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# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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## CONCERNS ABOUT KAMPEN

# Amending the Confession?

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***Is this how we should handle the confessions?***

Classis Ontario West (COW) of March 11, 2015 decided to overture the next Regional Synod East in the hope that this body will support and endorse a proposal that came from the Providence Canadian Reformed Church of Ancaster, Ontario, to amend the Belgic Confession. Thereafter, it would be passed along to General Synod for final adoption and thus become part of the official text of the Belgic Confession.

So what exactly does COW want General Synod to add to the Confession? The words, *". . .the human race by making and forming Adam from dust (Gen. 2:7) and Eve from Adam's side (Gen. 2: 21-22). They were created as the first two humans and the biological ancestors of all other humans. There were no pre-Adamites, whether human or hominid. God made and formed Adam after his own image. . . ."*

Now, as I see it there are a number of issues that come to the fore with respect to this addition or amendment.

## An ethical issue

The first has to do with an *ethical* issue. What do I mean by that? Well, it has to do with the fact that two members in our midst are specifically singled out in this overture and accused of being theistic evolutionists. They are considered to be disturbing the peace of Jerusalem in such a serious way that we need to change the confession to prevent them from teaching certain things, as well as to prevent others from emulating them.

Now, the naming of names is always a sensitive and serious thing. Whenever anyone does that care needs to be taken both in the world and in the church. At the same time you need to make every effort to get your facts straight. If not, in the world you will be sued for defamation and in the church you will be accused of violating the Ninth Commandment.

So what should you do if you believe that certain members are seriously in error and you are of the opinion that they need to be stopped in their tracks? Furthermore, what should you do if you want to use them and their false teachings as a basis for adding to a confession? Surely, the first thing you will do is make sure that you have a right and accurate understanding of their views.

This means that you will draft your letter of charges against these men and then send it to them for their response and reaction. Once they respond you will evaluate whether or not your case against them is still sound and, if it is, you will proceed.

That to me is the honourable and biblical way. I say this on the basis of what we confess in Lord's Day 43 about not "condemning or joining in condemning anyone rashly and unheard." Behind these words is the well-known biblical principle to "do unto others as you want them to do to you."

In addition to the naming of these two brothers, there is also the naming of the two churches of which they were or are members. That too should result in an extra effort to get all of the facts right. For by naming these churches people may well draw the inference that these two churches are tolerating members in their ranks with heretical teachings.

Hence before publicly mentioning the names of these churches, it would have been considerate if a letter had also been sent to each church naming the member, identifying what are considered to be his wrong views, asking the consistory about his status and, if need be, urging it to take disciplinary action against him.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

How do (or should) confessions be amended or added to? asks Dr. James Visscher in his editorial. There are many things to consider before doing so.

In this issue Dr. Cornelis Van Dam begins a series dealing with developments in our Dutch sister churches and the lessons to be learned from these developments. Dr. Van Dam has also written another article for the Clipping on Politics and Religion column.

Issue 11 brings readers an article by Rev. Clarence Bouwman entitled "Excitement in India." There are the regular columns Treasures New and Old and Education Matters. We also have a letter to the editor, a question for "You Asked," and a book review.

One more important part of this issue: "In Memory of Wilhelm (Bill) Gortemaker." On April 28, 2015 our brother, friend, and colleague passed away. The Editorial Committee of *Clarion* shall miss him; yet we rejoice that he is home with the Lord our God.

*Laura Veenendaal*


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*Cover photo: Theological University, Broederweg, Kampen*


# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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So was any of this done? Did the Providence Church which wrote this overture originally write to these brothers and their churches before accusations were leveled publicly and used as a basis for proposing an addition to the Belgic Confession?

There is no evidence in the overture that they did. As far as I can ascertain, neither the members nor their churches were ever contacted.

Indeed, one of the men mentioned in the overture has since gone on record in social media vigorously disputing the fact that he is a "theistic evolutionist." There is also the fact that the other accused appealed to an earlier Regional Synod East regarding his views and subsequent discipline, and that the Regional Synod sustained his appeal against the decision of Classis Ontario West.

All in all, the procedures used in this case raise some serious ethical issues. Is this how we deal with one another as members and local churches in the church of Jesus Christ?

## A confessional issue

The second issue that this matter raises is a *confessional* one. In other words, is it right to take a historic Reformed confession and amend it in light of a current theological controversy? Up until now the Canadian Reformed Churches have always tended to answer that question in the negative.

*Is this how we deal with one another as members and local churches in the church of Jesus Christ?*

No doubt our history plays a role here. The fact that in the 1940s our fathers were expected to agree to an extra-confessional wording on pain of deposition or expulsion has resulted in our churches being extra cautious about tampering with the confessions. The prevailing opinion has been that our confessions do not need amending and that together they are clear and sufficient when it comes to the necessary points of doctrine.

As a result, for many years we have in our ecumenical relations urged other churches to exercise great care in adopting all kinds of statements on doctrinal matters and raising them to quasi-confessional status.

Yet with this overture we are suddenly doing something that we have for decades been urging sister churches *not* to do. Why, a case can be made that we are even going beyond these warnings for suddenly it is no longer about adopting theological statements and giving them confessional status, but it is about adding to the actual confession itself.

Now, you might think that I am being unnecessarily old school here, and perhaps there is some truth in that. In my years at seminary back in the late 1960s and early 1970s I was taught by men like Prof. Dr. Jelle Faber, Prof. Lubbertus Selles, Rev. Gilbert Van Dooren, and Rev. Hendrik Scholten, as well as others, and they repeatedly issued the warning not to tamper with the confessions.

*If that is the route we should go as churches, we will be mapping out a busy future for ourselves*

As a result, I must raise the general question: is this how we should handle the confessions? Whenever heresies or so-called heresies raise their ugly heads do we need to react with the stick of confessional amendment? If that is the route we should go as churches, we will be mapping out a busy future for ourselves.

Imagine if in the past we had amended the confession to deal with a certain minister whose teachings on the doctrine of the church were deemed to be unclear, confused, and wrong. Or what about theonomy or federal vision? Do they not deserve a well-placed confessional retort? Or what about the Shepherd controversy? Should that have not pushed us to take up our pens and clarify further what the confession says about the relationship between faith and justification? Or what about the views of men such as E.P. Sanders, N.T. Wright and others? The list goes on and on.

Do we really want to go down this road? Do we really need to go down this road?

## A textual issue

That brings me to the third issue and it has to do with a *textual* one. The Providence Church and Classis Ontario West would have us first add the words "the human race by making and forming Adam from dust (Gen. 2:7) and Eve from Adam's side (Gen. 2:21-22)." Is this really an improvement or a hedge against theistic evolution? As such these words are really just repeating or paraphrasing what Scripture itself already says.

I would say that if a member in our churches was to stand up and declare that Adam was not made of the dust of the earth or that Eve was not made from Adam's side, he or she would be dealt with on the grounds that they were in contravention of Scripture itself. In other words, if Scripture is clear on a certain matter and a member refutes it, he or she should be disciplined on the basis of Scripture criticism. In such a case we do not even need to refer to the confessions.

Why bother to kick in an open door. Why target what is obviously unscriptural and insist that it needs to be added to the confession?

Thereafter, the overture goes on to propose the following addition, "They were created as the first two humans and the biological ancestors of all other humans. There were no pre-Adamites, whether human or hominid." Again, I would ask, "Is this necessary? Is this helpful? Is this an improvement?"

May I remind you that in addition to the Belgic Confession, we also have the Heidelberg Catechism. What does it say in Lord's Day 3, Question and Answer 7? It refers to our depraved nature and says that it comes "from the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise." Does this not exclude any notion of pre-Adamites? Does this not identify our biological ancestors? And what about Article 12 of the Belgic Confession which states that the Father has "given to every creature its being, shape, and form. . ."?

The point that I want to make is that our doctrinal standards already exclude ideas of there having been pre-Adamites, whether of the human or hominid variety. They clearly identify Adam and Eve as our first parents.

**ACCEPTED**

Accepted the call to the Cornerstone CanRC of Hamilton, ON:

**Rev. J. Louwerse**

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## CHURCH NEWS

I fail to see that this overture says any more or says it any better.

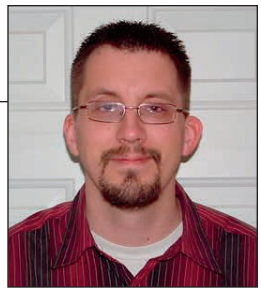
In short, the things that the brothers in southwest Ontario are concerned about are already covered in both Scripture and confession.

### An ecumenical issue

Finally, I come to the fourth issue which is an *ecumenical* one. By that I mean to say that changing or adding to the confessions should not be viewed as a Canadian Reformed right or prerogative. We share these confessions with many other faithful Reformed churches around the world. If we believe so strongly that they should be changed, then we should make our case to our sister churches. After all, that is what we have also promised to do under the existing Rules of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

Failure to do so and the adoption of a go it alone policy will bring us in conflict with our promises. It will also see us travelling down a singular and perhaps, even, a sectarian road.

In conclusion let me commend the brothers in Classis Ontario West for wanting to be valiant for the truth. At the same time let me add that this is not the route that we should take as Canadian Reformed Churches. Over time it will open the doors not just to one amendment, but to many more. The end result will be a Belgic Confession that loses its historic character and becomes cluttered with all sorts of additions, many of which will be debated for decades as to their appropriateness and effectiveness. C



# Without Faith it is Impossible to Please God

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***"Without faith it is impossible to please God."***
(Hebrews 11:6)

I am fascinated by the man Enoch. The Bible tells us just enough about him for us to be filled with wonder but not enough to satisfy our curiosity. What sort of man was he, that God should cause him to escape the curse of death to which all human beings are subject? The author of Hebrews, guided by the Holy Spirit, tells us that Enoch was a man who pleased God. This "pleasing God" was not something hidden but plainly evident, since he was "commended" before he was taken up.

What did Enoch do that pleased God? The concern of the author of Hebrews is not to tell us what he did but how he did it. Enoch was a man of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. No person can please God without faith. If Enoch pleased God, it showed that he was a man of faith.

The text of Hebrews 11:6 goes on to tell us more precisely what this faith includes. First, we must believe that God exists. Were there atheists in Enoch's day? We can only speculate. Enoch is affirmed as a man who believed the existence of God. Today there are many who not only doubt the existence of God but who also aggressively proclaim that "God is dead." By faith we stand against this unbelief. By faith we maintain that God is real and personal and near and powerful. Knowing God prepares us for serving him and pleasing him.

There is a second aspect of faith that is mentioned in Hebrews 11:6. We must also believe that God "rewards those who earnestly seek him." This speaks directly to the little we know of our ancient brother Enoch. It is said of Enoch that "he walked with God." We are not stretching the phrase "walked with God" too far if we say that Enoch therefore "earnestly" sought God. To walk with God is to have close fellowship with him, fellowship that recalls the perfect bliss of Paradise (Gen 3:8). Enoch was allowed to walk with God because he was a man who loved God deeply and desired him fervently. God proved with Enoch that he rewards people of faith who seek him this way. Enoch's reward was very special; he was allowed to skip past the death that afflicts all humans. Our reward is different but no less special. We are saved from the eternal death that we deserve for our sins. Although we are subject to death, we will be raised again to live forever.

By this faith we are able to please God. Faith does not save us or earn us God's favour. But by faith we are joined to Jesus Christ, who washes us with his blood and Spirit. Jesus removes our sin and renews us in his image. Jesus prepares us to walk with God and to know his love and fellowship. By the same faith that lived in Enoch, we are able to please God. C

## For Further Study

1. What is involved in pleasing God?
2. Why is it impossible to please God without faith?
3. What does this mean for people who do "good" things but aren't believers?

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# Developments in our Dutch Sister Churches and Lessons to be Learned

## (Part 1 of 4)

This morning[1] let us consider some of the main developments in our Dutch sister churches (Reformed Churches in The Netherlands - Liberated or RCN) and what we can learn from them. It may be most useful to take the mandate that Synod Carman (2013) gave the committee for contact with the Dutch churches, along with some of the relevant decisions made by their recent Synod of Ede (2014-2015). During this presentation I will be making use of materials our committee has produced.[2] It should however be kept in mind that although I am a member of this committee, I am not speaking on its behalf.

Some have said that the committee has been quite negative in their past reports. There are a lot of good things going on in Holland as well. The committee has acknowledged that. As a matter of fact we stated in our report to Carman (2012):

> We are also thankful for the desire for faithfulness to the Lord which we encountered in the RCN people we communicated and met with. The Spirit is certainly at work in the Netherlands, as can also be seen in the many organizations and groups which are involved in mutual support in various fields such as politics, science and education as well as in support for the disabled and for homosexuals.[3] Add to this the considerable works of mercy and outreach and what one sees in churches which are very engaged not only inwardly, but especially outwardly. We remain impressed by the active faith of our brothers and sisters in the Netherlands. Our prayer is that this activity of faith may continue and that the RCN may remain a beacon of faith in action as reflected in the above organizations.

However, given the mandate and our concerns as sister churches, the focus was on negative developments.

To keep things manageable this morning, for this topic is huge, we need to be selective. Let us look at the following areas that were included in the synodical mandate: developments connected with the Theological University in Kampen, the role of women in the church, some aspects of the unity discussions between our sister churches and The Netherlands Reformed Churches, and the binding to the Reformed confessions.

### Developments in Kampen

The Theological University in Kampen is the official institution for training ministers of the Word in our Dutch sister churches. It has an illustrious history and has been greatly blessed by the Lord for the good of his people in Holland. It is however important to realize that this school is not only a training ground, "seminary" for ministers, it is also a university. As such it is to be a centre for academic research and is subject to government regulations. Indeed, since 2010 it receives about half its funds from the public purse.[4] Although this school officially strives for confessional faithfulness, in the last number of years there have been growing concerns of what is transpiring there.

These concerns all boil down to how Scripture is viewed and explained. There is evidence of a weakening commitment to the classic Reformed view of Scripture as articulated in the Bible (e.g., John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21) and confessed in the Belgic Confession, Articles 2-7. For example, there were vigorous protests when Synod Zwolle-Zuid in 2008 appointed Stefan Paas as lecturer in missiology. These protests came because of his unbiblical views of Scripture and its contents in his Old Testament dissertation and elsewhere. He, e.g., did not accept the historicity of the biblical accounts of creation and the Exodus and claimed that Israel's origins were from the Canaanite population and that Israel's religion had roots in Canaanite thought.[5] However, the response of the University and subsequent synods was that he is not teaching Old

Testament and this matter is closed. As far as we know, this is the first time that unbiblical views were officially tolerated in Kampen. His appointment in 2008 was therefore a watershed moment in the history of this institution. Protests against his appointment continued, even to Synod Ede, which brushed these objections aside and later promoted Dr. Paas by appointing him as Professor of Missiology (*Acta*, Art. 6-15). When reflecting on these events, one needs to remember that the decisions of the Synod of Assen in 1926 affirming the historicity of Genesis 2 and 3 are technically still in effect in our Dutch sister churches. By tolerating and not undoing Paas' appointment in spite of the legitimate objections brought against his work, the Theological University in Kampen will probably no longer be able to call anyone to account concerning unbiblical views and writings.

There were also justified concerns about Koert Van Bekkum's dissertation, done in Kampen, and other writings. His methodology assumes that we cannot take for granted the historical factuality of what is recorded for us in Scripture. The biblical text needs to go into a dialogue with archeological research and findings to see what value the truth claim of Scripture has. The result is that the straightforward claims of Scripture are put aside because in Van Bekkum's view these claims cannot be substantiated or verified. For example, 1 Kings 6:1 indicates that the Exodus took place 480 years prior to Solomon's fourth year as king. But to accept this dating is according to Van Bekkum a "lazy man's solution."[6] One apparently cannot just accept Scripture at face value. In his dissertation, he also called into question biblical events such as the sun standing still in the days of Joshua and elsewhere in his writings raised doubts whether David killed Goliath.[7] However, these concerns were also not heeded and the Synod of Harderwijk (2011-12) appointed Dr. Van Bekkum as Old Testament lecturer.

Other concerns around Kampen can also be mentioned. The issue of homosexuality is very much alive in the Dutch churches. The Theological University hosted a conference on the topic on January 20, 2012 of which the proceedings were published.[8] The speakers were obviously not all agreed, but two general features are striking about the book containing the conference papers. There is very little exegesis or asking what Scripture says and there is much talk of the current culture and the need for the church to accommodate homosexuals as much as possible so that they feel welcome in the church. It is of course a given that the church should welcome all, but the point here is that biblical norms were not at the forefront in this conference but human perceptions and feelings.

For example, in chapter 5, Ad De Bruijne notes how times have changed. Not too long ago homosexual practice was virtually universally rejected. Now church discipline is hardly used against practising homosexuals in our sister churches. According to him, only about a third of practising homosexuals are kept from the Lord's Supper. De Bruijne asks whether we should have a new approach since many homosexuals are leaving the church. To be sure he asserts that one cannot rest in homosexual behaviour. But De Bruijne also says that in a pastoral situation you may have to temporarily acquiesce in a homosexual relationship as those involved seek to grow in Christ. For this reason, he pleads for restraint or no church discipline around practising homosexuals. Such discipline only serves to alienate them from the church. Furthermore church discipline is not administered uniformly today so why should we pick on the homosexuals? But, De Bruijne continued that, as with all compromise, the full gospel and biblical norms need to be preached, including that sexual communion is to be only for the relationship between man and woman.[9]

It is noteworthy that while De Bruijne suggested the possibility of acquiescing in homosexual relationships out of pastoral considerations, Synod Zwolle-Zuid which took place four years earlier (2008) had taken a rather different position. This synod was faced with the question whether a consistory should proceed with disciplining homosexuals who were living together because they had said that they would sexually abstain. Synod addressed the issue by declaring that the consistory is fully justified to continue in warning those involved because such a living together should be rejected. One must not underestimate the power of Satan and sin and place oneself into temptation. The church should also be aware of the negative consequences of publicly tolerating homosexual practice (*Acta*, Art. 52). Indeed, and De Bruijne's appealing to changing cultural contexts cannot undo the fact that Scripture calls homosexual relationships sinful. Our concern for doing God's will and upholding his ordinances should take precedence over being compromising to those struggling with homosexuality. This point was clearly brought to the fore by Dr. Wolter Rose who gave an excellent speech, upholding biblical norms and emphasizing that one's love for Christ should be determinative and have precedence over one's homosexual feelings. It is troubling to think that with a coming union of our sister churches with the Netherlands Reformed Churches in the making, homosexual relation-

ships will likely be tolerated in the united church. After all, the Netherlands Reformed Churches now accept such relationships and are even studying whether practicing homosexuals can also be office bearers.[10]

One final negative example of what is taking place: most recently, Hans Burger, whom Synod Ede appointed as a lecturer in systematic theology in Kampen, has sent shock waves through the Dutch sister churches with an essay he wrote on the sacrifice of Christ. In that essay Burger acknowledged that Scripture speaks of Christ's death as a sacrifice. But he then goes on to say that "it is important to distinguish that from dogmatic articulations such as 'Jesus brings a sacrifice by bearing our punishment in our place as payment for our guilt. In this way he gives the required satisfaction to God and acquires our salvation.' This train of thought you do not find in this way in the New Testament."[11] Herewith, and in other statements in this article, he appears to deny the substitutionary atonement of Christ. The topic is obviously very important since the meaning of Christ's death is at the heart of the gospel. Burger has insisted that he is misunderstood and the discussion on this issue is ongoing. It is not clear where this will all lead to. For our present purpose, it is enough to note that this type of unclear scholarly airing of views that are confusing and apparently contradict our confessional understanding of Christ's sacrifice does not increase the confidence of the churches in their training for the ministry.[12]

It is therefore not surprising that in light of what is all transpiring in Kampen, there appears to be a growing disconnect between the churches and their training for the ministry. The perception is that no strong Reformed leadership is forthcoming from the Theological University, a perception shared to a certain extent by those who teach there.[13]

A root problem in Kampen, in my view, is not taking seriously the authority of Scripture. If Scripture is not honoured as the authoritative and infallible Word of God, what then is left of normative Reformed scholarship? By not taking a strong position against unbiblical approaches, the question is whether Kampen will now ever be able to take a stand against unbiblical scholarship. Considering current developments, the future does not look very promising and this situation is very sorrowful. The Kampen university has enormous influence in the churches, especially through the ministers it trains. As that institution goes, so eventually will the churches.

*To be continued with a look at other developments in our Dutch sister churches.*

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[1] This material was presented at the spring Office Bearer's Conference held in the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington on March 28, 2015.

[2] Facts that may not be specifically footnoted are backed up in the *Report of the CRCA Netherlands Subcommittee on Contact with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands* to Synod Carman 2013 found at http://www.canrc.org/?assembly=181.

[3] J.H. Kuiper, ed., *Handboek 2012 van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Bedum: Scholma, n.d.), 344–67.

[4] See the 2011 and 2014 reports of Raad van Toezicht en College van Bestuur van de Theologische Univesiteit, p. 18 and p. 14 respectively as found at http://www.gkv.nl/organisatie/deputaatschappen/curatoren-tu/

[5] See, Stefan Paas, *Creation and Judgement,* Old Testament Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 104, 113-114, 120 and e.g., the protest letter at http://www.refdag.nl/media/2009/20090121_Paas_artikel with references to his writing.

[6] Koenraad van Bekkum, "From Conquest to Coexistence: Ideology and Antiquarian Intent in the Historiography of Israel's Settlement in Canaan," Th. D. diss published as a book (Kampen: Theologische Universiteit van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, 2010), 33.

[7] See Cornelis Van Dam, "Interpreting Historical Narrative: Truth Claim, Truth Value, and Historicity," in *Corrrectly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today,* eds Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 90 n. 26.

[8] Ad de Bruijne, ed., *Open en Kwetsbaar: Christelijk Debat Over Homoseksualiteit,* TU-Bezinningsreeks (Barneveld: Vuurbaak, 2012).

[9] Ad de Bruijne, "Vriendschap Voor Christen-Homo's," in *Open en Kwetsbaar: Christelijk Debat Over Homoseksualiteit,* vol. 11, ed. Ad de Bruijne, TU-Bezinningsreeks (Barneveld: Vuurbaak, 2012), 62–64. Synod Ede decided that the marriage of one man and one woman was the most fitting form ("meest passende vorm"). (*Acta*, Art. 8-12). Does this imply that there are other tolerable forms of marriage? Cf. Jochem Douma, *Afscheid Van de Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt)* (Hardenberg, NL: Heijink, 2014), 62–63.

[10] On the official website of these churches, it is reported that "De commissie die antwoord moet geven op de vraag of gemeenteleden die een homoseksuele relatie hebben, ouderling of diaken kunnen worden, zal pas in het voorjaar van 2015 haar eindrapport klaar hebben."[The committee which has to answer the question whether congregational members who have a homosexual relationship can be elders or deacons will not have its final report ready until the spring of 2015.] http://www.ngk.nl/rapport-ambt-en-homoseksualiteit-pas-in-2015-klaar/.

[11] Hans Burger, "Voorbij Het Offerkritiek (Het Beeld Van Het Offer)," in *Cruciaal: De Verrassende Betekenis Van Jezus' Kruisiging,* Henk Bakker and et al. (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2014), 53–54 (my translation).

[12] For some of the critique and discussion in which Burger participated, see http://www.eeninwaarheid.nl. Also see the website of Rev. D. de Jong, http://www.bijbelknopendoos.nl/.

[13] Kuiper, *Handboek 2012*, 506.

# Excitement in India

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We were honoured to have as guest in our home for a week in mid-January Rev. Jacob Gopalswamy from India. (Gopalswamy is actually the name of an Indian god, and so Br. Jacob prefers not to use that part of his name.) As his story illustrates something of the hunger I mentioned in my recent article on "Dreaming" (Vol. 64, No. 7), I'll take the opportunity to write up what I've learned from him about the Lord's church-gathering work in his part of India.

## Who?

Br. Jacob was born and raised in Chennai, a Tamil-speaking part of India bordering the Bay of Bengal. His ancestors were strongly Hindu; in fact, his grandfather built a large Hindu temple that today still supports eighteen resident priests. This grandfather's numerous sons were all named after Indian gods; hence Jacob's family name. When Jacob was two years old his parents were killed in an accident. His grandparents, uncles and aunts, in step with the superstitions of the Hindu faith, concluded that Jacob and his siblings (a sister of three and a half and a brother of six months), were bad influence – why else would their parents be killed – and so refused to care for them in any way. The older sister led her little brothers down the street. . . . Somebody from the local orphanage, sponsored by Help-a-Child Netherlands, saw them, and took them in. That's where Jacob was raised – without father, mother, uncles, aunts, or family of any sort except for his two siblings. In hindsight Jacob is ever so thankful that the Lord took his parents away because it was through this orphanage that Jacob learned to know the Lord.

## Calvin

After completing his secondary education Jacob went to Calcutta to study theology at a Christian seminary. At the end of the five-year course, his professor assigned a project; each student in the class was to research a particular person and make a presentation on that person to the class. Because some assignments would end up being easier to do than another, the professor decided to put the assignments in a hat, and each student was to draw a slip of paper from that hat. Jacob – and he now sees it very much as God's providence – drew the slip that read "John Calvin." Though Jacob had studied theology at this Christian seminary for four and a half years, the name "John Calvin" was totally unknown to him. That's because Christianity in India is decidedly Arminian in slant and so John Calvin shunned. Jacob went to the seminary library to begin his research – only to find out that the library had not a single book about John Calvin. In a who's-who of church history, he found a short reference, and that was about it. So Jacob returned to his professor with the request to receive a new assignment on grounds that there was insufficient information on his assigned project. The professor refused to change the assignment, and advised Jacob to cross the River and check out the library of the Roman Catholic seminary. There, indeed, Jacob found some material on Calvin – but obviously with a Roman Catholic bias. . . . By the time Jacob was ready to present his research on John Calvin, he was convinced that Calvin was not at all a pleasant man and his thinking distinctly unattractive and unbiblical.

## Marriage

With his studies for the ministry completed, Jacob returned to Chennai and the orphanage where he'd grown up. He was of marriageable age now, but the customs of India forbade that he take any initiatives. That's for the father to do, or in his case the director of the orphanage. Boys are not meant to look at girls, nor girls at boys. But there was a girl in the same orphanage who was sponsored by a family in Holland, and she told her sponsor that she'd like to marry Jacob. That man in turn sent a note to the orphanage secretary advising that he'd be making a trip to India as soon as he heard when Jackie would be marrying

Jacob. So the secretary summoned Jacob and told him to stand over there, then summoned Jackie, and when she arrived told the two of them that'd they be getting married in three weeks' time. . . . Hard for us westerners to wrap our heads around that, but that's the way things are done in India! And it works; there's very little divorce because you simply need to learn to love the person you receive in marriage. Jacob and Jackie were blessed with two sons; Gerrit is currently 21 and Calvin is 17.

## Reformed

Gerrit Verboom, the Dutch sponsor, arrived for the wedding. Indian custom is that the father of the bride gives a gift to the bridegroom. So Mr. Verboom asked Jacob what he wanted. Jacob had no wish, except that his studies on Calvin prompted him to ask Mr. Verboom for some more information about Reformed churches – for didn't Mr. Verboom belong to one of those strange Reformed churches? Mr. Verboom in response sent Jacob a copy of the *Book of Praise*. There Jacob found the Heidelberg Catechism, a document he'd never seen before. Lord's Day 1 blew him away. It spoke of comfort, comfort because you *belong*. Jacob had been an orphan for as long as he could remember, never belonged to anyone, and so never experienced the comfort that can come from the affection of a mother or a father. Yes, he was a Christian, but to think in terms of *belonging* to Jesus Christ, being so treasured that the Lord would shed his blood for him – the way the Catechism worded it warmed his heart as no other literature had ever done. So he asked Mr. Verboom if there was a way he could study more of this Reformed confession. Mr. Verboom put him in contact with contacts of his in Australia. That, ultimately, is what led Jacob to travel to Australia and eventually be ordained into the Ministry of the Word in the Free Reformed Church of Mt. Nasura. At the time of his ordination I was serving up the road in the Free Reformed Church of Kelmscott, and so met Br. Jacob various times. Mt. Nasura in turn sent Rev. Jacob as missionary to his hometown of Chennai.

## Mission work

That work began in 1999. Soon enough Jacob translated the Heidelberg Catechism into the local language of Tamil, had 2000 copies printed, and distributed them wherever he could amongst possibly interested peoples. The appetite was such that 5000 more had to be printed, then another 5000. He led a couple of conferences on the Heidelberg Catechism, and then a conference on the Canons of Dort. This led to great growth in churches, so that by 2009 there were thirty-nine congregations. Meanwhile, Br. Jacob completed a doctorate in theology from the Theological University in Apeldoorn, The Netherlands (the same institution, and under the same professor, as Dr J. Van Vliet). The church leadership realized that this growing group of churches needed ministers trained in Reformed thinking (as opposed to Arminian), and so determined to begin their own seminary.

## Seminary

Property was found in Chennai, a good library was assembled, computers were installed, a faculty of six was put in place, and a student body of fifty-four was enrolled. The Seminary was opened on the morning of July 4, 2009, with the enterprise explicitly directed to the glory of God and his church gathering work in India. That very evening 200 Tamil thugs, armed with clubs, destroyed the computers, put fire to the library, and scattered the student body. When Jacob the next day lodged a complaint with the police, they refused to hear his complaint, telling him that this was Hindu land, with no room for Christianity.

What could be salvaged from the ruins was loaded up and transported to the city of Hyderabad in next province. There new premises were built, and the work of the seminary begun in earnest. Today 120 students study at that seminary, ninety-six of whom are young men preparing for the ministry. The language of instruction is English. The churches, meanwhile, have grown to sixty-seven congregations, currently served by about fifty-two ministers. As the students complete their five-year program at the seminary, they may take up a task within the churches or spread across the country to preach the gospel to those who do not know the Lord. And there are countless in India who does not know the gospel; more than half of India's 1.2 billion citizens have never heard the name of Jesus Christ!

Through gifts received from Mr. Jan Baan, a Dutch businessman, plus enrollment fees for the students, the seminary is financially solvent. The challenge Jacob faces – he's the president of the seminary, as well as professor of Old Testament – is to keep the seminary Reformed. It's a challenge because most of the staff he has (currently some eleven professors) were trained in Arminian seminaries. Those who would teach at the Hyderabad seminary must read the Three Forms of Unity and agree with their content. But coming in from the outside, then reading and signing the Three Forms, does not mean one *thinks* or teaches in Reformed categories. So Jacob wants help in teaching the content of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, as well as the *Institutes* of John Calvin. He wants that help specifically from our churches, be they in Australia or in Canada, because he wants our heritage. In December 2014 he was

in Australia to seek that assistance, and in January in Ontario. He has spoken to our professors in Hamilton to see how they could help, has approached a local church for assistance, and made his plea wider known through public meetings within the churches. He's convinced that he needs help now (as opposed to five years from now) because *now* the character of this young seminary needs to be formed. That's equally true, of course, of the character of the young federation of churches.

## Orphanage and school

On the same property as the seminary, there's an orphanage with currently 476 children. This orphanage too is under Jacob's responsibility. Given that Jacob and Jackie both grew up in an orphanage, it's very understandable that their hearts lie very close to this project. In a country where some thirty-three percent of the (local) population belongs to the "untouchable" caste – and this caste is marked by great poverty – there is abundant scope to put the love of the gospel into practice through an orphanage. This institution is under financial duress, and Jacob has been scrambling to find funds to keep supplying for the children's needs.

On the same property is also a Christian school, with a current enrollment of about 1000 students. These students come from the orphanage and many more come from the local community. Those from the community must pay a fee, and with those fees the school has sufficient income to support itself. At present there is need for a few more classrooms and science labs, but the construction costs would need to be funded from sources outside the school fees. Jacob is looking overseas for that money.

As a side note of interest, Jacob reports that all residents of the orphanage begin learning the Catechism by heart at age eight. By the time they are fifteen years old, each resident is able to say any Lord's Day from memory. It's something Jacob insists on because he's come to appreciate so deeply the scriptural wealth and comfort caught in the Heidelberg Catechism. Perhaps there's something we in the west can learn from the distant east!

## Federation

The sixty-seven churches belonging to Jacob's work have not yet been formed into a working federation of churches. Yes, the ministers and elders meet together with neighbouring churches from time to time to discuss issues of common concern, but matters as classes, church visitation, synods, and the like have not yet developed. For Br. Jacob that's a big concern, principally because he doesn't quite know how to move the situation from its current status into a functioning federation. To grasp the biblical principles that make a federation of churches necessary and that describe what the resulting organization needs to look like is one thing. It's a very different thing to put that biblical theory into practice in a culture that's oriented heavily to hierarchy – so much so that Jacob knows the danger of being seen as the de facto pope. Certainly as I listened to Jacob, and tried to understand the cultural forces that he's dealing with, I found it very difficult to give good advice. Conversely, I like to think that the sheer exercise of talking it through and facing particular questions has helped Br. Jacob move forward in figuring out what needs to happen next.

## Issues

To help us get a sense of some of the challenges facing mission work, I'll pass on a story I heard a couple of times from Jacob. Having multiple wives is not at all uncommon in India. Among those who came to faith through Jacob's preaching was a man with two wives. Through his Bible reading and in church this man came to understand that the norm of Scripture is that a man has one wife. To solve his dilemma he killed one of his wives. The police then came to Jacob to arrest him. In India the person who commits a crime has a certain responsibility, but the person who prompted him to commit the crime has a much greater responsibility. Because Jacob taught this man the gospel, he was seen as ultimately responsible for the death of the one wife. By God's grace Jacob could explain the situation satisfactorily so that no charges were laid against him. Meanwhile, the issue makes clear that a missionary is faced with dicey ethical questions, to say nothing of courage. And that in turn means that he needs much prayer and support.

## Smithville

So where do we fit in this picture? A couple of things come to mind. In first place the time I spent with Br. Jacob has pressed upon me again that the whole world belongs to Jesus Christ, and he is sovereignly gathering his church wherever he would, and doing it in marvelous and surprising ways. That's exciting, and so very encouraging. The powers of darkness cannot and shall not prevail. We confess that, but it's inspiring to see that confession confirmed with specific examples.

In second place, we need to consider what we can do for the brethren in India. Obviously, we pray for them, and need to continue in prayer for them. We have a heritage they hunger to possess. Are there ways we can share that with them? It drives my thinking back to the questions I raised in the previous article "Dreaming." Before God's throne, those questions need responsible answers. C

# *In Memory of Wilhelm (Bill) Gortemaker*

(October 17, 1945 – April 28, 2015)

On April 28, 2015, the Lord our God took home to himself our brother, friend, and colleague, Wilhelm (Bill) Gortemaker. Every year in September we would gather together in Hamilton as the Editorial Committee of *Clarion* to review the past year's volume and to plan ahead for the new one. As Publisher/Printer/Owner of the magazine, Bill was always there and we knew that when he came the Tim Horton's donuts would come with him. During the meeting he would sit back quietly and listen well. When necessary he would give his Publisher's Report and make a few comments. Throughout our gatherings he always exuded a most accommodating demeanor and a quiet dignity.

Several years ago Bill introduced us to his son William and announced that he would be stepping back and that William would be taking over his role. It was transition time at Premier Printing in Winnipeg. In spite of that he had a hard time really letting go and still came to our meetings. We always enjoyed his presence and valued his contribution.

Indeed, it was evident throughout that Bill's prime aim was to do whatever he could to make *Clarion* a fine magazine that would serve the needs of the churches. He was never in it for the money or the prestige. Why, we are sure that over the years Bill probably lost more money than he made on *Clarion*, *Reformed Perspective,* and the publication of countless good but not always profitable Reformed books. Bill (just like his father-in-law Gerry Kuik before him) was in it to promote the name of the Lord.

In all of this he always had the firm and steadfast support of his wife, Grietje, his children, and family. Our hearts go out to them as Bill's passing will leave a big hole in their lives. In particular we think of Grietje, with whom Bill had hoped to spend as yet some fine retirement years.

Yet it was not to be. Our God had other plans for Bill, plans filled with glory and with a life to be lived in his presence. We know that for Bill it is now better by far. He is home at last.

As Editorial Committee of *Clarion*, we will all miss Bill deeply. As Editor, I will miss the best Publisher any editor could ever have. He was always available to discuss matters. He was never interfering. Wisdom marked his dealings. What a legacy and an example he left behind!

May our gracious covenant God comfort Grietje and her children, and all of us with the wonderful news that in Jesus Christ we have a Saviour who is the resurrection and the life of his people forever.

*James Visscher, Editor*
*Laura Veenendaal, Copy Manager*
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# Why Pretend Islam Has No Role in Violence?

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Why do so many Western politicians refuse to see and say the obvious, namely, that the religion of Islam in its official documents is providing justification for and encouraging terrorism, killing, and an incredible persecution of Christians? Daniel Pipes, an American historian, collected some examples and posted them on the Middle East Forum website (www.meforum.org) under the heading "Why Politicians Pretend Islam Has No Role in Violence." Here are a few samples. President Barack Obama said that the Islamic State (ISIS) "is not Islamic" because its "actions represent no faith, least of all the Muslim faith." He affirms that "we are not at war with Islam [but] with people who have perverted Islam." Similarly, British Prime Minister David Cameron portrayed ISIS as "extremists who want to abuse Islam" and who "pervert the Islamic faith." According to Cameron, Islam is "a religion of peace." Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte likewise affirmed that "ISIS is a terrorist organization which misuses Islam."

Pipes rightly notes that such a denial of Islam's role in violence "neglects the scriptures of Islam and the history of Muslims, steeped in the assumption of superiority toward non-Muslims and the righteous violence of jihad. Ironically, ignoring the Islamic impulse means foregoing the best tool to defeat jihadism: for, if the problem results not from an interpretation of Islam, but from random evil and irrational impulses, how can one possibly counter it? Only acknowledging the legacy of Islamic imperialism opens ways to reinterpret the faith's scriptures in modern, moderate, and goodneighborly ways."

Why then are such ignorant and counter-productive statements made by politicians who know that they are false in view of the spreading violence in the name of Islam by organizations such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabab, and the Taliban? Pipes acknowledges the role of cowardice and multiculturalism but continues to note two more important reasons. "First, they want not to offend Muslims, who they fear are more prone to violence if they perceive nonMuslims pursuing a 'war on Islam.' Second, they worry that focusing on Muslims means fundamental changes to the secular order, while denying an Islamic element permits avoid troubling issues. For example, it permits airplane security to look for passengers' weapons rather than engage in Israelistyle interrogations." (Such interrogations do not treat all passengers the same but uses profiling.)

But there is more to it. Islam is an all-encompassing religion and belief system, but so is in some ways the thinking of the political left that currently has enormous influence. On the Gatestone Institute website, Uzag Bulut, a Turkish journalist, noted in her April 6, 2015 article "The West's Romance with Iran and Islamists" that "the Marxist view holds that religion is just a placebo in the face of economic oppression. So, the thinking goes, if there is a problem in a Muslim society, it must mainly stem from poverty, inequality and class conflicts, as well as 'Western imperialism.'" Blaming poverty for the violence is precisely what President Obama has been doing. In his view the rise in Islamic terrorism is related to economic deprivation and high unemployment. Uzag Mulut perceptively notes in her article that "those who maintain this view remain silent on viciously repressive governments such as Hamas, Iran and North Korea." Many on the left "seem to fantasize about the future of the Western and Muslim worlds as if once 'capitalism,' 'American imperialism' and 'Zionist occupation' were abolished, these despots would suddenly discover they no longer need violence or Islamic radicalism and that a sunny new era of peace would begin. So, their view seems to go, if you criticize Islamism, you are an intolerant, hard-hearted 'racist' or 'bigot,' and your remarks are obviously 'hate speech.'"

As she notes further in her article: "Poverty or imperialism, however, do not cause people to burn people alive, kidnap schoolgirls and sell them at a slave market, while saying that God commands the practice. Poverty, anger or alienation do not cause people to behead or crucify non-Muslims; cite relevant verses of their holy book as a justification, and brag about and film what they do." The Western leaders and intellectuals of the left "seem wrongfully to associate political Islam with 'being oppressed.' Political Islam, however, is not the ideology of the oppressed. It is an ideology that oppresses."

Neither the belief system of Islam nor that of the political left can set people free from oppression, but the gospel of Jesus Christ can. That is the glory of the mission of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (http://www.merf.org/) as it continues to broadcast the only gospel there is to the Islamic world. That gospel is ultimately the only solution for the violence. C

# How Dr. James K.A. Smith's Teachings May Impact Christian Education (2)

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In the first review we summarized Smith's assertion that we are changed/shaped not by reason but rather by what we love. Smith theorized that our loves are shaped by small, repeated practices that often are not seen as important by some but nonetheless lead people to make momentous decisions. He urged people therefore to think carefully about their choices since they are shaping themselves as well as the children who see and experience those choices as well.

## The good, true, and beautiful

Dr. Smith moved forward with his argument by shifting the focus to formation. He focussed specifically on the formation of teachers. He began by challenging teachers to look critically at what micro-practices have shaped them and to what their loves are directed. He called on teachers to realize they were/are just as vulnerable to shaping as the students they teach. He made the point that teacher education programs, like everything else, have a set of assumptions and aims that are going to affect/shape the teachers that graduate from the program. Teachers need to be aware of that and work to reduce that impact and replace it with the proper orientation which he called the good, true, and beautiful.

Smith views teachers, and parents, as being exemplars, people to learn from about what is good, true, and beautiful. Western society's version of good, true, and beautiful is built around personal autonomy, the freedom to do whatever I please. Christianity does not accept autonomy as a goal. Christianity accepts and demands restrictions on our autonomy or freedom.

We also need to see that neutrality is not possible in life. An example given by Smith was the churches that in reaction to declining church attendance or the claim that church is boring, re-structured church to be like a shopping mall experience. The basis for doing this is that people seem to like going to malls so if we make church similar to a mall experience they will like coming to church. Smith claims that in this approach you are assuming you can sanctify or redeem a model, the shopping mall, which is in fact opposed to the Christian view of what is good, true, and beautiful. Church under that model is built around making us happy rather than accepting Jesus Christ as he is presented in the Bible. This is how we end up having distortions like the health and wealth gospel. Autonomy and our personal happiness are not primary considerations in the gospel.

Good worship according to Smith includes liturgies that take the congregation through the "narrative arc" (the story of the Bible: creation, fall redemption, and the coming consummation) of the Bible over and over again. When we look at the liturgy in the Reformed church we can see that. We are guided right from the opening greeting from Psalm 124:8, to a confession of sin through to redemption. Good worship is also, in Smith's words, faculty development. This is why staff members need to be faithful church members, nourished by good worship. Apart from that they cannot develop as exemplars of virtue focussed on the gospel version of good, true, and beautiful.

## Together

So how can a community bring about the change in themselves to be virtuous people, "worthy" exemplars? Smith gave three specific things that he said need to be repeated over and over to be translated into formation. Eat together, pray and sing together, and think and read together. This is a good example, at least in part, of a typical school day. Smith asks if, during this daily routine,

we remember what we are doing. Or are we focussed on the "bits" so that we lose sight of what the "bits" are building towards?

One can summarize this portion of his presentation by stating that teachers must be virtuous exemplars of what is good, true, and beautiful. To be exemplars they need to continually work at growing in virtue and holiness via intentional, Holy Spirit-driven practices that orient them towards the good, true, and beautiful.

## Our secular age

Smith's concluding presentation shifted the focus from the believer to the impact of believers living in a secular age. He began by asserting that there is reason for hope as Christians. Secularism is not the same as atheism, he feels. He pointed to some contemporary examples from literature, television, and biographies of how secular people are yearning for something more. For example, he quoted author Julian Barnes who said, "I don't believe in God but I miss him."

*Autonomy and our personal happiness are not primary considerations in the gospel*

Smith looked to Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor for a breakdown of some key points regarding what secularism is. The first point he made is the idea that in different times in history it is close to impossible for people to think in a certain way. For instance, in the Middle Ages, it was pretty much impossible to be an atheist since all of society accepted the idea of God. To have denied God would have been to think the unthinkable. Today we are no longer in that same space. Instead Western society today has denied the transcendent, the idea that there is something beyond us, whether that is God or some other god/conception. Having lost that sense of transcendence western people have replaced it with the immanent or the here and now, the seen and felt, or natural, observable, tangible world. This is the idea that if I cannot see it I will not believe it.

The result is that many western people do not find meaning in life by looking to God or transcendence. Smith cautioned that that does not mean their life is meaningless to them. Many secular people have managed to create a sense of purpose and meaning for their lives. However this does not mean that modern people don't still, at times, feel drawn to the idea of the transcendent. When grief, tragedy, or other difficulties appear, people become disenchanted with the here and now, the immanent. This creates what Taylor calls cross-pressures in our lives. An important implication of this cross-pressure is not just that secularists wonder whether the transcendent might in fact actually exist but, since as western Christians we live in the same secularist age, we might also doubt the transcendent or God because society all around us rejects God and the unseen world. The net effect of secularism is that belief has not been replaced with unbelief, atheism; instead, people believe in all sorts of things; hence, the many alternative spiritual options out there.

## So what does this have to do with Christian schooling?

This is where Smith dealt, if only briefly, with his idea of what Christian schools might or should be like. He used two similes: schools as urban monasteries and schools as a porch. I think it is important to begin by noting two of his presuppositions. One is that, he thinks, churches today do a lousy job of being churches and the second is that religion today has been reduced to intellectual abstractions or to use his word, *excarnated*, changed from flesh (lived/incarnated) to non-flesh (in the mind only/not lived).

*Teachers must be virtuous exemplars of what is good, true, and beautiful*

With those two starting points Smith noted that because many churches do such a poor job of incarnating worship, Christian schools have been tasked with picking up the slack. He feels that schools are seen as the place to do that because they are more genuine, lived communities than churches are today. At school five days a week students and staff struggle to live Christianly together while church for many is only a couple hours in a week and therefore not really a community. The result to Smith is that the Christian school functions like a sort of urban monastery, where a community of patience is cultivated and lived.

He then presented the idea of seeing schools as a porch to the church. That means living the Christian life in view of others (on the porch) and from there to then reach out and minister to people. This is where he moves to the missional role of schools. He felt, but did not explain, that schools could function missionally in a covenantal way. By living on the porch you can love the people of the neighbourhood at basic levels by showing what family looks like, what parenting looks like, what life should look like. This is presenting the gospel as an embodied picture, a story, of what the gospel truths look like in practice. This is faith incarnated, instead of just a set of theological statements. Through his concluding example he brought his argument full circle: faith as a lived experience is connected to the role of liturgies in our churches and schools, and emphasizes the impact we can have in a secular age.

***The result to Smith is that the Christian school functions like a sort of urban monastery***

## So what now?

It is not the intent of the authors of this two part summary to endorse or criticize Dr. Smith's position. To do justice one should read his two books on this topic. The hope is that by reviewing his work it would provide the Reformed community much to think about. It would be worthwhile to assess our practices and liturgies, as parents, churches, and schools. In closing, we'll leave you with a thought-provoking quote from James Smith that summarizes his basic argument: "Think about it: when I fail to act in ways that are consistent with Jesus' call to holiness, is it because I don't know what to do? Really? Isn't it often the case that, in fact, I have the knowledge but lack the desire? Or that some other desire has trumped what I know?"

*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.*

## Dear Sir,

In the *Clarion* of April 10, 2015, Rev. Theodore G. Van Raalte in his article "A Covenant of Works" under the heading "Why distinguish pre-and post-fall" writes: "The main reason flows out of the threat God made in Genesis 2:17."

I have never read this text as a threat but as a caution from God to Adam out of love for him. God said you shall surely die, God did not say I will kill you. Also I have never understood this dying as a physical death but rather as a spiritual death since Adam did not physically die on that day but lived on for many years.

It is similar to us saying to our child – stay away from the edge of the cliff or you may fall and hurt yourself. We don't want any hurt or hardship to befall our children.

He continues in this paragraph: "Further, God threatened, 'You will surely die.' He did not say that he would bring his people back if only they would repent."

Since Adam did not yet disobey God there was no reason to talk about repentance.

The Israelites, as described in Deuteronomy 30, had already disobeyed and therefore wandered in the dessert for all this time and yet the LORD God forgave them and made a covenant with them there. This is how great the love of God is. "But if your heart turns away. . . I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish" (Deut 30:17, 18). Here also God warns the Israelites what will happen, a warning not a threat. God does not let us live our life and wait until we fail to uphold the covenant and then out of the blue jump on us with punishment. God warns us well ahead of time what will happen if we disobey.

Again it is similar to when we warn our children to stay away from the edge of the cliff, we don't say we have a first aid kit with us so don't worry about falling, no we warn them about what will happen, then if the child does fall, after he falls we bring out the bandages.

God warns us and tells us what will happen when we get careless but throughout Scripture he shows us that he loves us even to the point that he gave his own son to suffer for our wrongdoing.

Instead, as in many other places so also in Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV) God says: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." To me it appears that we should read the Bible in a positive way rather than negative.

*Martin Onderwater*

## Reply

I thank Br. Onderwater for his helpful reflections. It is good to remember that God's command not to eat from the tree was an act of love. I agree wholeheartedly. But can a threat also be an act of love? I think so. Let us note: The Lord doesn't just say, "Don't do x!" (a warning). He says, "If you do x, *you will die!*" (a threat). That's how my dictionary explains the words "warning" and "threat." A threat means that a consequence is attached, in this case capital punishment, conditional upon our action "x." In the Hebrew language this threat of God is even strengthened and may be translated literally, "Dying you shall die." This means, "You will certainly die." This Hebrew construction "strengthens the note of certainty in affirmations and in promises or threats. . . ." (says my Hebrew syntax book, and the first example it provides is this text, Genesis 2:17).

What God says in Genesis 2:17 is not the same as, "If you fall over this cliff, you will die" (a natural result), for eating fruit doesn't naturally lead to death. In fact, this fruit was "good for food" (Gen 3:6), not poisonous. The strong threat God makes underlines that this command is a test of obedience, pure and simple. God is sovereign. At the same time, his threat taught us to rely completely on God for stability, since death was *possible*. How sad that we did not heed such a strongly-worded threat, given in love!

In God's wise plan this holy threat of God, once broken, sets up the need for our Saviour Jesus Christ. Before the fall, we did not need his precious blood. Now we do, and the gift of his Son comes to us in what we call the "covenant of grace" in the Canons of Dort 1.17 and in our Forms for Baptism and the Lord's Supper. That's positive!

*Dr. Van Raalte*

*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.*

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*Minister emeritus of the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto, Ontario*
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**Q** In John 17:5 Jesus prays for himself and he is asking the Father to glorify him with the glory *he had before the world began.* Will that be when his work is finished as a Paraclete? We believe that he still has our flesh in heaven, but will that change once all his chosen ones will be in the many mansions?

**A** In John 17:1 the Lord Jesus has come to the end of his farewell address to hs disciples. He, then, turns his attention to his Father. He knows that his time has come when he will have to give himself over to suffering and death. He prays, "Father, glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." You could say that here he picks up the theme and characterization that he gave his disciples in 13:31 already: "When he [Judas] was gone, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.'" Christ will be glorified in his suffering and death already! Then he mentions that he already had this glory before the world began.

What does he mean by that? Does he refer to his divine glory and majesty the Son had before he came to earth? No. Before the world began he already was predestined to his humiliation in the flesh, to his suffering and death in order to give us eternal life. "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake" (1 Pet 1:20). Revealed to do what? To redeem us with his precious blood, a lamb without blemish or defect (v. 19)! Before the creation of the world God the Father chose us in Christ (Eph 1:4). Now in John 17 he prays as High Priest to the Father that he as the Lamb of God may reveal himself in this glory to those whom the Father gave him (v. 24): namely that he may obtain atonement by his death for the sins of the world. He prays that they may see "the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." Before the creation of the world the Father loved him as the Saviour of those who were chosen, as the Mediator of the elect. He prays that they may see him in this glory and also share in his glory!

After his ascension into heaven, Christ continues to present himself as the Saviour, the Word Incarnate, when he sends his angel to give his testimony to the churches (Rev 22:16): "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give this testimony for the churches." There, in verse 12, he presents himself as God – I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End – and man: I, Jesus." In the book of Revelation he manifests himself in his glory which he has with the Father, yet he continues to bear the name Jesus. We don't read anywhere in the Bible that Christ lays down his human nature. Then what about at the time when everything has come to its completion, when all his work is done? What about the time after he has handed over the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24)? Then too, the union of his human and divine nature continues; it is an eternal union!

At the end of the age, after the fulfilment and completion of all things, there will be a kingdom of God and of his Christ in which there is "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev 22:1, 3). In the New Jerusalem the Lamb will be there (Rev 21:22): "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." In the New Jerusalem Christ, the Lamb, is the light-bearer, the source of light (as he was at creation too, John 1:4, 5). His messianic glory comes along into eternity; there won't be an end to Christ's involvement as Mediator:

He is our eternal King (LD 12) whose kingdom shall have no end (Nicene Creed). Christ continues as the Mediator between God and men, through whom there is communion with God. In Revelation 21:9, also, we read: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." The unity with Christ continues as the union of Bride and Bridegroom, as Head and congregation, as King and subjects, as Shepherd and sheep, etc. The unity of the believers who belong to Christ continues: they are with Christ in Paradise (Luke 23:43), when they die in the Lord (Phil 1:23; cf. Col 3:4); and at his return "we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air," Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, "and we will be with the Lord forever!"

After his return he will also drink the wine anew with us in the kingdom of his Father (Matt 26:29). There will be communion with him, and in him with the Father. Also in other Scriptures this unity with Christ is expressed, as in the promise that we as God's children are heirs and co-heirs with Christ. "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne," he promises in Revelation 3:21, so that we can confess in Lord's Day 12 that we "hereafter reign with him eternally over all creatures." Thus we learn from the Scriptures that the exalted and glorified Mediator is the Head of the new mankind, and he is so forever! His entire work is signified by his heavenly glory.

*Is there something you've been wanting to know?*
*An answer you've been looking for?*

***Ask us a question!***

*Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander*
*denhollanderw@gmail.com*

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# BOOK REVIEW

*Peter H. Holtvlüwer*
*Minister of the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church at Tintern, Ontario*
holtvluwer@bell.net

## *The Song of Songs: The Greatest Love Song – Exploring the Mystery of Love in Courtship and Marriage*

**By Matthew H. VanLuik (United States: Xulon Press, 2015)**

**Additional Information: 208 pages. Available from various book sellers online as a printed version (~ $20) and an e-version (~ $10). A special bargain may be available in your part of Canada: contact ordersongofsongs@gmail.com**

How often do you read the Song of Songs? A little uncomfortable, is it not? Maybe even embarrassing. Have you heard many sermons on it? I doubt it. It's hard to preach on such sexually provocative passages! What to make of this most unusual Bible book? Rev. Matthew Van Luik (of Brampton CanRC) helps us a great deal in his new meditative volume covering this entire Bible book.

### Allegory?

In a valuable introductory chapter, VanLuik reviews some unhelpful ways of interpreting the Song of Songs. He goes on to make a clear case for understanding it as a collection of love poems (dealing with a woman and a man) that has been gathered and edited (under the Spirit's influence) into one whole song. It has been popular in the

past to take this Song as an extended allegory, where the two lovers are a picture of God and his people, ultimately of Christ and his bride, the church. Yet, such an approach does not do justice to the details and nuances of the lovers' interchanges and simply does not ring true. This book plainly (though poetically) speaks of human love, sexual desire, and the dynamics of a growing bond between a man and a woman from engagement into marriage. VanLuik brings out these dynamics very well.

## Courtship through marriage

As VanLuik's subtitle indicates, he takes the view that the poems are arranged sequentially, touching on the stages of a relationship from courtship to the wedding night to the challenges of living together as husband and wife. The unnamed couple in the poems is not any one historical couple but rather an imaginary pair used by the inspired compiler of the Song to teach believers how God meant such love to be reflected in their lives. It's not a straight-forward narrative but rather snap-shots of the progression of their relationship. Having read and reflected on VanLuik's explanation, I think his approach makes good sense of the text and works out quite well.

## Learning about love

In the fifteen chapters following the introduction, Pastor VanLuik works through each poem of the book in turn, bringing out the lessons for believing lovers, whether courting or married. Careful attention is given to application for both men and women, triggered by the specifics of the text. A key to his interpretation lies in how God created this relationship in the beginning, how it was distorted by our sin (cf. Genesis 1-3), and how God in Christ is restoring this bond of true love (cf. Ephesians 5:21-33). He skillfully and helpfully keeps in view how Christ by his blood and Spirit works to help us overcome our selfish, sinful instincts in order to bring our relationships back in line with God's original design.

The entire book has very pertinent advice for courting and married couples. VanLuik does not shy away from dealing with the overtly sexual imagery but, while explaining it candidly, he does so with care, maintaining honour for God's gift of sexuality. If a mature young couple were to work their way through this book and discuss it together, I would think their relationship could only improve and specifically be more Christ-based in how they relate to one another. Rev. VanLuik's advice is prompted by the text but also shows much pastoral experience and keen insight into both human nature and the struggle of man/woman relationships.

Additionally, he speaks often and just as wisely about each member of the couple's relationship with Christ. The picture of marriage in the Song points to and is perfected in the marriage of Christ and his bride. VanLuik uses that analogy quite effectively to point us as men and women to love and serve our spiritual "husband" more fully and faithfully. One of the pleasant surprises for me was how often (every chapter, more than once usually) VanLuik draws a connection from the passage to our Saviour – not in a rote way but in a genuine manner which gets you thinking about your own personal Christ-likeness. As much as studying this book may bless your marriage, it will just as much bless your individual bond with the Lord.

## Format

If I have a critique about the book, it concerns the format and layout, which is a minor matter by comparison. Each chapter helpfully begins by quoting in full the relevant portion of the Song but the quote does not include a reference to which "voices" are speaking, as in the man, woman, or "others" as is common in current Bible translations. That makes it difficult for the reader to discern who is speaking and harder to follow the explanation in the chapter, forcing one to open the Bible anyway.

In addition, paragraphs are overly-lengthy (sometimes a whole page!), subheadings are not bolded and there are too few of them. That all makes for a dense look to each chapter, something which is less than inviting to a casual reader. Also, the lack of capitalization for the proper nouns "Scripture" and "Bible" is both strange and annoying to a Christian reader. Certainly, this book is worth over-looking such irritants, but hopefully a future edition can correct these and similar issues.

## Read and reflect

The language and style of writing is easy to understand but because of the subject matter, this book is not a fast read. VanLuik's work and its wisdom needs to be thoughtfully digested and discussed. I recommend it especially for mature young couples as well as married folk who desire to strengthen their love for each other and for the Lord. Each chapter has a list of helpful questions at the end which would lend itself to discussion as individual couples or for use in some sort of marriage counselling class.

Rev. VanLuik's volume may also be used as a study guide for a general adult Bible study group but then some of the questions may need to be passed over as too personal for that setting. This book would make an excellent gift to an engaged couple or even to newly-weds. Recommended! C

# ADVERTISEMENTS

*Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (especially those with an Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.*

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

1970 ~ June 13 ~ 2015

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Psalm 23:6*

With heartfelt joy in God, we announce the Forty-fifth Wedding Anniversary of our Dad and Mom, Pake and Grandma

**LEO and DIANE KAMPEN**

We thank the LORD for his goodness and mercy in their marriage, and together with them we seek the favour of our God upon their lives for years to come.

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## 60TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

1955 ~ June 18 ~ 2015

*Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Psalm 103. . .*

We thank the Lord for 60 years of marriage for our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents

*This is the day which the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24*

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## 50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

1965 ~ June 19 ~ 2015

*The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want. Psalm 23*

With thankfulness to God we would like to announce
the 50th Wedding Anniversary of our parents, grandparents
and great-grandparents

**ERNIE and JANE SCHULENBERG (nee VandenHaak)**

We praise God for the blessing they have been in our lives.
May God continue to guide and bless them in the years to come.

| | |
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| *Collingwood, ON:* | *Jesse Endeman* |
| *Shelburne, ON:* | *Tyson, Rochelle, Drew* |
| *Smithville, ON:* | Arnie and Marcy Schulenberg |
| | *Austin and Denise Schulenberg,* Aiden |
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Open House to be held Saturday, June 20th, 2015 from 2-4 pm
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*Mailing Address:*
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## OBITUARIES

*. . . shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*
*1 Peter 5:2-4*

In His time, while serving in the office of elder,
our chief Shepherd promoted our fellow office-bearer to glory
after a brief battle with cancer.

**WILHELM (BILL) GORTEMAKER**

October 17, 1945 – April 28, 2015

Beloved husband of Grietje Gortemaker (nee Kuik)

*Consistory with the Deacons of the*
*Winnipeg Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church*
15 Bates Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2C 3G8

## OBITUARIES

Axel, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen
The Netherlands

Brampton, Ontario
Canada

May 12, 1938 – April 18, 2015

*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. I Corinthians 15:58*

It pleased the Lord to take to Himself, his servant

**CHRISTIAAN JOHANNES NOBELS**

in his 77th year.

After a courageous battle with cancer, Chris passed away
peacefully in his home, with his wife and children at his side.

Lovingly remembered by his wife, Caroline Nobels
(nee Van Huisstede) of 54 years.

Cherished father, grandfather and great-grandfather of:

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*When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,*
*It is well, It is well with my soul.* Spafford, 1876

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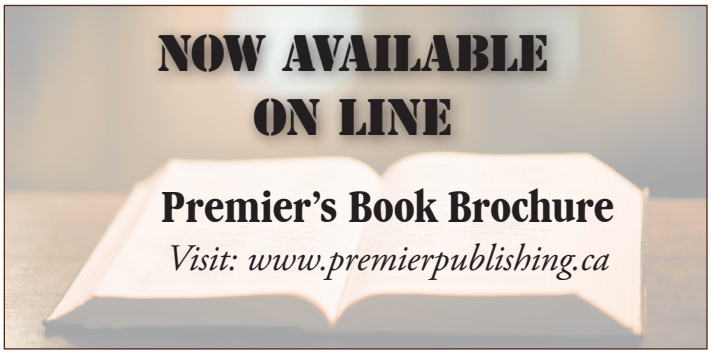

## TEACHING POSITIONS

**Covenant Canadian Reformed School of Neerlandia**
invites applications for the following positions:

**HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE and/or ENGLISH TEACHER**
**and an ELEMENTARY TEACHER**

for the 2015/2016 school year.
CCRS is a K-12 school with an approximate student population of 240 that serves the churches of Barrhead and Neerlandia. We are a rural community about 1.5 hours northwest of the city of Edmonton, AB.
We offer a supportive school community and a very competitive wage and benefit package. Covenant also offers shorter work weeks with many four day weeks throughout the school year. We are looking for enthusiastic teachers who are committed to the Reformed faith and the cause of Reformed Christian education. We especially encourage those teachers with administration experience or aspirations to take on administrative roles to apply or inquire, as these position(s) will likely be coming available in the near future. Also, university students in their final year are encouraged to inquire about positions starting in 2016/2017.

Additional information can be obtained by contacting the principal:
**Mr. James Meinen**
780-674-4774 (work), 780-674-3145 (home)
principal@covenantschool.ca

Applications can be sent to:
**Gwen Mast, Secretary of the Board**
Box 26, Neerlandia, AB T0G 1R0
tngmast@xplornet.com

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The Board of the **Canadian Reformed School Society, Hamilton, Ontario** operating **Timothy Christian School** invites applications from qualified individuals to fill the position of

**PRINCIPAL**

Duties to commence August 1, 2015.
Interested parties who cannot commit until the 2016/17 school year are also encouraged to apply.

Timothy Christian School is expecting an enrollment of approximately 370 students in K-8 for the 2015/2016 school year, and a staff of about 30 (full and part-time).

Letters of application should include a resume, a statement of faith, your view of Reformed education and two letters of references.

For more information, please contact the principal, **Mr. H. Plug**
Phone School: 905-385-3953, Home: 905-574-6498
Fax: 905-385-8073
Email: hplug@timothyschool.org

Please send your applications to:
**The Human Resource Committee**
c/o Timothy Christian School
430 East 25th Street, Hamilton, ON L8V 3B4
Or email it to: hrc@timothyschool.org

---

The board for the **Tyndale Christian School Society** of Calgary invites applications for the following positions

**FULL-TIME SECONDARY GRADES TEACHER**
**FULL TIME EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANT**

Tyndale Christian School is a Reformed K-12 school with an enrollment of 83 students. We offer a supportive school community, enthusiastic volunteer base, and competitive wages and benefits. We are seeking energetic individuals who are committed to the Reformed Faith and to Christian education.

We are specifically looking for a high school teacher (all disciplines considered).
A Bachelor of Education is a requirement for the teaching position. An EA Certificate is preferred for the EA position.

If you would like further information about the opportunities, school operations or living in the beautiful Calgary area, please contact the board chairman:
**Mr. Joe Schouten**
Home: 403-568-2822, schoutenjoe@gmail.com
Or the principal: **Mr. Ed Hoogerdyk**
Home: 403-285-4680, ed.hoogerdyk@gmail.com

Applications can be sent to:
**Lyndon Kok, Secretary of the Board**
138 Mount Douglas Point SE, Calgary, AB T2Z 3J8
lyndonkok@gmail.com

---

The Canadian Reformed School Society of Edmonton, operating **Parkland Immanuel Christian School,** invites applications for the 2016-2017 school year for the position of

**PRINCIPAL**

Parkland Immanuel Christian School operates a growing, reformed, K-12 school with 325 students, and a staff of 30 teachers and educational assistants. The school is blessed to have a supportive school community, competitive wages, and a collaborative and professional environment that encourages and supports excellence in teaching.

Applicants must be a professed member in good standing of a Canadian Reformed, United Reformed, or sister church, and must have the necessary post-secondary qualifications to teach in Alberta. They will have the necessary skills and desire to serve the school community with responsible leadership, educational expertise, and superior communication skills.
The closing date for applications is Monday, November 30th, 2015.

For further information, please contact the Board President,
**Mr. Rob Appleyard**
Home Phone: 780-633-5807
Cell Phone: 780-239-7622
Email: president@parklandimmanuel.ca

Applications should be emailed to the address above, or directed in writing to the school:
**Mr. Rob Appleyard,** Chair of Principal Search Committee
c/o Parkland Immanuel Christian School
21304 35 Avenue, NW, Edmonton, AB T6M 2P6

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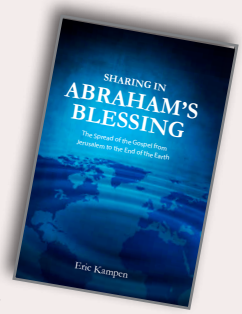


**By Eric Kampen**

While there is no shortage of excellent books dealing with the history of the Christian church, this book seeks to contribute by giving a succinct survey of the spread of the Christian gospel from Pentecost to the present.

Further, in all the details the reader may lose sight of the overall picture. To use a familiar image, it will be difficult to see the forest because of the many trees. This book aims to be a "forest book," looking at Church History from above so that it is possible to see how the pieces fit together and relate to one another.

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Minimum Education: Master's Degree

**Skill Requirements:**
Education: Master Degree in Theology, must be recognized by the Canadian Reformed Churches in North America; knowledge of world history, Chinese history or Chinese Literature would be a great asset.

**Experience:**
Minimum 2 years in religious translation of theological books and/or Christian materials/literatures from English to Chinese (simplified version).
Languages: Speak, Read, Write English
Work Setting: Religious Charitable/Church organization
Language Pairs: English/Chinese, Mandarin/English

**Translation Specialization:**
Biblical, faith-based, Christian Reformed church theological terminology.
Security and Safety: Basic security clearance
Own Tools/Equipment: Computer, Cellular phone
Work Conditions and Physical Capabilities: Attention to detail
Work Location Information: Urban area
Transportation/Travel Information: Own transportation
Work Sample: Example of completed work
Other Language: Mandarin

**Essential Skill:**
Reading text, oral communication, problem solving, critical thinking, significant use of memory, computer use, writing, working with others, finding information.

**Other:**
As this job specializes in faith-based translation from English to Chinese, both fluency in English/Chinese as well as strong Biblical knowledge and understanding of the Reformed theology and denomination are necessary.

**Employer:**
Canadian Reformed Church of Cloverdale, BC
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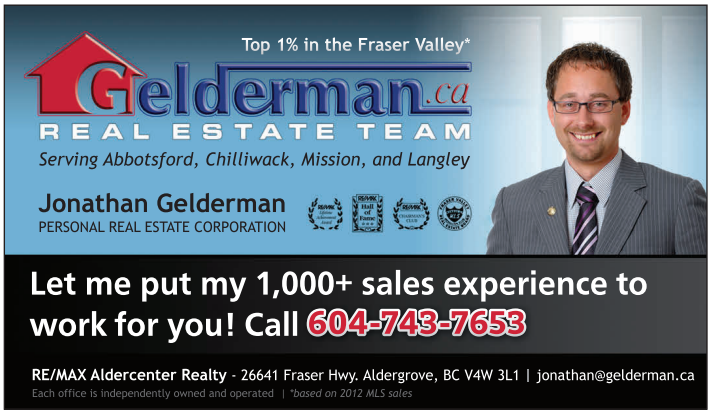



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