

Clarion

*Prayer: A Barometer of the Soul
Highlights of General Synod
War in Ukraine*



Clarion

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

With thanks to our heavenly Father, General Synod Guelph 2022 could finish its work in ten intense days, which is about average for our last several general synods. The provisional Acts have been published online at canrc.org and will be available in print later this summer, the Lord willing. Then it will be the task of members and churches alike to review the Acts and take stock of decisions. To help with that, we present an overview of Synod's major decisions by Rev. Eric Kampen, who served as vice-chairman. And for the great majority of us who have never served at a general synod, the "Day in a life of a . . . Synod Delegate" article will be, I think, rather interesting. For all those who have sacrificed time, energy, and talent to serve at this or previous synods, thank you for your labour of love.

Prayer is another theme in this issue as Rev. Matthew VanLuik urges us in the editorial to take prayer seriously as a barometer of our souls. Rev. George van Popta lays before us a new musical rendition of the Lord's Prayer, while Rev. Ben Schoof meditates on Paul's prayer, "May love abound." May these pieces inspire us to be more intentional and diligent in our prayers.

As Russia's unjustified invasion of Ukraine carries on and many innocent lives are lost, injured, or otherwise damaged, it is helpful to gain deeper insight into President Putin's motives through the pen of Rev. Eric van Alten who has lived in the Ukraine. Switching gears, have you wondered what the Holy Spirit was doing in the Old Testament period and what changed with the coming of Christ? Rev. William den Hollander (sr.) tackles this question in the column *You Asked*.

Mr. Keith Sikkema gives us part two of his five-part church history series on the person and work of Douwe VanderWerp, a man whom the Lord used to help reform his church in the Netherlands—and also later in America (mid 1800s). Issue 13 is filled out with an introduction to br. Joel Slomp of Alberta in the *Ray of Sunshine* column and an update from MERF about the spread of the gospel in the old Persian language Farsi, which is still spoken in large swaths of the Middle East. The internet is a powerful tool for this work. *Clarion Kids* brings to our children a fun lesson on our only Saviour Jesus from Lord's Day 11. Enjoy!

Peter Holtvlüwer

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EDITORIAL

Prayer: A Barometer of the Soul

“I find prayer to be hard” is not an uncommon lament. Usually it expresses a genuine desire to be able to communicate more easily with the Lord. As the conversation continues, it becomes clear they do pray but they seek something better. “I wish I could pray like you,” they say, not understanding that there are also times a pastor scrambles to find the words to express what is in his heart.

Prayer is not about performance, or about saying things well and beautifully; it is an honest and open communication with the Lord. The Lord is not seeking well-thought-out or eloquent prayers, but that we open our heart to him. Prayer is the barometer for our spiritual life, it is the measure by which we come to see our spiritual health with the Lord.

Central to our life

Prayer must be central in the lives of God’s children. Paul often writes that he is constantly praying for the congregation to whom he is writing. He encourages the Ephesians (6:18) to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” We clearly get a sense that prayer was an integral part of his daily life. Paul realizes that he cannot effectively proclaim the gospel without constantly seeking the help of God. The Lord must be central to our life if we are to accomplish anything in his service.

The danger for believers is that our Christian life just becomes a way of life. We grow up in the church, we have our social interactions with other Christians, and we have adopted a certain lifestyle that we think agrees with the will of God. We may even feel pretty good about ourselves when we compare our life to the evil in the world around us. But what is true religion, or better, what does it mean to be a true child of God? God’s purpose in Christ Jesus is to restore us to a living relationship with him.

Our focus

The great theme of Scripture is that God comes in Christ to enter into a covenant with us. It begins with God promising to give Eve a son (seed) who will restore mankind to fellowship with the LORD. Later God says to Israel, “You will be my people and I will be your God.” The LORD comes to enjoy fellowship with his people. He is a Father who loves to hear the voice of his children.

Therefore, when prayer is not a central part of our life, it is like living without God. When you do not pray, you push God out of your life and act as if you can manage without the LORD. Often prayer only becomes useful to us when we are in trouble and need the LORD to help us. If we are honest, too often we only see the LORD as a source of help but not as someone with whom we feel comfortable to build a relationship.

What is the image that we have of God? Theologically we may think about God as a great being, who is so much greater than I am. How can we be comfortable in pouring out the troubles in our heart to God? Yet that is the example we have in the Psalms, for the psalmists pour out their troubles to the LORD, plead with him for his mercy, and rejoice and praise him for his greatness and goodness.

Our relationship with God

Prayer becomes hard when we do not feel comfortable exposing our hearts to the LORD. It is hard when you do not feel free to speak to him about your struggles against sin or are afraid to tell him about your fears or worries. But we have the example of Jesus. The Gospels often tell us that he withdrew to a quiet place to pray to his Father. Why does the Lord Jesus need to pray? We may think that since he is God, he is powerful and strong and doesn’t need his Father. Yet he prays to the Father because he loves him so. Although Jesus can do all things, still he seeks the comfort and strength of his Father amid his troubles. The thing that distresses the Lord the most on the cross is that he is forsaken by his Father.

If that bond is the most important thing in his life, how much more should our bond with the Father be our priority? We are dependent on the Father for everything. Our strength is that we have a Father who cares for and loves us. Therefore, we want to be constant in prayer. As an elderly sister fondly remembers her mother as a “praying mother,” may we be known as a “praying people.” 📖



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May Love Abound

“It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.” (PHILIPPIANS 1:9)

We’re all rejoicing in, looking for, or mourning the loss of love. Whether it’s secular songs, Disney movies, or Sunday sermons, love is the main thing. We all want to be loved and to love.

I don’t think you’d find too many people who would trade a loving spouse or family for money or success. But a lot of very rich and successful lonely people would trade it all for more love. Male, female, rich, poor, we all want love. And our text is a prayer for love, and for that love to abound.

Note first that it *doesn’t* tell us who our love is for. And so included is both God and people (our family, church family, and neighbours). Our love for both God and people needs to grow. In fact, one cannot grow without the other.

So, how does love grow? If you watch enough Disney movies, you learn that love comes “automatically.” The hero and heroine look at each other and on that first glance they just know. They are in love. We know that’s not how falling in love works! Even recent Disney movies poke fun at that idea. But perhaps even we assume that love *grows* automatically. Just live or spend time with someone and love will abound.

But it’s not so easy! Since we’re sinners who sin against those we’re with, the default is that love will shrink over time. Unless we work at it. Our text tells us that for love to abound it must grow “in knowledge and depth of insight.”

Knowledge is facts and information. But we all know that you need more than just facts about someone to love them properly. Knowing your year of birth and eye colour doesn’t help much. I need to know how you’re doing, what’s going on in your life, what struggles you might be having, or what blessings you’ve received. Then I know how to love you well. And so in Scripture knowledge that leads to love is about relationships.

To love God, we need to know what God loves and what God hates. His commandments. Being busy with his Word. We know this well. And yet often we don’t do anything about it. We neglect God’s Word and personal devotions. We have a surface-level awareness of our brothers and sisters. Not deep knowledge.

And so, for love to grow, our text also encourages us to grow in all “discernment.” Discernment is about *using* what you know about someone to act in love toward them. Discernment is to

distinguish between what is right and wrong. To be able to do or say the right thing in any situation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ had such true love. He came down to earth to be God *with us*, Immanuel. He learned by experience what it is like to live as a mortal human being on this earth full of trials and temptations. But he did more than just know. In love he also acted to do what is best to save us from our sorrows and sins, by dying on the cross for us.

And so if you, like Christ, have knowledge and discernment, you will be able to approve what is best. You will know God’s law, and act according to it. You will know the needs of those around you and you will help them accordingly.

Later in Philippians 1 we get a great example of this from Paul. Some missionaries are preaching nearby in order to make trouble for Paul. He knows that they are preaching not for true motives but out of envy and rivalry. Their motives may be wrong, and Paul may encounter difficulty. But in the end they are preaching Christ. Love is growing, lost souls are being saved. So Paul says, “What do I care about myself?” Christ is proclaimed and so I rejoice.

That is love! May our unselfish love also abound more and more. 🙏

For further study

1. Read Philippians 1.
2. Are you growing in knowledge about God and your neighbour? If not, how can you?
3. How do you struggle to do the loving thing you know you should? Would it help to find someone to assist in holding you accountable?



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Highlights of General Synod 2022

Official Press Release

ERIC KAMPEN

On May 10, 2022, the twenty-third general synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches was convened by the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church in Guelph. It was a synod that began by listening to God's voice as revealed in his Word, and was concluded by hearing God's voice in creation.

God's voice in his Word

As is customary, on the evening preceding the convening of Synod, a prayer service was held. This was led by Rev. Douwe Agema, who was chairman of the previous synod, held in Edmonton in 2019. He preached on Psalm 119:57-64 under the theme, "The Spirit teaches us to handle rightly the Word of Truth." He impressed on the delegates that they had been tasked by the churches to serve the churches in total submission to the Word of God. He added that it was the prayer that the Spirit would give the strength and wisdom to handle the Word rightly so that all glory would go to our Lord and King, Jesus Christ.

On May 10, Rev. Peter Feenstra, emeritus minister of the Emmanuel Church, guided the process to come to the

constitution of Synod. The delegates elected Rev. John Ludwig as chairman, Rev. Eric Kampen as vice-chairman, Rev. Karlo Janssen as clerk, and Rev. Carl Van Dam as second clerk. The agenda items were divided over five committees. As each synod is free to decide on the format of the Acts, it was decided to work with a different format than used by previous synods, in the hope that the Acts would be more reader friendly.

The first week of Synod saw the delegates immersing themselves in the agenda items assigned to them, seeking to work in humble submission to God's Word. To serve the members of the churches, this review will touch on the matters dealt with in a topical manner.

Interchurch relationships

A major item on the agenda of every synod is interchurch relationships. For many years, the relationships were dealt with by two committees, one maintaining contact with various churches in North America and another maintaining contact with churches throughout the world. Synod decided to make this one committee, as there is overlap in meeting with churches in ecclesiastical fellowship at various international gatherings.



Hosts of the 2022 Synod - Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church in Guelph, Ontario

A proposal about developing various categories for exercising ecumenical relations, rather than our current way of only having one category, was referred back to the committee for refinement, with the instruction to reflect on the feedback provided by the churches.

Synods also are occasions where visits are made by representatives of churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship. Guests were present in person from all over the globe, including South Africa, Australia, and Korea. These guests were given the opportunity to address Synod, passing on greetings. Some of those who had been invited, but were not able to attend, delivered greetings via video links. Others sent letters of greetings. These interactions with delegates from various churches throughout the world gave visible expression of the catholicity of the church. It was striking that a number of presentations concluded with Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain."

In reviewing the reports of the committees looking after interchurch relationships, and hearing the presentations of the guests, Synod was made aware of the struggles and joys of these various churches throughout the world. A general theme was that, while COVID had been hard on the churches, God had graciously preserved his churches through this time.

Book of Praise

The previous synod had mandated the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise (SCBP) to suggest some more hymns, as well as psalm versions with different melodies, for testing in the churches. The Committee put in a herculean effort over the past three years to fulfill this mandate, soliciting song suggestions, coming up with a suggested list of hymns and psalms, receiving and considering feedback, and then preparing a report for this synod. The whole process of testing these songs was greatly hindered by the inability to gather for worship because of the COVID outbreak. When all the factors were considered, Synod considered it best to provisionally approve the psalms and hymns, deleting a few as suggested by the SCBP, for use in the worship services. The Committee was mandated to serve Synod 2025 with final recommendations based on further review of feedback received.

Synod also had to deal with overtures to eliminate the hymn cap of one hundred hymns, set by Synod Chatham 2004. The overtures argued that removing this cap need not jeopardize the priority of the use of the psalms in worship. Synod was not persuaded and decided to retain the hymn cap. Retaining this cap, however, will not affect the testing of hymns during the worship service for the next three years.

Under the heading of the *Book of Praise*, mention can be made of suggestions regarding forms for the celebration of the



One of the many Plenary Sessions

Lord's Supper. It was decided to remove the qualifier "For the second service" from the abbreviated form. That qualifier was put in place in a time when churches would have a celebration of the Lord's Supper in both services on a Sunday. It now enables the churches to use this as an alternate form. There was also an overture to adopt some shorter forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Synod decided to mandate the SCBP to present the next general synod with more possible forms, perhaps using some of the forms of our sister churches.

Our Seminary

A highlight of this synod was the appointment of Dr. Reuben Bredenhof, Minister of the Free Reformed Church of Mt. Nasura, Western Australia, as Professor of Ministry and Mission at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). His appointment was necessitated by the upcoming retirement of Dr. A. de Visser at the end of the Academic Year 2022/23, at which time he will have served the churches at CRTS for nineteen years. On Monday evening, May 16, Dr. Bredenhof addressed the members of Synod and guests via video link. He indicated that it was most humbling to receive this expression of trust, and to be granted the beautiful opportunity and privilege to train young men who are getting ready for a life of ministry and mission at CRTS. He thankfully accepted the appointment and was eagerly looking forward to beginning his task. Dr. de Visser also spoke

to the Synod and guests, expressing gratitude to the Lord for the opportunity to serve the churches for eighteen years in his task at the seminary.

Synod dealt with many other matters related to the Seminary and preparation for the ministry. It received the general report on the operations of the Seminary over the past number of years, as well as reports about funding for the pastoral training program and the fund for needy students. With much thankfulness it could be noted that the Seminary is able to continue to do its work of teaching men for the ministry of the gospel.

Related to the work of the training for the ministry of the gospel, Synod dealt with an overture which recommended that preparatory examination of students, when they are declared eligible for call, should be conducted in the classis of their home church before they went to the Seminary. This would apply only to students originating within the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches. For many years, the bulk of that responsibility fell on Classis Ontario West, as the students were members of churches in that classis. Synod adopted this overture, effective January 2023. This will greatly alleviate the workload of Classis Ontario West.

Other matters

Synod dealt with many other matters, such as reports from committees looking after the federation website (canrc.org),



All Synod Delegates, Fraternal Delegates and Foreign (Guest) Delegates in attendance on Thursday, May 12, 2022.

Bible translation, archives, and days of prayer. It also had to deal with a number of appeals. Synod appointed the church at Aldergrove to convene the next General Synod in 2025.

God's voice in creation

It may not be apparent from this brief review, but the delegates spent an intense ten days discussing, reflecting, considering, and debating. Each day was opened and closed with reading God's Word and asking for his blessing. There was the desire to deal in a just and righteous manner with all the matters on the agenda, so that the Christ, the king of the church, would be glorified and his people served.

In his concluding remarks, the chairman, Rev. John Ludwig, expressed his thankfulness that Synod could be conducted in a brotherly manner, even when there were differences of opinion. He also acknowledged how so many members of the Guelph-Emmanuel church willingly gave of their time and talents to help Synod function well. The delegates enjoyed many excellent meals and benefited from the skilled IT and secretarial help. As a token

of appreciation, the church was presented with a picture of a Guelph landmark, with a plaque expressing gratitude for hosting Synod. The chairman was given a ceremonial aluminum gavel with the date of the synod inscribed. Thanksgiving prayer was then offered to our gracious God for his blessing over Synod, but just before the "Amen" could be said, we heard the voice of God as described in Psalm 29. The powerful voice of the LORD thundered, the waters poured from the heavens, and the power went out and remained out for more than twenty-four hours! We enjoyed a final meal in dimmed lighting, said our farewells, and began our homeward journeys. 🇨🇦



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A Day in the Life... of a Synod Delegate

ILSE VANDERMEULEN

Bert Vane is retired from his self-owned landscaping business, a member of Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church in BC, and a delegate for General Synod 2022 in Guelph. Not many of us will ever be a delegate, so what does being a member of a general synod entail? How do you prepare for and do all the work? And is it intimidating to contribute amongst ministers and theologians who have a few more letters behind their names?

Brother Bert Vane is currently an elder and chairman of council at Aldergrove CanRC. He has also served as chairman of the Brazil Mission Board and volunteered for Wagner Hills, a treatment centre for addictions. "I also serve God as father of three children still at home (out of eleven). And I have time as a retired person to read and study and help more in the congregation."

Regional synods appoint delegates to general synod: twenty-four in total. Brother Vane let his name stand and the synod in Guelph was the second national synod he participated in. "This being my second time going to general synod, preparation was done differently. The first time I read and knew what was in the documents and I thought I was prepared, but this time I spent more time on why I leaned a certain direction. What are the biblical principles? What is healthy for the church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and for us as federation?"

Leaving his hobby farm for two to three weeks, Bert and his wife Linda took an RV across Canada to Guelph. "I do look

forward to the discussions and I do come with an open mind on wanting to hear the opinions of the other delegates and to see it from their perspective. There are a lot of different thoughts out there and we are not unified as churches on all the issues and to hear the other delegates is important to me before I come to a final decision." Synod also offers an opportunity to meet many old faces from the past as well as new faces, and to enjoy great food and fellowship.

Subcommittees

One of the first items on the agenda of general synod is appointing the chair, vice chair, first and second clerk. These executive members then propose that synod arrange itself into four subcommittees of five members each (the executive forms a fifth committee of sorts) in order to collaborate together in proposing decisions on the various agenda items assigned to each committee. Brother Vane was appointed to the advisory committee dealing with churches abroad as well as churches in North America. It so happened that he dealt with the same topic in his advisory committee when at General Synod Edmonton 2019.

"The first time I came down I was very nervous, very intimidated. I hardly ever spoke at synod. The first time you have to figure it out, but now that I knew [what to expect], I am a lot more comfortable and relaxed, especially on why do you stand where you are [on a topic]." The committees meet and try to



One of many subcommittee meetings.



Bert Vane.

find a direction. They will also consult with the plenary session and take guidance and advice. "If we go a certain direction and that is not how the body wants to go, then we can adjust."

After the evening sessions, brother Vane needs his rest and steps away from the materials. "You do think about it of course. I am a morning person, so once I knew which committee I was on, I would re-read the material before the sessions." He brought his bike and enjoyed a good bike ride in the early morning to get mentally ready for the day. Brother Vane also seeks strength through prayer. "When I do study in my office, I do go into prayer to make sure I ask the LORD for guidance. Being nervous and all that, I was happy after the first day that I was able to do some procedural things and felt more confident. I thank the LORD in regard to those things. I do feel that strength from the LORD."

Each committee meets to discuss the materials (e.g. reports, letters, appeals) received by Synod and assigned to a given committee. "First, we get a feel for the various issues. And then we set a bit of an agenda on how we are going to do it and the wisest is to first tackle the hardest issues as they often determine the outcome of smaller issues." Committee proposals are sent to the clerk to be put in a certain format. These in turn are brought forward to the whole synod for discussion and votes.

Harmony

General Synod Guelph needed just under two weeks to work through its agenda. "A few items we could defer to the next synod," explained brother Vane, "as churches needed more time to be informed (mainly because of COVID). A good example of this is proposed changes to the *Book of Praise*." He looks back on the good harmony and brotherly cooperation with gratitude. "I did expect some things to go differently, and there were passionate speeches sometimes, but it is healthy to have differences of opinion."

Looking forward to going home and taking up his tasks in Aldergrove, brother Vane is thankful and honoured to have had the opportunity to be at General Synod 2022. "It's been really good," he says. "The people in Guelph did an exceptional job organizing. Next synod will be in my hometown of Aldergrove and it will be a challenge to match Guelph!" 🇨🇦



Ilse Vandermeulen

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This article is a translation of "Oorlog in Oekraïne," first published in April 2022 in *Neder Bekeken* 29(4): 126-129.

War in Ukraine

ERIC VAN ALTEN

Translated by Mieke deGelder

As I write this, we are already into the seventh week of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. More than 4.7 million refugees have left the country since the start of the war, and more than 7.1 million have been internally displaced. Ukrainian villages have been completely destroyed by Russian missile attacks. Almost 2000 Ukrainians, including women and children, have died, although this figure likely underrepresents the reality (figures as of April 12, 2022). A humanitarian disaster is rapidly evolving. And in the meantime, Russia says: "We do not want war, but we have no other choice."

.....
a noble objective,
on the face of it.
.....



Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ/Russian Armed Forces, Patriot Park, near Moscow.

Is this assurance coming from the mouth of Russian President Vladimir Putin credible? Is war really Russia's last resort?

Putin's false narrative

The Kremlin's narrative is clear: there is abuse—even genocide!—of Russian citizens and Russian-speaking residents taking place in Ukraine, particularly in the separatist areas of Donetsk and Luhansk. This exploitation—so the story goes—is the work of the Nazi regime in Kiev. Hence Moscow's decision to “demilitarize” and “de-Nazify” Ukraine by way of a “special military operation” to protect Russian citizens. At stake, in other words, is self-defense: a noble objective, on the face of it. In Europe especially the use of the Nazi motif can count on being met with widespread sympathy.

On closer inspection however, this narrative is devoid of all truth. The most obvious reason is that the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, is of Jewish descent: his grandfather survived the Holocaust. And when Zelenskyy became President in 2019, the Prime Minister was a man named Volodymyr Groysman—likewise a Ukrainian of Jewish descent. Both have

attested that their Jewish ancestry never played any role in their being Ukrainian. These facts make a mockery of Russia's allegations of a Nazi regime in Kiev.

Furthermore, there is also no evidence of genocide or ill-treatment of any minority groups in Ukraine. No one denies that there are small, far-right groups in Ukraine, but in the most recent election they won just over two percent of the votes. Moreover, since then their influence has diminished further. In effect, the protection of Russian minorities against far-right extremists is not necessary. The Kremlin's narrative simply makes no sense.

And what of the accusation that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) poses a threat to Russia? Well, the reality is probably the other way around: Russia's gradual and subtle occupation of other countries' land (think of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Donbas) poses a threat to NATO countries, with the effect that NATO is bolstering its line of defense on its eastern border. The opposite of Russia's accusation is therefore the case. And isn't that typical? Russia creates the problem (by occupying other countries' territories); NATO

Not everyone is equally happy with this fusion of faith, military power, and politics, but ultimately, it *is* supported there where it matters the most: in the highest circles of the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church

(which is essentially a defense organization) responds by guarding their borders; and Russia says “Look, you are threatening us!” Or, in the words of President Zelenskyy: “If you want to know what Russia is doing or intends to do, just listen to what they are accusing others of.” Here too then, the Kremlin’s narrative is far removed from the truth.

But we need to dig yet deeper. . . .

A revealing cathedral

In June 2020 the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ was ceremoniously opened in Patriot Park, just outside Moscow: not such a remarkable event in itself, for in the decades since the fall of Communism, hundreds of new churches have been built and come into use (twenty-five in 2018 in Moscow alone). And yet this cathedral urges our specific attention.

Formally called the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ, it is popularly known as the Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces: a church for the Russian army, therefore. The exterior finish is of camouflage colours, while the interior is filled with mosaics and murals depicting battle scenes from Russian history alongside Bible texts. The Russian victory over the Nazis in the Great Patriotic War (World War II) is particularly emphasized in and around this cathedral. Two controversial mosaics that were initially part of the planning but later omitted were (1) a depiction of a jubilant parade following the Soviet Union’s victory over Nazi Germany, showing soldiers holding up a poster of Joseph Stalin; and (2) an image of Vladimir Putin and other dignitaries upon the takeover of Crimea in 2014 accompanied by the words *Krym nash* (Crimea is ours). Putin and Stalin, almost included in the lavish decoration of an Orthodox church dedicated to the Russian army. How is this possible?

Well, in order to understand this, it is key to recognize that there is a *rehabilitation of war* taking place in post-Soviet Orthodoxy. In the immediate aftermath of Communism, the general stance toward the Russian army and military service was decidedly negative. But thanks to the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, a kind of piety gradually began to emerge in regard to military service—a piety we do not encounter in other Orthodox traditions. For example, military personnel who have died in battle are often seen as a special unit of saints, interceding in heaven on behalf of other soldiers and the people. This theological reflection on military service on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church is also apparent in that priests of the church are very active in the dedication and sanctification of military vehicles, armaments, military complexes, and even nuclear weapons. And the matter becomes even more concrete when we hear that private military companies involved in the 2014 Donbas conflict described their activities as “a war for Holy Russia” and referred to themselves as a “Russian Orthodox army.”

Hence, the merging of the Orthodox faith with depictions of the most glorious military victories in Russian history as visible in the Cathedral of the Armed Forces is no anomaly. On the contrary, it shows that war and the use of military force have become an essential part of Russia’s religion and national identity. Not everyone is equally happy with this fusion of faith, military power, and politics, but ultimately, it is supported there where it matters the most: in the highest circles of the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church. This symphony of state and church¹ has been working together for decades to make military struggle part of a renewed Russian identity.

And so, for Vladimir Putin to claim that war is the last resort is simply not credible. In the Russian ideology, which Putin has

¹ See “The Picture in Putin’s Head,” *Clarion* (Vol 71, No 8).

been actively promoting since the early 2000s, war is far from the last resort: it forms an essential part of it! Indeed, the mosaics inside the Cathedral of the Armed Forces illustrate as much for all to see: the invasion of Georgia in 2008; the annexation of Crimea in 2014; the fight against international terrorism in Syria since 2015. And all this is ecclesiastically confirmed when the Patriarch of Moscow, Kirill, does not condemn the invasion of Ukraine but rather defends it. In a sermon on March 6 he stated, among other things: “We have entered into a struggle that has not a physical, but a metaphysical significance.”

Kirill’s position has been strongly criticized by the Ukrainian churches—not only by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate (from whom it is to be expected), but also by that part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that has remained loyal to the Patriarch of Moscow. Several bishops have instructed their priests to stop praying for Kirill (as is customary), and there are also a number of dioceses that are considering separating off from Moscow and joining the Kiev Patriarchate instead. Cyril Hovorun, professor of ecclesiology at the Stockholm School of Theology, believes that Kirill’s position is essentially one of finding himself in a “golden cage:” he helped to provide the ideology that is justifying Putin’s claim to Ukraine, and in return the Russian Orthodox Church has received many benefits. And “even if he [Kirill] understands what is going on in Ukraine with the war, even if he wants to speak up and name things by their proper name, he can’t. . . . He is a completely unfree figure [who] needs to follow faithfully the official narrative.”²

The risen Christ


Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is therefore not the last resort. It is the conscious deed of a man who made military action part of his ideology in his quest to realize *his* ideal Russia by way of one Orthodox tradition.

But when you walk up the stairs of the Cathedral of the Armed Forces—stairs made of molten Nazi weapons, so that you are literally stepping on the enemy, “validating” the reference to the Kiev government as “Nazis”—and enter the church, one of the first icons you encounter is this: the risen Christ with a sword in his hand!

It is this Christ to whom Putin will eventually have to give account of his hungering after power and land. And it is this Christ who is mightily at work in Ukraine right now. No, not

necessarily with the sword of war and violence (although the Ukrainian resistance to the Russian invasion cannot but be described as a work of divine grace), but all the more with the sword of his Word. Far from a silent icon in a Russian cathedral, Christ is actively working among the golden lampstands (Rev 1:12–13). He is embodied in the actions of his followers both in and far beyond Ukraine (Matt 25:31–46). He is embodied in believers who have opted to stay in cities like Kharkiv, Mariupol, and Kiev in order to serve their fellow citizens with the Word and prayer, with food and medicine: believers leading frightened civilians in prayer and song. He is embodied in believers who have fled to the west of the country and are putting all their energy into bringing women and children safely across the border to Poland, Hungary, or Romania. He is embodied in soup kitchens across neighbouring European countries, where Ukrainians are being welcomed with open arms. He is embodied in the millions of dollars and euros already raised by Christian organizations worldwide to assist and care for Ukrainian fellow believers. This Christ – together with his armed angelic forces – is traveling around Ukraine, protecting young Christian brothers who have had to take up arms against a Russian force. This Christ is not in a cathedral just outside Moscow; he is working for his church in Ukraine. And he is fighting with a weapon mightier than Putin will ever possess: the Word of the gospel!

Patriarch Kirill was right when he emphasized the metaphysical dimension of this war, though unfortunately he finds himself on the wrong side of the battle. But that it is a metaphysical battle is doubtlessly the case: a battle against evil. Seldom in the history of the world has the pure evil of an attack been as evident as it is in this war—so much so that even non-Christians are sensing it. And so, we may boldly sing from Psalm 63 at this time:

*When foes your servant seek to slay,
In yawning pits will earth receive them.
The sharpened sword will sorely grieve them;
They will become the jackal’s prey.
But then the king in God will glory
With all who swear by his great name,
For liars he will put to shame
And silence every adversary.
(Psalm 63:4, Book of Praise) *

² See <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/russias-patriarch-kirill-defends-invasion-ukraine-stoking-orthodox-tensions>



Shining the Light in Farsi

Even before the rise of the Persian empire, Isaiah 44 & 45 prophesied the name of its great leader. That king returned the Israelites from exile in 538 BC, to rebuild Jerusalem, anticipating the coming of God’s promised Messiah to bless all peoples. His dynasty extended Persian rule over a vast empire that then included almost half the world’s population.

Several centuries after Christ’s coming, Islam swept most of these areas. The Persian or Farsi language, however, is still spoken in Iran, areas of Afghanistan, Iraq & the Persian/Arabian Gulf states and Tajikistan. Yet, travel

and turmoil of our age, has carried Farsi-speakers to every corner of the globe. Most are Muslims, yet all celebrate the traditional pre-Islamic Persian New Year ‘Norooz’ on the first day of Spring.

Like the Arabic online ministry, MERF’s Farsi gospel ministry shares God’s Word in both indirect and direct formats. It uses online radio websites as well as multiple social media platforms. The internet serves the spread of the good news. The message now reaches Farsi-speakers far and wide 24 hours a day. There are many encouraging responses.



Radio ROSHDINO - Persian New Year greetings

Download MERF News at: powerofchristatwork.net



“Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.” - Psalm 74:12

Shadkami.org is the indirect outreach format. ‘Shadkami’ in Farsi means *Rejoice*. This online radio takes a magazine format. Its programs tactfully introduce Farsi-speakers to the life and teachings of Christ. It uses appealing audio, visual and print presentations suited to different ages and interests. Sometimes this includes poetry or prose, drama, topical discussions, songs or videos of nature along with Bible quotations.

All presentations gently lead to the core of the scriptural message. It points to the hopelessness of sinners, on the one hand, and to God’s gracious hope in Christ, on the other. Every month over 200 thousand view Shadkami YouTube channel videos. Tens of thousands visit the website monthly.

Roshdino.org is the direct outreach online format. It is meant for those already seriously interested in Bible knowledge, many of whom have already made a profession of faith. ‘Roshdino’ literally means *New Growth*. Every book of the Bible, other Farsi Christian literature and audiovisual resources are available to be read or downloaded from the site. Thousands visit the website monthly. Many regularly download materials. Every month over 80 thousand view Roshdino YouTube channel videos. Some visitors become regular subscribers. Others make contact with questions and comments. These are carefully followed up. Some of the most interested contacts meet online with the Farsi team leader

Continued on back



"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." - Acts 4:12

regularly for Bible study and prayer. This is very valuable because many Farsi-speaking people live in places where there are no churches or it is unsafe for them to attend a church.

M from Iran in Turkey asks for prayer after the rejection of his asylum case.

S from Iran says, "...Your programs of Radio Shadkami are really the cause of my joy and comfort!"

METF's Farsi Team

The Farsi team is made up of dedicated Farsi native speakers eager to use their gifts to

share Christ's gospel which has liberated them from the darkness of Islam. Although team members live in different places, they coordinate their work together over the internet. Their own spiritual journeys, from darkness to following "the Light of the World," enable them to understand and identify with the thoughts and struggles of their fellow Iranian listeners.

Some believers are having to flee their homeland. Praise God that after years of uncertainty, waiting and recent endangerment, the Lord has answered prayers for resettlement of a METF Farsi team member refugee family at the end of this month with church sponsorship in a safe country. Pray for their adjustment and for others like them.

Iranian believers greatly rejoice in their Savior. Some do so in the midst of loneliness and suffering. Online ministry provides them with comfort and at times enables them to link together for

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live"
— John 11:25

fellowship. For example, recently a very distressed Iranian sister in Christ connected with the team. She spoke of her painful circumstances. Her husband suddenly passed away. Even though he had confessed faith in Christ and received Christian baptism, his burial in Iran had to be according to Islamic rites. Praise God for the comfort she received that he belongs to Christ, the "Resurrection and Life," and that no matter what happens to the body, every soul who clings to Christ is safe for eternity. Halleluiah!

METF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support! Please make cheques payable to METF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through www.merf.org/support

e-transfers:
merfcanada@gmail.com



YouTube discussion on biblical fasting

Douwe Johannes VanderWerp

(1811-1876) PART 2

KEITH SIKKEMA

Church work

It's Saturday morning. Mr. VanderWerp has church work to do. Mr. Pietersen used to do it, but he got too old. He dons his flat cap and wooden *klompen* to walk to the white plastered church on the mound¹ in Niekerk. The morning fog is lifting; the sky is blue with a few clouds. White gulls swarm behind a plowman. Mr. VanderWerp waves at him and starts singing Psalm 19:

*The spacious heavens declare
God's glory everywhere;
the skies proclaim his might!*

He is young, and strong, and happy. He walks through the grass to avoid the ruts, and, curling his toes to keep his *klompen* from falling off, he jumps over puddles in his way. He doesn't want to slip and get wet and cold and dirty, because he has to clean the church today and get everything in order for tomorrow's services!

From afar, he spots the shimmering lion-weathervane² on the church steeple. It only takes fifteen minutes to get there. He

opens the gate and checks the church yard. The gravestones are upright, and there are no cow-patties. Good!

He steps inside, takes off his *klompen*, and lights a few candles to see better. He wipes the pulpit and the pews, checks the firewood for the stove, and sweeps the floor. It's not a big church, but the work must be done: People will come tomorrow to worship the LORD! When he thinks about this being the LORD's house, he starts singing Psalm 84, on slow and majestic whole notes, as always:

*O LORD of Hosts, almighty King,
The praises of your house I sing.
How lovely is your habitation!
How blest are those whose strength you are,
Who seek the ways that from afar
Lead them to Zion's holy places.*

He has a strong and clear voice, Mr. VanderWerp, and the psalm echoes through the church! This way, as he sings about praising the LORD, the work is a pleasure!

¹ In the Middle Ages, before dikes were built to protect low-lying flat coastal lands from flooding by the sea, people built mounds to flee to during storm-generated high tides.

² In 1629, Evert Lewe (Lion), a wealthy shareholder of the Dutch West-India Company whose Captain Piet Hein captured the Spanish Silver-fleet in 1628, paid for extensive repairs to the thirteenth century brick building. He had its steeple adorned with a lion, rather than a rooster as a weathervane.



The church in Niekerk, between Houwerzijl and Ulrum.

Before he is done, *Dominay* VanderHelm steps into the church. He always comes on Saturday mornings to tell him what the Sunday liturgy will be like. "Good afternoon, *Dominay*!" he greets the minister. "Good afternoon, brother!" the minister responds. "Let's have a look at the liturgy!"

It is also the teacher's task to read the law and the Scripture passage in church; and, as there is no organ yet,³ he must also make sure everyone starts singing at the same time, with the same tune. He sings well, especially when they sing psalms: That is praising God with his own words! He loves it.

He frowns a bit when *Dominay* VanderHelm shows him the songs. They are mostly evangelical hymns, and hardly any

psalms at all. Only some hymns praise God for his grace to rescue people from their sin and misery. Many are about being good and following Jesus as an example. Mr. VanderWerp doesn't care for those hymns. Church is meant to worship God, not to make people feel good about themselves.

"*Dominay*," he says honestly, "we sing too many hymns. We should sing more psalms. They are God's inspired words for us. Psalms are good and worthy of God our Creator. They sing of our creation and who we are. They tell about our salvation and how we should hope in God in our journey through life. They point us to Christ our Redeemer. Most hymns are from men and about men, and many of them are not good."

³ An organ was installed in 1883.

Dominay VanderHelm doesn't like that. He thinks that dumb custodians should not interfere with the liturgy—that's *his* task. He studied at university for that! He does not think much of the school either and homeschools his children. However, he is trying hard to be nice, and he smiles. "Ha, Mr. VanderWerp! Calvin was a long time ago, and we've come a long way since then. We must go with the times, brother! These hymns were approved by Synod nearly thirty years ago!" He doesn't say it, but he thinks that schools may teach about being good Christians, but not about sin and misery. He thinks that teachers may not offend any children from non-Christian families. Some psalms are pretty nasty, too, and just to be nice, he goes on, "Come on, brother, you must be a bit more tolerant! Anyway, I still have to work on my sermons . . . I'll see you in the morning!"

Dominay VanderHelm leaves, but Mr. VanderWerp is sad and sighs. He loves the LORD and wants to do what is right, but now he has an issue with the minister. It is not just about hymns. *Dominay* VanderHelm often says that you should not get stuck in old-fashioned thinking but must be tolerant of people with new ideas. Should he not teach the truth from the Bible? *Dominay* VanderHelm is stuck like *klompen* in the muck of tolerance and not taking the Bible for what it says.

To Mr. VanderWerp, the Bible is clear: All people are depraved and full of sin and misery. All deserve God's anger and wrath. Their salvation is only by God's free grace because Jesus washes away the believers' sins. *Dominay* VanderHelm is smart, but he leads people away from the LORD and the truth into the slimy pit of good-sounding lies, like . . . like a wolf that attacks the flock.

Conventicles

If God's people don't get spiritual food in the church, it is no wonder that they are often meeting in somebody's house after church or during the week, to encourage each other and to seek the LORD. These meetings are called Conventicles. Often one person reads a sermon by a faithful minister of long ago, an "Old Writer." They pray, they sing psalms, and share how the LORD is leading them to himself, and how they must be patient as they wait for him. Mr. VanderWerp thinks of Psalm 40, and softly sings the words to himself,


*I waited and I waited for the Lord.
Then from the pit he lifted me;
From clay and mire he set me free:
The Lord bent down to me, my cry he heard . . .*

He kneels down at a pew right there on the cold floor, and prays to God for patience and wisdom. He prays that God would hear him, and that people like *Dominay* VanderHelm might be lifted out of the clay and mire, out of the muck of improper tolerance, twisting the Bible, and leading people astray. The church needs to return to the firm truth of the Word of God. That can only happen by the power of the Holy Spirit. He trusts that God will hear him for Jesus's sake.

Mr. VanderWerp believes that God will hear him and not forget his people. But if only *Dominay* VanderHelm could speak to the hearts of the people who love and long for the LORD and want to walk with him! If only the warmth of the Conventicles could be present in the church on Sundays! How good and blessed it is to listen to the LORD's true words of salvation!

When he is finished, he goes to Ulrum to talk to his good friend *Dominay* Hendrick DeCock. It's only a thirty-minute walk further from home. He smiles when he sees the church steeple on the mound in the middle of Ulrum. It points up to heaven from where the LORD rules all things, and it has a lion for a weathervane. It makes him think of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who conquered.⁴ It comforts him. Just like that, he starts singing Psalm 56,

*For this I know, that God is at my side;
In him, whose word I praise, I will confide;
He heard my voice when in my fears I cried.
The LORD is my defender . . .*

In his white-plastered manse, across the yard from the church, *Dominay* DeCock is singing the same psalm. There are wolves on the loose that attack the sheep of the LORD. He is troubled, but comforted—because God is at his side. 



Keith Sikkema

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⁴ Revelation 5

Our Father in the Heavens

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

George van Popta

The Lord's Prayer

CRANHAM, alt.

$\text{♩} = 90$ *mp*

1. Our Fath - er in the heav - ens, great in maj - es - ty,
 2. May your great name be hal - lowed and by all a - dored.
 3. We pray that your great king - dom may come with haste.
 4. We pray, O heav - en - ly Fa - ther, may your will be done

for ev - er - more the rul - er, for e - ter - ni - ty.
 Teach us to know and serve you from your ho - ly word.
 Lay Sa - tan's dark do - min - ion ut - ter - ly to waste.
 by us, your lov - ing chil - dren, and by eve - ry - one.

mf

11 Turn to us in fa - vour; show to us your face
 May we show you hon - our and en - hance your fame
 Rule us by your Spir - it and by your word
 In our earth - ly du - ties, Fa - ther, oh may we,

mp

15 for you are rich in mer - cy and pa - ter - nal grace.
 that oth - ers too may wor - ship, prais - ing your great name.
 that we ac - knowl - edge you as our great King and Lord.
 like heaven's de - vot - ed an - gels al - ways faith - ful be.

2

20 *mp*

5. Give us, O God, we pray you, our dai - ly bread
 6. For - give our debts, O Sav - iour, do not them re - cord
 7. In - to temp - ta - tion do not lead us, O Lord,
 8. Yours is the king - dom, Fa - ther, yours a - lone the might;

25

that we your, need - y chil - dren, may each day be fed.
 but free - ly, par - don us as you have prom - ised, Lord.
 for we are prone to wan - der from your per - fect word.
 to you be - longs the glo - ry ra - di - ant and bright.

30 *mf*

May we free our trust from crea - tures here be - low
 Prompt - ed by the grace that you so free - ly give
 Strength - en us by your own Ho - ly Spir - it's might
 You are ev - er faith - ful, al - ways and a - gain.

34 *mp*

and look to you, our Fa - ther, from whom bless - ings flow.
 our neigh - bour's debts a - gainst us we too for - give.
 and put Sat - an and his de - mons to flight.
 To you we pray, O Fa - ther, A - men, A - men.

ERRATA

Dear Clarion readers,

In *Clarion* Vol 71 No 10, the footnotes from the article “Black Lives Matter: What Should We Think of It? (Part 2)” by Dick Wynia were mistakenly left out during the layout process. We apologize to the author as well as our readers. Please find below a list of sources that should have been printed as footnotes.

The *Clarion* Team

- ¹ Patrisse Cullors’s 2015 statement that she and her fellow Black Lives Matter (BLM) founders are trained Marxists
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEp1kxg58kE&t=9s>
- ² Patrisse Cullor’s confirmation that she “believes in Marxism”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEp1kxg58kE&t=12s>
- ³ June 2020 article for the American Philosophical Association stating that BLM applies Marxist thought in its approach to addressing systemic racism
<https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/06/17/black-lives-matter-as-identity-politics-and-class-struggle/>
- ⁴ On its website, BLM honours Dr. Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party, a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist organization of the 1960s and 70s
<https://blacklivesmatter.com/honoring-the-legacy-of-dr-huey-p-newton-and-the-black-panther-party/>
- ⁵ Patrisse Cullors describes BLM as a “spiritual movement”
<https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-fight-for-black-lives-is-a-spiritual-movement>
- ⁶ Promotional material for a BLM Healing Justice Webinar in 2021 clearly suggests that practices such as ancestor worship have a place within the movement <https://blacklivesmatter.com/healing-justice-webinar/>
- ⁷ American Baptist minister Voddie Baucham argues in his book on Critical Race Theory, *Fault Lines*, that BLM is “openly pagan”
Voddie Baucham *Fault Lines* (Washington D.C.: Salem Books, 2021) 218-219
- ⁸ BLM is “committed to dismantling the patriarchal practice that requires mothers to work ‘double shifts’ that require them to mother in private even as they participate in justice work”
<https://www.dcareaeducators4socialjustice.org/black-lives-matter/13-guiding-principles>
- ⁹ In feminism, describing society as patriarchal means that it has a systemic bias in favour of men and against women and children
See also Baucham *Fault Lines* 220-221
- ¹⁰ Quote from BLM co-founder Opal Tometti’s June 2020 interview with *New Yorker* magazine: “People understand that this system is filled with all sorts of inequality and injustice, and that implicit bias and just outright racism is embedded in the way that policing is done in this nation—and when you think about it historically, it was founded as a slave patrol. The evolution of policing was rooted in that.”
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/a-black-lives-matter-co-founder-explains-why-this-time-is-different>
- ¹¹ The evidence of earliest police forces (whose purpose was not to catch runaway slaves)
<https://www.aei.org/op-eds/the-problem-with-claiming-that-policing-evolved-from-slave-patrols/>
- ¹² Statistics compiled by the *Washington Post* on people who were shot and killed from 2016-2019 by the police in the U.S. In the course of those four years, almost 4,000 people were shot and killed by the police. Roughly half of those people were white, and about a quarter of them were black. Each year in that time period, on average, twenty-five unarmed white people and eighteen unarmed black people were shot and killed by police. On average, twenty-four of these unarmed victims—sixteen white and eight black—were not fleeing the scene. Nearly all of these incidents involved suspects who physically attacked police, usually under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
Thaddeus Williams *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020) 93-94
- ¹³ Williams cites several incidents in which police have killed white people in circumstances very similar to highly publicized police killings of black people. These incidents have received no media attention, and the police officers involved have not been disciplined or convicted.
Williams *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth* 93
- ¹⁴ Citing statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, Larry Elder says, “The No. 1 reason for death, preventable or otherwise for young black men, is homicide, almost always at the hands of another young black man,” while the main cause of death for young white men is accidents.
https://www.joplinglobe.com/opinion/columns/larry-elder-where-black-lives-matter-when-you-need-them/article_dae98758-d8e7-5339-9b4a-f34b6ba77ed8.html

CLARION KIDS

AMANDA DEBOER

LORD'S DAY 11

Jesus means *Saviour*. A saviour gets people out of trouble. The Lord Jesus saved his people from their sins. Maybe your teacher told the class it was quiet time, but you talked anyway. That is a sin. Jesus died for that sin. When you ask God to forgive you, the sin is gone. How amazing! All we need is the Lord Jesus's death. Still, maybe you might think to yourself, "How can I make up for talking in class? I'm going to be extra obedient for the rest of the day!" But God tells us we don't have to make up for our sins. In fact, we may not! Jesus's death is enough. How good is our God! Does this make you happy and thankful? Then, if you do try hard to be obedient, you do that to thank God that Jesus, our Saviour, is enough.

Look up the following passages to fill in the blanks.

Isaiah 43:11

I, I am the _____, and besides me there is no _____.

Acts 4:11, 12

"This _____ is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is _____ in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be _____.

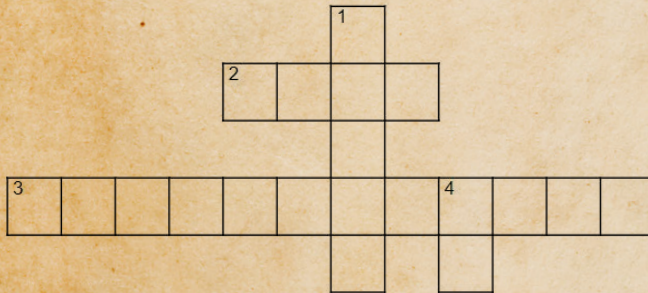
Crossword Puzzle

Down:

1. His name means Saviour
4. Do we need another saviour?

Across:

2. What Jesus did to pay for all our sins
3. We obey to show our _____



Happy birthday to James, Jeffrey, Sarah, Charlie, Derrick, Joel, and Julie! We wish you all the Lord's blessing in the year ahead. May you have a wonderful day celebrating with family and friends.

Joel Slomp

July Birthdays

4 James Buikema will be **61**

c/o R. Jager
627 Maple Ave
Burlington, ON L7R 1M7

11 Jeffrey Jansema will be **25**

158 Lane Road
Dunnville, ON N1A 2W1

14 Sarah Vandergugten will be **27**

23 Jane Street
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

20 Charlie Beintema will be **47**

29 Wilson Ave
Chatham, ON N7L 1K8

20 Derrick VanderHorst will be **35**

c/o Twin Oaks
3217 Twin Oaks Cres
Burlington, ON L7M 3A8
derrickvanderhorst@gmail.com

25 Joel Slomp will be **37**

316 Church Rd
Apartment 102
Spruce Grove, AB T7X 0G2
joelrslomp@gmail.com

25 Julie Ostermeier will be **34**

484 Millen Rd
Unit 5
Stoney Creek, ON L8E 6G4



Hi, my name is Joel Slomp. It's been a while since I have written a piece in Clarion. The last two years with COVID were quite hard for me, not seeing too many of friends and gathering with them through Rehoboth. I had to take a leave from my work—everyone knows how that feels. It was also hard not being able see my brother Stephen when my senior facility was closed and no one was able to go in and visit. It was a hard year; I lost many friends and high school

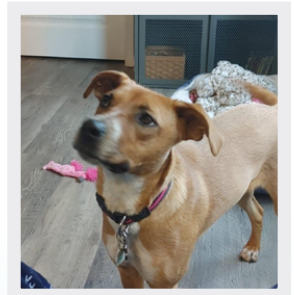
and elementary friends at Covenant in Neerlandia and friends of mine in Rehoboth as well as the dog I wrote about in Clarion back in 2016 named Schooner.

I still work at Wal-Mart as a cashier, and I am also still in the Special Olympics. I am an athlete in swimming and basketball. Recently, on May 27, 2022, I adopted a new dog.

Wow! The last time I wrote a piece in Clarion was the first time I joined the Ray of Sunshine, it was on my thirtieth birthday. Now I am turning thirty-seven years old this coming July—time flies.

This past November I went to Ontario and visited family and friends. I also visited my dear friend Cindy Blokker and surprised her at Harbour Home and met her roommates as well.

To end this, I would like to share few Scripture verses from the prayer of Moses.



*"Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.*

*Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

*You return man to dust
and say, 'Return, O children of man!'
For a thousand years in your sight
are but as yesterday when it is past,
or as a watch in the night."*

(Psalm 90:1-4)

YOU ASKED

The Spirit's Work in the Old & New Testaments

What's the Difference?

The Holy Spirit has eternally been a member of the Trinity, always there and working with the Father and the Son. He descended on Jesus in bodily form, as a dove, at his baptism and was poured out on Pentecost. We discovered in the Old Testament instances where he was poured out on specific people (Exod 31:3; 1 Sam 10: 6, 10; 1 Sam 16:13; Neh 9:20). So, the Holy Spirit was always working. In what way was the Holy Spirit's work different in the Old Testament compared to the New Testament?

Indeed, in the discussion about the Holy Spirit and about the greatness of his work and the evidence of his presence, it seems as if the Holy Spirit appeared on the scene in the NT only, after Pentecost finally. That's a much too restrictive approach! It doesn't do justice to the OT; it doesn't do justice to the Holy Spirit either, to his work with the people of God, or his work in the history of salvation. In the OT you read about the great variety in the ways and means with which the Holy Spirit was already working. You see him in his work of creation and of recreation.

The Spirit in creation

It's right from the beginning of the work of creation that we see the involvement of the Holy Spirit. The Bible starts out with the fact that the Holy Spirit was hovering over the waters. This word "hovering" is a rather unique term in the Bible. It denotes that right from the beginning the Holy Spirit acted as the life-giving power in all of creation. He still hovers over it, in order that creation can come to its fullness. God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. "The Spirit of God has made me," Eliphaz tells his friend Job (33:4), "and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." Thus, man became a living being. He is the Holy Spirit, the life-giving Spirit who proceeds from the Father.

He is one with the Father and the Son, and that's evident right from the start. The Father creates the world, and the Holy Spirit enters this creation, giving life to it. He gives each man his own form and shape, his own gifts and talents (evidenced in Exodus 31:3), thus bringing the wonderful variety to the world

of mankind. This Holy Spirit also hovers over creation afterwards and maintains this life. That's what Psalm 104 sings about: the Holy Spirit renews the face of the earth, which we witness every spring again when he decks creation with a green veil and dresses the trees with blossoms. He fills all creation with his power, and he provides food for all creatures!

The Spirit in recreation

In the OT, the Holy Spirit also worked in and with people. He did so in a very direct way, so that they received messages from God and passed these on. The Spirit made use even of people like Balaam who blessed the people of God. In Acts 1 we read that the Scripture must be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas. David himself was aware of this very much, as he expressed at the end of his life, "The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue" (2 Sam 23:2). The Spirit of the LORD instructed him (Ps 143:10). The Spirit recruited others also to encourage the people Israel, like Azariah, who told king Asa, "The LORD is with you when you are with him" (2 Chron 15:2). Nehemiah, also, was much aware of the work of the Holy Spirit in the OT (Neh 9:30). The prophet Ezekiel tells us how the Spirit lifted him up and brought him to the exiles in Babylonia in the vision given by the Spirit of God (11:24).

It happens too often and it's done too easily, that the Word about the Holy Spirit is restricted to the NT. When OT and NT are compared in regard to the work of the Holy Spirit, the emphasis is laid too much on the partial involvement, the partial endowment of the Holy Spirit in the life of God's people in the OT


(e.g. to this prophet, or that judge, or king). Then people forget, however, that already in the OT everyone who believes in the LORD and accepts all his promises, receives this faith from the Holy Spirit! So, even if the prophet Joel prophecies that in the NT the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon the whole congregation, upon young and old, in the OT we read time and again how the Holy Spirit came upon people, claimed them, and filled them with power or wisdom.

Rich and richer

At the same time, it is true of course that this revelation about the Holy Spirit in the OT awakens a great expectation for the life-giving and life-renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the NT. Many a prophecy in the OT shows us the progress in this work: his going from good to better, from much to more (Isa 11:2; 44:3; Ezek 36:27)! It's therefore the riches of the OT when we see the foreshadowing work of the Holy Spirit and the many prophecies regarding the work of the Holy Spirit fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, right from the beginning, in the holy conception by the Holy Spirit and in the fact that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb of his mother already, we see the role the Holy Spirit plays in the work of creation and recreation. In the

life of Jesus, in his youth, when he was baptized in the Jordan, when driven out into the wilderness, and after the temptations, the Holy Spirit is at work all the time. By his Spirit he chose the apostles, yes throughout Jesus's life the Spirit was involved with him and his work, even where he is not mentioned. Thus, the Holy Spirit fulfilled the OT in every aspect and detail, in every promise and prophecy!

Then we hear the Lord Jesus explain to his disciples also that it is this Holy Spirit who will take what is his and declare it to them, leading them in all the truth! This Holy Spirit, who has done nothing but God's work in the old dispensation, continues his work in the new also. He, who has brought the OT to fulfilment in the work of Jesus Christ, now continues his work by taking the treasures and gifts of Christ and giving them to the world, to the nations, yes also to us! The Holy Spirit as the life-giving Spirit and the life-renewing Spirit restores life to men by faith in Jesus Christ. He renews their life by uniting them with Christ. 



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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Dear reader,

The above is the last *You Asked* contribution from Rev. W. den Hollander. Some eight years ago, when we wanted to start the column, we asked him to take on the challenge, not knowing how it would go.

It turned out to be quite a regular column with a wide variety of topics, all of which Rev. den Hollander duly researched in order to give beneficial and well-balanced responses. And so he did, 146 times in eight years!!!

Our brother has asked for his work on this to come to an end. We honour this request with appreciation for his substantial and upbuilding contributions to our magazine. Thank you, Rev. den Hollander, and best wishes to you and your wife as you continue to serve in your retirement years.

And we look to pass the torch: we mean to continue the column in some way going forward. Please stay tuned for an update.

W. Gortemaker

