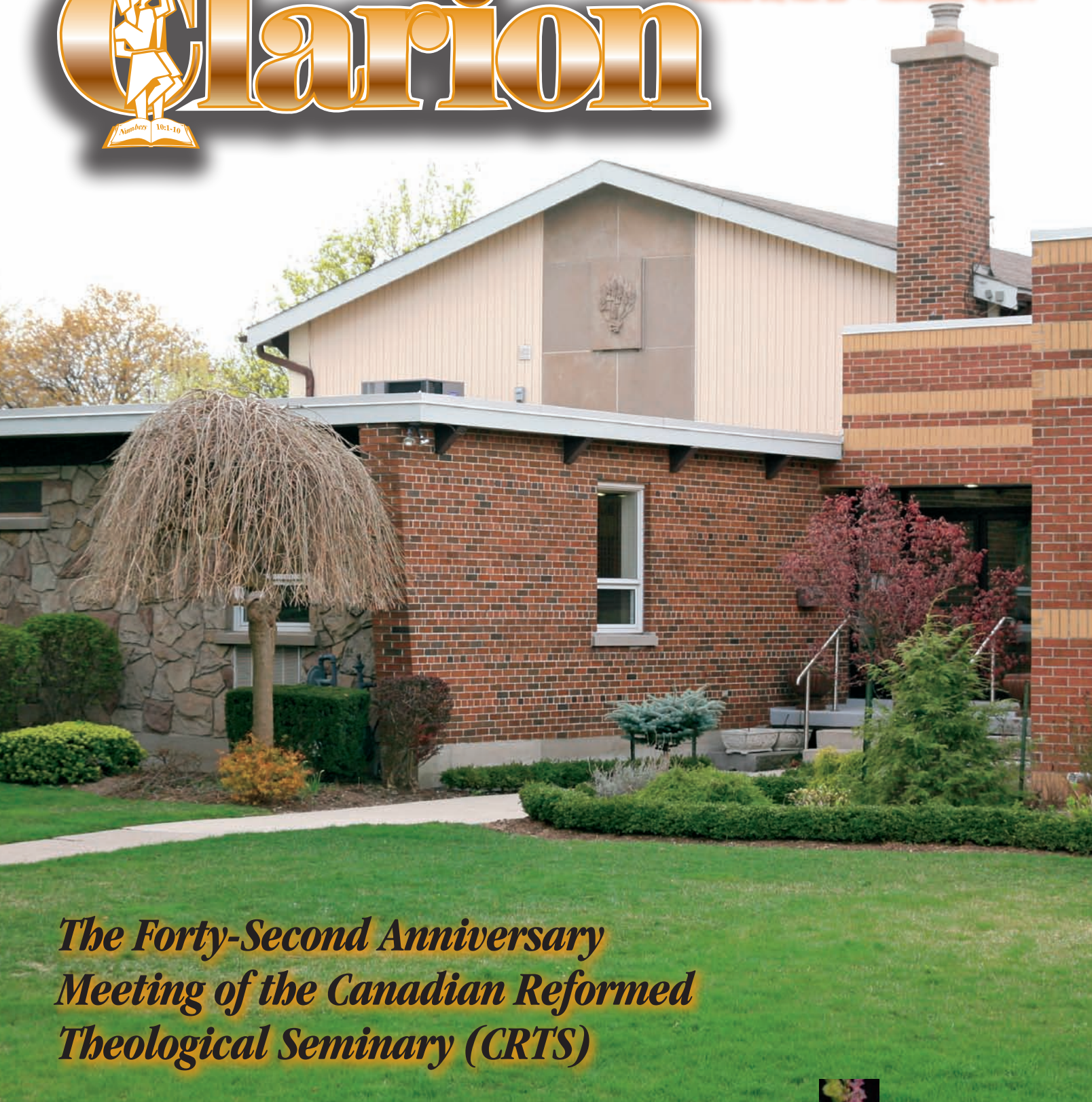


Clarion



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The Forty-Second Anniversary Meeting of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

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- The King of Peace





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The Means of Grace

Baptizing and teaching are the means by which disciples are made

Every trade, profession, or even hobby has its specialized terms. It is not necessarily the case that they use unique words. Most often words are simply used in a unique way. A person who wants to pursue a profession, trade, or hobby will have to become familiar with the terms.

This is no different in the life of the church. There is a specialized use of words and terms. A person who wants to learn about the gospel has to take the time to become familiar with the way words and terms are used.

When it comes to understanding the terms used in the life of the church, one would expect that this should present little problem for those born and raised in the church. In the same way that children learn much language by simply listening to others talk, those born and raised in the church can be expected to learn much by simply listening to others. In addition, just as children have opportunity to learn to become more precise in their language through the years of elementary and high school education, so church members have the opportunity to learn to become more precise through the years of church education in catechism classes and weekly preaching.

It is not unusual to discover, however, that people are not familiar with basic words and phrases. One such phrase is "the means of grace." This should be a most familiar term to the ears of every believer.

Meaning

When we use the word "means" in the phrase, "means of grace," it refers to a medium, method, or instrument used to accomplish a certain purpose. We use it in situations where someone proposes a great project or perhaps a very expensive trip. We might ask, "Do you have the means to do that?" We want to know how they intend to accomplish their goals.

Use of means in our physical life

From Scripture we learn that our God is a God who uses means to accomplish his purpose. We see it in our physical life. For example, we acknowledge that God creates new life in the womb of a mother. This does not just happen. He does that through the sexual relationship between husband and wife.

Another example is the way we acknowledge that God gives us health and strength. Again, this does not just happen. There is actually a very long process involving cultivating the earth, planting crops, harvesting, cooking of food, and finally eating food.

Use of means in our spiritual life

Just as God uses means for our physical life, this is also true for our spiritual life. This is why we speak of the means of "grace," that is, the means by which God accomplishes his gracious plan of saving those he has chosen from before the foundation of the world. Most basically, this involves the sending of his only Son into the world and him dying on the cross, rising on the third day, and ascending into heaven. We can say that we are saved by means of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

The term "means of grace," however, is not used in connection with the role of our Lord Jesus Christ in our salvation. Rather, the term is used to describe the process by which God makes his children share in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ so they may escape punishment and receive eternal life. This does not just happen. It is not immediate, that is, without the use of means, but it is mediate, that is, God employs certain means.

That God uses means to accomplish his plan of saving sinners is clearly taught in Scripture. We see it in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). There we read how the Lord Jesus sent the disciples into the world to make disciples of all nations. That passage



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is often misunderstood as if the Lord Jesus gave three commands, namely, to make disciples, then to baptize, and then to teach all he had commanded them. A careful reading of the passage shows that the command is to make disciples. Our Lord did not continue to give two more commands but he told them how to do this, namely, by baptizing and by teaching. Baptizing and teaching are the means by which disciples are made.

God's use of means is also stressed by Paul in his letter to the Romans. Of particular significance are his words found in Romans 10:14-17,

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? . . .Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

It should be noted that Paul placed the emphasis not on reading the word but hearing the word preached, by official ambassadors.

We see this same emphasis on the preached word in 1 Peter 1:23-25, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. . . and this is the word that was preached to you."

What's Inside

Issue 23 is our annual College Issue, featuring reports and speeches from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary's Convocation ceremony in September. In this issue you will find a Convocation Report from Rev. Richard Aasman, the chairman of the Seminary's Board of Governors; the Principal's Report from Dr. Gerhard Visscher, and a report from Women's Savings Action.

The article featured in our College Issue is from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, who spoke at Convocation about The Gospel of the Priestly Blessing. This keynote speech was a special event in that it coincides with Dr. Van Dam's retirement after thirty years as professor of Old Testament at the Seminary. Readers will continue to see Dr. Van Dam's writing in his regular editorials in *Clarion*.

Issue 23 also includes an editorial from Rev. Eric Kampen on the term "means of grace," a Remembrance Day themed Treasures New and Old meditation, a letter to the editor, and a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

The use of the means of grace in the confessions

The use of means is repeatedly stressed in the Reformed confessions. It is mentioned in Article 2 of the Belgic Confession. There it is confessed that God has revealed himself to us by two means, namely, his creation and his Word. The Word is stated to be critical in that it teaches us all we need to know for God's glory and our salvation. The extensive treatment of the Word of God in the Belgic Confession reflects the renewed emphasis in the Great Reformation on the Word of God as the chief means by which God works faith.

In the Heidelberg Catechism we come across it a number of times, even though the term "means" is not used. For example, in Lord's Day 7, Answer 21 it is confessed that it is "the Holy Spirit (who) works faith in my heart by the gospel." In Lord's Day 25, Answer 65 it is confessed that faith comes "from the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments." The combination of Word and sacrament brings to mind the Great Commission.

It also receives extensive attention in the Canons of Dort. It is most significant that the Canons, while explaining salvation in terms of God's eternal election, also show how God uses the means of grace to accomplish his purpose. It is mentioned repeatedly to guard against misunderstanding and misuse of the doctrine of election and to give encouragement and direction to all who hear the call of the gospel to believe in Jesus Christ. Three articles in particular stand out.

In the first place, there is Article 16 in Chapter I. This is in the midst of the discussion about reprobation, the doctrine that God has not elected some to salvation but instead, God decreed to leave them in the common misery (Art 15). Most striking are the words of Article 16,

Some do not yet clearly discern in themselves a living faith in Christ, an assured confidence of heart, peace of conscience, a zeal for childlike obedience, and a glorying in God through Christ; nevertheless, they *use the means* through which God has promised to work these things in us. They ought not to be alarmed when reprobation is mentioned, nor to count themselves among the reprobate. Rather, they must diligently *continue in the use of these means*, fervently desire a time of more abundant grace, and expect it with reverence and humility. . . .

God's use of means receives the fullest treatment in Chapter III/IV as it explains the way God works conversion. We read in Article 17,

The almighty working of God whereby he brings forth and sustains this our natural life *does not exclude but requires the use of means*, by which he according to his infinite wisdom and goodness has willed to exercise his power. So also the aforementioned supernatural working of God whereby he regenerates us, in no way excludes or cancels *the use of the gospel*, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul. For this reason the apostles and the teachers who succeeded them, reverently instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to his glory and to the abasement of all pride. In the meantime, however, they did not neglect to keep them, by the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline. So today those who give or receive instruction in the church should not dare to tempt God by separating what he in his good pleasure has willed to be closely joined together. For *grace is conferred* through admonitions, and the more readily we do our duty, the more this favour of God, who works in us, usually manifests itself in its lustre, and so his work best proceeds. . . .

The mention of discipline seems an addition but it makes sense when it is kept in mind that discipline is the application of the gospel to the particular situations of life for believers. We should also note the call to honour God's way of working through these means to accomplish his work of grace by faithfully using them.

The third reference is found Chapter V, dealing with the perseverance of the saints. We read in Article 14, "Just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the preaching of the gospel, so he maintains, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of his Word, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and by the use of the sacraments."

Conclusion: use the means!

The phrase, "the means of grace," should be a familiar part of our faith language, immediately making us think of the way God uses the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, as well as discipline, to accomplish his gracious work of salvation. It helps us understand the importance of the ministry of the church, both in our own lives and in the efforts to reach others. It also encourages us faithfully to use the means of grace, for "the more readily we do our duty, the more this favour of God, who works in us, usually manifests itself in its lustre, and so his work best proceeds. . . ."





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MATTHEW 13:52

The King of Peace

"He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth." Zechariah 9:10

At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918 the guns went silent on the Western Front, bringing to an end the First World War. And now we annually remember the thousands of Canadians who died in both world wars, and other wars since.

One year after the end of World War I, U.S. President Wilson came to a peace conference in Paris bearing his peace plan for the world which included military disarmament. This conference resulted in the Treaty of Versailles, which helped give rise to dictators like Mussolini and Hitler. Even though British Prime Minister Chamberlain returned from meeting Hitler saying "There is peace for our time," another world war began within less than a year. After World War II, plans for world peace were made again, this time under the auspices of the United Nations. But again the peace of this world has been seriously punctured and shredded by other conflicts.

Jesus Christ did say that nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. But just when will the end to war come and lasting world peace arrive? Will there be a time when we will no longer remember those fallen in war?

The time is coming! So God said through Zechariah: "I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war horses from Jerusalem and the battle bow will be broken" (9:10). He spoke these words about peace in a world also torn by war. The Babylonian empire had been defeated by the empire of the Medes and Persians and God's people had returned home after seventy years

of exile. Like all the empires before it, this empire would also face conquest. As Zechariah indicates at the beginning of chapter 9, God's judgment is coming on the nations surrounding Israel, such as Syria and Philistia.

As God's instrument of judgment, Alexander the Great conquered these nations with bloodshed. Was Jerusalem, the place where God lived among his people, conquered too? The Lord God said: "I will defend my house against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch" (v. 8).

Our Canadian military forces have been instruments in the service of the Lord God of heaven and earth. They helped in the defeat of great forces of evil and tyranny such as Nazism and Communism. We as church have greatly benefited from the sacrifices of many Canadian soldiers, sailors, and airmen. Because of their contributions in war and battle, we may live in peace in a free country. Each Lord's day we are able to hear the message of lasting peace. But who is the King who makes this possible, who protects his church in the midst of war and conflict?

Zechariah points to a far greater King who will bring real and lasting peace. This King of peace, our Lord Jesus Christ, rode into Jerusalem not on a war horse, but a donkey! This already shows his peace-loving intentions. With this King there is complete disarmament. As the Lord said, "I will take away the chariots from Ephraim, and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow

will be broken." These weapons of war will be removed completely.

This does not mean that Jesus Christ condemns war. God's Word says there is a place for a just war, for the government does not bear the sword in vain. They must defend the peace and freedom of our country. But the Lord speaks of removing all weapons of war, to show that the kingdom he rules is not of this world. As Jesus would say later to Pilate: "If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews." Rather, this kingdom comes by the preaching of God's Word. Jesus Christ proclaims peace to the nations, for he made peace through his blood, shed on the cross. May the peace of Christ rule in our hearts!

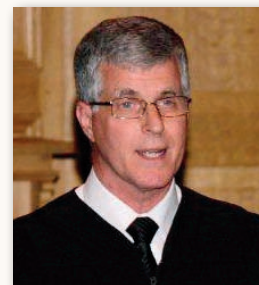
Indeed, the rule of Jesus Christ in our everyday lives will not be brought about by guns, bombs, and mines but by the Spirit of peace. And "his rule will extend from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." His rule is not just over Canada, but over all nations. This rule of peace is expanding, even as there are wars and rumours of war. When Christ returns there will be no more wars. Then all the chariots, war horses, and bows will be taken away forever!

On November 11, let us observe a minute of silence and remember those Canadians who have died in the wars of the past century. More importantly, let us always remember the Prince of peace, Jesus Christ. Believe in his proclamation of peace and live under his reign of peace! Look forward to when his kingdom of peace will come in all its fullness and glory.





Richard Aasman



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Report of the Forty-Second Anniversary Meeting and Thirty-Seventh Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

College evening

The first week of September turned out to be a busy time at our Theological Seminary, even though lectures had not yet started. Professors and staff were busy preparing for the start of new academic year. New students were arriving and getting acquainted with the building, staff, and fellow students. Soon the governors arrived for their meetings. This included meetings of committees that were set up for working toward gaining accreditation by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). This accreditation process promises to be a busy, lengthy, but ultimately rewarding experience. All this activity at the seminary would reach a climax at the convocation that took place on Friday evening, September 9, 2011.

Once again Redeemer University College proved to be a great venue for our convocation. Our organist was Tony Spithoff. We also had a wonderful musical ensemble that played during the collection (the collection was for the CRTS annual conference). The music and singing contributed to the joyful spirit that was clearly experienced by everyone present. The evening was opened by the chairman of the Board, Rev. Richard Aasman, who read Numbers 6:22-27 and led in prayer. At every convocation, several letters of congratulations and appreciation from the churches are read. Most of the letters were from churches in Australia which showed the love and support of our

sister churches for our seminary. Of course, sending students from Australia to the seminary and receiving ministers in return certainly strengthens that bond.

A special welcome was given to Rev. Thomas and Genevieve Reid. Rev. Reid is librarian and registrar of Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary and is assisting our seminary as we seek accreditation with ATS.

The principal of the seminary, Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher, presented an interesting principal's report. You can read the entire report elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. As I watched Dr. Visscher walk over to the podium and open his folder, I saw that he would read his report from an iPad. This was not surprising considering that our seminary remains current in the use of modern technology. Dr. Visscher mentioned the new students to the seminary: Johan Bruintjes of Denver, CO, Rick VanderHorst of Langley, BC, Steve Van Leeuwen of Neerlandia, AB, Gerard Veurink of Coaldale, AB, and Randall Visscher of Langley, BC. Willy Mudenge, originally from Burundi, eastern Africa, was admitted to the Bachelor of Theology program.

The keynote speaker for the evening was Dr. C. Van Dam. Since Dr. Van Dam has recently retired from his position as Professor of Old Testament, it seemed fitting that he would speak at this convocation. His address was entitled, "The Gospel of the Priestly Blessing." His focus was on Numbers 6:22-27. You can

read this address elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. It was clear that the audience appreciated a vintage Van Dam speech. Immediately after the address, Dr. J. Van Vliet presented a Festschrift to Dr. Van Dam, entitled, *Living Waters from Ancient Springs: Essays in Honor of Cornelis Van Dam*. (A review of this book can be found in *Clarion*, Issue 21).

Since our Seminary is ultimately about training men for the ministry of the Word, as always, the highlight of the convocation was the graduation of students. It was, therefore, with great gratitude to God that we witnessed the conferring of the degree of Master of Divinity on Abel Pol, Justin Roukema, Steve VandeVelde, and Ted VanSpronsen. A Diploma of Missiology was also conferred *in absentia* on Rev. Tim Sikkema. A word of thanks was expressed by one of the graduating students, Ted VanSpronsen. The assembly responded with a rousing singing of Psalm 134:1 and 3.

The Women's Savings Action, represented by Joanne Van Dam and Chris Nienhuis, presented a pledge for \$35,000.00 for the coming year. Dinie Gootjes is also a member of the WSA committee but was not present because she was in The Netherlands with her husband Dr. N.H. Gootjes. You can read the WSA report elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. The devotion of the WSA to the seminary, and the money collected, is much appreciated!

Rev. J. Ludwig led in closing prayer. In the opening and closing prayers we remembered the unique situations of the J. DeJong, J. Geertsema, and N. Gootjes families, along with sister K. Deddens in The Netherlands and sister W. Faber in Hamilton.

As is customary, the assembly concluded with the singing of "O Canada." The program was completed shortly before 10 pm which gave the audience ample opportunity to congratulate the graduates afterwards. It was also a time of good fellowship, and of renewing friendships and acquaintances. You are welcome to view a video version of the College evening at www.canadianreformedseminary.ca.

Open house

On Saturday afternoon, at the CRTS chapel room, there was an open house for meeting Dr. Cornelis and Sr. Joanne Van Dam on the occasion of our brother's retirement. Our brother has served in the ministry for forty years, of which thirty years were spent as Professor of Old Testament at the CRTS. He will be missed. Thankfully he has a capable replacement in Dr. Jannes Smith as Professor of Old Testament. The seminary community presented Brother and Sister Van Dam with a 50 CD collection of baroque music. Several letters of congratulations were also read. One thing is clear: the change in Dr. Van Dam's life might better be described as a transition than retirement. Our brother has lots of plans and will stay active in the churches. We are deeply thankful for what the Lord God has given us in Dr. Van Dam and for the support of his wife. It was a beautiful afternoon.

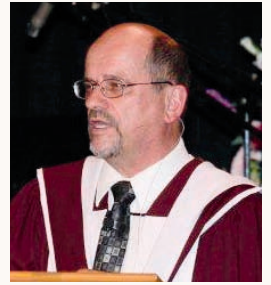
It is our hope and prayer that the Lord will bless the professors, students, and supporting staff of the seminary with health and wisdom as they work together for the glory of God and his church during the 2011/2012 academic year.



Prof. J. Geertsema, Dr. A. de Visser, Dr. G. Visscher, Dr. J. Van Vliet, Dr. J. Smith, Dr. C. Van Dam



Principal's Report 2010 – 2011



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In the life of a seminary, the really important activity is of course always the work of students and professors as they apply themselves to the task of determining what exactly it is that future pastors need to know, and the process of delivering and acquiring that knowledge. Building knowledge, forming character, developing skills – this is the heart of seminary life. For this we give thanks to our gracious God year after year.

That does not mean that there is not something characteristic about every year. And if we ask what was unique about this one, there are a few factors.

Departure of a colleague

One was the absence of a very familiar face. After thirty years of faithfully labouring at the Seminary, the absence of Dr. Van Dam did certainly not go unnoticed. On October 10 of this year, he will have served in the ministry for forty years, thirty of those at the seminary – something that we commemorated last January when CRTS sponsored its First Annual CRTS Conference; many colleagues and students of Dr. Van Dam were invited to participate by way of lectures and by way of submissions to a volume that has now been published in the volume called *Living Waters from Ancient Springs*. For an Old Testament professor that number forty may have a ring of completeness about it, but it still seems unreal that he is no longer on the teaching staff. Officially we hope to say farewell to him tomorrow afternoon from 2 - 4 at the seminary – you are all invited. We thank God for you, brother. And we thank your wife for being such a wonderful assistant to you all these years. May the Lord bless you both as you now officially enter this new stage of retirement.

Arrival of another

The absence of one person is often softened by the arrival of another. Even though Dr. Jannes Smith had moved as far from the Seminary as he possibly could way down under in Albany, Australia, his abilities and expertise were sufficiently well known

for us to want to retrieve him, and in the past year already the students have tasted something of both his abilities and expertise. It is great to have you among us, brother. And when we take note of your age, we are optimistic that under God's providence the Old Testament department will be in good shape again for several decades to come. We also note with gratitude the publication of our brother's dissertation (*Translated Hallelujahs: A Linguistic and Exegetical Commentary on Select Septuagint Psalms*. Peeters, 2011). May the Lord continue to bless you and your wife in your new significant role among us.

We cannot write about the departure and arrival of members of the college community without thinking of the passing on of our dear sister Anneke Geertsema to glory. We thank the Lord for her and for what she has meant to our brother and his family, and pray that he will continue to care for our brother Geertsema. He along with Br. and Sr. DeJong, Sr. Faber, and Br. and Sr. Gootjes continue to be in our prayers in the knowledge that unless our Lord tarries much longer, a time of departure (Phil 1:22-23) is inevitable for each of us.

Travels

Every year we are busy not only with the regular instruction of seminary students, but we also get out either to disseminate something of what we know or to acquire more knowledge ourselves. To that end, here's a list of where we've been:

Dr. J. Van Vliet

1. Spoke on September 30, 2010 at Covenant Teacher's College Lecture Series, Hamilton, ON; on "Kingdom of God and the Image of God"
2. Spoke on October 14-16, 2010 at Sixteenth Century Society & Conference (SCSC), Montreal, QC on "Specious Pacification and Pleasant Consensus: Calvin's Ecumenical Efforts in 1549"
3. Spoke on October 22, 2010 at Reformation Rally, Listowel, ON on "The Reformed Re-formation of Man"

4. Spoke on October 29, 2010 at Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association Convention, Orangeville, ON on "Godly Discipline in the Home, Church, and School"

Dr. A.J. De Visser

1. Spoke at Reformation Rally, Ancaster, October 2010: "Peace to Those Near and Far: Reflections on the Mission Mandate A.D. 2010"
2. Spoke on evangelism at various meetings (Glanbrook ON, Lisbon NY)
3. Attended Gospel Coalition Conference, Chicago, April 12-14, 2011
4. Spoke at URC Ministers conference, Grand Rapids, May 14, 2011; topic: the minister's role in evangelism
5. June 24-28, 2011: Evaluation visit to mission work in Prince George BC for the sending church of Smithers BC
6. Scheduled for July 2011: Visit to churches in Australia, speeches on evangelism; also a speech at office-bearers conference on preaching
7. Scheduled for first week of August 2011: Visit to mission work in Port Moresby and Lae, PNG, with presentations at the Bible College in Port Moresby.

Dr. G.H. Visscher

1. Spoke at a number of Deacon's Conferences on "The Office of Deacon" (Brantford, Lincoln)
2. Travelled to Singapore to speak on "Justification in the 21st Century," and on "James contra Paul?" October 21, 22, 2010
3. Spoke at the meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta, Georgia, on "The Epistle of James: Justification or Sanctification?" November 17, 2010.

Students

At the previous convocation, the degree of Master of Divinity was conferred on six students. (Mr. Ryan Kampen is still awaiting the appropriate paperwork which will allow him to be ordained as the pastor of the American Reformed Church of Denver, Colorado, Mr. Tony Roukema has since become the pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church of St. Albert, Alberta, Mr. Tim Sikkema is serving as a missionary in Lae, Papua New Guinea, Mr. Jason VandeBurgt is working in a machine shop and serving as an elder in Fergus, ON, Mr. Sean Wagenaar is exploring mission possibilities in Australia, and Mr. Arend Witten is serving as pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church of Vernon, B.C.)



Tonight we may present you with four more students for the Master of Divinity degree, Abel Pol, Justin Roukema, Steve VandeVelde, and Ted Van Spronsen. Abel Pol is completing a pastoral training program in Fergus South; Justin Roukema is awaiting a call; Steve VandeVelde is preparing for the classical preparatory examination in order to become eligible for call, and Ted VanSpronsen has accepted a call to pastor the Free Reformed Church at Busselton, Western Australia.

Tonight Mr. Tim Sikkema also receives the Diploma of Missiology but because Lae, PNG is far away, this will happen in absentia.

Tonight we are also happy to welcome five new students to the Master of Divinity program: Johan Brintjes of Denver, CO, Rick VanderHorst of Langley, BC, Steve Van Leeuwen of Neerlandia, AB, Gerard Veurink of Coaldale, AB, and Randall Visscher of Langley, BC. We are also pleased that of late we could admit Willy Mudenge to the Bachelor of Theology program; Mr. Mudenge is from Burundi, eastern Africa but has been a Canadian citizen for some years. We are overjoyed to have you all. May the Lord bless your studies, and your families as you adjust to life among us. This brings us to a total of fourteen students for this year.

Staff

In the past year we also celebrated the fact that one of our staff members, Ms. Catharine Mechelse, had given twenty-five years of faithful service to the seminary; we thank her for that and wish her God's continued blessing. The past year also saw a third member added to the staff, Miss Rose Vermeulen. It's a risky business, however, hiring a young lady to work at such a male-dominated place; sure enough, she has now become Mrs. Abel Pol. We congratulate Abel and Rose, and wish them God's blessing in their life together.



*T. Van Spronsen, A. Pol, S. VandeVelde, J. Roukema
Dr. A. de Visser, Dr. G. Visscher, Dr. J. Van Vliet, Dr. J. Smith*

Appreciation

One of the blessings of working at CRTS is the knowledge of a wonderful level of support through the Canadian Reformed community. Often that level of support becomes visible in a tangible way. In the past year, we were honoured with a gift that came from the hands of a senior member in Burlington who constructed a wonderful set of oak mailboxes and a cabinet on which they are placed. We thank our brother Herman Kamstra for his work and appreciate the labour of love that went into it.

Accreditation

The other feature about the past year that certainly stands out has to do not with people but with a process. The accreditation process made a significant step forward in June of this year when after a site visit, the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools granted us candidacy status. This means that we now have a two year window in which to compare ourselves to ATS standards and become a fully accredited school.

Now you might ask: what is all

this talk about accreditation about?

First of all, you should know that it is a route on which Synod Smithers 2007 placed us. In response to our request for a fifth professor, Synod Smithers urged us to first undergo an external review process. In the theological world, the best possible external review is the one that happens through ATS and accreditation.

Perhaps one needs to think about it like this. Realize that none of the professors who have taught at our seminary have had any extensive experience with theological education prior to coming here. Our training for being professors consisted in the fact that once we were seminary students ourselves, subsequently we became pastors and, with the benefit of some further doctoral studies, we went back to seminary, better equipped with abilities to lead others on the same path from the student to the pastor stage. That doesn't mean that the seminary didn't do a good job all those years; to the contrary, the forty year history of the seminary, the work of graduates in the churches is proof enough, and the significant number who have gone on for doctoral work underlines that

proof. At this point in our history, however, it is worthwhile to ask what theological education looks like elsewhere, and how it is that we can yet improve. And the best way for us to do that presently is by means of our involvement in the accreditation process. We do not need to fear this, since ATS will not impose doctrinal or other restrictions upon us. It simply serves as a window into how theological education is done elsewhere. ATS sets the standards for what a seminary should look like, and what the M.Div. program looks like. In the past year, we have compared our seminary to those standards, and isolated issues that warrant further consideration and discussion. Now that we are candidates for accreditation the road is open for us to engage in further self-study and discussion and consider whether improvements warrant implementation. In the words of one brother, we need someone to tell us what we do not know that we do not know; and at the same time, we need to be reassured that there are things that we do know after all and actually do quite well. We are confident that this extensive exercise will lead to us developing even a better program for future students, and at the same time, open up the way for further enhancement of the teaching staff.

Surely, as children of God we need to excel in all things. How can we not when we are in the service of such a great King? But especially when it comes to the proclamation of the gospel of the King, every effort needs to be made and every possibility explored so that we might excel in his service. May our gracious God continue to bless us also in this academic year.





Cornelis Van Dam



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The Gospel of the Priestly Blessing

Speech given at the 2011 Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. In keeping with the popular character of Clarion, technical footnotes have been omitted.

Board of Governors, Senate, brothers and sisters,

At the end of our Sunday worship services, the minister concludes the service with a blessing. One of those services typically ends with the priestly blessing taken from Numbers 6. It is a beautiful blessing. Listen to the familiar words:

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. (Num 6:24-26)

But what exactly does all this mean? It can happen that when we hear the same words often, we do not always take the time or effort to think about what we are hearing. After these words have been spoken we are typically ready to leave the church auditorium and go home.

This evening I would like to pause for a few moments at this blessing to help us appreciate anew the gospel that is found in these words.

The text of the blessing

There are several things to note here. The form of this blessing as we find it in verses 24-26 is beautifully structured. There are three lines and the covenant name Yahweh (Lord) occurs three times, once on each line. Each line consists of two parts. The first part is consistently longer than the second part. However, as a group, the first line is the shortest, the second is longer, and the third is longest. In the Hebrew text, the first line consists of fifteen consonants, the second of twenty and the third of twenty-five. The first line consists of three

words, the second of five and the third of seven words. The entire blessing amounts to fifteen words. If you take away the name of the Lord, you have twelve words left, which is the number of the tribes of Israel. The cumulative effect of the lengthening of the lines results in a tremendous climax ending with the word "peace."

While Israel undoubtedly appreciated this beautiful structure and sensed the climax that it engendered, the New Testament church has seen in this threefold blessing an allusion to the holy trinity of God. The early Christian church considered the first line to refer to God, the Father, the second to God, the Son, and the third to God, the Holy Spirit. Although one could dispute whether this is really correct, it does not appear to be unwarranted to see a reference here to the trinity. After all, the Lord himself commanded that this blessing be given and this is the true God who would in due time reveal himself to be triune.

The meaning of blessing

What exactly is a blessing or benediction? Is it a wish, a prayer, a new reality? What is it? It is certainly not a magical formula which automatically works and changes things simply by being spoken by the right person. The New International Version gives a good translation of this blessing. It does not say: "The Lord blesses you and keeps you" etc., a statement of fact. But "The Lord bless you and keep you" etc. That is like saying "May the Lord bless you," etc. It can therefore be interpreted as a prayer. But at the same time it is much more.

In Numbers 6 the Lord himself defines what the action of blessing does. When God instructed Aaron and his sons to bless Israel (Num 6:23), then after giving the actual text of the blessing, he said: "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them" (Num 6:27). Blessing is putting God's name on his people. What does that mean?

This means that when the priest lifts up his hands (Lev 9:22) and pronounces God's name over the people that people is then brought into a close association with the Lord. The name speaks of God's presence. With the name being placed on the people, the covenant God claims them for himself. The clear implication is that he, the Lord, will then indeed be favourably disposed to them and bless them. As Numbers 6:27 indicates: "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." The priest invokes the blessing, the prayer if you like, but God is the one who actually gives the blessing. As the text says: "And I will bless them." The Hebrew is very emphatic here. God is the one who does it, and not the priest. When God claims his people as his own, he will take care of them. He will bless them! This truth is emphasized by the Lord's name being mentioned three times.

The covenant God claims them for himself

The benediction is thus a declaration of divine blessing. At the same time it is also a prayer that such a blessing materialize (2 Chron 30:27). How do we relate the two? How can this blessing be both a declaration and a prayer at the same time?

On the one hand, it is a declaration for God lays his name on his people and reaffirms the relationship which he has with them. He is their God. Let there be no doubt about that! The blessings that God mentions through the priest are not just a wish. They are real and God gives these gifts. At the same time, the words which the priest speaks are not some magic formula so that simply by speaking the words, the priest is able, as it were, to give by his very act of speaking the blessings enumerated in the benediction. The blessings declared by the priest are in effect God's sure promises. But receiving them from God is not automatic. The response of faith is needed (cf. Deut 28:1-2; Ps 24:4-5). That is why the priest says "the Lord bless you and keep you" rather than "the Lord blesses you and keeps you." In that sense, the benediction is a prayer. "May the Lord bless you."

When the priest pronounces the blessing, it is a prayer which is guaranteed to be heard when those receiving it trust in God and obey his word. After all, the living God wishes to place his name on the people and reaffirm the close covenantal bond which he has with them. And the blessings he gives are rich. Let us consider them.

The context and the text of the blessing

The first line reads: "The Lord bless you and keep you." It is striking that although this blessing is directed to the entire nation, the pronoun "you" in Hebrew is in the singular. This emphasizes the Lord's concern for each and every Israelite. They are all equally dear to him. He does not treat the nation as one mass of undefined individuals. No, the Lord is interested in each and every person as an individual precious to him.

What does the term "bless" mean in the phrase "the Lord bless you"? When God blesses he shows his liberality and favour by being the abundant source of all good things. More specifically, one could say that when the Lord blesses he endows with strength and empowers. In practical terms this means much offspring, abundant prosperity, and peace (Deut 28:2-14). Thus one who is blessed is able to function and produce at the optimum level. That was also the intent of God's blessing creation at the beginning of the world (Gen 1:22, 28).

The one whom the Lord blesses, he also keeps. "The Lord bless you and keep you." This initial blessing is all comprehensive. "Keep" means "to protect, watch over, guard, preserve, take care of." All this speaks of God's faithful care. Psalm 121 uses this word for "watch" and "keep" six times and it is a wonderful commentary on the term.

I lift up my eyes to the hills_ where does my help
come from?

My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven
and earth.

He will not let your foot slip_ he who *watches* over
you will not slumber;

indeed, he who *watches* over Israel will neither
slumber nor sleep.

The Lord *watches* over you_ the Lord is your shade
at your right hand;

the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by
night.

The Lord will *keep* you from all harm_ he will
watch over your life;

the Lord will *watch* over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

The next line of the priestly blessing is a bit puzzling in today's culture. "The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you." What does "make one's face shine upon you" mean? The idea is that a shining face is a friendly face, a face that looks favourably towards you. That is why David in distress prayed: "Let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord" (Ps 4:6; cf. 31:16). For the same reason, the proverb says: "When a king's face

brightens, it means life; his favor is like a rain cloud in spring" (Prov 16:15). The shining face of the Lord means that his presence and nearness speak of his help and favour and that he is gracious to help those in need. The shining face of the Lord thus speaks of his blessing and is synonymous with it. As Psalm 67:1 puts it: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us."

The second line of the blessing concludes with "the Lord be gracious to you." Being gracious denotes God's free, unmerited goodness, love, and mercy. The light of God's shining face, which was just mentioned, exposes our sin. As Moses put it in Psalm 90: "You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence" (Ps 90:8). Only God's grace can overcome these sins (cf. Exod 33:19). And with this blessing, God promises to do just that.

The final line is "the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." More literally, the first part reads: "The Lord lift up his face toward you." The thought of the Lord's making his face shine is further developed here. By lifting up his face, "God is in fact looking directly at his people so that they may receive the benefit of his full attention." This action is the opposite of God hiding his face. Then he is angry (e.g., Deut 31:17-18; Ps 104:29). So when the Lord turns his face toward his people then it is for good. In this case the promise is that he will give his peace.

The term for peace, *shalom*, is very comprehensive. It is far more than the outward cessation of hostilities and a peace treaty with former enemies. Ultimately it is the full and true peace with God and the neighbour that impacts all of life. When there is true peace with God then sins have been forgiven, righteousness has been established, and God's grace is being enjoyed to the full. Ideally such a peace shows itself in prosperity and a holistic well-being and sense of fulfillment in all of life. In short it is the covenantal peace and fulfillment that only God can give. In a very real way this points to the eschatological hope of God's people. This part of the blessing is thus a fitting climax to the Aaronic benediction.

This brings us to the significance of this benediction for us today. But to do that, we first need to go the very first official Levitical service recorded in Scripture in Leviticus 9.

The use of the benediction today

At the end of this service, "Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them" (Lev 9:23). There are two things to note. First, we also receive the blessing at the end of the worship service. That

is significant. It ties the blessing to going out of church. The blessing does not just signal the end of the worship service, but it also connects that worship and blessing to life outside the church. We can go into the fullness of life with the sure knowledge of God's blessing. His name, his presence, has been placed in our lives.

When there is true peace with God then sins have been forgiven, righteousness has been established, and God's grace is being enjoyed to the full

The second notable aspect of Aaron blessing after the worship service becomes clear by asking the question: How could Aaron do this? On what basis was it possible for him to declare God's blessings for the people to receive in faith? The blessing was possible because it was based on the atoning blood of the many sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins made that day. Aaron actually stood on the edge of the altar when he gave the blessing, for Scripture informs us that after the blessing he stepped down (Lev 9:22). The blood of the covenant made the blessing possible (Lev 9:9-18; Exod 24:8). Today too the blessings that end our worship services are based on the blood of reconciliation – only now the blood of Christ, *the blood of the covenant* (Matt 26:28). We live in a time after the great once-for-all sacrifice made on Golgotha (Heb 9:26) and that is very significant for the blessing.

God's blessing over our lives stands on the foundation of the completed work of our Saviour. That means that we never need to doubt his Word of blessing. His blessing does however require our obedience of faith if the promises are to be realized and the prayer of the blessing is to be fulfilled. Psalm 24, for example, tells us that it is the upright person who "will receive blessing from the Lord" (Ps 24:5; also, e.g., Deut 28:2; 30:15-16). But what a comfort for faithful children of God to know that the Christ has died and has secured the blessing! It is a sure thing!

It is remarkable that in the Aaronic priestly blessing the face of the Lord is mentioned two times. Why this heavy emphasis on God's face in such a short blessing? Clearly God wants to stress that in this blessing he shows his face, meaning, he will be near to his people (as also indicated by putting his name on the people). When one thinks of God showing his face, one cannot but think of how that was fulfilled in our Saviour. After all, whoever has seen him has seen the Father

Dr. J. Van Vliet presenting the Festschrift



(John 14:9). In Christ God has come near and showed his face up close. What was not seen in the Old Testament time was revealed in the New Testament dispensation. God showed his face and had it shine on the church as never before (2 Cor 4:6)! Yes he turned his face toward his people to give the peace that surpasses all understanding. He did so in Christ crucified and resurrected.

And that was not all. After Christ finished his work of bringing himself as the atoning sacrifice, he not only rose for our justification but he also ascended into heaven as our only high priest where he makes intercession for us (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:35). But in ascending, he blessed. He stretched out his hands and as he departed he blessed his disciples (Luke 24:50-51). That was surely a moving scene. The high priestly figure of our Saviour saying farewell to his disciples and as he leaves them he blesses them (Luke 24:50-51). And as he rose higher and higher the reach of his blessing hands spread further and further. It spread across the Roman province of Judea, as he went higher the reach of his hands spread westwards across the Mediterranean Sea and eastwards to the Euphrates and Asia. His hands of blessing eventually spread over the whole world. We today, as those who love him, may live in the realization that we are under his blessing. The blessing at the end of the worship service confirms us in this reality every week again. It is a blessing that goes with us all week long – God's face shining on us and turning to us for peace. This benediction places God's name on our lives. He gives himself to us. Surely, we can rejoice in the gospel of the blessing! It

encompasses our life and directs us to the time when we, according to his promise, will actually see his shining face. We will see him, face to face (2 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2).

In Conclusion

In conclusion, since this is my final speech as a member of the faculty, allow me a few closing comments. I wish to thank the Lord our God for the opportunity for service that he has given and the blessings of health and strength he has given. I pray that I may still continue to be of service to the praise of his glory.

Furthermore, I wish to thank the Board of Governors and so the churches for the trust they have exhibited in giving me such a responsible duty for so many years. It is hard to believe that thirty years have gone by and yet so it is. I was privileged to serve with founding faculty members: Dr. J. Faber, Prof. L. Selles, and Rev. G. Van Dooren at the Queen Street address and Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene who had just replaced Rev. H. Scholten. Others followed in the course of the years. I also wish to thank the Board and the churches for the support and care which they provided over the years. For those who are not involved, it is hard to imagine the tremendous amount of work done by the Board, usually alongside their full-time tasks. I have great appreciation for the enormous work they do.

It has been a tremendous joy to have excellent colleagues and a great working environment through the years and the same goes for the current senate. It is

a wonderful thing to be united in faith, in purpose, and commitment in training students for the holy ministry and I will miss that daily interaction. Thank you colleagues for the support, friendship, and collegiality that we can experience together. I wish you all the continued blessing of the Lord in your ongoing work and in particular my successor, Dr. Smith. It is a great joy to know that the Old Testament work will continue and that it is in very capable hands.

As for the students, it has been a singular privilege to be teaching the Old Testament disciplines to those aspiring to the ministry of the gospel. The Old Testament is rich and even after so many years one has the feeling that there is still so much more to learn and discover. Thank you students past and present for your interest, work, and questions, and for bearing with me.

My thanks also go to our Librarian, Ms. Margaret VanderVelde and our Administrative Assistant Ms. Catharine Mechelse, as well as Mrs. Rose Pol, for the cheerful and competent assistance over the years.

I would also like to acknowledge the phenomenal support from my wife, Joanne, during all these years. I could not imagine a better support and encouragement for the work I was called to do. It has been wonderful. The Lord has blessed us richly. We also give thanks that our son Carl, together with his wife Lisa, may serve in the ministry and that our mothers can both be present for this occasion.

In conclusion, thank you all, and may the Lord our God bless you abundantly! Remember, we may live under the blessing hands of our Saviour. May we all experience the holy joy this gives to our lives!



*Board of Governors of CRTS: A. Bax, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg, K.J. Veldkamp, Rev. R. Aasman, B. Hordyk
L. Jagt, Rev. A. Pol, Rev. J. Ludwig, H. Kampen, Rev. W. Slomp*



Presentation of the Women's Savings Action at Convocation 2011

Mr. President, Members of the Board and Faculty, Graduates, Brothers and Sisters

In our electronic age does it still make sense for the Women's Savings Action to present the Seminary with funds to purchase more hard copy books?

Recently the library of an exclusive boarding school got rid of its hard copy books in favour of electronic ones. There is a new café where the circulation desk used to be. Where bookshelves once stood, students now sit in easy chairs, studying or watching one of the three new flat-screen TVs. The library has traded its 20,000 volumes for a database of millions of digital books. All students can read any of these digital books either through Amazon Kindles or laptops available for every student to use. What do you think? Sound attractive? In the twenty-first century is this the way to go? Well, there were mixed reviews. Not all librarians or students were happy about this decision, for a variety of reasons, ranging from not all students are equally adept at working with the new technology to "without the books, you kind of lose the feel of a library."


While this library got rid of its books, another library which is a major digitizer of books is making sure that they have a paper copy of each volume just to make sure that should the digital one disintegrate they still have the real one on hand! Because, apparently, there is such a thing as digital rot. That's right – digital rot. Paper can slowly disintegrate but so can electronic media.

So, yes, we think that it does make sense for the Women's Savings Action to continue to provide funds for the purchase of books. Mind you, the library does have a growing collection of digital books. Electronic resources definitely have a place in a library, but not to the exclusion of books. And so the library of the Seminary is firmly but not foolishly in the twenty-first century!



We are very thankful that the enthusiasm for the work of the Women's Savings Action continues into this electronic age. We consider it a real privilege that as women of the church we may also do our part to assist the training of the ministry in such an important way. Every year the dedicated efforts of the representatives provide funds for the library. Every year sees some changes among the representatives and this year also sees a change in our board. Janet Van Vliet has been found willing to take over from Dinie Gootjes. Dinie is not able to be present this evening, but we would like to extend to her publicly our heartfelt appreciation for what she has done for the Women's Savings Action for the last ten years. Thanks, Dinie, for the excellent cooperation we could always enjoy! May the Lord surround you and your husband with his grace in the years ahead. Janet, a hearty welcome to you! We wish you the Lord's blessing as you take on your new task and we look forward to working with you on the board.

It is with great gratitude to the Lord that we may announce that \$32,439.85 has been collected. A heartfelt thank you to all of you for your generous donations and your hours spent collecting and counting.

Mr. Principal, it gives us great pleasure to present you with a pledge for \$35,000 for the coming year. 

Seeking A Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism, D.G. Hart and John R. Muether, Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2007

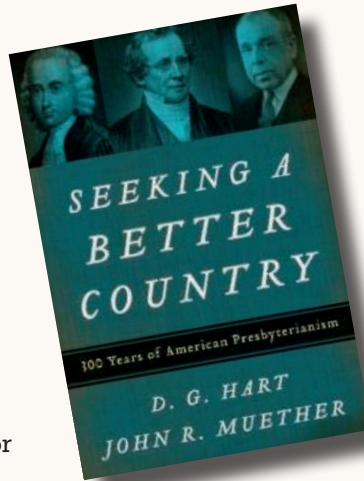
Additional Information: Hardcover, 288 pages, \$25.00 US

Surveys of history have a reputation for being major league snore fests – even for people with an interest in history. And church history surveys? The church history survey that can keep one’s attention for its full length is rare. More often such books are kept on hand as reference tools and seldom read from cover to cover. *Seeking A Better Country* is one of those rare, enjoyable church history surveys that is actually readable in its entirety.

The authors are well-known Presbyterian historians; both are members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Both have numerous volumes to their credit. Though their allegiance to the OPC is evident in places, they have attempted to avoid a celebratory or triumphalistic approach to telling the story of Presbyterianism in the United States. Instead, they have provided a sober, critical history that endeavours to promote “self-awareness, discernment, and wisdom.” This is a laudable goal and one that, in my estimation, has been reached.

Some of the highlights of this story include the struggles between the Old Side and New Side of American Presbyterianism and, later on, between the Old School and New School. Of particular interest is the role of the Westminster Standards and confessional subscription. From the very beginning, there was no consensus on whether there should be confessional subscription in the Presbyterian church and, if so, what that should look like. Also fascinating is the place of revivalism in the history of American Presbyterianism. The authors tell of the Presbyterian background of Charles Finney and the relationship of revival meetings to the Scottish Presbyterian practice of communion seasons. *Seeking A Better Country* powerfully portrays the struggle throughout American Presbyterian history between pietists and confessionalists.

These days the name of Darryl Hart is often associated with a controversy over two-kingdom theology. “Two-kingdom theology” refers to a position by which the church’s authority is limited to spiritual matters. The church is called to proclaim the gospel.



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The church is not permitted to speak to or get involved with other areas of life, such as politics. Practically speaking, this means that the church cannot tell its members to vote for one political party as opposed to another. A careful reading of this volume may help readers to better understand the two-kingdom position. “The spirituality of the church” has been an emphasis in certain Presbyterian circles for a long time and failure to accept this concept is certainly at the roots of the historical development of churches like the OPC.

One critical remark I want to make has to do with Benjamin B. Warfield’s views of evolution. Our authors claim that Warfield “warmed up to evolutionary theory.” He did this by distinguishing the science of evolution from its associated philosophy. Moreover, Warfield pointed to Calvin as a proponent of “pure evolutionism” (179). This is not a nuanced presentation of Warfield’s position. Better on this point is Fred Zaspel’s *The Theology of B.B. Warfield*. Zaspel documents Warfield’s “strengthening conviction against evolution.” Moreover, he elaborates on Warfield’s understanding of Calvin. Warfield found Calvin to be inadequate and inconsistent. When it comes to evolution, Warfield was critically agnostic and noncommittal.

Historical awareness is critically important for Christians. Why? Because through awareness of history, we see how Christ has been working to gather, defend, and preserve his people. At the same time, we also see how Satan has worked tirelessly to undo Christ’s efforts. As people with a background in the Reformed churches of The Netherlands, we probably know a little about that history (although even that might be presumptuous to say). Most likely we know far less about Presbyterian history on our continent. There are important lessons to be learned and *Seeking A Better Country* is a well-written and generally reliable guide.

