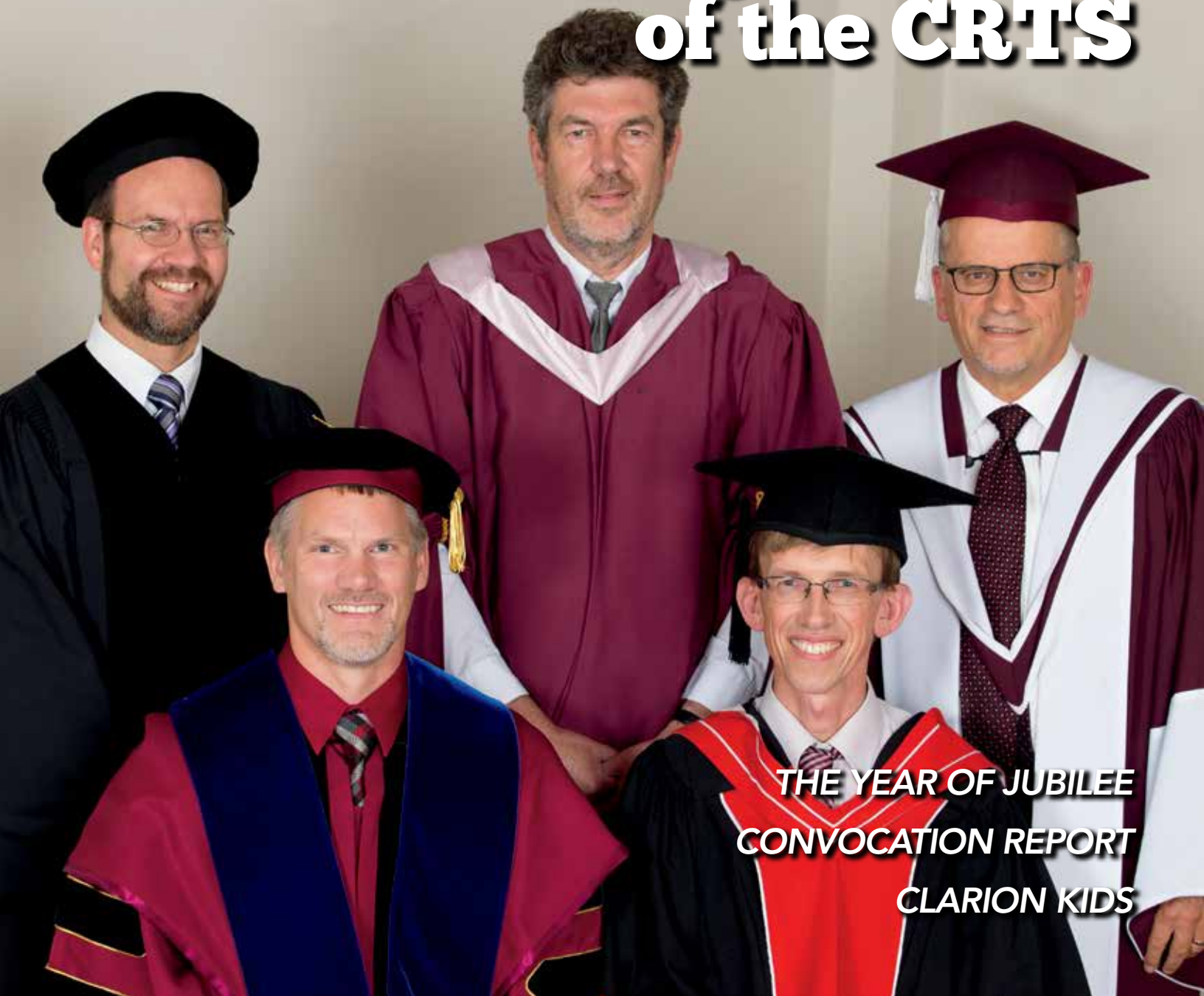


Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

V 66 N 20 OCTOBER 6 2017

48th Anniversary Meeting of the CRTS



THE YEAR OF JUBILEE
CONVOCATION REPORT
CLARION KIDS

Send Us Wood!

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*We, God's people, ought to forthrightly
admit to the Lord that we are guilty
of not having as fervent and zealous a desire
for the progress of his gospel as we should*

According to some old French sources, John Calvin once told the Reformed Church of La Rochelle in France, “Send us wood, and we will send you arrows.” The year was 1561 and the number of Reformed believers in La Rochelle was growing so quickly that the pastors were overwhelmed. One of the leading noblemen of the city was deputed to Geneva to ask for help. “We need more pastors!” was the plea. Calvin’s purported reply was, “Send us wood, and we will send you arrows.”¹

What did Calvin mean? The arrows were the pastors that the church wanted, and the wood was the raw material that Geneva needed. Calvin was saying something like, “Okay, fine, we’ll send you some pastors to help you out, but we need you to do something as well. Pastors don’t appear out of thin air. We need churches that nurture young men in their midst who will aspire to be pastors, for if you don’t send us wood, we can’t make arrows.”

Positively, needing pastors is a blessed and wonderful thing. The Lord keeps gathering his sheep and they want him to lead them by his Word and Spirit, through the ministry of faithful under-shepherds. Praise the Lord! Negatively, it is a sad thing when the churches have many positions which they cannot fill due to the unavailability of pastors. As far as I know, we as Canadian Reformed Churches have never – in almost seventy years – had a surplus of pastors.

Statistics, URNCA, CanRCs and FRCA

Currently the United Reformed Churches have eight vacancies in Canada and some in the USA. One of the CanRC ministers, who makes it a bit of a hobby to keep track of all the statistics, figured out that between the CanRCs and the

Free Reformed Churches of Australia, if seminary student numbers, retirements, new openings, etc. continue to track as they have been for the last decade, these two federations will have fifty-five vacancies. He then added, and I quote,

In the last decade, 40 men graduated from CRTS with an M.Div., but only 28 are serving in our churches today (a 70% ordination to graduation trend has been pretty stable over the past 30 years). In the next decade, at that rate, we will need to graduate 80 men to fill all our pulpits! If CRTS were to graduate 60 men in the next decade (a 50% increase!) these trends would say 42 would be ordained in our churches. That would be 108 pulpits / missionary placements / professors, with 13 vacancies by 2027, resulting in a 12% vacancy (today it’s 20%). But to graduate 60 men with an M.Div. in the next decade, we likely need to identify 75 or more men in seminary, or on track in pre-seminary education, already today! The harvest is plentiful. Pray the Lord of the harvest send out workers.²

The faculty and board of CRTS, as well as many of the ministers in both federations, have prayed about this frequently. As I think about this, my mind is drawn back to the great needs of the Reformed churches in the past, and I wonder whether we can learn from them.

Martin Luther and sharp arrows

Let’s start with Luther, in a time when there was not yet any distinction between “Lutheran” and “Reformed.” In late 1523 the City of Miltenberg was forced by its civil rulers to return to Roman Catholicism. Some church leaders were imprisoned and died. Luther wrote a letter of consolation in

February 1524, based on Psalm 120. First of all, we should meditate upon the Psalm (we'll use the KJV), then notice how Luther uses it.

In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me. Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue. What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper. Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

On Friday, September 8, 2017, the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary hosted their annual College Evening. In this, our Convocation issue, we include the Convocation Report from Rev. Richard Aasman, Dr. John Smith's keynote speech, and Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher's Word from the Principal, as well as several other addresses. Our thanks to Dr. Ted Van Raalte for his help in pulling the material together and writing a guest editorial as well!

Congratulations from us at *Clarion* to James Zekveld on his graduation from CRTS. This issue also reports on the ordination of Han Lee, a graduate from last year's class. In addition, we bring readers Treasures New and Old, Clippings on Politics and Religion, *Clarion* Kids, Education Matters, and a letter to the editor.

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Luther's meditation emphasizes for the believers that the battle is spiritual, not physical. And, although the Psalm speaks of the lies and deceit of the oppressors being punished with sharp arrows and hot coals, Luther leads us in considering our own failures. The hot coals and sharp arrows are things we ought to pray for, he writes, but we don't. They represent the Word of God doing its mighty work through the work of faithful pastors. Luther writes about how the gospel is not spreading fast enough:

I can blame [this] on nothing but our own indolence [laziness] in asking for sharp arrows and hot coals. God has asked us to pray for his kingdom to come and his name to be hallowed, that is, for his word to make more Christians and to help them grow strong. However, since we let matters rest as they are and fail to pray earnestly, the arrows are dull and weak, the coals are cold and ineffective. The devil is not very much afraid of us. . . . Let us now turn the tables on him, vex him, and avenge ourselves. That is to say, let us call upon God without ceasing until he sends us marksmen equipped with sharp arrows and coals.³

We, God's people, ought to forthrightly admit to the Lord that we are guilty of not having as fervent and zealous a desire for the progress of his gospel as we should. We let matters rest too easily; we are too easily satisfied with the status quo. We have our churches, our buildings, our pro-

grams, our Christian schools, and our Christian political activity. But do we prize the gospel like we should? Does it mean everything to us to see the gospel preached, to be a part of lives being transformed by that root transformation that only the Spirit does by the gospel? How many of our churches' financial decisions are made purely with a view to getting the gospel preached and souls saved? Do we purposefully send away our best men to preach the gospel? Do you feel deep anguish at the lack of progress? Let us get on our knees! I have sin to confess in this regard. Do you?

Guillaume Farel inflamed with desire for the gospel

The same Psalm was taken up by Guillaume Farel in 1542, when the believers in Metz suffered an attack. Two hundred residents of Metz had left the city because they were not permitted to worship there and then had been intercepted by French soldiers under the Duke of Guise. An old man died defending his purse and two women died trying to escape across a river. The city of Neuchâtel, where Farel pastored for decades, gave up their pastor for about a year while he helped Metz. Before the attack occurred, Farel had already published a fifty-six-page prayer to help the believers in Metz. After the attack occurred, he comforted them with preaching, praying, and song. He called it "deeply devout prayer in which is made the confession of sins of the believers who cry after God," and closed with a



musical version of Psalm 120, the same Psalm Luther had used. Consider prayerfully his opening words:

O Lord God and Father, full of mercy, have pity on us and lend your ear to our cry. We are compelled to lift up [our cry] to you, our only refuge, help and consolation in this great distress. *We are pressed by the dreadful famine of your word, lacking the lawful food for our poor souls, deprived of good and faithful pastors who carry out their office and duty just as you, O Lord, have commanded.*⁴

Notice that Farel does not blame the Lord, nor does he blame the enemies of the gospel. Rather, he includes the confession of the sin of believers in the prayer's title. Elsewhere, in the first Reformed confession ever published (1534), he could not restrain his pen from crying out to heaven and earth about the horror of his days, when all kinds of disorderly songs, plays,

We have to live and breathe the gospel so deeply that the question and the desire to pursue the ministry simply cannot be avoided

and books were published, but God's Word was prohibited. But he also took heart: "A messenger of God or a true evangelist will never be defeated. For God, as he has promised, gives to his own words of wisdom against which no one can resist." Then he asks our Father, "May all know you by your Son, from the greatest

to the least. Make the trumpet of your holy gospel heard from one end of the earth to the other. Give power to the true evangelists. Destroy all the sowers of error, so that the whole world might serve you, call upon you, worship you, and honour you."⁵

I'm sure you noticed Farel's desire for the worldwide spread of the gospel. He lived and breathed that desire; he became inflamed with it ever after his conversion.

In 1545 Farel lengthened this prayer to 156 pages and republished it under a new title that emphasized the need for worldwide gospel preaching: "Form of prayer to ask God for the holy preaching of the gospel."⁶ His whole life – especially the years 1524–1540 – were consumed with finding suitable men who could serve as preachers. That's exactly why he detained John Calvin in Geneva in 1536. And God heard these prayers; the Reformation made great progress. When Geneva finally established the formal training of ministers in 1559, it was Calvin who seems to have recalled

Luther's and Farel's use of Psalm 120, and who therefore told the church of La Rochelle, "Send us wood, and we will send you arrows."

What might be the LORD's purpose?

Perhaps the LORD has determined that his true church must always have some shortage of pastors so that his people will pray more fervently for this gift. Perhaps. However, I could point out that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has only 10,000 more members than the CanRCs and yet has an astonishing 540 ordained ministers.⁷ That's a statistic worthy of exploration sometime. Why is our situation so different? Why is the LORD humbling us? To help us see our own shortcomings? To teach us that we are not prizing the preaching of his gospel like we should? To show us that we have not prized those sharp arrows enough to raise up the wood that God needs? We can't force our young men to become pastors; rather, we have to live and breathe the gospel so deeply that the question and the desire to pursue the ministry simply cannot be avoided. It has to be organic, real. Maybe I shall try to write about that sometime, God helping me.

Clearly, our solution is not simply to make another "Prospective Students Day" at the seminary. We'll do that too. In fact, we're thinking about a week-long event. But first and foremost, let us humble ourselves before God and admit that we need to prize his holy gospel more than anything.

¹ "Envoyez-nous du bois et nous vous enverrons des flèches." M. Arcere, ed., *Histoire de la ville de La Rochelle* (La Rochelle: Desbordes, 1757), vol. 2, p. 104.

² An email from Rev. John van Popta, dated 26 June 2017. Used with permission.

³ Martin Luther, "A Christian Letter of Consolation to the People of Miltenberg," *Luther's Works* ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), vol. 43, pp. 111–12.

⁴ Guillaume Farel, *Oraison tresdevote en laquelle est faicte la confession des pechez, des fideles qui ainsi crient après Dieu* ([Strasbourg: J. Knobloch, 1542]), a2r (emphasis added).

⁵ See Farel's *Summaire*, ch. 35, as translated in Jason Zuidema and Theodore G. Van Raalte, *Early French Reform: The Theology and Spirituality of Guillaume Farel* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 160–62.

⁶ Guillaume Farel, *Forme d'oraison pour demander a Dieu la sainte predication de l'euangile* (Geneva: Jehan Girard, 1545).

⁷ Danny E. Olinger, "Then and Now at Palos Heights: 84th General Assembly, *New Horizons* 38:7 (Aug–Sept 2017), 3. Online at http://opc.org/new_horizons/NH2017/NH2017Aug.pdf. Accessed 11 September, 2017."

God's Glory Declared in the Heavens

"The heavens declare the glory of God." Psalm 19:1

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In your walks outdoors this summer did you ever stop in wonder as you gazed up at the sky? What a majestic sky! What an expansive heavens! Be it day or night one stands in awe as one looks upward. Actually, wherever we live we have the same glorious display of God. So God reveals Himself to all.

That is what David writes in the first part of Psalm 19. This psalm begins also with David looking upward to the skies and saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

What glory we see in the works of God's hands! For what is more impressive than the clear blue skies or the vast variety of clouds? What is more wonderful than the shining sun, bright moon, and the twinkling stars? God reveals Himself throughout all times with the work of his hands.

How do the heavens proclaim God's glory? Without words! You cannot *hear* their testimony of God the Creator. As David writes in verse 2 and 3, "Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge! There is no speech, nor are there words: their voice is not heard" (NKJV). In quiet majesty the heavens proclaim the glory of God. This silent testimony is seen by all. As David notes, "Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the end of the world!" Whether one lives in Norway or New Zealand, whether one

speaks Swahili or Spanish, all see this revelation of God. It is his general revelation. He has not left Himself without testimony (Acts 14:17).

How then do the heavens declare the glory of God? By doing the task the Lord God has given to them! It is the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and stars, which determine the separation of day and night. They serve as signs to mark seasons, days, and years (Gen 1:14). As it literally says in verse 4, their line goes out into all the earth, their words to the end of the earth. They serve as the measuring line. When the sun rises in the sky, it is day; when the moon shines, it is night! So they do their task, as the sovereign God had decreed: "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Gen 8:22).

David points to the sun as an example. The sun follows God's decree faithfully. Day after day the sun obeys! Every day the sun rises out of the tent God pitched for it and runs its course through the sky. As David writes, "It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other: nothing is hid from its heat." Everyone in the world can see the sun rise in the east and set in the west. All mankind enjoys its light and comes under its heat. By fulfilling the designs of the Creator for its place and function, the sun obeys God!

This is what David and everyone sees. For God has made it plain for *all* to see. The skies point to our great and majestic God: the God of glory! Yet, how many glorify Him?

There is something even more impressive and glorious than God's revelation of Himself in the heavens: God's revelation of Himself in his Word! David tells of this in the second part of the psalm. God is revealed more clearly and fully in his Word. He reveals Himself as Lord. The Lord that is Yahweh! In the second half of this psalm this name of God is used seven times! The God who established an everlasting covenant with his people; who revealed Himself as faithful and true to this covenant; who showed Himself as the faithful Redeemer of his chosen people! Surely this is most glorious! Most impressive! Most gracious! What a Lord David and we have.

It is from the Law of the Lord that David knew of glorious redemption. The law of the Lord our God begins with: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of slavery." Having so graciously and mightily redeemed his people, He gave his statutes, commands, and ordinances to them. These are more precious than gold, sweeter than honey! Such is God's Word, which tells us of redemption and also lays out his demands. David, as servant of the Lord, was to keep his commands, ordinances,

and judgements. So God was to be glorified by David his servant: just as He is glorified by the sun his servant.

But did David keep the law? No! For what does David say near the end of this psalm? Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. David did not always bring glory to our Lord God. Someone other than David

was needed to bring full glory to God! One who can keep the law, who is truly righteous. One who is blameless, innocent of great transgression. He is Jesus Christ, the son of David, our great Redeemer! What glorious works of redemption He has done for us. From the Lord's full and complete Word we know of our great Redeemer. So we

have every reason to live in thankful obedience; to bring glory to his great Name! May the words of our mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer!

This meditation was originally published in this magazine in 2005.



CONVOCATION 2017

Report of the Forty-Eighth Anniversary Meeting and Forty-Third Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), September 8, 2017

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People started arriving early on this beautiful summer evening, gathering and talking in the hallways of Redeemer University College. That's one of the wonderful aspects of a CRTS anniversary meeting and convocation: it is a time for meeting old friends and acquaintances. It was clear that some had driven long distances or even flown to be present. Live streaming meant people could participate in this evening from around the world. Comments from last year demonstrated that people who could not attend certainly appreciated the live streaming. The auditorium was not as

full as last year when we had nine graduating students. Nevertheless, it was a good sized, enthusiastic audience.

The chairman of the Board, Rev. Richard Aasman, opened the evening by reading Leviticus 25:8-28. This passage was chosen in connection with the speech of the evening. The opening prayer remembered the recent passing on of Dr. J. DeJong, and asked that the Lord will surround sister Margaret DeJong with his love and care. Mentioned in prayer were the widow of the late Dr. K. Deddens, sister W. Faber, widow of the late Dr. J. Faber, Prof. J. Geertsema,

Dr. N.H. Gootjes, and his wife Dinie. Appreciation was also expressed for the continued work and health of Professor Emeritus Dr. C. Van Dam. Thanksgiving was expressed for brother James Zekveld who would have the Degree of Master of Divinity conferred on him this evening. Following the prayer, excerpts were read of a letter from the Deputies Curators of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg. The latter has called brother Zekveld to be their missionary in Manitoba, and he has accepted. The Churches in South Africa expressed appreciation for the fact that students coming from their mission fields could make use of videotaped material from CRTS.

The principal of the seminary, Dr. G.H. Visscher, spoke briefly. You can read the contents of his address elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. One of the things that Dr. Visscher focussed on was the blessing that the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) has been for our seminary. He also mentioned that four students have been admitted to the Master of Divinity program: Raoul Kingma, Ruurd Of-fringa, Kevin Star, and Timothy Veenstra. One student has been admitted to the two-year Diploma of Theological Studies program: Harma-Mae Smit. Dr. Visscher also mentioned that this is his final day as principal of the seminary. Effective the next day, Dr. J. Van Vliet will be the principal.



CALLED

Called by the CanRC in Abbotsford, BC:

Rev. Dave de Boer

of the Ebenezer CanRC in Chatham, Ontario

DECLINED

Called and declined the call extended by the Neerlandia (South) CanRC, Alberta:

Rev. Stephen t'Hart

of the Free Reformed Church in Baldavis, WA

CHURCH NEWS

The keynote speaker for the evening was Dr. J. Smith, professor of Old Testament. His address was entitled, "The Year of Jubilee." You will find the full text of this speech elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. Dr. Smith demonstrated how Jubilee is such a gracious provision of God to his people. Sadly, Old Testament Israel did not use it and so missed out on its benefits. Thankfully, Jubilee is fulfilled in Jesus Christ whose entire ministry was Jubilee. He paid the ultimate debt to set us free. All glory belongs to God who is never changing in his grace. As audience we received a real flavour of what it must be like for students to sit under Dr. Smith's teaching.

After a rousing singing of Psalm 116:9, 10, led by our capable organist, brother Brian Vanderhout, the degree of Master of Divinity was conferred on brother James Zekveld. Dr. J. Van Vliet mentioned that brother Zekveld, as the only student in his year, was "in a class all his own." Brother Zekveld was also given the floor to share with us his experiences at the seminary. Using the format of Dr. Seuss' book, "*Oh, the Places You'll Go*," brother Zekveld playfully gave us a taste of the teaching style of all five professors. Clearly there has been a good bond between student and professors.

The Women's Savings Action (WSA) was represented by the sisters Debbie Alkema, Karen Schuurman, and Janet Van Vliet. \$35,000 was presented for the CRTS library. Dr. Visscher expressed CRTS's thanks for the faithful work and the amazing contribution by the sisters in the WSA.

The collection was for the CRTS Publication Foundation – a fund that provides money for the faculty to produce books. Rev. J. Poppe led in closing prayer focussing particularly on work of the seminary in the upcoming year. As is customary, the assembly concluded with the singing of "O Canada." After the program everyone had opportunity to congratulate the graduate. It was also a time of good fellowship, and of renewing friendships and acquaintances. You are welcome to view a video version of the College Evening at www.canadianreformedseminary.ca.



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The Year of Jubilee

Mr. Chairman, Governors, Colleagues, Friends, Brothers, and Sisters in the Lord: 2017 is an anniversary year. On July 1st, and indeed throughout the year, we've celebrated the sesquicentennial of our home and native land, and we reflect on what it means to be Canadian. On October 31st, and indeed throughout the year, we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and we reflect on what it means to be Reformed. Other anniversaries could be mentioned as well: on April 12th, it was one hundred years ago that Canadian troops won the Battle of Vimy Ridge in the First World War; on August 19th, it was seventy-five years since the Dieppe Raid in the Second World War when nine hundred Canadians were killed in a military offensive known as Operation Jubilee. More personally, 2017 marks the fiftieth wedding anniversary of both my parents and my wife's parents. Judging by the ads in the back of *Clarion*, they're certainly not the only ones to celebrate their golden jubilee. Perhaps most significantly for us tonight, it's been forty-nine years since General Synod Orangeville decided to establish a Theological College and to appoint its first professors. Forty-nine years – not quite fifty yet, but as we'll see, forty-nine may well be the more significant num-

ber. Tonight I would like to speak to you about the Year of Jubilee – its Old Testament setting, its gospel significance, and its ongoing relevance for today. We'll do that in light of the five *solas* of the Reformed faith.¹

Sola Scriptura

Let's begin with *sola Scriptura*, the principle that the Bible as God's revelation is the only and infallible norm for doctrine and life. The law of the Jubilee is part of a larger passage that's explicitly identified as divine revelation. It begins in Leviticus 25:1 with these words: "The Lord said to Moses on Mt. Sinai, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them. . .'" and then follows a lengthy divine speech that continues right to the end of chapter 26, which concludes with these words: "These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the Lord established on Mt. Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses." This implies that chapters 25 and 26 ought to be read together as a single unit of divine discourse. Chapter 25 speaks first of the Sabbath year in verses 1-7, and then of the Jubilee in verses 8-55. Chapter 26 speaks of reward for obeying the law and punishment for disobeying it. The two chapters belong together.



This is confirmed by their literary structure. The first part of chapter 25 gives the principle of the number seven: “For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops, but in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath to the Lord.” The last part of chapter 26 returns to this principle of seven: “If you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. . . I will scatter you among the nations. Your land will be laid waste and your cities will lie in ruins. . . Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath years; it will have the rest that

They had to learn what Jesus learned, that it is better to go hungry than to listen to the devil

it did not have during the Sabbaths you had in it.” In short, the passage about the Jubilee is presented as authoritative revelation in the form of a God-given law that binds the conscience and holds its hearers to account.

The Lord gave this law at Mt. Sinai, after he had delivered his people from slavery, to prepare them to live as heirs of the Promised Land. It was God’s plan not only to divide the land into territories for each tribe, but also to subdivide each territory into smaller portions for the clans within each tribe. God bestowed his covenant blessing within the context of family, so that each household would directly and tangibly experience their identity as children of God, heirs of the promise, each enjoying the Lord’s provision under their own vine and fig tree for the generations to come.

Now in Leviticus 25 the Lord foresaw situations that might separate a man from his God-given property. A man might become poor and be forced to sell a field to a fellow Israelite or perhaps even to a foreigner. Worse yet, the man might become so desperate that he would sell himself to his creditor to pay off his debts. In response, God laid down a number of principles. The first is found in verse 23, that the land belonged to the Lord, and therefore he retained the right to restore it to its original owner. Secondly, the Israelites were to do whatever they could to prevent debt by showing kindness and love to their neighbour. If a brother Israelite was forced to sell himself into debt slavery, his creditor was not to treat him as a slave but as a hired worker, and if at anytime a kinsman redeemer would come and pay the debt, the creditor would have to let his worker go. If no redeemer came, then the creditor would still have to release him in the Year of Jubilee.² Likewise, if a brother

Israelite had to sell a field, at anytime he could get it back through a kinsman redeemer, and if not, he would get it back at the Jubilee. Thirdly, you can imagine that an approaching Jubilee could affect real estate prices and cause conflict: a seller might like to sell *high* just *before* the Jubilee, and a buyer might like to buy *low* just *after* the Jubilee. Make it profitable! To prevent abuse, the Lord set the Jubilee as a benchmark for regulating real estate prices according to a sliding scale: the price was to be set according to the number of crops that the buyer could expect to grow before he lost the field again in the Jubilee: the more growing seasons, the higher the price, and the fewer growing seasons, the lower the price. In this way, the Lord promoted equity and encouraged love for the neighbour. In short, the Jubilee was a year when debt-slaves could return to their families and families could return to their properties.

I want to clarify two important aspects of the Jubilee. The first is that it was to begin in the seventh month of the seventh Sabbath year. In other words, the fiftieth year began before the forty-ninth year was finished. The first five months of the Jubilee coincided with the last five months of the seventh Sabbath Year, and the last seven months of the Jubilee coincided with the first seven months of the following year. Mathematically, what that means is that the Jubilee cycle was not a fifty-year cycle but a forty-nine-year cycle. So to all those who have just celebrated their golden jubilee, I regret to tell you that you’re a year too late. The fixed pattern was the repetitions of seven years. The Jubilee straddled the end of one seven-year cycle and the beginning of the next one. When the Jubilee began, the fields were already fallow from the Sabbath year; the man who had bought the property was not allowed to squeeze one more crop out of it before he lost it again. No, he had to let it rest. And when it reverted to the original owner, that owner could not quickly plant some crops to grow food for himself; he had to wait another growing season. Both the buyer and the original heir had to learn that *man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord*. They had to learn what Jesus learned, that it is better to go hungry than to listen to the devil.

That brings me to a second important aspect: the Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement, a rather sober day when all the people, rich and poor alike, gathered together at the tabernacle, they fasted, and they watched as the high priest made atonement for their sins. This feast levelled the playing field: they all, rich and poor alike, were debtors before the Lord, sinners in need of God’s grace. Atonement Day was like a spiritual reset button: it symbolized

that all the impurities were taken away and that the work of the tabernacle could begin all over again. It reminded the people that they could only return to their rightful inheritance once their sins had been atoned for. I suspect that the word Jubilee makes us think of joy and jubilation, but the Hebrew word actually means ram's horn; it probably refers to the fact that the Jubilee was announced by blowing the trumpet.³ So it had a more serious message: it's time to let go of debts; it's time to go home and start over.

The Israelite Jubilee was a unique institution in the ancient world. In some cultures, debts were cancelled when a new king came to the throne. In ancient Egypt, a so-called *sed*-festival was held in the king's thirtieth year.⁴ Such customs are sometimes called jubilees, but they were not the same as the Old Testament Jubilee. Now some might say, who cares what other cultures did? Don't we hold to *sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone? Yes, but here it's important to note what *sola Scriptura* does not mean. It does not mean that the Bible is the only legitimate source of information. The Jews too had other books besides the Hebrew Bible. One of them was a book called Jubilees, likely written in the second century before Christ.⁵ This book retells the history of the Old Testament from creation to Mt Sinai, and it divides this entire history into forty-nine jubilee periods, 49 x 49 years for a total of 2401 years from the creation of the world to the Exodus. That sounds fascinating, doesn't it, that the timing of the Exodus should have marked the beginning of the fiftieth jubilee period of world history. But is it true? It may interest you to know that the book of Jubilees was actually part of the Bible for the Ethiopic church in Africa, although it was never part of the Jewish canon, nor of the Roman Catholic or the Protestant Bible.⁶ Many Hebrew fragments of this book were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, but the fact that it was first written in Hebrew does not yet make it holy Scripture. Furthermore, the book of Jubilees is not the only attempt to calculate the age of the world. Many such attempts have been made, but the principle of *sola Scriptura* does not bind us to any of these. *Scripture* is authoritative, yes, but *our reconstructions of history on the basis of Scripture* are not. Nor does the principle of *sola Scriptura* mean that we still have to observe the Jubilee today. Roman Catholic popes have regularly proclaimed Years of Jubilee ever since the 1300s, together with Jubilee indulgences and ceremonies.⁷ (The most recent one was held just last year.) But the Reformed churches confess that "the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ, . . . so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians."⁸ We are not saved by observ-



ing the law but by grace alone. That brings us to the second *sola*, *sola gratia*, by grace alone.

Sola Gratia

The law of the Jubilee is infused with the grace of the gospel. Debt slaves had their debts cancelled not because they had worked long enough, but because God said the time had come. The landless had their properties restored not because they'd managed to buy them back but because God declared them heirs. The God who had shown his people grace by delivering them from slavery now expected them to show the same grace to each other. But did it happen? Was there ever a Year of Jubilee in Old Testament history?⁹ Some scholars call Leviticus 25 "utopian legislation," laws for an ideal society.¹⁰ There I would disagree. These laws are far too practical for that, prompted by the chronic realities of brokenness and poverty, and inextricably connected to real estate prices and land valuations.¹¹ They were *bona fide* laws, designed to be obeyed.

But *were* they obeyed? I would like to divide the question into two: was the Jubilee *kept*, and was the Jubilee *counted*?

First, was it kept? We do not read anywhere in the Old Testament that a Year of Jubilee was ever held. In itself, that is of course an argument from silence. The Bible doesn't tell us everything that happened. Yet if, as I suggested earlier, Leviticus 25 should be read in tandem with chapter 26, about the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience, then we can deduce that Israel followed the path of disobedience. The historical books are filled with stories of apostasy, and the prophets are filled with angst over the

abuse of the poor at the hands of the rich who “added house to house and field to field” (Isa 5:8). The last king of Judah proclaimed liberty for the Hebrew slaves when Jerusalem was under siege, only to take them back again when the siege lifted. And you should read the scathing judgment of the Lord in Jeremiah 34: “You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom for your fellow countrymen. So I now proclaim ‘freedom’ for you, declares the Lord – ‘freedom’ to fall by the sword, plague and famine. . . I will bring [the Babylonians] back to this city. They will fight against it, take it and burn it down.” When Jerusalem was destroyed and the people taken into exile, then, says 2 Chronicles 36, “The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed.”

Yet that was not the end. In the very next verse, 2 Chronicles 36 tells how the Lord moved the heart of King Cyrus to let the people go back home. Isaiah 61 foretells the return from exile using jubilee language:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor [that’s the year of Jubilee]. . . . They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. . . they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs. Even though the people did not proclaim a Jubilee for each other, the Lord proclaimed a Jubilee for them, and allowed them to return to their ancestral properties. The Lord kept the law in their place. That’s grace! Did God do this because the people had paid enough for their sins and earned their release? Daniel 9 makes very clear that that was not the case. There Daniel, realizing that the seventy years were over, prayed a long prayer of confession. He begged the Lord to set his people free, but not because they had earned it. Daniel said, “We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive!” The Lord then sent his angel Gabriel who told Daniel that the returning exiles should not expect years of blessing but years of trouble. Gabriel explained that seventy sevens would still have to pass before sin would be atoned for. It’s a difficult passage, but it likely means that sin would not be forgiven until the Messiah would finally come and put an end to sacrifice through his death. The people could only be saved through a Messiah who would be cut off and left with nothing. Only by grace!

In short, the exile proves that the laws of the Jubilee had not been kept. Was it counted? That’s a different question. In the days before standardized time – when years were marked by the movement of the sun, moon, and stars, when there was no B.C. or A.D., but years were tabulated by the reign of the local ruler, when some people used the lunar calendar and others the solar – in those days, God’s people had to *count* time. Verse 8: “Count off seven Sabbaths of years – seven times seven years – so that the seven Sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years.

Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land.” This responsibility of counting time

was given to all the people, but it will especially have been the prerogative of their leaders: the priests, who had to make sure that the feasts were held at the proper times, and the kings who had the authority to call God’s people together. There are a number of indications, both in Scripture and in extra-biblical literature, that the priests did indeed keep track of Sabbath years and jubilees. Ancient Jewish writings mention at least two Jubilee years, one in the eighteenth year of Josiah and the other in the twenty-fifth year that Ezekiel was in exile (Ezek 40:1).¹² Now, it is difficult to prove either of these, and I don’t have time this evening to go into the arguments,¹³ but it does stand to reason that if the priests kept track of feast *days*, they would also have kept track of festal *years*, even if they were powerless to enforce them.

**Jesus
characterized his
ministry as the
inauguration
of a Jubilee**

Sola Fide

What made the priests powerless? Consider two factors. First, the Jubilee laws would only work if the people actually took possession of the entire land that the Lord had promised to them – if all the tribes and their clans actually claimed their places and held onto them. That seldom happened. For much of its history Israel was subject to invasion and occupation by the surrounding nations. They could only hold on to their inheritance by faith in the Lord, *sola fide*. Secondly, remember that the people asked for a king like that of the surrounding nations, even though Samuel sternly warned them that such a king would act counter to the democratic and decentralizing spirit of the Jubilee. Samuel said,

This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his

chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. . . . He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. . . . He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day (1 Sam 8:11-18).

More positively, Israel's kings were supposed to champion the cause of the poor and give justice to the helpless.¹⁴ But what king would be interested in proclaiming a jubilee? Only a king with a self-sacrificial spirit, a king willing to lose everything, a king willing to share his kingdom with the people. Such a king is Jesus Christ. The best of Israel's kings, Josiah, did proclaim a Passover in the eighteenth year of his reign, but we read nothing of a Jubilee (2 Kgs 23:23). His was a time to circle the wagons, a time to centralize power in Jerusalem against the growing threat of military invasion. And so the disenfranchised and impoverished people who had lost their fields to rich creditors could have no faith in the temple priests: maybe the priests could count the years, but they could not help the people. The faithful would have to wait for a better priest to announce a Jubilee for them.

Does this mean that the law was flawed? Not at all, for the principle of *sola fide* was built right into the Jubilee legislation. God's people had to trust that he would give them the land. And this was not blind faith: the Lord had already

won mighty victories against the Egyptians and the Amalekites, so that the Canaanites were shaking in fear. God's people also had to trust that they could leave the land fallow even for two years in a row and still have enough to feed their families. Nor was *this* blind faith: the bumper crop in the sixth year should have given them all the reassurance they needed; they would have been able to count the cost. Read the fifty-five verses of Leviticus 25 and you will see how the Lord patiently answered every question that the people might have, every objection they might raise. The problem did not lie with the law but with the people's lack of faith. Therefore they had to look to a faithful priest-king who could fulfill this law for them, and with that we come to *solo Christo*, in Christ alone.

Sola Christo

Every new minister of the gospel needs to choose a Bible text for his inaugural sermon, a passage that will set the tone for his pastoral ministry. Tonight's graduate will soon face that choice as well, the Lord willing. I find it fascinating that our Saviour chose a prophecy about the Jubilee as his inaugural text. After he had been baptized and tempted by the devil, the Lord Jesus went to the synagogue in his hometown, Nazareth; he took the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and unrolled it to what we call chapter 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he sat down and began his sermon with these words, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." In other words,



Jesus characterized his ministry as the inauguration of a Jubilee. It's fascinating, first, that Jesus, who to all appearances was neither a king nor a priest nor a teacher of the law assumed the authority to proclaim a Jubilee in his time; and second, that the reaction of the audience was not joy but skepticism and hardness of heart. They even interrupted his sermon and tried to kill him: the offence of the gospel pushed Jesus toward the cross, precisely where he needed to go. But not before he had ample opportunity to lift up the downtrodden, to heal the lame and the blind, to forgive the sins of the oppressed, and to chastise the teachers of the law who thought that salvation was to be found in obedience to the letter of the law, despite the testimony of their own sordid history.

Time fails us to explore the Jubilee character of Jesus' ministry, so let me give just one example. When Peter asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother? Up to seven times?" then Jesus responded, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven," invoking perhaps the principle of seven from Leviticus 25 and the "seventy sevens" of Daniel 9. And then Jesus continued with a parable about an unusual king, who forgave an enormous debt at tremendous cost to himself, and who expected the forgiven debtor to forgive others. After all, that was the original message of the Jubilee: those set free by the Lord ought to set one another free. So too in the kingdom of Christ: those who pray for forgiveness must also forgive – and not just once every fifty years or so! Forgiving debts is difficult: of ourselves we're not any better at it than the Israelites were. Married couples can attest to that as well: it's hard to forgive each other. But we need to remember who we are: people who have experienced Atonement Day, people who have heard the gospel proclamation of Jubilee and are travelling home to our eternal inheritance. If along the way God permits us to celebrate our golden jubilees, then that's a testimony of his grace in Christ. And if we don't make it to those jubilees, because our marriage is cut short by illness and death or broken apart by sin, we have not thereby lost our only comfort in life and death. To quote a song by Michael Card, "Jesus is our Jubilee!"

Soli Deo Gloria

Let me conclude with *solī Deo gloria*, "to God alone be the glory." This principle too is built into the Jubilee legislation. It's found in the reason for the law. Why observe the Jubilee? Because *I am the Lord your God*. That refrain, *I am the Lord your God*, is found three times in Leviticus 25, five more times in chapter 26, and exactly forty-nine times throughout the book of Leviticus. It almost always accom-

panies a command: "Do such and such. I am the Lord." It's a refrain that calls for simple obedience and childlike trust. It captures the very purpose of our existence: to live our lives for him. It prompts us to respond in worship, "You are the Lord!" It prompts us to say in wonder, "This is our God!" And it invites us to discover in these ancient Scriptures the never-changing character of our God: his holiness, his wisdom, his grace, his glory, and his beautiful vision for our salvation. May the Lord bless us as we study his Word again this year. And may God keep our land glorious and free.

¹ Footnotes have been kept to a minimum, and some complex issues have been simplified or passed over. Christopher J. Wright's treatment is particularly helpful, both for exegetical detail and socio-economic application: "Jubilee, Year of," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D.N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:1025–1030. For gospel trajectories and application to the Christian life, see Richard H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 145–152, and John R. Sittima, *Meeting Jesus at the Feast: Israel's Festivals and the Gospel* (Grandville: Reformed Fellowship Inc., 2010), 137–152.

² Other laws specified that a Hebrew slave had to be released in the seventh year (Exod 21:2; Deut 15:12).

³ Lev 25:8 uses the more common word for trumpet, namely *shofar*, but other passages have its synonym *yobel*: Exod 19:13, Josh 6:4–13.

⁴ Nicolas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (trans. I. Shaw; Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 53.

⁵ O.S. Wintermute, "Jubilees: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 2:35–142. James VanderKam dates it between 170 and 140 B.C. ("Jubilees, Book of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3:1030).

⁶ Hence it is classified as "pseudepigraphal," as opposed to "canonical" or "apocryphal."

⁷ Robert North, *The Biblical Jubilee. . . after fifty years* (Rome: E.P.I.B., 2000), 115–117.

⁸ Belgic Confession, Article 25.

⁹ This question is much discussed in the scholarly literature and usually answered in the negative. See, e.g., Wright, "Jubilee, Year of," 1027–1028; Jeffrey A. Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee: Uncovering Hebrew Ethics through the Sociology of Knowledge* (JSOTSup 155; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 34–36.

¹⁰ This view is especially held by those who hold to a late date for the Levitical laws, but, as Wright observes, "It is hard to see what purpose would have been served by framing new idealistic legislation designed to preserve" a socio-economic system that no longer functioned in the post-exilic age. ("Jubilee, Year of," 1028).

¹¹ See also Lev 27:17–24; Num 36:4.

¹² Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 48, citing *b. Meg.* 14b and *b. 'Arak.* 12a from the Babylonian Talmud, as well as *Seder 'Olam Rabbah* 11, 24.

¹³ See, e.g. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 48–53, 148–151; Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Rev. Ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 116–130.

¹⁴ See, e.g. Deut 17:14–20; 2 Sam 14:4–8; 2 Kgs 8:3–6; Ps 72:1–4, 12–14.



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A Word from the Principal Seminary Evening 2017

Whenever we reflect on a past academic year, it's really hard to tabulate all the work that goes into it. There are countless lectures, seminars, meetings, personal discussions, and interactions between professors and students, and also students among each other. It's good to remember that our intent these days is not just to pass on as much knowledge as we can, but to help students be the best possible Christian persons they can be – and in that way, be prepared to serve God and his people. It's not just information we're after, but transformation, so that they in due time can be the best possible instruments used by God for the transformation of his people. For that, of course, we all need God's rich blessing, and we covet your prayers for that great purpose.

Welcome

Looking forward to the next year then, I would like to introduce to you five new students who will begin their study next week.

We are pleased to welcome four new Master of Divinity students:

- Raoul Kingma, who comes to us from Willoughby Heights Canadian Reformed Church, with roots in the Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church. With a Bachelor's in Engineering and a Master's in Applied Science, he will no doubt have a unique perspective on theology and ministry. We welcome him and his wife, Sara, into the CRTS community.
- Ruurd Offringa, who comes to us all the way from Armadale, Western Australia, though he grew up in Manitoba. Ruurd has quite some teaching experience, which will no doubt stand him in good stead as a future pastor and teacher. We welcome him and his wife, Tara, into the CRTS community
- Kevin Star, who comes to us from the Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey, B.C., a place that many of our professors recognize as a good place to be. As former pas-

tors, then, they also know him from earlier days, and one is even feeling old today, as he baptized Kevin as a baby. (We'll let you figure out who that professor might be.) We welcome Kevin into the CRTS community.

- Timothy Veenstra, who comes to us from Blessings Christian Church, here in Hamilton, Ontario with a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from McMaster University. We welcome Tim and his wife, Kristen, into the CRTS community.

We are also pleased to welcome one student for the Diploma of Theological Studies.

- Harma-Mae Smit, who comes to us from Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta. She holds a BA in History and her interest in seminary was piqued through some recent time spent among our brothers and sisters in Brazil. We welcome Harma-Mae into the CRTS community. Always great to have more women added to the predominantly male community.

And lest you think that's all there are, let me mention that we also have fifteen other students, for a total of twenty students, seventeen of whom are M. Div. students. While we acknowledge that our student body could and should double to meet all the expected future demand, we are thankful for each one of them and pray that God will bless them also in this academic year.

Thank you

It would probably be quite amiss of me not to mention this evening that this is the last time I will stand before you as Principal of CRTS. I have been honoured to serve in this role since January 2008, for nine and a half years, but tonight I am relieved to be relieved of the duty. And there remains only the task of thanking all who have so wonderfully supported me in this task. As I took over the task six months earlier than expected because of the illness of Dr. Gootjes, who was afflicted with a disease so similar to that of Dr. de Jong, we are aware that the first one who needs to be thanked

is our gracious God. We do nothing without his providential, loving care, and his renewing work through Christ and his Spirit. Both sickness and health, weakness and strength, we receive from him and his sovereign wisdom.

I think it might be beneficial, though, to reflect on some of the major things that have happened to us during the past ten years. I do this not to suggest that I accomplished them all. Most certainly not, for faculty, staff, and Board have all been involved in so many ways.

It all began when, in 2007, General Synod Smithers, rather than granting us leave to appoint a fifth professor, gave us a mandate to have an external comprehensive review of the seminary. That led to us seeking a review and accreditation through the best seminary accrediting agency in North America, the Association of Theological Schools. This in turn led to us examining and reviewing every policy, practice, and procedure that was in place and to innumerable changes, some to be compliant with ATS and some simply as a result of that review. CRTS changed from being a place where we just followed past practice and routines to a place where there was always a readiness to consider new and better ways. Here are some of the changes:

1. Development of Spiritual Formation Plan, with professors mentoring individual students
2. Development of Programmatic Learning Outcomes
3. Semi-annual reviews of syllabi by Senate (including Learning Outcomes for each course)
4. Implementation of a Comprehensive Assessment Plan with an Assessment Co-ordinator
5. Procedure re: professorial appointments revised to be more in the control of the Board, rather than the Senate
6. A new approach to professor's sabbaticals, with sabbaticals built into the curriculum
7. Appointment of a fifth full-time professor
8. Full accreditation received in 2013 for the maximum seven years through ATS
9. Incorporation of the Pastoral Training Program into the M.Div. degree
10. An external review of library holdings
11. Development of research guides
12. Review of guidelines for academic freedom
13. Development of new expectations of faculty
14. Commitment to periodic Strategic Planning sessions
15. Articulated approach and subsequent review of Distance Education
16. Provincial certification for the admission of foreign students
17. Greater awareness of ongoing trends and discussions in seminary education through ATS (the Association of

Theological Schools) and CHEC (Christians in Higher Education Canada)

18. A new operating name: Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

When we were on the outset of these things, there was the fear that the core of CRTS and its Reformed commitment would be jeopardized. Looking back, however, we can say that none of that has happened. ATS was always supportive of our need to stand on the basis of our confessional positions and work them out in our instruction and curriculum. But we have learned from them and others how to deliver the same program in a better way and hopefully produce a better result. We have a greater awareness that seminary education is not our project alone.

As I suggested, it's not as if all these things listed above were my doing. It was my task as Principal, though, to guide the ship through these various waters. But none of that would have been possible without the wonderful support, co-operation, and work of my colleagues on the faculty. Behind the scenes, there was and is also the work of a diligent staff, who contributed to many of these discussions and continue to do their work well so that we can concentrate on ours. And there are present and past members of the Board, who gladly gave of their time and effort for the well-being of the training for the ministry. I wish to thank them all. We are all so many earthen vessels doing what we do with many weaknesses, but united in our cause and empowered by the same Spirit, God is pleased to use it for his great purposes.

These remarks might give the impression that I am about to disappear into the sunset. Let me dispel that as well. I look forward to just serving as the New Testament professor for some years yet as the Lord provides health and stamina. May our gracious God bless Dr. Jason Van Vliet, our new Principal, in his task and may God be with us all throughout another academic year.

Travels

As is our custom, the Principal's Report usually tells our readers about the various comings and goings of the seminary professors. This serves to show that we both want to remain current in our academic fields and connected with the churches whom we serve through the seminary. In that past academic year then,

Dr. Arjan de Visser

- travelled to South Africa in August 2017 to attend the synod of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa on behalf of the CanRC

Dr. Jannes Smith

- travelled to San Antonio, TX, for the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2016
- to Toronto in May 2017 for the Canadian Society for Biblical Studies where he also delivered a paper on “Psalm 7 in Greek”

Dr. Theodore Van Raalte

- travelled to Ottawa, ON in October to present a paper at the “Zanchi, Hooker, and the Rise of Reformed Scholasticism” Conference
- toured the CanRCs and schools of Alberta in October on behalf of CRTS
- travelled to Recife and Macieó, Brazil in February–March to lecture and preach

Dr. Jason Van Vliet

- travelled to Langley, BC to speak at the Always Reforming Conference
- to San Antonio, TX for the meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society

- to South Africa to teach theological students of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, as well as to present the seminary to the churches

Dr. Gerhard Visscher

- travelled to San Antonio, TX, in November 2016 for the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society, the Institute of Biblical Research, and the Society of Biblical Literature
- to Toronto in November 2016 for a meeting of Christians in Higher Education Canada
- to Arizona in January 2017 for a meeting of the Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents
- to British Columbia in April 2017, to represent the seminary to the CanRC churches and schools in BC

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam

- travelled to San Antonio, TX, in November 2016 for the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society
- travelled to The Netherlands in April 2017 to attend the synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated).



CONVOCAATION 2017



Women's Saving Action

Good evening. Mr. Chairman, members of the board and faculty, graduate and guests,

If a picture is worth a thousand words, would it stand to reason that hundreds upon thousands of words might be worth a few pictures? We thought so. And so, the Women's Saving Action committee decided to organize a little photo contest.

Considering the mandate of the WSA is to collect funds in order to support the Theological Seminary, specifically

the library, the challenge was soon put forth: “Capture, in picture, what it means to you to have access to an in-house library and what that entails.”

We enlisted our hardworking, highly efficient librarian Margaret Alkema to help us. After all, she is the “keeper” of the thousands upon millions of words, in the form of approximately 35,000 books, not to mention the numerous electronic journals and periodicals available in the seminary's library.



In all reality, can anyone clearly capture or fully appreciate the hours of work, study, commitment, or even personal risk that may have gone into the millions of words that grace the library shelves of our seminary? Truly, it is by the grace of God that we have this wealth of written treasures at our fingertips because our Lord in his infinite mercy has preserved them for us and gifted them to us; some of our rare books are dated back as far as 1569!

Perhaps the participants of the contest would have some interesting insights to share by way of a picture. Could their pictures help us to understand why it is so important that our church family continues to support the funding of the library in order to ensure that there is accessible, current study material?

Now, truth be told, we may have had to dangle a carrot or a “dropje” bag or two in front of our highly motivated participants, but soon the photos came clicking in.

The submissions also provided us with the opportunity to post our pictures on our Facebook page and tap into the world of social media. Facebook claimed that over a period of ten days we reached more than 3000 people; some from as far away as Germany and South Korea!

It should be mentioned, however, that one student did not follow the rules of the photo contest and felt inclined to submit a short video instead. It goes without saying that he did *not* meet the requirements of the assignment. *If* that wasn’t creative enough (and I quote), “This video was clearly the most blatant snubbing of library rules ever produced.” Our poor librarian! However, we did feel that there should be some positive acknowledgement for the fact that it was

also the first Polish and most polished narrated international film in the history of CRTS!

Thank you to everyone who participated in our first-ever photo contest. It was successful and entertaining. If you haven’t had the chance to do so, you can still view the top four photo contest submissions and video on our Facebook page.

On a closing note, we would like to thank a few more people. For those of you that may not know, the Woman’s Saving Action said goodbye to Mrs. Van Dam and Mrs. Nienhuis last year. These women worked quietly and fruitfully, serving over forty-two years combined! Thank you, to both of you, for your long-standing dedication and commitment to WSA. Needless to say, this past year has been a learning curve for our new committee members, but we are thankful that despite the significant change, the support from our church community has remained the same. This is due in large part to our hard working representatives in each of our churches for gathering in the funds from year to year. Thank you! We recognize that we could not do this without you, under the Lord’s blessing. Running a library is no small task. Books and electronic purchases are extremely costly, and the maintenance of an orderly, updated library is ongoing. To that end, on behalf of our supporting churches, we would like to present a pledge of \$35,000 to the library committee. May God continue to bless this work so that our Seminary’s library remains current, efficient, and maintained; we are all blessed by it, and we thank God for it. Thank you.



Ordination of Han Lee

James Zekveld
2017 graduate of CRTS



On Monday, August 14, Reverend Han Lee was ordained at Salem United Reformed Church in Bowmanville. It was a unique moment in the life of both the United Reformed Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches. Rev. Lee was born in South Korea, son of Rev. Cha Sik Lee of the Presbyterian Church in South Korea. He has been a bit of a traveller, attending high school in the U.S., living in China, and finally coming to Canada in order to study at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. He graduated from there with a Masters of Divinity in 2016. While he was at the seminary, he met and married Kara Lee Zylstra, a teacher at Heritage Christian School. The two met while Han Lee was doing an internship at Streetlight Ministries.

Reverend Lee is known among his fellow students for his ready wit. He showed this at the ordination through a short exchange with Dr. Gerhard Visscher. Dr. Visscher brought greetings from the seminary. When he asked Rev. Lee whether he remembered the Scripture text used at his graduation, Rev. Lee evaded the question by exclaiming, "You look great tonight Dr. Visscher!"

In God's providence, the Salem URC was looking for a man to serve in their congregation. Their former pastor, Rev. Martin Overgaaaw, had taken a call about two and a half years ago. They had had a fair bit of contact with the Canadian Reformed Seminary during their vacancy. A number of students and professors had preached for them.



It was not hard for them to make the move of calling a Canadian Reformed student.

In fact, brother Piet Louws mentioned this in his opening remarks. He expressed his joy at the way the two churches were coming together. This was confirmed by the evidence of unity in the ordination service as well. Rev. John Bouwers, the pastor of the United Reformed Church of Jordan Station, led the service and gave the charge, while Dr. Ted Van Raalte, a professor at CRTS preached the sermon. When the pastors laid hands on Han Gil there was a significant crowd of men up there. These included Rev. Lee's father, the Reverends Bouwers, Dykstra, Persaud, and Zegers from the URC, the Reverends Van Raalte, Van Vliet, Visscher, Nederveen, and Van Popta from the CanRC, and the consistory of Salem URC.

Dr. Van Raalte preached on Isaiah 52: 4-10, proclaiming the great joy that men of God have in proclaiming the gospel of God. He charged Rev. Lee to never to forget the glory of the God who had saved him and brought him before God's congregation to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. He called for rejoicing in that we have been given the privilege in participating in that proclamation; that each Sunday worship service is a victory over Satan and his work. We glimpsed our united joy for that gospel among all present.



Motion 103 and Catering to Islam

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Motion 103 passed the Canadian House of Commons on March 23, 2017. It called upon the Canadian government to “condemn Islamophobia” and asked that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage undertake a study on how the government could, among other things, develop a comprehensive approach to reduce or eliminate “systemic racism and religious discrimination including Islamophobia, in Canada.”

There has been and continues to be considerable concern about the implications of this motion. What will the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage propose? What kind of legislation will result from this? Will it impact freedom of speech? Why is Islam singled out for special protection?

One of the results of the unease Canadians have with this motion is the formation of Canadian Citizens for Charter Rights and Freedoms (C3RF). Their website notes that it finds the use of the term “Islamophobia” confusing and alarming. Confusing in that it wrongly equates Islamophobia with anti-Muslim, anti-Jewish, or anti LGBT hate speech. Alarming in that it is part of a wellfunded Muslim Brotherhood public relations campaign to deflect legitimately founded criticism of Islamic extremists who seek to replace Canadian Law with sharia law, strike fear into the majority of Muslim leaders and clergy in Canada, and put a chill on legitimate criticism of political Islam.

Comment: The Muslim Brotherhood has been designated a terrorist organization by countries best able to judge like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates.

C3RF also noted that the Liberal party was unwilling to compromise on the use of the ambiguous term “Islamophobia.” “C3RF had hoped that the government would have accepted recommendations from various faith communities, free speech advocates, former Justice Minister Irwin Cotler, the Conservative Party, the MuslimJewish Dialogue, and other groups to exclude the term and speak to the rights of all religious communities.”

The refusal of the Liberals to rid the motion of the problematic and undefined term “Islamophobia” does not bode well. On the basis of its research, C3RF fears that “anti-Islamophobia measures are on track to be implemented on a Canadian society and public that have been designated as ‘systemically’ racist and full of ‘religious’ bigots respectively.”

It is a well-known fact that our Prime Minister caters to Muslims. He frequents mosques and, as Antony Furey reported, he even visited a mosque whose imam “was publicly listed on the mosque’s very website as the member of a group that was designated a terrorist organization abroad and whose leader had been banned from entering the United Kingdom and France for his extremist views.” In response to that report, Furey noted that “someone at the Prime Minister’s Office even had the gall to call me up and chew me out for it.” But “nobody ever did explain what was incorrect about my reporting.”

Why is the left so protective of Islam? In the previous issue of *Clarion*, Zmirak’s answer was that the left hates Christianity and sees Islam as an ally on that file. Whether this applies to Trudeau and the Liberal party can only be answered by someone who knows the hearts and minds of those involved. There is, however, clearly no love for Christianity with the Liberals as Andrew MacDougall has shown in his February 17, 2017 *Globe and Mail* article, “Liberals Waste No Time Playing the Anti-Christian Card.” Among other things, he referred to the Liberal’s ridiculing the fact that the new conservative leader, Andrew Scheer, was pro-life, for traditional marriage, and opposed transgender rights. Not surprisingly, Trudeau does not allow opponents of abortion into the Liberal Party. That policy automatically excludes consistent Christians.

As the implications of Motion 103 become more clear, may the freedom to criticize Islamic teaching and to promote the true doctrine of salvation be preserved in our land.

Resources use also include: Website of Canadian Citizens for Charter rights & Freedoms and Antony Furey, “Canadians Want a Light Shone on Radical Islam” (Feb 17, 2017).

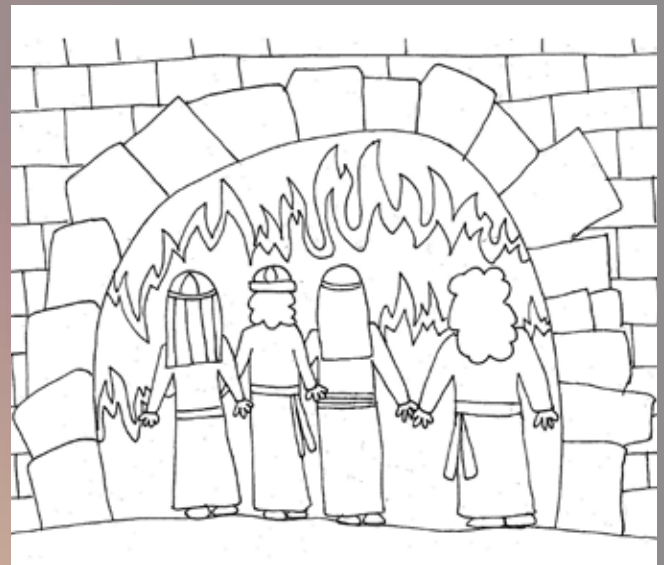


The Fiery Furnace

Daniel 3

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, built an enormous idol out of gold. He commanded every single person in the land to bow down to the idol and worship it. Daniel's friends knew that God did not want them to worship idols, so they refused to obey the king's command. The king was very angry, and he commanded that they be thrown into a very hot, fiery furnace as punishment. But God sent an angel to protect Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He did not let the fiery furnace hurt them. When the king saw what God did, he worshipped God instead of his idols.

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



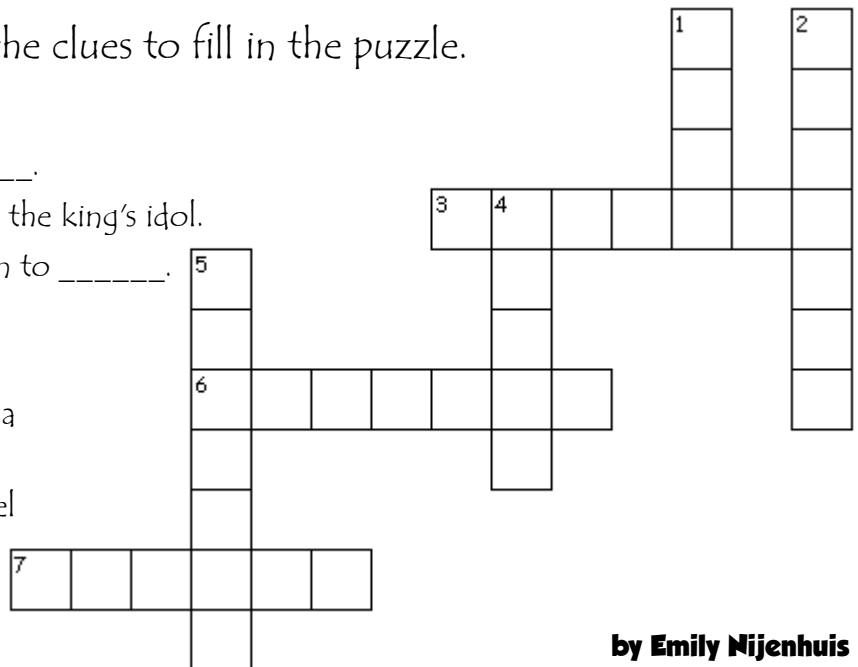
Crossword Puzzle Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

Across

3. Nebuchadnezzar was king of _____.
6. Daniel's friends _____ to worship the king's idol.
7. God did not let anything bad happen to _____.

Down

1. The king built an _____ out of gold.
2. The king threw Daniel's friends into a fiery _____.
4. God sent an _____ to protect Daniel and his friends.
5. The king wanted everyone to _____ his idol.



by Emily Nijenhuis



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Reformed Education is Covenantal

(Part 2)

In the first section of this article, Keith established two foundational points: The covenant permeated the lives of every Israelite in the Old Testament era; in the New Testament, the covenant continues to be normative for all new testament Christians. For these reasons, we need to continue to teach the children of believers in a covenantal manner.

Cross-border

1500 years later, Roman Catholic establishments reacted to the Reformation with spiritual and physical violence. In that context, and in covenant solidarity, de Brès' Belgic Confession helped Reformed people express their faith; he was hanged for it in 1567. Similarly oppressed, and yet convinced that God's people must assist one another, Reformed ministers met across the border in Wesel in 1568, setting the stage for the start of our church federation, at the cross-border Synod of Emden, 1571. Building on the French Church Order of 1559, they now drafted their own, with explicit provisions for mutual support, and stressing unity of doctrine whether in German, French, or Dutch. They also answered each other's practical and doctrinal questions. They epitomized covenantal unity—and were willing to risk life and limb for it.

In Canada, the Lord blessed us with freedom to have covenantal education – even with partial public funding in some provinces. The communion of saints also contributes heavily, but, over time, millions were also donated by the Dutch brotherhood. To wit, while their own schools were mostly publicly funded, several worthy educational causes were not, and they eventually coordinated fundraising nationally through “*De Stichting*,” which included an allotment for *Reformed Education Abroad* and an algorithm for fair distribution of non-directed funds. This was motivated by scriptural encouragements to give and do good freely (2 Cor 9:7-9, Gal 6:9-11), and a sense of community that went

beyond doing justice and showing kindness (Mic 6:8) to those in need locally. They linked it to covenantal baptismal expectations, and support that implied. Thanksgiving for their contributions has rightly been abundant.

In community

When we say that Reformed education is covenantal, we know, in line with Deuteronomy 6, that parents are not alone in raising their children: They can count on the grateful support of a covenant community that was set free from slavery. Older women advise young moms; older men help young dads with wisdom and experience; and parents discuss these things amongst each other. The school is one form of support parents receive, and it, in turn, is rightly supported with prayer, muscular, and financial contributions from parents and non-parents alike. Communities that neglect such support leave the ancient paths.

In the classroom, teachers who embrace salvation in Christ will thankfully uphold that they are fellow heirs of God's promises along with their students – and will strive to treat them as such. There is a call for all to be living members of Christ's body, to love one another just as Christ loved them first, and to serve one another in support of each other's salvation, each with their own unique and well-proportioned features, to be prophets, priests, and kings. This is the framework when teachers discipline and disciple students for serving the Lord.

Covenantal education considers relationships among all stakeholders in the school on a higher plane than legal

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expectations in employment contracts. In line with New Testament instructions about the relationships of masters and bondservants, fellow-heirs in Christ have every reason to serve God and the neighbour in love and gratitude. This does not abolish employment contracts, role descriptions, and consequences for unmet expectations, but as all must humble themselves daily before the throne of grace, there is consideration for *doing well unto others*. Having peace with God translates into having peace with each other and a mindset of growing in serving him together.

The curriculum also is affected if the school is covenantal. Teachers will work out a unit on “Community” from a perspective of how the Lord wants the covenant community to work. In a unit on “Seasons,” God is glorified if Genesis 8:22 and Romans 8:22 are presented as indicators of God’s providence. In Phys Ed, a guiding theme must be the purpose God has for our bodies. In Math, teachers will remember Colossians 1:17 and acknowledge that $2+2=4$ only because of Christ. In general, their teaching will be filled with wisdom of God about his Word and work, making the school much more than a dispenser of academics. Of course, the school leadership supports this, but at teacher conventions, and through the *CRTA Compass* and personal contacts, teachers also have ways to explore how God’s covenant with man and with his creation makes a comforting difference for how and what they teach.

While much curriculum and many programs are developed locally, the schools’ covenantal character is also evident in cooperative efforts. The Reformed Curriculum Development Committee in BC (RCDC) comes to mind,

and Ontario’s League of Canadian Reformed School societies, and its Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Education (CARE) committee. Also, if schools seek to develop handbooks or policy on some topic – such as for membership, hiring, arrears, or discipline, they work together. In each case, the covenantal character of the schools lies at the basis of the cooperation. Here, the primary question is not “what’s in it for us,” but how each can gratefully use their gifts for the benefit of others – and the associated costs are distributed fairly over all. Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College expresses that both in its name and in the practical support it gets from all schools in the country.

In sum

Covenantal education recognizes that we were meant to work out our calling in complementary relationships – first with God, but also with our fellow-man, in marriage, in the family, in the church, and also in education. It recognizes that it is by God’s grace in Christ that we can be right with God, and therefore also with others, even as we stumble along to bring up the next generation in the fear of his Name. In gratitude, let’s earnestly seek and pray for the coming of God’s kingdom (LD 48, 49). Let’s not leave the ancient paths, but flourish at God’s green pastures and still waters. There is a great example to be set for the next generation and for those around us: This is how it is done – like it was meant to be in Israel, like it was in the New Testament church, and like our suffering forebears and sacrificing founders envisioned it. Education is Reformed only if it is covenantal.



Response to the article written by Rev. Rob Schouten, "So you are thinking of leaving our church"

In response to the article written by Rev. Rob Schouten, "So you are thinking of leaving our church" (Aug 11, 2017), I feel compelled to ask a few other questions.

You write, at the beginning of your article, that when questioned, they might say, "But I just feel happier and more at home in this new church." But I wonder: is it wrong to desire to feel happy and at home in one's home church? If our members do not feel happy in church, are there ways we as church community can help to make that happen?

You state that truth should trump emotion every time in the Christian life. But I would ask, can truth and positive emotion not stand side by side in the Christian life? In worship, can and *should* they not both be present?

When we as Canadian Reformed churches have a number of our membership leaving to join other churches, would it not be wise to also reflect on how our services could incorporate legitimate changes that would bring glory to

God and benefit the members? Perhaps attend the church your member is thinking of joining, with the member and some elders. Ask the member what is happening here that is missed in our church. Is there a way that something could be incorporated into our church life or worship? Acknowledge that we don't do everything perfectly.

With this very brief reaction to your article, I am not suggesting that we need to change everything in our worship to become just like other churches. Of course not. But should a trend to leave our churches for various reasons not *also* result in some serious self-reflection? Truly Reformed worship will be a place of joy for believers and will bring praise to our God and Maker. "Worship the LORD with gladness, come before him with joyful songs" (Ps 100:2).

Marg DeJong
Hamilton

*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.*

