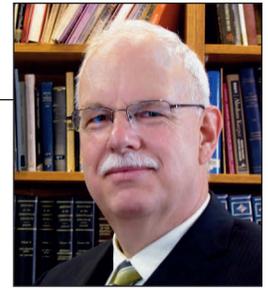


# Clarion

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**IS THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ONE OF FEAR?**



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## Fear Factor (2)

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*The good news of the risen Jesus implies a fear factor for those who refuse to accept it. Full disclosure of the gospel means that this warning must be clearly stated*

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### A sequel

The avid reader of *Clarion* will recall, perhaps, that I wrote the editorial for the first issue of the 2015 *Clarion* with the title “Fear Factor.” The editorial contrasted immobilizing fear that can come because one is overwhelmed by what is happening in one’s life and in the world, and the mobilizing fear that comes when one fears the LORD. This editorial will follow up on that theme, linking it with the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the gospels, we read how the initial response to the news of our Lord’s resurrection was one of fear. The angels at the tomb and our Lord Jesus himself told the women who had come to the tomb, “Do not be afraid.”

### Understandable fear

It is not surprising that the initial response was one of fear. We quickly respond with fear to far lesser situations than suddenly meeting two angels wearing clothing white as snow, and then meeting someone you knew was dead. This fear comes with encountering the unexpected and the unfamiliar.

The resurrection of our Lord evoked a far more dreadful fear in the soldiers sent to guard the tomb. They had not been sympathetic to the Lord at all, and then they experienced an earthquake and angels who rolled away the stone covering the opening of the tomb. Matthew tells us that they “became like dead men.”

We can be sure that there came a good dose of fear, as well, in the hearts and minds of the Jewish leaders. If you know that you are guilty of having an innocent

man condemned and then you hear that he is alive again, there is bound to be the sense that he will come back to get you. There must have been relief, over time, that he did not appear on their doorstep, or resume his public ministry, but they did not like the disciples preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead.

The fact that the risen Lord never appeared to the people responsible for his death to punish them does not take away that the message of his resurrection contained a note of fear. We may want to play it down in order not to cause offense to anyone, but it is an inevitable part of the gospel. The gospel holds out hope for those who believe in the risen Lord. At the same time, it holds out the prospect of judgment for those who do not. This comes out in Paul’s words in Athens. He said that God “. . . commands people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30, 31). The book of Revelation portrays this coming of a risen, living Jesus to judge the living and the dead in vivid colours. The good news of the risen Jesus implies a fear factor for those who refuse to accept it. Full disclosure of the gospel means that this warning must be clearly stated.

### Joy and hope replaces fear

In the accounts of the resurrection, we see how quickly fear gives way to joy and hope. Matthew tells us that the women departed quickly from the tomb “with fear

and great joy." The Apostle Peter writes of the effect of the news of the resurrection on the disciples. We read in 1 Peter 1:3 that "according to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." When Jesus died, hope died. When they heard Jesus had risen, hope revived.

This reviving power of the news of the resurrection helps us understand why the early New Testament Church did not roll the

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 6 is our Easter edition. Rev. Eric Kampen brings readers another "Fear Factor" editorial, this time in relation to Easter. The Treasures New and Old meditation also focuses on Christ's resurrection.

In this issue we start a series by Dr. Wes Bredenhof, "Outward Looking Church." He asks: is evangelism and outreach a commission or a craze?

In "Loss Assurance" Rick Ludwig shares his experiences and thoughts from the national Christian Counseling and Education Foundation conference on Loss: Finding hope that lasts when life falls apart. There is also a report from Jeremy de Haan (third year CRTS student) on the annual CRTS Conference; the theme this year was "As You See the Day Approaching: Reformed Perspectives on Eschatology."

This issue includes the Clippings on Politics and Religion, Education Matters, and Ray of Sunshine columns. There is also a letter to the editor.

*Laura Veenendaal*

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day of worship back one day, to the day of the week the Lord was crucified, but rolled it ahead one day, to the day of the week he arose from the dead. The resurrection implies death preceded it. It is not so the other way around, for death does not necessarily imply resurrection. For the Christian church, the annual Easter celebration is actually not necessary because the resurrection of the Lord is celebrated each Sunday. Easter is the reason for Sunday and each Sunday is a reminder as to why the Christian life is not one of fear, but of joy and hope.

### **Resurrection and salutation**

That we can speak of joy and hope is evident each time we assemble for worship on Sunday in the greeting the minister gives to the congregation. No, not the “good morning” type of greeting, meant to give a friendly face to the worship service. That does not mean too much for one who has come to the place of worship to join the congregation in meeting God. It is the greeting he gives in the name of the Lord, the official salutation, “Grace be unto you and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In those words is the message, “Do not be afraid, even though you have come into the presence of the holy God.” Those words bring out the grace of God, as is evident in his gift of Jesus Christ, who by his death has restored us in our relationship with God. It is because of Jesus Christ we know we are at peace with God. The Apostle Paul writes that Jesus was “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25). Jesus’ resurrection is evidence of our justification and it is as risen Lord that Jesus applies to us his justifying sacrifice.

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***For the Christian church, the annual Easter celebration is actually not necessary because the resurrection of the Lord is celebrated each Sunday***

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When we think about it, the words of greeting we hear at the beginning of a worship service are an echo of the words heard on the day our Lord arose from the dead, “Do not be afraid.” We need to hear those words before we can go any further in worship. We need them because the week that has gone by was filled with many shortcomings, sins, and transgressions. If we have a sin-

cere awareness of our many remaining sins, if we look back at the many failures, if not in deed than in thought, there may even have been hesitation in going to worship God. Worship makes us so self-conscious of living before the face of God and on Sunday it may seem like we have to give account. As sinners, we have every reason to be afraid. What a relief it is to hear the greeting: grace and peace be unto you. It is the Easter greeting all over again, each Sunday again. Jesus, who died for our trespasses, has been raised for our justification.

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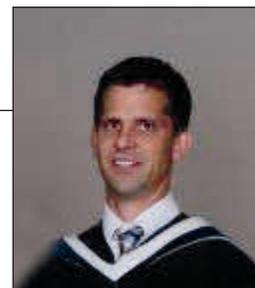
***What a relief it is to hear the greeting: grace and peace be unto you. It is the Easter greeting all over again, each Sunday again.***

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### **Fear and joy**

What has been said so far has in effect placed fear in contrast to joy. It is worth noting that the women who were told Jesus had risen departed quickly “with fear and great joy.” It was mentioned earlier that fear can be a response to unexpected and unfamiliar circumstances. Fear can also indicate a healthy and loving respect. We know that the women were quickly persuaded Jesus had risen, while the disciples took some more persuasion. For the women, fear and joy went hand in hand. This is good to keep in mind in reflecting on meeting the Lord in our weekly worship. Remember, the day was not rolled back. If our worship was always on the Friday to remember Good Friday, one would expect the somber tone of a funeral. The day of worship was rolled forward, to the day of the resurrection, when sadness and fear gave way to joy. This is important to keep in mind in how we approach worship. While there will be many reminders of our sin and misery, ultimately, worship is giving thanks to God for the gift of his Son, who died and who rose again, being victorious over death and sin. The unrepentant sinner and hypocrite has reason to fear, but those who look to Jesus Christ have reason for joy because we have peace with God.

We do well to keep in mind that every Sunday is Easter. That means each Sunday we hear the comforting words, “Do not be afraid.” The more we are conscious of that, the more we will taste Easter joy each Sunday. 



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# Resurrection Hope

***“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”***

(Matthew 28:6)

Can you think of an experience that changed your life? Maybe a new career? Your wedding day? What Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” saw when they go out to the tomb of Jesus would change their lives forever.

The two Marys set out early Sunday morning. What did they expect to see? Mathew 28:1 simply says they went to look at the tomb. Mark and Luke tell us that they went to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, which was done in those days to mask the smell of a decaying body. They have come to mourn and to give Jesus a proper burial. Clearly they expected to find a corpse. And why wouldn't they? That would be the natural turn of events after they saw him die days before and after they saw Joseph of Arimathea put Jesus in the tomb.

As they head toward the tomb, you can imagine the sadness and despair they must have felt after putting so much hope in Jesus. What about all his promises of forgiveness, redemption, restoration, and the kingdom of God? Did those promises lie dead with Jesus in his tomb?

But then, something completely unexpected happens. God, who seemed silent on Friday, now takes action. When the women get to the tomb, the peaceful morning is suddenly disrupted by a violent earthquake. An angel comes down from heaven like a flash of lightning, walks over to the stone, that took three men to put in place, and rolls it away with his own two hands. The soldiers guarding the tomb and the women are gripped with fear.

The angel isn't concerned with the soldiers. He sits on the stone and begins talking to the women who expect Jesus to be dead. “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He's not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.” The women hear the good news and when they see it for themselves, their sadness turns to joy. Jesus is alive!

Their joy is bigger than just their own relationship with their beloved teacher. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in Paradise, sin, decay, and death always seemed to win through-

out history of the whole world. Bodies break down and die, lives break apart under the weight of greed, anger, and violence. But now God is doing something new. When these disciples see Jesus risen from dead, they know that he has destroyed the power of sin and that he really will bring restoration to the world, just as he promised. God will not let death win.

Our lives are constantly being worn down by sin. We try our best to change but it doesn't come easy. We set goals, but seem to so easily get pushed off course. Can we ever expect our lives to be any different?

The Bible says that Christ's resurrection gives baptized, believing Christians hope today. Romans 6 says that when you give yourself over to Christ and die with him, you will also live with him. Sin and death cannot destroy you because the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will bring you transformation and life.

We can't change ourselves but God can change us. Put your trust in Jesus and your life will take an unexpected turn for the better. C

## For Further Study

1. What are some bad habits you haven't been able to change?
2. How does believing in Jesus make change possible?
3. Why does Matthew keep telling us what the women saw? Look up 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 to help you answer.
4. Why would it be important to realize that the resurrection of Jesus is an actual historical event?
5. How does Christ's resurrection encourage you?

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# Outward Looking Church: Current Craze or Christ's Commission? (1)



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*Revised from a presentation for the Spring Office Bearers Conference held March 22, 2014 in Burlington, ON.*

In the Canadian Reformed Churches, we hear a lot of talk these days about our need to become more outward looking. It's therefore certainly worthwhile to consider whether this is simply a passing fad or whether there's something biblical here that needs our attention. I have three comments by way of introduction.

First of all, it may seem like this something that has just popped up recently. However, this subject has been under discussion before in the Canadian Reformed Churches. In 1972, here in Burlington, a minister taught a course about Reformed congregational evangelism. The lectures were also published in a booklet format. Later, in 1979, the material was expanded and published as a book. Perhaps the author was known to some of you: Rev. G. Van Dooren. The second edition of his book was entitled *Get Out! & Get Rid of Dilemmas*. Some of the questions we're going to be considering were already addressed by Rev. Van Dooren over thirty years ago. Now the easy thing to do would be to stop here and just tell you to go and read the book. It's apparently still available from Premier Publishing, so you could do that. However, there comes a time when a younger generation has to pick up the mantle from the older. Even if the questions we're looking at today are old, they are still being asked and they're still deserving of an answer from today's generation. While I respect the work done by Rev. Van Dooren, I'd also like to build on it and take it further in some ways.

My second introductory comment relates to my own history with these questions. I was ordained in 2000, as a missionary. I served the Lake Babine Nation in British Columbia, as a missionary of the Smithers church. Together with my family, we lived on a small reserve

about 100 km north of Smithers, Fort Babine. A missionary and his task are naturally outward looking. Eventually, the time came when our family was called off the mission field and I became a pastor in a regular church. The Lord called me first to become a co-pastor of the Langley church. One of the ways that the Lord drew me there was through the pleas of his people. They said that, as a former missionary, they needed me to help their congregation become more outward looking. Fresh off the mission field, I had a perspective that could serve their desire to be a church oriented to the community where the Lord placed them. That plea certainly resonated. Indeed, it became an important part of my work there. Fast forward to 2009 and a call came my way from the Providence church in Hamilton. This theme of having an outward looking pastor to lead a congregation that wants to be outward looking came up again. I was recently reviewing some of the letters and e-mails I received from Providence church members when considering the call and I was surprised by how many of them brought it up. It definitely factored into my discerning the Lord's will for me to move to Hamilton. Based on that, I think you can already sense where this is going to go.

My third introductory comment has to do with what one pioneer Canadian Reformed pastor allegedly said. Back a number of years ago, I met an older brother who had been under the ministry of one of our pioneer pastors. The name of the pastor is irrelevant. This older brother told me that Rev. X. had once said something like, "Beware when the church is fixated on evangelism. It's never a good sign for the health of the church." I don't know whether Rev. X. actually said it. I've never seen any proof of it and that's also why I hesitate to mention his name. Regardless of whether it was said, there has often been suspicion attached to those who want to be more outward looking. The sentiment attributed to Rev. X. is definitely

out there. When I first heard this comment, I actually tended to agree. After all, there have been those in our churches who have used mission and evangelism as a tool to try and change things via the back door. This is especially true with regard to worship. By having a mission project or evangelism effort with the songs we want sung with the instruments we want played, perhaps we can pull the church along in the direction we think it should go. At times, our missionary-minded and evangelistically-enthusiastic people have not been the most confessionally-grounded people in our churches. The thinking sometimes seems to be that when we do mission work, we have to leave all this Reformed baggage behind. So, that means we have to abandon the singing of psalms, we have to abandon the Three Forms of Unity, and anything else that makes us distinctively Reformed. To borrow the expression of C. S. Lewis, the evangelistic believer or missional church must be “merely Christian.”

However, this is a false dilemma. We can be confessionally Reformed in the fullest sense, and be outward looking churches. You don’t have to choose between one and the other. There are Reformed missionaries who have the Three Forms of Unity, not only as their confessional basis, but also as a powerful missionary tool. Around the world in the most surprising places, there are Reformed churches who are not only *not* ashamed to sing the psalms (and even with Genevan melodies), but they delight in doing so. So let me lay my cards on the table at the outset: I am going to argue in the following articles that not only can confessionally Reformed churches be outward looking and be healthy – they *must be* outward looking *in order to be* healthy.

Next time, we’ll begin by surveying what our confessions say to the question at hand. C



# Loss Assurance

At the beginning of each New Year my friendly insurance agent pays me a visit. He brings me a medium black Tim Horton's coffee and in short order we begin catching up on how the holidays went, how our families are doing, and how things are with the business. About two thirds of the way through the cup of coffee his expression changes and he becomes a bit more somber. It's time to review the rates for the coming year. "Are you adequately insured against losses?" he wants to know. The insurance industry doesn't beat around the bush. Losses are coming; how well will you be financially prepared to bear with them?

## CCEF National Conference

This annual meeting with my insurance agent came to mind as I attended the CCEF national conference this past fall with my wife and some friends. CCEF (Christian Counseling and Education Foundation) is committed to bringing thoughtful, Christ-centred teaching to help fulfill our mission to restore Christ to counseling and counseling to the local church. The conference focus was: "LOSS, Finding hope that lasts when life falls apart." As the over 1000 attendees gathered in general sessions it quickly became clear that what we are facing is pandemic. In this life everyone loses. The words of Job were quoted, "Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. They spring up like flowers and wither away; like fleeting shadows, they do not endure" (Job 14:1, 2). The message of the Bible is squarely aimed at the loss of everything good in this life. The focus of the conference pivoted on the question of how our faith in Christ can square with this experience. How can we find hope for ourselves and for others? Losses are coming; how well will we be spiritually prepared to bear with them?

It seems a dismal prospect, and yet it is a fundamental truth, that we are assured of loss in this life. There is a continual ebb and flow of coming and going, gaining and losing, birth and death. David Powlison began the conference by framing the well known beatitudes of

Matthew 5 in this context. The beatitudes envision a difficult world, rife with losses. Jesus confronts this reality in the light of his ministry. The first four statements in the beatitudes extol our self awareness of our essential weaknesses and how we are comforted in the knowledge that he became like us. The second four statements illustrate how, through Christ, we are strengthened to become increasingly like him. Our losses will not be taken away from us on this side of eternity. They serve to shape and change us through Christ to make us a blessed people; a people who live in hope in the midst of loss. We are people who are equipped for loss in Christ.

No sooner than we declare that we have hope in loss, we enter a quandary. Will we try to rise above our losses? Will we gloss over them? Will we dismiss them? Will we become stoics? Will we speak pat answers? We were encouraged at the conference to meet loss straight on in the midst of the sadness, the hurt, and the despair. Numerous speakers detailed the complexities of varied losses. Many people are facing the death of loved ones, from adults to children, from close loving relationships to fractured complicated ones. Others are dealing with "living" lost relationships, between spouses, between parents and children, and even between friends. Some are confronting financial loss, loss of business or employment, others contend with physical losses, loss of mobility, loss of mental acuity, loss of dreams and aspirations. My astute friend, during the conference, admitted that some have even chosen loss for themselves or their families as part of a life change. The challenge at the conference was to find hope in the midst of our experience that life is falling apart.

Winston Smith identified that, at the outset, finding hope in the face of loss is aided by a clear understanding of what faith is not. Faith is *not* an emotion. Our emotions (happiness, sadness, contentment, fear, etc.) are our God-given responses to what happens to us and around us. Faith embraces our emotions and has an answer for each and every one of them in Jesus Christ. We don't need to critique or suppress our emotions around loss, we

need to meet them with faith and trust that God will help us through. In this way we share in experiencing Jesus' loss and suffering in the same way as we share in experiencing his victory. Our grief in loss is the requisite action of the child of God. Crying out to God (silently or aloud) acknowledges our relationship with him as his children. As children we are reliant on our Father. As children we are confident of his care. Nothing can separate us from his love (Rom 8)! Ultimately, as we come closer to the triune God, we realize we are caught up in something that is greater than this life with its gains and losses. As we slowly relax our tightened grip on what we have in this life we fall into the loving embrace of God who fills us in every way (Rom 15:13).

Smith continued by declaring loss as the only *door* to God. Jesus gave up (lost) everything in order to gain our favour with God (Phil 2). Jesus declared in the gospels that those who followed him had to be "losers;" people who are willing to forsake what the world offers, people who will lose their life for the kingdom. The Apostle Paul said that he counted all things loss for the benefit of knowing Christ as his Lord, for whom he gave up all things, considering them as nothing (Phil 3). Avoiding loss is not the point in the end, persevering through loss is. The scriptural call is to go through the valley of loss accompanied by the Spirit of Christ and with each other. We have to admit this is a robust message, but what does it look like in real life terms? How can we help each other in loss?

Mike Emlet also spoke to our relationships in loss; how we help each other. There were some who attended the conference in the face of loss, still burdened with grief. There were some who were revisiting past losses and pressing on through them, many times in new relationships. And there were others who wanted to help those experiencing loss and equip themselves for this task. Emlet identified all Christians as being in the dual role of *suffering* and *helping* (2 Cor 1:3-7). He explained Paul's teaching as a *cascade of comfort*, like a waterfall. Our losses and sufferings prepare us to bring comfort to others who face loss. It works this way: God is the source and provision of all comfort which he provides to us in our hurts so that we would learn from it for the purpose of comforting others. So then we begin to see our suffering and hurt as a way of providing for others. And so it flows, as we share in our sufferings together we share in the comfort of the Spirit, washing over us as a community of believers again and again. Nobody graduates in this experience; we continue to limp along

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together through it. This process happens when our pain is transformed to hope, in Christ, so it can be transferred to the lives of others who are suffering. Emlet challenged us to see that the waterfall will overflow one way or the other. It will either be a cascade of comfort and hope or one of bitterness and misery. This awakening to hope in loss is the work of the Spirit, part of our sanctification. Sanctification does not mean we are getting better in ourselves, but that we are becoming more and more reliant on Jesus. Losing ourselves in Christ!

## Conclusion

The conference gave us much to think about. And at the beginning of another year, like at my meeting with my insurance friend, we still stand facing the assurance of loss. How can we prepare for our losses and the losses of those we care about this year? We have a blessed assurance in Jesus Christ. He gave up everything to redeem us. He understands our grief in loss. He carries our sorrows and by his Spirit makes it possible for this loving assurance to overflow to each other. As cross bearers we carry the emblem of loss as a sign of victory; a victory that is assured in Christ and sealed with his Spirit. The sign of victory is what we exchange as we embrace each other in our losses this year. Jesus reigns and will restore all things (Acts 3:21)!

As much as I appreciate my insurance policy to provide me some peace of mind in 2015, there is nothing that compares to this assurance in Christ. May we continue to live in the peace of Christ, in and through whatever losses the Father sends us. It's the only way to make it through another year.

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
O what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.*

*Perfect submission, all is at rest,  
I in my savior am happy and blest;  
Watching and waiting, looking above,  
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.*

Audio files for all the presentations at the conference can be freely downloaded at [www.ccef.org/events/national-conference/2014](http://www.ccef.org/events/national-conference/2014)



# CRTS 2015 Conference

It might strike us as flippant to refer to eternal life as an eternal holiday. But if we consider that the word *holiday* is a combination of *holy* and *day*, and that Sunday is the Lord's ordained holy day, then to refer to the eternal Sabbath as an eternal holiday is, in fact, quite fitting. So to spend a weekend meditating on eschatology, the doctrine of the end times, amounts to meeting together as a family and getting excited about a coming vacation.

That was our privilege at the annual conference of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. The theme this year was, "As You See the Day Approaching: Reformed Perspectives on Eschatology." The speakers addressed questions such as: Will we be like pre-Fall Adam on the new earth? Will there actually be a physical new earth? Why is hell important, if at all? What happens to us when we die? Far from being speculation about what will happen in the future, the speeches were proof that a biblically grounded eschatology impacts our hearts and lives today.

## Keynote speaker

The conference opened Thursday night with the first public speech. It featured the keynote speaker, Dr. Lane Tipton, Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. His topic, as he put it in his introduction, concerned the "intersection of pneumatology with eschatology." He recognized that this sounded less than thrilling to the mainly non-academic audience, so he assured us that his goal was indeed to present these truths in a way meaningful to the average believer.

Pneumatology is the study of the Holy Spirit, and Dr. Tipton wanted to show how the work of the Spirit was related to the end times. He gave us a speech that blended technical exegesis with pastoral warmth, mixing phrases like "eschatological plenitude" with concrete pictures of Moses' glowing face. He spoke with a contagious joy that was clearly born of the material he was presenting, a joy that made his speech come alive. The focus of his talk was two passages, one from each of Paul's two letters to



the Corinthians. Space won't allow me to cover everything Dr. Tipton said, so I will focus on the one point that was the buzz later over coffee and dessert.

Dr. Tipton was emphasizing the glory of the life that comes from the Spirit, and how full that glory will be when we experience the resurrection. He worked through Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15 regarding the natural and spiritual bodies (verses 42 and following), and demonstrated to us how striking Paul's contrast between the two really is. The dead body of a believer, Paul writes, is in the category of "natural body." But so is the body of Adam, pre-Fall. What this means, Dr. Tipton explained, is that the body that Adam had in Eden is closer in kind to a corpse than it is to the spiritual body we will be given at the resurrection. Compared to our resurrection bodies, Adam's body was *death-like*. To make the point with even more impact, Dr. Tipton said, "The one place I would not want to go to, other than hell, is Eden." This would take us backwards, away from our current and future Spirit-wrought life with Christ. It is a shocking statement, but it shocks us into recognizing the sheer volume of glory to which the Spirit is bringing us!

## Faculty speeches

On Friday the conference showcased current and former CRTS faculty. Dr. Smith spoke first thing in the morning on eschatology in the book of Psalms. The book provides unique challenges to the careful reader, especially with regards to eschatology. The psalmist speaks often about the grave, the pit, and Sheol, but there is a distinct lack of joy. Also, while there is a clear sense that the LORD will judge all of mankind, the fuller understanding of the Second Coming and the resurrection of the dead as revealed in the New Testament is not at all explicit. So we cannot simply read our doctrine of eschatology straight back into the Psalms. Rather, the key is reading the book through Christ and the fullness of revelation that he brings. We can read Sheol, then, as something conquered, and be assured of our vindication when God does bring his judgment. It is through Christ that believers can apply the Psalms to their hearts for comfort in the face of death, and hope for the Day of the Lord.

In the second morning speech Dr. Van Dam spoke about political action in light of the end times. A central principle in this discussion is that we live with the tension of the already/not yet. That is, we are living in a world that is already ruled by Christ, but the fullness of that rule has not yet been realized. So on the one hand, the theologians are wrong, Dr. Van Dam argued, who believe that the laws of Scripture, especially the Old Testament laws, should be our national laws as well. Christ doesn't rule that way. But on the other hand, the radical two kingdoms people don't have it right either, who say that Scripture has no place in political discussions. Rather, we must keep something of a balance, recognizing that while there is a place in politics for Scripture to speak, no true change can come about apart from the conversion of hearts. So we ought to seek the good of our neighbour and our country, a "good" that is informed by Scripture. And we ought not to be overly discouraged by political setbacks, recognizing that we are not here to establish a scripturally revealed nation-state, but to work instead in the kingdom of God, which knows no boundaries.

During the afternoon session we heard from Drs. Van Raalte, Van Vliet, and Visscher. Dr. Van Raalte spoke about the "intermediate state," that is, what happens to "us" when we die. He argued against some Christian philosophers who claim that humans have no souls, that when we die we simply wink out of existence until the resurrection of the dead. In this thinking there is no

"us" to speak of after death, and we do not join Christ in heaven. In response Dr. Van Raalte demonstrated from Scripture that this cannot be maintained. For example, Christ spoke of the poor man Lazarus as still existing after death (Luke 16:19-31), and Paul said that it was better than life to die and be with Christ. To argue that human beings are nothing more than their physical parts is to assume a view of the person that is inconsistent with Scripture. We really can look forward to meeting our Saviour in heaven at the moment of our death.

Dr. Van Vliet chose the more sobering topic of hell, and whether or not we should still speak about it today. It's an important question in contemporary Christianity, as big authors like Rob Bell have argued that the doctrine of hell is obsolete. Further, even if Christians do still believe in hell, it isn't preached as often as it once was. In the face of this, Dr. Van Vliet reasserted the importance of preaching this doctrine to God's people. When we are confronted with the terrible prospect of hell, we are confronted with the awesome holiness of our Triune God. But we are confronted at the same time with the enormity of what Christ accomplished on the cross, and we are moved by so great a love. Thus, although it is anything but pleasant, hell ought to feature in our preaching, that God's holiness and his love may stand out in their fullness.

The final speech of the afternoon was that of our principal, Dr. Visscher. He explored the question of whether we'd live on a physical new earth or in some kind of eternal heaven. For example, what did Peter mean when he wrote that our current universe is "reserved for fire" (2 Pet 3:7)? Dr. Visscher pointed out that this passage also speaks of the earth having been "destroyed" in the flood. Of course, that was not a total destruction, but a cleansing, or a purifying destruction. This, then, is what Peter has in mind. Our physical universe will be the one in which we live with God, yet it will have gone through the purifying fires to be improved just as gold is. An interesting but separate point Dr. Visscher also made was that when the kings of the earth "bring their splendor" into the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:24), this will include the physical cultural products we make on this side of glory. There were jokes later over whether or not this would include Apple products.

The conference closed Friday evening with the second of the two public lectures. Here Dr. de Visser explained how eschatology influences, or should influence, our liturgy and worship. He argued that eschatology should be

a regular part of our sermons, or more specifically, that it should hone our preaching to an urgent edge. We live in a time in which people live for the present, not the future. Thus it is important that God's people, who are no doubt influenced by this, be regularly confronted with the coming judgment, both for hope and for repentance.

To this end, Dr. de Visser referred to the many instances in our liturgical forms where eschatology is mentioned. For example, the purpose of the Lord's Supper is "to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes," and it provides us with a "foretaste of the marriage feast of the Lamb." The form for baptism reminds us that we belong to an "eternal covenant" with the Father, that we are "united in Christ's death and resurrection," and that through the work of the Holy Spirit "we shall finally be presented without blemish among the assembly of God's elect in life eternal." It's all there, and gives all the more reason, Dr. de Visser argued, for eschatology to feature more prominently in our liturgical life. Indeed, he exhorted ministers and elders to pray regularly for the return of our Lord. This should be done at least once a month, he said, and if the minister's heart is tuned eschatologically then this will show itself in his prayers. Ascension Day

should also be celebrated with more enthusiasm than it normally is, as it provides an obvious reference in the church calendar to the triumph and eventual return of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

Friday was a long day, and by the end this reviewer was good and tired. But it's a joyful thing to be tired out by visions of future glory. And it's a joyful thing to experience the holy desire to die, as Paul did, in order to be with Christ. I hope our ministers will indeed be encouraged by Dr. de Visser's words, and work at regularly placing before our eyes those visions of glory that excite our hearts. This anticipation has the power to transform the most mundane parts of our lives by lifting them into their proper everlasting context. After all, we walk now, already, in eternal life, with physical death being merely a step along the way. So with our eyes to that yonder horizon, may part of what marks us as God's people be a long eternal gaze, that the future light may already be glinting off our hearts.

As we sang at the end, in hope of the end, "Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!"





*Cornelis Van Dam*  
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# Obama, Islam, and Christianity

A myth perpetrated by Muslims is that Christianity cannot criticize Islam for its violence against Christians as now seen in the Middle East, especially by the Islamic State (IS). After all, look at the killing and violence the Crusades have inflicted on the Muslims in the Middle Ages. On February 5, President Obama unfortunately echoed these sentiments and thereby gave his support to this myth.

In a speech given at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, the president referred to the killings, terror, and unspeakable acts of barbarism perpetrated by IS and then went on to say: “And lest we get on our high horse and think this [that is, the killings etc.] is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades. . . people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ.” Basically the president said that Christianity is no different than the Islamic State. His attitude is: Who are we to judge? Happily there was considerable protest against the president’s comments.

The website of *Front Page Magazine* published a worthy response by Raymond Ibrahim, a Middle East and Islam specialist. The first point he made: “The wide gulf between violence and hate ‘justified in the name of Christ’ and violence and hate ‘justified in the name of Muhammad’ is that Christ never justified it, while Muhammad continuously did.” Muslims still commit savage atrocities because of the example of Mohammad. “Every evil act IS commits – whether beheading, crucifying, raping, enslaving, or immolating humans – has precedents in the deeds of Muhammad, that most ‘perfect’ and ‘moral’ man, per Koran 33:21 and 68:4.”

When people say, but Christ said “I come not to bring peace but a sword” (Matt 10:34), then Ibrahim rightly noted: “Jesus was not commanding violence against non-Christians but rather predicting that Christians will be persecuted, including by family members (as, for example, when a Muslim family slaughters their child for ‘apostatizing’ to Christianity as happens frequently).” Christ told Peter to put away the sword (Matt 26:52). How different Islam is. When IS justified the killing of the Jordanian pilot by burning him alive, it quoted Mohammad putting out the eyes of some with “heated irons” and “Khalid bin alWalid the heroic ‘Sword of Allah’ who burned apostates to death, including one man whose head he set on fire to

cook his dinner on.” Al Azhar, the Islamic world’s oldest and most prestigious university “still assigns books that justify every barbarity IS commits, including burning people alive.” Ibrahim then asks, “Does Obama know of some secret document in the halls of the Vatican that calls for amputating, beheading or immolating enemies of Christ to support his religious relativism?”

With respect to the Crusades, “Obama naturally follows the mainstream academic narrative that anachronistically portrays the crusaders as greedy, white, Christian imperialists who decided to conquer peaceloving Muslims in the Middle East.” The reality is quite different. “Familiarity with the true sources and causes behind the Crusades shows that they were a response to the very same atrocities being committed by the Islamic State today.” The Crusades were in response to Muslim invasions and their killing and enslaving Christians. “If the crusaders left their own lands and families to come to the aid of persecuted Christians and to liberate Jerusalem, here is Obama portraying them as no better than the Islamic State – which isn’t surprising considering that, far from helping persecuted Christians, Obama’s policies have significantly worsened their plight.”

Ibrahim concludes that “Obama’s claim that there will always be people willing to ‘hijack religion for their own murderous ends’ is patently false when applied to the Islamic State and like organizations and individuals.” IS is not hijacking Islam for their purposes but simply acting as Mohammad would have wanted them to do. “Muhammad himself called for the murder of his enemies; he permitted Muslims to feign friendship to his enemies in order to assassinate them; he incited his followers to conquer and plunder nonbelievers, promising them a sexual paradise if they were martyred; he kept sex slaves and practiced pedophilia with his ‘childbride,’ Aisha. He, the prophet of Islam, did everything the Islamic State is doing.”

It is important to have the facts straight when considering what is happening in the Middle East and defending the good name and honour of our Saviour. His kingdom does not come by the physical sword, but by the proclamation of the Word of God which is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:15). In this way he gathers the innumerable multitude for that great day.

C



# A Celebration

*Henk Nobel*  
 CARE Committee member, and  
 Principal of Emmanuel Christian  
 High School, Fergus, Ontario  
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By God's grace the Curriculum Association of Reformed Education in Ontario (CARE) is celebrating the completion of eight years of hard work! In the summer of 2006, a project was begun that finally came to completion in the fall of 2014; a project which provides a set of building blocks, thorough background information, and activity suggestions to assist all teachers in telling Bible stories to their charges. This project is a momentous achievement and therefore worthy of celebration.

This document, along with the Church History curriculum completed earlier, are the two largest accomplishments CARE has produced thus far. CARE is not implicitly saying that these are the two most important subjects taught in our schools; not at all! It simply underlines the obvious, that there is much available in the regular subject disciplines that we can use and adapt for our daily lessons in math and geography, but little available for our teachers in the area of both church and Bible history. For that reason, these two areas were such large projects. Allow me to give some history and some comments on the content of the newly completed Bible project.

In the summer of 2006 a committee was appointed with the mandate to prepare a Bible study program. It was felt that there was a dearth of material available to assist teachers in this area. In addition, very little collective thought and direction had been given to how a Bible class was to be held. The committee therefore began by penning a *Conceptual Framework* for Bible study in our schools.

It is worthwhile to highlight some conclusions which the *Conceptual Framework* formulated. Firstly, it was noted that "at all grade levels, Bible Study is about God's ongoing care for His creation; about the history of salvation through the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ; and about the work of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, through Whom we are also part of God's church

and equipped for a life of service to God and our neighbour." This statement undergirds all of what is done in a Bible study class at all grade levels.

The *Conceptual Framework* went on to identify twelve themes intended for the classroom teacher as they plan their daily lessons. The themes are meant to assist them in implementing the aims for Bible study, as they draw out more clearly the lessons of the Bible by placing people and events within the grand perspective of the ongoing redemptive-historical work of our God. Each lesson is built upon the overarching theme, with the twelve specific themes woven into it, no one lesson containing all twelve, of course.

The *Conceptual Framework* also strongly recommends the narrative approach to Bible Study for primary and junior grades. In the intermediate grades the narrative approach may become less suitable, and at the secondary level different approaches will prevail. The reason for the strong urging for the narrative approach can best be given by quoting from the document:

We are called to speak of the mighty deeds of the Lord, and narration is the primary method of doing this in the elementary grades. The narrative is one of the many means God uses to pass the Word to the next generation. God uses images as a teaching tool, but He comes to us through His Word. Much of that part of God's Word, which is dealt with in the elementary school, comes to us in the narrative form (Ps 78; Ex 13:14-15; Deut 6:20-25).

The pedagogical advantage of narration is that it weaves together the cognitive and the affective to form a lesson in which students with varying abilities and needs can achieve the goals of Bible Study in a meaningful and cohesive manner. It allows teachers to teach the content engagingly and meaningfully. It not only develops auditory skills, attention span, vocabulary and articulation, but also facilitates the

development of the student's comprehension and interpretative skills.

God allows His Word to work through the "teller" who is being renewed in the image of God – therefore the teacher must reflect faith, love and righteousness to the students. The narrative technique may be teacher-directed but in its essence does not leave out the student. By focusing on the historical-redemptive perspective within the covenant, the teacher involves the students in the story as members of the same covenant and sharing the same God, making this story of God's salvation also their own, for they, too, belong. The narrative is a means to reveal who the Lord God is – in every story the student must learn to see God and His great love first, rather than man or him or herself.

Much in vogue today in other Christian schools is drama and role-playing in Bible lessons. The document also broaches this subject and makes the following observation:

Role-playing as a methodology involves action that applies the learned material. It seeks to substantiate the emotional experience of the person and emphasizes the affective aspect of learning. By its nature, storytelling leaves the story itself in history, while drama brings it into the present. It is often assumed that the students need to experience or re-enact the message of the story in order for it to touch their hearts. In a role-play, the students are central in the activity.

The drama experience may imply that the revelation does not come from the hearing of the Word of God, but through the subjective personal experience with God. Reliving the revelation becomes an event



in which God is experienced. The emphasis shifts from what God does to what the students experience. In the narrative approach, a story can be told so that it reaches the hearts of the students without the need of reliving or experiencing the message. The 'seeing' of the message as it is acted out can hinder or even overpower the dimension of the message, which comes through in the hearing. (VanPohta, 2006)

The document highlights many other facets important in our Bible instruction. It touches on topics such as Story Bibles, points of view in Bible storytelling, the use of visual aids, the role of imagination, moralistic, and exemplaristic teaching, use of Bible songs, to list but a few. All are worthy of our attention but space does not permit me to deal with them.

One area I would like to touch on, though, is the area of evaluation in Bible study. The CARE appointed Bible group struggled with this area; the views on this topic by the committee members were diverse. Let me allow the *Conceptual Framework* document speak on this, as this was then also the committee's conclusion:

Bible Study is a unique subject, as it specifically aims to tell the great and wonderful deeds of the Lord to covenant children. This aim does not consist merely in academic knowledge and skills; it also calls these children to a response of gratitude for God's work of salvation through Jesus Christ. The overarching and specific aims (section 3), as well as the suggested themes (section 4) of Bible Study reflect this. More clearly than any other school subject, Bible Study pursues affective aims, with themes which focus on what God is doing. Both the aims and the themes seek to guide the students in their spiritual growth to know and love their God and Father. It is in the affective aims that the knowledge aims receive their full meaning and purpose: Knowing God and His counsel from Scripture informs how we are to live a life of obedience in a relationship of love with the Lord. (Psalm 119, Proverbs 1, Hosea 4, Romans 10)

As Bible Study seeks to instill reverence and awe for the triune God, and a commitment to a life of grateful service to Him, the emphasis should not be on evaluating whether or not students meet or fail to meet an academic standard, but rather on assessing ongoing growth towards the aims. An academics- or knowledge-based percentage grade could very well dis-

tract from these aims, by inadvertently suggesting that a child's commitment to serving God is low because he or she did not do very well on a test; or, conversely, by suggesting that it is high because he or she received an A grade. Students' ability to do well (or not well) on a paper-and-pencil Bible Study test or assignment must not be confused with their level of confidence that the Lord Jesus Christ is also their Saviour, or their commitment to serve Him wholeheartedly.

After the Committee completed the *Conceptual Framework* in the summer of 2008, the Bible Committee organized annual, two-week long summer Bible template writing sessions. During these sessions, two to four people at each grade level from K to 8, spent time writing templates for a unit of Bible study at the grade level assigned them. This work was completed in 2014 – seven summers of writing! The end result is 4,037 wonderful pages of templates for individual Bible lessons for grades K–8. Each of these templates gives a theme for the lesson, a rationale for the theme, the context of the story, a division to use in building the story followed by the most important component, building blocks around which to build the Bible story. In these building blocks, background information is given, historical information, cross-references from Scripture, comments about an aspect of the story. . . in other words much information that will save the story preparer/teller hours of work in the preparation of the lesson. The template then concludes with some suggested follow-up activities if so desired, some songs from the *Book of Praise* that tie in to the story as well as a listing of some further resources for the story if so desired. In other words, it provides a wealth of information for the user. We rejoice in its completion, and give thanks to the League of Canadian Reformed Schools who financially sponsored this work and to our God who allowed us to do this task. It is CARE's hope and prayer that this document will long serve teachers and other interested people.

The document is available on CD at a cost of \$249.00. Contact [h Nobel@echs.ca](mailto:h Nobel@echs.ca) if you wish to have a copy.

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*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 Arthur Kingma [akingma@echs.ca](mailto:akingma@echs.ca).*



## February

Belated birthday greetings to our February celebrants, I hope your day was filled with joy and laughter. May the Lord be near to you in this year as you live your life loving God and your neighbour.

At this time I also think about Cora Schoonhoven, who was taken into glory on December 17, 2014. She also celebrated many February birthdays with our dear celebrants listed below. . . we can know with thankfulness that life is eternal and so Cora lives eternally waiting in glory for the final return of Jesus Christ. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!

### 6 **TREVOR BUYS has turned 35**

c/o Anchor Home  
361 Thirty Road  
Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2

### 12 **CONNIE VANAMERONGEN has turned 50**

361 Thirty Road  
Beamsville ON, LOR 1B2  
Email: conniev1965@gmail.com

### 24 **FRED LUDWIG has turned 63**

653 Broad Street West  
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8



## March

I also wish a happy birthday to many who celebrate in March. May you too have a wonderful day enjoying the blessings of the Lord! Also, enjoy cake and family and friends celebrating this special day with you.

### 3 **TREVOR HOFKINK has turned 37**

14407 McQueen Road  
Edmonton, AB T5N 3L3

### 9 **DAVID RAWSON has turned 53**

Apartment 206, 1105 Jalna Blvd.  
London, ON N6E 2S9

### 10 **JAMES BOONE has turned 19**

5404 LadBrooke Drive S.W.  
Calgary, AB T3E 5X8

### 12 **GERRY EELHART has turned 53**

c/o Mrs. Grace Eelhart  
Emmanuel Home, #120 13425-57 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5A 2G1

### 14 **TINEILLE VANROOTSELAAR has turned 19**

1488 Highway 3 E  
Dunnville, ON N1A 2W7

### 14 **LISA ALKEMA has turned 34**

42 Spadara Drive, Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3  
lhalkema@gmail.com

### 15 **JIM VANDERHEIDEN has turned 56**

653 Broad Street West  
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

## A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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

Patricia Gelms  
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905-692-0084

### To the Editor,

In his article “Israel not on the Map,” published in the Christmas Edition of *Clarion*, Professor Van Dam claimed that the Palestinian Authority has “on every possible platform rejected Israel’s right to exist” and that it has “made no attempt to educate its people towards peace and coexistence with Israel,” instead issuing propaganda that includes a refusal to place Israel on Palestinian maps.

Professor Van Dam’s article is largely predicated upon claims that are sourced from Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), an organization run by Jewish settlers living illegally upon Palestinian land in the West Bank. I would like to suggest that PMW is an unreliable source, especially seeing as an *Israeli* Supreme Court judge dismissed the group’s evidence last year as “very biased and very deficient” because it “totally ignores” facts “which do not support [it’s] desired conclusion.”<sup>1</sup> Upon examination, this proves to be precisely the case with the claims reiterated by Professor Van Dam in his article; each and every one of them can be shown to be false or else a distortion of the truth.

An example of such a distortion is Van Dam’s reiteration of the claim that, as a part of the Palestinian Authority’s policy of incitement, Israel is not “on the maps used in the classrooms of [Palestinian] schools.” The statement is (mostly) true, but it is also entirely devoid of context. Israel too is guilty of skewing geography. A recent study conducted by a U.S. funded research group (if anything, biased towards Israel) found that “A vast majority of maps” not only in Palestinian but in *Israeli* textbooks “either totally omitted the other side, or showed interim borders without naming the other side” (Jerusalem Post). The report further affirmed that although both side’s textbooks tended to portray “the other” negatively, “types of extreme demonizing or dehumanizing characterizations. . . [were] absent.”

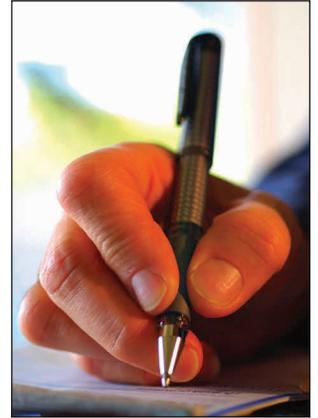
Van Dam also reiterates an allegation made by PMW that the Palestinian Authority has “on every possible platform rejected Israel’s right to exist.” This is untrue. Since its inception in 1994 the Palestinian Authority has unilaterally recognized Israel’s right to exist. It’s leader, president Mahmoud Abbas, recently reaffirmed this fact, stating in April 2014 that the newly formed Palestinian Unity Government “will recognize Israel. I reject violence and it will reject violence. . . No one should claim

now that it’s a government of terror” (The Times of Israel).

Israel, for its part, has never recognized the validity of a Palestinian State. The charter of the Likud, Israel’s current ruling party, “flatly rejects the establishment of a Palestinian State west of the Jordan,” in doing so declaring a refusal to withdraw to Israel’s pre-1967 borders. This declaration is in direct violation of a great number of international laws and agreements, most notably United Nations Resolution 242, which, due to “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war,” demands the “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the [1967] conflict.”

There is more to the Israel-Palestine conflict than Professor Van Dam’s article lets on. For nearly fifty years the Palestinian people have suffered under a brutal Israeli occupation that has systematically deprived them of both their civil and human rights; an occupation that has been deemed illegal by nearly every international body and human rights organization on earth. With this crucial context in mind, Reformed Christians should hesitate before unilaterally siding with Israel against its neighbors and should instead pray for an end to the conflict based upon mutual recognition of rights and reconciliation.

Sincerely,  
Colter Louwerse



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<sup>1</sup> The same Israeli judge found there to be inadequate evidence of a policy of incitement against Israel on the part of the Palestinian Authority.

### Brief Response

1. The main point at issue seems to be whether the Palestinian Authority (PA) recognizes Israel’s right to exist. It is true that Abbas said the things brother Louwerse noted. However, such declarations simply mean that those of the PA “recognize Israel’s existence as a fact of history, but reject Israel’s right to exist.” This quote is from <http://www.gatestoneinsti->

tute.org/2679/gingrich-palestinian-authority-pmw where more details about this duplicity from PA sources can be found. In 2014 a Unity Government was formed, composed of Abbas' Fatah which ruled the West Bank and Hamas which controls Gaza. When Abbas declared (April 2014) that the newly formed Palestinian Unity Government will recognize Israel and renounce violence, he was immediately contradicted by Hamas. Their leaders said that they would not renounce terrorism and would not recognize Israel's right to exist. The Western media liked what Abbas said and gave it wide coverage and hardly took note of Hamas's desire to continue to work to destroy Israel. Abbas needs continued Western funding and knows what they want to hear. More information can be found at <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4298/hamas-abbas-jihad> in the writing of

Khaled Abu Roameh, an Arab Muslim and veteran journalist who writes on Palestinian affairs for the *Jerusalem Post* and is also a Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Gatestone Institute.

2. There is obviously much more that can be said. For example, with respect to the refugee problem, it is not good enough simply to blame Israel, one also needs to understand the history of this tragedy (see, e.g., Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed*). My article only meant to highlight the map issue. Most of the Arab world is hostile to Israel and Iran has repeatedly said that it wants the state of Israel destroyed and wiped off the map. To that end it is also arming Hamas in Gaza and the Hezbollah in Lebanon with weapons to be used against Israel. The map issue is not an academic matter.

CVD



Tel Aviv