

Contemporary  
Challenges for  
Reformed  
Education

The Path  
which Glorifies  
Our Lord

Lord Sabaoth  
His Name



*Luther's birthplace,  
Eisenach, Germany*



W.L. Bredenhof

Rev. W.L. Bredenhof is  
co-pastor of the Canadian  
Reformed Church at Langley,  
British Columbia  
wbredenhof@canrc.org

# Contemporary Challenges for Reformed Education

*A sense of historical consciousness is a key ingredient  
to wise and thankful living*

As another school year recently began, I was gifted with another opportunity to reflect on the blessings of having Reformed Christian education available for our children. In our local situation, we have Credo Christian Elementary and Credo Christian High School. Having home schooled for a couple of years, my wife and I are very grateful to be now part of a community where education is a corporate concern. To us, this blessing is of inestimable value and when we gather together with other parents at the beginning of a new school year, we feel doubly grateful to God.

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*You cannot have a Reformed education  
where the creeds and confessions are not  
taken seriously*

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I recognize that these blessings did not come without a struggle. My grandparents on both my father's side and my mother's side were among the pioneers for Reformed education in the Canadian Reformed church community. In many places, the need was not always seen for our communities to have their own schools. Though we probably wish we could forget it, the fact is that much grief and struggle surrounded the establishment of many Canadian Reformed schools, particularly in the formative years of 1950-1980.

## **Why a struggle in the past?**

A sense of historical consciousness is a key ingredient to wise and thankful living before God and

one another. If we forget to recount the deeds of God in redemptive history, soon a generation will arise which has no knowledge of the Lord or his ways (see Judges 2:10). That holds true for the redemptive history we read about in Scripture, but also God's works among us in more recent history. Therefore, we need to remind ourselves of why our forefathers struggled for distinctively Canadian Reformed schools.

Of course, I did not live through these struggles. I can only work with the anecdotal evidence that I have heard and from the few written sources that are available. When I consider what I have read and heard, the one theme that always emerges is the desire that existed to have unity between the family, church, and school. In the area of education, this unity would come to expression through a school that had the Reformed creeds and confessions (the Three Forms of *Unity*) as its basis.

When our parents and grandparents came to Canada, some Christian schools did exist. Many of these Christian schools had been set up by Reformed believers – mostly affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). This created a problem on two fronts. First of all, there was the fact that there was no place for us in the CRC when we immigrated. In the CRC, there was no acknowledgement of what God had done for us in The Netherlands by setting us free from synodical tyranny. Some said: "When we cannot be in the same church, how can we work together for the same school? What will happen, for instance, when the teacher teaches church history? Will our children learn the value of what God did in the Liberation of 1944?" Others said: "We have basically the same Reformed faith. We should be able



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**EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:**

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal  
Coeditors: R. Aasman, W.B. Slomp, Cl. Stam, C. Van Dam

**ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:**

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

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to work together for Christian education. Our similarities are greater than our differences.”

On the second front, there was a movement in some CRC circles to disengage Christian education from the Reformed confessions. It was felt by some that the Three Forms of Unity are a confession for the church, but they have no place in the school. This went hand in hand with a growing desire to include Christians from other backgrounds into the school community. Today, many general Christian schools in Canada acknowledge that they are working under the guiding perspective of a Reformed philosophy – and some also acknowledge their desire to teach according to Reformed confessions. Nevertheless, often all this is de-emphasized to the point that nearly any Christian family would feel comfortable sending their children to these schools. Moreover, these schools sometimes have teachers who are not confessionally Reformed. Our forefathers had the foresight to see things moving in this direction and that added impetus to the movement to have our own Canadian Reformed schools. The cause of distinctively Canadian Reformed education can be said to have won the day.

**Why a challenge now?**

Today, things seem to be moving in a different direction. Most of our Canadian Reformed schools have been around for a number of decades. Though there are some exceptions here and there, many of us are comfortable with the idea that part of our Canadian Reformed identity is having our own schools. This is just part of who we are and perhaps we begin to take it for granted. Maybe we no longer reflect on the fact that there are sound historical and theological/philosophical reasons for this state of affairs.

This does not challenge us in a stable, established situation. But when we begin looking at missionary situations, things are quite a bit different. We struggled for it at home and now we have it, but do we see the need for confessionally Reformed education abroad? Do we have a double standard when it comes to Christian education?

Let me illustrate why this is important with one example. It is no secret that Christianity is exploding in Africa and Latin America. Unfortunately, it is not that well known that much of this growth is

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happening in and through Pentecostal sects. These Pentecostal sects are heretical, especially when it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity. In North America, these aberrant "Oneness" teachings are found with popular writers and TV personalities such as Gwen Shamblin, Benny Hinn, and T.D. Jakes. The idea here is that God is essentially one person and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are simply different faces of the one person. These sorts of teachings are nothing new – they have been around for centuries and the Athanasian Creed represents a response to these heresies. In fact, in that creed we confess that a right understanding of the Trinity is essential for salvation.

The Athanasian Creed belongs as part of the basis for a confessionally Reformed education at home and on mission fields near and far. Imagine the consequences if a Christian school teacher were to teach Bible while not believing something as basic as the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. This is just one

example. You cannot have a Reformed education where the creeds and confessions are not taken seriously. The scriptural orientation of Christian education is most fully protected when the school and its teachers are committed to the Reformed confessions. We must not forget this truth. We struggled for confessionally Reformed education for our children and grandchildren in Canada. We must also strive to support confessionally Reformed education elsewhere in the world. To do otherwise would not be consistent nor would it reflect our belief that the Reformed faith is the most faithful to Scripture and therefore the most God-glorifying.

Inconsistency in this area will have lasting and devastating consequences. We live in a global village. Our young people visit various mission fields regularly. When they see that adherence to the Reformed confessions is no longer considered a key ingredient for Christian education, isn't this going to have consequences for what happens in our own communities? Our young people know inconsistency when they see it. Then it will only be a matter of time before we relive the struggles of the first decades of our church federation. After all, why should we insist on our own Christian schools at home when we have no second thoughts about supporting general Christian schools elsewhere?

Our Canadian Reformed schools have been an enormous blessing for which we can be thankful. Let us not take them for granted nor let us take the principles by which they were established for granted. The challenge today is for consistency. Consistently applying what we confess, we can be assured of God's continued blessing, not only in our established Canadian Reformed communities, but also in our mission fields.



J.P. VanVliet



Rev. J.P. VanVliet is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey, British Columbia  
[jvanvliet@canrc.org](mailto:jvanvliet@canrc.org)

# The Path which Glorifies Our Lord



**MATTHEW 13:52**

*“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

**2 Corinthians 3:18**

Many reformations have taken place in the history of God’s people. Think, for example, of the eighteenth year of King Josiah’s reign. The high priest Hilkiah found the Book of the Law in the temple. After years of inexcusable neglect, the people once again heard and heeded the Word of God. And the Word transformed the worship. Idolatry was reduced to rubble while the covenant was renewed and restored (2 Kings 22 and 23).

Another instance that comes to mind is the reformation of Jerusalem’s priests, or at least some of them. In Acts 6:7 we read, “So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” Suffice it to say, that event must have generated some shockwaves in the upper crust of Jewish society.

Finally, since this is the Reformation Day issue of *Clarion*, we would be remiss if we did not make reference to the work of God in the sixteenth century. Using men such as Martin Luther, Heinrich Bullinger, John Calvin, John Knox, and numerous others, the King of the church called people to turn aside from centuries of accumulated ceremonies, superstitions, and

heresies and instead to turn back to the truth of the inspired Word.

Glancing over these three examples of reformation, you will notice a common thread. In each case reformation of the church involves a return to the Scriptures. To put it in other words, the issue is this: will the church be conformed to the image of man’s wishes or in the likeness of God’s revealed will? Which one will it be? That is the crux of every reformatory movement.

Of course, every true reformation of the church also includes a transformation of the members of the church. The Apostle Paul describes this profound transformation in 2 Corinthians 3:18. At the heart of the verse is this glorious truth: “We are being transformed into his likeness.” The bigger words such as “transformed” and “likeness” immediately grab our attention, but perhaps the most important word is the little one, “his,” referring to our Lord Jesus Christ. The crux of every church reformation is also the crux of our daily life. Which template will I use to trace out my thoughts, to shape my speech, and to profile my practices? Will it all be done according to *my likes* (or dislikes) or in the likeness of *my Lord*? Me or thee? Which one will it be?

The essence of being transformed and being Reformed is that we answer those questions with a resounding, “Not unto us, not unto me, but only and always unto thee, O Lord!” That is the path which glorifies our God and that is the path which also leads to our own glorification.

Our Lord Jesus Christ “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” (Phil 2:6), thus He let go of the glory of heaven, was born of the virgin Mary, and suffered in humility all the days of his earthly life. Yet one day, up on a high mountain, the humiliation was momentarily swept away and our Lord was transformed before the very eyes of his disciples. “His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light” (Matt 17:2). The glory of God’s own Son lit up the mountain top!

However, that moment, too, passed. The glory faded away. Jesus and his disciples descended from the mountain. In a way, it was something like the time when Moses went up on the mountain. He saw the glory of God and it transformed him as well. When he came down, his face reflected the Lord’s glory, but it was a glory that slowly faded away over time.

Yet precisely here we note the difference between the mediator of the old covenant and the Mediator of the new. Before the cross, Christ's glory was revealed on a mountain but only for a fading moment; however, after the cross Christ ascended higher than every mountain, indeed, up to the right hand of his Father in heaven. There He entered his final glory which will never fade but which lasts forever.

This enduring glory of our ascended Lord is the glory into which Christ Himself is transforming us through the

working of his Holy Spirit. Yes, this transformation is a process and, no, it is not nearly done. Christ is transforming us with "an ever-increasing glory," or literally, "from glory unto glory." Yet the goal of Christ's sanctifying work is that we ourselves will reflect, as if in a mirror, the radiant glory of our Saviour Himself! Now, *that* is a miraculous transformation!

It is the same story over and over again. When the church and her members glory in man, elevating human desires, human authority, and human thinking, then, in the

end, it only results in more sin and shame. However, when the church and her members glory in the Lord, elevating the Word of God, the will of God, and God-centred worship, then the Lord Himself glorifies. And what is more, also "we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." The road of true reformation is also the path leading to radiant glory. Don't wander from it; walk down it.



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## Rev. R. Lankheet and Rev. G.Ph. van Popta

*Rev. R. Lankheet is minister of the Covenant Reformed Church (URC) at Toronto, Ontario*  
[lankheet@sympatico.ca](mailto:lankheet@sympatico.ca)

*Rev. G.Ph. van Popta is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Ancaster, Ontario*  
[gvanpopta@canrc.org](mailto:gvanpopta@canrc.org)

# Towards a Common Songbook (Part 9)

## I/We

The seventh guideline says: In content and form, the songs of the church must be free from artificiality, sentimentality, and individualism.

As the Joint Songbook Committee considers hymns, we often end up discussing the application of this guideline. When is a song artificial, sentimental, and/or individualistic? To apply this guideline consistently without prejudice either for or against a hymn is not so easy to do. Often a hymn which is someone's favourite is deemed to fail on the ground of this guideline. How should we apply this guideline?

In broad terms, if the song says more about "me and my soul" than about "God and his work in creation and for the church," it is suspect. But, someone will counter, do not the Psalms say a lot about me and my soul? Yes, they do. And so we do well to look at the Psalms. As we have said before, the Book of Psalms is God's own inspired songbook and gift to the church. If we imitate the content and form of the Psalter for our Hymnal, we will not be far off the mark.

The Psalms are perfectly balanced in several ways: they are balanced in proclaiming, on the one hand, the great things

God has done in creation and for our salvation, and, on the other hand, our response to God. They are also balanced in speaking about "I" and "we," about the individual believer and the church. We want to dwell on that latter symmetry using two examples from the Psalms.

Psalms 25 is very personal. It starts with, "To you, O Lord I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God." In this Psalm King David asks God to teach him, to show him his mercy, not to remember his sins of youth, etc. The words "I," "me," and "my" are repeated often. It seems to be a very individualistic Psalm

about "me and my soul." But notice how it ends: "Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles." King David prays his personal prayer to the God who redeems the church. The individual prays within the context of the congregation.

There are more Psalms that begin with "I" and end with "we." Then there are other Psalms that begin with "we" and end with "I." An example of such movement ("we" to "I") is Psalm 66. The inspired author begins by calling the earth to shout for joy to God. Next he reminds the church ("we") of how God has preserved them. He ends by vowing personally ("I") to praise God and to bring sacrifices to Him. The individual believer praises God because the Lord has been faithful to his people.

It is instructive to note that the Heidelberg Catechism often follows this line as well. For example, Lord's Day 16 begins with speaking about Christ humbling Himself to death and being buried. Then it speaks about how the death of Christ benefits us and what we gain from his crucifixion and burial. It ends with the believer personally confessing the assurance and comfort he receives from the inexpressible anguish, pain, terror, and agony of Christ. A cursory read through the Heidelberg Catechism will show that many of the Lord's Days follow this flow of Christ, church, believer.

While considering which hymns to include in the common songbook, we do well to keep this biblical and confessional form and content in mind. In concrete terms, that means that a hymn such as "My Jesus, I love Thee" cannot stand in the light of this guideline. Although it repeats several biblical truths, the emphasis clearly is on "my" feelings and "my" love rather

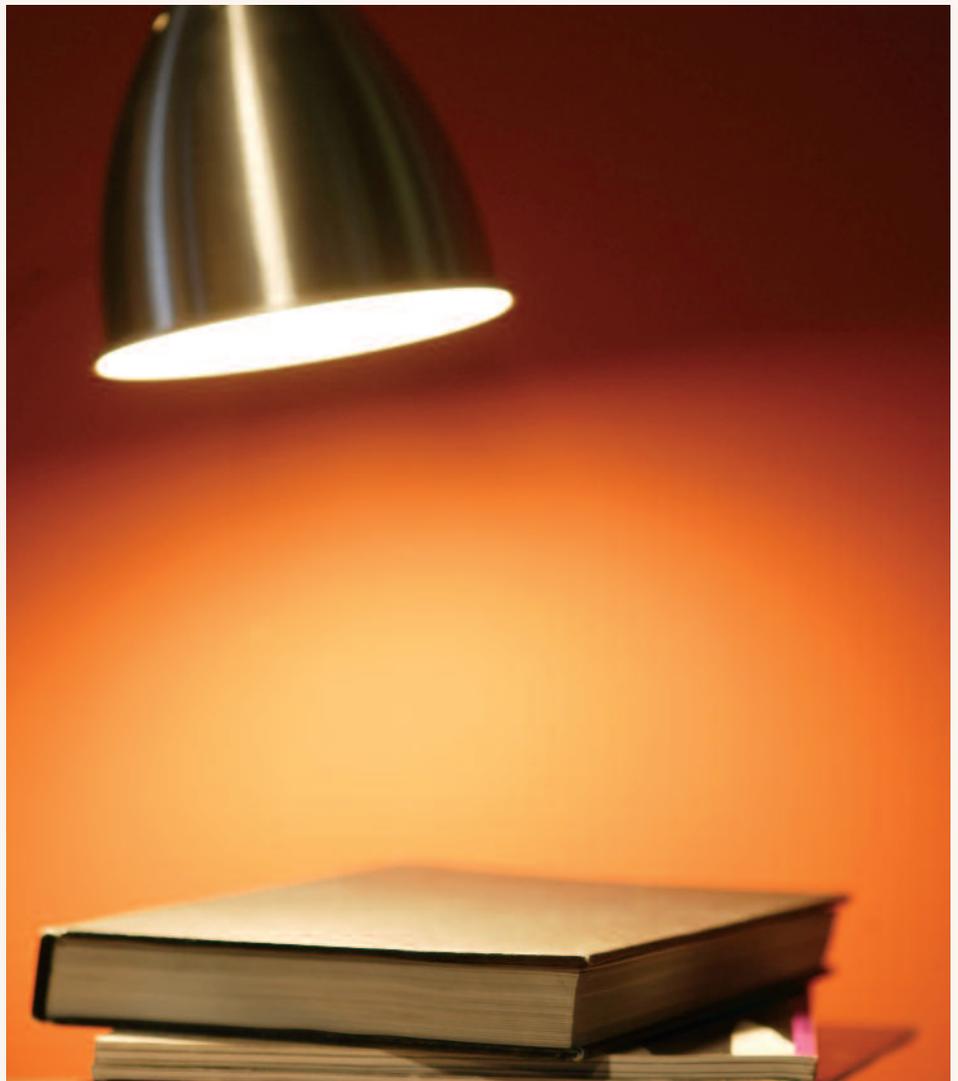
than upon Christ and the church. It is individualistic.

It also falls into the error of sentimentality. For example, the line, "When the death-dew lies cold on my brow" and the refrain, "If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now" seems to be more a product of nineteenth century Wesleyan hymnody than an accurate reflection of biblical teaching.

This hymn is artificial in that it does not proclaim the whole truth of biblical revelation. It ends with the soul of the dead believer enjoying the beatific vision gazing

upon the face of Jesus "in mansions of glory and endless delight, I'll ever adore thee in heaven so bright." In other words, it ends with the intermediate state. This is wrong, since the Bible teaches that at the end resurrected believers in their new bodies will stand together with all the church upon the new earth.

May God give the committee wisdom to recommend a hymnal that will help the individual believer sing within the context of the church and to sing songs that are biblically accurate.



Rev. R. Bredenhof is  
minister of the  
Canadian Reformed  
Church at St. Albert, Alberta  
[rbredenhof@canrc.org](mailto:rbredenhof@canrc.org)

# Lord Sabaoth His Name

## An old favourite

A favourite hymn of many Christians is the one penned by Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress." Around Reformation Day – and throughout the year – this hymn is sung by the church with gusto. Often after sermons celebrating the great power of God our Saviour, the organist will pull out a few extra stops and we'll belt out this cherished song.

## Lord of the Sabbath?

As happens with a few more of our tried and true psalms and hymns, "A Mighty Fortress" (Hymn 41 in the *Book of Praise*) contains a few old expressions whose meanings are no longer perfectly clear. And though we love to sing familiar lyrics, even from memory, it's only proper that we know the meaning of what we are singing. Our heart as well as our mind should be fully involved in the worship of God.

In the second stanza of "A Mighty Fortress," we find especially one phrase that is widely misunderstood. Speaking of "the right Man on our side / The Man of God's own choosing," Luther asks and answers a rhetorical question about our Saviour: "Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He." And then, to further identify this person, his title is given: "Lord Sabaoth his Name."

What is this title, "Lord Sabaoth?" If asked, someone might think for a moment and tentatively suggest that this could be linked to

the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 12:1-8. There Jesus is disputing with the Pharisees concerning what is lawful and unlawful on the Sabbath. Jesus ends his words to the Pharisees with this definitive statement, "For the Son of Man is *Lord of the Sabbath*" (v. 8). So then, we conclude, in the second stanza of "A Mighty Fortress" we celebrate Jesus as the one with authority over the Lord's Day.

## Lord of hosts

But while Matthew 12:8 teaches an important truth, it's *not* Jesus' teaching of his lordship over the Sabbath that's being celebrated in Hymn 41:2. The confusion arises because "Sabaoth" (not Sabbath!) is actually an English representation of a Hebrew word, *sebaoth*.

## *God is sovereign over all powers in the universe*

Now, the hymn that we sing is a translation of Luther's original song, "*Ein Feste Burg*." Luther of course didn't write his hymn in Hebrew, but in German. Yet in his composition, he simply gave the German representation of the Hebrew word *sebaoth* (for your interest, the original German of the line in question is "*Der Herr Zebaoth*"). From Hebrew to German to English, "Sabaoth" has found its way into this favourite hymn.

For what this word "Sabaoth" means then, we have to turn to the Hebrew Old Testament. There we

regularly find the title for God "*Yahweh Sebaoth*." This title is often translated in English Bibles as "the Lord of hosts."

Over what kind of hosts is the Lord? This is much debated. There are some texts in Scripture that depict God as the head of human armies; for example, in 1 Samuel 17:45 David confronts Goliath with these words: "I have come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel." Other texts suggest that the hosts God commands are the celestial bodies, like the sun, moon, and stars; after God defeated the Canaanites, Deborah sang, "From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera" (Judg 5:20). Still other texts say that the Lord's hosts are heavenly creatures, such as the angels; the prophet Michaiah described this war-room scene in heaven, "I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven around Him" (1 Kgs 22:19).

Looking at these three options, it may not be necessary to choose only one of these at the expense of the others. The general idea of the title "Lord of hosts" is that God is sovereign over all powers in the universe. This is the reason the NIV translates the Hebrew "*Yahweh Sebaoth*" as "Lord Almighty." Still, we should also notice that the title certainly associates God with battle and warfare. As we said, He is the Lord of hosts of human soldiers, celestial troops, and heavenly fighters.

## Psalm 46

Luther tells of how Psalm 46 was the inspiration for "A Mighty Fortress." And this Psalm, too, portrays our God in battle against his enemies. The setting of Psalm 46 is one of unrest. Creation is unsettled: "the earth [gives] way. . . the mountains fall into the heart of the sea" (v. 2). The peoples boil: "nations are in uproar" (v. 6).

In spite of all this, the Psalmist's confession is sure: "God is our refuge and strength" (v. 1). "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress" (v. 7) – a mighty fortress indeed! Surely the Lord of hosts would again vanquish his foes! The Psalmist goes on to sing of God: "He breaks the bow and shatters the spear, He burns the shields with fire" (v. 9). As other passages in the Old Testament portray God (e.g., Isaiah 63:1-6), so does Psalm 46: God is a mighty warrior. He is a general who is not afraid to go to the front lines for his people.

This martial Psalm was very dear to Luther's heart. During times when the Reformation seemed near collapse, Luther would say to his friend and fellow reformer Philip Melancthon, "Let's sing the forty-sixth Psalm." This Psalm all about God's great power over his enemies gave Luther and others rich encouragement that God was still on their side. Yes, it is Jesus Christ who is fighting for his people: "Christ Jesus it is He / Lord Sabaoth his Name." He who commands the mighty armies of God is the Lamb who was slain! Christ will always fight for the church He bought with his blood! To this triumphant King Luther sang in steady confidence, even in his darkest hour.

## Luther and music

Music had been part of Luther's life from an early age. He was involved in choirs, he studied theory, he learned the flute and lute, and he worked on various

compositions. Music was highly esteemed by Martin Luther as a gift of God. He once declared that "next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise." He often emphasized music's importance in bringing glory to God. Music could be used well for echoing the truth of the gospel.

## *Our God is unchanging in his power and zeal for the people He has redeemed!*

With such a high regard for music, and possessing some musical ability himself, it's not surprising that Luther composed many hymns and songs. He wrote at least thirty-five hymns, though none so well known as "A Mighty Fortress."

## "A Mighty Fortress"

The hymn expresses well Luther's faith and not only his, but that of much of the Reformation church of his day. Protestant Christians looked to God Almighty as the one who would fight and also win their fierce battles against falsehood and persecution. For that reason, "Ein Feste Burg" has been called the "Battle Hymn of the Reformation." It captured the spirit of the Reformation so aptly that when Protestant martyrs were walking to their death, it was often "A Mighty Fortress" that they chose to sing.

And its popularity in the Protestant churches has hardly waned. "A Mighty Fortress" has been translated into hundreds of languages and there are at least eighty different English versions. Some of these versions have changed "Lord Sabaoth" into "Lord of Hosts," but it seems that more have preserved the remnants of that rich Hebrew title for God our Saviour. The title is a beautiful link from the Old Testament people of

## Church News

Declined the call to the church at Lincoln, ON:

**Rev. J. Van Woudenberg**  
of Guelph, Ontario.

Called by the church of Langley (Willoughby Heights), BC:

**Rev. J. Ludwig**  
of Grand Rapids, MI.

Accepted the call to the Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland (Vrijgemaakt) at Tilburg, Neth:

**E. Venema**  
set aside for mission work by Surrey, British Columbia.

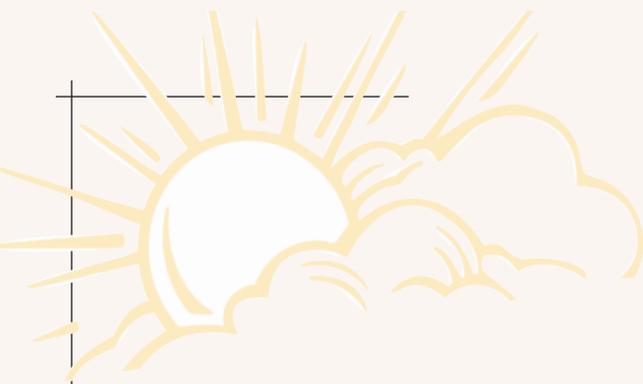
Accepted the call to Aldergrove, British Columbia:

**Rev. R.A. Schouten**  
of Abbotsford, BC.

God to his New Testament people today. Our God is unchanging in his power and zeal for the people He has redeemed!

## Renewed enthusiasm

As we again remember Reformation Day, and as we again and again celebrate the power and faithfulness of God, let us take "A Mighty Fortress" on our lips with renewed enthusiasm. We may sing it with Martin Luther and with the church of all times and places. We may sing it with great confidence in our God of awesome might and with great confidence in our Saviour enthroned in heaven. Even in dark times for the church, and even though we're just weak foot soldiers, our Lord will fight for his people until the very end. "Lord Sabaoth his Name / From age to age the same / And He must win the battle."



# Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*"I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds."*

Psalm 77:11, 12

In reflecting on the mighty power and strength of the Lord as it is revealed in history, the poet of Psalm 77 makes a remarkable observation. At the beginning of this psalm the psalmist is in great distress. He is in a situation in which he no longer feels the saving and guiding hand of the Lord. In pain and with much anxiety he calls out to God for help but does not feel the Lord's nearness. Disaster has overtaken his country and he feels responsible for the sins of the people. The covenant God who had once promised to always guide and be near to them now seems to be far removed.

In verses 10 through 20 the psalmist begins to remember what the Lord has done for him many years ago. He starts to look beyond the present troubles and begins to draw hope from God's saving acts of old. He recalls how the Lord brought them out of Egypt and helped them cross the Red Sea. He guided them through the wilderness under the charge of appointed leaders. They received food and water in abundance. They were his people and He was guiding them to the Promised Land. The Lord has an awesome way of leading his people to his glory. In majesty and might He works upon his creation, controlling and governing its every power. Yet He honours it, upholding its laws as He performs mighty deeds of deliverance for his people.

Our help and comfort today also is to know that the Lord will appear and help us in our times of need, just like He did in the past. He gives us his Word to read from and his Holy Spirit to guide us and to work in our hearts. The Lord also appears to us every Sunday through the pure preaching of the Word. We may also always call on Him in prayer in our time of need.

The two sacraments were also given to the church to confirm his promises to us. With the sign of baptism He calls us his own and promises "that He will dwell in us and make us living members of Christ, imparting to us what we have in Christ, namely, the cleansing from our sins and the daily renewal of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without blemish among the assembly of God's elect in life

eternal" (Form for the Baptism of Infants). With Holy Supper we are reminded of Christ's ultimate sacrifice for our sins, so that we may receive the forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

Every day God continues to reshape and reform his people. His deeds are just as great today as many years ago. Although we cannot see his ways, we know that it is majestic, awe-inspiring, mysterious, and glorious. So even in our trials today we may take comfort that the Lord is near and will always be near for those who fear Him. His love for us is beyond our understanding, and is an everlasting love. His truth and light are still living in his church. His footprints may not be seen but He daily makes us confident "that He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6). Let us always give thanks to God for his awesome deeds and his redemptive work for us, his chosen ones!

*O thank the LORD with great rejoicing,  
His deeds among the peoples voicing!  
Praise Him, His wondrous works proclaim  
And glory in His holy Name.  
Let those who seek Him praise the LORD,  
Their hearts exulting in His word.*

Psalm 105:1

## Birthdays in November:

**3 WILMA VAN DRONGELEN will be 49**  
306-33375 Mayfair Avenue, Abbotsford, BC V2S 1P4

Congratulations, Wilma, with your birthday. May our heavenly Father bless you in this new year with good health and much happiness. We hope that you have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends.

Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman  
548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2  
905-563-0380



*Dr. J. van Bruggen is professor emeritus of New Testament studies from the Theological University of Kampen, The Netherlands*

# My God is Always Greater (Part 2 of 2)

## God is always greater!

### *The deficiency of the creation*

It seems that creation and history offer enough material to form a certain image of God. Isn't the creation mirroring his face? Aren't we personally made according to his image? It seems possible to get a certain idea about the painter by studying his paintings.

God has forbidden this path. Our materials in creation and history are valid but not sufficient. We have a very large studio with an endless assortment of attributes. The sky with the stars at night and the birds during the morning. The earth with so many animals and the sea with all kind of creatures living there. What painter has ever had a palette with so many colours? Which creature has more forms at its disposal than mankind, not living on an empty moon but on the rich adorned planet earth! There is no end to our inspiration of paintings and pictures and films. There is neither a last frontier for sculptors nor a last minute for poets. Again and again we have to build new museums and new exposition halls on this earth! And at the same time we have to be aware that God is not in those museums. We have to realize that our materials are insufficient, because God is always greater than our greatest imaginations!

### *A world of frosted glass*

The creation is pointing in God's direction. The hurricane is an echo of his voice. The sun is the reflection of his light. In the power of the horse we see a reflection of the power of God. In the beauty of man you see a glimpse of the beauty of God. But He himself is always greater.

This was made clear to Job. God speaks with him about thunder and dragons, evidence of God's work. But at the same time Job learns that the Almighty God is far above these creatures. Elijah also perceived this; the storm around Sinai was a sign of the Lord, but God Himself was not in that storm. Rather, He was far above that storm in the deep silence of his being.

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## *God is asking us to transcend created things and believe in Him who is not created*

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This visible world compared to God is no more than a world seen through a pane of frosted glass.

### *The carved world picture*

Mankind today chisels a world through science and the use of modern technology and then leaves it at that. People make a universal image of it, with a pedestal called evolution and an

impact called progress. They don't call this universal image God. They only stop with this image of the world: no more words, nothing is said about a Creator. But in fact this modern image becomes a statue of its own, a nameless idol. The idea is that there is no one beyond our imagination of the world in which we are living and that we are exploring.

But God invites us to gaze above this visible world into the invisible one. He is asking us to transcend created things and believe in Him who is not created and who lives in an invisible light, far beyond our imagination. You can not find Him with a telescope or a microscope, nor can you visit Him or capture his voice with your satellites. You will only find everything that is upon the earth and in the air and in the oceans. What we find is great and far more than we can investigate. You can take pictures of creation, write books about the created world, and make documentary series about many issues. A magnificent world: you never get bored looking at creation. And this is *our* world! Perhaps we can feel proud.

But God is unhappy when we look no further than the library of creation. He is not honoured when we stop at creation as if there is no Creator. He rejects those who bow before nature and human rights as if these were the boundaries of everything that exists.

God forbids us to make images of Him here below, because He is far higher and beyond all our imagination. He is not merely the impersonal intelligent design or the personal intelligent designer; He is the living and unpredictable God from eternity to eternity.

*Above the peak of the mountains*

One of the most important things we have to remember whenever we begin studying the Bible or praying to God: He is far above us. We can kneel before Him, but his ways are higher than our ways. And we will never be able to guess what He will do or what His opinion will be about certain issues. We cannot think or speak in God's place.

No, we need to kneel before Him who is the Almighty, who we are not able to see, who we cannot find, and whose image and stature we can not even imagine in any way. You kneel because you hear his voice, a sound that makes us aware and convinces us that there is a higher Being that governs the universe. Breathlessly we observe the oceans and rivers which flood the land, so powerful that millions of people need to be evacuated. God the Creator is more powerful than the tsunami, stronger than the tornado.

We need to discover that there is someone who is wiser than the animals and humans. Our eyes and thoughts are filled to the brim, but we keep on hearing behind us: this is not Him as yet. Nevertheless, we hear his voice: "I am the Lord your God, a jealous God." He is there for sure, but keeps his image hidden. Yet He does not wish to be forgotten in his creation. The guilty

one who disappears behind the shrubs will be shocked to hear the voice: "Adam, where are you?"

*Keep silent*

Generally people are not afraid to speak against God. Their opinions seem so convincing that they argue and dispute with Him. They say: "How can I believe in a God who allows people to murder each other?" Or: "If God should exist, why doesn't He change my life and take away my unhappiness and sickness?" People are thinking for God, in God's place.

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*We cannot think or speak in God's place*

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The unhappiness of this world and everything that happens between people belongs to the created world. And it is impossible to create an image of God through looking into the unhappiness of mankind. Many horrible things are happening every day and we may have a lot of questions. But when we have revolutionary feelings about God, we misunderstand the creation, as if it were possible to find out who He is through what happens in mankind and in nature. The tsunami is not God Himself and deadly weapons are not his invention.

In the Bible many of the prominent leaders such as Moses, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Job become silent when the Lord responds to their rebellion. The author of Psalm 73 also recognizes his error when he creates from his

experiences an image of the Lord that does not agree with God's revelation. Don't be too hasty with your tongue; God is always far beyond your imagination! He or she who wishes to study God's Word and thereby increases his or her knowledge about God needs in the first place learn to be humble. In humility we may approach the Almighty Lord who is greater than we could possibly imagine.

*Above our confessions*

That's also the case with our confessions. We try to formulate as accurately as possible what we heard through the voices of God's prophets. But sometimes we think that God is enclosed by our confession as if we should have said everything that can be said about Him. As if we should have the whole truth in all its details. Of course we have truth in our confessions, but God didn't become our prisoner through our formulation of the truth of the Scriptures. He stays free and far beyond our imagination and our confessions.

In the final judgment we will not take our confessions and say, "O Lord, You are exactly as we imagined it, precisely as we expressed it and formulated it." We will only hope that He will say, "Well done, my boy, my girl, you were loyal to my words, finally come in and see the reality itself!"

*Holy is his name: tremble, all ye nations, tremble!*

This feeling of awe and fear, respect and reverence, for a Person who transcends all our imaginations and ideas is nearly absent in our society and culture.

There are no carved statues in the streets of the western capitals. People are no longer afraid, not even of death! That is the modern, immaterial, new statue of God. He is not real. And if He should be real, you don't have to be afraid: He is only representing a weak type of love and lacks real power and influence in our technocratic world. He is no longer dangerous. That is the weak and soft image of God in modern society.

But hear the roaring voice in the second commandment: "I will not keep those innocent who are guilty!" Listen and know that the Lion is there, menacing and mighty. Whenever we do Bible study, let us tremble and be careful. Make your soul silent.

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*In humility we may approach the Almighty Lord who is greater than we could possibly imagine*

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Throw away all the feelings of animosity, stubbornness, and self-assurance. Let our words about God be pious and permeated by holy awe. For how would someone see God and live? Let us never speak about Him or think about Him without first and foremost bowing our head before his majesty, that head which so often is so full of self worth, so opinionated, so stubborn and conceited. Do not misuse the Scriptures to fashion an image of your God. He is greater than we can even imagine.

## **The image of the unseen one**

*No statue, nevertheless a temple!*

In Israel there were no statues of God allowed. They didn't need a temple to house images of God. In fact, the temple emphasized the absence of images to the surprise of all the nations. What is the meaning of a temple without a statue to worship? Such a temple makes clear that although there is no statue, there is nevertheless a direction in which to look when you come closer to God. There is a *direction* because you can approach Him and come nearer to Him, although you don't see his image. The unseen Lord desires to bring his reality nearer to us. Not nearer to our eyes, but nearer to our hearts. He is really there in heaven.

*The image of the invisible God*

At a certain moment in history, in the last days, God finally decided to make his image visible and touchable. That was in Jesus Christ. Whoever has seen the Son has seen the Father. He is God's picture and statue and representation. Finally we learn what the temple was all about: He is the radiant appearance of God's glory and He shows us the lavish light of God's gracious face.

Who had ever imagined this statue? Ancient philosophy and science developed ideas about the wise king or the influential sage, but the idea of God becoming man and being in our midst, healing and teaching, was far beyond their imagination. Even the prophets of Israel did not realize that this would be the solution to their unsolved riddles of revelation.

*Jesus: no graven image!*

Now that we have Jesus, it becomes clear why God didn't appreciate wooden or iron images. They were far short of the image of the real Son of God! Does this mean that since the days of Jesus' appearance we can carve the image of God? Jesus on the cross, or a drawing of the kind healer in Galilee? In modern Christianity many people have made images of God in the form of Jesus-images. Now, they believe, they know how God is. He is always kind and human. He is your unconditional friend. Look at Jesus. Imagine what Jesus would do and you understand the thoughts of God!

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*Let our words about God be pious and permeated by holy awe*

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But we are forgetting one important thing. In the gospels we see only the backside of the image of God. We see Jesus in his humiliation and suffering. We see him in weakness and in tears, rejected and despised. And He doesn't raise his voice. But don't forget that this is the specific time of his coming as Son of the King amidst the revolutionaries. After his humiliation came the time of his exaltation. We don't see Him today in his glory. John at Patmos did and he fell as dead upon the ground. Jesus in his glory was far beyond John's imagination! His face was as the sun, his voice as the roaring waters of the sea. Do not think that you can master the Lord through the gospels of his

suffering. Don't touch Him: He is going upwards to his almighty Father!

#### *Living statue*

God forbade man to approach Him through statues. That was not because God shouldn't have a stature or because He should be blind without eyes or no more than air without hands. The real reason is that his stature is Jesus Christ, suffering and glorified. All things will be from Him and through Him and towards Him! Don't carve images; kneel before Jesus, the living image of God, Lord and Saviour.

### **Make us your image bearer!**

#### *Empty hands, open ears*

What is the proper way to serve the Lord? Not by using our own ideas about God's image, but by listening. Those who keep God's commandments love Him and leave it to the Lord. For upon reflection we realize that we do not know much.

It is somewhat inherent in us to know better! Remember the Apostle Peter on the Mount of the Transfiguration (I will put up three shelters!) and at the occasion of the washing of the feet (you will not wash my feet!) and at the announcement of the Lord's imprisonment and suffering (that will not happen!). Time and again Peter carried an image of the Lord that did not fit with reality, that was not subservient to God's will. Peter tripped over his own ideas of God's image.

Similar things occur throughout the church history. We cannot imagine that the Lord would not approve of these crusades, or we cannot imagine that the Lord would allow organs and hymns in

the worship service, or we cannot imagine that the Lord would gather his church in any other way than what we have come to think is the right way.

Our imagination about God, beautiful as it might be at times, tends to influence our actions and our behaviour. And yet to listen and obey is better than sacrifice.

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### *We will reflect the image of Jesus Christ*

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Listening is very difficult. It is not one of our greatest talents. We live in a time where there is little listening and much more expressing of our opinions. We cannot understand that God's ways in the history of the church could be different than the scheme we have in our thoughts.

### **Open for the future wherein we will see with open eyes**

The total gracious revelation is directed towards the reconciliation, the restoration of man as God's image. Paul reminds us of Sinai in 2 Corinthians 3. Moses' face reflected there the radiance of the glory of God "fading though it was." To see it was exceptional and yet it was also a sign of things to come. For this will be the direction, the future. And then Paul writes about us who have seen the glory of God through Jesus Christ, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is Spirit." This is a difficult sentence with an inconceivable reality. God reveals

Himself in Jesus Christ. We see Jesus our Redeemer. We receive the Holy Spirit. We are being transformed. A metamorphosis takes place. We will reflect the image of Jesus Christ. We become perfect mirror images, imposing and radiant.

Those are the plans of our God and He works this through his Spirit. But He is very careful and prudent. He does not tolerate interference; He is a jealous God! He rejoices with all those who submit themselves to the craftsmanship and handiwork of his Spirit and Word, who are changing from lawless citizens to holy servants. Man must learn to approach the Almighty God with empty hands, submitting himself to be sculptured into the perfect image of our God. This is an image before which angels will bow.

The Christian church does not have an image of God. For Him there is an empty niche among the images of apostles, prophets, and preachers. But God's image will be seen, in apostles and prophets: in you and me!

We do not have Bible study to work on the complete and perfect image of the *Lord*. No, we study the Word of our God so that together we change from glory to glory, transformed in his likeness with ever increasing glory according to the image of Him who has called us in Jesus Christ.

I may conclude with an amazing and surprising promise for the future from our Lord and Saviour and I wish to pass this on for your reflection and encouragement as you meditate and take up the task again this fall: blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.



# A New Building for Carman West

## First worship service

June 18, 2006 was a day of great rejoicing for the congregation of Carman West. After many months of planning, working, and anticipation, we could worship together in our new church building for the first time. Rev. Pol chose as text the words that are engraved on our cornerstone, "Worship the Lord with gladness" (Ps 100:2a). He reminded us that this building is designed for worship, a form of service. Many Bible translations translate this verse as "Serve the Lord with gladness." We can see his blessings and providential care in the fact that we are able to worship in a new building. God is the one who made this all possible and provided all that was needed to bring the project to completion. We are to serve the Lord with gladness and put in effort to listen to the sermon and concentrate on the singing and prayer. We need to serve God with our heart, our lips, and with our entire lives, not just on Sunday, but throughout the week. We need to take the talents God has given us and use them in his service. Our God is good, his love endures forever. Let everyone worship the Lord!

## Grand opening

Eleven days later, on June 29, we hosted a grand opening evening. Ben Vandermeulen opened the evening with a



welcome to all those present. We sang Hymn 42:1, 2, and 8 and Mr. Vandermeulen read Psalm 100. He then led us in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, emphasizing God's hand in this new building. Mr. Vandermeulen provided us with a short history of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Carman.

Rev. Pol explained what the name "Reformed" means, tracing our beliefs back to the time of the Reformation. He emphasized the principles of Scripture alone, grace alone, and faith alone. He invited everyone to join us on Sundays for our worship services. This building is our new home: a place for rest, refreshment, and interaction. Our primary purpose is to interact with God. We also interact with each other, as brothers and sisters, providing love and support.

In the ribbon cutting ceremony, one person from each decade came forward to hold the ribbon. Mrs. L.

Vanderveen, one of our senior members, who has been a part of our congregation from her arrival in the 1950s until today, cut the ribbon.

Ben Vandermeulen acknowledged the work of the many, many volunteers who contributed their talents in bringing this project to completion. Worthy of special mention was the Building Committee, consisting of Fred Dewit, Andy Huisman, Arno Linde, Ron Vanderzwaag, and the Council liaison, Dennis Douma. Fred Dewit, chairman of the building committee, expressed his thanks to all those who helped, as well as to the contractors and sub-contractors who were a pleasure to work with. He thanked God for guidance and safe-keeping during construction and expressed the wish that the building may be used to feed the sheep. He also thanked his fellow committee members for all their efforts.

The mayor of the Town of Carman, Murray Rinn, congratulated the congregation on their beautiful building and offered his wishes that we may be able to enjoy this building for centuries to come. The reeve of the Rural Municipality of Dufferin, Doug Sisson, also extended greetings from the RM. He noted that we have come a long way from our humble beginnings more than fifty years ago; today the small town of Carman is the home of two congregations. He quoted Psalm 127:1, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain." He wished us continued growth and prosperity.

The contractor, Lee Sandulak of Lee's Construction, provided us with some interesting details about the building. He thanked all the tradesmen who did their work so well and offered us his thanks and best wishes for God's blessing.

Joseph Hasner, from House of Signs and Music, the supplier of our Johannes Organ, noted that he was glad he had recommended a powerful organ, since he could hear powerful singing from the congregation. He offered his congratulations and best wishes and hoped that the organ will serve

us well for many years. We then had an opportunity to hear the organ accompany the Alleluia choir. They sang two selections, "Praise God," based on Hymn 6 and "Praise my Soul the King of Heaven." The audience was requested to sing along with the last stanza of the second selection and they did so enthusiastically.

Elder Ron DeRuiter came forward on behalf of Council to thank all the committees who had put so much time and effort into this building project. Special thanks went to the Building Committee.

Rev. J. Mulder, a former minister in Carman, shared a few thoughts. He reflected on the first church building which we had in Carman. He told some amusing stories about that first building and encouraged us to appreciate the history of our church and the great efforts and sacrifices made by our parents and grandparents as they looked to the future. He offered congratulations on behalf of all the churches in Ontario.

We were then congratulated by our fellow churches in Classis Manitoba/Denver. A letter from the church at Denver was read. Rev. Jonker extended best wishes from the congregation of Winnipeg



Grace. He presented Council with the gift of a beautiful eagle and reminded us of Exodus 19, where the Lord tells Israel that He carried them on eagle's wings and brought them to Himself. Mr. Michael Kuik brought greetings from the congregation of Winnipeg Redeemer and presented Council with a clock. Letters from two former ministers, Rev. C. VanSpronsen and Prof. J. Geertsema, were read. They expressed their regret at not being able to be present and offered their best wishes. Mr. Henry Nagtegal from Providence United Reformed Church brought congratulations on behalf of his congregation. Rev. Holtvlüwer offered congratulations on behalf of our sister church in Carman East.

Harry VanKammen, chairman of the Board of Dufferin Christian School, noted that for the last seven years Carman West has been using the school for their meetings, catechism classes, and societies. Now they are graduating to their own building, from classroom to consistory room. He therefore presented Council with the traditional graduation gift at DCS, a Bible.

Rev. VanRietschoten shared some thoughts on this special occasion. He reminded us that it is the congregation that is the church and not the building. He led us in closing thanksgiving prayer. We closed the formal part of the evening with the singing of O Canada. Audience members were invited to enjoy the refreshments provided and explore the new building.



Keith Sikkema

Mr. Keith Sikkema is principal of Dufferin Area Christian School in Orangeville, Ontario  
ksikkema@istop.com

# Luther, a Movie Review



Several years ago, Gateway Films (<http://www.visionvideo.com/>) and the Christian History Institute produced its *Reformation Overview* video series. In addition to material about Wycliffe, Hus, Tyndale, the Swiss Reformers, and the Anabaptists, it also included a thirty minute summary of a full-length movie on Luther. The intended purpose of the series was to be “an introduction for those with little or no awareness of the great themes of the Reformation; a compelling exercise in discerning what it means to be a Christian and part of the people of God;” and “not. . . a diatribe against the Roman Catholic church.” The series wanted to remind viewers that “God is to be found only where it pleases Him to seek us. The abiding validity of Reformation theology is. . . that it challenges the church to listen reverently and obediently to what God has once and for all said and once and for all done in Jesus Christ. How the church will respond to this challenge. . . is a matter of life or death. It is the decision of whether the church will serve the true and living God. . . or succumb to the worship of Baal” (Introduction, pp. 8-9). With some reservations (the material was prepared for an adult audience, without explicit focus on central themes in our schools’ church history programs) I previously recommended the *Reformation Overview* series for use in grades seven and beyond

after teachers had taught the core material themselves.

A relatively new two hour Luther movie (2003) made me consider this topic again. For reviews, see <http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/> and, more recently, *Christian Renewal*, October 26, 2005, pp. 28-29. In CR, Hermina Dykxhoorn recommends watching it as a family. In “*Watching Movies – No? Yes? How?*” Gootjes, Plug, and Poppe address whether we should watch movies at all, drawing particular attention to the measure in which movies respect the Ten Commandments. I focus on this particular video with a view to its usefulness in our schools.

## Church history

With the *Flame of the Word* church history series for grades 4 and up by A. Nap and P. Torenvliet; with the availability of *Church History*, a textbook for high schools and colleges by Rev. P.K. Keizer; and with the work of CARE (Curriculum Assistance to Reformed Education), teachers in our schools receive ample support for teaching this subject. Among other things, CARE developed a framework which contains an umbrella theme and various strands for the selection of course material. This umbrella theme (Through the ages, Christ gathers, defends, and preserves his church, of which I am a member) and its strands (the church, its history, and its membership) also call for integrated attention for

Christ’s kingship, the communion of saints, the catholicity of the church, God’s providence, and the antithesis. Without this framework, any teacher can easily drown in an ocean of facts and lose sight of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Parents should be able to continue to place a high degree of trust in our teachers to present this subject to our children.

A well-defined focus on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in church history assists the teacher to evaluate material for its suitability for classroom use. Because movies capture our interest and attention, because they make it appear easy for the teacher to prepare, and because they can be used to quickly and pleasantly introduce, reinforce, or review ideas and events, videos and DVDs must be evaluated before use. A moving picture leaves a mental image that tends to last much longer and more vividly than plain printed text. Material that is presented in a video must not only be historically dependable but also enhance the focus of what has been taught.

## Luther

When we teach about the work of the Lord through Luther (1483-1546), his life’s events are a good vehicle to bring this out in a narrative. I will highlight a few of those events as background to the following discussion. In addition, a teacher should not venture to rely on the video to teach about Luther

before familiarizing himself or herself with the material and its significance for God's work in the Reformation.

Luther was born towards the end of the Middle Ages, when the doctrine and practice of the church were dominated by the papacy. Martin's parents were not devoid of superstitions, but serious about Martin's upbringing. Thus, on the morning following his birth, he was baptized and named after the day's saint. Luther's own piety is evident from his vow to become a monk during that fateful thunderstorm on July 2, 1505. Teachers will want to present typical errors of the church at the time, such as the devotion to saints, superstitions, and the understanding that sacraments conveyed grace to their recipients. The conflicts that surface here with the Word of God should be addressed and exposed. If Christ was the Head of the church, why did it not teach Scripture but its own doctrines? Why did church leaders not address prevailing misconceptions? However, the Lord Jesus Christ preserved his church and was about to bring Reformation through a return to God's Word. This exposed the evil of a church and of a pope Luther came to identify as the Antichrist.

In the Augustinian monastery, Luther's agony over his sins and guilt before God and the resulting self-chastisement bring out other elements that need to be exposed. Luther's superior, Johann von Staupitz, advised Luther to draw on the forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ for what he could not accomplish himself. At first, Luther continued to seek justification through works. But then, he considered that he had been ordained as a priest, had accepted the order to study theology, made a trip to Rome, bought an indulgence there, and sought relief from

purgatory for his deceased grandfather by climbing Pilate's steps on hands and knees. At the top, Luther expressed doubt about salvation through works: "Who knows whether it is so?" As he became convinced that only God's own Word would reveal the truth concerning our salvation (*Sola Scriptura*), Luther found that it was not so: we are saved by grace alone (Rom 3:24: *Sola Gratia*).

### Implications

Having discovered from Scripture that salvation is by grace and through faith only (Gal. 3:11, Rom. 1:17 and 3:28: *Sola Fide*), Luther found its profound implications during the years following. His famous ninety-five theses (October 31, 1517) condemned indulgences as a fraud. This development and the subsequent satanic attacks (through the Pope, the Emperor, the Anabaptists, and the humanists) show God's providence in sustaining the Reformation and the antithetical struggle for the truth. There was Frederick the Wise, who vouched for Luther's safety; there were the kidnappers, who brought him to the safety of Wartburg Castle where he translated the New Testament into German; and there was Catharina von Bora, who became his supportive wife. Highlights of Luther's opposition to the attacks included his responses to the papal bull of excommunication in 1520, the public burning of this bull at the Elster Gate of Wittenberg in December, 1520, his defence on the basis of Scripture at the Diet of Worms in April, 1521, his return to Wittenberg in 1522 to confront the Anabaptist iconoclasm, and his response to the humanist Erasmus, who argued for a free human will.

The Lord's blessing in the spread of the German Reformation showed at the 1530 Diet of Augsburg, where

Margrave George of Magdeburg confessed boldly and in front of Emperor Charles V, "Before I let anyone take from me the Word of God and ask me to deny my God, I will kneel and let him strike off my head" (Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 253). The moderately phrased Augsburg Confession was presented there as well. The Emperor would not accept it, but by God's grace and providence, he was too busy to enforce his position with the sword for the next fifteen years or so. We thank God for preserving the Lutheran Reformation and enabling it to grow throughout Europe through the work of men like Tyndale, Zwingli, Calvin, and Knox.

### The movie

The movie presents several of the events mentioned in this summary. For people familiar with the story of the Reformation in Germany, it is indeed highly recognizable and it is very helpful in its portrayal of what things were like in those days. However, as a secular product designed to entertain, the perspective is lacking that Reformation is God's work. That is somewhat surprising because of the funding support it received from the German Lutheran Church. Without a doubt, the movie had to appeal to a wide audience. Luther is the hero and references to Scripture fade in strength of portrayal to the celebration of this hero and elements of entertainment. This observation is underlined in the Special Features section of the DVD, which, among others, highlights boldly that "500 years ago, one man changed the world."

The key actors play impressively well, but their perspective is different from what we would want to teach our children in church history class. Joseph Fiennes (Luther) comments that the main idea of the film is

about the minority and the oppressed, about the control the Roman Catholic Church had on the masses and how it kept people down. He likes his role because "Luther brought Rome down." Similarly, Sir Peter Ustinov (Frederick the Wise) notes that "Luther started the Reformation" and Alfred Molina (Tetzel) learned from evangelical televangelists how "committed they are to what they believe – whether one agrees with them or not." He liked playing Tetzel because the man so unselfishly stood for what he believed.

The movie is rated PG-13. Parents are strongly cautioned, because "some material may be inappropriate for children under 13" and the movie incorporates disturbing images of violence. The latter would include (among others) the killing of a boar, the rough handling of priests during the Anabaptist revolt, the apparent burning of Tetzel's hand demonstrating the nature of purgatory, the burning of Luther's friend at the stake, the dead bodies resulting from the peasants' revolt, and the humiliating treatment imposed on people who disagreed with the Roman Catholic Church. Further disturbance is generated by the suicide of a young man, a priest entering a brothel, and by the episode where Martin and Catharina briefly get passionate in bed. The section in which Luther pokes fun of the errors of the Roman Catholic Church to his students in Wittenberg raises questions as well.

### Justified?

Can a movie that must be thus characterized be fruitfully used in a Reformed elementary school? If secular critics label it PG-13, can the school justify presenting it to a whole class of students, whose

parents are likely to make different decisions on the matter? It should be clear from the start that the movie is not at all suited to *introduce* a curriculum that seeks to establish God's work in the history of the church. Its secular and entertaining objectives clearly miss that key criterion. The teacher must consider whether students should really be exposed to such scenes as previously described, including several that clearly break the Ten Commandments.

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*A well-defined focus on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in church history assists the teacher to evaluate material for its suitability for classroom use*

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In that regard, the teacher may choose to select certain scenes that would be particularly helpful in portraying the time or course of events. If a teacher wants to show what a Diet of the Holy Roman Empire looked like, for instance, the movie provides a useful example. Luther's defence at the Diet closely matches the historical record and could be used. Even then, the follow-up activity in which the teacher involves the students should bring out elements from the movie that distract from the main goals of the unit of study.

It does make a difference with what age group the teacher wants to use the video. Older students' skills in critically analyzing movies need to be honed in contexts such as Media Studies and part of that process could include an identification of elements the movie's perspective misses. Scenes an elementary

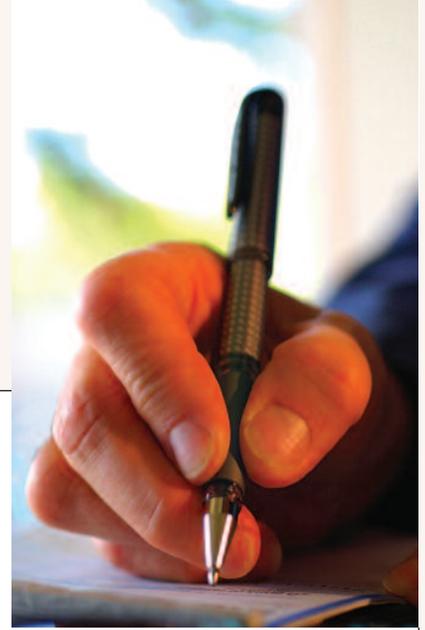
teacher would skip in a church history class may be included in high school for such critical discussion. For older students, it is also easier to recognize that some of the portrayed violence is but acting. (The movie makers are somewhat apologetic about actually harming the boar, which was not my greatest concern.)

### Conclusion

It is tempting to use videos in church history classes, especially such as deal with characters and events central to the intended course of study. However, as the producers of such material have their own agenda, audience, and context in mind, teachers need to take care that the video does not override what they should teach themselves. Viewing the video in whole or in part may have value for grade seven students or beyond, but should typically include a critical component to develop discernment. Used in that way, the new Luther DVD presents a greater challenge than the earlier one produced by Gateway Films: it is longer and has a more blatant entertainment purpose. If families choose to watch it, they would benefit from not relying on the movie for their understanding of the Lord's work through Luther and would do well to use it as a tool for developing discernment.

As a secular product designed to entertain, the perspective is lacking that Reformation is God's work.

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



### Letter to the Editor

In his editorial (June 9, 2006), Rev. Stam opines that the churches should use wine (alcoholic) in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. "Wine is a festive drink," he argues and quotes several texts. I agree that wine has a festive character but it also has an ugly side. "Wine is a mocker; beer is a brawler" (Prov 20:1).

Here's the simplicity of the situation in one of the local congregations: the church has a member who admits to alcohol addiction, the Council with the congregation collectively decides not to serve alcohol at the Lord's Table, keeping in mind 1 Corinthians 8:9. A while later an appeal goes out to our broader assemblies stating that alcoholic wine must be served. After these appeals are bounced from Classis to regional synods and on to general synods the ruling is made that yes, wine (alcoholic) must be served (Synod Chatham, 2004, Recommendation 5.2, p. 109). In this process, I have yet to see a solid scriptural reason why this should be so.

The problem here is not whether one has succumbed to the "temperance movement," but rather, what will Synods "dictate" to the local congregations next? Do we need to canonize the use of wine? As Rutgers says about hierarchy, "Germ, seed, or tree, it is the same, only a matter of time" (*Bound Yet Free*, p. 8).

To my knowledge no local church has ever asked Synod to rule on whether or not juice or wine should be the required element. It has all come to the table of these broader assemblies by way of personal appeals to what the local churches are practicing. How did it get this far? Keep in mind the following quote: "There is, however no direct channel from a church member to the major assemblies" (*With Common Consent*, p. 146).

I do agree with Rev. Stam's statement, "The fruit of the vine refers to wine." However, does this mean we need to replicate the Lord's Supper precisely as was done by our Lord?

When we read Paul's remarks on how the Lord's Supper should be celebrated, he concludes by saying, "And when I come I will give further directions" (1 Cor 11: 34). We do not read about these further directions. Calvin is "certain that Paul speaks only of outward decorum. As this is put in the power of the church, so it ought to be arranged according to the conditions of times, places, and persons" (Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. 20).

I think we can conclude that Calvin would include freedom when it concerns the "outward symbols of bread and wine" and if the above church feels that it can in good conscience celebrate the Lord's Supper with fermented wine again, let that be so as well.

Aubrey Vandergaag

### Response:

I mentioned that a consistory can always find a proper and exceptional way to give a real alcoholic juice, but my point is that we should not make juice generally available.

The whole matter of catholicity was left unmentioned by the letter writer.

Cl. Stam

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