

Clarion

Binding and Compelling the Conscience
Mandatory Vaccinations and the Church (3)
Ordination of Rev. Offringa



Clarion: a trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed
Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

What's Inside

As we approach Good Friday, we are pleased to present a meditation by Rev. Jeff Poort on the significance of a certain fabric being torn from top to bottom. In Scripture, those little details often symbolize huge realities and reflection on this one will pay many dividends. Rev. George van Popta gives us similar devotional material on our Saviour's death with his new hymn, "All in that Dreadful Evening." May we all be strengthened in our faith as we commemorate Christ's death and resurrection.

Meanwhile, the struggles of life continue in our COVID times. Rev. Tim Schouten concludes his three-part series on vaccine mandates for churches and Rev. Eric Kampen gives us insight into what is and what is not a matter of "binding" the conscience according to our Belgic Confession. Certainly a lot of food for thought in those two pieces! And if you feel so inclined to express your opinion one way or the other, feel free to write a

short letter to the editor. We want to encourage the thoughtful exchange of ideas.

We have other topics to ponder too. Mr. Jeff Morris begins a two-part series on comparing science with theology and asking whether our faith needs to fear science. Rev. Eric Onderwater provides a mission update on the work in Brampton, ON for our *Discipling the Nations* column. Rounding out this issue is the report on the ordination of a new servant of the Word in Niagara South (Rev. Ruurd Offringa), an encouraging report from the Women's Savings Action for our Seminary library, *Clarion Kids*, a press release, and a book review on a devotional meant to help parents understand God's sacrament of baptism for their child. Sounds like it will make for a lovely gift. Have a blessed Good Friday and a very joyful Easter Sunday!

Peter Holtvlüwer

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EDITORIAL

Binding and Compelling the Conscience

Over the past two years, there has been much talk about our conscience. People speak of freedom of conscience and of not doing certain things because it is against their conscience. Since *Clarion* is a confessionally Reformed magazine, it is only appropriate that we reflect on what is said about the conscience in our confessions as they sum up Scripture. The term is used eleven times. The use that seems to connect most closely to the way it is used in our day is in Article 32 of the Belgic Confession, “Therefore we reject all human inventions and laws introduced in the worship of God *which bind and compel the conscience* in any way.”

Let’s see if the voice of our spiritual forefathers, not caught up in the issues of our time, can still give some guidance today.

Context

Article 32, the last of three articles that confess how the church should be governed, has as title, “The Order and Discipline of the Church.” As the article works this out, it seems to speak more about what we should *not* do rather than what we should do. We read that those who govern the church “must at all times watch out that they *do not deviate* from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded. Therefore we *reject* all human inventions and laws introduced into the worship of God which bind and compel the conscience in any way.” These words reflect the wariness about rules of those who had been freed from the many rules and regulations that had come upon church life over the preceding centuries. With respect to worship, there had been many rules about confession of sin, prayers to saints, rituals, and the saving power of the sacraments. All were deemed essential for salvation. It was not much different from the yoke put upon the people by the Pharisees and Scribes in the days our Lord was on earth. The burdens were so heavy that many consciences were tormented as people wondered whether they had done enough to earn salvation (cf. end of BC 24). Through faith in Jesus Christ, the conscience was freed from this fear, terror, and dread (BC 23).

Need for rules

The wariness of man-made rules for salvation did not take away the awareness of the need for those governing the church to make rules besides the commandments given by God. The Spirit has not given rules for every aspect of church life. Leaders must come up with rules that preserve and promote harmony

and unity. It can’t just be left to spontaneity, for that will lead to chaos, as the believers in Corinth discovered. The apostle Paul said that God is not a God of confusion but of peace, and that all things should be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:33, 40). A congregation is a family, the members are brothers and sisters. Leaders function like parents. In the church family, they have to come up with rules such as times for worship services, when and how Lord’s Supper is celebrated, how wards are set up, what liturgy to follow, when and how elections take place, when special events are commemorated, just to mention a few things. It is not that these are matters which pertain to faith and salvation, but everyone will recognize that the community will only function well if all follow these rules.

Guidance

It should be clear that when it is said that “we reject all human inventions and laws introduced into the worship of God which bind and compel the conscience in any way,” it talks about man-made rules *which are made conditions for salvation*. Our forefathers, however, understood the distinction between human rules necessary for good order, meant to promote harmony and unity, and rules invented by men as conditions for salvation. They rejected the latter but upheld the necessity of the former. It is well possible that someone does not like certain rules. As long, however, as rules are not made conditions for salvation, one cannot claim that they bind and compel the conscience. That is only the case when rules undermine the gospel. If it is not an issue pertaining to our salvation, we should not make it an issue.

Deliberately I have not mentioned any of the issues that currently cause unrest among us as we gather for worship. Rules have had to be made by church leaders to preserve harmony and unity. I would say, though, that no one has introduced human inventions and laws into the worship of God which bind and compel the conscience in any way. To preserve harmony and unity, such rules must be followed. Jerusalem would be a lot more peaceful if everyone did just that. 🇺🇸



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The Rent Veil

“And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” (MARK 15:38)

Many things happened when Jesus Christ died on the cross: earthquakes, rocks splitting, people rising from the dead. Yet the event that Mark focuses on in his gospel is a tearing of some fabric. That sounds almost trivial, and it would be until you consider that this fabric was of a particular curtain—a curtain with a history.

That history goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve were able to fellowship with God and walk in his presence. When they fell into sin, that fellowship with God ended. They were driven out of the garden, and cherubim with a sword blocked the way to that fellowship. Why? Sin made it impossible to stand in God’s presence. You can see this at Mount Sinai in Exodus 20, where the people of God cannot go close to the mountain. God is too holy. They will die if they touch the mountain.

God still wants to dwell with his people and he even tells them to build a tabernacle right in the middle of the camp so that his presence can be among them. Yet even this tabernacle, and the more permanent temple that would follow, would have a barrier between God in the holiest place and the people. The separation was evident in the finely embroidered curtain that the Gospel of Mark refers to. It separated even the ceremonially clean high priest from the holiness of God. Even when the high priest would annually enter that Most Holy Place, after many ceremonial washings and offerings of atonement, to sprinkle blood on the ark, he had to do so in the midst of much smoke from the incense so that he would not set eyes on God’s glory (Lev 16:13).

The curtain was not just a security measure for the people. It symbolized the seemingly unsolvable problem their failure had caused. The curtain represents how separate God and the human race had become. Sin was still barring the way.

For God’s Word to inform us that it was *this* curtain that was torn is very significant. The barrier is being removed. The presence of God is being made available again!

There is also an important detail which tells us how this was able to happen. The text says that the curtain was torn “from

top to bottom.” The temple was over three stories high. This was not something that any human being could do by accident. This shows that it was God himself who was getting rid of this obstacle. This was a sign that God already saw the death of his Son Jesus Christ on the cross and deemed it an atoning work. It was sufficient to remove the barrier.

It was as though the sword that had barred the way for people to enter the presence of God in the Garden of Eden had now fallen on Jesus Christ, opening the way to fellowship with God once again. We can once again gaze upon his glory. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed . . .” (2 Cor 3:18). By the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, all this becomes possible.

What a display of grace! God himself brought about the solution to what for us was an impossible situation! The tearing of the curtain is for us a symbol of God’s abundant willingness to bring about our salvation, even though we do not deserve it. He alone is worthy of praise! This Good Friday, rejoice again in the power of Jesus’s death to open to you the presence of the holy God! ☺

For Further Study

1. In what ways do some of your sins prevent you from experiencing the presence of God?
2. What are the benefits of living in the presence of God? Read Psalm 16 and note some of the details mentioned there. How can you experience a foretaste of this already now?



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Mandatory Vaccinations and the Church

Part 3: The Role of Christian Conscience

Introduction

In this series of articles, we have asserted that, “the church cannot implement [vaccine passports]. The church cannot stand at the door and refuse entry to those whom Christ has welcomed. The church cannot comply with government regulations that would cause her to obey man rather than God.” In the first article, we developed this assertion in light of the Lordship of Christ and his criteria for entry into the church. In the second article, we examined the nature of the church as an

actual physical community of believers, an emblem and fountain of the gospel, and the family of God. In this final article we will see what the Bible has to say about one more important matter—the Christian conscience.

In the gathering of very eclectic, very different, people into one body, there will always be different sensitivities and convictions. Room needs to be given for these sensitivities and convictions, and the church should not unnecessarily or hastily bind the consciences of its members when it comes to

It is clear that Christ allows for the Christian conscience, and therefore so should the church of Christ

disputable matters. It is true that the conscience and conduct of a Christian is bound to the Word of God; nevertheless, it is clear that Christ allows for the Christian conscience, and therefore so should the church of Christ.

The principle of Romans 14–15

In Romans 14 and 15 God reveals through the apostle Paul some principles about conscience. These principles are laid down in the context of disagreements between the “weak” and the “strong,” but they are applicable to any situation where Christians disagree about the moral significance of a certain product or action.

In this section, it is striking that Paul makes room for conscience even for something in which he knows the objective truth. With respect to eating meat, he plainly says, “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus Christ that nothing is unclean in itself” (v. 14). We should not miss the significance of this—the inspired apostle knows that it is morally permissible to eat meat. He could have simply stressed this point to the Romans and left it at that. Instead, he makes some very striking statements about the role of Christian conscience. In verse 14, he continues by saying, “But it is unclean *for anyone who thinks it unclean.*” In verse 23, he writes, “Whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For *whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*” Some people, due to their backgrounds and sensitivities, will have moral misgivings even about things that God has declared clean. Paul teaches that they need to act in accordance with these misgivings rather than ignore them.

As mentioned, this principle is applicable to many different situations. If we need to act on our conscience even in things that God has revealed are morally permissible, then much more do we need to do so when it comes to things that are not revealed. This becomes more and more the case as human involvement increases in the creation of a product. Paul could declare about food that “nothing is unclean in itself” (he makes this point even stronger in 1 Timothy 4:4). It is fairly straightforward to say this about food. Although it is processed by human hands, it is

produced by the power of God giving life and growth to the animal. But what do we think about products and activities that have significantly more human involvement? The more human involvement, the more possibility that a product or activity is no longer clean, but unclean. What is the moral meaning of a particular thing? Christians will come to different answers.

For example, we can think of entertainment such as professional sports. Some Christians will not attend an NFL or NHL game. Perhaps they are not comfortable with the atmosphere, the advertising, and the seemingly idolatrous components of professional sports. Other Christians will happily attend (especially if they were given free tickets). In this situation, we cannot discern who is “weak” and who is “strong,” and we may not be able to find a particular Bible verse that supports our conviction. Instead, different Christians come to different conclusions about how biblical norms apply and about what a particular thing means in the context of our culture. Yet the principles of Romans 14 and 15 apply: “It is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean . . . whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”

Application to COVID vaccines

There are a number of ways in which this principle applies to COVID-19 vaccines. In this section I will speak personally because these are convictions that I currently hold. It is my hope and prayer that expressing these convictions will allow those with opposite convictions to understand the importance of making room for conscience. I recognize that many Christians are very thankful for the vaccines and have a hard time understanding why others are opposed to receiving them. I am open to correction and welcome critique.

My concerns with the COVID vaccines are mainly related to the sixth commandment. It is my responsibility to evaluate whether or not taking such a vaccine is the most responsible choice in light of my duty not to “harm or recklessly endanger myself” (HC, LD 40). In this light, I am currently not convinced of the necessity, safety, and efficacy of the available vaccines. I don’t believe the government or the mainstream media has been entirely forthright in their communications on these

matters. The data demonstrates that certain demographics have only a miniscule risk associated with COVID. This includes healthy adults in their thirties (that's me) and children. Further, there is evidence that the vaccines have significant side effects (including deaths), more than any other vaccines before them. Even more importantly to me, these vaccines were produced at a breakneck speed and the long-term effects are by definition unknown. Finally, it is clear that these vaccines do not prevent transmission of COVID, even after three or four doses.

An additional concern related to the sixth commandment is the use of fetal cell lines in the vaccines available in Canada. To the best of my knowledge, the Pfizer, Moderna, and AstraZeneca vaccines were developed or tested using the cell line HEK-293, derived from the kidney of an aborted child in 1973. To the best of my knowledge, the Janssen vaccine was developed using the cell line PER.C6, derived from the retina of an aborted child in 1985.¹ Different Christians have different moral evaluations of these facts. Some will point out that many years have gone by and that the connection with abortion is remote. With respect to the sixth commandment, they might point out that the vaccines derived from these cell-lines will save many more lives than they cost. In response I would try to make the case that these arguments are misguided and that this is a form of unbiblical utilitarianism. However, I don't think I can say "Thus says the LORD" about this matter, and so I don't attempt to bind the conscience of someone who thinks differently. Nevertheless, from a very personal perspective, I can't get past this information about fetal cell lines in my conscience. I would be sinning if I voluntarily received any of these vaccines or allowed them to be given to my children. Romans 14 applies in this situation:

"It is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean . . . whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

More could be said about conscience when it comes vaccines. There are additional factors, but they are hard to convey concisely. We should keep in mind that deeply held convictions can sometimes come out of the heart before they come out of the mind. We should not simply dismiss a brother or sister in Christ who struggles to put their concerns into words.

Welcome one another

As Christ is Lord of the church, so Christ is Lord of conscience. Therefore, we cannot exclude those who are unvaccinated. We cannot stand at the door and refuse entry to those whom Christ has welcomed.

The Apostle Paul concludes the section on conscience with these beautiful words: "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:5-7).

It is my prayer that this series of articles will assist local churches in welcoming one another. If and when we are told to implement mandates, let us look to God's leading and seek to wisely navigate that situation. But let us never stop being the church—the community of the justified, the gospel made visible, the fountain of the gospel, and the mother of believers. The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" So let the local church also say, "Come!" 🗨️

Endnotes

¹ Food and Drug Administration Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee. *Transcript of Meeting Wednesday May 16, 2001*, page 77. Accessed January 22, 2022. <https://wayback.archive-it.org/7993/20170404095417/https://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/01/transcripts/3750t1_01.pdf> .

For more information on the ethical implications of HEK-293 and PER.C6, see:

Alvin Wong, "The Ethics of HEK 293," in *The National Catholics Bioethics Quarterly*, Autumn 2006.

Accessed January 22, 2022.

[https://www.pdcnet.org/C1257D43006C9AB1/file/5265B61D5497F52585257D94004802BB/\\$FILE/ncbq_2006_0006_0003_0077_0099.pdf](https://www.pdcnet.org/C1257D43006C9AB1/file/5265B61D5497F52585257D94004802BB/$FILE/ncbq_2006_0006_0003_0077_0099.pdf)

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CANTICLE

All in that Dreadful Evening

$\text{♩} = 69$

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1. All in that dread - ful eve - ning Je - sus was be - trayed,
 2. All in that dread - ful eve - ning Je - sus was thrice de - nied,
 3. All in that dread - ful eve - ning Je - sus was thrust on high,
 4. All in that dread - ful eve - ning Je - sus was cru - ci - fied.

T
B

5

a - ban - doned by all his friends who ran a - way, a - fraid.
 de - sert - ed by his dis - ci - ples and then by Pi - late tried.
 sus - pend - ed a - bove the earth, dis - card - ed there to die.
 The Lord shed his pre - cious blood, and on the cross he died.

10

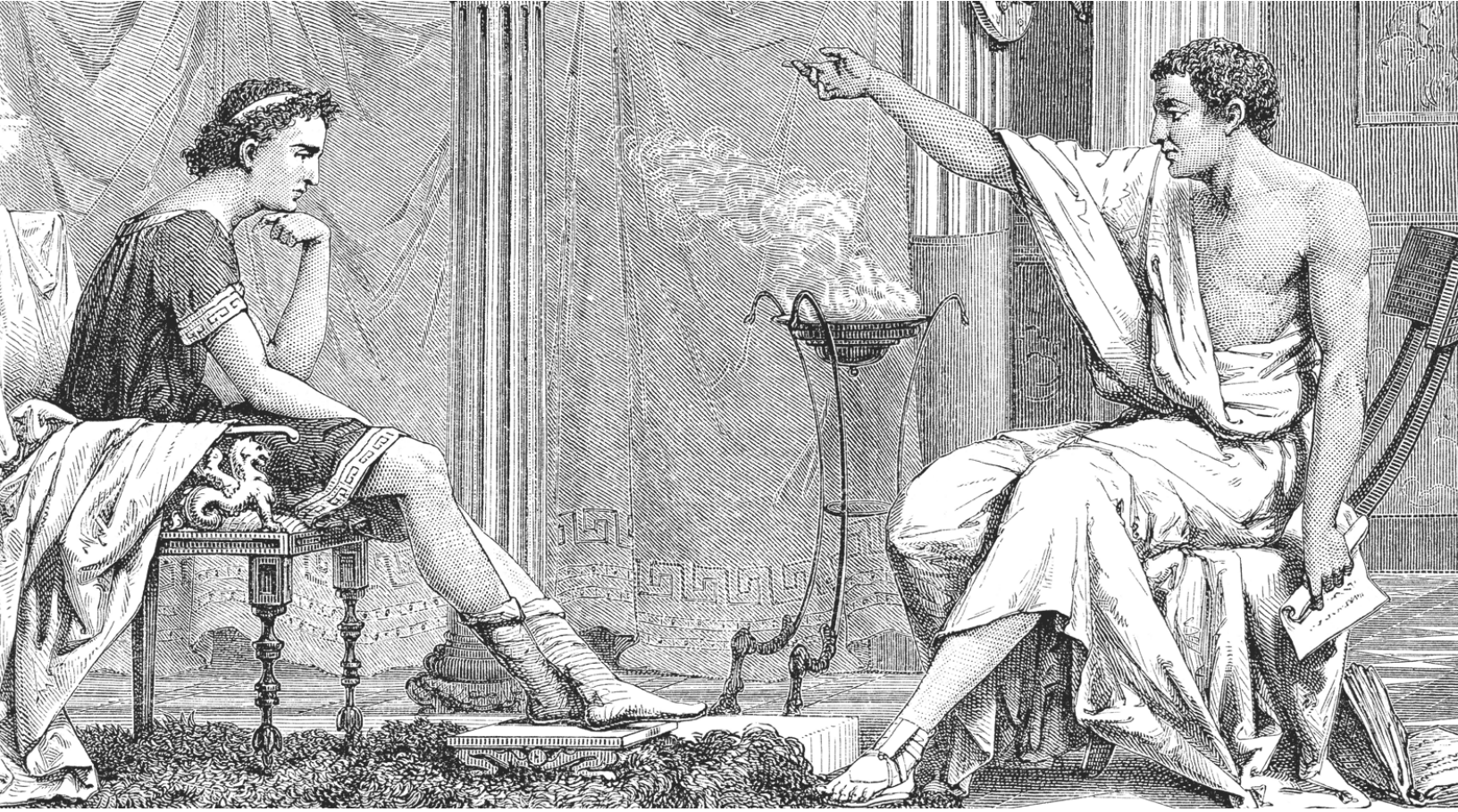
Our Lord then was hand - ed o - ver to those who for him paid—
 He mocked and he scourged our Lord, who not a word re - plied—
 For - sak - en by God his Fath - er, his God to whom he cried—
 The Lord gave him - self for me. Him - self he sac - ri - ficed—

15

all in that dread - ful eve - ning, the night Je - sus was be - trayed.
 all in that dread - ful eve - ning when Je - sus was thrice de - nied.
 all in that dread - ful eve - ning when Je - sus was thrust on high.
 all in that dread - ful eve - ning when Je - sus was cru - ci - fied.

Text: George van Popta, 2021
 Tune: Hugh S. Robertson (1874-1954)

APRIL EVENING



Christianity and Science: Investigating a Most Beautiful Book

Part 1 of 2

In the West, there is a common belief that Christianity and science are somehow opposed. In this two-part article we will explore this idea before concluding that it is false.

The Reformation was a time of enormous religious upheaval as Martin Luther exposed the deteriorated theology of the Roman Catholic Church, while rearticulating the great truths of the Christian faith. Luther's work, along with the efforts of his contemporaries and successors including Zwingli, Calvin, and De Brès, led to a "protest" against papal authority and a renewed zeal for the supremacy of God's Word. While all orthodox Christians remain united by the ecumenical creeds (Apostle's Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed), the enormous impact of the Reformers' work, as evidenced by the many Protestants who continue to affirm *sola Scriptura*,

sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, soli Deo gloria, is almost impossible to overstate.

The Scientific Revolution

While the theological ideas of the Reformation were having a deep impact on the world, a complementary movement was developing around scientific ideas. This movement, sometimes called the "Scientific Revolution," has also dramatically shaped Western thought from the mid-sixteenth century down to this day. As Reformed Christians, we tend to focus on the theological ideas that shape Western thinking, and rightly so. Could there be a higher task than to engage in theological reflection? Still, there are powerful scientific ideas in the culture today which, though not theological themselves, supposedly threaten to

undermine our theology. These ideas, left unchecked, can turn our young people away from the gospel and prevent new converts from believing the faith. And yet, once “science” is properly examined, it will be clear that science can only elevate theology, not diminish it.

So, our aim is to examine the scope of science and the purpose of this is three-fold. First, to help us discern when scientific pundits are overplaying science’s explanatory power. Second, even more so, it is to prepare those who will soon be confronted with strong scientific claims in college and university. And third, it is meant to equip us so we can winsomely share the gospel with our scientifically-minded neighbour.

Scientific beginnings

Aristotle was a Greek philosopher who lived in the fourth century BC and for many he is considered the world’s first scientist. That’s because he taught that humans could learn new things by studying the physical world. Other philosophers, such as Plato, taught that physical reality is not the purest form of reality; rather, the immaterial realm was purer, to which the physical universe is inferior. Aristotle rejected this completely, arguing that the physical world is as real as anything, and we can learn about it just by observing it.

In many respects, Aristotle laid the foundation for the systematized practice of science. His theories were promulgated in Muslim countries for centuries, including the idea that the earth is the centre of the universe. In the thirteenth century AD through Muslim traders, Aristotle’s works fell into the hands of theologians who embraced many of his theories. It is easy to see why. Even before Aristotle, the Hebrew Scriptures taught that the Holy God of Israel, who is called “I AM,” created the universe and everything in it good. Not only that, but humans were the climax of God’s good creation, and God had commanded his human creatures to be stewards over it. Aristotle’s insistence that creation should be rationally investigated, and that the earth is the centre of the universe, aligns nicely with Christianity.

Copernicus and Galileo


The works of Aristotle and other writers of antiquity brought to fifteenth century Europe a renewed interest in ancient culture and the formal discipline of science. This interest percolated into a period known as the Renaissance, as Western thinkers became interested in human creativity and ability. Add to this

the underlying issues within the theology and hierarchy of the Roman church, along with the invention of the printing press which allowed ideas to flow quickly, and the Western world was poised for foundational shifts in thinking.

By most accounts, the Scientific Revolution began when Nicolaus Copernicus’s work, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Sphere*, was published posthumously in 1543. In it, Copernicus offered the ground-breaking theory that the earth is not the centre of the solar system (geocentric); instead, the planets, including the earth, orbit around the sun (heliocentric). This was a truly earth-shattering hypothesis, not because there were any real theological implications, but simply because it altered deeply held notions of how the universe operates. Galileo, in true scientific fashion, would soon confirm Copernicus’s theory by observing the phases of Venus with his telescope.

Fundamental shift

Soon, scientific ideas were printed and shared all over Europe. At the same time, a theological reformation swept across the continent. For the first time in centuries ecclesiastical authorities were being challenged, instigating bloody religious wars between different Christian groups. This in turn caused thinkers such as Francis Bacon and John Locke to look away from the church toward science as a foundational source of knowledge.

In the following decades many important scientific discoveries were made. This flurry of scientific interest was cemented into Western consciousness when, in 1687, Isaac Newton published his famous *Principia Mathematica*, in which he outlined his exquisite theories of motion and gravitation. Newton’s insights into the laws of physics were so accurate and powerful that he initiated a new mechanical view of the universe. Given the theological upheaval at the time and the new understanding that the universe is governed by laws that can be discovered by humans, we can see why science often gets construed as an elevated source of knowledge. 

To be continued in the next issue



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Ordination of Rev. Offringa

JOHN HOMAN

Sunday, January 16 marked yet another milestone in the congregational life of Niagara South Canadian Reformed Church. In this case, the congregation could receive its own pastor and teacher. Since institution in May 2020, the preaching needs were met by a wide range of guest ministers. While this was something to be thankful for, the goal still remained that we as congregation could receive our own pastor from the hand of the LORD.

In the beginning of September 2021, Niagara South could extend a call to br. Ruurd Offringa. In due time, we received word that br. Offringa could indeed accept this call. Preparations began for the final classical examination, which took place on December 15, 2022. Upon sustaining this examination, the final steps could be taken towards the ordination, which was scheduled for Sunday January 16, 2022.

Worship services on this day were two halves of one whole. In the morning service the congregation could witness the installation of Rev. Offringa and the afternoon service served as Rev. Offringa's first worship service as minister of the Word.

Ordination

The morning worship service was led by Dr. VanRaalte, who had also served as mentor for Rev. Offringa while he studied at CRTS. Dr. VanRaalte chose the first eight verses of Titus 3 as text for his sermon. As a letter written by Paul to Titus, who served as a young leader in the early church, there is much pastoral guidance found throughout the entire letter. In this passage, the focus became to "Insist on good things, to present God his Spirit-renewed heirs: remind us of our patterns (vv. 1-3), remind us of his powers (vv. 4-7), remind us of everyone's profits



(v. 8).” With this as a guide, these eight verses were unpacked. The greatness of God’s regenerating work through the Holy Spirit as noted in verses 4–7 was highlighted. Dr. VanRaalte ended with emphasising the sermon theme, exhorting that “I want you to insist on these things (as shown in these verses) so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.” With this the congregation was reminded of the awesome task and calling that our new pastor and teacher would be taking on. Upon completion of the sermon, with its theme fresh in everyone’s minds, the form of ordination was read. Rev. Offringa answered in the affirmative to the questions of ordination and, following the laying of hands, Rev. Offringa was officially ordained as minister of the Word.

Inaugural worship service

The afternoon service marked the inaugural worship service of Rev. Offringa in his capacity as a minister of the Word. In this case, he chose to use the words of Psalm 19 as focus for the sermon. The key message of the sermon was “Our God and LORD reveals himself; God reveals himself through creation (vv. 1–6), the LORD reveals himself through his Word (vv. 7–11), his servant desires to reveal the LORD (vv. 12–14). By taking us through this Psalm, the congregation could be reminded and

encouraged that, while we cannot necessarily sit down with God and talk with him about things, God does certainly tell us about himself; not only in his creation, but also (and most importantly) by means of his Word. Finally, this leads God’s servant to desire to reveal the LORD in what he does.

Concluding words

While in many other circumstances the welcoming of a minister also includes a social event to specifically welcome the minister into the congregation, the circumstances did not allow for this. However, the simple fact that we could witness this great event together is a suitable enough welcome for this point in time.

Now that Niagara South has received its own minister of the Word, the ministry of the gospel can continue by means of Rev. Offringa. May the LORD indeed give Rev. Offringa all he needs so that he may insist on the good things highlighted in Titus 3, strengthening and ministering to the congregation and also guiding the congregation so that it may be a shining light in an ever-darkening world. It is our prayer that this too may serve to continue to advance the gospel, and that the preaching received under Rev. Offringa may serve to give God the glory and majesty that he is due. 🙏

Soli deo gloria!

Top left: Dr. VanRaalte reading the questions of ordination to Rev. Offringa

Bottom right: The laying on of hands. Pictured left to right: Rev. R Sikkema, Rev. Offringa, Rev. R Kampen, Dr. VanRaalte, br. J VanZanten (elder Niagara South).



Add to the Conversation!

We welcome interaction, whether in agreement or disagreement. Send us a letter at letters@clarionmagazine.ca.

See clarionmagazine.ca/letters for guidelines.

Mission Work in Brampton

An Update

Our diverse context

Hello! My name is Eric Onderwater. I currently work as a mission pastor in Brampton, Ontario with my wife, Lisa, my four children, and the one hundred members of Grace Canadian Reformed Church. Our church is located in the northwest corner of Brampton, and we live near the church in the same neighbourhood.

Our neighbourhood is incredibly diverse as eighty-two percent of local families identify as a visible minority (basically, they do not have European heritage). Families here come from all over the world: Nigeria, Ghana, the Caribbean (Jamaica, St. Lucia, Barbados, and other islands), India (Punjabi, Gujarati, Tamil, and others), Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Poland, the Philippines, Italy, and more. South Asians, as you might expect, are the largest group and Africans are the second largest group.

This is both an opportunity and challenge for ministry. The opportunity comes as many of our neighbours are open to Christianity; as a result, we have members and regular visitors from many of the groups listed above. The challenge is there is a great deal of cross-cultural learning needed for us and the congregation. Mistakes are easy to make, such as that time Lisa and I served chicken to Hindu vegetarians.

COVID and recent blessings

COVID, or course, has been a difficult season, but not without fruit. God is moving in our community, and he brought two new disciples during COVID. One is a woman from Italian background, who lived off and on the streets of Brampton for the last ten years. She joined our church last summer. Another recently arrived from Mexico, and the Lord willing he'll join us as a member early this year.

In addition, once COVID restrictions receded in the fall of 2021, we saw a significant influx of regular visitors. Through that, we've had roughly eight to ten households enter our "orbit," so to speak. By that we mean families or individuals who visited once and then came back again the next week and now attend church on a regular or semi-regular basis. It's one thing to have a visitor on Sunday; it's quite another to have them come back.

These newcomers, like everyone in our neighbourhood, come from a variety of backgrounds, both in ethnicity and in exposure to Christianity. Some grew up as Christians in India, some come from a nominal Pentecostal background, and others grew up Roman Catholic. Some have no Christian roots at all and knew very little about Christianity before attending. Still others come with a mature faith. Whatever the case, God is busy gathering his own into a body that looks more and more like the diverse body that will be gathered in heaven.

Working in the harvest

Now, strictly speaking, not all of this is mission proper. Some of the growth from visitors is mission, of course (mission: sharing the gospel with those who do not know Jesus and/or those who have never belonged to a church). Other growth is from Christians looking for a new church. Yet, even then, it is still valuable for Christians from other backgrounds to join a Reformed church. Many are unaware of the treasures we possess as Reformed people, and it's a blessing to share that with them.

Lisa and I are working hard to host and welcome these newcomers and visit with them. Thankfully, we are not alone, as the congregation is stepping up big-time to help welcome and host newcomers. We've also started a congregational hosting program, in which we match new members and visitors with

congregation members who are willing to host them. This has been a blessing for everyone involved.

As a church, we continue to engage the unchurched in our area. There are a few ways we do that. First, discipling, teaching, and supporting new members opens doors into their networks. If new members receive enough support, they will start bringing their friends and family to church. This is the most powerful driver of mission.

Second, Lisa and I continue to build relationships with our neighbours and meet new people in our neighbourhood. We've invited neighbours to church and had many conversations of faith with them. Hospitality and friendship are a powerful driver of this, as it implicitly changes preconceived notions of Christianity and even what a pastor might be.

Third, we have some outreach programs. We've started ESL teaching, as nearly everyone struggles with English in our community. That's been challenging, but we currently have three Muslim women being taught. Lisa also began Mom's Café, which is an evening in which moms can get together and find

support. COVID stopped this, but perhaps we will begin again soon. We also have other ideas, but we need to be careful that we don't overextend ourselves. Working with existing contacts is our priority.

Conclusion

Overall, we are thankful for what God is doing in our community. He's at work, and we can see the results of that. Our prayer is that he would continue to send the Holy Spirit in power, so that more and more of our neighbours may see the beauty of knowing Jesus Christ. We covet your prayers in this matter. May we all vigorously pray "your kingdom come," so that Christ's kingdom may indeed come in Brampton and throughout Canada. 🇨🇦



Eric Onderwater *Co-pastor (for mission work)*
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ASK A QUESTION

Is there something you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for? Send us your
most thought provoking questions to explore
in our **You Asked** column.

Please send questions to **William den Hollander**, *Minister emeritus*
Bethel Canadian Reformed Church, Toronto, Ontario

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0 | denhollanderw@gmail.com

CLARION KIDS

AMANDA DEBOER

LORD'S DAY 5

Do you think you need help? Maybe you think, "No, I can do a lot of things by myself!" And you probably can do many hard things on your own! But can you pay for your own sins? No, you can't. No one can. In fact, we keep doing more and more sins each day! We need help. Maybe a big bear or a strong lion could help us pay for our sins? No. God will not punish an animal for what people have done. An animal would not be able to handle God's anger because of our sins. People should pay for their own sins. In fact, only a perfect person can pay for our sins. Someone who can live their whole life without sinning once! And this person has to be God at the same time. Do you know who this is?

Use the following letters to fill in the blanks and answer who paid for our sins. (You may use each letter more than once, if needed): C, E, I, O, T, U

___ # ___ L ___ RD J ___ S ___ S ___ #R ___ S ___

Wordsearch

deliver
punish
man
God
help

D	M	A	N	X	G	H	B
P	E	A	N	C	I	D	Q
U	U	L	E	K	O	J	R
C	Z	N	I	G	W	T	J
B	H	J	I	V	I	H	Q
B	T	M	W	S	E	U	I
S	L	E	D	D	H	R	G
X	E	H	E	L	P	Q	G

WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION ANNUAL NEWSLETTER



WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION

FUNDING THE SEMINARY LIBRARY

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Ephesians 2:8-9

"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them." Romans 12:6a

Gifts

The two texts quoted above mention gifts. We recognize that Jesus Christ is the most wonderful, gracious gift of all, coming to a broken world to redeem his people and save them from their sins. From that one gift comes gifts too numerous to mention! God then works thankfulness in our hearts so that while we live out our lives serving him, we in turn want to use our gifts to be a blessing to others. Although the gifts we have to offer are so meager when we consider what we have received, what joy there is when we use our gifts according to the *grace given to us*.

We would like to take this moment then to thank our WSA representatives for using their *gifts* to support the CRTS Library in prayer and by collecting for the Women's Savings Action—*Funding the Seminary Library*, every year again. We are truly grateful for the *gift* of our dedicated reps because the seminary library is not part of the annual budget and relies on the *gifts* collected by our churches. We could not do the work we do without the *gift* of our church community. (I wonder how often we could slip the word *gift* into our everyday conversations!)

As you know, the culmination of our work is presented at the annual seminary convocation by means of a cheque gifted to the library. With great thankfulness to the Lord, our reps collected \$41,854.92 over the past year and so we were able to pledge \$40,000 to fund the seminary library. We are so thankful for this generosity of our supportive churches, especially since last year with its cloud of uncertainty we collected a little under \$27,000. Our reps helped us to bridge the gap.

Remember?

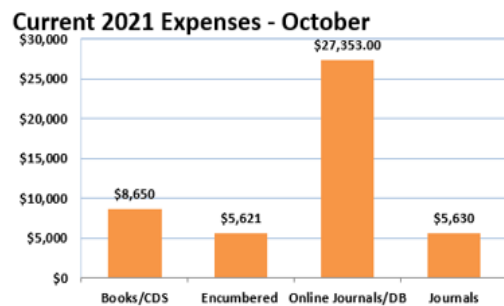
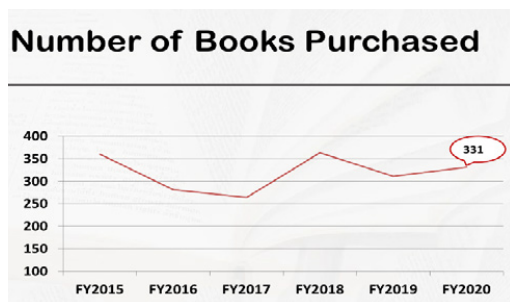
Remember we mentioned last year that we have real concern that as the older generation disappears so will the support of our seminary library? Remember we thought it might be wise to consider reaching out to our local schools with some of our videos in order that we might reach the younger generations? Well, we have some good news! We now have a video that can be shown at all the schools, complete with worksheets and follow-up activities that are grade appropriate. For any of you that may have live streamed the 2021 convocation, perhaps you remember that the WSA presentation focused around a movie trailer for this video, starring grade four students touring the seminary and the library. WSA has reached out to all of the twenty-three elementary schools, asking permission to show the video and if perhaps it can be incorporated with a reading/book week or outreach program that the school might already have. A number of schools have already shown the video and we've received positive reviews. Two schools even held a collection, contributing approximately \$200 each. Please note that school collections are not meant to replace the work our reps do in their churches. The purpose is to "teach the next generation" about the

WSA, though asking the children to bring in some “mission money” for this cause could also be a part of this teaching process.

Considering this ambitious project, if you would like to be involved, we’d love to hear from you! Please email your local rep or a WSA committee member. You can find contact information in the Yearbook or by going to the CRTS website, and clicking on the *Library* tab.

Stats

Our dedicated and efficient librarian takes care of “all things library.” She also keeps us informed and educated on expenditures, needs, and cost. Here’s just a couple of the many interesting stats she presents every year at our WSA meeting:



Please note that we do not have much wiggle room to cover expenses once our surplus funds from our special anniversary collection are depleted. It will be difficult to make up the difference between collections and expenditures in the next few years.

Did you know that?

If every confessing member donated just five dollars annually, we would have sufficient funding.

Donations can be made on-line through CanadaHelps.org link (search: CRTS). The link can also be found on the CRTS website. Please encourage your congregation to *include the specific name of their church in the box marked “company info”* to ensure that the donation is attributed to the right congregation.

You can email money transfers to wsa@crt.ca (password: crtswsa). Please encourage your congregation to *include their mailing address and specific church name in the ‘message’ box*. Again, this is very helpful for our treasurer so that she knows who is donating and what church they attend. Thank you!

Signing off

As we embark on the year of our Lord 2022, your WSA committee is encouraged and grateful to see that our reps continue go about their work. We are also thankful that our church community continues to give to a cause that is over fifty years old and yet remains so relevant and important to the work of our Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. We thank God that the seminary continues to bless our federation with ministers of the Word, of which we are all beneficiaries, and recognize that the culture of our times can never stop the faithful teaching and preaching of God’s servants. Another gift to be so thankful for. ☺

Blessings to all of you,
 Deb Alkema, *Secretary*
 Karen Schuurman, *Treasurer*
 Janet VanVliet, *President*



For You and Your Children: Discover Baptism in the Bible

P.G. BOON

For You and Your Children (141 pages) was published by the author in Pretoria, South Africa. It is available via Reformed Book Services in Brantford, ON at reformedbookservices.com for \$12.75 CDN. You are also welcome to contact the author at fampgboon@gmail.com

This book review by Stephen 't Hart was first published in *Una Sancta* and is published now in *Clarion* with permission.


There's a limited number of onesies, baby blankets, and toys that a newborn baby needs, and so although these make great gifts there's reason to sometimes think of giving something else. For the last few years, when we've visited a family that just received a baby, Dorinda and I have often chosen to give the gift of a child's story Bible or else a book on parenting. We intend to keep that up, but there's a new book that we'll be enthusiastically giving out: *For You and Your Children: Discover Baptism In The Bible*. This book was written by Rev. Dr. Pieter Boon of our sister churches in South Africa and it's a one-month devotional that examines the biblical meaning of baptism. Each of the thirty-one meditations has a short Scripture passage to read, followed by a clear explanation of that passage and its connection to baptism, and then a single question for reflection and discussion. The book is further divided into six sections: covenant, purification, become like children, for you and your children, the baptism of Jesus, and saving water.

For You and Your Children is easy to read but is still theologically deep. In the preface Rev. Boon writes, "Difficult questions are not shunned! However, debate is not the main focus, but amazement about what the Bible reveals about baptism." And, "My focus is more on the pastoral level of everyday family and church life." Dr. Boon has succeeded in this very well.

As I read through the book, I often found myself wondering if it would cover topics such as the connection between

circumcision and baptism, the difference between the baptism of John the Baptist and Christian baptism, a defence of infant baptism, the so-called baptism in the Spirit, the connection between covenant and election, and the connection between baptism and what the book of Revelation says about having our robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. As I read further into Rev. Boon's book, I was delighted to see a meditation dealing with each one of those topics, and more.

This devotional has been nicely type-set, with a good-sized, easy-to-read font, sufficient space between the lines, and wide margins. The book itself is dedicated to Rev. Boon's brother-in-law Alex. Alex was a professional artist and had been asked to do the illustrations for this book, but the Lord took this brother to himself before he was able to do this. The task of illustrating was then taken up by Rev. Boon's wife Jenny, who is also an excellent artist. Both the front cover and the drawings interspersed throughout the book are delightful. My personal favourite is the one on page sixty-eight, where Jenny did a great job drawing her husband Pieter on a swing besides a three-year-old boy.

Rev. Boon writes that the intended audience for this book is parents who have recently had their baby baptised, but that it's also suitable for bible study groups. I suggest it would also be suitable for family devotions more widely, including families with teenaged children. 

PRESS RELEASE



Classis Contracta Central Ontario

Friday, January 14, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.

Held Via Zoom

On behalf of the convening church, Rehoboth, Rev. Clarence VanderVelde opened the meeting with Scripture reading and prayer. The credentials were examined and the six primary delegates from Blessings, Rehoboth, and Redemption churches were present. Rev. Gregory Davidson was also present.

Classis Contracta was constituted. The agenda was adopted.

After examining the necessary documentation, Classis approbated the call extended to Rev. Gregory Davidson by Blessings Christian Church. The Form of Subscription for Ministers was read and signed. Rehoboth Church was appointed to represent CCO at the installation of Rev. Gregory Davidson on Sunday, January 16, 2022.

The Acts and press release were drafted and approved by the suggested officers. Rev. Jake Torenvliet led in closing prayer. The meeting was adjourned. 

Rev. Jake Torenvliet
Clerk

