

# Clarion



**Prayer is  
speaking to God**

**GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER**

**CLARION KIDS**

**YOU ASKED**



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# Prayer in Worship

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## *Singing is praying*

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### Reflecting on our habits

Our lives are filled with routines we do without giving them much thought. We call them habits. This is a good thing, as long as they are good habits. Many of these habits will be passed on to the next generation without much conscious thought, unless one is suddenly asked, “Why do you do it that way?” Then you are forced to reflect on why you do what you do and explain it. Such reflection is good for oneself, as it should renew appreciation for what one does, and it good for the one asking the question as they understand the reason for various habits. Even if not asked, it is good to be proactive and explain various habits, lest the next generation simply does things out of custom or superstition.

This is true also when it comes to the manner of our worship. We will have familiar patterns of worship. We are forced to reflect on why we do what we do when someone, be it a visitor or one of our children, suddenly asks, “Why do you do it that way?”

The element of worship I will address in this editorial is the element of prayer. The purpose is to reflect on why we do what we do, so we might be involved in congregational prayer with renewed fervor and be able to answer anyone who asks us. We will consider the three prayer times during the worship service. I will work with the assumption that most congregations use the B Form of Worship, as found on page 596 in the *Book of Praise*.

### The prayer before the sermon

The first prayer time we consider is the prayer before the reading of the Word of God. If you listen carefully, you will notice it usually begins with praise to God. It is only fitting to praise his great and glorious name. This will be accompanied by thanksgiving for his Fatherly care experienced during the past week, his nearness in times of trouble as well as joy. There is also reason to

give thanks for the opportunity to worship him in freedom. This is truly a gift when we consider the hostility and persecution experienced by many fellow believers throughout the world, particularly those in countries with Muslim majorities, such as in the Middle East and Africa, as well as in countries where authorities are very suspicious of any religion, such as in China.

Praise and thanksgiving will be followed by the key components of this prayer, namely, prayer of confession, prayer for forgiveness, and prayer of illumination. This prayer prepares the way for fruitful listening to the Word of God as read and proclaimed. Our sins and sinful inclinations are an obstacle to fruitful listening. The past week will have been filled with sins in deed, word, and thought. We need to humbly confess those sins and ask for forgiveness. Further, we need the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. Without that illumination, we will not have the proper frame of mind to listen. Instead, we will be prone to listen as we listen to a speech or a lecture, ready to challenge the speaker, expecting the speaker to keep our interest, and perhaps drifting off into sleep or various distracting thoughts. The awareness of our sinful inclination, our short attention span and our desire for entertainment, make the prayer for illumination essential. With our sins forgiven for the sake of Christ's blood and our mind illumined by the Spirit of Christ, we are ready to listen to God's Word. Listen carefully next Sunday, and you should find these elements in the prayer before the sermon.

### The prayer after the sermon

The second prayer we consider is the prayer after the sermon. This is sometimes called the “long prayer,” or the “congregational prayer.” In the order of worship for the morning service on page 596 of the *Book of Praise*, it indicates that this is a prayer of “thanksgiving, and prayer for all the needs of Christendom.” If you listen carefully,

the thanksgiving will usually begin with thanksgiving for the Word of God as it has just been heard. Many ministers will include what might be called a prayer of application, where it is asked that the sermon may bear fruit in the lives of the hearers.

A significant part of this prayer will be devoted to the needs of the local congregation. It will include thanksgiving for births, birthdays, anniversaries, and other special events. It will also include

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Rev. Eric Kampen begins our issue with an editorial prayer in worship. What are the purposes of these prayers? And have we formed good habits in this area of our worship?

In Issue 15 we published the first of a series of three articles by David Robertson of the Free Church of Scotland. In this issue we have the second, "Is the Church Capitalist?"

There is a short report from the Fraser Valley Women's League Day, with a speech that was given by Ginny Vanderhorst, "God Loves a Cheerful Giver."

We have a number of our regular columns: Treasures New and Old, Clippings on Politics and Religion, You Asked, *Clarion* Kids, and Ray of Sunshine. There is also a letter to the editor, a music review, and a canticle.

*Laura Veenendaal*

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petitions for various needs in the lives of the members. A helpful place to look to get a sense of the variety of topics to be covered is the “Prayer for the Needs of All Christendom,” found on pages 635-637 of the *Book of Praise*. This prayer can include prayer for mission, the preservation of the church, Christian instruction, those who suffer for the sake of their faith, those who are being chastened with poverty, imprisonment, physical illness, expectant mothers, and our daily work. The topics for this prayer are so numerous, ministers will tend to divide them up between the morning and afternoon services. Further, while some aspects will be mentioned weekly, others may be remembered in prayer over the course of different Sundays. Everything need not be mentioned each Sunday.

With respect to this prayer, three points merit elaboration. First, it should be remembered that this is a congregational prayer, not a personal prayer. There will be matters that a family or an individual may remember in prayer, but that does not necessarily make it a matter of congregational prayer. We can think of events in one's extended family, which are reason for thanksgiving or petition. There may be the birth of a grandchild, or the health concern of an uncle or aunt on the other side of the country. Congregational prayer should focus on matters that pertain to life in the congregation and that are understandable to the members of the congregation.

In connection with this, there is a need to exercise discretion in praying about events happening in the world. If an area on the other side of the world has been affected by an earthquake, or there has been another mass shooting some place in the USA, it may be trendy to pray about it, but the key question to consider about inclusion is how it is relevant in terms of the needs of all Christendom.

Second, congregational prayer requires preparation. As was mentioned earlier, there are so many matters to be included that ministers will divide various matters over the two services each Sunday, as well as over several weeks. This means that it is not really appropriate to give the minister a list of various items to include in prayer just before the start of a service and expect them to be included. There are so many means of communication that there is really no need to give items at the last minute. A minister should know before the Sunday, so that he can meaningfully incorporate the various items. He also will have opportunity to consider whether an item should be included. Last minute items have the effect of requiring the minister to mention them before the prayer and give some explanation, to avoid the prayer from becoming a newscast.

Third, and perhaps this is more a point for the one leading in prayer, prayer should remain prayer. There is a danger to preach in prayer. This forgets that prayer is speaking to God on behalf of the congregation, not speaking to the congregation.

As you can tell from the various points mentioned, especially this second prayer requires preparation. Just as a minister will not deliver a sermon without careful thought as to what he will say, so a minister needs to give thought to what he will bring before the Lord in prayer.

### A third way of praying

It would seem that we have covered all of the times of prayer during a worship service. Yet, in the introduction, it was said there are three times of prayer. This third time is actually multiple times, perhaps, as many as five or six times. In contrast to the previous two times of praying, where the minister speaks on behalf of the congregation, in the prayer we are now considering, the congregation prays communally, in unison. This takes place when we sing. Indeed, singing is praying. There is the interesting line at the end of Psalm 72, which concludes Book Two of the Book of Psalm, “The prayers of David, the Son of Jesse, are ended.” This shows us how psalms are seen as prayers. This makes sense when we recall how prayers include praise, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, and petitions. We find all these in the psalms, as well as scriptural hymns, that have been composed over the centuries. When we sing in worship, we, in effect, are praying in unison.

This is an important point to remember. As there is the danger to tune out when the minister leads in prayer, so there is the danger to tune out when we sing. As singing is praying to God, it impresses upon us that, just as in every element of worship, we should be fully engaged, paying attention to what we are singing.

### A house of prayer

We began by speaking of the habit of prayer. By now, you will have been reminded of what to expect in the various prayers offered during a worship service. It should be evident that much thought has to go into prayer in preparation for the worship service. It is good to know this so that you can meaningfully follow the ministers as he leads in prayer and pray along. When we further see singing as sung prayer, we will begin to understand how much time in worship is actually devoted to prayer. In this respect, a church building can rightfully be called a house of prayer.





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# Obedience and Blessing

***"So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today. . . then I will send rain on your land in its season."***

**(Deuteronomy 11:13-14)**

You are probably reading this sometime around Canada's Labour Day. A number of us, I am guessing, don't even know why it's called Labour Day. We just know it as the long weekend that marks the end of summer and the beginning of another school year and season of work. But Labour Day's history goes back to 1872 when a massive labour strike took place in Toronto with workers seeking better conditions and a shorter work week. That first march of workers to Toronto's Queen's Park led to an annual celebration of workers' rights throughout Canada. In 1894 Labour Day was declared a national holiday. . . one that we still enjoy today.

On this holiday we look forward to another season of work be it at school, in the office, on the jobsite or at home. But here's a question: on what basis can we expect God's blessing over our labour? Or to put the question in the context of Deuteronomy 11: on what basis could the people of God expect to receive

his blessing as they took possession of the Promised Land? Deuteronomy 11 is clear, "Obey and you will be blessed." A few verses later, "Disobey and you will be cursed."

In fact you'll come across that dual theme over and over again in the Old Testament. Take 1 Kings 17 as an example. Ahab leads God's people astray into Baal worship. Elijah comes to him and says "there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." See, disobedience means no supper on the table. A few verses later we see Elijah being obedient to God's command to go and hide in the Kerith Ravine and what does God do for him there? Feeds him. See, obedience means supper on the table. It's in the New Testament too. Matthew 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

But aren't we painting ourselves into a corner? The Israelites would never be able to be sufficiently obedient in order to bring about God's

blessings. Nor can you and I! So, what then? On what basis do we anticipate God's blessing? Clearly not on the basis of our obedience! But on that of Christ our Savior! His perfect obedience, graciously imputed to us, leads to God's loving care and blessing in our lives.

Is Scripture wrong then to make the connection between *our* obedience and God's blessing? Perish the thought! That cannot be! Because, what is our obedience evidence of? It's evidence of a Spirit-worked faith in the God of heaven and earth who has gifted us his Son's perfect obedience.

Then our thankfulness induced obedience is meager at best but the God who sends rain from heaven considers us completely obedient on the basis of his Son's obedience. And so he blesses in precisely the measure he knows is good for us. And so, we look forward to getting stuck into our work again seeking to live a life of faith and obedience fully expecting God's blessing on our labours.

## For Further Study

1. In what ways are you perhaps tempted to think God owes you his blessing because of your life of obedience?
2. If the obedience that leads to supper on the table is not ours, but Christ's, then is it fair to say that it's our disobedience that leads to no supper on the table? (See COD I,5)
3. As you look back on summer and look forward to a new season of work what do you have to be thankful for? How will that shape the way that you labour for God in the months ahead?



# Is the Church Capitalist?

## Is the American Church Too Compromised with the Culture?



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*This article was originally published on Rev. Robertson's blog, The Wee Flea, in February 2016. It is reprinted with permission.*

So that was interesting! Yesterday's article sure stirred up a hornets' nest. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. And tired Presbyterian ministers heading home from a funeral should probably not respond to provocative blog posts. . . but we are where we are.

In today's culture, where children are idolised, they say that the quickest way for a preacher to commit ministerial suicide is to critique any of his congregants' children. Touch the apple of someone's eye and watch the sparks fly. Judging by some of the reactions I have received, it seems as though my response to the "Socialism is evil" post on the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals blog has zinged an arrow right into the apple of many! I promised Part 2 so, to use yet another truism, in for a penny, in for a pound (which being translated meaneth. . . in for a cent, in for a dollar).

I need however to make a couple of caveats here.

I am not advocating socialism. I am advocating that we as the church do not advocate any political socio-economic system, that we do not identify it with the church, and that we do not condemn those who don't share our political views as evil.

I love America. I am not anti-American. Despite those who have feelings to the contrary, it is possible to deny that socialism is evil and love America. I accept fully that there is an anti-Americanism that pervades much of European society that is discriminatory, illogical, and abhorrent. From a personal perspective, I love America, the land of the Free. Any nation that produces B.B. King, Marilyn Robinson, and Mark Twain has a lot going for it! And I love the American church – I listen often to preachers such as Tim Keller, Matt Chandler, John Piper, and Ligon Duncan. It's far too easy for people to just dismiss criticism by being emotional and saying, "They

are only saying that because they don't like us." Or, as I have come across often, the belief that everyone in the world is jealous of America because obviously America is the greatest nation in the world. Such national pride is not of course confined to Americans (says the Scot!) but it does seem to pervade much of Christian culture, where the greatness of America is far too often confused with the greatness of the Kingdom.

My reason for writing this is not because I want to advance or defend a particular political point of view. Nor is it because I want to attack or denigrate any country or any church. Nor am I saying it because the Scottish church is any better – in fact I think in many ways we are in a far worse condition. I am saying this because I love the American church and I think it is in deep trouble for many reasons; one of which is this strange alliance of politics and Christianity.

In this theology, American Capitalism is the essence of America, which is in turn the essence of Christianity. To criticise Capitalism (or at least refusing to agree that Socialism is *de facto* evil) is apparently unchristian, unbiblical, and unconfessional – which is presumably why the Alliance of *Confessing* Evangelicals allowed this post. I don't confess that socialism is evil, and if the Free Church ever was daft enough to add another chapter to the Westminster Confession stating that it was, I guess I would be out of a job! The equation of the gospel of Jesus with *any* of the kingdoms of this world has always been a disaster.

The first MTW missionary to Scotland told us his testimony: "I was a drug user, sinner, and Democrat, then I was converted and became a Republican." This equation of becoming a Christian as being synonymous with a particular political position was a strange one for me, as it is for most Christians in the world. Another time I spoke at a PCA presbytery and an African American pastor stood up and thanked me. "That's the first time I've heard a Dem-

ocrat speak in twenty years at this presbytery. Thanks brother.” When I assured him that I was not a Democrat he responded, “Well, you sure sound like one!”

### How did we get to this position?

How did we get to this position that, in many areas of the evangelical church in the US, being a Christian is associated with being a Republican? It was not always so. I think the answer is complex but let me suggest one factor; the genius of the political analyst and strategist Karl Rove and the impact of the so-called “Moral Majority” under Jerry Falwell. Rove quickly realised that there were at least twenty-five million evangelical votes up for grabs, if only he could find a galvanising issue. And he did – abortion and other “culture war” issues. In this he was greatly aided by the Liberal left, who had long ago given up on any kind of economic justice. Cultural issues and particularly the abortion question became the shibboleth issues – on both sides. To be honest much of it was smoke and mirrors. No Republican President ever rescinded, or sought to rescind, *Roe v. Wade* but the issue was clear. It successfully delivered millions of white evangelical voters into the Republican sphere.

However, whilst I regard abortion as a key issue and it certainly influences how I vote, I cannot help but feel that this Faustian pact has ended up being a bit of a poisoned chalice for the church in the US. The US may not have an established church but it appears as though much of the US evangelical church has an established political viewpoint. Let me give a couple of examples of the harm the tying in of Christianity to a particular view of politics and economics has done in the US.

The first is the destruction of “Blue Sundays” and the end of the whole idea of the fourth commandment (complete with its emphasis on social justice, Sabbath rest etc.). Commerce ruled and the church meekly followed. Nothing could be allowed to interfere with the service (worship?) of mammon. Is it too fanciful to link this with the fad for churches as entertainment/business centres, rather than gatherings for the covenant worship of the Lord’s people?

The second is the way that money is used in the US church, where there is so much inequality. When I read 2 Corinthians 8, I find the phrase that Marx and Engels used in their Communist Manifesto, “From each according to his means, to each according to his needs.” Paul explicitly says that there should be equality (and yes he is speaking financially.) I accept, of course, that it is not something imposed by the State yet it should be voluntarily practiced within the church. The bottom line is that “The community as a whole” (see back to our defi-

nition of socialism in the previous article) should share in what the Lord has blessed us with. In one sense you could argue that the church is the ultimate in (voluntary) socialism. We pool our resources together, have “all things in common,” help one another, care for the poor, and evangelise the lost. The wealth that the church has should be pooled together so that the widow’s mite is as valuable as the millionaire’s tithe, and it is administered by deacons full of the Holy Spirit and faith – not just those whose bank accounts are full. But what I see happening in much of the US church (and also over here) is that the rich have an inordinate influence. Who cares about the widow’s mite (apart from Jesus)? I have witnessed the abomination of millionaires’ conferences and elaborate fundraising dinners as Christian churches and charities pander to the wealthy in order to get their substantial donations. And I have seen in practice, many times, that just as in the world, so in the church, “He who pays the piper calls the tune.”

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### *It is a significant problem and one that needs to be faced*

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When I read the biography of Billy Graham I was astounded to discover that in the early years a major part of his funding came from a wealthy man who wanted to use him as a bulwark against Communism. What’s wrong with that? The gospel is not to be used to further *any* political agenda. We preach the gospel in order to defeat all sin, and all the systems of this world, not just one.

I think this illustrates a pattern that is like a cancer on the American church; the “Men in Black” (in this case I am talking about the accountants, lawyers, and businessmen, not Scottish Presbyterian elders) call the tune. It’s all very well to talk about biblical principles and practices but when it comes to hard cash we are told we have to be pragmatic. What this means is that those who have money can, far too often, dictate policy, practice, and preachers. I know of so many examples of the harm that occurs when church discipline and godly doctrine is replaced by millionaires’ networking and church politics.

This article is already long enough but let me give one personal example. I once spoke at a conference after which the organiser privately thanked me and said that the students loved it and he loved it, but. . . I knew there would be a but. What was wrong? He told me not to bother asking for any money because the people who had the money hated what I said. He explained that even though



what I had said was true, realistic, and biblical, it was not what the funders wanted to hear so any appeal for money (I was partly there to fundraise for mission work in Scotland) would be ignored. Apparently, I didn't know how to "play the game." *But is this game worth playing?* How much heresy, blasphemy, and hypocrisy have been financed by those who hadn't the spiritual sense to know better? It appears that boards, trusts, and investments are more crucial to the American church than the Lord's appointed means of deacons!

A third factor of this cultural assimilation is that, far too often, the church is run like a corporation rather than a covenant community. The power brokers are the wealthy. After all, if you have a fifty million dollar building to pay for you can't afford to upset too many wealthy people. They have lots of money to give away (and an incentive with their taxation to do so as well) so we are competing for their largesse. Far too often the eldership is run more like a corporate board than a spiritual court and the minister is the (well paid) CEO. I wish my American brothers and sisters would take a lesson from the church here in Scotland. In my view, one factor in our decline was when a person being a banker was considered more of a requisite for becoming an elder than being a godly farm worker.

And then there comes the abomination of the branding of Christianity. Even Calvinism has become a brand. I too have the John Calvin t-shirt, and the Calvin beer, as well as the books. I remember being at one of those "side meetings" at a conference where we were offered a lovely lunch and a good talk. I was enjoying the food for the body as well as the food for the soul when I almost choked on my southern fried chicken. I called over one of the hosts, pointed to the leaflet we had been given, and asked somewhat incredulously, "Is that a copyright sign besides the word 'Sonship?'" You can't copyright "Sonship" any more than you can copyright "Adoption" or "Atonement," but they had.

Another time I was visited by an American missionary who represented one of the myriad mission organisations. He showed me his particular programme and I said that we could use it if we were allowed to adapt it. "Oh, no, I am not authorised to allow you to do that. . . it's the whole package or nothing. They have accepted it in Slovakia and Sweden." I asked him jokingly if he was just going to European countries that began with an S. He said yes. What a mission strategy! Selling a product to countries that begin with the same letter! Why didn't the Apostle Paul think of that one?!

Another time I spotted a notice in a Reformed seminary that advertised Evangelism Explosion as being a one dollar per soul in Poland – meaning that for every dollar given to EE one soul in Poland was saved. The spirit of Tetzl is alive and well!

It is not for nothing that the blasphemy of the health and wealth teaching has spread like a cancer from the US church into the rest of the world, especially Africa and Asia. I know that many of my American brothers and sisters fervently oppose that, but I wonder if we have ever considered whether or not this false teaching might have grown as much out of the American cultural soil as it has out of the theological? It strikes me that just as Mormonism is the ultimate US Frontier religion, so the health and wealth gospel is wonderfully suited to the American capitalist dream. Maybe it's not just socialism that is satanic?

All of us would do well to remember that Jesus came to start a covenant community, not a capitalist corporation – no matter how slick the presentation, or grandiose the mission statement.

I suspect I already know all the arguments against what I have said. I have heard them many times, both the public and the private ones. Since I'm on a roll, I'll just deal with three.

### **You just don't like the rich and you are opposed to wealth**

Not true. Any rich person is very welcome in my congregation – as much as any poor person. I do take seriously what the Bible says about not many wealthy and wise being called and what Jesus says about how wealth is a real hindrance to entering the kingdom. But I know also that wealth is a blessing from God and I thank the Lord for every wealthy, generous Christian who shares what the Lord has blessed him with. I am writing this on the train home from attending my Auntie Sheila's funeral. She died aged eighty-five after having served the Lord for many years as a missionary in Africa. A wealthy man I know, who lived a frugal but not poor life, gave a great deal of support to her privately and consistently. I only found out about it later. He was a great example of how wealth should be used. In this respect let me share with you something I read from Augustine last week – in one of his sermons on John.

He who loves God is not much in love with money. . . . Money then will be the means of pilgrimage, not the stimulant of lust; something to use for necessity, not to joy over as a means of delight. . . . Use money as the



## CALL ACCEPTED AND CALLS DECLINED

Accepted the call to the Flamborough, Ontario Canadian Reformed Church and declined the calls to the St. Albert, Alberta and Hamilton (Providence), Ontario Canadian Reformed Churches:

**Candidate Jake Torenvliet**

## CHURCH NEWS

traveller at an inn uses table, cup, pitcher, and couch, with the purpose not of remaining but of leaving them behind.”

I thank the Lord for the rich Christians I know who have grasped and practice this. (If any of them want to help clear our building debt, fund Solas, or help with our church plants. . . I’m all ears!)

### **This is all helping evangelise the world**

Yes, in some instances. But far too much of the Lord’s money is being wasted. I don’t know if this statistic is still true but a few years ago something like ninety-eight percent of the money collected in US churches was used in the US. And even that which isn’t is too often used to promote American churches and American programmes. I recall one senior US minister telling me that in his view seventy to eighty percent of money spent on missions overseas was being frittered away. At a conference in a European country I was visited at midnight by a group of Eastern Europeans. When I asked them why they were visiting me at that ungodly hour, they said that they wanted to invite me to speak in their country, but that they did not want to upset their American hosts. The story they told me was fascinating. When the Wall came down they were initially delighted. Freedom! But with freedom came problems. Pornography and western missionary organisations poured in. Every one of those organisations would have as their mission statement something along the lines of, “We are reaching the world for Jesus.” They brought money and resources. And whilst the Lord used some of that, overall they felt that the effects had not been good. The privatisation of religion had also led to increased competition, inter church/agency politics, “rice” Christians and numerous heresies, as well as missionaries being sent back in “spiritual” bodybags – exhausted and disillusioned. One senior pastor who had spent time in prison said that he had almost got to the stage where he preferred communism!

### **A word in your ear – or a friend’s ear**

This is the private argument. The “quiet word in your ear.” You can’t say any of this because you will be de-

funded (like being defriended on Facebook but even more painful!). Just as there is “she who must be obeyed,” so there is “he who must not be upset.” I have seen the power games that get played in the “networking” and church politics that happen. I have witnessed a ridiculous amount of fawning, backslapping, wining and dining solely because the person concerned has a lot of money. James 2 (and read chapter 5 while you are there!) comes to mind:

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slanderous the noble name of him to whom you belong?

The Proclaimers have a song about this kind of attitude; “Cap in Hand.” I’ve done it myself. I’ve gone to ask for help from potential wealthy benefactors and some have been gracious but most see that we just do not “fit the profile.” To paraphrase the Fife twins, “I can’t understand why we let someone else rule his church, cap in hand.” Now again this is not saying that all rich people who give money insist on stating how it is spent, although many do. Many others would back them, saying, ‘What’s wrong with that? It’s their money.’

### **No – it’s not. It is the Lord’s money and we are just stewards of it.**

Never mind the Greeks bearing gifts, sometimes I think we need to beware of the rich churches/individuals/mission organisations that come bearing gifts providing we fit in with their pre-determined agenda. Again please note I am not saying that *all* are like that – but it is a significant problem and one that needs to be faced.

This is also something that goes on here. I find it more than a little disturbing that whilst lip service (and a little cash) is paid to the notion of bringing the good

news to the poor – it is middle class suburban or city centre churches which flourish, have large programmes, multi-staff, and are seen as the key congregations. It's interesting that I would have no problems finding many people who want to come and plant churches in St. Andrews or Edinburgh, but aren't interested in Kilmarnock,

Paisley, or Cardenden. Apparently the Lord isn't either because, whilst many are called to mission, few are chosen for the insignificant places.

Anyway enough. In part three I will try to add some balance and ask the third and final question – is Capitalism Satanic?



## MUSIC REVIEW

Arjan de Visser

# Melodia – A New Organ CD

Organist Martin Jongsma has released a beautiful CD with preludes and variations on psalm and hymn melodies from the Canadian Reformed *Book of Praise*. For church organ fans there is much to enjoy here, and for non-church organ fans this could be an opportunity to start developing an appreciation for the king of instruments!

The program is eclectic with various musical traditions being represented: Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican; or, put differently: Dutch, German, and English composers. The program features compositions from the seventeenth century (Anthoni van Noordt), the eighteenth century (J.S. Bach, J.L. Krebs), the nineteenth century (Felix Mendelssohn), and the twentieth/twenty-first century (Dick Sanderman, Gert Bierling). Martin Jongsma also plays one of his own compositions, a chorale and variations on Psalm 47. It is interesting to note that three composers have a Canadian connection: S. Drummond Wolff, Healey Willan, and of course Martin Jongsma himself.

Because the character of pieces is quite diverse, is it to be expected that the listener will like some pieces better than others. My personal favourite on the CD is Mendelssohn's well-known Sonata VI, a chorale and variations on *Vater Unser* (the Lord's Prayer, Hymn 63 in the *Book of Praise*). At the same time, I appreciated the opportunity to be introduced to organ compositions



which I had never heard before; for example, Sanderman's Variations on Psalm 100.

All pieces on the CD are played on the organ of the Cathedral of St. Catherine of Alexandria in St. Catharines. This is a fairly new organ, built by Orgues Létourneau Ltée in Quebec and installed in 1990. It represents the French tradition but is well suited to play literature from all periods. Harpert Vanderwel took care of the recording (quality guaranteed).

The CD features chorales, preludes, and variations on Genevan Psalms 38, 42, 47 and 100, and the melodies of Hymns 17, 56, 63, and 82. The price of the CD is very reasonable, and even if it had cost more, I would still recommend it. We need to support young and upcoming organists such as Martin Jongsma as much as we can. Warmly recommended!

**CD Availability** - \$20/CD + shipping with 25% of proceeds going to Anchor Association

AB: Gerard Veurink – gerardveurink1@gmail.com

BC: Anita Binnendijk – anitabdijk@gmail.com

MB: Jellie Vankammen – vankammenhj@gmail.com

ON: Teresa Jongsma – jongsma.john@gmail.com

Martin Jongsma – martinjongsmamusic@gmail.com



# Fraser Valley Women's League Day 2016

On a sunny Wednesday morning, June 22, women from far and near gathered in the Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church building. Ann Bysterveld welcomed all, and for a moment it seemed that this would be a normal start to a typical league day. But not! We were suddenly transported to what seemed to be a super wide bodied jet, when two flight attendants – Julia and Belinda, with commentary by Ann – demonstrated rules for the day: turn off all personal devices; smoking prohibited; emergency exits front, centre, and rear; Bibles and BofPs in the pew pockets; and gender neutral bathrooms . . . just for today.

The tone did get bit more serious after that! Ginny Vanderhorst provided a thought provoking speech: “God Loves a Cheerful Giver” (also printed in this issue). Group discussions, refreshment breaks, a scrumptious lunch, a book table, signing cards for our missionary wives, a lively general discussion, a poem, and a song or two. Too quickly, the day of festive fellowship was over. Under God's grace, this annual tradition has continued for more than five decades; no doubt the women look forward to gathering again in Yarrow in 2017!



Speaker and Leaders Ginny VanderHorst, Jane Deglint, Ann Bysterveld (L to R)

Ginny VanderHorst

## God Loves a Cheerful Giver

*This article was originally a speech presented at the Fraser Valley Women's League Day.*

Good morning, sisters in the Lord! How did I come up with this topic? Various reasons. In my home congregation of Langley Canadian Reformed Church, the home visit theme for this year was “Giving.” How do we do that

financially, physically, spiritually? How do we share the blessings that we have received? Do we share? How much do we share?

Another reason that tweaked my interest was a series of articles in *Christian Renewal* on the topic of the Poor: Who are they? Why are they poor? What is our obligation to them? Do we have an obligation to help them?

Our Women's Society, "Guided by Your Word" has studied the book of Luke this year. We have used Rev. Clarence Stam's book, *Messiah: The Holy One of God* as one of our study guides, one that we found very helpful, and with many practical insights. Often the topic of the love and pursuit of money comes up in the book of Luke.

I also found an issue of *Diaconia* with an insert written by Rev. Douwe Agema for a Council Handbook on the topic of finances. I also found this to be a valuable resource.

### Everything comes from God

Scripture teaches that everything we have comes from God. He created everything and he calls them mine. Psalm 24 opens with, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it and all who live in it" and in Psalm 50 we read, "For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains and the creatures of the fields are mine." God directed man to be stewards over his creation, over the flocks of the air and the fish of the sea. They are his, but we are to take care of them. So, everything we have is also his, comes from him, given to us, for us, but to his glory.

What is tithing? The action of tithing is as old as the Bible, first mentioned in the book of Genesis. Abraham gave a tenth of all his possessions back to God when he gave them to Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High.

Tithing is giving a tenth of what you have, back to God, and the service of God, providing for the ministry and the spreading of his Name and glory. The people of Israel were to give a tenth of what they had so that the work in the tabernacle and the temple could go ahead unhindered. Those involved in the ministry were to be supported by those who did other work.



*Taking advantage of lovely weather*

Was there an important lesson for them to learn in their tithing or through their tithing? Yes, that they would support the work of ministry. But also, as we read in Deuteronomy 15:23: "That you may learn to revere the Lord your God always." The Lord demanded the best and the first of the harvest, not their leftovers. Every year again they were to give, and it seems that some years, they were to give even more. Giving to the Lord is giving back to the Lord what he has first given us.

David's prayer of thanksgiving in 1 Chronicles 29 is a good reminder of where our wealth comes from and what we should do with it. There was incredible generosity in Israel for the collection for the building of the temple. David remembers in his prayer that all riches and honour came from God and then acknowledged that God gave not only the funds, but also the willingness to the Israelites to give generously and joyously.

The temptation to keep what he has given us is always there. Sometimes there seems to be more month than money. The love of money is a real danger – God warns us against that in his word. Wealth is not wrong in itself. God blessed Solomon with a wise and discerning heart, but also riches and honour. This wealth sadly became part of Solomon's undoing.

God also warned Israel when life became better for them in Canaan. When they had full stomachs and good houses, they might forget all that the Lord had done for them, leading them out of Egypt, feeding them in the desert, and bringing them to this land. "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth" (Deut 8:17-18).

We can also have this attitude with what we consider to be "our wealth." The book of Proverbs makes much mention of money: "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth and he adds no trouble to it" (10:22); "Whoever trusts in his riches will fall" (11:28); "Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God" (30:7-9).

One more Old Testament quote before we move on to the New Testament and the teachings of our Lord Jesus. In the book of Malachi, God regards not giving as stealing:

"Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the



full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."

God's people were to give first to the Lord, trusting that he would give back to them abundantly. We need to have the same trust.

### Treasures in the right place

How crucial is our giving still today? The word tithe is hardly mentioned in the New Testament, except when the Pharisees were said to be profaning God with their tithe. They weighed and measured everything just to make sure they gave just enough, but not an iota too much.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The rich young man mentioned in Matthew 19 really struggled with his service of the Lord. He genuinely tried hard to obey all the commandments and do what he could in order to be saved. But Jesus speaks to him in love and with compassion when he points out his errors. Jesus wanted to show him that his heart was divided between his love for the Lord and his love for his money and possessions. Rev. Stam writes with compassion about this young man. Does Jesus really want him to go from extreme wealth to abject poverty? He could know that the Lord would provide for all his needs. But what Jesus really wanted was said in his last words to this young man, "Come, *follow* me." The rich young man turned away sad, because he was not ready to do that. His hands were too full of his stuff to reach out to Jesus with his heart.

Paul addresses the church in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 12:14: "I will not be a burden to you for I seek not what is yours, but *you*."

Does God really ask us to give up all that we have like he said to the rich young man? Does he ask us to give half of what we have, as Zacchaeus offered? In Luke 15 Jesus says, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none. And he who has food, do likewise." That is half. Do we give like the poor widow did in Luke 21? She put into the collection two small copper coins. Jesus said of her, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." We must give with trusting thank-



*The all important food ladies Mary Grim, Nora VanOene and Anita Dam (L-R)*

fulness, believing that there *will* be enough money at the end of the month.

Our reading from 2 Corinthians shows so clearly the relationship between God's giving and our giving. He blesses us with seed so that we may plant, and then he blesses us with growth and harvest so that we may give back to him. He doesn't take from us; he wants us only to give some back.

Years ago we had Rev. D. VanderBoom as our minister in Langley. He once preached a sermon on giving, with a line that I will never forget. He said, "There are people sitting in the pew. . . and you know who you are . . . who have not given enough to the church. . . to even pay for the piece of bread you receive at the Lord's supper table." In other words, they had given nothing. That's not much! That's not what is asked of us, as a fruit of thankfulness. That is robbing God.

### Gracious giving

I was once talking with someone about tithing. This person said that she doesn't tithe, or doesn't feel that she does. I paused to think about that, and then asked carefully, "Surely you give to the church and to other causes?" She said, yes, they do, but she usually just leaves it up to her husband, who takes care of those things. She just trusted that what they gave to the church was more than enough. She didn't feel good about this, remarking that the act of giving is asked of her too.

Not all of us women here are wage earners; some of us are. But, all of us should take an active interest in what we as a couple or a family are giving financially. It is asked of us too, to give, and also to teach it to our children.

A number of years ago, I was on the Committee of Administration for our congregation. One of our duties was to open the envelopes containing voluntary contributions

and to record them. We did this, not knowing the names of the contributors, only matching up donations with member numbers. There were always some envelopes that contained coins. It would be a random amount, probably from a child with a paper route or the like. These children had obviously been taught the lesson at an early age of giving part of your earnings back to God.

When our children come to the point of doing profession of faith, and take on that firm commitment to church membership, are they taught that this spiritual commitment also calls for a financial commitment? Is this part of their pre-confession class education? Not a legalistic commitment, or a “membership fee” commitment, but a *gracious giving* commitment.

As part of a Reformed community, we value Christian education and to have our children taught in this manner. It is even addressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, in Q&A 103, when it states that “the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained.” This opens up a whole new discussion. Are our school tuition fees to be seen as part of our tithing? Are these *voluntary* contributions? Someone who didn’t think so recently said to me, “I *give* to the church. I *pay* for the school.”

Another question: The government gives us a tax break based on the charitable donations we make. This includes church, school tuition fees, and donations to many other charitable organizations. Mark Penninga, Executive Director of ARPA, recently had an interesting article published on just this subject in *Reformed Perspective*. ARPA is not, by choice, a charitable organization. This way, they can run their operation and do their work without government strings attached. ARPA is very thankful that they can operate due to the generosity of individuals and businesses who support the work of ARPA and expect no tax benefit back. If it had chosen to go the route of charitable status, it would fall under many restrictions put on it by the federal government. All these other organizations, including our schools, have many government rules that they have to live by; not all bad, but these rules can change. If the government were to make those rules tighter or more restrictive, or make us compromise our Christian values, would we and these organizations be willing to give up their charitable status? Would we be willing to give up those tax benefits in order to live by God’s rules, not by Caesar’s? Would this reflect in less giving to these Christian causes? Would our cheerful giving still be as cheerful? Would our generous giving be as generous?

## Sacrificial giving

The tithe: is ten percent enough? May we give more? Should we give more?

The point is not the percentage. The point is not legalistic. The point is to be generous, to give sacrificially. The point is: where are our riches? What is most important to us? Randy Alcorn says in his book, *The Treasure Principle*, “God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but my standard of giving.” He also says, “It’s not about how much we dare to give as how much we dare to keep.”

Paul says in Romans 12:13, “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” And in verse 8: “Let the one who contributes do so in generosity and the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” Cheerful giving carries on, not just with our finances but with our time and our possessions.

Look what Jesus said in Matthew 25:35-40:

“‘For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”

A simple drink of shared water is valued by God; a simple reaching out to others is seen by him. This reveals the act of giving of ourselves, of our time, our energies, our love. We have not only been blessed with financial gifts, but also the gifts of the Spirit as listed in Galatians; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Give generously and cheerfully of these gifts as well.

I’ll end with something I discovered in Rev. Agema’s *Diaconia* article. He drew my attention to a prayer on page 642 of our *Book of Praise*. It’s called “An Opening Prayer for the Meetings of the Deacons.” Its intent is to prepare the hearts and minds of the deacons for the work of mercy they need to discuss, and the people and lives that they will be dealing with, recognizing that they need God’s guidance in their work. It’s worth reading.

May God fill us with the same desire to do good to those who need it, thereby furthering *his* kingdom. May God indeed make us willing, godly, stewardly, gracious, generous, and cheerful givers.



# China Seeks Control over Religion



*Cornelis Van Dam*  
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With a growing Christian population in China, the country's atheistic government is doing everything it can to control the religion of its citizens. In an important address in the spring of his year (April 23), China's president, Xi Jinping, called on authorities to stick to the religious policies of the Communist Part of China (CPC). Since it is good know something about the challenges Chinese Christians face, this article passes on some highlights of Xi's speech as reported on in the English language website of Xinhua, the official Chinese news agency.

Although the president promised to fully implement the Party's policy of religious freedom and retain the principle of religious independence and self-administration, he added ominously that he would also "help religions adapt to the socialist society."

"Religious groups. . . must adhere to the leadership of the CPC, and support the socialist system and socialism with Chinese characteristics, Xi said. They should 'merge religious doctrines with Chinese culture, abide by Chinese laws and regulations, and devote themselves to China's reform and opening up drive and socialist modernization in order to contribute to the realization of the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation.'"

Xi also said: "We should guide and educate the religious circle and their followers with the socialist core values, and guide the religious people with ideas of unity, progress, peace and tolerance." Religious groups should "dig deep into doctrines and canons that are in line with social harmony and progress, and favorable for the building of a healthy and civilized society, and interpret religious doctrines in a way that is conducive to modern China's progress and in line with our excellent traditional culture." Also, Xi stressed "in no way should religions interfere with government administration, judiciary and education."

With an eye to Western missionary endeavours, Xi stated: "We must resolutely guard against overseas in-

filtrations via religious means and prevent ideological infringement by extremists." CPC members must act as "unyielding Marxist atheists, consolidate their faith, and bear in mind the Party's tenets." "Efforts should also be made to help teenagers form a scientific outlook of the world, and guide them to believe in science, study science and promote science."

In a *Christianity Today* article (April 28, 2016), Brent Fulton noted that government control over religion is deeply embedded in China. "Since imperial times, state power has been seen as ultimate. It is, and has always been, the prerogative of the Chinese state to define orthodox belief and to set the boundaries for religious groups whose doctrines fall outside official limits." With Xi's new initiative to try to control Christianity, it would seem likely that "a new law on religion is not far off." Such new legislation could include government meddling with Christian teaching and determining what is acceptable to believe. "While 'religion serving socialism' has been in the CPC lexicon for some time, direct intervention in the beliefs and practices of individual religions – including calls for the 'Sinification' of Christian theology – have become more common under Xi."

All of this bodes ill for the majority of Chinese Christians who reject the officially recognized ecclesiastical organizations. They rightly see that the government has no legitimate spiritual authority over them. Up to now, local officials have left many of these house churches alone, but with the CPC wanting to supervise religion more closely, "it becomes evident that there is no place for the majority of Chinese Christians within the prevailing hierarchy."

The future will show that no political entity or oppression can stop the Son of God as he continues to gather the innumerable multitude for that great day. May this reality continue to encourage God's people in China as they seek to obey the King of kings.





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# The Prayer of Jehoshaphat

1. O LORD God who dwells in heav - en, you have al - ways been our God.  
2. Now our e - ne - mies o'er - whelm us and de - stroy us with their swords.  
3. Lis - ten to my word, O chil - dren: "Be not an - xious or a - fraid.

5  
Rul - er o - ver all the na - tions, king - doms fall be - neath your rod.  
We cry out to you, in heav - en, with con - fused and an - guished words.  
I will fight the bat - tle for you. Trust in me, your on - ly aid."

9  
In your hands are might and pow - er. None can stand a - gainst you, LORD.  
We are weak and have no pow - er and call out from bit - ter shame.  
Praise the LORD who lives for - ev - er, and loves us with con - stant love!

13  
You drove out the hea - then na - tions, freed our land from pa - gan hordes.  
A - bra'm's friend, O God our Sav - iour, grant us vic - t'ry in your Name.  
Praise our God our faith - ful Sav - iour! Praise our God in heav'n a - bove!

Text: George van Popta © 2016; based on 2 Chronicles 20  
Tune: Johan Thommen, 1775

87 87 D  
O DU LIEBE MEINER LIEBE





# Clarion Kids

## The Exodus

### Exodus 12 - 15

After 430 years of slavery to the Egyptians, God set Israel free. The Egyptians gave the Israelites lots of nice things because they wanted them to leave quickly. When they came to the Red Sea, Pharaoh decided he didn't want to let the Israelites go after all. He chased them with a big army, but God split the Red Sea so that the Israelites could walk through on dry ground and escape. When they were all through, God let the water go back to its place, and the Egyptian army was completely covered. God saved Israel that day, and many more times as they travelled in the desert.

**Maze:** Help Moses lead the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry ground!



Go to [www.clarionmagazine.ca](http://www.clarionmagazine.ca) to print and colour this picture!



#### Fill in the Blanks:

The Israelites were slaves in \_\_\_\_\_  
for \_\_\_\_ years.

Moses led the Israelites through the  
\_\_\_\_\_ Sea on \_\_\_\_\_ ground.

\_\_\_\_\_ chased Israel with a big  
\_\_\_\_\_.

God \_\_\_\_\_ Israel by covering the  
\_\_\_\_\_ with the water when the  
Israelites were through.

by Emily Nijenhuis

## Katie de Boer

Hello! My name is Katie de Boer. I am a very happy sixteen-year-old girl, and I live with my family in Chatham, ON. Although I cannot speak, I would like to tell you a little bit about myself, so my younger brother Alex is helping me. When you meet me, you can see that I am very content. I love people, and I show my excitement by big grins and arm movements. I might even give you a hug or sit on your lap; all six feet and one inch of me! I have two brothers and a sister, all younger than me. They love to entertain me by making odd noises that I dearly hope they don't make in public. It makes me giggle so hard! Sometimes they will even blow on my hand. It tickles. My mom and dad also take good care of me. My dad is the pastor in Chatham and I love to listen to him preach, even though it took me a few years to learn not to run out of the pew and to be somewhat quiet.



I love to play with anything sensory; things like water, sand, rocks, music toys, etc. I love going to the beach, which combines two of my favorite things in the whole world: water and sand! My favorite toy is a round bowl which I use to swirl a golf ball endlessly. Don't ever try to take it away from me! I'm very possessive of it. My other favorite toys play music. My family is constantly replacing their batteries and humming "Old McDonald" in their sleep.

Although God has given me many gifts, speech is not one of them. However, I do have my own ways of communicating. I am nearly always happy and I love to show it with a big grin, lots of giggles, and many vigorous arm movements. On the rare occasion that I am grumpy I will stomp and grumble at you. I have an extensive vocabulary of giggles, growls (happy and sad), and sounds; some of which end in a shower of saliva on you. These I will use to tell you what mood I am in. If I want something I will tell you by bringing it to you.

For example, if I want milk I will bring you my cup. If I can't bring it to you I will bring you to it!

I am mainly a content, easygoing girl, but I am not without mischief☺. For example, you leave a jar of peanut butter on the counter, without supervision, I may just eat it, or worse. I have been known to paint my room with it, and then smirk while watching everyone else painstakingly scrub it off my ceiling. And I have done this with more than just peanut butter. Mac and Cheese, margarine, and Cheese Whiz are just a few other examples. I also can't resist things that dangle, so I will frequently take off with your keys or necklaces.

I love God which I show by loving others and by enjoying Christian music. No car ride is complete without it! Well, now you now know a little more about me. If you ever get a chance to visit me in Chatham be sure to stop by!

Sent to you with much love from Katie.

## Birthdays in September

- 6 KATIE DE BOER will be 16**  
481 McNaughton Ave E, Chatham, ON N7L 2H2
- 8 MARSHA MOESKER will be 39**  
c/o Lighthouse  
6528 1st Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4
- 14 JERRY BONTEKOE will be 52**  
c/o Anchor Home  
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
- 22 NICK PRINZEN will be 44**  
c/o Beacon Home  
653 Broad St W, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 25 DAVE VANVEEN will be 46**  
c/o Lighthouse  
6528 1st Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4
- 29 PAUL DIELEMAN will be 47**  
c/o Beacon Home  
653 Broad St W, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

## A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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

Rachel Vis

731 Lincoln Street, Wellandport, Ontario L0R 2J0  
tom.rachelvis@gmail.com • 905-329-9476





William den Hollander  
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Q

**In John 20:21-23 Christ breathes on his disciples and gives them the Holy Spirit. Then why does Christ tell them to stay in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit from the Father?**

A

In John 20:21-23 the disciples receive the authorization to go and preach the Word, the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. As Jesus was sent as representative of the Father, so the disciples are sent (cf. Mark 10:40; John 13:20).

Jesus sent his disciples into the world with his authority *and with his power*. God's Son was sent to the world to represent the Father; in the same missionary line the disciples are sent out with a special mandate as representatives of Christ. In these verses we see him call and provide competent servants, representatives. They are able because he himself enables them; he equips them with his Holy Spirit as he breathes on them. He breathes new life into them, as it were. "As the Father sent me I am sending you." They need his Spirit, his power, for that, the way he needed it when he entered this world to conquer sin and death, Satan and his whole dominion, to bring the peace of God by the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins in the blood of Christ!

At the appointed time the disciples did go out into the streets and they obediently fulfilled the mandate of their Master. That happened on the day of Pentecost. At the time of his ascension into heaven the Lord Jesus had told them to await this special day for its special purpose: the coming of his church and kingdom (Acts 1:7). The apostles, who were the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus from the beginning, became faithful witnesses of

Jesus' words and works, of his suffering, death, and resurrection. Thus the disciples became apostles, sent out the way their Master was sent into the world! On the day of Pentecost they *show* this power in their fearless testimony, ready and able to execute their mandate in the church gathering work of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8).

What happened in John 20: 21-23, therefore, was something *different* from what happened later on the day of Pentecost. That's when the Holy Spirit came to dwell *among the congregation*. That's when *all* were filled with the Holy Spirit, not just the apostles but *all* believers who were present. Then it became evident and visible that the Holy Spirit is given to *all* who believe (cf. Acts 2:38, 39; 1 Cor 12: 13). *All* the followers of the Lord Jesus, young and old, man and women, became witnesses of their Lord and Saviour. In John 20:21-23, however, it's about the small circle of *apostles*, about *their* special task as apostle, their authorization to speak in the name of Jesus. In his name they may proclaim the forgiveness of sins and for those who believe their message their sins *are* forgiven!

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

**Ask us a question!**

Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander  
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In the June edition of *Clarion*, Professor Van Dam sought to tackle the problem of ongoing Palestinian Christian emigration outside of the West Bank, indicating the Palestinian Authority and “rising Islamism” as the primary causes. Yet it is regrettable that nowhere do his sources cite the opinion of the Palestinian Christian population itself – this due to the fact that to do so would necessitate a very different picture of the situation in the West Bank. A 2008 survey found that only 8% of Christians polled cited “religious extremism” as a factor motivating emigration. A 2006 survey put the number even lower (3%) and another poll put it as low as 0.8%. Similar polls indicate the cause of Palestinian Christian emigration to be the very one Van Dam dismisses – the brutal and ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. When asked, a full 78% of Palestinian Christians claimed that “Israeli aggression and occupation” was the main cause of emigration. Moreover, across multiple polls a large number of Christian Palestinians have specified the deteriorating economic situation as a cause of emigration – Israel controls the West Bank’s imports and exports, additionally using the captured market of the Palestinian population as a dumping ground for Israeli goods. Van Dam notes that once predominantly Christian cities like Bethlehem have now experienced an influx of mainly Muslim Palestinians (this due to refugee and urban-rural migration), while “the Christian sector continues to shrink.” He inaccurately places the blame for this on the policies of the Palestinian Authority – the reality is that Palestinian Muslim migration into cities has overwhelmingly been spurred on by the Israeli “Defense” Forces, which since the 1990s have been systematically clearing “Area C” (61% of the West Bank) of its Palestinian inhabitants. None of this is to deny that anti-Christian discrimination exists in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – it does. However, it is clear that Palestinian Christians see Israeli colonization and occupation as a much greater threat to their security. If Van Dam is truly interested in the peace and security of Palestinian Christians, why does he not discuss the Occupation?

Anyone who has spent a significant amount of time in the Occupied West Bank will recognize that Van Dam’s account obscures the Palestinian Christian reality. While in Palestine over the summer of 2015 I

stayed with a Christian man, Samir, and his family in Beit Sahour (a small village adjacent to Bethlehem). When asked directly and privately, Samir described a situation in which, while Muslim discrimination against the Christian minority was real, he was far from being a “hostage in his own city” – Samir works with and has many close Muslim friends. By contrast, his most alarming accounts were of the Israeli response to Palestinian Christian nonviolent resistance in the late 1980s, characterized by month long curfews, indiscriminate and lethal fire (Samir showed me the bullet holes in his home), lengthy detention without trial, confiscation of property, destruction of homes, and more.

I also visited the “Tent of Nations” – a Palestinian Christian farm owned by the Nasser family and situated between three encroaching illegal Israeli settlements. In an effort to force the Palestinians to leave their land, the Israeli army has blockaded the sole road leading to the farm, cut off the water supply, and bulldozed the inhabitant’s homes (they’ve since been rebuilt). At the same time, radical Israeli settlers have burned the farm’s olive trees and pose a constant threat of violence and harassment. Carved into a rock at the entrance to the property are words echoing Jesus’ command in Matthew 5:43 – “we refuse to be enemies” – the Nasser family’s resolution of peaceful resistance against overwhelming odds.

The Palestinian Christian refusal to hate *Israel* has been accompanied by a call for justice. In 2009 representatives from the four major Palestinian church denominations co-signed a document outlining the Christian position vis-à-vis the occupation. Under the heading “Our word to the Churches of the World” it poses a simple question: “Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two peoples [Israeli and Palestinian] attain justice, peace, security and love?”<sup>1</sup>

The specifics merit lengthy discussion, but the essentials of an answer ought to be readily apparent.



Colter Louwerse



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<sup>1</sup> The Kairos Document, while regrettably far from espousing Reformed theology, is nevertheless important in that it indicates widespread Palestinian Christian sentiment regarding their political situation. It has been signed by over 3000 Palestinian Christian figures.

### Brief Response

Thank you for sharing your experiences in the West Bank from three years ago. I am obviously not condoning unwarranted Israeli harassment of West Bank residents. The point of my article was to address the question why Christians are now leaving the West Bank while their number is increasing in Israel. I have no reason to question the credibility of my resource, Robert Nicholson, who is an expert on Jewish-Christian relationships. He mentioned,

as recorded in my article, that the Palestinian Authority and rising Islamism were the primary causes for current Christian emigration. Nothing in your letter actually contradicts this. Your most recent polling data are from 2008. But even that poll showed a 5% increase compared to just two years prior for giving religious extremism as a factor for emigrating. We are now eight years later from your most recent poll. With fast moving events in the Middle East, particularly with the apparent growing threat of ISIS influence in the West Bank, Nicholson's observations and analysis as of March 2016, are entirely credible. As he concluded: "Christians are fleeing for the same reason they are fleeing Iraq, Egypt, and Syria: the rise of Islamic intolerance and violence against anyone who denies the revelation of Muhammad."

CVD 

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.  
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*

