

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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*There is a time
for every matter under heaven.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1



*Best Wishes
and the
Lord's blessings
in the year
2013
to all our readers*

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Celebrate Like Those Who Have Hope

A timely issue

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul had to encourage his readers as they dealt with the death of loved ones. He wrote, “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). Paul then showed how our Christian hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory shapes our grieving. As this hope shapes our grieving, it actually shapes everything we do, including our celebration. We can adapt Paul’s words and say, “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you. . . to celebrate like the rest of men, who have no hope.”

It is particularly helpful to think about this at the time of the year when there is much celebration. Companies throw Christmas parties. We have our own family celebrations at Christmas, as well on New Year’s Eve. These are not the only times of celebration in the whole year, but when it comes to celebrations, the year does seem to end with a bang, so to speak. Some find it difficult to squeeze in every party they are invited to. So, it is a good time to ask ourselves if we celebrate as those who have hope.

Scriptural warning

Our manner of celebrating is addressed in the practical sections of various apostolic letters found in Scripture. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, . . .our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy (Rom 13:11-13).

In his letter to the Ephesians he wrote, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery” (Eph 5:18). In Peter’s first letter he wrote that his reader had Spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust,

drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you (1 Pet 4:3, 4).

When you note that Paul wrote to the believers in Rome and Ephesus, and Peter wrote to the believers scattered throughout the area of present day Turkey, it is evident that there was a strong pull to the party habits of the world in which the early Christians lived. Peter’s words indicate that there was considerable pressure to participate in the party scene of those days. Not participating was seen as being judgmental.

From the words used by Paul and Peter, we learn that these were wild parties. We actually come across some words that we may not even know the meaning of, beyond sensing that they speak of something bad. For example, in each of the passages we come across the word “debauchery.” One dictionary defines debauchery as gross sensual indulgence or as abandoning all duty, virtue, and faithfulness. All three passages also refer to drunkenness, as it leads to debauchery. You get the impression that in the parties of those days, people just let loose. Filled with liquid spirits, they were in high spirits.

It is worth noting how Paul’s warning in Ephesians 5 not to get drunk on wine is immediately followed by, “Instead be filled with the Spirit.” This is a striking contrast of liquid spirits and the Holy Spirit. A Christian can’t be filled with both and be true to the name Christian, for where the liquid spirits increase, the Holy Spirit must decrease. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of self-control, while the liquid spirits take over control.

Scriptural direction

We should not think, however, that this warning against partying in the style of the world means that Christians have to go through life with sour and dour faces. Keep in mind that the celebration style of the world is because they have no hope. That lack of hope leads

to the mindset expressed in the lyrics of a still popular song, “We’re here for a good time, not a long time, so have a good time, the sun can’t shine every day” (from the band Trooper, 1977). As Christians we have every reason to be joyful. There are repeated exhortations in Scripture to rejoice. Do note that it is a call to rejoice in the Lord (e.g. Ps 33:1; Hab 3:18; Phil 4:4).

This talk of joy, of course, is first and foremost an inner joy. That inner joy is there even when one is surrounded by much external misery. This is obvious from the context of the book of Habakkuk and Paul’s letter to the Philippians.



“Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed”



This does not take away that there is also opportunity for actual joyful celebration. We see that in the way the LORD commanded Israel to keep a whole series of feasts. Besides the weekly Sabbath, there was an annual cycle of feasts associated with the agricultural calendar. One can read about this in Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16. The LORD commanded his people to rejoice at the different phases of the harvest. To make sure that those celebrations would be in accord with the hope of Israel, the LORD linked key events on the agricultural calendar with what we might term the annual church calendar of the Old Testament times. Israel was to celebrate before the LORD and remember how he had delivered them from Egypt. This is evident in the way the three key feasts of unleavened bread (Passover), Pentecost, and Feast of Booths were to be celebrated at the place where the LORD would chose to make his name dwell. First this was the tabernacle and later the temple. The time of rejoicing over material blessings was also the time to rejoice over spiritual blessings. The rejoicing over material blessings was to take place in light of the spiritual blessings. Note the key point of linking material and spiritual blessings, of celebrating in the presence of the LORD.

Current application

While as New Testament Church we are free from the ceremonial laws, this principle has been applied by the church in different ways. Already early in the history of the Christian church, there developed a celebration of the birth of the Lord Jesus. The date was chosen because it was a time of the year when people

were accustomed to celebrating the lengthening of days as part of the old pagan religions. The early church, in its wisdom, filled the vacuum in celebration that had come about because of rejecting the old pagan feast with a feast that linked it to an important event in the church calendar, the birth of Christ. It remains an ongoing discussion as to whether this was good or not, but it is a reality. You can fight it or live with the wisdom of the forefathers, and link the celebration of an event on the annual calendar with the great event of the incarnation, when the eternal Son of God humbled himself and took on our human flesh.

We can also see this in connection with the custom of having a worship service in connection with the start of a new year. This is something that we have inherited as, by the providence of God, we have our church roots in The Netherlands. It is a fact that services in connection with the new year were maintained upon the request of the civil authorities, who saw it as a way to control excessive partying. Again, you can fight it or live with the wisdom of the forefathers, and link the celebration of an event on the annual calendar with the fact that salvation is now closer than when we first believed.

Even apart from these external aids, our celebrations should always be done as those who have hope. Both Paul and Peter were not just thinking of possible Christmas and New Year’s parties but of all partying. As Christians, the Lord our God should always be on our mind. If we live conscientious, thankful lives, we will think of him often. Our daily prayers at meal times and before bed, and our weekly worship, keep him ever on our mind. Our Lord is with us constantly through his Holy Spirit who dwells within us. His presence should not be seen as a bogeyman to keep us from sinning, but as a joyful stimulant to live our whole life to the glory of our God, also in our celebrations. We live our whole life before the face of God, also when no one else sees us.

Wishing all a joyful celebration

As we are in the midst of our year end celebrations, we do well then to impress upon ourselves that celebrating is very much part of our Christian identity. Christians actually are the only ones who have reason to celebrate. The unbelieving world parties to numb itself and many wake up with a bad hangover and regrets. As Christians we may celebrate because of our hope in the coming of our Lord Jesus in glory. Such celebration should not be numbing but invigorating.

May our gracious God grant you all a joyful time as family and friends as you celebrate like those who have hope.



What's Inside

In your hands you hold the final issue of *Clarion* for the 2012 year. Here at the magazine we are thankful for a regular supply of articles and we are pleased to be able to send our readers an issue every two weeks. As in the past, Issue 25 is much longer than most issues, commemorating the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ as well as reflecting on the year that is coming to an end and looking forward to a new year.

We bring the readers several articles especially for the Christmas season, including the editorial, Treasures New and Old meditation, and an article from Rev. Klaas Stam. We are thankful for permission from *Faith in Focus* to republish an article by Leo de Vos entitled "My Soul Magnifies the Lord,"

as well as to *The Messenger* for Neil Pronk's article "Christ's Two Appearances." Our Editor Dr. James Visscher also gives us a review of the 2012 year in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

You will find reports on happenings within the church recently: young people graduate, a new pastor is joyfully welcomed, and both congregations and ministers celebrate twenty-five years. Issue 25 also brings you Ray of Sunshine, a letter to the editor, a press release, and a book review.

Along with the many greetings from church members throughout the federation, I would like to wish you greetings and best wishes on behalf of us all at *Clarion*. Dear readers, may the Lord grant you a blessed Christmas season and may he be your guide as you enter a new year.

Laura Veenendaal



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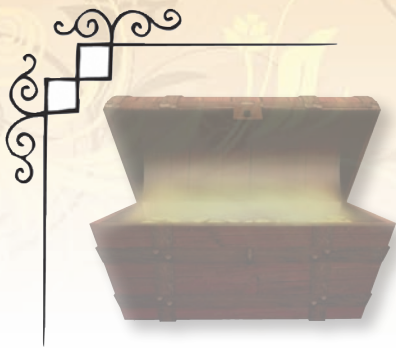
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Light



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MATTHEW 13:52

"In him was life, and that life was the light of men." (John 1:4)

At this time of year people enjoy putting Christmas lights on their homes, or in trees or shrubs. The days are short and it gets dark early. The desire for light is natural. Life and light go together. Light is necessary for life to grow and blossom. If there is darkness and no light, living things will not flourish, but finally die. It should therefore not surprise us that the Bible links the words "light" and "darkness" with a number of very important concepts.

In his account of the gospel, the Apostle John testifies of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. "In him was life," writes John, "and that life was the light of men" (1:4). Notice how the Apostle links life and light together. He then goes on to describe our Saviour as "the *true* light."

What kind of light does Jesus give? It's not "the light of reason," or "the light of nature." He is the only source of true spiritual light and life. The statement about Jesus Christ as the light emphasizes his divinity and the effect of the Word that he proclaimed. Compare it, for example, to Psalm 36:9, "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light." Those words applied to the LORD, the God of the covenant. But the Apostle John shows that such words also apply to our Saviour.

Light in the darkness

Jesus Christ promises to give us light. He proclaimed concerning himself: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The world in which Jesus Christ was born was different than the world made in the beginning. It's a world that has been defiled by man's sin. It's a world in which there is much darkness. The effects of sin can be seen all around us and are also evident in us. Our sinful nature continues to produce bad fruit.

Without Jesus Christ people live in darkness. This darkness results in eternal damnation. But there is hope for all who take refuge in him. After all, he "gives light to *every man*" (John 1:9). This means that he gives

salvation without distinction. It's not just for Jews. It's for people from every tribe and nation on earth. No repentant sinner will be turned away.

Salvation is for all who acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the promised Messiah. John writes in 1:12, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

"Receiving" Jesus Christ refers to accepting that he is who he claims to be. This is how John explains what it means to believe in the name of Jesus Christ. Believing in the "name" of Jesus Christ involves believing all that is revealed about him as the incarnate Son of God. Consider his glory, his power and majesty. Consider the love that motivated him to be born of the virgin Mary and to live on earth as a human being. Think of his earthly ministry and his death on the cross to save us from the darkness of sin. Think about his resurrection and ascension into heaven. Rejoice in what he continues to do for our salvation.

There were Jews and also people of heathen background who saw the light. They acknowledged Jesus Christ as the Saviour. John is talking about them when he writes about "all who received him." Jesus was born as a Jew. His primary task was to reveal himself to the Jews as their Messiah. But John makes it clear that salvation is not only for Jews. It's also meant for people like us.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Embracing this truth involves more than simply understanding it with our minds. It's a matter of the heart. It leads to a lifelong commitment, a life of faith.

Our Saviour continues to be the source of life and light. As we look to him in faith, something remarkable happens. We "reflect the Lord's glory," and "are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). There is a purpose for this. Think of how Jesus describes his followers: "*You* are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14).

Those words remind us of our task. What are you going to do about it?

Christ's Two Appearances

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Is there a biblical warrant for celebrating Christmas?

With Christmas approaching, the question many Christians will ask again is, is it biblical to celebrate our Saviour's birth? This is an important question. It seems clear from reading the New Testament that the early Christians did not celebrate Christmas, at least not the way we do today. There are, of course, the stories of Christ's birth and the shepherds and the wise men, the songs of Mary, Zachariah, and Simeon. But in the letters of Paul and the other apostles there is not one reference to a Christmas celebration. Why? Did the early Christians not care about our Lord's birthday? Were they opposed to it, like the Puritans who felt that Christmas was a frivolous and worldly festivity so that during Cromwell's reign they even forbade its observance by law? I don't think so.

The Puritans were good people who have left us a very valuable legacy of devotional writings, but I think they went too far with their opposition to Christmas celebrations. I realize that they based their view on the fact that the New Testament is silent on the matter, but I think they misinterpreted that silence.

How the early church viewed the Incarnation

The reason why we don't find first-century Christians celebrating the incarnation is that they did not see the life of Jesus in segments as we do. We distinguish between his birth, the early years in Nazareth, the public ministry, the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, and the descent of his Spirit. We have the complete record of Jesus' life in the gospels and it is easier to study it when it is broken up that way. But they saw the life of Jesus and his ministry as one complete whole; all the great events blended together into one, which they called "the

appearing of Jesus Christ." As Paul writes to Titus, his fellow servant in Christ:

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (Titus 2:11-14).

Christ's first appearance

The Apostle groups these various phases of Jesus' life and ministry together in one great event, which he calls "the appearing." What does Paul mean by that term? Notice that he speaks of two "appearings," one at the beginning of our passage and another one at the end of it. The first one is a part of history, for, says Paul, "the grace of God *has* [emphasis mine, CP] appeared." It covers the entire life and ministry of Jesus Christ, approximately thirty-three years, from his birth through to the cross and the resurrection; from Bethlehem to the Mount of Olives; from the open heavens, where the shepherds heard the voices of the angels singing, to the open heavens when the disciples looked up and saw him disappearing into the clouds of heaven. Thirty-three years are thus compressed into one event: the "appearing of Jesus Christ."

Christ's second appearance

The second appearing refers to a future event. We are, Paul says, waiting "for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us." Paul calls this our "blessed hope." Ever since Jesus ascended up to heaven, his church has been anxiously awaiting his return. The

first appearing is called the appearing of the grace of our Lord Jesus, while the second one is the appearing of his glory – two quite different things.

In between comes what has been called, quite properly, “the age of grace,” the age in which we live, and the age in which Paul wrote. It is interesting that the Greek word for “appearing” is “epiphany.” Literally, that word means “a shining forth or dawning.” One modern translation captures that meaning well when it says, “The grace of God has dawned upon the world.” That is the meaning of Christmas, basically. The birth of the Son of God represents the shining forth of divine grace to mankind.

As Paul puts it: “The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.” The incarnation of Christ reveals that God is gracious. It means gospel, good news. The gospel presupposes the guilt and danger of sinners. It declares what Christ has done to remove our guilt and to rescue us from that danger. It proclaims God’s readiness to forgive and restore. “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17).

The ultimate purpose of Christ’s first appearance

However, Christ also appeared in this world for another reason. Having stated that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, Paul goes on to say, “It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.” In a sense, that is the real purpose of Christ’s appearing in this world. Yes, he came to save sinners, but to what end? Not only that they would escape eternal punishment, but also and especially that they would once again serve God and glorify him. “It is God’s will,” Paul writes to the Thessalonian Christians, “that you should be sanctified” (1 Thess 4:3). When God saves a sinner this is his goal. He wants us to take up where we left off, when in the Garden of Eden we got off the track and the train of our life derailed. It is only the gospel that can tell us how to get back on the right track. By ungodliness is meant everything that is contrary to God and his law.

Worldly lusts remind us of what the Apostle John writes in his first epistle, chapter 2:15, 16: “Do not love the world or anything in the world,” etc. All of these we must deny and forsake. Nor is it only open transgressions that we are to avoid, but we must resist even our sinful

thoughts and desires. This is only the negative aspect of the law. But there are also many positive requirements God insists on. Paul says we should “live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.” This is the kind of life God requires of us. Who can ever meet such high standards? No one, left to his or her own strength and inclinations, can do so. But notice what Paul is saying here. It is the gospel of grace that teaches us to do what is impossible by nature. “Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil” (Jer 13:23).

The birth of the Son of God represents the shining forth of divine grace to mankind

But what is impossible with men is possible with God. That’s why the gospel first directs sinners to flee to Christ for pardon of all their sins through his precious blood. This is our first business, and only after we are enabled by God’s grace to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ our faith will start to work, being motivated by love. We learn to set our feet on that new and narrow path that leads to heaven, relying on Jesus to whom we are united by faith as the branches are joined to the Vine. Any good works we perform are done by virtue of that union. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). This is the secret of godliness, the gospel mystery of sanctification, and the only way to become holy. To bring all this about our Saviour appeared among us.

The connection between Christ’s two appearances

What is the connection between these two appearances? What Paul means is that only those who as a result of Christ’s first coming have learned to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, etc., will also look forward to his second coming. Ungodly sinners who live according to the lusts of the flesh have no incentive to wait for Christ to come from heaven. For that coming can only mean judgment and condemnation for them. Believers in Christ, on the other hand, rejoice at the prospect of seeing him return with the clouds of heaven. Why? Because as Paul says here, his second appearance

represents his people's "blessed hope." Why is Christ's second advent something believers are hoping for? Because it will be the moment when all they have done for God and his cause on earth will be brought to light. Although our good works will never be the ground of our acceptance with God, they will not escape his notice. He will approve of them and reward them openly.

What an incentive to holiness this should be! At Christ's first appearance the nature, purpose, and effect of his mission was not clearly understood. He performed miracles, cast out demons, and healed many sick, but only a few believed on him in a saving way. It was not until Pentecost that the purpose of his incarnation, death, and resurrection were fully revealed. Then the power of his gospel was demonstrated in the conversion of the three thousand and many more later. The healing balm of the gospel was poured out upon multitudes. And yet there is another, even clearer manifestation of Christ's saving mission to follow.

At his second coming there will be one grand public display of the success of the gospel. Then and not till then will be seen the full extent of our Saviour's work. When that multitude that no man can number will stand before the throne – all of them washed in Jesus' blood with palm branches of victory in their hands – it will be clear to angels, demons, and the lost that Christ's mission has succeeded. He will have rescued from this sinful, corrupt race a people formed for himself who shall show forth his praises forever. It will be seen and understood that he gave himself to redeem us, not merely from condemnation, but from sin; from the love and practice of sin and to purify unto himself a peculiar

people, zealous of good works. Then our blessed Lord will see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. He will be glorified in his saints and admired in all that believe (2 Thess 1:10).

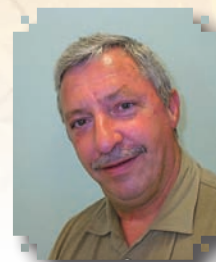
Incentive to serve and celebrate

Surely, this should be a strong incentive and motivation to serve him with more zeal and consistency than we have displayed so far. May our holy God, who has favoured us with his holy gospel, render it effectual by his Holy Spirit to make us holy in all manner of conversation and godliness and may he at that great day of Christ's appearing present us "holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Col 1:22).

***This should be a strong
incentive and motivation
to serve him with more
zeal and consistency than we
have displayed so far***

Let us keep these things in mind as we celebrate the birth of Christ this month. And as we wish each other a blessed Christmas, let us remember that the only way we can have such a Christmas is to understand by faith the inseparable connection between our Saviour's two epiphanies (appearances) and our thankful and heartfelt responses to both of them. Anything short of this is not a Christian celebration at all but little more than a pagan festival.





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Christmas: The End of Fear

The Christmas feast is the ultimate celebration of God's *love*. We know that "God so *loved* the world that he gave his only-begotten Son that whosoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Because God's love stands central at Christmas, perhaps this is the reason why so many non-Christians also like this feast. People long to be loved. In a hard and heartless society where love is growing colder all the time, the quest for love continues. But often we do not get past the stage of cheap sentimentality.



People long to be loved



For many people the search for love is a desperate, broken quest. It is hard to find a person who will *truly* love you in return. Even in close and intimate relationships, people are often afraid to give themselves unreservedly. Too many heart-aches and disappointments. We can become very cynical about love. In many instances we are *afraid to love*.

The world is filled with fear. We shudder at the horrors that are committed in the name of love. Some even say, "What's love got to do with it? What's love but a second-hand emotion?" And it is true: under the guise of love, many atrocities have been committed. But somehow the story of the baby in the manger strikes a chord: perhaps here is sweet love! Alas, the tinsel attention of the world is fickle and fleeting. The Babe is soon forgotten.

The end of fear

Perhaps this Christmas we may focus on the theme: *the end of fear*. It is striking how many times around the first Noel and subsequent redemptive historical events, we read: "Do not fear." Let me highlight the version of events given in the gospel according to Luke.

When the priest Zechariah sees an angel in the temple, where he is serving, he is gripped with fear. But the angel says to him, "*Do not be afraid*, Zechariah." When Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel, he says to her, "*Do not be afraid*, Mary, you have found favour with God."

In the song of Zechariah we find these words, ". . .to enable us to serve him *without fear*. . . ." When an angel appears to the shepherds in Ephrata's fields, we read that the shepherds are "*terrified*." They have great fear, and the original uses the word "mega phobia." But the angel says, "*Do not be afraid*. . . ."

This fear can be explained in part by the a la carte appearance of angels. If you suddenly saw an angel, you'd probably fall right off your rocker. But it is more than just fear of extra-terrestrial beings. The people involved knew with unmistakable clarity that they were suddenly in the presence of God. Who can stand in this brilliant light?

I also think for a moment of what happened to Joseph. He saw an angel in a vision and was also deeply troubled. But the angel said to him, "*Do not be afraid* to take Mary home as your wife" (Matt 1: 20). Obviously Christmas is a feast that powerfully dispels all fear.



He expresses to us his boundless love and takes away all our doubts and anxieties concerning redemption



God has come to us, Immanuel, and yet we do not have to be afraid. The fear of Adam in Paradise, after he sinned, led him to hide from the Lord (Genesis 3:10, "I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." Fear leads to hiding, seeking obscurity, lest we be found and indicted.

Church News

Called and declined the call to Bethel Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto, Ontario:

Rev. D. Poppe

of Coaldale, Alberta

Called by the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Fergus, Ontario:

Rev. P. Feenstra

of Grand Valley, Ontario

But the word at Christmas is: *do not be afraid*. God has in Jesus Christ not come to destroy but to redeem. He expresses to us his boundless love and takes away all our doubts and anxieties concerning redemption. Whoever receives this gospel and is unafraid to meet God has found the essence of Christ.

There is no fear in love

The Apostle John has written these memorable words, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts our fear because fear has to do with punishment" (1 John 4:19). Christ has taken our curse upon him and borne the punishment for us. Therefore there is no reason to fear anymore. By God's grace in Jesus Christ through faith in him, all fear is banished.

Perfect love casts out fear. Of course our love is never perfect in this life. We do have our worries and anxieties. Sometimes a Christmas celebration can be spoiled by

these anxieties. Maybe we are afraid sometimes that this child will one day rise up against us. But Christmas means the end of fear, if we embrace this Saviour.

I think of 1 John 3:18, which even in its beautiful context, is an excellent Christmas section in the Bible. Christmas is the end of fear. We can breathe again. There is new life. Let us embrace it in Christ. Whatever I may still be afraid of in this life, I do not fear meeting my Saviour Jesus Christ. He came once; he is coming again. It should fill you not with desperation but anticipation. "We have confidence on the day of judgment" (1 John 3:17).

1 John 3 is must reading on Christmas Day. Have a blessed festive season.

And this is his command:

to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ,

and to love one another

as he commanded us.

I John 3:23

My Soul Magnifies the Lord

A Christmas meditation on the Song of Mary

Rev. Leo de Vos is the
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And Mary said:

*“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me –
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost
thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”*

(Luke 1:46-55)

Some of you have heard this beautiful song of praise described as The Magnificat. This is because the Latin Vulgate begins Mary’s Song with the words Magnificat – to magnify. Some have compared this song to Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2, but closer examination shows that it is saturated with portions of the Psalms. Boys and girls might wonder why they should memorize Scripture and Catechism, but here we see the rich results of memorization in Mary’s life. You cannot memorize too much from God’s Word.

The occasion of Mary’s praise

If we want to understand this beautiful song, we must understand the circumstances when Mary expressed these words. The angel Gabriel had already visited Mary with words of wonder. What amazing news: “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:31-32)! Mary has been chosen by God to give birth to the Son of the Highest, the Messiah.

Now we also know that Mary had difficulty with Gabriel’s revelation. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones brings to our attention the stages of Mary’s faith: At first Mary is skeptical, staggering at this great revelation – “How will this be. . . since I am a virgin?” (v. 34) And we thank God for Gabriel’s ready answer – “No word from God will ever fail” (v. 37). Then Mary moves to the second stage: “I am the Lord’s servant. . . may your word to me be fulfilled” (v. 38). Mary says, “I don’t understand but I leave it in God’s hands.” Can we not identify with this stage – well, I don’t understand, but I will submit? Shortly after, Mary hurries to the house of her cousin Elizabeth, and Elizabeth speaking by the Holy Spirit confirms the words of the angel Gabriel (see verses 42-45). And God used these words to speak to Mary and give her a full assurance of faith, for she immediately breaks forth into praise!

The Bible’s description of Mary’s stages of faith is helpful to us. We can identify with her stages of faith and also with her weakness of faith. We also identify with the assurance of faith God gives us in his Word, just as the words of Gabriel and Elizabeth gave assurance to Mary. And when the wonderful truth of the birth of Christ penetrates our hearts, we are led to join Mary in a song of praise. How wonderful that God has not left us in our sin, but sent such a Saviour!

The depth of Mary's praise

Mary uses two expressions: my soul and my spirit to say that she is moved within the very depths of her being. Her joy is not superficial, but a response of everything within her to God's revelation. Does the gospel ever move you and send shivers of delight into the very core of your being? Is it not true that sometimes we are too cold and clinical in our confession of faith? If we really understand what happened when the Son of God left the courts of heaven and came into the world in this way and manner; if we grasp something of its eternal significance, of its profundity, its amazing character, how can it fail to move us, especially in our souls and in our spirits (Lloyd-Jones, *Magnificat*, p. 11)?

Christmas is not just having a warm, nice feeling of being surrounded with friends and family. But for us, it should move us to the depths that God loved sinners so much that, at the right moment, Christ died for the ungodly. We should be deeply moved that there is a bright light burning like a lighthouse in this dark world, a Saviour who we confess as Christ the Lord!

What do Mary's words to magnify the Lord mean? The verb magnify means to make great, to enlarge. But, you might ask, how can God be made greater? Is he not altogether great and unchangeable? We must understand that, in this passage, the verb magnify means to glorify, praise, extol. Think of when a young man falls in love and marries – he puts his bride on a pedestal, he magnifies her! Initially, at least, he cannot make her any different than she already is, but she becomes the centre of all his thoughts and affections. Mary in this song focuses on the Lord and his mercy to sinners. In her mind and heart, God is on a pedestal! Mary's passion is that all the world would see the greatness and mercy of God. Her song is an invitation that all sinners may come to know, love, and praise Jesus Christ. "Glorify the LORD with me, let us exalt his name together" (Ps 34:3). This Christmas season let us shout the same to our family, our neighbours, and to our work-mates – O, magnify the Lord with me, O, that all may know and love Jesus Christ, O that Christ would be lifted up on a pedestal in our minds!

The object of Mary's praise

The Roman Church lifts Mary up to a high pedestal, but Mary, while humbling herself, lifts up the name of God. Notice the words by which her song addresses God: he is the LORD, Jehovah, and shines in greatness and glory! The name Lord or Jehovah emphasizes that

God is our covenant God who keeps his promises. Mary also makes it clear that she is but a sinner in need of the Saviour as well. Notice that she exalts the Saviour, while confessing her own submission and weakness: "For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed" (v. 48)."

Sometimes in reaction to the Roman Catholic veneration of Mary, we have slighted Mary's role in giving birth to the Saviour. We must honour Mary not for anything she is in herself, but for her wonderful role in redemptive history. Mary reminds us that, because she has been chosen by God to give birth to the Messiah, all generations will call her blessed. However, in her song, it is crystal clear that she, too, is a sinner who needs and loves the Saviour!



**Mary's passion is that
all the world would see
the greatness and
mercy of God**



Notice that Mary also praises God's great power! "For the Mighty One has done great things for me" (v. 49), "He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts" (v. 51). Oh how weak and hopeless is our situation in this world. Thank God for the power of his salvation. When we feel overwhelmed surrounded by the secularism and unbelief of our culture, we must remind ourselves of God's great power to destroy the haughty imaginations of men who are wise in their own eyes.

Mary praises God for his holiness: "Holy is his name" (v. 49). Why does Mary mention the holiness of God here? We can answer this question with another question – why did Christ have to come into this world? The answer is because God is holy and hates sin. Christ came to satisfy the justice of a holy God, so that we could be his children. Without a clear idea of God's holiness, the righteousness work and life of Christ would not be understandable.

She praises God for his mercy! "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation" (v. 50). While grace takes into account our guilt, mercy takes into account our misery due to our fallen nature and sin. What do we see in hospitals, in rest homes, in

the streets, on TV news? Whether we see people broken physically or spiritually, we see misery. We see people lost and groaning under increasing burdens of the consequences of sin. Christmas is the message that Christ has come to show mercy to poor but penitent sinners.



**Christmas means that
God keeps his promises!**



Mary also praises God for his faithfulness! “He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors” (v. 54-55). When we look at the Christmas story it is essential that we remember that God had promised to send the Saviour in the Old Testament. We can scarcely read a chapter of the Old Testament without encountering God’s covenant promises time and again. God made the promise of a Saviour to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15 and then repeated this promise to Abraham and to his seed. Mary has long thought of these promises and now that God is showing his faithfulness to them by fulfilling them, she breaks out in praise. Christmas means that God keeps his promises! And these promises are still valid for us and for our covenant children. When we read the Bible at home, preach the Bible at church, teach the Bible at home, church, and school, we can never speak enough about God’s faithfulness. This faithfulness is never more clearly seen than when God sent his Son to be our Saviour.

J.C. Ryle reminds us: Let us lay hold of this woman’s example, to lay firm hold on Bible promises. It is of the deepest importance to our peace to do so. Promises are, in fact, the manna that we should daily eat, and the water that we should daily drink, as we travel through the wilderness of this world. We see not yet all things put under us. We see not Christ, and heaven, and the book of life, and the mansions prepared for us. We walk by faith and this faith leans on the promises. But on those promises we may lean confidently. They will bear all the weight we can lay on them. We shall find one day, like the virgin Mary, that God keeps his word, and that what he has spoken, so he will always in due time perform.

SOURCES

In writing this meditation, I was blessed by a sermon of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on this passage. It can be found in: *Christmas Sermons: An Exposition of the Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55). I also found a note on the back cover to be of interest and hopefully instructive to us. It reads as follows: “During his long ministry at Westminster Chapel, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones used the Christmas season to preach some notable Advent sermons. In his own words, ‘we take advantage of this season to remind ourselves of the coming of our blessed Lord into this world.’”

J.C. Ryle always warms the mind and heart. The quotation comes from his *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*.



*“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;
therefore the child to be born will be called
Holy, the Son of God.”*

Luke 1:35

Guido de Brès High School, Commencement 2012

It was a beautiful blustery day on September 29 as the 2012 graduands of Guido de Brès Christian High School were reunited at their high school one last time. The students enjoyed a luncheon with their classmates of four years, parents, and the teachers who were there to guide them through each of those high school years. Many pictures were taken as students reminisced the good times spent at Guido de Brès.

Soon the graduands entered Hamilton Place, full of excitement that this day had finally arrived. The Guido orchestra marked their arrival with the music of Tim Nijenhuis, "Variations on Ebenezer." Mr. VanderHoeven, Chairman of the Board, welcomed the graduands and visitors and opened the ceremony with reading a portion of God's Word. He reminded both the graduands and the audience that on a day like today we should joyfully remember the blessings that our Lord has showered upon us. We responded with the singing of Psalm 90:1, 9 which speaks of God's grace to us through the generations, how he is our refuge, our dwelling place, our haven. We may have confidence knowing that in generations to come God will be our children's everlasting home.

Mr. Vanoostveen, the new principal at Guido de Brès, spoke of how this school has flourished because of its rock solid foundation. He told the students that their class picture in the hall of Guido was a memorial of their time spent at Guido, a reminder of the work that God had done in that part of their life. He continued to explain that the graduands are living rocks, a people belonging to God. However, they are still being formed; one part of their life has come to a close, and the next part of their life is just beginning.

We then enjoyed a powerful musical performance by the following graduands: Robin Vanderwoude, Marlaina Vanderhout, Andrew Bosscher, and Brad VanDasselaar. These talented students along with Tim Nijenhuis played a medley of "Great is Thy Faithfulness" and "The Steadfast Love."

This led us to our main speaker, Mr. VanDooren, who had worked as principal for the past twenty-five years. He gave students the message that not only were they ready to move on, they already had. He emphasized how this Christian class has spread their wings into the world and now each of them needs to respond to 1 Peter 3:15 - "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Mr. VanDooren expressed that in this world of uncertainty, as the graduands move out of the safety net of their Christian schools and are faced with the philosophies of this world which will test their faith, they need to stand firm and defend their faith. We need to take time to deeply think about God and his Word, to talk to our friends, and learn how to stand firm in an anti-Christian world. He left the graduands with this question: "Are you prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have in Christ?"

The audience joined in the singing of "Great is Thy Faithfulness," after which the graduands were called forward one by one to receive their Ontario Secondary School Diplomas. After all 101 graduates stood for applause and photos, they made their way back to their seats while everyone sang "In Christ Alone." A number of graduates received special awards for different achievements and a list of the recipients can be found below.





Andrew Bosscher stood up for the class of 2012 and gave the Valedictory Address. He began by introducing who Guido de Brès was, and why it is an honour to have our school named after him. He reminisced about the good times spent by all in their four years of high school. Andrew even brought along the numerous McDonald straws that had once filled a locker at Guido. Andrew gave thanks to fellow students, parents, and teachers, especially Mr. Alkema (rumour has it that maybe some bribery was involved). Andrew ended by giving thanks to God, our Heavenly Father for the many blessings received.

The audience joined in singing "The Hope of Faith Shall Not Deceive Us," reminding us once again that our Lord and Saviour rules this earth and so our faith should be deeply rooted in Christ and should not waver despite the confusion of the world we live in today. We closed the celebration with a thanksgiving prayer, led by Mr. A. Bethlehem, and then the audience rose to sing "Oh Canada!"

Congratulations Graduates of 2012! May God always be your Guide and may his Word always be a light on your path.



AWARDS

The Harry Aasman and George DeBoer Memorial Scholarships

Rachel Kieft	Matt Ludwig
Jessica Mans	Belinda Olij
Kaitlyn Vanderee	Sarah VanderVeen

The Guido de Brès Proficiency Scholarships

Emily Breukelman	Meaghan Datema
Taran Hoogsteen	Esther Knegt
Melanie Koning	Thomas Smeding
Ian Vandergriendt	Sara Vanderhorst
Andrew VanLuik	Tim Veenstra

The Governor General's Academic Medal

Belinda Olij

The Guido de Brès Christian High School Participation Awards

Shane DeJonge	Tyler Schutten
Nathaniel Schutten	Kaitlyn Vanderee
Sara Vanderhorst	Evan VanderVelde
Robin Vanderwoude	

The Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award for Students

Breanne Buitenhuis

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

Melanie Koning

Ontario Secondary School Diplomas

Jacob Harry Aasman	Dustin John Jansema	Eleanor Trudy Stieva
Meagan Elizabeth Apperloo	Jeremy John Jongsma	Melissa Johanna Maria Alida Stieva
David Michael Bergsma	Thomas Henry Jongsma	Robyn Jane Tenhage
Eric Hubert Bethlehem	Meghan Brianne Kampen	Jessica Lynn Togeretz
Matthew John Bosma	Victoria Megan Kampen	Matthew James VanAmerongen
Andrew John Bosscher	Rachel Geralynn Kieft	Timothy Jason VanDam
Kevin Franklin Bosscher	Esther Marie Mildred Knegt	Bradley John VanDasselaar
Cody Tyler Bouwman	Cory Shane Komdeur	Fredrik John Vandebos
Morgan Kane Bouwman	Melanie Alyvia Koning	Izak John Vanderee
Kyle Edward Boverhof	Brittany Ann Ligtenberg	Kaitlyn Michelle Vanderee
Emily Arina Breukelman	April Elizabeth Linde	Ian Jacob Vandergriendt
Shane Wesley Breukelman*	Kristen Lindsey Ludwig	Sara Jacklin Vanderhorst
Jacob Garrett Philip Broekema	Matthew Edward Ludwig	Marlaina Jacqueline Vanderhout
Kevin Adrian Buikema	Jessica Helena Mans	Sarah Lynelle VanderVeen
Breanne Evelyn Buitenhuis	Leanna Michelle Nicholson	Edward James VanderVegte
Timothy Gerard William Buitenwerf	Joshua Peter Nobels	Evan Michael VanderVelde
Ethan James Burns	Charissa Lee Nordeman	Jordana Grace Vandervelde
Meaghan Gloria Datema	Ryan Adrian Nordeman	Henry James Vandervliet
Michael James DeBoer	Belinda Christine Olij	Mitchell John Vanderwoude
Rachel Dianne DeBoer	Sabrina Ellen Olij	Robin Elizabeth Vanderwoude
Shane Willem DeJonge	Reece Jacob Oosterhoff	Jacqueline Nicole VanHengstum
Allan Michal Draaistra	Marisa Lynn Petter	Wilhelmina Melinda Van Iperen
Joshua Nicholas Evink	Derrick Benjamin Pilon	Adrian Brice VanLuik
Sarah Joanne Feenstra	Jonathan Hein Post	Andrew John VanLuik
Laurie Geraldine Gracey	Joshua Fredrik Post	Edward John VanRootselaar**
Kevin James Gritter	Scott Nicholas Post	Nicholas James VanRootselaar
Graham George Helder	Jeremy William Prinzen	Jordan Hendrik Gerard VanVeen
Holly Grace Hofsink	Willem Christopher Salomons	Christina Elizabeth
Taran William Hoogsteen	Nathaniel Marc Schutten	VanWoudenberg
Alexandra Nicole Hordyk	Tyler Gerard Schutten	Tabitha Maria Wilma Veenstra
Cassandra Jane Huinink	Patrick Kenneth Schwantz	Timothy John Veenstra
Desiree Ceara Hulleman	Joshua Arend Smeding	Travis Dylan Venema
Darren Hendrikus Jans	Thomas Arend Smeding	Gavin Mark Wieske
Darryl Gerry Jans	Kevin Gerrit Spanninga	

* Received the Ontario Secondary School Certificate

** Received the Certificate of Accomplishment

Graduation 2012 at Emmanuel Christian High School



Guest speaker
Mr. Kasper Vanveen

Valedictorian
Tim Hutten



The autumn display was at its finest. The maples were at their prime. Various shades of red, orange, yellow, and green edged fields and roads, making the trip to the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church of Guelph a most pleasant drive. The afternoon sun enhanced the intensity of the colours. Dust trailed combines that were harvesting the soya bean fields. Billowy white cumulus clouds decorated the bright blue autumn sky. Emmanuel Christian High School's Graduation 2012 could not have been on a better day.

From their parked cars students, parents, board members, and staff walked across the parking lot into the church's Fellowship Hall. Decorative garden-picked flowers arranged in glass bowls graced each of the seventeen tables, providing bright autumn colour to the neatly arranged room. The graduands took their places at the head table that graced the centre of the room. Meanwhile, Niel and Liz VanWeerden, and the kitchen crew, were busy with the food, adding the last-minute spices and dishing it up into serving bowls and hot stainless steel trays—ready for the buffet table. Once the MC, Mr. Dave Nienhuis, got all to quiet down, he opened the meal with Bible reading and prayer, welcomed

the honoured graduands and the rest, and then hastily proceeded to provide all guests with an orderly way to receive their food. Various smiling and courteous Grade 12 students filled the guests' plates with a variety of salads, vegetables, pulled pork, and applesauce.

Between the main course and the desserts, the grads and all the other guests could enjoy a Made-by-the-Staff Jeopardy game about all the grads, a scrambled name search of various graduands' names, and a video clip or two that shared lighter moments of the grads while they attended Emmanuel.

After coffee, juice, and a plethora of desserts, the guests could walk in the decorated foyer or on the church grounds while the Grade 12 students diligently cleared the tables and did the dishes. All the other guests and family members arrived, and found their places in the church auditorium. The graduands donned their gowns and stoles, the orchestra arranged for "Pomp and Circumstance," the organist provided the background music, and last few guest trickled in. At 8:00 the official ceremonies began. The principal, Mr. Henk Nobel, led the procession of grads to their seats, and the board chair, Mr. Andrew Wildeboer, took his place behind the pulpit. After reading from Psalm 73, leading in prayer, and getting us all to sing, the board chair spoke words of welcome to all and words of congratulations to the grads. The guest speaker, Mr. Kasper VanVeen, a parent of one of the grads, then shared his message to the graduands. By comparing songs of today with songs of the past, he showed how empty the world's message to the youth is. And then, by comparing the world's message to that of God's Word, especially focusing on Psalm 73, he showed to the grads how rich they are to have such a basis of Christian education. He encouraged them to go on in their apprenticeships, college, or university educations, but not to forget the wisdom of God's Word, nor his purposes for their lives.

Before the principal and the chairman handed out diplomas, the principal shared his message to the grads.



Catching up with one another during dinner

He reminded them that the grass may appear greener on the other side of the fence, but that in reality, it usually isn't. He highlighted the last chapter of Ecclesiastes where the author concludes that "all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." In following this biblical instruction, the grass will always be green "under our very own feet."

After the diplomas were distributed, and the class of 2012 was presented to the audience, Mr. Arthur Kingma and Mr. Theo Hopman presented the graduates with various awards. The awards not only highlighted academic achievements, but also service and stewardship experiences (see the sidebar), for the curriculum of Emmanuel is not only an official curriculum of books and knowledge, but also an unofficial curriculum of showing leadership, care, and love, of developing ones talents, and of providing a positive school spirit for the whole student body.

The students chose Tim Hutten to represent them as their valedictorian. It was difficult for many present to not think of Tim as a Matthew Cuthbert from the play Anne of Green Gables that the students put on in the spring, but Tim did a fine job of highlighting various serious and humorous aspects through which the class learned and gelled together. Tim also thanked all stakeholders for their contributions to their education at

Honour Role

Henk Brakke, Janine DeGroot, Dianne Eygenraam, Rachel Harlaar, Yolanda Hoeksema, Craig Kroezen, Susan Landman, Alicia Lodder, Ben Meinen, Meagan Nijenhuis, Alina Sikkema, Eric Tamminga, Kendra VanLeeuwen, CaileyVanVeen, Samantha Vink

Post Farm Structures Award

Dianne Eygenraam

Royal LePage RCR Realty Business Excellence Award

Susan Landman

Citizenship Award

Meagan Nijenhuis

Stewardship Award

Rachel Harlaar

Governor General Award

Yolanda Hoeksema

Jordan Hutchinson Memorial Academic Proficiency Award

Rachel Harlaar



Emmanuel, and voiced the graduates' thanks to God for everything that he gave to them in the last four years.

After the official closing, the grads quickly marched off to the Fellowship Hall, grabbed a drink and some desserts, and lined up to receive the congratulatory well wishes from almost all present. Smiles, laughter, and joyous talk filled all the spaces in the building for almost an hour before the thankful crowds dispersed through the lamp-lit parking lot into their vehicles. A light rain had settled over the region, and through that rain brothers and sisters, friends and parents, grandparents and interested community members rode to their respective homes. God granted all a wonderful, memorable evening.



Presenting the Graduating class (4 students missing)

From the Publisher

Forgotten

It becomes more and more clear that the majority of our fellow citizens have forgotten the Almighty God. Our countries were founded and populated by Christians who openly sought the blessing of God. But our culture has turned to the worship of the idol of self. The natural world and what can be proven scientifically are set in opposition to the supernatural power of God. The holy standards of his law are ignored. A growing number do not even have a basic knowledge of God and the Bible!

The God of the covenant warned his people many times not to forget his covenant, his works, and his commandments. The book of Deuteronomy is full of such warnings. But the people often turned aside, as the Lord declares by Jeremiah: *“my people have forgotten me days without number”* (Jeremiah 2:32). Nevertheless God said to his covenant-breaking people *“yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant”* (Ezekiel 16:60).

Remembered

Both Mary and Zechariah recognized in the birth of the Messiah God’s remembrance of his promised mercy. Zechariah said that the Lord God of Israel had acted *“to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant”* (Luke 1:72). The covenant God did not forget his forgetful people or his promises to them! *“The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.*

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Psalm 98:2-3). Let us remember his works with thankfulness.

Thank You

Clarion magazine serves to remind us of God’s grace and our covenant obligations. This year again editors Dr. J. Visscher, Rev. P. Holtvlüwer, Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. K. Stam, and Dr. C. Van Dam have written and gathered much material for our spiritual edification. Our copy editor, Laura Veenendaal, organized and prepared this material on a regular schedule. Thank you all for your faithful work.

We were served with other regular articles: Dr. R. Bredenhof coordinated the *Treasures, New and Old* column; Arthur Kingma coordinated the *Education Matters* column; Corrine and Patricia Gelms wrote *Ray of Sunshine*; Rev. G. Van Popta, Rev. J. Van Popta, and Dr. W. Bredenhof also regularly supplied material. We also note the efforts of Otto Bouwman for the *Education Matters* column over the years. Coordinators and writers, thank you.

Dear subscribers and advertisers, thank you for your support, as it too is indispensable for the publication of *Clarion*. We look forward to your continued support in the coming year.

Greetings

Our heartfelt greetings and best wishes to you all as we celebrate this joyous Christmas season and mark the changing of years. May we all remember the love and faithfulness of God, and go forward depending on his sure promises.

William Gortemaker

Abbotsford Welcomes Rev. Justin Roukema!

Although Abbotsford welcomed a second pastor and teacher in Rev. J. Roukema early this past summer, it wasn't until October 12 that we were able to give him an official Abbotsford welcome. Obviously, with that kind of lag between his ordination and the welcome evening, the evening had to be good, and the Abbotsford congregation did not disappoint!

Since both Rev. Justin Roukema and his wife Amanda grew up in the Fraser Valley, we had to come up with some difficult challenges for them to see how well they still knew the area and its people. To introduce them to the younger generation, they had to match daughters to their mothers and sons to their fathers. Amanda proved especially adept at this, even lending her husband a hand when she had time to spare after correctly matching up her side.

Magdalene Vanderlinde then presented an entertaining round of "Dutch Bingo," where she managed to connect all but two members of Rev. Roukema's ward in some way, from siblings and parents to more obscure connections such as cousins marrying sisters-in-law or nephews. While it may have seemed a bit strange to anyone walking in off the streets, we could all appreciate and smile at the many ties and links within our family of believers.

Rev. Roukema was then pitted against his co-pastor, Rev. Janssen, in a variant of the popular wedding "shoe game" where we could get to know both ministers a little better. Holding up their answers without seeing the answer of their opponent, they answered questions ranging from "Who is more likely to tear up at a movie?" to "Who eats more cake on visits?"

Rev. Roukema and his wife also got a chance to fight it out in a difficult round of trivia, where they proved close matches with strong competitive spirits! They couldn't be stumped on anything, from the church address, to the names of our organists, and even to what day Tuesday Morning Bible Study meets on.

The Detmer and Teresa Deddens family shared their musical gifts with the congregation, showing they are



ready and able to step in as musical accompaniment should the organ ever fail during a worship service. On a more serious note, they also sang John Rutter's "The Anthem" in beautiful harmony, a collection of encouraging and uplifting texts set to music.

Tuesday Morning Women's Bible Study took the opportunity to address Amanda specifically, thankful that she has already joined them in Bible Study and officially welcoming her and helping her get to know us a bit better through song. She is already known to be creative and artistic, so the ladies shared hobbies and creative outlets they enjoy and encouraged her to join any of them in discussing and pursuing those interests. She was presented with a beautiful handmade quilt that included patches signed by the ladies "to keep her warm on all those nights when Justin is out visiting!"

Rev. Janssen then had a chance to address his co-pastor, and made a brief speech centred on that word "co.". Going back to Latin, he tied in the words "company," "colleague," and "cooperate," and welcomed Rev. Roukema as an equal partner with whom to share the role of pastor and teacher in Abbotsford congregation.

Finally, on behalf of the congregation, Rev. Roukema was presented with with a large wall clock, recognizing that God has a time and purpose for everything, and it was in his plan that Rev. Roukema would come to serve in Abbotsford congregation in 2012. It is with great thankfulness that we officially welcome a second minister to Abbotsford!

Elora Congregation Celebrates Twenty-Five Years

With fond memories and many laughs the congregation in Elora commemorated God's faithfulness over the past twenty-five years. The Elora Canadian Reformed Church, instituted in 1987, was the thirty-ninth church in our federation in North America.

The official celebration on October 20 began with a dessert social for past and current members of Elora congregation in the recently renovated church building, nicely decorated with white pumpkins and mums and white antique cabinets displaying pictures and other items reminiscent of the past twenty-five years. It all helped to bring back a lot of stories and laughs of how things were then compared to how things are now.

Back in 1987, forty-six communicate members of Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church in Fergus, together with seventy-one children, signed up to start the Elora congregation. Within a few months the new congregation was instituted on Sunday, September 6. Rev. Clarence Stam led this service using the words of Revelation 1:12-16. Today, the church directory has tripled in size and eight of the founding families still belong to Elora: Luitsen and Annie DeWitt, Bert and Dinah Hutten, Jerry and Claire Hutten, Dick and Dina Lodder, Onno and Annette Sikkema, and Jackie Sipkes. Two members of the founding families, Jackie DeBoer (née Reinink) and Cobie Hutten, MC'd the official part of the evening in the church sanctuary. The theme was "giving thanks," based on 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." It summarized the deep gratitude felt for all the Lord's blessings over the twenty-five years.

Brother Jerry and Sister Claire Hutten highlighted some of those blessings for us, like the more than 2600 church services we could have unhindered over the past twenty-five years. Many guest ministers preached until Elora received their own ministers of the Word: Rev. James Slaa (1993-2001), now living in Smithers, BC,



Elora church building

our "Aussie" minister, Rev. Vermeulen (2001-2007), and our current preacher, Rev. Clarence VanderVelde (2009). Brother Hutten recalls: "Rev. Stam [leading services] at the beginning, who would at times preach for us a third service after his own two in Fergus; Dr. Van Dam who was a regular in the early years, being here numerous times each month; and Rev. P. Aasman who tirelessly taught our catechism students for a number of years."

The five men installed as the first office bearers in 1987 were present during the celebration evening: Allard Gunnink, Jerry Hutten, Alex Thalen, Luitsen DeWitt, and Fred Reinink. Brother Hutten mentioned that the consistory has almost tripled in size, just like the congregation, but the amount of council meetings was reduced: "The early days had the elders and deacons meeting together as consistory, at the beginning, sometimes three times per week! Consistory meetings were at the office bearer's houses around the kitchen table; the families were young enough back then that the children were in bed long before the meetings began. The archives were typically kept 'safe' in a shoe box at someone's house – on a shelf, or under the bed. . . now I might add in filing cabinets lining one of the walls of the council room."

Milk crates

Finding a suitable place to worship was a challenge. “We worshipped in various rental facilities in the area, the two regular spots were the Salem school at first, then the old Alma community hall. We were sometimes scrambling for a place to worship when one of those places could not have us for various reasons.” According to Sister Hutten, the worship services over the past years were interrupted by a cat, mouse, and a bird. “We once made a makeshift pulpit out of milk crates for Prof. Deddens because he was so short. We have worshipped alongside Santa Claus and Christmas’ decorations of all sorts, manger settings, and even worshipped in the local legion one Christmas Day.”

In 1991 the congregation purchased their own building that was transported on big trucks to the new purchased property on Wellington County Road 7 in Salem, where it was placed on a new foundation. The manse next to the church was put up on Good Friday afternoon 1997 after the morning service; it was like a barn raising bee. In 2011 an extensive renovation and addition to the church were completed, making the building a beautiful functional property with comfortable worship facilities, a spacious council room, catechism rooms, and good area for the congregation to be together.

Horse and buggy

More interesting facts about the Elora church and congregation came out in a game of Family Feud, organized by the young adults Bible study group: the means of transportation “Elorites” have used to go to

church (snow mobiles, tractors, and horse and buggy); the most popular baking at coffee socials (boterkoek); and the most odd things that ended up in the collection bag (Dutch and Canadian Tire money), to mention a few. Also letters from our past ministers containing hearty greetings and many good memories, read by Brother Henk Nobel, added to the reflections of the evening. A power point presentation summarized past and present in a visible way, containing pictures of the congregation, consistory, study societies, and church activities from 1987-2012. It emphasized that young and old, past and present members have all contributed along the way to make us what we are today: Christ’s church in this community.

So what will a glimpse into the future of Elora show us? Sister Hutten gave us her perspective: “Give us ten or fifteen more years and the senior section will likely fill the first five pews fully equipped with our own individual iPads set up with a Bible and *Book of Praise* app, two elevators, and we’re going to need a few more paved parking spots outside. The nursery, if we hold true to our past, will be filled to the brim with all of our great grandchildren. We could even consider bus service since most of us live in Elora, maybe even a home for the aged. The ladies aid had better start putting some of that pie baking money away for some serious needs down the road. . . .”

Whatever the future will hold, we can rely on our faithful heavenly Father. Therefore, we closed our anniversary evening with thankful hearts and voices singing Hymn 66: “Great is Thy Faithfulness, O God, My Father.” We may rest assured in God’s care and blessings. May all our efforts going forward be to his praise and glory!



Rev. Schouten's Twenty-Five Years of Ministry

Guests, Rev. Schouten and family,

Tomorrow, October 4, it will be twenty-five years ago you were installed into the office of minister of the Word in Calgary, Alberta. Today in Aldergrove, B.C. we all may remember with you that it has been twenty-five years that the charge was given to you to love Christ, to feed his lambs, and tend his sheep, to quote 1 Peter 5:2; not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be. You were also charged to preach the pure doctrine, so that by your preaching and teaching the congregation may be kept in obedience to the Word of God. Additionally you were charged to not neglect the gift (1 Tim 4:14) with which the Lord has endowed you for this ministry. Devote yourself to your duties with all your strength, and with perseverance, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Tim 4:16).

Well, dear pastor, by the grace of God, as far as man is able to determine you have faithfully kept the charge. You have kept the charge not only in the congregation of Calgary, also in Abbotsford and Aldergrove.

You've perhaps noted that Rev. Schouten is a true Western Canadian. He grew up in Surrey, studied in Hamilton, and then returned immediately to the West. He received many calls to go east, but declined them all to live in the most beautiful part of Canada. Perhaps you've also noted that our pastor only serves congregations with the first three letters of the alphabet. . . Calgary, Abbotsford, Aldergrove. It's our wish you stay a true Westerner, and stick with the letter A. . . you get it. . . there's no other church in Western Canada starting with the letter A.

This Western Canadian commitment even extends to the brand name of his bike he recently purchased. It's a Rocky Mountain Sherpa. As you may know, our pastor loves biking. He's put some 3000 kilometres on his new bike, which he bought only a couple of months ago. You know from next door here, he bikes out to Cultus Lake,

to Harrison Lake, Rolley Lake, Birch Bay. . . I'm not sure when he gets to all these lakes, if he goes for a dip into the lake or not, but I can tell you about his favorite destination. . . it's a round trip out to Fort Langley. Now this is a bit of a sweaty ride, due to the elevation between here and the Fort, but you can always stop at the halfway point, pop into a book store with a coffee shop, and talk a little bike shop talk with other cyclists.

Our dear pastors blogs. His blog is called "Keep Ablaze." A couple of weeks back he wrote a column "Two years ago." It was two years ago he underwent surgery to remove a mass from his colon, followed by six months of chemotherapy. Thankfully our faithful God saved him for his family, and for the congregation, and the wider church community. He was blessed, as he writes, with a





strong sense of the Lord's nearness to him and the Lord's faithfulness to his family. Rev. Schouten writes that life with cancer seems to have a purifying effect on a child of God. He strongly wants, if allowed, the opportunity to continue to serve the cause of Christ and his Kingdom. The doctrine of the kingdom of God is his focus of study during the three months sabbatical which he is presently enjoying. The result of these studies, we hope, will appear in a series of public lectures, or a booklet. Sabbatical. . . a time with more time to spend in reading, studying, and most importantly with family.

Dear Rob, Janet, family, we are grateful that we may celebrate with you this twenty-fifth anniversary of the ordination into the gospel ministry. We encourage you to whole heartily continue to serve in this gospel ministry. As you wrote in your blog: "There's still so much to learn, so much work to be done in the service of Christ, and so many goals still to pursue." It's our prayer that our Father in Heaven will provide you with the strength,

energy, and continuous insight in the Holy Scriptures to serve him and him alone.

I would like to close with the profile from Rob Schouten's blog. About Rob Schouten:

I am a believer in Jesus Christ. Through the forgiveness and renewal of life imparted to me by him, I strive to be a good husband, a wise father, a faithful pastor, and a kind neighbour. I am interested in all aspects of God's creation and human culture but I tend to focus on biblical theology, preaching, apologetics, ethics, political engagement, gardening, cycling, and the great outdoors. I hope to use this blog to share some of what I've learned as I pursue God's call.

Rob, Janet would you now come forward to accept a gift of appreciation from the congregation.

Let's sing stanza 1 and 4 of Hymn 7.

*Glory be to God the Father,
glory be to God the Son,
glory be to God the Spirit,
God Almighty, Three in One,
Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Glory be to him alone.*

*"Glory, blessing, praise eternal!"
Thus the choir of angels sings.
"Honour, glory, power, dominion!"
Thus its praise creation brings.
Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Praise the mighty King of kings!*



Ray of Sunshine

Birthday profile



Frank Zegers, a fifty-four year old gentleman, has resided at the Lighthouse in Fergus since last February. He loves living there. His jokes, Dutch phrases, and laughter bring joy to the home. He talks a lot and is always asking many questions. He wants to be in a good, happy mood.

He loves the Lord and wants to walk in his footsteps. He loves to talk to people about the Lord and will do so as he walks the nearby trails. Frank loves the outdoors and is a nature lover. Yes, he can identify many birds, even their sounds, and if you walk with him he will be sure to tell you about the plants you see and birds that fly. He has a green thumb and is often busy with his house plants making new cuttings. Frank is very willing to lend a hand in the gardens, wants to help you do dishes, and would jump at an opportunity to help you in your woodworking shop or spending time with your farm animals. Frank also enjoys doing crafts in his room where he spends many relaxing hours colouring, painting, cutting and pasting pictures from magazines, and woodburning. Often he gives finished crafts away as gifts. As he works, you can hear his CD player, or he listens to a sermon, or he sings beautifully. He likes to pray for people who are sick and needy, as well as for his mother and siblings whom he loves. Going to church and concerts is always a highlight for Frank, also for the social aspect. Let me end with words that Frank will often use as you leave, "May the Lord bless you and keep you!"

We extend a hearty belated happy birthday to all who have celebrated a birthday. We hope that you had a wonderful day celebrating with friends and family. And for those with birthdays yet to come we hope that your day is blessed with happiness and joy. Indeed, may the Lord bless you and keep you!

December

Sandy Spyksma will be 31
Peace Haven Homes
6 Oneida Drive, Brantford, ON N3S 7X8

JAMES KAMMINGA will be 28
Box 1125, Carman, MB ROG OJO

FRANK ZEGERS will be 54
6528 1st Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

JULIE KAMMINGA will be 24
Box 1125, Carman, MB ROG OJO

January

LIZ KONING will be 52
9905 152nd Street, Edmonton, AB T5P 1X4

CHRISTINE BREUKELMAN will be 41
2225-19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

STEPHEN DYKSTRA will be 30
Box 3573, Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0

HENRY DRIEGEN will be 57
#19-31450 Spur Avenue, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5M3

GRACE HOMAN will be 57
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road S., RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

EDWIN SCHUTTE will be 29
844 Bowman Road, Abbotsford, BC V3G 1S9

JANINE SMID will be 43
141 Kittridge Avenue E., Strathroy, ON N7G 2A9

KATHERINE NIJENHUIS will be 47
6528 First Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

TYLER HOEKSEMA will be 24
6755 Lorne Drive, Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

A note to all parents and caregivers

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

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms

8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

Phone: 905-957-0380; Email: jcorngelms@porchlight.ca



Dr. Cornelis Van Dam is professor emeritus of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

Not of Works

Ralph F. Boersema, *Not of Works: Norman Shepherd and his Critics. The Justification Controversy Laid to Rest Through Understanding.* Minneapolis: NextStep Resources, 2012.

Additional Information: 235 pages, about \$15.00 US. It can be ordered via ralph@refmail.net for \$18.00 CDN (postpaid)

This is a much needed and instructive book. Rev. Ralph Boersema, retired missionary who has laboured for many years in Brazil, has taken the time and trouble to investigate and find out exactly what has been going on with respect to the views and person of his former professor, Rev. Norman Shepherd. I have great respect for my colleague for doing all the research reflected in this book and for putting this book together in spite of his physical limitations of being legally blind. Most of all, I respect his integrity in not simply accepting the veracity of published condemnations of Shepherd's views by Reformed church committees but searching the matter out to see if these condemnations were really warranted. An astounding fact mentioned in Shepherd's preface to this book is that not a single church committee which condemned Shepherd ever spoke to him about his views. Boersema took the effort to do that as well as to speak to critics of Shepherd in order to try to get an accurate picture of the controversy. This book can therefore be taken seriously as one that is well researched and balanced.

Purpose

In Boersema's own words:

The main point of this book is not to convince the reader that Mr. Shepherd is correct. It is, rather, to promote theological reflection on the Bible's teaching. Such reflection is not helped when opponents misunderstand each other. Therefore, this study wants to convince the reader that there are ways in which the critics misread Shepherd. In some cases clear statements are not taken into account and sometimes incorrect conclusions are drawn from what he says, and even from what he does not say (4).

The irenic character of this book is articulated in the author's preface when he writes:

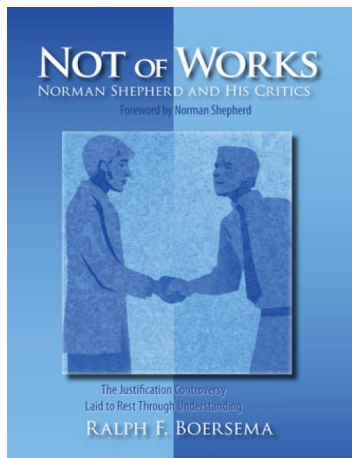
I want to be clear that Mr. Shepherd and I recognize a strong bond of fellowship even with those whose views we question. We embrace as Reformed brothers also those who hold views that we think need to be reconsidered. . . . As reflected in its cover design, this book extends the right hand of fellowship to Shepherd's opponents and seeks mutual up building about real differences, rather than recriminations based on misunderstandings (xxix).

The issues

For the purpose of context, the foreword by Norman Shepherd is very helpful. In it he summarizes the main issues. Boersema opens his account by noting that Shepherd is opposed to "‘Easy-believism,’ the idea that one can receive Jesus Christ as personal Savior, without obeying him as Lord. In answer to this error, he taught his students that living faith is always penitent, obedient faith. Faith cannot exist without works (James 2:26)" (3). That being said, a lot is involved in fleshing out exactly what that means and implies. A review cannot possibly do justice to the rich and deep contents of this book, but let me mention the following.

Boersema's method in this book is to listen to the critics and dialog with them from the writings of Shepherd. As a result of his research, he affirms at the outset that Shepherd:

is only seeking to refine and develop Reformed thought, just as we are all called to do. In none of the points he is raising does Shepherd opt for legalistic, Romanistic or Arminian views. We may question whether he expresses himself clearly, whether he is right in his appeal to certain Reformed fathers or whether his exegesis is sound. We ought to interact with him to mutually build each other up. However,



we do not do well to interpret his teachings in the light of legalistic, Romanistic or Arminian schemes of thought. Careful attention to Shepherd's writings soon reveals that this just does not work (5).

In chapters 2 to 4 Boersema deals with justification, including the

necessity of works for justification and justification and sanctification. While interacting with Shepherd's critics, Boersema explains how Shepherd seeks to understand James 2:24 ("man is justified by works and not by faith alone") in the light of Romans 3:28 ("we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law"). He shows that "faith cannot exist without works, but believing works do not merit justification" (25, 43). This is "the obedience of faith" (CD, I 9).

The issue in chapters 5 to 7 is whether Adam would have merited eternal life with his good work of obeying God. Boersema shows that a long-standing theme in Reformed dogmatics is to deny that life eternal was to be given to Adam *as a reward* for his merits in obeying God. It is furthermore questionable whether there was a covenant of works with Adam whereby he would merit eternal life. Can any creature *merit* something in relation to God? We are indebted to God to do good works. Also before the fall, man's fellowship with God was the fruit of undeserved favour. It is part of the obedience of faith. This is the view held by theologians such as Klaas Schilder, John Murray, and Jelle Faber, and most recently championed by Norman Shepherd. In light of these and other considerations, Boersema suggests that rather than speak of covenant of works and covenant of grace when speaking of the covenant before and after the fall, we should speak of covenant of original favour and covenant of redemptive grace (80).

In chapter 8, Boersema deals with the issue of election and covenant. He stresses that we can only go by God's revelation and not the secret things of God (Deut 29:29). Over against those who suggest that the covenant is made only with the elect, Shepherd notes

that Scripture teaches that God made his covenant with believers and their children, not just with the elect. The promises and demands of the covenant, including the call to repentance, go forth to all. This covenantal approach is that which is also familiar to us and is in the line of our confessions. Furthermore, the call to repentance must go out to all the nations. "It is a genuine offer of grace to the whole world, not just to the elect" (88).

Chapter 9 deals with the imputation of Christ's active obedience. This difficult topic is not easily described in a short review but Boersema patiently gives a very clear account of it and shows that while Shepherd denies the imputation of Christ's active obedience for our justification and so differs from the majority of Reformed teachers on this issue, his views are not inconsistent with the teaching of past Reformed theologians who have not been considered unorthodox for holding to this teaching. Shepherd is, for example, in the company of Johannes Bogermann, the moderator of the Synod of Dort (1618-1620) on this point. The reason Shepherd denies the imputation of Christ's active obedience for our justification is the lack of biblical evidence for a works/merit principle of justification and a covenant of works which this position presupposes (106). Shepherd affirms that the forgiveness of our sins is grounded in the death and resurrection of Christ who "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom 4:25) (xvi). Shepherd does not deny that Christ's perfect obedience throughout his life was necessary for our salvation, but affirms that our justification is through Christ's blood (Rom 5:9; also see LD 25, Q/A 67) (108). Boersema competently deals with this intricate topic, also in interacting with Shepherd's critics. He also shows that the idea of the imputation of Christ's active obedience is not found in Calvin, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort.

In chapter 10 he explores reasons why Shepherd's views received such hostility and affirms that Shepherd was not interested in a new theology but only in improving Reformed theological expression through careful exegesis (128).

In chapter 11, Boersema notes that Shepherd's work is important. For example, it should make one more sensitive to the use of the law as the rule for

thankfulness and not just as convictor of sin (134-135). However, we merit nothing by doing God's will. We simply show our love for God by doing his will.

The book concludes with several appendices. In appendix 1, Boersema gives extensive quotes from Shepherd's critics and gives his response to them. Appendix 2 contains Shepherd's thirty-four theses on justification in relation to faith, repentance, and good works which Shepherd presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1978, along with Boersema's comments. In order to promote peace and unity among Reformed Christians by destroying straw men, Boersema presents a fictitious but realistic dialog between two elders about Shepherd in Appendix 3. Bibliography and indices round off the book.

In conclusion

This irenic book seeks to pull the Reformed community together and not allow controversy over Shepherd's views to cause unwarranted estrangement from each other. As Boersema noted at the outset and repeated later (141), the main point of the book is not

to convince the reader that Shepherd is correct but to promote edifying theological reflection. Boersema himself raises concerns here and there with Shepherd's formulations and ideas (88, 130) and acknowledges that "more explanation might have improved the reception of Shepherd's views" (123). However, he also correctly notes that it is the reader's responsibility to read what is written and not draw conclusions on what is not written. Boersema affirms that

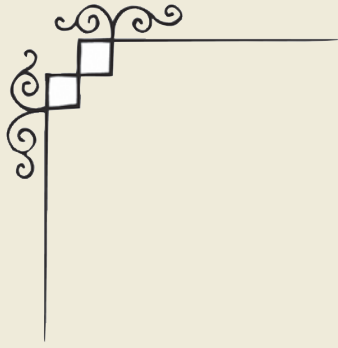
The need of the moment for Christ's church is for some of the critics to publicly acknowledge that their understanding of his [Shepherd's] views was mistaken. The peace of the church does not require that all agree, but it is served by humble recognition that there have been differing streams of interpretation in Reformed theology since the Reformation and that more than one have exegetical merit (142).

This book deserves a wide readership in the Reformed community affected by the Shepherd controversy. May the Lord be pleased to use it to bring understanding and peace among brothers and sisters of the same faith.

*But when the time
had fully come,
God sent forth
his son. . .*

Galatians 4:4





Letter to the Editor



Response to Klaas Stam's Article, "Do we need mentors?"

Dear Editor,

I would like to thank Rev. Stam for considering the idea of mentors and inviting feedback. We at the Langley Canadian Reformed Church have "signed up" with Stephen Ministries and have made use of their training resources and structures in forming a mentoring committee within our congregation. When we use the word mentor in this context, we are thinking of members from our congregation trained and supported to provide one-to-one caregiving relationships for other members who might benefit from such a relationship. Having gone through the process of starting this committee, we have been sensitive to many of the points that Rev. Stam has raised, but did not find them convincing.

Rev. Stam asks, "Do we need mentors?" and the answer from Scripture is clearly no. We don't need mentors, just like we don't need a property committee, nursery attendants, caretakers, and a host of other entities with which most Canadian Reformed congregations are familiar. A church of the Lord Jesus Christ needs elders and deacons. If mentors or mentoring would ever compromise the preaching of the gospel and care of God's people, then we would expect elders and deacons to intervene and, if necessary, to end the program.

Rev. Stam wonders whether mentorship might lead to an erosion of the special offices that Christ has given to his church. This could of course happen if the elders and deacons were to contract out their duties and abdicate their responsibilities to anyone else, mentors included. However, we see mentors working not in competition with elders and deacons, but as a support to their care. Our elders have a lot on their plate, and the execution of their duties simply does not allow them to make a weekly visit to one

or more members of their ward over the course of a year or two. A mentoring committee is a great way to utilize others in the congregation who have the time and gifts to help out. Elders and deacons do not abdicate their responsibility when they seek out avenues of help and support for the sheep under their care, they exert it.

Rev. Stam also wonders if mentorship might erode the sense of the office of all believers. We think not, since formalizing and organizing within the congregation does not impede spontaneous and voluntary participation in other areas. In Langley we have a "Helping Hands" group that will organize meals and cleaning for members. Does that mean that no one cooks or cleans voluntarily? Not at all! The ladies of our church are like a small army, a Casserole Corps, ready to descend upon any family in need with a battery of pasta, rice, and potatoes dishes. Formalization and organization need not hinder voluntary participation, but they can help ensure continuity and accountability where it is crucially needed.

Although much more could be said, I hope that it is clear that mentoring committees and the resources provided by Stephen Ministries need not be a threat to the church and can be a useful asset.

In Christ, Rev. Ryan deJonge

Response

Thanks for your clarifying response. I sincerely hope that the program is helpful and that the pitfalls described will not occur. Perhaps in due time an update will be helpful.

Greetings, Klaas



Classis Alberta of October 2, 2012 convened by St. Albert Canadian Reformed Church

On behalf of the convening church of St. Albert, Rev. A. B. Roukema opened the meeting and invited the assembly to sing Psalm 33:1, 6. He then read Psalm 33 and led in prayer. Welcome was extended to all, including Rev. D. Kok from Leduc URC. Some matters of memorabilia were noted. The credentials were examined and found to be in good order, and one church had instructions. The classis was declared constituted. The officers suggested by the previous classis took their respective positions: Rev. R. Aasman, chairman, Rev. A. B. Roukema, vice-chairman, and Rev. J. D. Louwerse, clerk. The agenda was adopted.

The following reports were received. 1) The report of the treasurer was received with thankfulness. 2) A report from the church at St. Albert for the inspection of the books of the treasurer. The books were found to be in good order. 3) Reports of the Church Visitors: Coaldale Canadian Reformed Church, Edmonton Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church, Edmonton Providence Canadian Reformed Church.

Rev. D. Kok, fraternal delegate from the URCNA brought greetings and words of encouragement, and expressed thankfulness for the bond between the two federations. The chairman responded in kind.

A proposal is received from Taber regarding a central meeting place for classis. It is decided to leave classis regulations as is but encourage the convening church to consider using a central location.

The church at Barrhead expresses thankfulness for pulpit supply, and asks that it continue.

Question period according to Article 44 CO was held. One church asks for advice on a matter of church discipline.

In closed session advice was given on a matter of church discipline.

Letter received from Langley CanRC regarding Regional Synod.

Providence requests that the archives of the now defunct Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry be destroyed. This is agreed to.

Taber suggests guidelines for successful videoconferences. This is discussed and some additional suggestions are made. These will be added to the appendix to classis regulations dealing with videoconferences.

Convening church for next classis is Taber. Classis is scheduled for December 11, with March 12 as the alternate date. Officers: Chair – Rev. H. Kalkman, Vice – Rev. R. Aasman, Clerk – A.B. Roukema
Standing Committees and /or classical deputies/
church visitors.

1. Treasurer: J. Buitenbos.
2. Church to audit the books of the treasurer: St. Albert.
3. Church for care of the archives: Edmonton Providence.
4. Church to inspect the archives: Edmonton Immanuel.
5. Church Visitors: Revs. R. Aasman, J. Louwerse, W.B. Slomp (conv.), H. Kalkman, M. Jagt, and D. Poppe.
6. Committee for examiners:
Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. W.B. Slomp.
7. Examiners:

Exegesis OT:	Rev. R. Aasman
Exegesis NT:	Rev. J. Louwerse
Knowledge of scripture:	Rev. A.B. Roukema
Doctrine and creeds:	Rev. W.B. Slomp
Church History:	Rev. H. Kalkman
Ethics:	Rev. D. Poppe
Church Polity:	Rev. H. Kalkman
Diaconiology:	Rev. M. Jagt
8. Committee for Financial Aid to Needy Churches:
C. DeBoer, W. Noot, J. Vanderdeen.
9. Deputy for contact with the provincial government:
Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar. He is requested to submit an annual written report each spring.
10. Appointment of Observer to RCUS:
Rev. H. Kalkman, alternate. Rev. D. Poppe.
11. Appointment of Observer to URCNA:
Rev. A.B. Roukema
12. Delegation to Regional Synod West Langley, Nov. 5, 2012. D.V.
As elders: Brs. Bernie Van Raalte and Bert Wierenga
As alternates: Brs. John Vanderdeen and Ray Noot
As ministers: Revs. M. Jagt and J. Louwerse
As alternates: Revs. A.B. Roukema, and D. Poppe, in this order.

Question Period was not made use of.

The chairman noted with thankfulness that brotherly censure was not necessary.

Acts and press release were read and adopted.

Rev. Aasman lead in prayer and closed the meeting.

For classis,
A.B. Roukema, vice-chair e.t.



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

Year 2012 in Review

Once again we have come to that time when the days of another year are coming to a close. The year of our Lord 2012 is almost over.

Wrong psalm?

Yes, and as it winds down many of us reach for our Bibles and turn to Psalm 90. Perhaps more than any other psalm this is the psalm that is read and quoted as we move from one year into the next.

Still, the question may be asked, "Is it really fitting and suitable?" After all, consider the words of verse 7, "We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence." Or what about the words of verse 11, "Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you?" What these words, and more, indicate is that this is not a psalm that was originally written in a time filled with fond memories and cosy remembrance. Rather Moses writes it after Israel has experienced God's anger, wrath, and judgment.

Can we then still use it? Of course, but we should be honest enough to acknowledge its negative side and to point out its original setting. Indeed, it teaches us that full of the Spirit of God, Moses does not give up on prayer even in the face of God's anger. He does not collapse in despair. He is honest enough to admit that Israel has it coming but bold enough to ask the Lord not to withdraw his favour completely. He pleads for the Lord to relent, "How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants." Even in dark days Moses does not shrink, and if he can do that, how much more can we today who have Jesus Christ at our side, not do the same?

With this in mind we can read this psalm and learn too from its references to time and its swift passage. It contrasts the eternal God (v. 1-2) with finite man (v. 3-4). It compares us to fickle grass (v. 5-6). It urges us, in light of the brevity of our days and years, to get with it and

to "gain a heart of wisdom" (v. 12). It expresses the hope that the number of our days of affliction will be matched by the number of our days of gladness.

For any number of you 2012 was a good year, for others it was not so good and no doubt for some of you, it was a terrible year. Nevertheless, as dire as the circumstances may have been Moses reminds us that there is one thing that we can always do, and that is to turn to our God and ask him for better days, for days full of compassion and renewed favour.

Still, it is not the intent of this column to dwell excessively on personal things. Our scope is wider and broader. It has to do with churches, with servants, with seminaries, and with kingdom work. What are the highlights of 2012 as far as our federation is concerned?

Churches and calls

We begin with churches and calls and note that in last year's review we started in the east and moved west. This time we will reverse the order and commence in the west.

British Columbia

The year 2012 saw a lot of change, especially in the most westerly Canadian province of British Columbia. In the northern region the church of Houston said "farewell" to the Rev. Hendrik Alkema and his family as they moved all the way down to Albany, Western Australia. But then in fairly quick order Rev. Carl van Dam of the Grassie Canadian Reformed Church was called, accepted, moved, and installed. This time Houston will not need to wait a year or years for a replacement. Good for them!

In the southern part of the province things were also changing. The church at Abbotsford extended a call to Candidate Justin Roukema and he accepted. Since then he has been ordained and taken up his work as the second pastor of this congregation. There he is privileged to work beside the Rev. Karlo Janssen. Meanwhile to the

east things were also stirring in the church at Yarrow as the Rev. Richard Eikelboom and his wife arrived from Launceston, Australia. For them it was quite a different move. Some years ago they transitioned from Calgary to Tasmania with all of their children. This time they came back but without their children, who remained behind. Hopefully they are in a congregation that will soon provide them with some “adopted” family and children.

Going a little more east in the Fraser Valley one comes to Chilliwack, and the congregation there was also able to greet a new minister. Candidate Abel Pol and his family arrived to take up the pastoral work in this charge. As a newly minted minister in a large church, he will have his work cut out for him and we wish him well.

Surveying the scene in BC points to only one vacancy and that is in the church of Langley. Calls extended to the Revs. John Louwse and Marc Jagt were met with declines and so the largest church in the federation continues to have a vacancy. Notice I did not say that it was vacant as the Rev. Ryan deJonge continues to serve there, but with more than 700 members, some additional manpower would no doubt be much appreciated.

Alberta

Moving next door we come to Alberta. For quite some time the churches in this province all had pastors but then the Rev. Bert Tiggelaar retired in 2011 and Barrhead church has been in pastoral search mode ever since. Thus far the calls that have been extended have been met with declines and as this is being written it is not known what the Rev. Rolf den Hollander will do with his call. Perhaps they will have some success this time.

Elsewhere in the province attempts to move Rev. John Louwse of Neerlandia, Rev. Dirk Poppe of Coaldale, and Rev. Marc Jagt of Taber have proven to be unsuccessful. Of course, this will not stop churches who are vacant from trying to lure them away.

Manitoba

Manitoba is full. With the arrival of the Rev. Steve Vandeveld in January of 2012 the only vacancy in this province came to an end. Attempts to attract a minister to accept a call to the church planting work that the Redeemer Winnipeg Church wants to do in southern Manitoba have thus far failed to materialize. Hopefully in 2013 a capable candidate or pastor will be found.



Colorado

Seeing that the Denver American Reformed Church is a member church in Classis Manitoba, it seems right to head far to the south and to the west for a moment. We do so not because Denver has a ministerial vacancy but because Denver had up until October a ministerial wife vacancy. Rev. Ryan Kampen had been the only bachelor minister in the federation; however, this was remedied when he married Esther Weidenhammer of Carman, Manitoba, on October 6. Our congratulations to the newlyweds!

Ontario

Although Grand Rapids is in Michigan and not Ontario, it does belong to a classis in Ontario, so we will include it under that heading. The church there continued to remain vacant after the departure of the Rev. John Ludwig in 2009. Attempts to find a replacement failed, but the calling work continued and finally struck gold when the Rev. Ken Kok accepted. The same is true for the church at Chatham. After a long vacancy the Rev. David deBoer accepted its call. Since then he and his family have moved, settled down and gone to work.

Moving east we come to the church of Kerwood. Its pastor, the Rev. Cornelis Kleyn, felt led by the Lord to accept a call to the mission work in Papua New Guinea, and thus a new vacancy arose. No word has been received yet as to a replacement.

Elsewhere in Ontario, the Rev. John VanWoudenberg received a call from the church at Dunnville, and accepted, in what appeared to be, very quick order. Outside observers were left to wonder whether or not this

was what could be called “a call by stealth.” One moment he was a pastor in Guelph and then he suddenly emerged as a pastor in Dunnville.

The same cannot be said of the Rev. Douwe Agema. Those who are up on church news were aware that he received and accepted a call to the newest congregation in the federation, the Living Word Church of Guelph.

Meanwhile, not too far away in Fergus, there arose two vacancies. Rev. Agema’s departure created a vacancy in the Maranatha church and the departure of the Rev. Walter Geurts created an opening in Fergus North. Unfortunately the last vacancy was not due to a call elsewhere but due to a decision to sever the pastoral tie between pastor and congregation. Needless to say, this is a most painful thing and we wish both Rev. Geurts and his family, as well as the Fergus North church, much wisdom and strength as they go their separate ways.

Not that far away the church at Toronto (or should it be Richmond Hill?) entered into a period of vacancy with the retirement of the Rev. Pim den Hollander (more on that later). No doubt preparations are being made and soon the calling work will begin in earnest.

The same is true for the church at Grassie. The departure of the Rev. van Dam placed them in the vacant category but the calling wheels are no doubt in motion.

Besides the above vacancies, the Cornerstone church in Hamilton continued its efforts to find a pastor to work alongside the Rev. Bill DeJong. Thus far no additional worker has been found, but the search goes on.



Much further to the southeast the church at Blue Bell finds itself in the same predicament. After serving there for twenty-five years the Rev. Ken Kok was led to accept a call elsewhere and thus Blue Bell finds itself in the ranks of the “vacant.”

Still, all of this is not absolute for there is a deeper sense in which this church and all the other faithful churches in this situation are never really vacant. As long as Jesus Christ remains the head of his church the biggest vacancy of all remains filled, and what remains is the work of filling lesser vacancies. May that lesser, albeit important, work continue in the knowledge and certainty that King Jesus will sustain during the interim and provide for the future.

The retirement ranks

Of note in 2012 was also the fact that the ministerial retirement ranks continued to swell. At the beginning of May, the Rev. James Visscher ended his active service in the Langley church. The official retirement date also marked the end of twenty-five years of service in this congregation. Later in the year the Rev. Pim den Hollander of Toronto reached the age of sixty-five years as well and also decided that it was time to transition. Finally, the Rev. Jan de Gelder of Flamborough also joined them age-wise; however, he decided to soldier on through the winter months and plans to join the ranks of his two colleagues above, and others, in the spring of 2013.

Sickness

Speaking of others, it should be noted too that 2012 was a difficult year as far as health is concerned for some of the retired brothers. Professor Jakob Geertsema was in and out of the hospital and had one operation after another. Thankfully, the Lord enabled him to stage a series of comebacks and he continues to be in good spirits. Rev. Johannes Mulder also had and still has his health issues, so much so that he needs to move and receive more help than only his wife, Lies, can provide. Hopefully the door to additional care will open soon for him.

As always there remained ongoing concerns too about the health of Prof. Jack deJong and Prof. Niek Gootjes. Both of them, and their families, continue to be carried by the prayers of the saints across the land.

Anniversaries

As our federation ages and as both churches and pastors age too, the number of anniversaries continues to increase. 2012 saw the following ministers celebrate twenty-five years in the ministry of the Word: Rev. Ken Kok (Grand Rapids), Rev. Dick Wynia (Lincoln), Rev. Rob Schouten (Aldergrove), and Rev. George van Popta (Ottawa). It also marked the fortieth year in the ministry for the Rev. James Visscher (Langley). May the Lord bless these brothers as they continue on in the service of the Lord.

Buildings

The order here is churches and ministers or professors first, and then buildings. In that connection this writer is not aware of any new church buildings being erected in 2012. This does not mean that everything is at a standstill, however, for while in southern Manitoba he was brought up to date on the significant renovation being undertaken by the church of Carman East. It was decided that the time had come to both spruce up and enlarge the building. As a result, the worship space is being renewed and new meeting/catechism rooms and baby-sitting facilities, plus a bigger foyer/fellowship hall are being added. All in all, it should lead to a much more functional building.

Synod 2013 in sight

A visit to the federation website (www.canrc.org) reveals more than just news about calls and anniversaries; it also highlights the fact that another general synod is just around the corner. According to the synod regulations, all of the reports to synod should be available six months ahead of time. A cursory look at the website shows that most of the standing and special committees are meeting this deadline. Good for them! As well this is good for the churches and for all of the members. In the past these reports were made available in print to only the office bearers in each church. Now these reports can be read, discussed, and commented on by all. I dare say that it leads to a more informed membership.

At the same time it also requires a membership that owns computers and is computer savvy. On the whole this is, I would think, not a problem as our members never appear to be far behind when it comes to the latest technology. Still, there will always be some. So for those

of you who do not own a computer, you are urged to consider purchasing one, and those of you who have difficulty operating one are advised to consult your grandchildren.

The Seminary

Synod Burlington 2010 decided, upon recommendation, that it would be good to give the Theological College a more up-to-date and proper name, hence while the official and legal name remains "The Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches," the new operational name is "The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary" or "CRTS" for short.

Aside from a name change, how is the Seminary doing? All reports and indications are that it is doing marvellously well.

Symposium and conference

2012 opened with another successful symposium sponsored by the Seminary. This time it was on preaching. Each faculty member delivered an address to students, pastors, and guests alike on one or other aspect relating to the ministry of the Word. A number of the theological students received as opportunity to present a concept sermon and were given appropriate feedback. Young and old, experienced and inexperienced, pastor and students received all sorts of advice on how to hone their homiletic skills. Hopefully, the churches are already receiving and hearing the benefits of these efforts.



In the week after the preaching symposium a conference was held on church planting. The Rev. Ross Graham, who heads the church planting efforts of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, was in attendance and shared some of his insights. The Rev. Henk Drost, who works for our Dutch sister churches in the Ukraine, gave a number of insightful and stimulating talks on evangelism. These presentations were subsequently posted on the Seminary website (www.canadianreformedseminary.ca) and continue to be accessible there.

It may also be noted here that plans are well underway to host another symposium on preaching in 2013, only this time it will be on catechism preaching. Also, a conference is being planned to highlight the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism. Seeing that these conferences are attracting more and more attention and participants, next year's effort may need to be moved off-site as the Seminary building will not be large enough to host all of the activities and attendees. Needless to say, that is not a bad problem to have.

ATS work

The past year also found the staff, faculty, and board of the Seminary deep in the final phases of accreditation work. Becoming a member of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) is an arduous task requiring all sorts of assessments, studies, analyses, and presentations.

Has all the effort been worth it? From speaking to some of those involved one gains the impression that this has been a challenging but profitable exercise. In life generally it is good for any organization, company, or institution to re-examine its purpose, goals, and functioning from time to time, so why not a seminary? In addition, it is beneficial for an organization to know where it stands when it comes to comparable organizations, as well as to belong to an association that has credibility and demands accountability. Hence the efforts of all involved in this project are to be lauded. May it lead to full membership in an association that will help iron sharpen iron.

Students

In September of 2012 three students were awarded degrees: Tim Schouten, Rob VanMiddelkoop, and David Winkel; however, only the last student decided that in



due time he will ask the churches to examine him with a view to receiving a call and entering the ministry. Before such an exam takes place David Winkel will first work until the end of the year in the church of Guelph (Emmanuel).

While thankful for this one student and potential minister, it cannot be denied that there is a degree of disappointment and concern in the air. Of course, one cannot compel young men to enter the ministry, but at the same time it would be hoped that in the future a higher number of graduates will be willing, ready, and able to make that step. After all, we need more ministers! As things now look, there will be ten vacancies by the end of year and three more in the new year. The Lord of the harvest needs more harvesters.

And thankfully they are coming! The coming may be slow, but they are coming. While three students graduated in 2012, eight more could be admitted. Altogether the Seminary has its highest enrollment ever! Cause for rejoicing, indeed!

At the same time it is not a cause of relaxing and resting on one's laurels. It takes a long time to mould, shape, and train a young man for the ministry. It also requires an army of people: parents, teachers, ministers, friends, relatives. Finally, it also requires a certain ecclesiastical environment. What do I mean? It has to do with just how do church members view, support, regard, and esteem the ministry. Are the parents among us still encouraging their able children to aim for it? Are teachers and pastors still lighting a fire in the hearts of young men? Are the churches still praying for more shepherds and teachers?

A fifth professor

While incoming students and accreditation work was high on the Seminary agenda in 2012, so was one more thing, namely the preparations for the appointment of a fifth professor. For some time already various general synods have instructed the Seminary to move forward with such an appointment. Now, it is beginning to look as if General Synod 2013 will receive a recommendation and then instruct the Board to make it happen.

Still, all of this requires preparation. A special committee needs to be struck, the churches need to be consulted, proposed names need to be weighed, interviews need to take place, ample discussion needs to happen, and a candidate needs to be selected. In addition, all of this needs to be the subject of much prayer.

Yet you may wonder, “Is this necessary? Do we really need a fifth man?” From all of the reports received, the answer is “Yes!” What needs to be understood is that it is hard for the current teacher, Prof. A.J. de Visser, to do justice to the wide diversity of subjects that he needs to teach. In reality, he is head of not just one department but of three – church history, church polity, and the pastoral disciplines (preaching, teaching, training for office, counseling, evangelism, missions). In many other seminaries each of the subjects like counseling or missions has its own separate department, as well as a host of teachers, part-time and full-time.

Foreign mission

If the Seminary is close to the heart of the members, so too is the mission work that is being done in far off places by any number of missionaries sent out by our churches.



Papua New Guinea (Toronto church)

The local church that has served as a calling church for foreign mission the longest in our Canadian Reformed federation is the Toronto church. Why, I can still remember as a boy growing up in that congregation during the 1960s what an excitement surrounded the visit of the Rev. H. Knigge, the first missionary called by that church to work in far away and mysterious Papua New Guinea (formerly called Irian Jaya, and a province of Indonesia).

Well, here we are almost in 2013 and that work is still going on. True, it has moved from the western part of that huge and divided island to the eastern part. In addition, it is also true that the work of the missionaries has changed. Now, instead of being the only ones to preach to the locals, they teach and train local men to do more and more of the preaching and pastoral work.

Yet while the work may have changed somewhat, there is no doubt that the workload remains as heavy as ever. Realizing this, the Toronto church, also on behalf of its supporting churches, has called two men to do this work. Rev. Henry Versteeg and his wife Rita are there for their second stint. For years they served in the western part, then repatriated and served the Chatham church, and now that their children are grown, they are back and serving in the Port Moresby area. They will also soon be joined by Rev. Cornelis Kleyn and his wife. Together with the help of others, they will be involved in the training work at the Bible College. May the Lord see fit to bless their labours and so raise up many new pastors, teachers, elders, and church workers for his church in that part of the world.

Brazil (Surrey-Maranatha and Hamilton churches)

Two of our churches, one in the east and the other in the west, continue to be busy in Brazil. In that connection it should also be mentioned that the Surrey-Maranatha church will soon relinquish its responsibility as a calling/sending church and passing the baton to the Aldergrove church.

Currently, Surrey (soon Aldergrove) sends out and supports two men in the field, namely the Revs. Ken Wieske and Julius VanSpronsen. Together they have their hands full preaching and teaching in many places in northeastern Brazil. An increasing number of churches and pastors are discovering the Reformed faith,

contacting them, and asking for assistance. In addition, there are young men who need to be trained as future Brazilian pastors and teachers.

Further to the south in Maceio, the Rev. Bram de Graaf is labouring on behalf of the Hamilton church and its supporting churches. He is doing all that he can to move the local church there towards institution and self-existence. He too is engaged in seminary teaching and training.

Together these three missionaries also serve that fledgling federation of churches called the Reformed Churches of Brazil in many and various ways. Advice is frequently sought, guidance is often needed, and in-depth study on a host of issues is frequently demanded of them.

During this past year the Rev. Ken Wieske and his family could also enjoy a much needed furlough. Part of their time away from the mission field was devoted to resting and reconnecting with family and friends. Another part had to do with visiting the supporting churches in Manitoba, Alberta, and BC. May the time have been well-spent and may the batteries be sufficiently re-charged.

West Timor, Indonesia (Smithville church)

In a different part of the world than Brazil but much closer to PNG, we have the work that is being done by the Rev. Ed Dethan for the church at Smithville and its supporting churches. As with the other missionaries already mentioned, his work too centres around teaching and training. Together with others, he operates a College/Seminary in which young men are trained for various vocations, as well as for work in the churches. In



addition, he and his wife are also engaged in organizing social work and assistance for needy people and orphans.

China (Cloverdale and Langley churches)

Far to the north of Indonesia lies the most populous nation on the face the earth, China. Unlike so many others nations where missionaries can enter and work freely, China remains a nation controlled by the Communist Party. Officially it claims to allow freedom of religion, but the reality is that the Christian church in China faces many hurdles, barriers, and obstacles. At times and in different parts of the country God's people there also faces persecution.

Now anyone who is familiar with Chinese history can understand at least in part the government's obsession with control. For so long this ancient land has experienced nothing else than upheaval, warfare, and poverty. There is, and has always been, fear in the air.

Regrettably in such a climate what the Chinese authorities fail to understand is that the Reformed Church does not side with revolution and lawlessness but with peace, order, and good government. What better ally is there than an ally who teaches its members to pray for the government, to honour those in authority, and to pay taxes? What better friend is there than one that seeks the absolute best for your country and people?

Well now, in this land the churches of Cloverdale and Langley are active. Thanks to the efforts of their missionary, and with the assistance of others, local churches are being assisted, leaders are being taught, and members are being exposed to the beauties of the Reformed faith.

Nevertheless, the field is so vast and the work so endless that visits alone cannot meet the demand. More needs to be done and to this end the Internet is being used. An online Bible college is now in operation. It was supposed to start with an absolute limit of twelve students, but somehow twelve have become seventeen. If all who want to be taught were to be admitted the numbers would quickly swell to 170, even to 1700 and beyond.

And yet a start has been made. A small, select, able, and really, really hard-working bunch of students are now hitting the books. More are impatiently waiting to be enrolled. The introductory study phase is coming to a close and soon a start will be made on two courses in the first semester or year.

Thanks to the help of a number of very able brothers, all of the courses for the first and second semester/

year have now been written in English and work is commencing on the third and final semester/year. In turn these courses are sent to translators in Canada and China and then edited by a full-time and very able team consisting of Sr. Jean, Sr. Helen, and Sr. Maple. The computer work for all of this is being done by a brother who is, quite frankly, a computer genius. May the Lord see fit to bless this tiny effort in such a vast sea of humanity.

Home mission

Having ranged over a good part of the world, we now come home again to Canada and to any number of local home mission efforts and initiatives.

In the west there are currently four church planting efforts in various stages of development. In the *Surrey and Langley* area 2012 saw the ordination of two elders and one deacon for the Chinese Reformed Church. Usually the ordination of elders and deacons in a new church means that a new church is being instituted. In this case it was decided to separate ordination and institution. The result is that the brothers ordained are still under the jurisdiction of the Cloverdale church. After some time and after gaining some additional experience and confidence, a decision will be made on institution.

Also in the Vancouver area, work has begun on a church plant in the city of *Burnaby*. Again two churches, this time the Willoughby Heights and Aldergrove churches, have joined forces and put their shoulders to the task. A Bible study group has commenced operating and over time it is hoped that it will attract more and more people.

Further up north in *Prince George*, the Rev. Jim Witteveen continues to move the local church plant forward. More people joined in 2012 and a good foundation is being laid for what in the future will hopefully be another Canadian Reformed Church.

Winkler, Manitoba, is the designated site for another church plant. This time it is the Winnipeg Church (Redeemer) that is spearheading the efforts. Thus far they have called several men for this work but received only declines. Still, they are determined to press ahead and have already commenced with a Bible study group in the area.

In *Hamilton*, Ontario, the Ancaster church, together with the Burlington church (Fellowship), called the

Rev. Paul Aasman some years ago to develop an inner city mission called Streetlight. It continues to be the only church plant among our Ontario churches that I know about.

At the same time it faces its own unique challenges as it attempts to move on to institution. Inner city projects are notoriously difficult to shape into viable congregations, mostly because of issues relating to poverty, addiction, mental health, and single parent families. Asking stable families from elsewhere to move into the area solves some of these problems but also tends to create new ones. All in all, we can only wish all who involved in this ambitious venture well. May the application of much prayer, wisdom, and patience lead one day to a viable congregation.

What this short national survey indicates is that Canadian Reformed Churches are slowly warming up to the idea of planting churches. Only much more could and should be done. Some years ago I floated the idea that it would be great if each classis across the country had at least one church plant on the go. At the moment there are three in Classis Pacific West, one in Classis Manitoba, and one in Classis Ontario West. This means that less than half of the classical resorts are active in this regard. Something to think about, pray about, and work on – perhaps?

CRMA

Another mysterious set of capital letters strung together? Unfortunately the answer is “Yes,” although over time you might recognize them as standing for the Canadian Reformed Missions Association. As such this Association is still in its infancy having been around for less than two years. Still, there are signs that it is growing and here to stay. In September its second annual meeting was held. At that meeting Dr. A.J. de Visser introduced the subject of an overall mission strategy for our churches. This writer spoke about online theological training especially as this relates to a certain country and reported on its progress. Other business related to constitutional matters, finances, and membership.

Also some clarification about the vision and purpose of the CRMA was deemed to be necessary and the following statement was drafted and agreed upon:

The purpose of the CRMA is to assist local churches in carrying out their mandate to do mission work, both locally and internationally. Recognizing the principle that mission is the task of the local church, the CMRA has no intention of playing any other role than a purely supportive one.



What kind of support would the CRMA be able to offer? Based on feedback from sending churches and mission boards, the CRMA envisages that it will support the churches in mainly three ways:

- (1) The CRMA would assist churches and mission workers with advice. Whether questions come from a mission board that is involved in foreign mission, or a local church here in Canada that is looking for a good evangelism course, the CRMA could become an address where such questions can be asked.
- (2) The CRMA would help churches and mission workers to coordinate efforts and use each other's expertise. The problem is all too often that mission workers are struggling to find a solution to a certain problem while the solution for that problem has already been found somewhere else. The CRMA could function as a platform where mission workers can share expertise. The CRMA will also be able to maintain contact with mission organizations of other Reformed denominations (NAPARC, ICRC churches) and share relevant information with the churches.
- (3) There is often a great need for members of mission boards and evangelism committees to be equipped for their task, not just practically but also in terms of Reformed principles. The CRMA will stimulate this by organizing mission conferences with capable speakers, and by pointing churches and individuals to good Reformed material.

Hence the intent of the CRMA is to act as an advising, coordinating, and equipping body. Those who see it as a

precursor to some sort of centralized, dominating, and bureaucratic super mission board can rest easy. It's all about serving and not about lording.

Mission aid work

Closely allied to and connected to the work of foreign mission is the work of mission aid. In the northeast of Brazil Chris Boersema continues to oversee and organize any number of support programs. Aid to education, start-up loans for new businessmen in the church, help for seniors, changes and renovations to the seminary site, he takes care of it all and much more. Further south in Maceio the bulk of the mission aid support is directed at Christian education.

With respect to the work in Papua New Guinea I am not aware of a special mission aid committee being at work, although no doubt there are matters that arise which call for financial or material support. No doubt the church at Toronto, together with the sending Australia and New Zealand churches, has a strategy in place for dealing with such matters.

As for the work in West Timor, we know that a lot of assistance is given in the areas of schooling and orphanages. Sr. F. Dethan does a lot of work in this area. The same by the way can be said for Rev. Yonson Dethan and his wife who are supported by the Children of Light organization out of Edmonton, Alberta.

And then there is China where little or no money changes hands except a little to support several needy students. From the very beginning it has been the goal of this work to stress teaching, teaching, and more teaching. Hence no money has been set aside for schools or orphanages.

Relief work

Although relief work is closely related to mission aid work, it does differ in that it is not tied or connected to any specific mission work. In this connection one can think of the work that Randy and Karen Lodder are doing in Haiti, and that Jeremy and Ana VanBeelen, as well as Duane and Maribel Visscher, are doing in Mexico. While the former work is being done under the umbrella of the Word and Deed organization, the latter is done under the auspices of Children of Hope. In neither case is there a missionary sent out by our churches in the area. Would that it could be so; however, such is not the case. Still,

the work of spreading the mercy of Christ goes on in these places, and for that we should be thankful.

On a much broader scale we also have the relief work done by the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (www.crwrf.ca). During the past year they continued to support two orphanages (Acheho and Tumaini) in Kenya. They were involved in community development projects in Malawi, Mali, Guatemala, and the Sudan (Darfur region). They remained active in hospice and home based care in South Africa. As well, disaster relief had their attention in such places as the Philippines, Africa, and Japan. Finally, the CRWRF provides opportunities for both short and long term mission work abroad. Under the banner of Faithworks they do the former, and under the newly minted "International Youth Internship Program," they are organizing and stimulating the latter. A great deal of mercy work was done in 2012 and no doubt more will be needed in 2013 as our planet becomes prone to more and more disasters.

Christian education

There is not a direct connection between our churches and Christian education in that our consistories do not operate or fund schools. Our schools are not parochial schools. Still, there is no doubt that the tie between church and school is strong and that this is due especially to the home. By and large most parents and families in our churches continue to be huge participants in and supporters of Christian education. They elect boards to run these schools. Through these boards, schools buildings are erected, teachers are hired, and children are enrolled and receive an education.

At the same time it needs to be recognized that in some places these schools are the result of great sacrifices. For example, in the province of Ontario many a family needs two breadwinners, one to feed the family and the



other to pay for the education of the children. It is thus a sad reality that in a faith based community that places a high value on family life and stay-at-home moms, these same moms are often forced out of their homes and into the work force in order to make ends meet.

As difficult as all of this may be, there are no signs that Christian education is in decline. The work goes on and the schools continue to grow.

At least in most places. It has to be acknowledged that here and there in the eastern and western parts of the country several schools are shrinking. One thinks here of the Credo School between Brampton and Toronto and the William of Orange School in Surrey. The causes, however, are not related to waning support but to changing demographics, as well as to growing and encroaching ethnic populations.

At the same time other schools are under pressure to expand more and more. Schools such as Maranatha School in Fergus, Parkland Immanuel in Edmonton, and Credo Elementary School in Langley come to mind. Often school board members are left scratching their heads as to how to accommodate a growing number of students. Additions and portables frequently provide both long-term and short-term answers.

In the past I have tried to comment on the number of schools, teachers, and students that there are in our community, but such attempts often prove to be inaccurate. Let it, therefore, simply be said that in most places where one finds a Canadian Reformed church one also finds a Christian school where the covenant youth receive a great education. Thanks go out to all of the committed parents, the dedicated teachers, the efficient staff, the hard working boards and, above all, to the Lord who makes it all possible.

Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College (www.covenantteacherscollege.com) in Hamilton, Ontario, also needs to be recognized as a vital cog in the educational endeavour. Thanks to the efforts of the full-time staffers: Dr. Christine vanHalen-Faber, Allard Gunnink, and Judy Kingma, as well as the part-timers: Rev. D. Agema, Rev. Dr. W. Bredenhof, Br. A. Smid, Br. D. Smid, Dr. A. Witten, Br. P. Leistra and Br. T. Wildeboer, the students are amply supplied with qualified instructors.

Once again this year its graduates supplied any number of schools with fresh faces and new energy. This is especially true for Ontario where its graduates can find employment without restriction or regulation. Elsewhere



in the country it is a different story as other provincial governments require all teachers to have recognized degrees and to meet provincial standards. Hopefully, as the reputation of Covenant College grows it will move the hearts of provincial officials.

Special homes and places

In addition to our youth, also those with special needs and the seniors have a special place in our community. With regard to our special needs members, the residences operated by Bethesda in BC, Rehoboth in Alberta, and Anchor in Ontario take great care of their needs and provide them with a safe and loving environment.

On the senior front, such places as Trinity Towers (Brampton), Shalom (Grimsby), Maranatha and Mount Nemo (Burlington), Ebenezer Villa (Hamilton), Emmanuel (Edmonton), Manoah (Langley), Elim (Surrey), and many more, provide great places to grow old gracefully. Our thanks go out to the many fine caregivers working in these facilities.

Political involvement

Finally, this review would be remiss if it did not mention one more key development and that has to do with the political realm. During 2012 the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) was very active hosting presentations around the country as well as in the nation's capital. In Ottawa Members of Parliament

were invited to attend a special meeting, and some of them did. As a result, such pressing issues as abortion, prostitution, euthanasia, and human rights received some real biblical attention. Thanks go out to the ARPA Board, as well as to its energetic workers, Mark Penninga and Andre Schutten.

In addition, appreciation should also be expressed for the work that Mike Schouten is doing for the WeNeedALaw organization. Its main goal is to convince the Canadian electorate that Parliament should pass a law on abortion. At present there are only three nations in the world that have no such law, and Canada is one of them! A sad state of affairs, indeed!

Closing

The time has come to bring this long tale to a close. If I have forgotten something important or passed along wrong information, please email me at jvisscher@telus.net.

We end with a quote from that popular psalm mentioned at the beginning. As we said its original context is one of judgment and wrath, but there are still nuggets in it that apply today. Here is one that is fitting as we enter 2013: "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us, establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands" (v. 17).





Season's Greetings

From all of us at

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