



Clarion

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WHAT'S INSIDE

Greetings! It is no secret that we live in troubled times filled increasingly with anti-Christian sentiment in the public square. Rev. Van Luik's editorial helps to put that in perspective and renew our confidence in Christ's kingship. As we approach the annual commemoration of our Lord's death on Good Friday, the meditation by Rev. George van Popta will deepen our appreciation for the depths of his suffering on our behalf. Rev. Steve van Leeuwen, in what I believe is his first article in Clarion, reflects on the value and joy of God's law. And rounding out our meditational material is Rev. Tyler Vandergaag's final article pertaining to the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Thank you for this series brother, and please keep the articles coming!

Christian living involves being light and salt in this world, reaching out to others with the gospel, and so we are thankful for the update on the outreach work in Niverville provided by Rev. James Zekveld. Pastor George van Popta presents the second and final part of his report on the CRMA conference in which we can glean much helpful information about trends, challenges, and opportunities for mission work. There is also a noticeable accent on mission and how best to organize it in Rev. Gerrit Bruintjes's report on the URCNA's recent Synod Niagara.

A close and needed companion to mission work is that of preaching and teaching in established churches and so we thank our heavenly Father that a brand-new minister could be ordained in Grand Valley and an experienced pastor could be installed in Guelph-Living Word, both of which are reported on in this issue. Pastors and missionaries require much training to prepare them for their callings and so it is good to read an update concerning our federational seminary CRTS from the Principal Dr. Jason Van Vliet. The Board of Governors also presents a press release outlining the current running of the seminary. Students and professors alike require access to books, magazines, and other study materials, something our Women's Savings Action committee helps to fund year after year—see their uplifting report!

Our magazine closes off with three birthday greetings and an introduction to Arlene DeWit in Ray of Sunshine, Clarion Kids on the meaning of baptism, and a book review looking at something called "Christian Nationalism." Lots of variety, lots to ponder, and lots to be encouraged by as we press on doing the Lord's work!

Peter Holtvliuwer

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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:

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- L**oving in manner
- A**ttuned to current issues
- R**eadable and Reliable
- I**n Submission to Scripture
- O**pen to constructive criticism
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REVOLUTION OR REFORMATION

We live in troubling times as progressive forces in our society control more and more of the public narrative. The recently released “Twitter Files” reveal social media attempts to control that narrative and forces within government agencies pulling levers of influence to regulate messages. This progressively woke mob largely determines what is now considered culturally appropriate. They not only attempt to censor social media but are willing to destroy peoples’ livelihoods and businesses to achieve their goal.

There is a desire to completely restructure society. We live in a revolutionary time in which past principles are abandoned for new ones. Some examples: economic principles that say each one is rewarded for their effort are now replaced with the idea of “equality,” so that wealth must be distributed equally. Ironically, the rights and privileges feminists have worked for must now be sacrificed at the expense of transgenderism. The biblical structure of the family is being sacrificed for alternative lifestyles. Colleges and universities need safe spaces for people to go if they feel threatened by “hurtful” ideas expressed by others.

DESPAIR


As you face the chaos of society you may despair for the future. We may take some solace thinking that if we just hide from society, this will not touch us. It begs the question whether as Christians we may hide our faith from the world; but the reality is that even if we try, revolutionary forces seek to destroy the church and all those who maintain the honour of God. It is helpful to keep in mind this is not the devil’s first attempt to destroy the work of God. In the time of the French Revolution, revolutionaries were determined to stamp the Christian religion out of society. Then followed Marxist ideology that saw the church as the great enemy. They failed, unable to deliver the utopian society they promised.

The saddest commentary is that many churches today compromise the truth of the gospel to appease the progressive forces of society. We hear believers who come to us expressing concern that the places where they were worshiping have begun to compromise the gospel message with woke ideas. There are Christian leaders who believe the way to be relevant in our society is to accommodate the values of society. Many argue that it is a Christian value for the church to be inclusive, by which they mean that we must support other people’s ethical choices and not judge them. The result is that the church must reject the values God gives in his Word.

The present situation has many similarities to the time of the prophet Micah. The kings of Judah became increasingly wicked. They not only turned away from God, but they set up altars in Jerusalem to foreign gods. That is the very definition of revolution. Revolution turns away from God and follows the gods of this world, the idols of our own hearts. In their hearts people think that a revolution is needed to fix things in this world. The same revolutionary thinking often rises in the church when believers argue that we need to promote modern values and find new ways to worship. To make an impact on the world, it is thought we need to be in step with the values of our culture.

HOPE

The reality is that a revolutionary spirit leads to the destruction of the world, and it will lead to the destruction of the church. God reveals that reformation is needed. The great revivals in the history of the Christian church always took place when reformation came to the church. Reformation is not keeping the status quo, or holding on to the traditions that make us feel comfortable, but it leads to a radical change in the hearts of God’s people. Reformation is always a return to the source of our life, Jesus Christ. In the days of Micah, the kings of Judah revolted against God and the result was their destruction. To the faithful it appeared that God’s work is doomed, but God says in Micah 5:2 that he will return to Bethlehem, he will return to the source from which he raised up David to be king.

Whenever it appears that God’s work in this world is at an end, the Lord brings about reformation. He turns his people back to the source of their hope which is found in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. God raised a new ruler from David, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the one who restores us to a living relationship with God. Today there is the urgent call for the church and the people of this world to return to the only source of life. When our heart returns to the Lord, he is the source of constant renewal in our life and the life of this world. 



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DARKNESS

“Darkness has become my only companion.”

PSALM 88:18

On Good Friday, while on the cross, our Lord Jesus experienced three hours of darkness: “And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour” (Mark 15:33). The Father turned his face away from his Son for three hours. The first great creative deed of Almighty God was the gift of light. The first word God spoke over his creation was “Let there be light, and there was light” (Gen 1:3). But on that most dreadful of days, the Father withdrew the light, and the land was plunged into darkness. Our Lord Jesus was abandoned to the darkness. He was forsaken on the cross “that we might be accepted by God and nevermore be forsaken by him” (Form for the Celebration of Lord’s Supper).

When we meditate on Christ in the darkness, Psalm 88 comes to mind. The human author of Psalm 88 was Heman the Ezrahite. This Heman was probably the Heman mentioned in various places in Chronicles as one of the temple musicians and chief singers.

Psalm 88 is the dark psalm. It is the only psalm of the 150 Psalms which has no resolution. To be sure, Heman began by praying to the God who saves. He cried out to God in a prayer in which he expressed confidence in God (vv. 1-2), but for the rest of the psalm he complained bitterly to God that God had abandoned him and taken every friend and support from him. He ended the song with bitter words: “You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; darkness has become my only companion.”

Did Heman write here about his personal experience? We do not know. What we do know is that he put into words and song feelings that God’s children of all times and places at times have—we as well.


In 2012 I was blessed to go on a tour of Israel. One of the most moving moments was when we descended into the Sacred Pit, a dungeon under the site where the Palace of Caiaphas stood (as tradition has it). The Sacred Pit was discovered in 1888 and tradition also has it that Jesus was kept in this pit after he was tried by the Sanhedrin. At the bottom of the pit was a lectern on which were leaves of Scriptures in many languages that contained only

Psalm 88. Our leader, Rev. James Visscher, read the psalm. As we ascended the stairs, we spontaneously began humming Genevan 22—“My God, O why have you forsaken me?” Very moving.

In 1966 Paul Simon released a song titled “The Sound of Silence” and sang it with Art Garfunkel. Both Simon and Garfunkel are Jewish, and this song echoes the words from the songbook of their, and our, religions. The song begins with these words: “Hello darkness, my old friend // I’ve come to talk with you again.”

So far, so good. And arguably it ends where Psalm 88 ends: “The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls // And tenement halls // And whispered in the sound of silence.”

I still enjoy the music of Simon and Garfunkel, but I love the gospel much more. The gospel says that Psalm 88 does not have the last word. The last word that Christ spoke was not “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It was, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46). Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Let us live confidently in the light of Jesus. 

FURTHER READING

Psalm 88

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Think about the connection between the plague of darkness (Exod 10:21ff) and the darkness experienced by our Lord Jesus on the cross.
2. Meditate on the connection between Genesis 1:3 and John 1:3-5.



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Three Hallelujahs for the Law

“For I find my delight in your commandments, which I love.”

PSALM 119:46

STEVE VAN LEEUWEN

Have you ever considered a Bible text like Psalm 119:46, where the author delights in the law of God? Perhaps, after reading that text, you wondered if you were missing something. The reading of the law usually does not generate much excitement on

*How many of us consider
the reading of the law a highlight
of the worship service?*

Sunday morning, and yet the psalmist seems inspired and uplifted. Do we feel the same way? How many of us consider the reading of the law a highlight of the worship service? How many faithful saints leave the service declaring their delight in or love for the law of God? Surprisingly, the author of Psalm 119 does, and he does not stand alone in his expression of love for God’s law. In Psalm 19 David goes on at length describing God’s law with wonder and amazement.

And so, what are we missing? Why do we often find it difficult to delight in the commandments of God? Is it perhaps that we fail to see the grace that is expressed by the law of God? Do we see the law with blinders on our eyes that only allow us to see a list of “shall nots” rather than God’s gracious address?

LOADED WITH GRACE

And that is precisely where we need to start. What one should immediately realize about the reading of God’s law on Sunday morning is that it does not address people in general. No, the law addresses God’s covenant people. The law was given to the nation of Israel, and by extension to the church. And it begins with God’s gracious address—“I am the LORD your God.” God communicates to us that we are not the Egyptians, the Canaanites, or the world, who are separated from God and his grace. On the contrary, he is our God. We have been brought near and incorporated into the family of the Almighty, and so he addresses us as his people.

The second thing that we should notice is that God immediately reveals himself as a God who delivers. “I am the LORD your

God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” That is a statement loaded with grace. Our God reveals that he saves his people from their bondage. That pattern of deliverance needs to be understood and applied to our own slavery to sin, and the misery that follows. In other words, as our God, he delivers us, just like he delivered the nation of Israel. As his people, we are the special objects of his affection. And he greets us with that gracious message every Sunday morning. *I am your God, the God who delivers you from your sin and misery that is exposed by the reading of the law.*

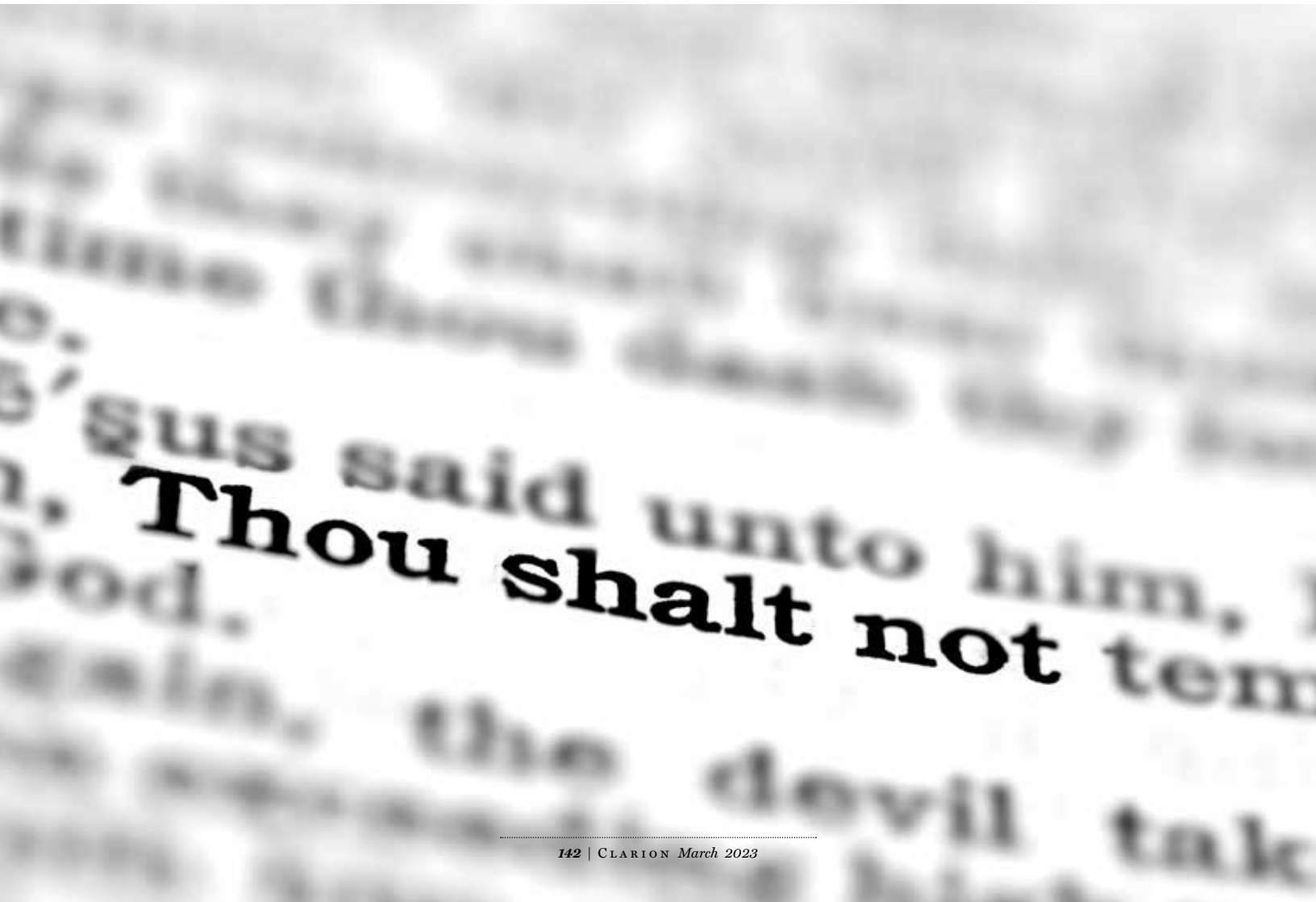
That, alone, is a reason to say “Hallelujah.” The word “Hallelujah” literally means “praise God.” And that gracious announcement gives us many reasons to praise God. To name just three: the law addresses your past, your present, and your future.

REJOICE IN A REDEEMED PAST

The grace of our God is clearly revealed in the preamble to his law, but if one overlooks it, he is prone to see only the negative.

For instance, if we fail to see the opening gracious promise of deliverance, we will inevitably reduce the law to a set of rules to be followed. In that light, the commandments will seem harsh because no one can keep them perfectly. Consequently, we would always be living in fear because of our transgressions and sins. If all that the law did was reveal our failure, it would be oppressive. And then, in a certain way, sin would rule our lives. We would be enslaved by our own despair, our own shortcomings, and our own failures. And then every Sunday morning we would be reminded once again of how far we have fallen. It would be like giving someone who was down another kick, or like adding an additional weight to someone who was already burdened. But that is not in line with the declaration of the Lawgiver who begins by declaring our status as his people.

Our God is not a God who piles up and exposes our burdens, adding weight to our suffering, chains to our bondage, and guilt to our remorse so that we are enslaved in our grief and despair. No, far from it. He is the God who leads his people out of slavery.



He takes the weight and the burdens of life away. He removes the chains and shackles that bind us in our misery. When the LORD God is your God, his intention is to set you free from all of that.

And that is exactly what he did through his plan of redemption in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ satisfied the law on our behalf. The guilt and pain of our transgressions has been covered by his blood. And we have had the shackles of our iniquity removed. We have been set free from our sin. John 8:36 says, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” And so, the intention of the law that exposes our sin is that we might be set free from it. And John reminds us that is what has happened. Our sinful past has been dealt with. What a wonderful thing to commemorate every Sunday morning as we come into the presence of our God for worship. We are reminded that we come before God with a clean slate because our offense against the law has been dealt with. We can rejoice because, by the grace of God, who we once were in our sin and misery is no longer who we are. We can rejoice that in our state of redemption we are received as God’s children. Hallelujah! God has redeemed his children from the curse of the law.

But that is not the only aspect of the law that should cause us to delight in the commandments. The law also provides us with a template for holy living that guides us from day to day.

REJOICE IN A SANCTIFIED PRESENT

God did not redeem Israel so that Israel could go out and do their own thing. No, God wanted a people to be set aside for himself as a holy people, a sanctified people. God had a purpose in setting the Israelites free. And his purpose was that they would be different from the other nations, distinct in their behaviour and practice. And that is true for the saints today as well. Paul says in Galatians 5:13–14, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’”


And the beauty of what Paul declares is that in Christ we are not only set free from the former weight of our own sin, but also empowered to start living according to the righteous requirements of God. In other words, our redemption from past sin is not the only effect of God’s saving grace. Having the redemption of Christ applied through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we can start to live according to the law in love for our neighbour.

Every Christian recognizes the need for believers to love God and their neighbour. And if love is defined as the fulfilling of the law, then every believer should be availing themselves of the wisdom of the law. The law instructs us and reminds us of what it looks like to love our neighbour. And when that law is being implemented in our lives and the lives of our fellow saints, it is something to rejoice about. 1 Corinthians 13:6 says that real love “does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.” When the law characterizes our lives, it is cause for celebration. Hallelujah! God’s children can begin to live according to the law.

REJOICE IN A RESTORED FUTURE

Our final reason to rejoice in the law is that it shows us what we will be. In the beginning we were created in Adam in true righteousness and holiness. The fall robbed us of these good gifts of God. We were no longer truly righteous as we were created to be. But God’s plan is that one day we will be restored to that truly righteous state of existence. In our broken selves, our vision is clouded so that we do not even realize what that is, but in the law, we get a glimpse of the perfection that God has in mind. And so, God graciously gives us the law not just to expose our sin, but so that we know what is being restored to us. We know that in ourselves restoration is impossible, yet as believers we long to be restored to the perfection that we had in the beginning. The thought that it has become a reality in Jesus Christ should fill us with great joy. Hallelujah! We can look forward to the restoration of true righteous and holiness.

HALLELUJAH

We can delight in the law because it shows us what we have been saved from. Likewise, we can delight in God’s law because it reveals what we have become: saints who are able to begin living in love toward God and our neighbour. And finally, we can rejoice in a future glory where all our thoughts, words, and deeds will conform to the righteous law of God. God’s law applies his grace to our past, present, and future. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! 



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The Secret To a Fruitful Life

TYLER VANDERGAAG

While talking about the fruit of the Spirit, someone once said something to me about how discouraging it can be to compare the fruit of the Spirit to our own lives. In a way that person is right. We see how little fruit we bear and how much we need to yet grow in sanctification, and we can easily get discouraged by it all. But discouragement is not all there is to the fruit of Spirit. The lack of fruit in our life encourages us to turn to our fruitful Saviour who alone can produce more fruit in our lives. That's what we'll see in this last article of this series.

OUR FRUITFUL LIFE

Immediately after listing the fruit of the Spirit, Paul says in Galatians 5:23, "Against such things there is no law." We might think that's a bit obvious. There's no law against joy or kindness that I know of. But this is to miss the point. The word "against"

is not so much used here in the sense of opposed to, but more in the sense of concerning or in relation to. So, his point is that you can't legislate and make laws to force people to love or be kind.

This goes back to the first article on this series. The fruit of the Spirit was given in the context of a struggle between legalistic law enforcers and lawless anarchists in the church. Some believed that a godly life of discipline and obedience was best imposed with laws. Others pushed for freedom from all laws. These two extremes are not unique to the church in Galatia. There have always been those in the church who are very strict, and have very little sympathy for those who don't act or think like them. On the flip side, there are those who shrink back from all calls to obedience and justify it by claiming that "God loves me just the way I am"—which is often just code language for "God doesn't care how I live, so why



*Marching to the beat of the Spirit's drum is the only way,
the only solution, the only hope of living a fruitful life!*

should you?" These two positions have done more damage and caused more disunity in the church than almost any other issue.

We are not immune from this danger today. We too must guard ourselves from these two extreme positions of legalism and lawlessness. They have no place in the church or in our hearts.

But if there is no law concerning the fruit of the Spirit and it's not a free for all, then how do we embrace the fruit of the Spirit? The answer is profoundly simple. When you belong to Christ Jesus, your sinful nature along with its passions and desire have been crucified, put to death (Gal 5:24). This is a point Paul already made in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." Now when those words become our own by faith, the Spirit of Christ enables us to "live by the Spirit" and "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). Keep

in step is a military phrase. This is what soldiers do. That's what those who belong to Jesus Christ and who live by the Spirit do too. We march to the beat of the Spirit's drum. This is the only way, the only solution, the only hope of living a fruitful life!

So, do you want to grow in Christian character? Do you wish to eradicate those legalistic or lawless tendencies in your heart? Do you desire to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit more and more in your life? Look to Christ. That's the secret to a fruitful life. *Abide in him. Live by the Spirit. March to the beat of his drum.*

JESUS'S FRUITFUL LIFE

Now, if this comes as a surprise to you, you've missed the whole point of this series, or perhaps I've failed to stress it enough. The focus of this series has been more on Christ and less on us; less

about our fruitful life and more about *his* fruitful life. That's because our biggest barrier to cultivating the fruit of the Spirit is thinking too little of the Lord Jesus and being too hesitant to abide and rest fully in him. Too often we fall back on our own resources and abilities. We resist our Saviour. We tend to think that his love for us has or will eventually run dry. We think he's easily disappointed with us when we sin, that his kindness is limited, and his anger is quick. But if this series has taught us anything, it's how wrong we are to think this way about the Lord Jesus! There—in his heart—we find the fruit of the Spirit in abundance and exactly as it ought to be: tender, ripe, and rich. He always lived by, was led by, and kept in step with the Spirit.

Remember his *love*. How he wept for his friend Lazarus. How it moved him not only to reach down and pull Lazarus from the grave, but to enter the grave for us and our salvation. He loved us to death—literally and truly. He still does. His love is as wide and deep as it is long and high. It's like an ocean without bottom or shores.

Mediate on his *joy*. How it led him to think of the horrors of the cross and the anguish of hell and God's wrath as light trifles and momentary burdens. He's the Good Physician and Doctor whose greatest joy is seeing us forgiven! May his *peace* be with you as it was with his disciples that first Easter Sunday. There's no hostility between us and God. Jesus has broken down the walls of sin that separated us from our Father in heaven.


Rejoice in his unlimited, long-nosed *patience*! With his long-suffering and forbearing patience he forgave Paul. This worst of sinners serves as the model, the proto-type, and pattern for how the Lord Jesus deals with us. He's slow to anger, patient ever. Recall his unusual *kindness* to those who were once totally depraved, foolish, disobedient deceivers and slaves to sinful passions and desires. He's the ultimate Philanthropist, the kind lover of his people.

He's your old *faithful* who never has and never will let us down. He's more faithful than Moses. He gave up his life willingly not as a servant of God but as his Son. Now—as our great high priest—he's at the Father's right hand praying for you and me, not erratically or sporadically, but faithfully and continually. He's the glorious *goodness* of God that passed by Moses and by his disciples too. He's God's goodness in human form, with a heart that beats to the drum of God's glory.

In his heart there's true *gentleness* (and humility). He knows how to handle our frail, fragile, and delicate hearts. He carries us as carefully as a shepherd carries a little lamb and as gently as if he were holding a box of crystal wine glasses. He's as accessible as he is gentle. His schedule is always open. His calendar, clear. We can always run to Jesus, no matter the time and no matter how weary and burdened we are. He's ready to give rest to our souls. And to top it all off, *self-control* ruled his heart. He never lost it on his parents as a child. As a grown man, he went to Jerusalem with resolute self-control and determination even though he knew it would be the death of him.

This, dear reader, is our Spirit-filled Saviour! This is the Christ you belong to in body and soul. This is the author and perfecter of our faith. This is the one upon whom we must always fix our eyes and our thoughts. This is the one you can open yourself up to. So, abide in him. Let him love you. Let his joy, peace, patience, kindness and all the rest overwhelm you. Be satisfied in him. He's the only one who can lift your spirits when you're discouraged and frustrated. He's the only one who can calm our fears when we're afraid and the worries of this life weigh us down. He's the only one we can turn to when we're empty and weary. He alone can sooth our souls when we're numb with pain, burdened by grief, or struggling with sin. He alone is the one who will fill you with his Spirit and produce in you a rich harvest of the Spirit's fruit.

CONCLUSION

So, whatever you do, don't go away from this series discouraged. Go your way encouraged and filled with joy and gladness. You have an awesome friend and an ever better Saviour in the Lord Jesus. He's always full of the Spirit and we can always rest and trust in him. That's the secret. Jesus is the secret to a fruitful life. Rest in him, rely on his Spirit, and rest assured that the fruit of the Spirit will begin to bud and blossom to the point where Christ will produce a rich harvest in your life. So I urge you one last time: *Abide in Christ. Live by the Spirit. March to the beat of his drum.* 



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MISSION WORK

in Niverville 2022

We are now five years into the work of church planting in Niverville. The work takes time. We build connections in our local community over time. Some are interested in the faith, some are not. And of those who are, not all are necessarily interested in the Reformed faith. The church, Ambassador Canadian Reformed Church, continues to grow. It's slow growth. We've lost some people and gained some over the years, but we also grow in our relationships with one another and with our community.

AMBASSADOR CHURCH

The church is really at the centre of the mission work. "The Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother." We want the church to reflect the Jerusalem above as pictured in a passage like Revelation 21:9–22:5. Ambassador needs to be a place where those who believe can receive the healing that comes from the tree of life. Here is what the Spirit uses: his Spirit-filled people to build up a body.

One of the dangers in a small church like Ambassador is burn-out. We have members that are wonderfully committed to that work of building up the body. One of the learning curves in mission is self-regulation. One cannot do everything. One cannot please everybody. Again, this is something that takes time to learn. We learn to take rests and find strength for new efforts to reach out into our local community.



James and Hannah Zekveld, Victor, Arley, and Phoenix.



David's Baptism

That is why the encouragement of one another is so important to the mission. This is the work of a body. One of the pictures of the church in the Scriptures is a fishing boat. A fishing boat takes multiple people to run efficiently. We are together in a boat on a sea of unbelief, and we work together to bring new people into the kingdom of God. In that sense, we follow Christ in fishing for men.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

One of the wonderful things we have seen this past year is how God has brought new members into the body of Christ. People have come from darkness to light. We have seen this in the baptism of a young man whom I have known since the beginning of my time here. Through the pandemic he was given the time actually to look into Christianity, and by God's grace, he came to believe. He was baptized this spring.

We also saw the profession of faith of a young woman and the baptism of one of her children. She came from a Roman Catholic background. Through the care of the congregation, she eventually came to desire Bible study and, through that, came to desire a part in the church of Jesus Christ. One child was baptized already, but her second child was not, and so we were able to witness and celebrate that reality.

SPREADING THE NETS

The work does not end there, however. During the era of COVID restrictions, I focused more on individual Bible study. With the lifting of restrictions, there are greater opportunities for public


outreach. In the second half of 2022, we re-instituted a lot of the calendar we had developed before the pandemic. We have a community BBQ, we do a monthly Games Night, we have a monthly coffee & chat for ladies in our community, and a bi-monthly hymn sing. We were able to do Christmas caroling again this year and due to the work of one of our members, Rob Bonefaas, we were able to have two different concerts over the year. The Christmas concert was attended by around 200 people, mostly from the local community. In 2023, we hope to advertise again for opportunities to ask questions about the faith at a breakfast hosted at the church.

All these things are spreading of the nets. We hope that members of our community will be intrigued and move toward a knowledge of the truth. This includes a new opportunity of a column that I have in the local paper. I write a short presentation of the gospel, Christ as saving king, every month. Again, I pray that the Lord may give it fruit.

AMONG FELLOW CHRISTIANS

It is important to note that we are in a community where there is still a lot of Christianity. There are around nine churches in Niverville that serve a community of about 5,000 people. I have developed relationships with many of the pastors in town. Many of the people we have had the opportunity to interact with are fellow Christians. In fact, some of those who have joined our church are from a Christian background.

This naturally makes the work here an ecumenical work as well. There is real light in these churches, and part of our desire is that they flourish as well. And to be clear, by flourish, I mean flourishing through God's work, not by tickling men's ears. So, where possible, I find the opportunity to encourage the churches in the area to remain firm in the basic doctrines of Christianity. One example of this is how I had the opportunity to give a brief explanation of the Apostles' Creed at community service. Where possible I also seek to give a good account of the basics of Reformed doctrine and practice.

I thank the Lord for the opportunity given to me to work in Niverville. And I ask for your prayers as we continue to seek to be bright and salty in our neighbourhood. Blessings! 



James Zekveld

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CURRENT TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES IN

GLOBAL MISSIONS

Canadian Reformed Missions Association Conference (2)

GEORGE VAN POPTA

Each year the Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA)¹ hosts a conference. In 2022 it was held on September 10th at Cornerstone Canadian Reformed in Hamilton. Delegates from most of the sending churches were in attendance. This is the second and final part of the report about the event.

In his second speech, the Rev. Dr. Lloyd Kim² spoke about current trends, challenges, and opportunities in global missions.

TRENDS

There is a steady decline in the number of men who have served in missions for thirty or forty years. We are not seeing an equal call to men to go out to the nations. More men are retiring than are accepting calls. To make disciples, we need missionaries going out to preach and teach. The question is, how do we mobilize the current generation to reach its generation globally.

About ten years ago Mission to the World (MTW) conducted a millennial study in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). MTW reached out to the millennials³ in the PCA and sought to understand who their key influencers were.

The need for discipleship was underlined. Millennials do not so much respond to conferences as they do to people who come alongside of them. They are driven by relationships. They do not have the loyalty to the denomination that earlier generations had. They are not going to be attracted to global missions just because MTW said that we need more missionaries. No generation has been more globally aware and more poised to make a difference

¹ For information on the CRMA and to see updates on the various Canadian Reformed mission projects, please see <https://reformedmissions.net>.

² Dr. Kim is the coordinator of Mission to the World (MTW), the mission agency of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

³ Millennials are people born 1981–1996.



Santa Barbara - Querétaro, Mexico

than the current one, but there is a disconnect between the older leadership and the new generation.

A good website is important. The first contact that millennials often have with an organization is through its website. Most often, they will not respond to an article printed in a magazine or an insert stuffed into the church bulletin.

The esteem in which missions are held is declining in the western world. In the past being a missionary was considered to be a noble thing. Now, it is often viewed negatively. People ask why you would want to be involved in a colonial-imperialist enterprise. In years gone by even non-Christians had some admiration for missionaries, but not so much anymore. Many youths are hesitant to respond to a call for more missionaries because of a negative view of missions.

We need to be open and honest about this. Missionary endeavours in the past have done some good things and some bad things.

Another trend is the tendency to support nationals rather than to send out North American men. This trend has influenced much of current missiology. People ask why we should send our sons and daughters overseas. Is it not better to send money to a national church? Aren't they in a better position to do the work? They know the culture and people better than we foreigners do. Isn't it a more efficient use of our money?

Dr. Kim asked why it should be an either/or and not a both/and. Also, there are places where there is no national church to partner with. Furthermore, the Great Commission has not been repealed.

There are also those who say that whereas we have spent much effort on overseas missions we have not paid enough attention to local mission. Voices are heard to say that we are willing to go to people far away, but we don't care about people across the street from us.

Dr. Kim again asked why it has to be an either/or—*either* overseas mission *or* local evangelism. We are called to do both.

Another trend is that many candidates are emerging who have experienced brokenness in their own or their family's lives. Divorce is becoming more of an issue as are blended families.

There are those who are laden down by a large student debt. Is it responsible to send such people overseas, and how do we help them to manage their debts?

CHALLENGES

MTW asked how we ought to mobilize the next generation to love overseas missions. They focused on four things:

1. Prayer.
2. Developing a mission culture in the local church.
3. Challenging people to consider foreign missions (recruiting).
4. Responding to increased ethnic diversity.

1. Prayer.

In 2012, MTW “ran the numbers” and realized that many new men were needed. Unless 150 men were raised, there would be a rapid decline in missionaries. So MTW initiated a “Pray for 150” program. They asked all the PCA congregations to pray that in the next few years God would raise up 150 men for overseas mission. Two years later, in 2014, 148 men had been recruited to serve cross-culturally. MTW asked themselves, “Why did we only ask for 150 men?” Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers to work in the field!

MTW then asked the denomination to pray that 1% of their membership would commit to overseas mission work in the next ten years. If a church has 200 members, that would be two people, possibly one couple. The congregations were asked to encourage the best of the congregation to consider global missions. The leadership of the churches were asked to consider sitting down with ten of their couples, for a year, and to speak with them about missions. Perhaps, after a year nine couples would say that it wasn't for them, but one couple might say that the Lord had placed on their hearts a burning desire to make known his name. That would be the 1%.

Often, we wait for people to come forward on their own. MTW challenged the PCA congregations to be courageous, for the leadership of each church to meet with couples, to pray with them, and to help them see the abiding need for missionaries. If the congregation produced this small tithe of 1%, there would be a four-fold increase in the number of missionaries.

2. Developing a missions culture in the PCA.

In the past MTW thought *they* were the agency for recruiting missionaries. MTW came to realize that the *churches* are the agency for that work, and MTW was to help the churches realize their task.

A noticeable challenge is that many seminaries no longer have missions programs. When budgets had to be cut, these programs were often the first to go. So, how was MTW to help the churches foster a missions culture? How was MTW to come alongside churches to help them with their human resources?

At first MTW had only one resources centre, in Atlanta. But then they realized that the South is different from the West, which is different from the North-East. So, they created three hubs in the different areas of the USA. Each hub has about three staff members who reach out to the local churches to help them pray for the 1%.

3. Challenging people to consider foreign missions (recruiting).

MTW asked, “If God were to answer positively the prayer for 1%, what would we do?” People were encouraged to dream. Each hub got together with local churches and prayed, dreamed, and talked. Lists were made of what the dreams were of. They identified countries and cities they wanted to see reached with the gospel. People were asked to be specific: *this* city, *this* neighbourhood, *this* university campus. They were encouraged not to pray about “missions” in general, but to be very specific about who, what, and where a missionary was needed.

4. The trend and challenge of increased ethnic diversity.

There is a huge growth in ethnic diversity in North American cities, and this is reflected in our congregations as well. It has been predicted that by 2040 there will no longer be one dominant ethnic group. The churches are becoming more diverse, but this is not reflected in those who are sent out as missionaries. Are we serving and using the whole congregation? The average ethnic diversity should be reflected in the 1%.

A more diverse group better reflects the kingdom of God. When we bring a more diverse team to the mission field, we are showing that the gospel does in fact break down barriers. The Anglo-Saxon way is not the only way of doing things. Different ethnic groups bring different ideas to the table, teach the rest of us, and we all grow together.

To bring different ethnicities to the table, we need to know something about the various cultures. For example, who is a leader? In one culture someone who speaks early is thought to have leadership skills while this may not be so in another culture.

MISSION DEPUTIES?

Dr. Arjan de Visser addresses the subject of mission work in “Foreign Mission by the Local Church,” *Living Waters from Ancient Springs: Essays in Honor of Cornelis Van Dam*, (Wipf and Stock © 2011), ed. Jason Van Vliet, pp 210–232.

Dr. de Visser writes about the practice the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) follow in conducting foreign mission work. The CanRC have assumed the approach of “foreign mission by the local church,” and have deliberately avoided any centralization of organization by a broader assembly. That has been the CanRC’s historical approach and we have followed the path marked out by General Synod Kampen 1951 of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Liberated (GKv).

This post-Liberation (1944) synod endeavoured to rid the churches of everything that smacked of hierarchy, and so discontinued the practice of having synodically appointed deputies or committees to oversee and give some direction to global missions. Foreign mission was left exclusively in the domain of the local church.

Along with other voices, past and present, Dr. de Visser suggests that we should move away from the rigid approach of “mission work by the local church *only*” and find some way for missions to be embedded in the ecclesiastical structures. He recommends that mission deputies be appointed by a general synod with an advisory mandate:

... while mission deputies should be mandated to serve the churches, particularly sending churches, with advice, information, and expertise, the mandate should also make clear that this body should not develop into a centralized board of mission. The task of sending out missionaries should remain the prerogative of local churches. At the same time, there is no doubt in my mind that our sending churches would benefit in significant ways from the services of synodically appointed mission deputies (p. 232).

MTW is asking, how do we recruit a new generation of missionaries who are coming from an ethnically diverse background? How do we prepare our fields for workers coming from different backgrounds? This does not proceed from a politically or socio-logically driven agenda; rather, it wants to be faithful to God's work of making disciples from the nations.

We need to see what God is doing across the world. Traditionally, mission has been "From the West to the Rest." There has been a large change in recent decades. Now it is from "Everywhere to Everywhere." Those who, in the past, asked "how do we *receive* missionaries" are now asking "how can we *send* missionaries." Missionaries are arising from the East and from the South, and not only to serve their own nations; rather, they want to send missionaries to the North and to the West. How do we and/or will we receive them? How do we partner with them? How do we come alongside them and learn from them?

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR QUESTIONS

Could you speak about the value of Short Term Missions (STM)?

Let me speak about the good and the bad of STM: STMs are bad when troubled teens are sent on them. Sometimes it is thought that an STM will "fix" a troubled teen. This is bad for the missionary on the ground, for obvious reasons. An STM can also be a large and detrimental distraction to the missionary if he feels the need to make up all manner of projects.

STMs can be good, for three reasons:

1. An STM can confirm someone's call to Long Term Mission (LTM). There is something about being on the ground in a mission field, smelling, tasting, hearing, and feeling what it's like. Many who are called to LTM had earlier gone on an STM.
2. Many who have gone on an STM go home to foster the idea of missions in their own congregation.
3. Those on an STM can aid the missionary, or the mission church, with particular needs, e.g., medical, teaching, construction, repair, etc.

What does MTW do for the repatriation of missionaries?

Missionaries are required to prepare for their own retirement. MTW staff will work with them, with the local church and/or presbytery, and walk alongside a retiring missionary. Many of their retired missionaries will help and advise repatriating missionaries.

MTW will help if there is a need for counselling, marriage counselling, or dealing with past trauma. MTW also celebrates retired missionaries.

How do MTW and the PCA prevent bureaucracy from devouring resources?

We recognize that many of us have come out of denominations that were not faithful and that abused resources, where "the tail was wagging the dog." MTW is accountable to the General Assembly (GA), which meets annually. In the PCA, MTW does not create policy; it only executes policy set by the GA. MTW is audited annually and needs to demonstrate how much of its funds go to programs, to administration, and to missions.


What do you do when women come to you and want to serve on the mission field?

The PCA has many (single) women working on mission fields, as part of a team. It is not prudent to send a single woman to work alone; rather, she should be a part of a larger team, for her to be safe and to flourish.

How do you encourage young people to consider LTM?

It used to be that young people would go to an event or a rally about missions, and then sign up. Now interest comes more through personal contacts: a youth pastor or a small group leader might encourage youth to think about missions. The older members, and especially the leadership in the church, need to love and invest in the lives of the youth. It will have amazing results.

How do we partner with national churches?

If you are planting churches together, you must be closely aligned, theologically and confessionally. If the national church is young and weak, and says "please come and help us," don't miss the opportunity. If the home church is not aligned, theologically and confessionally with the national church, it is still possible to help in works of mercy. 



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Living Word Welcomes **REV. POORT & FAMILY**

Santa Barbara - Querétaro, Mexico

On October 9, 2022, the congregation of Living Word in Guelph was blessed to witness the installation of Rev. Jeff Poort. Thanks and praise be to God for his goodness in providing our church with a faithful man to shepherd and lead us after a relatively short period of vacancy.

It was wonderful that Rev. Poort's installation service could be led by our minister emeritus, Rev. Agema. Rev. Agema preached on Jeremiah 1:9-10 with the theme "The Lord puts his Word in the mouth of his servant." We were reminded that the preaching is not meant to give prominence to the preacher, but to highlight the powerful message of God. After this, we were able to witness Rev. Poort profess his vows and receive his charge. Then we as a congregation received a charge of our own, including to "receive him with all joy."

Representatives from the Emmanuel and Maranatha Canadian Reformed Churches were present to congratulate and remind us that "God continues to gather and lead his flock." Letters of congratulations were read from the Elora, Arthur, Grand Valley, and Orangeville Canadian Reformed Churches.

INAUGURAL SERVICE & RECEPTION

In the afternoon, Rev. Poort led his inaugural service at Living Word and preached on John 1:22-23. He emphasized that the task of a minister is to serve as a voice, pointing to Jesus Christ as the Great Saviour sent by God the Father. The message is not about the messenger but who his message is about, namely, "The

One that comes after, the One who is greater." No matter who is preaching the Word, no matter their differences, this principle remains the same.

Following the service, we enjoyed an evening social with some games. We learned about Rev. Poort, his wife Rachel, and their children by playing a version of the classic shoe game. Then we played a trivia game of "Kahoot!" where they could learn a little about our congregation while we learned more about their hobbies including volleyball and the outdoors.

We enjoyed beautiful songs performed by the children and adults of our congregation and we ended the evening with a delicious potluck dinner in the neighbouring park, where the children could play together and the adults could socialize.

We are so thankful that Rev. Poort accepted the call to our congregation and we look forward to having him serve as our preacher and teacher. Our prayer is that God may bless his ministry here at Living Word and that we in turn, as congregation, may be a blessing to the Poort family. Together may we encourage each other in the faith and bring praise and glory to our God. May our church community truly be a Living Word in this dark world. May all our efforts serve as a blessing to those around us and most importantly, may God be glorified. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! ☪

Ana Van Dylk

Reflections

URCNA SYNOD NIAGARA 2022

GERRIT BRUINTJES

From October 17–21 the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) met at the Buffalo Convention Centre for Synod Niagara 2022. Since this was the first time they could gather in four years, Synod was highly anticipated, and the agenda was full.

The URCNA has the practice of sending two delegates from every church, which leads to a sizeable gathering! At the end of 2021, the URCNA had a reported membership of 25,296 spread among 131 different congregations. Every delegate is pre-assigned to an advisory committee that deals with specific matters on the agenda. These committees meet during Synod to hash out the

details and present a well-thought-out report along with recommendations in plenary session. The full Synod then, under the guidance of a capable chairman, engages in debate, consideration of amendments, and adoption of the recommendation and reports which become the official Acts of Synod. In between work sessions the delegates share coffee times, eat lunch and dinner, and use any free time to renew and strengthen friendships.

While this process is substantially different than what we are used to in the Canadian Reformed Churches, it does allow for every local church to be involved, the opportunity for every voice to be heard, and every ear to hear the rationales for the result. It was a

pleasure to witness our brothers in Christ work through matters in common to the churches. We were encouraged by the unity that remained even after difficult debates.

DECISIONS OF INTEREST

The largest and most heavily debated item on the agenda was how the URCNA would structure mission moving forward. A missions evening on Wednesday made clear that our brothers and sisters in the URCNA are active in foreign fields and have a wonderful zeal for home mission, with numerous locations under development. Eight years ago, they hired a federational missions coordinator who assisted the churches in both foreign and home mission work. The coordinator provides guidance in planning, encouragement to missionaries, and advice as requested along the way.

This year Synod decided to encourage every classis to set up a home mission committee that would promote and strengthen evangelism and church planting in the classical region. In addition, two synodical committees were established, one for Home Missions and one for Foreign Missions. These committees would assist the federation in promoting resources and facilitating communication and support between classes. The current mission coordinator will now focus primarily on the foreign field. The suggestion to hire a home missions coordinator was heavily debated, but in the end the proposal was not adopted. When all debate was done and the votes finalized, the brothers recognized the import of the moment and took time to unite in prayer and song. I found this to be a special moment that encouraged a spirit of unity and showed the benefit of having all churches represented. It certainly would be helpful for every church to have delegates present who knew the current dynamics of the federation that led to the final decision.


Several smaller items may be of interest. Synod established a synodical committee to address the biblical teaching on human sexuality and another to study the concept and practice of digital “livestream” worship. I personally look forward to reading these reports.

Synod did not accede to an overture to set up national synods (along the 49th parallel) which would meet in years that a general synod did not. While some brothers noted that further growth in the URCNA may necessitate such restructuring, the discussion and vote made clear there was little appetite for doing so at this time. Synod also spent some time considering the right of individuals to

appeal across classical boundaries. They decided that such appeals were allowed under the current church order and more specifically the adopted synodical guidelines. Synod noted with appreciation that the publication of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal was a great success. An app providing the songs digitally is available on the app stores and has been widely downloaded.

ECUMENICITY

The main session of Synod was sprinkled with addresses from various fraternal delegates. The URCNA enjoys good relationships with faithful Reformed churches both in North America and around the globe. Classis Central US has various interactions and a growing relationship with Classis Minnkota of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Synod expressed gratitude for this measure of faithfulness found in Classis Minnkota. The URCNA started new ecumenical contact (Phase I) with federations in Scotland, Sudan, Australia, and India, and moved into ecumenical fellowship (Phase II) with federations in Latvia, Indonesia, and East Australia. Rev. Steve Vandeveld brought greetings from the Canadian Reformed Churches, expressing our love and appreciation for our brothers and sisters in the United Reformed Churches. He noted that, even though moving to federative unity may be on hold, we continue to enjoy much organic unity especially in the Canadian context. Their committee for ecumenical relations mentioned to all brothers present that the Canadian Reformed Churches remain eager and willing to interact with any questions our URCNA brothers or sisters may have. We appreciated that the diversity in the URCNA was not a hindrance to their unity.

As fraternal delegates, we were tremendously blessed by the fellowship we could enjoy with our brothers in Christ at Synod Niagara 2022. We were deeply encouraged by the spirit of unity and true fellowship that pervaded the discussions both at committee level and in the main session. May we pray that God will bless our two federations to continue to unite in being a faithful witness of his goodness and grace. 



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Grand Valley Welcomes

THE VANDERHORST FAMILY

JOHN VANDERWOERD

ORDINATION SERVICE

The ordination of our new pastor and teacher, Rev. Bryan Vanderhorst, took place on a snowy Sunday morning, November 13, 2022. Our pastor-elect had asked Dr. W. den Hollander to lead the ordination service. Dr. den Hollander had served as brother Vanderhorst's mentor during the last two years of his seminary training. The sermon text he used was 1 Peter 5:1-4.

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

In this sermon the office-bearers were reminded to shepherd the flock of God. We heard about the instructor, the instruction, and the reward. After the form for ordination was read, a number of ministers from other congregations, a couple of professors, and a few elders were invited up for the laying on of hands. This included elder Stan DeHaan from B.C., a brother-in-law to Rev. Vanderhorst.

After the worship service, our corresponding clerk, br. J. W. Jonker, invited delegates from neighbouring congregations as well as Rev. M. Van Luik, the delegate for Classis Northern Ontario, to speak words of congratulations. Brother Jonker then read a number of congratulatory letters from those congregations who were unable to send delegates.

INAUGURAL SERMON

In the afternoon, Rev. Vanderhorst preached his inaugural sermon on John 15:4-5, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." We were reminded to remain united to the true vine, Jesus Christ, and then we will bear much fruit. We were shown how this imagery of the vine was also from the Old Testament. In Isaiah 5, we were shown this imagery as judgment. Even though Israel was God's chosen vine, they produced nothing but sin, unrighteousness, and injustice. They needed to trust God and his promise to send a Saviour, but most of the time they failed to do so. We were shown that it is through the Word and prayer that we remain united with Christ. During the worship service, Rev. Vanderhorst was not only able "to get his feet wet" by preaching his inaugural sermon, but also to




Bryan and Paige Vanderhorst on moving day, welcomed with a banner signed by members of the congregation.

get his hands wet, as Corbin Bergsma was the first child baptized by our newly ordained minister.

After the worship service everyone was able to enjoy a time of fellowship with beverages and cake provided by the Ladies' Aid.

WELCOME EVENING

After the afternoon worship service on Sunday, November 27, the congregation was able to enjoy a time of fellowship followed by a potluck meal where we all could enjoy the fantastic culinary delights of our congregation. After dinner and cleanup, the welcome evening was opened by br. Leo Kottelenberg, who with his wife Joni organized the evening. The choir sang three pieces of music. The Young People's Society had a game of "Jeopardy" where the council members were divided into two groups and had to answer a number of questions pertaining to Bible knowledge, Church History, and knowledge about the congregation in Grand Valley. The teams gamed competitively with much laughter until a winning team was finally declared. Then we had a game of extremely convoluted "Dutch Bingo" where it turns out that we all—including the Vanderhorsts—have family connections to one another. We were all then shown that through these connections, we are all connected to a delegate of the Synod of Dort from 1618-19. As a welcome gift from the congregation, elder Jeff Endeman presented the Vanderhorst family with a natural gas barbecue after which Rev. Vanderhorst spoke words of appreciation, and the meeting was closed in prayer.

We give thanks to our heavenly Father who has provided richly for the congregation of Grand Valley. May the work of Rev. Vanderhorst as our under shepherd continue to be blessed and to be a blessing for our congregation here in Grand Valley, and may it bear much fruit in God's kingdom, to the praise and glory of his Name. 

John Vanderwoerd

< Laying on of hands (L to r - T. VanRaalte, R. Feenstra, J. Vanderwoerd, B. Vanderhorst, S. DeHaan, M. Van Luik, W. den Hollander)

SEMINARY UPDATE

Under the Lord's blessing, life at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) is going well. Men are being trained for gospel ministry. A new professor has joined us. And, by the time you read this, the renovations should be nearing completion or hopefully even done!

FACILITIES

Since September 2022 we have divided our activity over two buildings: chapels and lectures are held at the Maranatha Free Reformed Church, while library research and staff work continue at our own building on West 27th St. During the renovation phase, we have been using the Maranatha Free Reformed Church because it is close to CRTS and has the right number and size of rooms to serve our needs very well. (The fact that it has a fantastic pipe organ is a bonus; the organists in the CRTS community have certainly enjoyed accompanying our singing in chapel.) We want to express our deep gratitude to the Maranatha congregation for accommodating us in such a gracious and generous manner.

As I write this at the beginning of February, the drywall is almost all up. Painting and millwork, as well as fixtures and flooring are scheduled for the coming weeks. Much of the electrical, plumbing, and HVAC in the building has been upgraded to current standards.

As someone taking a quick peek recently said to me, "This is a game changer!" Many walls have been removed and the ground level of the seminary is much more open concept now. Construction crews made a new, large classroom out of the combined space of two older, smaller classrooms, a hallway, and a closet. With large windows on either side the classroom is flooded with natural light. Very nice! Also, the student lounge is much larger with a compact but convenient open-concept kitchen. We can't wait to move in! Thank you once more, brothers and sisters, for all your generous support to make this possible.

When completed, the seminary building will have the capacity for forty-five to forty-eight students. This would allow for incoming freshmen classes averaging ten to twelve students, which would result in thirty to thirty-six students in the combined senior class. Let us pray that the Lord of the church would continue to send us more men to be trained, because it goes without saying that

if an average of ten to twelve students graduated each year, the supporting churches and mission fields would be greatly blessed.

STUDENTS

Speaking of numbers, currently our student body stands at thirty-four. Thirty of them are full-time in the MDiv program, which prepares for ordained ministry. Three are part-time students from Korea who are here for one year in what might be loosely compared to an exchange program from the Independent Reformed Theological Seminary in Seoul. One student is in the BTh program, which does not lead to ordained ministry but prepares for other service in God's kingdom.

Like many (all?) congregations and families, our student community experienced a more-than-usual amount of sickness last fall. Two little ones in our CRTS community even had to be hospitalized for a time. Thankfully, right now everyone is in more stable condition again.

Here is an interesting statistic. Although I could be off by one or two, according to my count fifteen (yes, 15!) babies were born in the 2022 calendar year in the CRTS community, including a set of twins. Not only is this a reason for much thankfulness, and much busyness, but it also indicates the demographic of our student body. We have quite a few young married couples.

Following through with the theme of marriage, I would also like to mention CRTS's "Joy Group," as they are commonly called. This is a Bible study group that includes the wives and girlfriends of seminary students. It also serves as an active support group. With couples and families coming from across Canada, and indeed around the globe, this group of sisters in the Lord reaches out to each other with spiritual encouragement and practical assistance.

CURRICULUM

Every year professors make tweaks to their courses—a new textbook, a more current topic, or a more streamlined approach. But last year the faculty as a whole brainstormed together about how our curriculum could be improved to better serve our students and ultimately the churches.

One of the more significant changes was to revamp the way we organize our January interim semester, a two-week period of

teaching immediately after the Christmas break. Now we have a cycle of four themes: more on preaching, cross-cultural missions, pastoral care, church planting. To be sure, each of these topics receives attention in the regular coursework. In fact, learning to preach is the pedagogical backbone of each and every instructional week. However, the January interim, or J-term, is a short time to focus intensively on a special topic in each of those areas. For example, we might focus on preaching *from the Psalms* or pastoral care *for those suffering from abuse*. This year we had a number of guest speakers on the topic of church planting. The sessions were well-received, and a good number of local ministers also attended.

We have also found ways to streamline some of the regular courses. This includes co-teaching in certain courses. Currently this only happens in three courses, but it is working well. For example, we used to have two separate courses in hermeneutics and exegesis. Hermeneutics focuses on the bigger picture of the Reformed principles undergirding biblical interpretation. Exegesis zeroes in on the proper steps of digging into a certain passage and bringing forth the truth of God's Word in a responsible way. It does not take too much to realize, though, that hermeneutics and exegesis fit together like a hand in a glove. So now our OT and NT professors are co-teaching one course that covers both aspects. Hopefully the students find it beneficial.

FACULTY & STAFF

The big news here is that Dr. Reuben Bredenhof and his family have arrived in Canada. They have settled into their home close to the mountain brow here in Hamilton. Their daughters are making their way into their new schools. Their Dad, our new professor, is also busy in the textbooks, familiarizing himself with the material he will need to begin teaching in September. There will also be a practical component to his preparations, as he visits both foreign and home mission fields to gain on-the-ground experience in how mission work proceeds. We are thankful that his years of preaching, teaching, and shepherding will stand him in good stead for the numerous courses he will teach in sermon writing, catechism teaching, and pastoral care. Yes, this also means that Dr. A. J. de Visser will be retiring soon . . . but not quite yet. (We can focus on that in a future issue of *Clarion*.)


Also, if you have been following the press releases you might have noticed that CRTS now has a part-time Teaching Assistant, br. Raoul Kingma, a recent graduate of CRTS. He has become a valuable part of the team. With the growing student body, the workload for professors has increased, and Ray has certainly done his part in keeping things manageable.

For the rest, the faculty and staff are doing well, by God's grace, and we pray that this may continue.

OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS

By the time you read this, our second federation-wide Prospective Students' Event should be in the rear-view mirror. We hope that it will have been as successful as the first one. This is a two-day event to which men from across the federation come to learn about gospel ministry and prayerfully consider together whether the Lord is opening doors for them to step in this direction. We did this back in 2019. The Lord blessed us with thirty-three attendees, some of whom are now preparing for the ministry at CRTS. Praise the Lord for that! May he grant similar results this time around. Our goal is to repeat this event every three years, with more local and regional initiatives in the intervening years.

Speaking of prospective students, the Board of Governors recently adopted, on a trial basis, a new admission policy for mature students. As reported in the Board's press release, "This was in response to Synod Guelph 2022's decision to authorize the Board of Governors 'to review current policies regarding admission standards for mature students.'" The new policy being tested is that mature applicants (being at least thirty years old) do not necessarily need a full B.A. degree but may be admitted if they have completed some undergraduate studies and the pre-seminary, original language requirements. As you might expect, there are more stipulations than that, but suffice it to say that if there are men who are at least thirty years old and who are interested in studying for the ministry but do not have a full B.A., they should reach out to the seminary to explore what the possibilities are. This policy will be used on a trial basis until the Board has reported on this matter at General Synod 2025.

In conclusion, thank you, once more, for all your support. From time to time, I cross paths with presidents and principals of other seminaries, and they often remind me how blessed CRTS is to have the loving support and wise oversight of a federation. I wholeheartedly agree. 



Jason Van Vliet *Principal & Professor of Dogmatics*
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WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION

FUNDING THE SEMINARY LIBRARY

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what was planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.”

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season.”

2 TIMOTHY 4:2

The WSA committee agreed that the annual newsletter should never be more than one page, double sided; adopting the BIF method of *brief, informative, and friendly*, so as not to lose you somewhere along the way. Then Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 happened and suddenly our newsletter was pushing its two-page boundary. It couldn't be helped! Sure, we could have quoted the very first little piece only, but not *really*. Look at that beautiful passage. Please pause and take a moment to read it in its entirety. Doesn't it just about sum up everything? Reflecting on the past few years and all the moveable parts that have teetered and tottered in a season beyond our control, how beautiful it is that we kept on travelling down God's perfectly planned path of salvation, no matter what season of life each of us finds ourselves in.

CONVOCATION

This past fall was certainly a season in time to “build up, embrace, speak, and love” as we celebrated with the CRTS graduates at the 2022 Convocation. After two years of significantly scaled down convocation ceremonies, it was so very good to be back in the grand hall of Redeemer University with all the board, faculty, family members, friends and the broader church community that came out to witness the graduation of six students and the opening of the next academic year. It was also a time to give thanks for the many blessings of God's goodness at CRTS regarding the renovation project and ongoing daily operations.

As always, and on behalf of our local reps, WSA presented at this year's convocation. Further, the culmination of our annual

work always includes presenting a cheque to the principal that will support the financial needs of our seminary library. We are so thankful to report that through God's abundant blessing and the dedicated effort of our local reps, \$34,678.73 was collected this past year. Many thanks to all of you that support this work in prayer and financial gifts. We also received an anonymous one-time donation of \$40,000. We are so thankful for this extra blessing. The reserve will help us in the lean years. Keeping in line with the annual budget, we pledged \$45,000 to the seminary library. God continues to answer our prayers and provide in amazing ways.

HELPFUL TIPS/REMINDERS

We thought it might be helpful if our supportive community knew of some of the helpful tips we send to our reps every year again. Maybe it answers some questions our donors might have.

1. *Our fiscal year ends June 30.* Any donation received after that will be rolled into the following year.
2. Donations can be made *on-line* through CanadaHelps.org link (search: CRTS) The link can also be found on the CRTS website. **Please include the specific name of your church in the box marked "company info," to ensure that the donation is attributed to the right congregation.**
3. Email money transfers to wsa@crt.ca (password: crtswsa). **Please remember to include your 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.
4. You have access to videos, pictures and information about WSA on the CRTS website under the *Library* tab. You may quote/use any of the information/videos to promote the work we do!

COLLECTING IN FAITH

Speaking of which, the WSA continues to be amazed by the fact that somehow the annual budget for the library is always met. Since WSA began, we have simply relied on freewill donations. According to any sound business model, that's unreliable and doesn't actually make sense. Then again, how often do campaigns, especially those done in faith, make sense?

We see the trends, the financial instabilities, the me-culture, and the numerous causes God's people are called to support. It can become discouraging when we focus on statistics, budgets, and dollars. Yet, here we are! Once again, the funds are there and the library continues to be blessed through faithful representatives and our donors—those that hold the seminary dear to their hearts. Ministers of the Word continue to be educated and have access to a well-equipped library with resources that are even utilized by other students in other universities. We are reaching more than just our own!

The page is shrinking fast so it's time to sign off with a word of encouragement. Always remember that every season has its moments, delightful and difficult. The beauty of it all is that the ministry of the Word will carry us through each one of them. How wonderful that WSA can play a small part in the education of those that *preach the word to help us be ready in season, and out of season.*

We continue to covet your prayers. 🙏

Blessings and thanks to all of you,

President: Janet Van Vliet

Secretary: Deb Alkema

Treasurer: Karen Schuurman

ARLENE DEWIT

Arlene lives in Chilliwack at one of the Bethesda homes, called Vedder Terrace. She has a very nice townhouse and lives there with her sister Mary. Arlene has 24-hour care because she is visually impaired, but that does not hinder her from participating in and enjoying life. Arlene loves to travel, go out, visit, listen to music, and knit.



Arlene's favorite food is Borenkool and her favorite refreshment is lemonade. Most mornings, staff bring Arlene to Starbucks for this special drink.

If you drop in for coffee at her home, you will likely see her doing one of her favourite things: knitting dookies (dishcloths). Arlene donates most of the dookies to the Mission Thrift Store/Bibles for Mission that sends Bibles to third world countries so they can learn about Jesus Christ. That makes her happy because Arlene knows Jesus Christ is her Saviour and she wants to help spread the gospel.

Arlene is a member of the Christian Reformed Church in Chilliwack and attends every Sunday. Arlene also attends Circle of Friends, where many of her friends go to socialize, praise the Lord, and sing.

Arlene will celebrate her birthday on April 23. She likes to invite her friends from Vedder Terrace to share a treat with her. Most likely Arlene will make cupcakes for everyone. Baking is fun, and Arlene likes to share what she has made with her friends here.

Arlene also loves to receive mail and letters and frequently gets letters from her nieces. That is special. She enjoys the outdoors and going for walks in the park. It is especially interesting for her to touch and smell things she cannot see. She likes to explore new things.

Arlene has a good life at Vedder Terrace with staff and friends who love and treasure her.

If you are in Chilliwack, feel free to drop in and say "hello!" You are very welcome.

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Happy Birthday to the three of you celebrating a birthday in April!

We wish you all the Lord's blessing in the year to come.

2 Derek Kok will be **53**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, Ontario
N1A 1T8

23 Arlene DeWit will be **62**
#4 6560 Vedder Road,
Chilliwack, British Columbia
V2R 0Y6

29 Bryce Berends will be **48**
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1 St Line, RR #3
Fergus, Ontario
N1M 2W4

CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 27

Do you remember what a sacrament is? A sacrament is an action done in church to remind us about God's forgiveness. Baptism is one of the sacraments. In baptism, we see some water go on a baby's forehead. Why is water used? What is so special about that water? Does it change us somehow to forgive our sins? No, the water does not actually change us. The water used in baptism is the very same water that you drink. There is nothing special about it. But the water reminds us about a very special promise! It reminds us that the Lord Jesus's blood washes away our sins. It reminds us that his Spirit helps us fight sin in our hearts. And this promise is even for a baby who doesn't understand any of it! That child is God's child, no matter how small he or she may be. Praise God for giving us the sacrament of baptism!

MATCHING

Lord's Day 27, Question & Answer 74 explains the connection between baptism and circumcision.

DRAW A LINE TO SHOW IF BAPTISM AND CIRCUMCISION WERE DONE IN THE OLD OR NEW COVENANT:

OLD COVENANT

BAPTISM

NEW COVENANT

CIRCUMCISION

TRUE OR FALSE

Circle the correct answer:

THE WATER USED IN BAPTISM IS THE SAME WATER WE DRINK. TRUE FALSE

BAPTISM IS ONLY FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE OLD ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND. TRUE FALSE

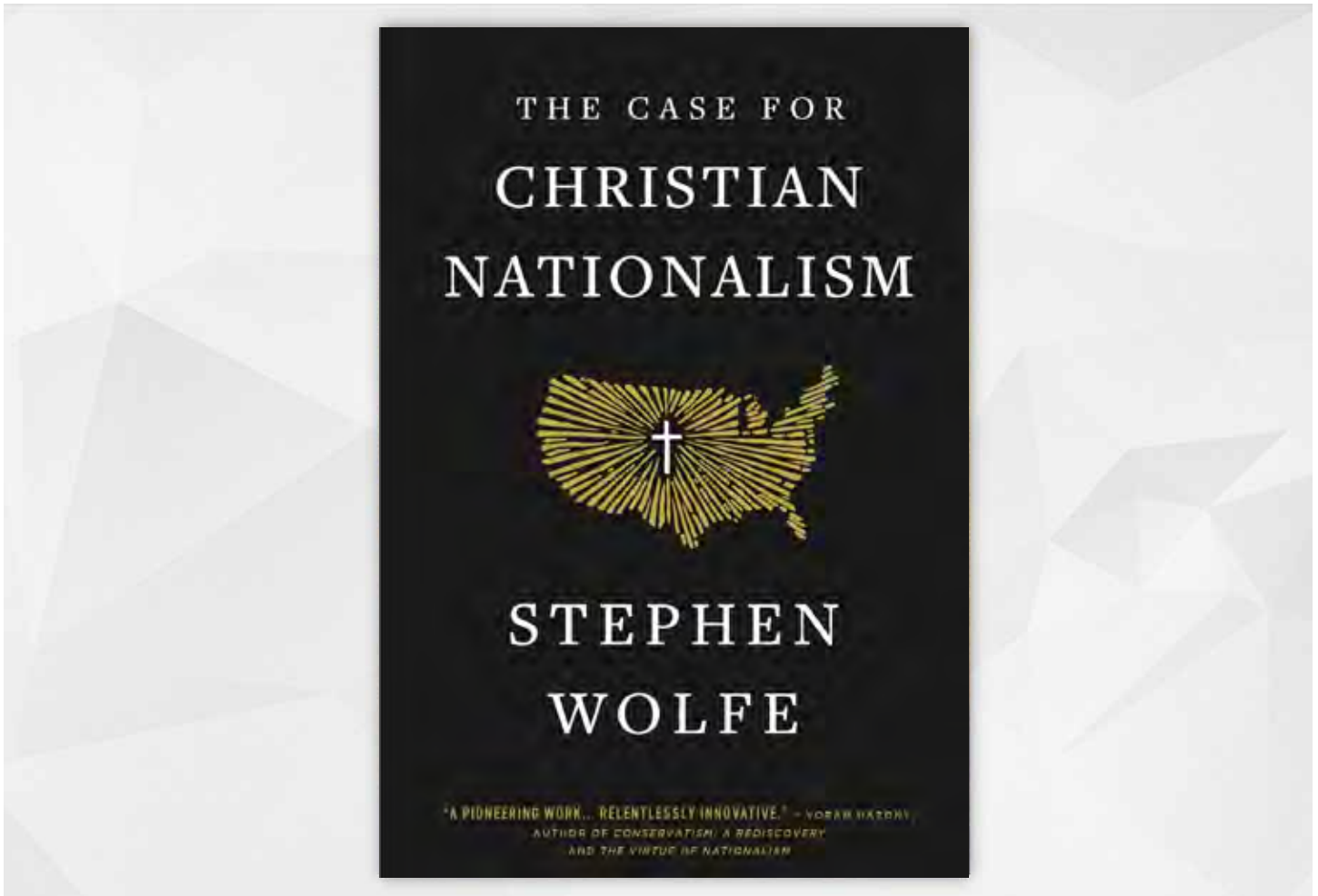
BAPTISM REMINDS US THAT JESUS'S BLOOD FORGIVES OUR SINS. TRUE FALSE



HEY KIDS!

Do you have questions about something you have read in the Bible or heard in a sermon? Maybe you are wondering about something you have read in a Lord's Day. We have a new column coming called KIDS' QUESTIONS. We warmly invite you to ask Mrs. DeBoer your question! With your parent's permission, email deboerca@gmail.com and find your question and an answer in Clarion!

AMANDA DEBOER



DOMINIONISM 2.0

The Case for Christian Nationalism,

Stephen Wolfe. (Moscow: Canon Press, 2022). Paperback. 478 pages. \$34.47.

This is one of those books with buzz. Many were anticipating its release and since appearing in early November, it's been getting a lot of attention, some positive. Douglas Wilson raves, "Wolfe is to be thanked for having the courage and learning to show us our way back [to the approach the US had at its founding]." Moreover, Christian nationalism isn't just an intramural topic

amongst believers. The mainstream media have also seized on it, partially or maybe even entirely, as the whipping boy for the United States Capitol attack on January 6, 2021. It's worth a critical look.

Author Stephen Wolfe is described as a "country scholar at Wolfeshire in North Carolina." He has a Ph.D. from Louisiana State University. He's authored many articles and hosts a podcast,

but this is his first book. In it he describes attending the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, so that seems to be his ecclesiastical affiliation.

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

What is Christian nationalism? It is “a totality of national action, consisting of civil laws and social customs, conducted by a Christian nation as a Christian nation, in order to procure for itself both earthly and heavenly good in Christ” (p. 9). In this book, Wolfe aims “to show that Christian nationalism (as defined) is just, the ideal arrangement for Christians, and something worth pursuing with determination and resolve” (p. 9). As far as method goes, Wolfe says he assumes the Reformed theological tradition, and so he doesn’t offer much in the way of interaction with Scripture. He offers both natural and supernatural arguments, often in combination.

I’ll be upfront with my assessment: this book is profoundly flawed, but at the same time thought-provoking. *The Case for Christian Nationalism* is built upon a speculative foundation. Wolfe’s entire argument is based on his notion of what would have happened in human society if the fall never happened. He argues that hypothetical pre-fall peoples would have formed “geographically and culturally distinct nations” (p. 57) with their own civil governments. Apart from being speculative, Wolfe here contradicts the Belgic Confession. He argues that “civil governments would have existed in the state of integrity” (p. 70). Wolfe maintains that the original function of government was “not to restrain sin” (p. 72). However, with Article 36 of our Confession, “We believe that, *because of the depravity of mankind*, our gracious God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers.”


FLAWS

I don’t want to make this a long review, so I’ll just give a short list of some of the other flaws without much added comment. Wolfe argues at length for the responsibility of the Christian “prince” to address public blasphemy. Yet he includes (p.159) a quote from John Steinbeck in which God’s name is abused. He argues that just as husbands must correct their wives when they perform their duties poorly, so the Christian prince should “correct the lazy and erring pastor” (p. 312). He uses a racial slur on page 288. He opposes open immigration since it undermines a nation’s ethnic

particularity. Spuriously using a reference to Thomas Aquinas, he suggests immigrants shouldn’t receive citizenship until the second or third generation of residency (p. 168). Wolfe argues that America’s policy of open immigration is evidence of tyranny, and this is sufficient grounds for a violent revolution (p. 348). In a Christian nation, neither women nor unbelievers would be able to vote or otherwise participate in politics (p. 73 and p. 392). The author doesn’t believe in limited government—in his Christian utopia, the government can “require the elevation of the pulpit above the Lord’s Table in church construction” (p. 317). Finally, Wolfe seems to have a myopic view of the world. He argues that “dissimilar people have trouble forming and sustaining a political community . . . cultural diversity produces conflict” (p. 146). Has he heard of nations like Singapore? He writes, “No nation (properly speaking) is composed of two or more ethnicities” (p. 135). I suppose Canada isn’t a nation then.

NO NATIONALISM?

The Case for Christian Nationalism does get you thinking about our calling with respect to politics. For example, if one disagrees with Wolfe (as I do), what’s the alternative? He says we have two options: Christian nationalism or pagan nationalism (p. 381). But how about no nationalism? Does Scripture teach us to be nationalists of any sort? I’m not convinced.

Back in the 70s and 80s, “dominionism” was a popular topic. That was owing to the theonomists/Christian reconstructionists. Wolfe tries to distance himself from what he calls “modern theonomy.” There are differences, for sure. However, one thing is the same: the drive for power, emanating from a hyper-aggressive can-do American spirit. Hear Wolfe: “We have the power and right to act. Let us train the will and cultivate our resolve” (p. 352). “Let us wield power in support of the church” (p. 386). “If it is going to happen, we have to make it happen” (p. 469). Christian nationalism is a regurgitation of American dominionism. It’s not the way. 



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MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

JANUARY 12, 2023

OPENING AND ROLL CALL

The chairman of the Board, Rev. John Louwse, led in opening devotions. The governors were all present, except for Alan Datema who was absent with notice, and Rev. Clarence VanderVelde, who was late because of car trouble. Dr. Jason Van Vliet was present as Principal and administrative assistant Leanne Kuizenga was present to take the minutes of the meeting.

MEMORABILIA

Information was shared about the personal circumstances of emeriti professors, as well as widows and families of professors.

MINUTES AND AGENDA

The minutes of the regular meeting held on September 8, 2022 were approved. The agenda for the meeting was established. Outstanding matters on the action log were reviewed.

DECISIONS, REPORTS, AGENDA ITEMS

1. With gratitude to the Lord it is noted that Dr. Reuben Bredenhof and his family have arrived in Hamilton. The Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton officially called Dr. Bredenhof to be set aside as professor of Ministry and Mission at the Seminary. He has accepted this call and his colloquium and installation as Minister of the Word at Cornerstone are planned for March, and his installation as Professor of Ministry and Mission is planned for the upcoming CRTS convocation in September.

2. Faculty workload has been addressed with the hiring of a teaching assistant. This has been of tremendous benefit to our professors. Yet an increased student body means more marking and increased commitments in the spiritual formation program (which involves our professors mentoring students). The Senate and Board need to continue to monitor and address the issue of faculty workload.

3. The Senate of CRTS proposed a new policy for the admission of mature students. This was in response to Synod Guelph 2022's decision to authorize the Board of Governors "to review current policies regarding admission standards for mature students." Previously, all students were required to have a bachelor's degree to enroll at CRTS. The new policy proposes that mature applicants (being at least thirty years old) may be admitted if they have completed at least six semester length courses of undergraduate studies from an accredited institution. In addition to this the applicant must also satisfy the existing requirements that are in place for Hebrew and Greek, and demonstrate the ability to pursue graduate level study by submitting an essay or paper on an assigned topic. This policy was adopted on a trial basis until after the Board has reported on this matter to General Synod 2025.

4. The Board addressed the issue of succession planning. Longer term, we will need to replace our professors. The Board asked the Senate to formalize the process of identifying students with the potential to pursue further studies. We also need to make the churches aware of the need for future professors, and to encourage them to support those pastors deemed qualified for further studies

(even though this involves sacrifices on behalf of the local congregation). There was some discussion about setting up a bursary fund or making other arrangements for the financial support of students interested in doing further studies.

5. The committee appointed to investigate the feasibility of an Australian CRTS affiliate campus presented an extensive report. A decision was made to refine this report so that it may be used in further discussions with the Australian deputies for training for the ministry.

6. The executive committee updated the Board on Dr. Ted Van Raalte's health circumstances and his teaching load for the second semester. The Board is working with the doctor's recommendations to allow Dr. Van Raalte a gradual, sustainable return to work. The Board is thankful for the continued progress made in his recovery!

7. The Academic Committee passed on the minutes of their past meeting. They were received for information.

8. Rev. Clarence VanderVelde and Dr. Jeff Temple reported on lecture visits to CRTS on November 22-23, 2022, as well as on visits with professors. These reports were received with thankfulness.

9. The Finance and Property Committee provided minutes of the recent meetings they held. A construction update was given. The goal is for classes to be taught in our own building again by mid-March. Thankfulness was expressed for the use of the Maranatha Free Reformed Church building.

10. Providence Canadian Reformed Church consulted with representatives of the Board about our interest in pursuing a combined-use facility with them. This was sent back to the Finance and Property committee for further consideration.

11. A report was submitted to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) on ensuring institutional vitality and educational effectiveness. It outlined CRTS's process of strategic planning and assessment, and the financial model by which our seminary is funded, budgeting procedures, compensation models, and workload. ATS received this report and gave a very positive evaluation of it.

12. An assessment was provided on the effectiveness of the work of the Board and its committees. It appears that the Board is

functioning well. An oral report was provided on follow-up on the evaluation of our principal's work. Thankfulness was expressed for our principal's capable leadership.

13. The Governance Committee sent a proposal on our handbook's mandate for strategic planning to the Board for final approval. This proposal was approved.

14. Dr. Jason Van Vliet presented his Principal's report. Faculty, staff, and students are looking forward to all being under one roof again, the Lord willing, by mid-March. The student body consists of more married men than in the past. Fifteen babies were born in the 2022 calendar year in the CRTS community. The past semester the student body experienced a more-than-usual amount of sickness, including having some young children hospitalized for a time. The first week of the January interim semester involved a focus on church planting. A prospective students' event is planned for February 23-24 for students interested in studying at CRTS along with their wives or girlfriends. Overall, faculty and staff are doing well.

15. Dr. Cornelis Van Dam reported on his attendance at the Evangelical Theological Society conference, and Dr. Ted Van Raalte on his attendance at a conference organized by professors from the Theological University in Kampen on the writings of Guido de Brès. These reports were received with thankfulness.

PRESS RELEASE & CLOSING

The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the vice-chairman in consultation with the executive and the principal. Rev. Julius Van Spronsen closed the meeting with prayer.

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,



Rev. Joe Poppe (Vice-chairman/Corresponding Clerk)

