

Clarion



**Always
reforming?**

THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA

CLARION KIDS

YOU ASKED



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

What's Reformed??

*It's good to get back to basics and clarify what
being Reformed is really all about*

This October 31 the Reformation turns 499 years old, which means we start working on year 500! And that will bring many celebrations and commemorations over the next twelve months – and rightly so. The Reformation was a tremendous work of God's grace and its good fruit is still with us today. We are Reformed Christians who belong to Reformed churches and strive to serve the Lord in all of life in a Reformed manner.

Yet, what does that really mean? It seems to me that there is confusion about this today. Those nearing retirement (and older) still use the word "Reformed" regularly and passionately, those in their twenties hardly at all, and those in-between sometimes have mixed feelings about it. It can be received as a positive or a negative or with a careless, "meh." Could you give a good definition of "Reformed"? Are we losing our love for the Reformation and all things Reformed? As we enter the big 500th year anniversary, it's good to get back to basics and clarify what being Reformed is really all about.

Always reforming?

The word "Reformed" has often been connected with the Latin phrase, "*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*," which means, "the church reformed, always reforming." Some have taken this to mean that the church must always be changing, searching for new ideas, new ways of "being" church as society changes. Nothing is to stay the same permanently. Worship practices should adjust to meet the needs of a new generation, the confessions (or parts of them) should be discarded and new ones made to match the new understanding of Scripture. Innovation, staying current with trends is the name of the game. You can find more than one web page of churches with "Reformed" in their name but who do not act, speak, or think

much like the original churches of the Reformation. Is *that* Reformed?

It may help to know that this phrase was not used by the Reformers (it isn't found until the mid-seventeenth century) but yet they certainly used the verb "reform" and spoke often of *reforming the church*. For some hundreds of years by that time, the Roman Catholic Church had become corrupt in many ways. Men like Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and others spoke out against this corruption and insisted that the church turn back to what it once had been. They called for the church to re-model or *re-form* itself according to the teachings of Holy Scripture – and that's what the word "Reformed" refers to!

Recovery not novelty

That little prefix "re" is key and means: going back to something! And that something was and is the gold standard of God's Word. "Reform" is literally to "form again" and was never about constant change or inventing new practices but simply and purely a return to doing things God's way! It's all about *recovery* of the church – in its beliefs, its worship, its government, its activities – and never about introducing novelties! This concept is at the heart of the entire Reformation and what gave it its name.

Is there value in the idea of "the church reformed, always reforming?" Yes, because our sinful hearts always wish to draw us away from the pure worship of God. Every Christian needs to be "always reforming," going back to Scripture for guidance in all of life and improving our obedience to it. In the same way, every church (which is only a body of redeemed sinners) needs to keep going back to the Word – not changing the standard but improving our obedience to it!

Unchanging?

Does this mean that Reformed churches never change? People sometimes complain that making changes in church life is like pulling teeth – tedious and painful. Why is there a resistance to change among us? Should there be?

The Reformers certainly were looking for change – but a change back to the way God had designed things! In that sense, every Reformed church should be open for change. We should be willing to examine our beliefs, worship, and practices and, where necessary, make changes in line with Scripture. But on the other hand, since

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Reformation Day is approaching – and so it is appropriate that in this issue's editorial, Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, "What's Reformed?" Do we know what the word really means? And how does this understanding affect the way we evaluate our church's practices and principles?

In this issue Dr. Karlo Janssen begins a two part article on the Reformed Churches in South Africa.

In federation news we have reports from Edmonton Immanuel's welcome of Rev. VanSpronsen and family, as well as a farewell from St. Albert congregation to Rev. Tony Roukema and family.

Issue 21 includes a Treasures New and Old meditation, Clippings on Politics and Religion, *Clarion Kids*, Ray of Sunshine, a question for You Asked, and a book review.

Laura Veenendaal

- 554 EDITORIAL**
What's Reformed?
- 558 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
Reformation: God's work of grace!
- 559 The Reformed Churches in South Africa (1)**
- 562 CLIPPINGS ON POLITICS AND RELIGION**
- 563 Welcome to Rev. Julius VanSpronsen and Family**
- 564 St. Albert's Farewell to the Roukemas**
- 566 CLARION KIDS**
- 567 RAY OF SUNSHINE**
- 568 YOU ASKED**
- 569 BOOK REVIEW**

Cover photo: Martin Luther memorial in Worms

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvlüwer, E. Kampen, C. Van Dam, M. VanLuik

ADDRESS FOR MAGAZINE CONTENT


Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J5
Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: 204-663-9000, Fax: 204-663-9202

Subscriptions subscriptions@clarionmagazine.ca
Advertisements ads@clarionmagazine.ca
Website www.clarionmagazine.ca

2016 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

			Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada			\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds			\$69.00	\$102.00
International			\$98.00	\$171.00

***Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra.**
GST/HST no. 890967359RT

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

2016 ADVERTISING RATES


Advertisements: \$20.00 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch.
We reserve the right to refuse ads.

PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

We acknowledge the financial support of the 
Government of Canada through the Canada
Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

the standard always remains the Bible, change in any of these areas may never be change for the sake of change or change to fulfill a mere human desire or to accommodate a man-made teaching.

Prior to the Reformation, it was the man-made teaching about purgatory that brought in the corruption of selling indulgences. It was the papal invention of Mary's perfect innocence and perpetual virginity that brought in the perversion of Mary-worship. These abuses came in slowly, over time, and caused a lot of spiritual damage to Christians. Dutch Reformed churches since the great Reformation have gone through at least two other periods of deformation and corruption and if you look at the Scottish, English, German, or even the more distant Korean or Indonesian Reformed churches you'll find the same bitter experiences.

The generation that God brings through a new reformation has much to be thankful for but make no mistake: that conflict comes at a great cost emotionally, among friends and family who are now estranged, and often financially as well. During those bad times, whole congregations and federations of churches drifted away from the Lord. Once bitten, twice shy. Reformed churches have learned the hard way to be cautious about change and to weigh things carefully before adopting it so as to avoid a new round of corruption and trouble. Is that so bad? Doesn't that fit with the Bible's command to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1) and be on guard for any perversion of the gospel (Gal 1:6-10)?

Is that Reformed??

On the other hand, we should not be suspicious about everything right away. New ideas should not be dismissed out of hand. This is where tensions can sometimes arise. An idea for an evangelism activity is proposed and the first thing heard is, "Is *that* Reformed?" Too often it's not an honest question but a thinly veiled accusation, a put-down, simply because it's something that person has never heard of. Or someone suggests a different way of organizing the Bible study groups and immediately the protest is heard, "That doesn't sound very Reformed."

These sorts of reactions are ways we can shut down speakers and leave little room for discussion. Without really wanting to engage the idea, we make it sound as if it's out of bounds by declaring it to be unreformed – yet we have not actually analyzed it ourselves in the light of Scripture! Such knee-jerk "questions" and statements are themselves unreformed! Instead, ideas for improving our obedience to Scripture, our practice of the

CALL DECLINED

Declined the call to the Free Reformed Church in Byford, Western Australia:

Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer

of the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church in Tintern, Ontario

Declined the call by the Free Reformed Church of Armadale, WA, Australia, to serve as missionary in Papua New Guinea:

Candidate David Pol

CALLED

Called by the Canadian Reformed Church of Owen Sound, ON:

Candidate David Pol

EXAMINATION SUSTAINED

Sustained his peremptory examination at Classis Northern Ontario on September 30, 2016:

Candidate Jonathan Chase

Sustained his peremptory examination at Classis Ontario West on October 5, 2016:

Candidate Hilmer Jagersma

CHURCH NEWS

faith, our worship, our church government, should be encouraged and discussed openly and honestly with the Bible as our guide. It would be better to inquire in a spirit of charity, saying things like, "Tell me more about this idea. I'd like to hear where it comes from and how it will help us improve in obeying our Lord's commands."

Reasoned proposals

The problem with many ideas in our time is that they come with no support, with little thought other than saying defensively: "What's wrong with it? Why can't we do this?" Surely that approach is not Reformed either! To go by what "other churches" are doing or by our gut feeling is not enough by far. We have to first ask ourselves – does it line up with Scripture? How so? Will it help the church to better live and act according to God's design for her?

Those who come with suggestions should do their homework and carefully think through how their proposal will help the church grow in her obedience to the Lord. They should be prepared to reason-out how their ideas are not only biblically sound but a way to really help the church in her various God-given tasks. Those who listen to the ideas should give them a fair hearing and, in a brotherly way, discuss and analyze their merits on the basis of God's Word and the benefits of their application.

Check with the past

We also have a history of more than 2000 years in figuring out how to be Christians and church in this world – is it possible someone has evaluated this idea before? What has the church learned about this sort of thing in the past? After all, doesn't the Lord teach us things through the history of his church-gathering work? The Bible itself teaches us to review this history (think of Psalm 78, or 105-107!). The leaders of the Great Reformation constantly went back to *both* Scripture and church history, to the teachings of the early church fathers. They were eager to learn from them and to be in harmony with all they taught that was sound and profitable (though they did not hesitate to part from them where they believed them to be off the mark).

Every church needs to keep going back to the Word

We have to fight our current post-modern instinct to pooh-pooh the past, to consider it a bore and a waste of our effort. Instead, we should see history as a valuable resource, an opportunity to learn from our by-gone brothers and sisters. Of course, historical precedent or argument by itself doesn't settle anything (it, too, needs always to be checked against God's Word) but to ignore history or say "who cares?" is arrogant (as if we are wiser than they) and foolish (as if God's work in their lives is of no consequence to us). Would we want Christians seventy-five or one hundred years from now to throw out what God has allowed us to learn in our generation? That would only lead to history repeating itself!

Cultural or biblical?

There's one more point which perhaps needs its own separate editorial and that's this: when we talk about things that are "Reformed" we need to distinguish cultural practices from biblical principles. Every ethnic group has its culture and that culture, one way or the other, affects the way we "do church." Quite often we are unaware that such practices are unique to our ethnic group – we just think it's "normal."

The truth is, certain things are only "normal" to us! Some of us with Dutch roots eat peppermints during worship whereas the English think that's gauche (they can't even comprehend that we eat *droppies*!). Some Reformed churches stand for every song, some for one or two, some for none. We sing the Psalms on Genevan melodies with instrumental accompaniment, but many Scottish Presbyterians sing out of a metrical psalter without any accompaniment while others use a mixture of tunes. We teach our youth Catechism on a week-night but many North American Reformed churches teach these same truths right before or after Sunday morning worship.

Obviously, some of these examples are more serious than others because they pertain directly to biblical commandments (e.g. worship) and obedience to them. We can discuss and debate the benefits of each practice but none of them is more or less "Reformed" than the other. Apart from the matter of church candies, all of the above are *applications* of a biblical principle (the call to worship the Lord and instruct the next generation) that arise out of both conviction *and* culture. Singing Psalms is a biblical command (Col 3:16) and therefore Reformed, but *how* to sing them (Genevan, Scottish metre, or other) is mostly a matter of ethnic background. That's not a bad thing or to be regretted, it just is. It's not unbiblical or unreformed to sing the Psalms to different tunes – each federation of churches will work that out for themselves, taking into account also their past, present, and future. More could be said but let's be careful not to quickly identify one of our practices as being exclusively Reformed when other different practices may be equally biblical.

We need to distinguish cultural practices from biblical principles

As we celebrate the quincentennial gift of being Reformed, let's do this with a renewed humility and appreciation for all that God has given us! Being Reformed means being biblical. In the church-building Spirit of Christ (1 Cor 12) and with an eye to the past, let's carefully and gently work out the application of God's commands and principles in today's culture so that his Name is glorified in everything. That, too, is fully Reformed: *Soli Deo Gloria!*





Cornelius VanSprosen
Minister Emeritus of the Maranatha
Canadian Reformed Church
at Surrey, British Columbia
cornelius_vansprosen@telus.net

Reformation: God's work of grace!

"I have found the Book. . ." 2 Kings 22:8

What and whom do we think of when we hear the word "Reformation"? Immediately a number of names pop up in our minds: Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Knox! All historical, renowned names of the first half of the sixteenth century, some 500 years ago. All people who contributed a great deal to the reformation of the Church of Jesus Christ in the sixteenth century, reforming the church from its deformed state.

We owe much to these men who made it possible for people to access the Word of God and worship him in a God-centred way again. Yet we would be greatly amiss and very man-centred if we focused all our attention on these fellow-beings and servants of the Lord. Actually nothing can explain how the Reformation came about, what moved these people, what opened their eyes. It is only by the *grace of God*! What we admire in the reformers is God's work in their hearts and minds.

The Reformation we remember in particular around this time of the year is not the only reformation. The Son of God gathers, defends, and preserves for himself a church from the beginning of the world to its end (Lord's Day 21) and he does this also through repeated reformations, initiated by him. When God after the fall into sin put enmity between the serpent and the woman and their offspring, was this not also a gathering, defending, and preserving of his church, a first reformation, a re-forming of man to the image in which he was created? In Genesis 12 we see another great reformation: Abraham living in a pagan, idolatrous environment is called out: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household." It wasn't Abraham's idea, but God worked it in his heart to heed his call to reformation and made him to be a blessing in the world. And so it happened time and again, throughout the time of the judges, during the kings.

A very clear example is what happened during the time of King Josiah (2 Kgs 22, 23). The people of God had slid back into deep darkness and ignorance of God, his Word and worship. The Word of God was no longer known! "Accidentally" (providentially!), a copy of the Book of the law was found by workers in the temple while the building was being restored. It was found "by chance." They were not looking for it, it was not their initiative to reform the service, but the Lord directed all events so that they, unexpectedly, found the scrolls!

By God's grace this was followed by an avalanche of reforms, a great reformation. The heart of it was rediscovering the Word of God and acting upon this in repentant obedience, God's gracious work in the heart of his people in order to defend and preserve his church! May we, people for whom the Bible is so readily available by various means, continue to heed the call to search the Word and let it transform and reform our lives as well!

For Further Study

1. What did King Josiah all do after rediscovering the Book of the Law? (See: 2 Kings 23, 24 and 2 Chronicles 34, 35)
2. We call ourselves "Reformed:" should we still be "reforming" as well?
3. What does Hebrews 13:7 teach us about remembering the reformation?



The Reformed Churches in South Africa (Part 1 of 2)



Karlo Janssen
Minister of the Canadian Reformed
Church at Abbotsford, B.C.
rcjanssen@shaw.ca

This past summer the URCNA, meeting in Synod Wyoming, decided to proceed with entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKSA. This decision comes on the heels of the GKSA decision regarding women in office taken earlier this year and in spite of their continued relationship with the CRCNA. Since we as CanRC are eager to merge with the URCNA, a decision like this should have our attention.

In the course of two articles we'll come to know the GKSA a little better. This article looks at the GKSA: who they are and where they have been. Next time we'll consider the URCNA decision and the issues that relate to it.

Origins

Cape Town, at Africa's south-west corner, lay on the seventeenth century sea route from the Low Lands (The Netherlands) to the Dutch Indies (Indonesia). Thus the Dutch created a port at Cape Town in 1652, just over thirty years after the Great Synod of Dort. Dutch settlers moved to the area and the Reformed Church was established in southern Africa. In 1688 and years following refugees from France, the Huguenots, also came to South Africa. This populated southern Africa with Calvinists of Dutch and French origin.

As the 1700s became the 1800s, the English annexed southern Africa. The change in government also had repercussions for the structure of the church. More power and influence in church matters was given to the state. At the same time, as in The Netherlands, a centralization of church authority took place.

Many of the Dutch settlers, known as the "Boers" ("farmers"), sought freedom from the English. The abolition of slavery by the English and the desire of the Boers to keep slaves was one factor. The 1830s and 1840s became the decades of the *Great Trek*: Afrikaners heading north and east from the Cape colony. They established independent republics, the Orange Free State and the South African Republic, later known as the Transvaal.

The DRC of the Cape Colony refused to give spiritual assistance to those who joined the trek. Thus the division of southern Africa into several countries led to the division of the DRC into two churches. In English they have the same name, but in Dutch they are distinguished by the words "*Gereformeerde*" and "*Hervormde*." The NGK was the church of the Cape, the NHK was the church of the Republics.

Formation of the GKSA

At this time Afrikaners were still drawing on The Netherlands for ministers. The issues that were the order of the day there became issues in southern Africa as well. One of these issues was the popularization of liberal theology through unscriptural hymns. In 1859 fifteen brothers in the Transvaal decided to secede from the NHK on account of this. Among them was Paul Kruger, who would later become president of the Transvaal. Some 300 NHK members joined them and the GKSA came into existence. Because these members of the first hour came from a group known as "the Doppers," the GKSA is also referred to as "the Dopper church."

The formation of the GKSA in the Republic precipitated similar pull outs throughout southern Africa, also in the Cape Colony. Thus, while the NHK and NGK were originally geographically separated, a GKSA could soon be found in all parts of southern Africa.

Characterization

The formation of the GKSA happened for reasons not unlike those for the formation in The Netherlands of what would eventually become the CGKN, a formation that began with the Secession of 1834. Parallel to the events in southern Africa are events in North America just a few years earlier: the schism in 1857 within the RCA that would eventually lead to the formation of the CRCNA. In 1886 the Doleantie created another dimension in The

Acronyms

(To avoid ambiguation, church names are in English while acronyms are in the predominant language used by the church.)

CanRC:	Canadian Reformed Churches
CECCA:	Committee for Ecumenicity and Contact with Churches Abroad (of the URCNA)
CGKN:	Christian Reformed Churches in The Netherlands
CRCNA:	Christian Reformed Church in North America
CRTS:	Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
DRC:	Dutch Reformed Church
ERQ:	Reformed Churches in Quebec
FCS:	Free Church of Scotland
FRCA:	Free Reformed Churches of Australia
GKN:	Reformed Churches in The Netherlands
GKv:	Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated)
GKSA:	Reformed Churches in South Africa
ICRC:	International Conference of Reformed Churches
NHK:	Dutch Reformed (Hervormde) Church (South Africa)
NGK:	Dutch Reformed (Gereformeerde) Church (South Africa)
NGK(N):	Netherlands Reformed Churches (in The Netherlands)
OPC:	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
PCA:	Presbyterian Church in America
RCA:	Reformed Church in America
RCNZ:	Reformed Churches in New Zealand
REC, RES:	Reformed Ecumenical Council renamed Reformed Ecumenical Synod
RPCNA:	Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America
URCNA:	United Reformed Churches in North America
VGKSA:	Free Reformed Churches in South Africa
WARC:	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCRC:	World Communion of Reformed Churches (merger of REC and WARC)

Netherlands, followed by the Union in 1892 of all the “Kuyperian” churches merging with all but three of the CGKN, creating the GKN. Thus around 1900 there were three larger orthodox Dutch Reformed churches in the world: the GKN, the CRCNA, and the GKSA.

In The Netherlands the CGKN grew for various reasons, in part because people and churches pulled out of the GKN again. Both the CRCNA and GKSA maintained relationships with both the GKN and CGKN.

Today the GKSA is a large church, with almost 400 churches, served by around 270 ministers in fifteen different languages. Two-thirds of the churches are Afrikaans speaking. Though predominantly found in South Africa, according to the GKSA website there are also churches in other countries: Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia.

Realizing it could not continue to depend on The Netherlands to supply it with ministers, the GKSA established their own training for the ministry in 1869. Originally in Burgersdorp, this seminary is now located in Potchefstroom. Today Potchefstroom is a sizeable seminary, served by some fifteen professors.

Though its roots lie in the singing of hymns controversy, like its Dutch counterpart the GKSA has never been against the singing of hymns in principle; hymns are fine if based on Scripture.

As such the GKSA is in many ways very similar to the URCNA or CanRC, just bigger.

Relationships

In South Africa, the NGK, NHK, and GKSA are often referred to as the three sisters, though the GKSA is not keen on the term. Though they maintain cordial bonds with each other, until recently the relationship was not a sister church relationship as our church order defines it. That may have changed in 2015: a memorandum of co-operation was agreed to by the NGK and GKSA, making provision for pulpit exchange, recognizing attestations, and granting access to the sacraments.¹ This relationship is cause for concern as the NGK are tolerant of liberalism, allowing (after the memorandum was adopted), for example, practicing homosexuals to serve in office.

Throughout most of the twentieth century the GKSA has had close formal ties with the GKN and the CRCNA. These three churches were the founding churches of the RES in 1946. However, as less orthodox Reformed ideas became increasingly tolerated in the GKN, in 1976 the GKSA cut its ties with the GKN.

The post war wave of Dutch immigrants also came to South Africa. As the GKSA had a sister church relationship with the GKN, some of those who had been members of the GKv established the VGKSA as of 1950. On a local level the relationship between the VGKSA and GKSA has increasingly become better. I was informed by a minister in the VGKSA that local VGKSA and GKSA have acknowledged each other, which will soon lead to pulpit exchanges. However, on a national level the relationship has not improved.

The GKSA has also maintained a close bond with the CGKN. Following 1976, the GKSA began to look at others who claimed the GKN heritage: the GKv as well as the NGK(N) that formed out of the GKv around 1970. Initially the VGKSA urged the GKv not to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKSA and the GKv paid heed. In 2005 the VGKSA no longer objected and the GKv and GKSA recognized each other as sister churches. The GKSA also have a sister church relationship with the NGK(N).

Originally the RES was just Reformed churches with a Dutch background but it soon expanded to include Presbyterian churches with a Scottish or American background that did not join WARC. Thus the GKSA began to connect more into the network of Presbyterian churches. Among GKSA sister churches today are the OPC, the PCA, and the FCS.

Apartheid

For much of the second half of the twentieth century the predominant topic of South African society has been racial segregation, known as apartheid.

The NHK and NGK actively advocated apartheid and defended it theologically. It led to their eviction from WARC in 1982. The GKSA did not theologically advocate apartheid. It was, however, organized into racially segregated synods. Thus there were, among others, the black Synod Soutpansberg and the black Synod Midlands.

The dismantling of apartheid led to the merger of the synods into one general synod. The first general synod of the GKSA was held in 2009. It was a synod of more than one language, besides Afrikaans English began to be used.

The practical aspects of cultural differences continue to trouble the GKSA but the churches bravely soldier on. At their most recent synod, following a day of deliberation, it was decided to use English as the main language, with translation from Afrikaans into English and English into Afrikaans if needed.

The merger of the various synods did not go smoothly. The GKSA Synod Soutpansberg is divided over the issue and a small portion of it continues its separate existence.

Networks

As mentioned, the GKSA stood at the cradle of the RES (later renamed REC). In 1988 the REC determined that the GKN, which was sliding fast down the path of doctrinal and ethical indifference, would not be evicted. This decision was maintained by the REC in 1992. As a result, following 1988 and again 1992, many member churches withdrew from the REC. Many of those who withdrew have since joined the ICRC. Among them was the GKSA.

The reception of the GKSA into the ICRC happened in 2005, at a conference in South Africa. It did not go smoothly. One question was whether the GKSA be admitted as one member, or whether GKSA (Soutpansberg) be given separate status. Note that in 2005 the various GKSA synods had not yet merged into one structure.

However, the bigger question was the hermeneutical direction of the GKSA. The GKSA were dealing with the question of the role of women in the church, and their discussion was open to the question whether women could serve in the office of minister and elder.

As the GKSA in 2005 had a decision which explicitly stated that women could not serve in a ruling office in the church, the ICRC decided to admit the GKSA as member.

In review

The GKSA has a history similar to that of the CanRC and URCNA. All three have their roots in a battle with liberal theology during the nineteenth century. There are differences too. Both the CanRC and URCNA were formed as the CRCNA drifted from its confessional and church political moorings, as also the GKN had done. The GKSA has not drifted as the GKN and CRCNA have. Further, the GKSA has always had a closer tie to the CGKN than the CanRC and URCNA have.

Currently the GKSA is a large, and ethnically diverse bond of churches that seeks to be faithful in doctrine, worship, and governance to the Dort branch of Reformed churches.

Next time

Next time we will explore the GKSA discussion on the role of women in the church and review the URCNA decision to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKSA.

¹ <http://www.gksa.org.za/memo.htm>



Cornelis Van Dam
Professor emeritus of Old Testament
at the Canadian Reformed
Theological Seminary in
Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

Europe's Disappearing Churches

Christianity is shrinking in Europe. This sad reality is corroborated with the declining number of churches. Giulio Meotti, an Italian journalist, addressed this state of affairs on the websites of the Gatestone Institute website and The Clarion Project. His accounts show not only the decline of Christianity but also the rise of Islam in what used to be the heart of Christian civilization. Here are some examples.

In the Dutch province of Friesland, 250 of 720 existing churches have either been turned into mosques or closed. Amsterdam's Saint Ignatius Church has become the Fatih Camii Mosque. One of the oldest churches in Utrecht, the Church of St. Jacobus, has been converted into a luxury residence. Each week in The Netherlands two churches close their doors forever and Islam is now considered "the most widely practised religion" in that country. Rotterdam has Western Europe's biggest mosque. A published letter from Bouchra Ismaili, a member of the Rotterdam city council, declared: "We're here to stay. You're the foreigners here. With Allah on my side, I'm not afraid of anything. Take my advice: Convert to Islam, and you will find peace."

The main mosque of Dublin used to be a Presbyterian church. In England, the historic Church of St. Mark in London is now the New Peckham Mosque. In Manchester the Mosque of Disbury used to be a Methodist church. In Clitheroe, Saint Peter's Church has become the Madina Mosque. Meotti notes that "it is no longer taboo in the media to talk about 'the end of British Christianity.'" Indeed, since 1960, 10,000 churches have closed, and by 2020, another 4,000 churches will shut their doors "while another 1,700 new mosques will be built, many of which will arise on sites of former churches."

In Belgium dozens of churches are closing and the municipality of Antwerp "proposed to transform the empty churches into mosques." In Brussels, half the children in state schools choose classes in Islam. That is ap-

parently where the future is. In Germany the German Evangelical Church closed 340 churches between 1990 and 2010. Recently Muslims purchased a Lutheran church in Hamburg. Many other churches are simply closing or being converted to other uses.

In France, the government has had talks with Muslim leaders to discuss the shortage of mosques in that country. A Muslim spokesman suggested that France's empty churches would provide the answer to the shortage of mosques. There are almost 3,000 mosques in France but 2,000 more are needed for the Muslim population of five million. Meanwhile churches are being converted into mosques as, for example, in Vierzon, Bourges, and Nantes.

The invasion of the Islamic religion into Europe, heartland of Christianity for so many centuries, may seem to some on this side of the ocean a bit unreal. But it is unfortunately a reality and in the context of history not unprecedented. One only needs to think of the iconic Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. It was once the biggest cathedral in the Christian world but after Constantinople, now called Istanbul, fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, it was converted into a mosque. Another, even older, historic Christian church that has become a mosque is the Umayyad in Damascus. This famous building was a Christian cathedral under emperor Theodosius in the fourth century. However when Damascus was overrun by Muslims in the seventh century most of the church was destroyed and a mosque built on the site. With these historic warnings, the situation in Europe is a sobering reality.

The late Muammar Gaddafi, leader of Libya, declared in a speech (April 10, 2006) that "there are signs that Allah will grant Islam victory in Europe – without swords, without guns, without conquest – will turn it into a Muslim continent within a few decades." This no longer sounds impossible. Could we be seeing the end of Christianity in Europe? Not a pleasant thought for Reformation Day.



Welcome to Rev. Julius VanSpronsen and Family

“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” (2 Cor 9:8)

Richly does he bless us indeed! Many prayers were answered when Rev. VanSpronsen confirmed his call to Immanuel church here in Edmonton, and thus began the planning. Not only to move Julius and Karen VanSpronsen and their children from Brazil but also to get their new home here ready and to show our appreciation by welcoming them to their new congregation with the love and open arms that we as Christians should show to all who cross our paths.

The congregation was indeed eager and excited to receive our new minister after waiting almost a year from the time he accepted the call to his moving date. Add that to the time we were vacant before he accepted the call, and it was around two years of being without a Shepherd and teacher, a long time indeed! We thank the Lord that he answered our prayers and provided us with a new pastor and teacher.

So the preparation work began: remodelling of the manse, helping with the move, and no welcome is complete for a new minister without a welcome evening to show how happy his new flock is to have him.

So much time was put in from so many people to organize this evening. What to eat and drink, who wanted to say words of welcome, planning and practicing of skits and entertainment, all this needed to be figured out and so our Home Mission committee took up this task and put in many evenings hammering out the details!

What an evening it turned out to be! Almost the entire congregation was there to welcome the VanSpronsens. Neighbouring churches had representatives speak kind words of welcome. Games like “Reformed themed Jeopardy” were played. A riveting musical Orchestra played a tune with unusual instruments like watering



cans, toilet plungers, giant spoons, brooms, and garbage can lids. Funny looking children in giant top hats danced a welcoming jig which was well received and entertained the crowd. And no welcome for a new family is complete without trying to convince them to start cheering for the local hockey team, and so Rev. VanSpronsen was decked out in the local team colours!

It truly was a fun and welcoming time. We pray that the Lord blesses the work of Rev. VanSpronsen and blesses his wife and family as they are in our midst! We are truly thankful to have them amongst us!



St. Albert's Farewell to the Roukemas

"Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened"

Farewell evening

On Saturday evening July 23, 2016 the St Albert congregation gathered to say farewell to Rev. Tony and Sr. Alisa Roukema and family. We had enjoyed faithful preaching and pastoral care for almost six years. Now however, the Lord chose Burlington Ebenezer to be the new congregation to benefit from Rev. Roukema's gifts, so the time had come to say "good-bye."

The evening was opened by Br. Conrad Van Dyk with the reading of Romans 8:28-38 and prayer. Br. Van Dyk expressed the general feeling of sadness that this family was leaving but also celebration over the years we've shared. And the evening would be one of celebration, and often laughter, over small personal remembrances.

After the singing of "Great is Thy Faithfulness," presentations were made from various study groups. The Story Hour Kids were first. Here preschool children are taught by Sr. Rhea Muis while their moms attend Bible study. T'was beautiful to hear the little ones singing "Jesus Loves You," "Loving Shepherd," and then, their favourite, "Fishers of Men!" The last selection included enthusiastic actions, especially by young Gideon Roukema. Gideon will always have a special place in our hearts because he was born and baptised in St Albert and the whole congregation watched him grow from infant, to toddler, to a preschooler sitting in the pew wearing his beloved little black fedora. In keeping with the fishing theme, Sr. Muis presented Gideon with a fishing rod and his favourite granola bar snack in a large economy size box!

Sr. Willa Bosch then read a poem "Look at the Sunny Side" on behalf of the Wednesday morning ladies Bible study. The Saturday evening study group then showed a power point of different landmarks in St. Albert, done by Br. John VanVeen. The Roukemas were able to correctly identify almost every picture! Next the church council



had everyone laughing at their presentation of how the Roukema household might look on a busy Sunday morning before church. The presentation was very well done in "Victor Borge style" with phonetic punctuation! The Tuesday morning ladies Bible study showed how well Sr. Roukema knew them by giving clues to which she had to supply the name. Sr. Shirley DeHaas also read a fitting poem entitled "The Pastor's Wife."

Children of the congregation presented the Roukema children with an outdoor game called "Kubb" made by Br Ken Hoeksema. The congregation also presented a dramatic photo canvas of a prairie scene taken by Br. John VanVeen near the church at sunset. Surely the Roukemas will not quickly forget this land of the "big sky!"

Greetings by email or in person were made by the local churches of Immanuel and Providence and also sister churches in Barrhead, Calgary, Taber, and the United Reformed Church of Neerlandia.

Rev. Roukema in turn, spoke some words thanking the congregation and council for support and encouragement. He expressed the fact that leaving was difficult for the whole family and that they will dearly and deeply miss us all.

Br. Bill Muis then spoke on behalf of the church council, remembering when Pastor Roukema first arrived as a new minister to his first congregation. Both the minister



Rev. Tony Roukema



*Alisa Roukema and
Jennifer Campbell*

and the congregation were blessed in the years shared. Rev. Roukema showed a genuine love for the flock entrusted into his care and the congregation grew in knowledge and in faith under that counsel and care. Br. Muis ended with the reading of Ephesians 6: 23, 24 and included the Aaronic Blessing in a closing prayer of thanksgiving.

Everyone then proceeded to the fellowship hall and thoroughly enjoyed a potluck dessert smorgasbord allowing time for informal contact and farewells.

Farewell sermon

The next day we listened to Rev. Roukema's last sermons as minister of St Albert. Here too was sadness but also celebration as the sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to the youngest two members of the congregation – Myla Rose Leyenhorst and Timothy Edward Smeding. Rev. Roukema chose as text for his final sermon, Ephesians 3:14-21. This selection was a prayer for the Ephesians and to believers throughout the ages. The theme was "Paul shows us a brother's prayer: may you continue to grow in Christ both in power and in love."

Rev. Roukema explained how prayer connects us to God and also to fellowship together in the Holy Spirit. We are shown how to pray and to love one another. How very important this is! The baptisms, done minutes earlier, show God's loving faithfulness thru the generations, that his promises are true and sure! That believers may grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. To know this awesome love that surpasses knowledge – so we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God! Rev. Roukema also drew our attention to Revelations 2 where the Ephesians are commended for their endurance, for their perseverance in resisting sin, for testing the false prophets, for all their hard work. They had knowledge, yet we read that they had forsaken their first love, the love that they had for God and others that was so strong when they first became believers. Rev. Roukema reminded us that beauty can become ordinary, that if our desire to worship and encourage others wanes, that the power to grasp the love of Christ will also wane. May that never happen to us who have been given so much!

The text ends with a doxology of praise to God, describing the timeless work of the Holy Spirit. Our closing song was Hymn 78:1-5, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," a wonderful way to equip St Albert for their time of vacancy and reminder that, although we may be separated physically from the Roukemas by many miles, we can continue to be a blessing to each other in prayer and love.



Clarion Kids

The Fall of Jericho

Joshua 5:13 - 6:27

Joshua and the Israelites had gone a long way when they finally came to Jericho. God told Joshua to march quietly with all the people around the city once a day for six days. On the seventh day they had to march around seven times. Then the priests all blew trumpets and the Israelites shouted really loudly. God made the wall of the city fall down. The people could go in and take the city, like God wanted them to. They were not allowed to take any of the nice things from the city though, because they were for God. God also saved Rahab and her family, just like he had promised.

Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this picture!



Double Puzzle

Unscramble the words. Then use the letters in the circles to solve the mystery word!

HOIJCRE

		○					
--	--	---	--	--	--	--	--

SUJHOA

				○	
--	--	--	--	---	--

HEETVNS

					○	
--	--	--	--	--	---	--

SEPMIRO

○			○			
---	--	--	---	--	--	--

HARBA

○				
---	--	--	--	--

							T
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	---

by Emily Nijenhuis

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

Find these words!

Joshua
Jericho
March

Seven
Shout
Quiet

Priest
Trumpet
Walls

Wilma Van Drongelen

Hello, I am Wilma Van Drongelen, I am 59 years old, and was born on November 3, 1957. I have been attending a Canadian Reformed Church since birth and accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour. My Father's name is Cornellos, he is already in heaven with Jesus. My mom's name is Thea, and she is at a nursing home in Langley. I have two brothers; one who is also in heaven, his name is Peter Mark. My other brother is John, he is now in Winnipeg, and I miss him! In our siblings I am the only one who has a disability. I have Down's Syndrome but Jesus knows that's why he sent me loving people who care for me.



When my parents were getting older they decided to put me in a home because they couldn't take care of me anymore; especially when my Dad was very sick. I did try once to be alone by myself, but my Mom said no because I have a severe asthma and shortness of breath so I need someone with me all the time. That was a very sad decision they made but I understand because I need somebody to help me. So in September 2012 I moved to my first caregivers, Liza and Rick, and I was with them for almost four years.

In the past years I had been praying and hoping to move to a new place. On May 30 I moved to a new home; my new caregivers are Georgia and Brent at 1892 Horizon Street, Abbotsford. I am happier and would love to stay here. God is good!

I attend a day program every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in Bethesda which is held in Bethel Church. Our program is a graduate day service or GDS.

We have very nice staff there that take care of us, and they help us learn many new things. Tuesdays and Thursdays are my days off and they are my favourite days! Those days we go walking to the mall and sometimes we will go walking for an ice cream around our neighbourhood area.

I love singing worship songs with my new caregivers, and meeting Filipino new friends. Sometimes we help give food to the homeless people in Abbotsford.

In 1995 I studied a basic sign language at UFV; I want to become a sign language teacher. I want to help deaf children to learn sign language. I also want to become a missionary and travel all over the world to help poor people and teach American Sign Language.

Some of my favourite bible texts are Psalm 23:1; The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. Also, Psalm 25 the whole chapter, and Psalm 100:1, Oh sing unto the Lord a new song for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm has gotten him the victory.

I have Down Syndrome but I know that Jesus loves me so much. Even though Dad and Mom are not around anymore I am thankful to God for his love. There are so many people in the church that care for me, friends, GDS friends and staff, and of course my caregivers.

Birthday in November

WILMA VAN DRONGELEN

Born: November 3, 1957

1892 Horizon Street, Abbotsford, BC V2S 3J4

Congratulations to Wilma on her birthday this month. We wish you the Lord's blessing in the coming year.

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
Minister emeritus of the
Bethel Canadian Reformed
Church of Toronto, Ontario
denhollanderw@gmail.com

Q

Is Anger Always a Sin Against the Sixth Commandment?

The summary of the sixth commandment in HC LD 40 seems to imply and is often preached to imply that all anger and the inability to function in a relationship is always motivated by hatred. I wonder if the Bible makes any allowance for other motivations such as deep emotional pain, and that kind of relational dysfunction.

A

In the last two decades much has come to the surface within our churches that speaks of painful, life shattering, interpersonal experiences in which the hurt is very, very deep. In the church also, due to abuse (sexual, emotional, verbal) deep emotional pain and consequent relational dysfunction have made it very difficult for some victims of such abuse to go on, to try and continue to go to church, to try and continue to function. In spite of attempts at restoration and reconciliation, everything in them struggles against even being among the people who try to remedy the situation, even more to be around the people who have hurt them. It is hard to look them in the eye. They don't necessarily have a *hatred* problem but a *hurt* problem!

Against the background of this reality I, too, have had to weigh my words carefully, for instance when preaching about the Lord's Day on "Our Father who art in heaven." Aware as I was of severe abuse by a father of his daughter, I could not simply use the (general) father image our members have in order to portray the image of our heavenly Father as loving, caring, compassionate, etc. Rather, I needed to acknowledge, even contrast, the two in the way of comparing a sinful and loveless father with the way our heavenly Father reveals himself in the Scriptures. The same is the case with regard to the love the Scriptures and confessions demand of those who believe in God's love in Jesus Christ.

It is important first of all to note that the connotations, expressions, and proportions of this love are *not the same in every situation or relationship*. Here, too, sin may have done so much damage that it may be possible for some just to suffice with the *acceptance* of the other as also a child of God but not necessarily a brother or sister with whom a good and mutual relationship seems feasible (much depends, of course, on the level and expression of remorse, contrition, and show of repentance!).

Indeed, Scripture also acknowledges this reality and makes allowance for other motivations such as deep emotional pain, resulting in such relational dysfunction. We are still living in a broken world, also in the church and the communion of saints. In the context of Paul's exhortations regarding this communion of saints in Romans 12, he addresses this reality of abusive experiences and the like with the words, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Just as we learn from the OT that among God's people there are the righteous and the wicked, so it happens among the communion of saints in the NT that some people turn out to be "enemy." Then our natural inclination is to hate such a person, yet our faith and love move us to "bear" with them, "suffer" with them, "care" for them,

rather than be overcome by evil and hate them! Though the evil one may tempt to hate such an enemy, the Holy Spirit is able to help a hurting member to move on in time and pray (and work) for healing! From a minister's point of view, situations like these require much understanding, sensitivity, compassion, patience, and wisdom, also and especially in the way the doctrine of Lord's Day 40 is applied in the preaching!

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

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander
denhollanderw@gmail.com
23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0

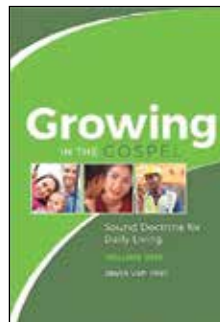


BOOK REVIEW

Growing in the Gospel

***Growing in the Gospel: Sound Doctrine for Daily Living* by Jason Van Vliet (Hamilton, ON: Lucerna Publications, 2016)**

Additional Information:
Sold by Amazon either in three separate paper-back volumes (approx. \$15 CDN per; or Kindle at \$7) or in one combined hard-covered volume (approx. \$45 CDN; 563 pages (total))



Looking for a clear, easy-to-understand explanation of biblical subjects like covenant and election? Or Creation and providence? Or Justification and sanctification? Perhaps baptism and Lord's Supper? Or maybe what happens when we die? Then look no further than Dr. Jason Van Vliet's impressive new work, *Growing in the Gospel*!



Peter H. Holtvliuwer
Minister of the Spring Creek
Canadian Reformed Church
at Tintern, Ontario
holtvliuwer@bell.net

'Round the kitchen table

You might think that when a Professor of Dogmatics (such as Dr. Van Vliet is at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary) writes a book on the main teachings of the Bible that you would end up with a dry, technical text book for students of theology. "This is going to be so over my head and unrelated to my daily life," you might think – but you'd be wrong! Dr. Van Vliet has worked hard to not only make the Bible's teachings *clear* to the average adult Christian reader but also very *applicable* to the needs and struggles we all face. He truly aims to have his readers *grow* in the gospel – in both grasping it its richness and living it in its fullness.

This is the kind of book you can read, understand and discuss with your spouse and (older) children around the kitchen table or in a Bible study group. It is written with the skill of a learned instructor who knows his field along with the heart of a pastor who knows how God's people think, feel and wrestle with life's issues. It's conversational, at a pew level. Many chapters begin with a

story from real life which not only introduces the teaching but also shows how it impacts everyday living. Carefully crafted questions at the end of each chapter bring up real and relevant matters of twenty-first century western believers. Readers are directed back to the Bible for answers and urged not to rest on personal opinion. This excellent feature will be sure to stimulate energetic and up-building discussion.

Scripture's teachings

Using the traditional arrangement of topics found in many books on theology and even Reformed confessions (e.g. the Belgic Confession), Dr. Van Vliet begins by explaining what the Bible says about God and creation, man and our sin (Vol. 1), Christ, the Holy Spirit and our salvation (Vol. 2), the church and how people come to faith as well as life beyond the grave and Christ's return (Vol. 3). Using everyday language, he carefully explains each subject from out of Scripture itself.

There is a danger that a writer uses the Bible to prove his own opinion but Van Vliet goes out of his way to show the reader what God is saying in his Word. With Bible in hand, the reader can perform the "Berean test" (Acts 17:11) and check for himself the truth of the explanation. At times, for subjects of controversy (e.g. the end times), various opinions are presented and where God's Word has not spoken then this is acknowledged. Van Vliet gives an earnest and honest presentation of God's Word. After explaining Scripture, the Professor moves on to refer regularly to the Reformed confessions (mostly the Three Forms of Unity), helping readers see afresh that what the churches of the Reformation have confessed for centuries is simply the plain teaching of God's Word.

Special topics

Dr. Van Vliet's style is explanatory and not polemical. It's not a book which in the first place outright tackles false teachings or faulty theology. At the same time, he is aware of various controversies swirling in our present-day North American Reformed church circles and so he spends some extra time on special topics such as "open theism,"

covenant and election (Vol.1), the Holy Spirit and Pentecostalism (Vol. 2), and the baptism of infants (Vol. 3). In fact, I found the explanation of baptism's Old Testament roots one of the stand-out chapters with a fresh presentation of overlooked passages like 1 Corinthians 10:2's "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." Also, unless I'm mistaken, Van Vliet is indirectly interacting with the teaching of Federal Visionists when he stresses the biblical distinction between justification and sanctification (and clarifying the role of good works, Vol. 2), and later how the Lord's Supper is not meant for children who cannot discern but for those who are able to make a credible profession of faith (Vol. 3). Dr. Van Vliet uses God's Word to help us navigate these issues.

Practical lay-out

Each of the three volumes consists of twelve chapters, just right for a season of Bible study. Each chapter is on average a modest sixteen pages, a very manageable size for adult Bible study groups or even for personal reading. Who would benefit from this book? Any Christian wishing to better understand the teachings of Scripture. Office bearers and parents who need to explain doctrines to their "people" will find this work immensely helpful. If you read a chapter a night (half hour?) three or four nights a week, you could nicely finish all three volumes in three months. You could also use the table of contents or subject index to go directly to a topic. While reading the volumes in order has value, a study group could select any of the three volumes to study on its own quite profitably.

The one small thing I would have liked to see in *Growing in the Gospel* is an index for Bible passages and another for the confessions. Dr. Van Vliet many times offers very helpful commentary on both Scripture texts and confessional passages and to have ready access to them via an index would benefit those who love digging deeper into the Word and our Reformed heritage. But that is minor. This is an excellent resource for Christians looking to understand Scripture more deeply and Dr. Van Vliet has, by God's grace, served the churches of the Reformation well! Recommended!

