

Clarion

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500 Years of Blessed Grace

JUSTIFIED ONLY BY AN ASSURED FAITH?

CLARION KIDS

YOU ASKED

Ted Van Raalte
Professor of Ecclesiology at the
Canadian Reformed Theological
Seminary in Hamilton, ON
tvanraalte@crtcs.ca



Faithful to His Word: 500 Years of Blessed Grace

*The word “reformation” is about bringing something
back to its original condition*

What was the Reformation?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to reform is “to make changes in something (especially an institution or practice) in order to improve it.” In its origins, the word “reformation” is about bringing something back to its original condition. With the uppercase R, “The Reformation” is defined as “a 16th-century movement for the reform of abuses in the Roman Church ending in the establishment of the Reformed and Protestant churches.”

The Reformation was a movement. It happened, starting 500 years ago, when Luther posted theses for disputation about indulgences on the doors of the churches in Wittenberg.¹ Little did he know what would unfold! The Reformation had as object the reforming of the Roman Catholic Church, but it had as outcome the formation of Protestant churches and, sadly, the hardening of the Roman Church.²

But if the definition is to bring something back to its original condition, what was the church’s original condition? Where is the perfect model of the church? In the time of the Christ? The apostles? Which church would serve as the model? Your local church?

None of the above. The model and form that the Reformed Church needed to follow was not any particular existing church, but the norms and standards for the church found in Holy Scripture. No church on earth will ever fully adhere to the Scriptures in all respects. No church stands out as the perfect model. The true reformation of the church is not merely a return to some glorious past but a return to the source of life and truth for the church – a return to the Spirit-given Scriptures. That truth applies today as well.

What needed reforming?

The church had needed reformation long before Martin Luther. The medieval church had hit a very low point around A.D. 1000, with a thoroughly corrupted papacy. Sadly, sexual promiscuity of every kind occurred in the papacy, even bestiality.

Various popes undid the acts of popes before them. Pope Stephen VI even had his predecessor’s dead body dug up, put the body on a throne, conducted a trial, found him guilty, and stripped him of his office. He had three of the dead man’s fingers – those with which he had previously consecrated others – cut off, to symbolize the annulment of all these acts. So much for papal infallibility!

In the following centuries, various religious orders and clerics controlled one third of the land in Europe. Archbishops cast three of the seven votes for each new Holy Roman emperor. Some church leaders functioned as feudal lords; ecclesiastical office was attractive for its wealth and political power. The structure needed reforming.

In 1302 Pope Boniface VIII issued *unam sanctam*, a papal bull which claimed that God gave Peter power in *both* the spiritual and temporal realms. Boniface reasoned that there is but one God and he can have only one highest representative on earth. Thus popes, being higher, ought to crown emperors.

Between 1309 and 1377 seven successive popes took up residence in Avignon, France, rather than in Rome. In 1378 Gregory XI returned the papacy to Rome, but a year later the cardinals elected a counter-pope in Avignon. This precipitated the “Great Schism” within the Western Church (two popes). Not until 1417, at the Council of Constance,

was the situation resolved. The Council asserted authority over the popes, forced three claimants either to abdicate or be deposed, and chose a fourth man to become the new pope. Afterward, popes were extremely uneasy about calling councils.

Finally, as we near the Reformation, the popes once again become greatly corrupted. In 1506 popes began to maintain their own personal army. Two of them fathered numerous illegitimate children. The next, whose teaching on indulgences was disputed by Martin Luther, used the proceeds of these indulgences to build St. Peter's luxury Basilica in Rome.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

The year 2017 marks 500 years since Luther's ninety-five theses were written: an event that is widely known as the start of the Great Reformation. To acknowledge and celebrate this important anniversary, *Clarion's* Reformation Day issue brings you a number of articles and columns devoted to this topic. A very big thank you to all our authors for their contributions!

In addition, several regular columns, including Clippings on Politics and Religion, You Asked, and Ray of Sunshine are in Issue 21, as well as a book review and several letters to the editor and press releases.

Laura Veenendaal

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Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliuwer, 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

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Late medieval spiritual deformities

- 1215, Fourth Lateran Council decisions
 - transubstantiation
 - private confession to the priest once/year
 - laity receive mass once/year but only wafer
 - papal primacy proclaimed anew
 - purgatory
- 1274, Council of Lyon affirmations
 - Mary immaculate (free of original sin)
 - prayer to Mary takes root: “Hail Mary, mother of God, pray for us now and in the hour of our death. Amen.” Also, the rosary of either 150 or 50 beads, divided into sets of 10, to keep track of “Hail Marys” and utter an “Our Father” after every set of 10.
- Mid to late 1400s, emotionalism, superstition, money-making increase greatly
 - images of Christ on the cross (crucifixes) more contorted and bloodied
 - 14 stations of the cross as aid to worship
 - sacred heart of Jesus and immaculate heart of Mary objects of devotion and art
 - veneration of relics makes lots of money
 - indulgences now available for loved ones in purgatory as well (sell more of them)
 - consecrated host centre of all worship, made hundreds of times/day upon hundreds of altars in each cathedral
 - leftover consecrated host kept in holy boxes (tabernacles) and held high for display and parade in gilded monstrances
 - many chantries (endowed masses on behalf of the dead, often with special altars and alcoves). E.g., by 1518 the diocese around the city of Geneva had 1435 endowed chantries. At the cusp of the Reformation, in 1536, the cathedral of St. Pierre in Geneva housed 100 chantries, plus 23 altars
- One scholar remarked that the difference between magic and priest’s work was hard to discern. Thus “*hoc est corpus meum*” (this is my body”) came to be satirized as “*hocus pocus*.”

What about the church’s spiritual practices? Plenary indulgences, which Martin Luther opposed, first appeared in 1095 when Pope Urban II authorized the first crusade. Not only did he involve the church directly in warfare, he also declared that those who undertook a crusade could merit a *plenary* indulgence. This indulgence was said to greatly reduce one’s time in purgatory, by remitting punishment for *all* sins up to that point. For many more unbiblical doctrines and practices that needed reforming, see the sidebar.

All of these things led to a great distrust of the papacy among the people. National sentiments often ran counter to Rome and its (usually Italian) pope. Bohemians would rather identify with their man who had been burned at the stake in the 1400s, John Hus; soon Germans would back Martin Luther.

Was reform really needed?

Now let’s step back for a moment. You might say, well, this litany of errors is a typical Protestant account. It makes the Reformation seem like a foregone conclusion. Who wouldn’t want to improve such a corrupted church? In fact, why did it take so long? But we must not jump to such a conclusion. Others had tried and met death (e.g., Peter Waldo; John Hus; Girolamo Savonarola). And, not everyone wanted change.

First, many people were quite satisfied with the church’s false system of salvation. It gave them comfort. They just had to follow their priest’s instructions to make things right with God. With seven sacraments, they were covered from birth to death. Some experienced their religion as very satisfying to their emotions.

Second, Christians did hear occasional sermons in their own language, probably from a travelling Dominican monk on a preaching tour around Christmas or Easter – likely not from their local priest.

Third, some of them probably thought that the priest’s liturgy, conducted in Latin, was extremely holy and pleasing to God. The relics, rituals, images, pilgrimages, saints, and masses had an aura of mystery and gave them security.

Fourth, in the period around 1200 a renewal of learning and piety occurred. European universities began to be established, for example, in Paris, Oxford, and Bologna. But the teachings of the church did not become more biblical (see earlier sidebar). In an attempt to counter wealth and corruption in the church, several new religious orders were created in the earlier 1200s, such as the Dominican preach-

ers, Franciscan friars, and Carmelite contemplatives. John Calvin liked to quote a few favourably, such as Bernard of Clairvaux.

Given the security many people experienced in their faith, coupled with the failures of earlier attempts at doctrinal and structural reform, why did the Reformation of the sixteenth century succeed? Why then? Why not earlier? Why did it happen at all?

Why reform in the Sixteenth Century succeeded

We can advance all kinds of explanations for the Reformation. In fact, God used many means to convince sinners of his beautiful gospel message and move them to seek reformation of the structures and teachings of the church. But first it's important that we acknowledge that the moving

When the church seeks to model all its structures and practices after Scripture, God is working mightily

cause of the Reformation was the grace of God. God intended it; that's why it succeeded then and there. He had humbled his church long enough, and only then granted real structural change. Real change is the gift of our faithful God and Father. We must be truly thank-

ful and give God the glory for the deep love of his heart in bringing his people back to the truth of his Word. He granted a renewed structure where true believers could worship him with a clear conscience.

Let us say it this way: When sinners stand by the Scriptures as the inspired work and word of God, grace is there. When sinners pray, grace is active. When sinners repent, seek forgiveness, and confess Christ, God himself has poured out his grace upon them. When the church seeks to model all its structures and practices after Scripture, God is working mightily. Any spiritual movement in conformity to Scripture is the gift of God. Scripture says so. Scripture teaches us that no sinner, left to him or herself, will seek out God. No unrepentant sinner loves the Scriptures, the Christ, God, or the church (Rom 8:7; Eph 2:3). Satan blinds them (Rom 1:18-23; 2 Cor 4:4).

But the Reformed pastors and church members loved to hear the Word; they trusted in the Christ, worshipped God,

and gave him the glory. Their hearts trembled at the Word of God. Read their writings if you doubt that. Read our Reformed Confessions. The tone of those confessions is only possible by grace, by grace alone. In particular, the humble faith that accepted the Word of God alone for the message of salvation is evidence of grace.

A more complete definition

For us the definition of the Great Reformation should therefore also be considered from the perspective of faith. We should seek a definition in keeping with what we confess from God's Word. How about the following? "The Reformation was a 16th-century movement for the reform of abuses in the Roman Catholic Church that, *under God's blessed grace*, resulted in *the continuation of his church in a more faithful form* – the Reformed and Protestant churches – and *under his judgment* led to the hardening of the Roman Catholic Church." We could change "Reformed and Protestant" to "Reformed Catholic," and that too would be in keeping with our Reformed Confessions.

Whatever the exact definition, let us fervently pray for a fresh outpouring of the grace of God. Let us ask that we would increase in humility, tremble more at the Word of God, be ready to re-examine our lives and churches, stand up against deformation, and promote the precious gospel of grace far and wide. We should be praying for faithful preaching, heartfelt obedience, and a delight in all the things of God. Many Christians today are in deformed and apostate churches. They need to seek reformation, no matter what hardship that may bring. May they pursue a new obedience – and ultimately find themselves joined only with those of like faith!

Somewhere in the definition of reformation it seems to me that we should be speaking of a white-hot zeal for God's glory, an intense effort for the salvation of all, and a consistent, joy-filled obedience to the Word of God. There's so much that true reformation is, but at root it is the powerful work of God's Spirit maintaining the Bride of Christ and preparing her for the Bridegroom's return. May he never cease to reform our hearts and lives and churches!

¹ Scholars debate whether Luther actually posted the theses on the church doors. The oldest claim we know about this famous event is from the year 1544, twenty-seven years later.

² The Council of Trent and the formation of the Jesuit order are evidence for this hardening.

Thesis #1: Repent

Reuben Bredenhof
Minister of the Free
Reformed Church of
Mt. Nasura, Western Australia
rm.bredenhof@gmail.com



"From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'." Matthew 4:17

When we commemorate Reformation Day, our thoughts often turn to the familiar scene of October 31, 1517. There comes Martin Luther, walking with determination to the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Hammer and nails in hand, he arrives at the door, takes a couple folded sheets of paper from inside his overcoat, and then sets at once to nailing these sheets onto the church's wooden door. In our minds there's of course little doubt about what was written on those sheets: These were Luther's ninety-five theses. Church history textbooks and teachers have long paused at this moment to carefully tell it and to explain it.

Whether Luther knew the potential impact of this action – the international councils, the church divisions, the wars – is a question for debate. What's clear is that within a few weeks of being posted, these ninety-five theses were being translated and copied and carried to all parts of Europe, unleashing a storm of controversy wherever they were read.

We know this story well, and also its world-changing consequences. But we may be less familiar with what exactly those ninety-five theses were. Now, this is a devotional column and not a church history review, but in looking at Thesis #1, these two worthwhile purposes nicely intersect. For after a short preamble, Luther begins with this thesis (or statement): "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of

believers to be one of repentance."

With his first thesis, Luther alludes to a passage from Matthew's gospel, 4:17. There Jesus has just begun his ministry in Galilee, having heard that John the Baptist had been put in prison (v. 12). And Jesus begins his preaching with the same message as John: Repent!

Luther had good reason to start with the command conveyed in Matthew 4:17. For, contrary to what is sometimes thought, his ninety-five theses were not random grievances against the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, with each of these connected statements, Luther focusses on one particular issue: the matter of indulgences. An indulgence was said to be the full forgiveness of a sinner, and a cancelling of his punishment. Such forgiveness was gained through the purchasing of tokens of indulgence. This cancellation of punishment could extend even beyond the grave, freeing the souls of loved ones from their suffering in purgatory.

In his own struggles over the doctrine of justification, Luther had come to emphasize the full and complete forgiveness of man's sin through God's grace in Christ. This amazing, free gift could be received by faith alone. Luther's scriptural conviction on this matter led him to question and then condemn the practice of selling indulgences. For the church was taking ownership of and then selling God's forgiveness! The church was turning

grace into something that was far from free! And all this had terrible effects on the minds and hearts of the average, sinful Christian. It bred a trust in the outward acts of religion and it bred a false sense of eternal security.

And so Luther called the church to return to the simple, biblical truth of what it means to be a penitent sinner. Repentance is not a prefabricated, elaborate ritual. Repentance is not something that can be bought at one time for all time. No, says Luther in Thesis #1, repentance is a life-long project for all believers. It must be personal, it must be sincere, and it must take place throughout our lives. And our true repentance is, by God's grace, enough for him to forgive all our sins.

"Repent," preached Jesus as he began his ministry. "Turn away from sin, and turn to God through me in faith!" If you repented yesterday, you must do so again today. If you repent today, you must do so again tomorrow. "[Christ] willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

Daily repentance is at the heart of the Christian life. It takes humility – to recognize and to grieve for your horrible sins each new day. And it takes faith – to constantly love and embrace Christ's amazing atoning work. In an age of excess ritual and showy religion, Martin Luther returned the basics, just as John and just as Jesus had done centuries before. Let us do the same.

This meditation was originally published in this magazine in 2005.



Justified Only by an Assured Faith?

Jason Van Vliet
Principal and Professor of
Dogmatics at the Canadian
Reformed Theological
Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
jason.vanvliet@canrc.org



This article is a modified excerpt of a larger speech presented at the annual CRTS conference, January 12-14, 2017

John Calvin once described faith in this way:

For to have faith is not to waver, [not] to vary, [not] to be borne up and down, [not] to hesitate, [not] to remain in suspense, finally, [not] to despair! Rather, to have faith is to strengthen the mind with constant assurance and perfect confidence, to have a place to rest and plant your foot (*Institutes*, 1536, p. 34).

Does that also describe your faith? The Reformation clearly established that we are justified *sola fide*, or “only by a true faith” (LD 23). But if true faith is this kind of never-wavering faith that Calvin describes, then you might wonder, “Do I have true faith? Because I do waver and I do hesitate. And if I cannot be sure that I have true faith, then how can I be certain that I am forgiven of all my sins?” You see, the whole topic immediately becomes very practical and personal.

Now thankfully, the above quotation is not the only thing that Calvin had to say about faith. He also said: “Faith is tossed about by various doubts, so that the minds of the godly are rarely at peace” (*Institutes*, 1559, 3.2.37; unless otherwise noted all references to the *Institutes* are to this final edition). So what is it now? Do true believers plant their feet on solid ground or stand there shaking in their spiritual boots because of all kinds of fears and temptations?

If we take a closer look at Calvin’s definition of faith, we’ll discover that, in Christ, true faith is an *assured* faith. Before we come to that, though, let’s briefly explore some historical background.

Background

In the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church confirmed and refined her doctrine at the Council of Trent, which spanned the offices of five popes and some eighteen years from 1545-63. Trent announced unequivocally that

the faithful should have firm hope but should *not* have absolute certainty concerning their salvation. Here are the precise words of the council: “Let no one promise himself anything as certain with absolute certainty; though all ought to place and repose the most firm hope in God’s help” (Chapter 13, Sixth Session).

This also meant that someone could be justified, then fall out of that state of grace, and then possibly be restored and be justified all over again. Once more, we turn to the decree of Trent: “But those who through sin have fallen away from the received grace of justification may again be justified when, God motivating them, through the sacrament of penance, they by the merit of Christ shall obtain the recovery of the grace lost” (Chapter 14, Sixth Session).

As you can imagine, this led many of God’s people to labour under an oppressive uncertainty prior to the Reformation.

Calvin’s definition of faith

In his well-known *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), Calvin helps us out by providing a succinct, one-sentence definition of faith. Here it is: “Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (3.2.7).

Notice, right from the start, that for Calvin faith is, by definition, firm and certain. Here the Reformer draws a clear line in the sand. On one side of the line stands Trent, the council which holds out hope but rebukes those who dare to be certain. On the other side stands Calvin, the

***In Christ,
true faith is an
assured faith***

Reformer who not only speaks freely about certainty, but even defines faith as certainty.

Yet how can our faith be certain, if the minds of the godly are rarely at peace, as Calvin himself admitted (3.2.37)? This conundrum resolves itself when we connect his definition of faith to two *solas* that were the heartbeat of the Reformation: *sola gratia* and *solus Christus*.

Sola gratia and assurance

For Calvin, true faith is not merely a question of “knowing that that God exists, but also – and this especially – of knowing what is his will toward us,” and further that his will toward us is both benevolent and merciful (3.2.6-7).

Taking it still one step further, God’s mercy is a *paternal* compassion. As surely as God is gracious, so certainly he is Father. Already in his first catechism, John Calvin connected the inspired dots between the sealing of the Holy Spirit and the gift of adoption. He writes: “[The enlightenment of the Holy Spirit] is also called a pledge which establishes in our hearts the assurance of divine truth. . . for [the Spirit is the one who] testifies to our spirit that God is Father to us, and we in turn are his children” (Hesselink, I. John. *Calvin’s First Catechism*, p. 18).

Once this truth is established in our minds, words start to leap off the pages of the *Institutes*, especially in his treatment of faith (3.2). In that section alone, the reformer of Geneva mentions our adoption eight times and refers to God as our Father no less than thirty-four times. This frequent repetition, like a constant reminder, enfolds us within the reassuring arms of Abba’s eternal, steadfast love. You see, adoption and assurance are two sides of the same grace-stamped coin.

“How so?” the anxious believer may ask. Calvin answers in this way:

We see that God, while not ceasing to love his children, is wondrously angry toward them; not because he is disposed of himself to hate them, but because he would frighten them by the feeling of his wrath in order to humble their fleshly pride, shake off their sluggishness, and arouse them to repentance (3.2.12).

It is true: God’s children sometimes experience the heavy hand of God’s wrath. Due to their own foolishness, they may even “severely wound their consciences and sometimes for a while lose the sense of God’s favour,” as the Canons of Dort (V 5) describe it. Yet in and through this all, God does not stop being their Father. What is more, his anger toward

EXAMINATION SUSTAINED

The Canadian Reformed Church at Calgary, Alberta announces that

Steve van Leeuwen

has sustained his peremptory exam at Classis Alberta. Ordination will take place on October 15, 2017, D.V., Rev. J. Huijgen officiating.

Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg, MB, announces that

Candidate James Zekveld

has sustained his peremptory examination at Classis Manitoba. He will be ordained as missionary on October 8, 2017, Rev. Tony Zekveld officiating.

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them is not fueled by hatred but fanned into flame by his paternal love. Indeed, as Calvin puts it, he is “*wondrously angry toward them*” (3.2.12).

Added to that, adoption bolsters assurance precisely because adoption is not foster care. If things do not work out between foster parents and the child whom they take into their house, the relationship can be terminated. Adoption, however, works differently. Adoption is no temporary arrangement; adoption is a lifelong commitment. Certainly, God the Father knows this when he seals his children with the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15).

Equally important is the fact that God’s gracious gift of adoption rests in *his* everlasting love not our ever-fickle love. Our love is the necessary *complement* to our faith (Gal 5:6), but it is not the initial *cause* of our faith, let alone the motivating factor behind God’s grace. That distinction is no mere technicality. It’s the difference between doubt and assurance.

Our adoption is rooted in God’s sovereign and gracious love *alone*, not in some combination of God’s love and our love. Mixing grace with any kind of human additive – even our well-intentioned love – only muddies the waters and ruins the certainty of the Spirit’s seal of the Father’s adopting love.

Adoption and assurance are two sides of the same grace-stamped coin

Solus Christus and assurance

This brings us to one of the last, but certainly not least, phrases in Calvin's definition: *in Christ*. The phrase is short but its significance cannot be overstated. The Christ who once offered himself for our sins on the cross is the same Christ who now intercedes for us at the Father's right hand (3.2.32).

What is more, our faithful and heavenly High Priest promises to continue interceding for us until the day that he returns on the clouds of heaven. This is what Calvin calls "the *perfect* salvation [that] is found in the person of Christ" (3.1.4). By *perfect* he means *complete, not lacking in any respect, either in the present or in the future*.

In the future everyone must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, as we read in 2 Corinthians 5:10. How often our assurance turns into doubt when our minds leave behind the present moment and focus instead on the final day! Yet for Calvin, when the spotlight is on Judgment Day the focus necessarily falls on Christ, our Faithful Intercessor, and the "wonderful consolation" that only he can provide. This is how he expresses it:

Far indeed is he from mounting his judgment seat to condemn us! How could our most merciful Ruler destroy his [own] people? How could the Head scatter his own members? How could our Advocate condemn his

[own] clients? For if the apostle dares exclaim that with Christ interceding for us there is no one who can come forth to condemn us [Rom. 8:33, 34], it is much more true, then, that Christ as Intercessor will not condemn those whom he has received into his charge and protection (2.16.18).

Here the logic of grace is so impeccably reassuring. If no enemy of God – yes, if not even Satan himself – can nullify the protective power of Christ's intercession for his people (Rom 8:38-39), will Christ himself undermine his own intercession by ultimately failing to save his beloved Bride for whom he sacrificed his own body and soul? May it never be. Indeed, it cannot ever be.

Solus Christus. Christ the *only* Saviour is, at the very same time, the *all-sufficient* Saviour. If our salvation depends upon the sacrifice of Christ in the past *plus* our perseverance in the present, then surely our salvation is uncertain because even if you are persevering today, what will tomorrow bring?

But our High Priest, Jesus Christ, is both. He is the Lamb who sacrificed himself for us *in the past* and the Advocate who intercedes on our behalf *in the present and in the future* – all the way up until Judgment Day. *Solo Christo et omnia in Christo*. Only by Christ and everything in Christ. In him alone our salvation is certain. . . truly and Christocentrically certain.



Panel discussion

Sola Scriptura: Anarchy?

Ted Van Raalte
Professor of Ecclesiology at the
Canadian Reformed Theological
Seminary in Hamilton, ON
tvanraalte@crtcs.ca



Opponents of the Reformation claim that the principle of *sola scriptura* (the Scriptures alone) leads to anarchy – every man believes what is right in his own eyes and claims that his beliefs and actions are supported by the Bible. In addition, they charge, *sola scriptura* is an abstract idea that no one ever lives by, for no one ever comes to the Bible without their own prior experiences, ideas, and biases. Scripture is always interpreted in the context of some community and therefore every interpreter is depending on some other source of authority which in the end rules over the Bible. Roman Catholics who make these charges would say that the problem is solved by making church tradition, especially as determined by the papacy, the true determiner of the meaning of Scripture.

In fact, the papacy claims to do two important things: first, it arbitrates between contending interpretations by drawing upon its apparent knowledge of an unwritten tradition; second, it has also determined just what is and

what isn't Scripture. This latter claim was especially made in response to the Reformation, when in 1546 the Council of Trent decreed that the Apocrypha actually belong to the Canon of Scripture and therefore determined doctrine. This ruling gave Rome a basis in their "Bible" for teachings such as believers being able to partly merit salvation with God by good works in this life and also undergo punishment and purification after this life in purgatory.

Tradition or Scripture?

The Reformers, of course, emphatically disagreed. "Here I stand!" became their motto. They correctly taught that the Bible formed the church; not the church the Bible.

If tradition must be the arbiter, it is able to nullify the plain meaning of Scripture. Indeed, this has happened repeatedly and still happens in the Roman Catholic Church. In effect, tradition becomes higher than Scripture.

But we know that Scripture itself demands that all tradition bow before the Bible and reform itself according



to what is found there. What is tradition? It is something “handed down.” When Scripture speaks positively of tradition, it often describes the “tradition” itself in writing or refers to publicly taught practices which had already been written or were about to be written (1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:3; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6). When Scripture speaks negatively of tradition, it is referring to any teaching – written or not – that “nullifies” the Word of God (as Jesus charged the Pharisees in Mark 7:13). This demonstrates that written Scripture has the determining authority. The apostle Paul told us to learn “not to go beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6). Further,

**The Bible formed
the church;
not the church
the Bible**

Luke told us that he *wrote* his gospel precisely so that the church might know the truth of what they had been taught (Luke 1:3-4). They did not need another source of tradition to discern his meaning. Isaiah said that if the people of the old covenant did not speak “according to the law and the testimony,” they had no light, no knowledge (Isa 8:20).

In the new covenant God even promises to write his instruction on our hearts and in our minds – the very instruction that he had already revealed in writing in his law, and not just upon the hearts and minds of a few priests, but upon all his people (Jer 31:33). Thus, just as the old covenant revelation is entirely written, so also the new covenant revelation. Further, God himself promises to seal his truth into our minds and hearts. Therefore, none of the teachings of Scripture depend upon an unstable and ill-defined “tradition” for their truth. God never promised that the true interpretation would be secured in one particular institution such as the papacy. Rather, he warned us about false teachers!

Therefore, tradition is not the determiner or arbiter of the meaning of Scripture; rather, Scripture defines and determines its own meaning, according to its own revealed principles of interpretation. The Holy Spirit seals the Bible’s truth upon all believers’ hearts as part of his work of making us believe.

The Bible in the Reformation

Let us consider carefully the centrality of the Bible in the Reformation, particularly in two geographical areas that would later be identified as Reformed (not Lutheran).

First, consider this dialogue from the Disputation at Bern in 1528. The first thesis to be disputed was, “The Holy Christian Church, of which Christ is the sole head, is born of the Word of God, abides in it, and does not listen to the voice of a stranger.” To this the Dominican monk who represented the Roman Catholic side argued, “The word *sole* is not in Scripture. Christ has left a vicar [i.e., a representative head, the pope] here below.” Haller, the preacher of Bern, replied, “The vicar that Christ left is the Holy Spirit.” Another Roman Catholic theologian answered, “See then to what a state things have come these last ten years. This man calls himself a Lutheran, that a Zwinglian; a third, a follower of Karlstad, a fourth, of Oecolampadius, a fifth, an Anabaptist, etc.” To this Martin Bucer, the reformer of Strasbourg, replied,

Whoever preaches Jesus as the only Saviour, we recognize as our brother. Neither Luther, nor Zwingli, nor Oecolampadius desire the faithful to bear his name. Besides, you should not boast so much of a mere external unity. When antichrist gained the upper hand throughout the world, in the East by Mohammed, in the West by the Pope, he was able to keep the people in unity of error. God permits divisions, in order that those who belong to him may learn to look not to men, but to the testimony of the Word, and to the assurance of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Thus then, dearly beloved brethren, to the Scriptures, the Scriptures! O Church of Berne, hold fast to the teaching of him who said, “Come unto me,” and not, “Come unto my vicar!”

Roman Catholics and Anabaptists similar?

Second, let us examine John Calvin’s reply to the Roman Catholic Cardinal Sadoletto a decade later, in 1539. The year prior, the Genevan city council had banished three of their pastors, including Guillaume Farel and John Calvin. Sadoletto, who was otherwise unknown to the Genevans, thought this boded well for the Roman Catholic Church, and so tried to woo the city of Geneva back. In his friendly letter he asserted that anyone who followed the Catholic church would be safe because the church does not, indeed cannot, err. He added that even if she did err, no one who followed her in this error would ever be condemned, so long as he followed the erring church with a sincere mind. I hope you will notice that this assumes that the common believers do not need to know the truth of Scripture; they can simply rely on the clergy to know it for them. This denies the promise of the new covenant that we reviewed above. How did Calvin respond?

Not only did Calvin use the Scriptures and the Church Fathers rightly against Sadoletto, he also made this very incisive observation:

Well, then, does Chrysostom admonish us to reject all who under the pretense of the Spirit, lead us away from the simple doctrine of the gospel – the Spirit having been promised not to reveal a new doctrine, but to impress the truth of the gospel on our minds. And we, in fact, experience in the present day how necessary the admonition was. We are assailed by two sects, which seem to differ most widely from each other. For what similitude is there in appearance between the Pope and the Anabaptists?

Is there a similarity between Roman Catholics and Anabaptists? Who could be farther apart? Traditionalists and Antitraditionalists are opposites, aren't they? Not necessarily. Listen to Calvin once more:

The principal weapon with which they both assail us is the same. For when they boast extravagantly of the Spirit, the tendency certainly is to sink and bury the Word of God, that they may make room for their own falsehoods. And you, Sadoletto, by stumbling on the very threshold, have paid the penalty of that affront which you offered to the Holy Spirit, when you separated him from the Word.

Note well that Calvin sees a similar problem at two opposite sides: the Roman Catholics and the Anabaptists (today many Pentecostals are in line with the old Anabaptists). Both of them rely on something outside of the Word of God and claim that one thing to be the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Roman Catholics say it is the church; the Pentecostals say it is their own experience. In either case, they make claims about what the Holy Spirit is doing without tying those claims to the very things that the Holy Spirit has said in Scripture.

Word and Spirit joined

Calvin further admonishes Sadoletto for separating the Word of God from him who gave it – the Holy Spirit:

Had you known. . . that the Spirit goes before the Church, to enlighten her in understanding the Word, while the Word itself is like the Lydian Stone, by which she tests all doctrines, would you have [separated the Spirit from the Word, as if the Church is an authority equal to the Word]? Learn, then, by your own experience, that it is no less unreasonable to boast of the Spirit without the Word, than it would be absurd to bring forward the Word itself without the Spirit.

Finally, Calvin correctly asserts that the true catholicity of the church stems from holding to the one teaching of Holy Scripture which the Holy Spirit – by the use of these very Scriptures that he so carefully inspired – seals on our hearts. The foundation of catholicity is unity in the scriptural truths.

O my brothers and sisters, my friends, behold the wonderful grace of God, as he sovereignly used the renewed study of his Word to renew his Church and free it from the false teachings of both Roman Catholics and Anabaptists!

Innovations today?

In our day many seemingly innovative teachers argue that the message of the Bible was tied up in an old patriarchal culture that no longer speaks to the present day. Further, they argue, there are trends in Scripture towards total equality and egalitarianism that would lead today to women holding church offices and churches accepting “faithful” homosexual lifestyle choices. And, of course, there are scientific “facts” that correct our supposed misreading of Scripture.

Is this true? As in the past, we need to be so very careful to let Scripture interpret Scripture, to find the rules of interpretation in Scripture itself, and to humble ourselves before the written word. Any new human words that go beyond the clear meaning of what has already been revealed must be rejected. We stand upon the Word of God, and its message is clear and authoritative. Moreover, God has given his Holy Spirit and guided his church to stand upon this truth. As part of the very act of making us believe, the Holy Spirit has convicted our hearts that the words he took such care to bring us in Scripture are true. Let us maintain the words of Martin Luther, spoken in 1521 before Emperor Charles V,

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen.²

¹ I have slightly updated the translation found in Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné, *History of the Great Reformation of the Sixteenth Century in Germany, Switzerland, etc.*, 4 vol. in 1 (New York: Carter, 1846), 757, italics added.

² *Luther Works*, 32: 112–13.



Clarion Kids

Martin Luther

Martin Luther was a German monk born in 1483. He was Roman Catholic, but as he studied and read he realized that a lot of what the Roman Catholics believed did not fit with the Bible. He is best known for writing the 95 theses, which tell everything he thought was wrong in the Roman Catholic church. He nailed a copy of his 95 theses to a church door on October 31, 1517. God used Luther to start the Great Reformation of his church. This means going back to fully trusting in Jesus and listening to what the Bible says. That is part of why we do things very differently from the Roman Catholic church still today.

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



Word Search

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

Bible	Luther	Reformation
Catholic	Monk	Roman
Church	October	Theses

Double Puzzle

Unscramble the words, then use the numbered letters to solve the final word.

RITMNA
6 4

RELHUT
2

SHSTEE
7

NARMO
1 9 5 10

HALTOCCI
3 8

F
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

by Emily Nijenhuis

Church and State at the Supreme Court of Canada

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



On November 2, 2017, the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) is scheduled to begin hearing a case that is of enormous importance for the freedom of churches to exercise church discipline. Can someone who has been disciplined by his church appeal that disciplinary decision in a secular court?

The SCC website articulates the issues at stake by asking: “How do the fundamental freedoms of religion and association protect membership decisions of religious communities and other voluntary associations from state and judicial interference?” And, “Does the public law remedy of judicial review apply to membership decisions made by voluntary associations such as religious communities?”

This case concerns Randy Wall, who was a member of a Jehovah Witness congregation, an unincorporated religious organization. A judicial committee of elders decided to exclude him from their fellowship because he had not adequately repented for drunkenness and the verbal abuse of his wife. Once disfellowshipped, all the members of the congregation had to shun him. Consequently, his real estate business suffered, since no Jehovah Witness would patronize him. He appealed to a Jehovah Witness appeal committee, but it upheld the disfellowship decision as did also the Watch Tower and Bible Tract of Canada.

Mr. Wall then turned to the Court of the Queen’s Bench in Calgary. He argued that his property and civil rights had been violated. This court ordered a hearing to determine whether the court had jurisdiction to hear Mr. Wall’s case. A judge decided that the superior court did have the legal power to do so. The Jehovah Witness congregation and its judicial committee then appealed to the Alberta Court of Appeal which affirmed that the court indeed had jurisdiction to hear the matter. One judge dissented and argued that the courts should avoid the judicial review of non-state actors.

The matter has now gone to the SCC, which has to decide whether a secular court has the legal power to review a deci-

sion of a congregation, in this case the decision to excommunicate someone. Because of the importance of the issues involved, the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) applied for and received intervenor status. André Schutten, Director of Law and Policy for ARPA, noted that “this case has implications for the church generally because the church has authority to church discipline and excommunication, and the state has no right to question their decisions. . . . Those keys were given directly by Jesus to Peter and his disciples, which is the church. That key was not given to the state. The state was given authority. . . to make sure that justice is done in the land, but church membership is not part of it.” In this way, as ARPA lawyer John Sikkema put it, ARPA intends not only to argue for freedom of religion, but also “to bring the Reformed perspective on church discipline to the public and to the courts; and to remind the court of the historical developments in the relationship between church and state, and of the importance of church independence and the limit of state authority over the church, historically.”

Other intervenors include churches and organizations such as The Evangelical Fellowship (EFC), the Catholic Civil Rights League, the Christian Legal Fellowship, and the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms. The EFC website notes that “Historically Canadian courts have determined that they do not have jurisdiction in the internal decisions of churches and other private associations. For churches, decisions about membership and church discipline are matters of doctrine and the interpretation of Scripture. The courts have recognized that matters of doctrine and theology are beyond their expertise.”

May the Lord bless the proceedings so that this respect for ecclesiastical jurisdiction remains. Churches must be free to define membership according to the norms of God’s Word and not to the whims of changing cultural pressures.



Liz Koning

January 2, 1961 - May 22, 2017

Liz Koning was born in Edmonton on January 2, 1961, the seventh of eight children. Within weeks of her birth, Liz had her first epileptic seizure, which would be followed by a lifetime of seizure activity, since they were never completely controlled. Thousands of seizures would take a toll on her, physically and mentally, and she suffered other handicaps, in no small part due to her epilepsy. She had her limitations, yet she never ceased to amaze us with what she could do and we loved her fiercely.

When Liz was four, our mother passed away, and it would be ten years before our Dad remarried. Over time, Liz and her new Mommy developed a beautiful and loving relationship.

After several years of living in institution-like settings, Liz moved into a group home, run by Rehoboth Christian Ministries, and for the last twenty years of her life she was blessed by the care of this extraordinary organization and by the love of the staff, her care workers, and her housemates. Her family, especially those in Edmonton, loved to go and visit her there, and she loved being the centre of attention. Liz loved to play "Go Fish," and could beat most opponents. She loved to make puzzles, and to colour, her favourite colour being purple. She loved big smiles and huge hugs. She loved to be taken shopping, especially to West Edmonton Mall, and to follow it up with a spaghetti meal.

Liz had a simple faith, which she professed before God and his church. Pastor: "Liz, do you love Jesus?" Liz: "I



do." The congregation followed this with the singing of "Jesus Loves Me," Liz singing along in her own loud and special way.

Liz lived through numerous serious medical crises, battling her way back to good health. But, at age fifty-six, she passed away, unexpectedly yet peacefully on May 22, 2017, with her Mommy at her side. Liz is survived by Jetske Koning (and Joe Koopmans), and siblings Bert and Jenny Koning (Peters), Tako and Henrietta Koning (Dykink), Pauline and Jack Dehaas, Ginny and Henk VanderHorst, Wendell and Regina (Landwehr), Phil Koning, Rita and Paul Dekleer, and their families. Liz was predeceased by her father Bert and her first mother, Truus.

Thank you to all who took the time to send Liz a card for her birthday. It was noticed and much appreciated by her house staff, by her family, and by Liz herself.

We are thankful to our heavenly Father for his love and grace shown to Liz. In all she went through, we know that Liz's life had value and was precious and could bear witness to that love of her earthly family and the love of her heavenly Father. And so we say, "To God be the glory!" And Liz would surely say (using one of her favourite expressions): "That's for sure!"

Written by a few of Liz's sisters

November birthdays

3 WILMA VAN DRONGELEN will be 60

1892 Horizon Street, Abbotsford, BC V2S 3J4

Happy Birthday to Wilma, we wish you the Lord's blessing in the year ahead. We hope you have a great day with family and friends.

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 God speaks with two voices: how are they similar, and where do they differ?

From Belgic Confession Article 2, 3, 5, and Canons I, Article 3, and Psalm 19:3, 4, we know that God speaks with two voices. What is the difference between the word in creation and the word in Scripture? Where are they similar; and where are the differences between them?

A We know God because God has made himself known (BC, Art. 2). First of all, God made himself known by his creation. His creative work we see in nature, which *declares* the glory of God (Ps 19:1-4): “The sky above proclaims his handiwork; day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their *voice* goes out through all the earth.” So indeed, God’s *voice* is speaking to us in nature! Also in Psalm 104 we hear this proclamation of God’s creation, with the winds being his *messengers*, and flaming fire his *ministers*. Hence creation is a beautiful book with wonderful pictures, flora and fauna, insects and wild beasts; sun, moon, and stars telling their stories, *voicing* the praise of the LORD.

This book of creation, of nature, is clear, readable, informative, intriguing, and convincingly manifesting; it proclaims the awesome Maker! It shows us his eternal power and divine nature, which have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world. God has shown this to everyone to convince (and convict!) people so they are without excuse (Rom 1:20). This knowledge, however, is not enough to tell people about the origin and cause of sin, or about their

salvation from sin. Although this book of nature, this voice of God in creation, proclaims the eternal power and divine nature of God, it does *not* tell people about God’s justice and righteousness regarding sin and sinners in this world. They need God’s revelation for that: his *revealed* Word!

Though the book of nature itself is clear and convincing, yet people have robbed themselves of their ability to read it. They became blinded by sin and their minds darkened due to sin. That’s not God’s fault but the people’s. Yet, God, in his mercy and wisdom and love for this world, gave his Word so it can open their eyes that they may see, and enlighten their mind so they can understand. God *speaks* to us in his Word (Hebr 1:1). The prophets and apostles were men who, inspired (moved) by the Holy Spirit, “*spoke* from God” (2 Pet 1:21; 2 Tim 3:16). The Scriptures are “the breath of God.” He also ensured that his words were preserved, written down, so they would be passed on accurately (BC, Art. 3). Hence, his Word has authority for our faith and life: we use it as a norm for our faith, we build our faith on it, and we read it again and again to confirm us in the truth of it for our life and salvation.

Since God has *spoken* in his Word, he sends ministers and missionaries out to preach and proclaim that Word. Thus people can *hear* his *voice* in the preaching of his love.

This book of God's Word is clearer and more complete than what we see in creation. It tells us God's way of salvation, God's love for this world in sending his Son (John 3:16). In him we see the Word become flesh, and by him the Father Creator was made known personally (John 16) and most convincingly (1 Cor 2:9-10; Rom 10:14). Thus we know God sufficiently and for all that is necessary for us to know for our salvation! *Both* creation and the Scriptures reveal to us God, yet they're *different* in that creation manifests his handiwork, while his Word reveals him as Creator and Redeemer more fully and more clearly!

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



LETTER TO THE EDITOR



Dear Editor,

I feel compelled to comment on Rev. Schouten's article, "So You're Thinking of Leaving Your Church" (Aug 11, 2017). I myself spent some time away from our churches, and I agree that there are some helpful things that can be asked of people considering leaving. But some probing questions could also be asked of the church itself, particularly about whether our confessional nature gets in the way of our Christ-centredness.

I think Rev. Schouten reveals a key blind spot in our Reformed thinking when he states that a person making profession of faith "pledges allegiance" to the Three Forms of Unity. Giving allegiance to anything other than Christ himself is idolatry. And although we have good intentions in keeping doctrinal standards, I believe in the end we make the Christ of the Bible too small. He cannot be "summarized" in a set of documents.

In addition, our form for the Profession of Faith seems to direct our commitment to the confessions more so than to the person of Christ. As a result, I think we have lost much of the relational empowerment inherent in a life of faith. If our focus is on anything other than Christ, we can't

really be equipped or directed by him. We lose the blessing of a church through whom Christ lives and breathes.

People need to be listened to as members of Christ's church, not criticized on the skinny excuse that they cannot go against the confessions. I think the biggest question here is whether our wills and emotions are being directed to an inferior (and static) master.

People (especially the young) want to be actively involved in service, missions, and reaching others in their community, and they may feel as if they have to go to other churches to do that. The Spirit is stirring up people to fulfill God's purpose in Christ, that all peoples of the earth might know him as the only God and Saviour of the earth. That (to me) is the embodiment of all that Christ is and what he is doing right now through his body. If we want to be a part of that, we may need to confirm that what we worship is in fact our *living* Saviour (Rev 1:18).

I hope you will forgive me if I come across as too harsh, but at the same time I thank you for the invitation to respond.

Sincerely, T. Bouwers
(Grand Valley Canadian Reformed Church)

13 Reasons Why

Our Christian community, living in a post modern age, is always trying to encourage me to be more in tune with the ungodliness of the world that is all around us and especially that which influences our young people. We must know what they're watching on their small screen, what they're texting, and with whom they are communicating. I am now a grandfather, but I can just imagine that parents are overwhelmed with this task of staying on top of it all; and if we don't, as Dr. de Visser wrote in his article, we are burying our heads in the sand.

Are we really?

I would rather say that by investigating what's corrupt in the world and in our minds, we are standing on sinking sand, and we may get buried up to our heads. The more we are in tune with the corruption around us, the more desensitized we become even as parents and grandparents, and we sink a little deeper into the sand.

The Bible teaches us to flee from all ungodliness: "I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me" (Ps 101:3). I think we need to teach our children that without knowing all the details of the ungodliness.

Ephesians 6:11 teaches us to "put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

First looking at the world and then deciding what armor to put on and how much ammunition we may need to

resist is backwards in my opinion; we may even forget to put on our armor and say: Oh, it's not so bad, give our young people a little bit of slack will you?

Let us follow Jesus when he was tempted. He always said, "It is written. . . ." He knew the Scriptures and he knows what the devil doesn't want to hear.

*With brotherly love, Bill Bartels,
Ancaster, ON*

Response

I like the way br. Bartels plays around with the sand metaphor. He had me trying to imagine people burying not just their heads but their whole bodies in sinking sand!

Anyway, in response to the concerns voiced by br. Bartels, I agree that parents cannot be expected to study everything the world offers by way of movies, social media, etc. I also understand his concerns about being "in tune" with the world (the danger of worldliness).

My article was not a plea to be *in tune with* the world. It was rather a plea to be *aware of* what the world is throwing at our teens. Of course, we can never know everything that is going on. But sometimes there are specific dangers that need to be called out, which is why I wrote the article on 13 Reasons Why.

A.J. de Visser

*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.*



Sermons on Job

Arjan de Visser
Professor of Ministry and Mission at
the Canadian Reformed Theological
Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
ajdevisser@crtcs.ca



Cornelis Van Dam, Hope and Comfort in the Book of Job. Premier Publishing, 2017

Additional information: 141 pages; soft cover; price \$9.00

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam has served us well with the publication of a collection of eight sermons on the book of Job. In the introduction it is mentioned that these sermons were first delivered in 1980 when Dr. Van Dam was pastor of the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church in Surrey. Subsequently he preached these sermons in other congregations in various parts of the country. Repeated requests to publish this series of sermons encouraged Dr. Van Dam to make the sermons available in printed form. The sermons can be used as devotionals, for Bible study meetings, and for reading in worship services. In order to serve these purposes, the book contains questions for further discussion at Bible study meetings as well as suggested liturgies for use in the worship service.

I heartily recommend this book. The message of the sermons is rich and biblical. The book of Job tells us about Job's suffering and how he dealt with it in faith. As such, there is much to learn for Christian believers today who also struggle with various kinds of afflictions. But Dr. Van Dam's sermons also help us to see how God is at work in the life of Job, and how this points forward to the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. From a theological perspective, it is interesting to read the sermons in this collection, as they illustrate the approach of preachers in the redemptive-historical tradition. As Dr. Van Dam himself acknowledges: "I owe a great debt to the historical redemptive approach which puts the emphasis on God's place in Old Testament narrative as he guides the history of redemption toward its goal, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the case of Job, focussing on God's agenda rather than Job's dilemma gives rich and comforting insights into this part of Scripture (p. 8)."



The sermons of Dr. Van Dam showcase the strengths of the redemptive-historical tradition: solid exegesis (sometimes a bit dense), connections to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in every sermon (drawn in various ways), application for the practical life of believers today. It is interesting to note that Dr. Van Dam is not afraid to be "exemplaric" in the good sense of the word: Sometimes he uses Job as an example for believers today, for example, when he says that fathers today can learn from Job who prayed for his children (p. 16).

And as a final, more light-hearted comment, I might say that sometimes it shows that Dr. Van Dam is not just Reformed but also Canadian. For example, in discussing the LORD's positive testimony to Satan regarding his servant Job, Dr. Van Dam explains this as if the LORD was saying: "Satan, did you see my glorious work in Job? Pretty good, eh?" (p. 16)



Press Release of the Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary held on September 7, 2017

Opening and roll call

The Board of Governors met at CRTS on September 7, 2017. All the governors were present. Rev. R. Aasman opened with Scripture reading and prayer. Leanne Kuizenga was present to take the minutes of the meeting.

Memorabilia

The following brothers and sisters were remembered in prayer: Mrs. K. Deddens, the passing away of Dr. J. DeJong, sr. M. DeJong, sr. W. Faber, Dr. N.H. Gootjes and his wife, Dinie, as well as the two emeriti professors, J. Geertsema and C. Van Dam.

Minutes and agenda

The minutes of the Board meeting held on January 12, 2017 were approved. The agenda for the meeting was established.

Receipt of Decisions, Reports-Material Agenda Items

1. A letter was drafted in response to the Deputies for the Training of the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) about the impact of CRTS if the Australian churches were to set up their own seminary. Three areas were highlighted: loss of Australian students, financial costs, and the need for seminary professors.
2. At the Strategic Planning Meeting held on September 6, 2017, a number of key items concerning the present and future operation of the seminary were discussed. The Board reviewed these items and committees were appointed to deal with the following key topics: distance education, encouraging enrollment, expanding the pastoral training program, and ways that CRTS can improve training for mission/church planting. At its next meeting in January the Board will discuss the mandates of these committees in more detail and communicate more information about them to our supporting community.
3. The Key Thrust, "Investigate 2nd year Preaching Consent" raised at the first Strategic Planning Session, was discussed. The Board agreed with the proposal to allow students to approach Classis for preaching consent af-

ter their 2nd year of study and decided that it would be best to have the proposal come via the ecclesiastical route to General Synod 2019.

4. Report of the Executive Committee. The chairman and acting vice-chairman (Rev. J. Louwerse) met with the Principal and reported that there is a good working relationship between staff and faculty members. Condolences were sent to Marg DeJong after her husband passed away.
5. Report of the Principal. Dr. G.H. Visscher expressed appreciation for the support and cooperation he received from the Board during his nine years as principal. He looks forward to being able to focus his time and energy on teaching New Testament. By December he will inform the Board as to when he hopes to retire. He wished Dr. J. Van Vliet the Lord's blessing in his new role as principal. Dr. G. Visscher was thanked for his dedication and diligence over the past nine years.
6. The report on visits to the lectures at CRTS on March 8-9, 2017 was received from Revs. R. Aasman and J. Poppe. These reports gave reason for thankfulness since the students are being taught in faithfulness to the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity.
7. The Governance Committee proposed a Form for the Ordination of Professors. The Board approved it and will inform Synod 2019 that it has been drafted for the installation of professors when they are installed as a minister in one of the local churches. This Form recognizes that the installation of the brother as professor will happen at the CRTS Convocation.
8. Dr. G. Visscher reported on visits he made to churches in British Columbia. This report was received with thankfulness.
9. Report of the Finance and Property Committee: The Board approved the 2018 budget. The assessment per communicant member remains at \$90. The 2016 Audited Financial Statements were also approved.
10. Report of the Senate. The Board accepted:
 - a. The recommendations of the Senate with regard to the wording of the Statement of Institutional Purpose (SIP), namely, "CRTS submits to the doctrine of the infallible Word of God as summarized in the ecumenical creeds and the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort," and will view the SIP as an internal document. Synod 2019 will be informed of this decision.

- b. The recommendation of the Senate not to have an elaborate tenure structure in place is approved. Seminary professors are ministers of the Word committed to their families, the seminary, and the church federation. Should there be any evidence of a reduced commitment to the seminary and professional development, there are adequate means to address such without necessitating a more elaborate tenure structure. This will be sent as the answer to the question raised by Synod 2016.
- 11. Annual Reports from the Registrar, Librarian, CRTS Website, Convocation Committee, Faber-Holwerda Bursary, Publication Foundation, Foreign Bursary, as well as from the faculty on course work and attendance at conferences were received with thankfulness.
- 12. The Board accepted the Sabbatical Proposal of Dr. J. Van Vliet. He will receive a full sabbatical, January 15 – July 15, 2018.
- 13. Association of Theological Schools (ATS). The Board formalized the appointment of M. Alkema as the Ac-

creditation Coordinator and expressed appreciation for the work that she does. An ATS delegation will visit CRTS in 2020 and so the governors were made aware that they will be required to work on committees for the new Self-Study report.

New business

The date of the next Board Meeting was set for January 11, 2018 at 1 p.m.

Press release and closing

The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the Vice-Chairman in consultation with the Executive and the Principal, and Rev. J. Louwerse closed the meeting with prayer and thanksgiving.

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

*Rev. J. Ludwig,
Vice-Chairman/Corresponding Clerk*

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario held on September 15, 2017 in the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church, Burlington ON

Opening

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. A. B. Roukema opened the meeting by welcoming all present. He led in the reading of Colossians 1:1-14, followed by prayer. The meeting was then invited to sing Psalm 46:1, 5.

Examination of credentials and constitution of Classis

The credentials for the delegates of the churches comprising Classis Central Ontario (CCO) were examined by the delegates of Bethel Canadian Reformed Church and found to be in good order. Credentials were also received

from Blessings Christian Church for Blessings' delegates seeking to be seated as part of Classis Central Ontario in response to the invitation to do so issued by Classis Central Ontario of March 10, 2017. This matter will be added to the agenda of Classis.

Appointment of executive officers

The executive suggested by the previous classis was appointed, with Rev. J. van Popta of Fellowship as Chair, Elder L. Kampen of Ebenezer as Vice-Chair, and Rev. G. Brintjes of Bethel Toronto as Clerk. Classis was declared constituted. The chairman thanked the Ebenezer church for the preparations it had made to convene this classis. He also noted, as matters of memorabilia and special observation, that:

- All churches in CCO have a Pastor for the first time in many years.

- We have some retired pastors in our midst as they continue to work among the churches (Rev. Nederveen, Rev. Versteeg).
- Rev. C. Bosch will be delivering his final sermon in Burlington-Fellowship on Sept. 17, 2017.
- The presence of representatives from Blessings Christian Church, representatives from the URC churches, and several guests.

Adoption of the agenda

The proposed agenda was adopted with some additions respecting correspondence received.

Admittance of Blessings Christian Church

After discussion Blessings Christian Church is seated at Classis.

Addresses

Rev. H. Versteeg was given the opportunity to address Classis with respect to his retirement. He expressed his appreciation for the support of Classis Central Ontario over the many years.

Rev. A. Bezuyen, on behalf of the URC federation, addressed Classis with appreciation for the continuing good relationship between our two federations.

Form of Subscription

Reverends B. DeJong and H. Jagersma were requested to sign the Form of Subscription, which they did. Rev. W. Bosch affirmed his signature made at a previous classis.

Reports

The following reports were received:

1. Report of the Church inspecting the Classis Archives.
2. Report of the Classis Treasurer.
3. Report of the Church auditing the books of the Classis Treasurer.
4. Report of the Church auditing the books of the Needy Churches Fund.

Proposals

Burlington Rehoboth presented an Overture to Classis recommending that General Synod Edmonton 2019 approve the use of the new OPC-URCNA *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, 2017 in public worship in accord with the adopted Art. 55 CO. After discussion Classis supported the Overture and will therefore forward it to Regional Synod East, November 8, 2017 in accordance with the ecclesiastical manner.

Question period (Art. 44 CO)

The chairman asked the questions according to Art. 44 of the Church Order. Each of the churches indicated that the ministry of the office-bearers was being continued and that the decisions of the major assemblies were being honoured. To the question whether any church required the judgement and help of Classis at this time for the proper government of their church, one church asked for advice and advice was given.

Appointments

The regular appointments were renewed or newly made, as required. Additionally, appointed as delegates to Regional Synod East to be convened November 8, 2017 are:

Ministers – C. Vandervelde, A. B. Roukema (Alternates: G. Bruintjes, J. van Popta in that order).

Elders – Bill VanHuisstede, Chris van Popta (Alternates: Bruce DeBoer, John Krikke in that order).

According to the schedule, Burlington-Fellowship is appointed as the convening church for the next classis. It will be convened, D.V., on December 8, 2017; alternate date of March 9, 2018. The suggested officers are Rev. G. Bruintjes as chairman, Burlington-Fellowship delegate as vice-chairman, and Rev. A.B. Roukema as clerk.

Personal question period

Personal question period was made use of.

Brotherly censure (Art. 34 CO)

With gratitude the chairman noted the good harmony at the meeting and deemed brotherly censure not necessary.

Adoption of the Acts and the Press Release

The Acts were read and adopted and the Press Release was approved for publication.

Closing

The chairman closed the meeting by requesting the singing of Hymn 52:1 and leading in thanksgiving prayer.

For Classis Central Ontario

September 15, 2017

Leo Kampen

Vice-chairman at that time 