloring, and always they demanded an attentiveness to physically manipulating things so that organization and neatness were evident. Today, children are increasingly adept at using computers, and accomplish most of these tasks in profoundly different ways. It appears no longer to be quite as important to teach a child how to use scissors or crayons; today just the mouse needs to be manipulated. That might impact the need to develop some aspects of fine motor control.

As these examples indicate, technology has changed not only communication patterns and methods, but is also impacting what society considers

important. It becomes evident that in the area of technology, we cannot look in the rearview mirror for guidance as we prioritize curriculum needs and other tasks in the coming years for our schools. What people considered important previously is no longer equally relevant for today. Current youth, known as the "net generation," are far more technologically astute than previous teens. The evolving consequences for our youth are being debated in a wide variety of forums.

## Questions

That begs some important questions. I believe it is fair to say that in most of our Reformed schools we have curriculum which is fairly content-rich. Is it appropriate to maintain such a focus? Why or why not? Consider as an example the history area of the curriculum from the school I serve. From third grade to sixth grade, our history program is based on Veritas history cards. We are hoping to lay a foundation (=content) of broad brush strokes of the flow of history. During the higher grades, much more information is added to that foundation. Tests given in high school provide students an opportunity to show that they have absorbed the content presented in class, and that they understand the correlations between ideas and events, or one event and the next. Other schools or programs might focus more on other areas of curriculum, and attach much less importance on content. One might ask what is the value of learning content when current society does not place as much importance on "knowing stuff" as previously? Schools – Christian or otherwise – might well wish to make the case that we ought to know our history, but that is clearly going against the predominant current cultural grain.

It is much easier to ask questions in this area than to provide concrete answers. Since technology is changing rapidly and will continue to impact every area of our lives we need to be seriously grappling with questions surrounding technology. As Reformed Christians, we cannot like Luddites retreat into some little world that does not recognize technological advances related to communications. Rather, we need to work diligently to ensure that technology remains a communications tool rather than a means to an end in itself. As Christians who embrace the Word and who worship the Word (John 1), we are going to have to remain deliberately counter-cultural to some degree, however challenging that might be. The preaching of the Word, the understanding of the Word, and the living out of the Word demand continued focus on skills such as reading, retaining, focusing, and listening. If

we fail to provide an education that enables children to develop those foundational skills, which are admittedly not considered mainstream or “cool” by much of the culture around us, then the generational transfer of love for God’s Word and his service will likely be even more difficult than previously. For example, if we address classroom management concerns primarily by enhancing teacher presentations technologically, in the end we might not have done our students as much of a service as we originally believed. (To be sure: much more is going on than addressing classroom management problems when technology is used successfully in the classroom; the goal is to successfully engage the students in learning worthwhile material.) To underline that thought, consider a parallel statement related to Sunday worship services: if we address congregational apathy by enhancing preacher presentations technologically, in the end what have we done?

*We need to work diligently to ensure that technology remains a communications tool rather than a means to an end in itself*

The Christian life is characterized by knowledge, self-control, focus, and consistent practice. Are those characteristics more likely to be developed in traditional classroom environments as opposed to environments in which students (or parishioners) are texting each other rather than focusing on active listening? How will technology really help our students to know what they need to know in life? (And that is not touching the question of what it means “to know” in the context of the educational setting – to what extent is “knowing” related to content and to what extent is “knowing” related primarily to process and practice?) The cultivation of skills and dispositions related to self-control, focus, and consistent practice need to remain a predominant concern as technology continues to make its high-powered advance. Consider the growing popularity of activities such as yoga meditation in our society. Is that in some way perhaps a response to a growing societal need because of technological developments?

Which is all to ask: Are we really comfortable with the way in which technology is used – or not used – in our schools? Are we using technology deliberately in a particular way for particular outcomes, or are we being swept along by the popular current and forgetting to ask ourselves and each other hard questions? The changing character and role of technology in our school societies is a good one for our communities to grapple with in deliberate ways.

*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](mailto:obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us).*





# Upholding God’s Sovereignty: Using our Confessions to Close the Door on Open Theism

By Rick Vanderhorst

As I come across people from other denominations and study at a Christian university, I find myself frequently encountering a teaching called Open Theism. Open Theism, also called the openness of God, or Process Theology, teaches among other things that God is not in control of all things, he does not know the future, and sometimes takes risks. Maybe it is only my experience, but I’ve found that this teaching is becoming more popular and you may encounter it sometime in the near future. One thing we should note about Open Theism is that it is not a small matter but a major doctrinal error regarding the nature of God. It conflicts what we confess about God in the Apostle’s Creed as is explained in the Heidelberg Catechism. For instance, in Lord’s Day 10 we read that *all* things come to us not by chance but by God’s fatherly hand, and that without his will, no creature can so much as move.

Any time we are dealing with doctrine surrounding the Apostles’ Creed we want to be particularly careful. The Catechism calls the Apostles’ Creed a summary of the gospel, making these articles essential to our faith. That is also why the Lord’s Days concerning the Apostles’ Creed (LD 8-22) are sandwiched with two Lord’s Days about true faith (LD 7 & 25). It is good to realize that this is an important topic, but one should

still display prudence when engaging someone who believes in the openness of God. Just what is the proper way to discuss this matter?

First, there should be a realization of where other people might be coming from. I recently came across a website where someone described Calvinism as a “fatalistic puppet theology.”<sup>1</sup> I was taken aback by this statement as it is seriously mistaken, but it may give us a clue of where an Open Theist is coming from. If you were not Reformed and your idea of God’s sovereignty was shaped by statements like these, you would have your doubts about accepting the providence of God too. Added to this, in a recent discussion I had with a non-Christian about Calvinism, this person made some negative statements about God’s justice in light of our confession that God does not choose everyone to salvation. Finally, in an article published a number of years ago in the *Vancouver Sun*, one man explains how he adopted the Open Theist view point after he witnessed his brother’s death in a car crash, since he could not reconcile this event with God’s sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> Difficult situations in a person’s past can create doubts in a person’s mind when it comes to God’s providence and we should realize this when we talk about this doctrine.



A great idea in these situations is to point people to our confessions. These doctrinal issues have been around before and sometimes have prompted confessions to be made in the first place. One thing we should note about our confessions is the humble tone they take towards the God's providence, which is an attitude we should all cultivate towards this topic. Take for example Article 13 of the Belgic Confession: "As to his actions surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire farther than our capacity allows us. But with the greatest humility we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us. . . ." Taking examples from the confessions is a good idea because then people know they are getting the real Reformed teaching. Our confessions express these doctrines so wonderfully and reading from them can help a person get past misconceptions of what the sovereignty of God entails. If someone holds the viewpoint taken from that website, I can point him or her to the back of the Canons of Dort where the churches reject the idea that God's providence "makes [him] the author of sin, an unjust tyrant and hypocrite." Or to the person crying out against God's justice, I can read Article 16 of the Belgic Confession, which explains how God remains just in his electing grace.

Aside from dispelling wrong ideas about God's sovereignty, one should also go on the offensive and demonstrate the comfort this doctrine brings to God's people. Sometimes the sovereignty of God seems like a scary proposition for us who want to be in control, but in reality, the opposite is true. Aside from dealing with the fundamentals of who God is, Open Theism ultimately puts salvation in question. If God is not in control, persevering in our faith is in now in our hands leaving us with little comfort of making it through the trials of life. Take for example Article 3 in the fifth chapter of the Canons of Dort, "Because of. . . indwelling sin. . . temptations of the world and of Satan, those who have been converted could not persevere in that grace (of God) if left to their own strength. But God, who is faithful, mercifully confirms them in the grace once conferred upon them and powerfully preserves them in that grace to the end." People with no confessional background are often delighted with statements such as this since they have never had the foundation many of us have through our church's instruction. With this in mind, let us be all the more eager to share it with them.

There are many examples in the Bible that one can point people to in order to demonstrate the riches of this doctrine. Joseph was abused by his brothers and wrongfully put into prison for a long time, and yet God was working through it all for the good of many as even

Joseph was able to confess (Gen 45:1-8). That is where one can point the man who witnessed his brother's terrible death, and it should bring us comfort too in the difficult trials we go through. But ultimately, point people to the cross of Jesus Christ. When evil men were busy arresting and putting Jesus to death, God was working also, mysteriously and wonderfully, intending that his only son should suffer the death we deserved to die in order to bring us to God (Acts 2:23, 3:17-18, 4:27-28). That should always be our focus when questions about the sovereignty of God come up: the cross of Jesus Christ. The whole of the Old Testament foreshadows and builds up to this climactic point in history which God brought about for our redemption. If he so willed and worked the death of his beloved Son for us, will he not also ensure that Christ's death was not in vain and equally work everything for our salvation? When talking with someone with these views, or to each other for that matter, show these things to them, and do it with your confessions in hand.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Berean Christian Bible Study Resources*, "Romans 9: Paul's attitude towards unsaved Israel," <http://www.bcbstr.com/books/rom9.html>

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Todd, "The future is not clear, even for God," *The Vancouver Sun*, August 30, 2008, [www.canada.com/vancouver/news/story.html?id=27b272c9-5cfc-4c0b-bdc3-f6f0c6ef874b](http://www.canada.com/vancouver/news/story.html?id=27b272c9-5cfc-4c0b-bdc3-f6f0c6ef874b)

<sup>3</sup> A number of the ideas in this article were inspired by Rev. Bouwman's lecture series on the Belgic Confession at the *Reformed Bible College* in the Spring of 2010, and by a blog entry on John Piper's web page *Desiring God* regarding God's sovereignty and the cross of Jesus Christ, though I can no longer find the entry.

