

# Clarion

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**Why did God give this  
sacramental sign?**

*UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY  
WHAT WERE SYNAGOGUES LIKE?*

## EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

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

## ADDRESS FOR MAGAZINE CONTENT



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

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

We should be familiar with the terms "infant baptism" and "believer baptism." In our guest editorial, Dr. Jason Van Vliet brings up a term that we may not have heard before: "household baptism."

Recently, Rev. Tim Schouten wrote a series of short articles for a local publication in Prince George, British Columbia. "Understanding Christianity" is a great series to share with someone interested in the foundations of the Christian faith. This issue contains the first three parts.

Issue 15 brings readers many of their regular columns as well: Treasures, New & Old, Clippings on Politics & Religion, You Asked, Education Matters, Ray of Sunshine, and *Clarion Kids*. There is a letter to the editor and a short report, as well as a book review (reviewing one of our own *Clarion* editor's books: Rev. Peter Holtvliwer's *Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms – Devotional*).

Laura Veenendaal

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# Household Baptism

## Circumcision on the eighth day was a *must*, not a *maybe*

The topic of infant baptism usually generates a lot of discussion. Recently someone submitted a question about it to Rev. William den Hollander's *You Asked* column.<sup>1</sup> The correspondent was genuinely concerned that some members in our churches are leaving for other churches where children are not baptized. Indeed, this is something that we should all take seriously. Has infant baptism become a minor, negotiable doctrine that can either be affirmed or discarded, depending on one's desire and circumstances? I'm thankful for Rev. den Hollander's response and, in this article, I simply hope to delve into this matter a little further.<sup>2</sup>

### The discussion has changed

It used to be that the difference between Reformed and Baptist was fairly clear cut, or at least it seemed to be. Reformed people emphasized the unity of the OT and the NT, the importance of the covenant, and the full sovereignty of God's grace in every aspect of our salvation. By contrast, Baptists tended to stress the discontinuity between the OT and the NT (dispensationalism), to speak less about the covenant, and to highlight the free choice of man to either embrace or reject God's grace.

With a stark contrast like that, it is no wonder that Baptists ended up teaching that only those who have made a credible profession of faith should be baptized. Similarly, it is understandable that the Reformed insisted that children ought to be baptized, since God has included them in his covenant and baptism is the sign of covenant in the NT, like circumcision was in the OT.

But the winds have been changing. There are now theologians who speak extensively about the covenant, and about the link between circumcision and baptism, and yet they vigorously deny that newborn babies should receive the sign and

seal of the covenant. One such theologian is Fred Malone, who wrote a book in 2003 with this intriguing title: *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism versus Paedobaptism*. As Reformed believers, our immediate reaction might well be: "Slow down, that doesn't work! Covenant is *our* key argument for infant baptism. You can't turn that around and argue for *believers-only* baptism using the covenant!" But Malone does precisely that, and we'll look at his key argument in just a moment. Before that, though, we need to look at some definitions.

### Unpacking the terminology

People often frame up this debate as *infant baptism* versus *adult baptism*. That's an understandable but not always entirely helpful way to speak. For one thing, it implies that the Reformed do not baptize adults, which is simply not true. In fact, our churches have even adopted a Form for the Baptism of Adults, a form that I've also had the privilege of using in public worship. To be clear, the Reformed baptize *both* children and adults, while the Baptists baptize *only* adults or teenagers who profess their faith.

For this reason, others prefer to speak of *credobaptism* versus *paedobaptism*. It's catchy because it rhymes, and it means believers' baptism versus infant baptism. But these terms have their limits as well because they imply that when it comes to baptism, faith is crucial for the Baptists but relatively unimportant for the Reformed. Again, that's not true. Even when we baptize infants we acknowledge that they are "called and obliged by the Lord to a new obedience," and the primary part of that call is "to trust him,"<sup>3</sup> which is simply another way of saying, "Believe in the Lord."

So the question is not whether baptism and faith are connected to each other. Of course they are! Rather, the

point at hand is whether the children of believing parents should be baptized *before* they are able to make a credible profession of faith (Reformed) or whether the church must wait with baptism until *after* the public profession of faith has been made (Baptist).

It would be much better, then, to speak of baptism *for both believing parents and their covenant children* (Reformed position) and baptism *only for those who have made a credible profession of faith* (Baptist position). Both terms are rather unwieldy; therefore, they probably won't gain much popular usage. Besides, we have a shorter, handy, more explicitly biblical term that will serve the purpose just as well, if not better. It's called *household baptism*. You can easily find it in the NT (Acts 10:22–48; 16:11–15, 25–34; 18:8; 1 Cor 1:16). You can also find its OT counterpart, *household circumcision*, in Genesis 17.

All things considered, terms like *infant baptism* and *believers' baptism* will not go away any time soon, and we can still use them so long as we understood them correctly. At the same time, we might well advance the discussion if we used the common, biblical term *household baptism* more frequently.

## Household circumcision and baptism

In Genesis 17:2 the LORD made his will perfectly clear: if a baby boy was born to a family of his covenant people, he must receive the sign of the covenant, which is circumcision, on the eighth day after birth (also see Lev 12:3). Circumcision on the eighth day was a *must*, not a *maybe*. Failure to obey this command had dire consequences. The disobedient would be cut off from God's people (Gen 17:14). Obviously, the LORD did not regard the circumcision of infants to be a minor matter of practice concerning which his people could hold differing opinions. Quite the opposite!

Yet there is more. In Genesis 17:12–13, our God continues by saying, “*Every male* throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised.” Household menservants, as well as newborn baby boys, had to be circumcised – *surely*, that is; no ifs, buts, or ands about it.

In Abraham's case, this added up to a sizeable number of men. Twenty-five years prior, in Genesis 14, he already had 318 men who were *born* in his household and trained for battle (v. 14). That number does not include the menservants who were *bought* with his money or those who were too young or too old to go to battle. Whatever the final tally of males in Abraham's household may have been, it undoubtedly

ly reached into the hundreds, and they were all circumcised on that very day. Once again, the Holy Spirit makes a specific point of mentioning this: “And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him” (Gen 17:27).

Interestingly, among the hundreds of males circumcised on that redemptively historic day, only *one* biological child of Abraham was circumcised: the young lad, Ishmael, who was not even the one through whom the covenant line would be continued (Gen 17:18–21). The LORD was making a point here. In making his covenant with Abraham and his offspring throughout their generations (Gen 17:7), the LORD applied this in terms of families or households. In Abraham's case, and in the case of many households in the OT and NT, this included servants. Therefore, male servants, both young and old, were also circumcised (see also Exod 12:44).

Once we understand the OT blessing of household circumcisions, then we are not surprised at all to read about household baptisms in the NT. The Lord our God is consistent from generation to generation, and from the old dispensation to the new. This also answers the frequent question, “Where do you read about infant baptism in the NT?” Answer: you read about it as part of household baptisms.

Notice especially what Paul and Silas said to the Philippian jailer when he asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). Why do the disciples *immediately* include the jailer's household, which would naturally consist of his children and any servants he had (see 1 Tim 3:4, 12; 5:4)? At this point Paul and Silas are still in the prison. They have no indication, let alone evidence, yet that the jailer's household will, or will not, believe. So why do these disciples speak with such confidence to the jailer saying, “Believe, and you *and your household* will be saved”? In fact, they are simply following the way that the Lord conducted himself with Abraham. When Abraham believed (Gen 15:6), his entire household was included in the promised blessings (Gen 17), and so it is with the jailer and his household in the NT.

## Heart circumcision and baptism

Circumcision is a minor surgery done to the foreskin of the flesh. Yet that small, symbolic act pointed to the much greater and more gracious reality of belonging to the LORD in a covenant relationship. Among many other blessings, this includes the *promise of heart circumcision*. The Lord never intended circumcision in the OT to be merely an external matter – something that altered the flesh but never touched the heart. Far from it!

Those who were circumcised in the flesh were also called to be circumcised in their hearts by humbling themselves before the LORD and repenting of their sinful, stubborn ways. For example, in Deuteronomy 10:16 the LORD says to his people, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn” (see also Jer 9:25-26). Of course, they were unable to accomplish this in their own strength, so the LORD also gave them this gracious promise: “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6).

The circumcision in the flesh, then, was a God-given sign that assured his people of his promise to perform a much greater circumcision, one not done by human hands with a scalpel, but one done by the Spirit of God upon the human heart. This was a promised reality *already in the OT*.

The LORD repeated this promise in the NT, through the apostle Paul, who describes baptism as “a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11-12). Putting off the body of the flesh is essentially the same as repenting, no longer being stubborn (Deut 10:16), and bearing the fruit of the Spirit instead. In this way both circumcision and baptism point to the same promise of washing by the Spirit of Christ (LD 26, Q&A 70).

## Sacraments confirm God’s promises

At this point we should return to Malone’s defence of believers-only baptism. He speaks eagerly about the sovereignty of God, the covenant, and the importance of circumcision, but he makes this critical distinction: OT circumcision is a prospective, or forward-looking, sign that points to *the need* for heart circumcision to take place, but NT baptism is a retroactive, or backward-looking, sign that points to *the fact* that heart circumcision has taken place.<sup>4</sup>

According to Malone, then, this is why infants *could be circumcised* in the OT. Looking ahead, adults and children alike need to have their hearts circumcised. Yet, following Malone’s reasoning through, children in the NT *must not be baptized* because, looking back, there is no evidence (yet) that their hearts have been circumcised and that they genuinely believe.

Sadly, though, Malone fails to understand the promissory character of God’s language, which is then symbolized and sealed in the sacrament of circumcision in the OT and of baptism in the NT. The point is not that one sign looks ahead regarding need and the other looks back regarding reality. Instead, both circumcision and baptism point up to

God and what he has promised to do: work true repentance within us and unite us to Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross and his life-giving resurrection from the grave.

To state it simply, neither circumcision nor baptism points to what has already happened in us but both point to what the LORD has promised to do to us. In the case of adult circumcision, or baptism for that matter, the LORD has already begun to fulfill many of those promises. In the case of infant circumcision, or baptism, we still need to wait to see how and when the Lord will fulfill many of his promises. But in principle, they are the same: both covenantal signs point to what God promises to do for us and within us.

## Now what?

Those who love the doctrine of the covenant yet refuse to baptize infants seem to have so much in common with us. Indeed, we can be thankful for our shared enthusiasm for the doctrines of God’s sovereign grace, the covenant, and the unity of Scripture. But according to the Lord’s own Word, his instruction concerning household circumcision was not a minor matter – neither is household baptism. Things become *more* substantial in the NT, not less (Col 2:17).

Believers-only baptism distorts the sign of God’s covenant. It makes it point *inwards*, toward us and what has happened in us. However, God gave this sacramental sign to point us *upwards*, to him and what he has promised to do. That difference in direction is enormously significant – both doctrinally and pastorally.

Beyond that, the *fullness* of God’s sovereign grace is at stake. At one point in his book Malone says that the Bible passages that speak about the covenant actually “eliminate the automatic, organic inclusion of believers’ children in the New Covenant.”<sup>5</sup> Really? The Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ, said, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them” (Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). If our sovereign Saviour says, “Come,” who are we to say, “You are not included,” or even, “You must wait until you can make a credible profession of faith”? No, if our Saviour says to the little ones of his covenant, “Let them come,” then we simply obey and bring them. . . also to the baptismal font.

<sup>1</sup> Clarion Volume 67 No. 7 (April 6, 2018), 192-93.

<sup>2</sup> Also see my article “Infant baptism: Should we agree to disagree?” in Clarion Volume 60 No. 17 (August 12, 2011), 402-5.

<sup>3</sup> Book of Praise, 597.

<sup>4</sup> Malone, Fred. *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism versus Paedobaptism* (Founders Press, 2003), 125.

<sup>5</sup> Malone, 81.





# Wisdom Through Wisdom's Reproof

*"If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you." (Proverbs 1:23)*

One of the more common "financial" proverbs of the day says that it takes money to make money. Early on in Proverbs, the reader soon finds out something quite similar: that it takes *wisdom* to get *wisdom*. Or, maybe more specifically, it takes listening to Woman Wisdom (as Proverbs often describes her) to get wisdom.

Proverbs 1 describes Woman Wisdom on the street corners calling to everyone, but her message is not tickling peoples' ears. She is reproving people, getting them in trouble for doing the wrong things. People do not want to hear her, and many are just ignoring her (Prov 1:24). But she points out in verse 23 that if they would just listen to what she has to say, they could grow in wisdom abundantly.

It takes listening to Woman Wisdom's rebuke to grow. But when you stop to think about it, that means we must go through life's experiences and allow God's wisdom to speak into them and analyze them. In other words, wisdom comes to God's people often through the mistakes we make and the wrongs we commit. Wisdom, either from God's Word or from godly people,

then takes us to task and shows us how what we did was foolish or unhelpful.

It makes sense then that Wisdom makes herself widely available, on the street corners, because we have a lot of trials and errors in life that she can take us to task on. We not only make a lot of mistakes, we often hurt others without even realizing it. There are two possibilities at that point. We can move forward with an "ignorance is bliss" attitude, or we can look back and reflect. We can ask questions. We can listen to Wisdom's reproof.

When you reflect on decisions you have made, you hear Wisdom's reproof of where the decisions were weak. Then you are open to learn from them. Then Wisdom ". . . will pour out (her) spirit to you. . ." and ". . . will make (her) words known to you" (Prov 1:23). She can speak directly through the Word, through a wise friend, through meditation or prayer. The point is that we be listening and reflecting biblically.

We can think in this respect of Jesus himself as a young child in the temple area, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions" (Luke 2:46). Jesus was growing

in wisdom by listening to Wisdom's reproofs of what is right and what is wrong. Of course, Jesus did not make the same mistakes nor commit the sins we commit. We could probably more accurately describe Jesus as learning from Wisdom's reproofs of *others*. The point, though, is that Jesus is asking questions to others who are experienced and have God's Word in hand. He is taking the opportunity to have Wisdom pour herself out to him.

Jesus would go on to use parables in his own teaching that pushed people to ask similar questions about their own lives. Many ended in reproofs. Reactions to him were much like the reactions to Woman Wisdom. Some rejected his questions and reproof in stubbornness. Others saw God's wisdom with new eyes. The Father has hidden his wisdom, Jesus says, from "the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children" (Matt 11:25). The question for us today is whether or not we are seeking out and accepting of Wisdom's reproof. Without it, we will only be wise in our own eyes. But with it, godly wisdom will be poured out and her words will be made known to us.

## For further study

1. What are some decisions that you've made recently? How could they have been made with more discernment? What can you learn from the experience?
2. In what ways can you seek out wisdom's reproof? Of the people you know, who is a person that knows God's wisdom and would sharpen you?





# Understanding Christianity

*What do Christians believe? Why is the cross the symbol of their faith? In this series, originally prepared in ten short parts for the Prince George Citizen, Pastor Tim Schouten explains some of the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith. In this issue we publish parts 1–3.*

## Part 1: Creation

It's good to start at the beginning. In this first part of "Understanding Christianity," we'll examine the first foundation of Christian belief, the teaching of the Bible about the origins of the universe.

Let's first look at two famous statements: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Moses), and "Man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras).

Which statement is true? We cannot honestly accept both at the same time. It's clear that they put us on two very different foundations.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (the first verse of the Bible) is a massive claim about history and reality. It tells us that the universe had a beginning. At the same time, there is a God who was there before the beginning. This God is the one who created, and therefore defined, our entire reality.

"Man is the measure of all things" is an equally massive claim. It tells us that there is no standard above the standards of humanity. Truth, meaning, and morality are all in our hands. In the words of John Lennon, there is no hell below us and above us only sky. There is no God. Therefore, we define our own reality.

So we see that these two statements present us with a fundamental choice of belief. Confronted with this choice, Christians emphatically accept the words of Moses and reject the words of Protagoras.

Christians believe that what is described in the first verse of the Bible really happened. They believe that everything we see and experience did not happen by accident

("time and chance acting on matter"), but was created and defined by an all-powerful God.

As it says in the New Testament: "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." Or, as Christians confess in the first line of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth."

God is the measure of all things, not humanity. This is the first foundation of the Christian faith, and it has profound implications for every other area of belief and life.

## Part 2: Design

Is faith blind? In Part 1, we looked at the Christian belief in an all-powerful God who created the universe. Understanding this belief is essential to understanding the Christian faith.

The question remains, however, whether or not this belief is reasonable. It may be essential to Christianity, but isn't it just a good example of the gullibility and blindness of faith?

Every person must answer this question for themselves. Christians, including countless scholars and scientists, have come to the conclusion that belief in divine creation is eminently reasonable. In fact, many people have become Christians through the very process of looking at the evidence.

The most important evidence for creation is the appearance of design in the natural world. This design is evident even to the most fervent atheists. For example, Nobel Laureate Francis Crick once wrote, "Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Richard Dawkins acknowledged, "the living results of natural selection overwhelmingly impress us with the appearance of design as if by a master watchmaker, impress us with the illusion of design and planning."<sup>2</sup>

Christians believe that the appearance of design is not an illusion but reality. People generally recognize design and assume it to be the product of an intelligent mind. For example, we recognize an ancient arrowhead on the riverbank because we can see that it was shaped by someone for

***“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” is a massive claim about history and reality***

a purpose. In a similar way, Christians believe that the complex and beautiful systems of the natural world were shaped by someone (God) for a purpose. The world looks designed because it was designed.

Design is a recurring theme in the Bible. Already in the first chapter God is described as ordering and structuring all of creation according to patterns and

kinds. The authors of the Psalms praise God for the majesty, order, and intricacy of the created world. They express awe at the glory of God on display in what they can see around them. Christians today do the same.

Is faith blind? Part of the nature of faith is belief in what cannot be absolutely proven, but this does not mean that it is blind. Instead, Christians believe that their faith rightly interprets the data of the natural world.

As we will see in the next part, this too is fundamental to understanding Christianity.

### **Part 3: Purpose**

What is the point of my life? Do I really have a purpose?

When we lose our sense of purpose, we tend to feel hopeless. Most of us have probably experienced this feeling at one level or another. It’s hard to move forward when nothing matters.

In the last part, we explored the Christian belief that the universe and everything in it was created by God. Here we focus on how this informs the further beliefs about who we are and why we exist. We’ll see that if we are designed by God, then we have the hope of being designed for a purpose.

When God made the world (as described in Genesis 1-2), he saved the best for last. He made people as the crown of the creation. He shaped them from the dust of the earth and then breathed the breath of life into them. He created humanity “in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27).

This special attention was for a reason. People were designed for a very specific purpose, that is, “to glorify God and enjoy him forever” (Westminster Catechism). Notice that this has two parts, which Christians do not see as mutually exclusive. We were designed to bring glory to God our Creator through our enjoyment of him. In the words of Baptist pastor John Piper, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.”

We live in a world where everyone seems to need a bigger purpose than pure survival. Why is this? Because it is built into us. We are not purely physical products of blind chance. We are created and designed by God for a spiritual purpose and will not thrive until we accept that and work within it.

The problem is that our instinct is to look for purpose in all the wrong places. That’s why we “still haven’t found what we’re looking for” (U2) and “can’t get no satisfaction” (The Rolling Stones). Just like a plane was designed to fly, so people were designed to give glory to God through a relationship with him and will “crash” when working against that.

This has always been the Christian belief. For example, in the early fifth century, the Bishop Augustine prayed, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.”

What is the point of my life? It is to do what I was made to do and, even more, to love the One I was made to love.

***If we are designed by God, then we have the hope of being designed for a purpose***

<sup>1</sup> Crick, Francis. *What Mad Pursuit* (p. 138). Basic Books. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Dawkins, Richard. *The Blind Watchmaker* (p. 21). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.







## Hungary Shows the Way

Hungary has been in the news from time to time, usually in a dismissive or derisive manner, especially because its outspoken Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, has made it clear that Muslims are not welcome in his country due to their incompatibility with that nation's values. Most recently, on April 9, 2018, he won a big election victory on that platform. The results of that vote showed that the people of Hungary rejected the European Union's embrace of multiculturalism and postmodern values. The *National Post* reported Orbán saying: "We want Hungary to remain a Hungarian country. This is our world, our culture, our lifestyle. These are our life principles. We want to defend these and we don't want others to change them."

An important part of what Orbán wants to maintain is the Christian culture of Hungary. After enduring years of communist dictatorship (1945-1989), the Christian heritage is more valued in Hungary than in many Western nations. In Orbán's case, one can be more specific, he treasures the Reformed heritage of his country which goes back to the sixteenth century Reformation. This fact was evident in a speech he delivered at the invitation of the Hungarian Reformed Church on the occasion of the national commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. He made it clear that he spoke both as Prime Minister and as a member of the Reformed Church. What follows are parts of his speech delivered on October 1, 2017 in Budapest.

This anniversary also presents us with an opportunity to clarify, to discuss and reach conclusions on what lessons the Reformation has for public affairs, state administration and the building of the nation. This is what I would like to speak about now; and due to the constraints of time. . . I won't explain things, I'll simply say them.

He went on to say that a Christian government of faith leading Hungary is "a manifestation of God's mercy. We

believe that, after a period of anti-Christian, internationalist governance, Hungary needs a period of governance that seeks to follow Christian values; and we accept that task."

We don't confuse our calling with the mission of our churches. Our calling is to protect the ways of life that have their roots in Christianity. We defend human dignity, we defend families, we defend the nation, and we defend our faith communities. For us this is not a mere task, but a duty and a calling which we must perform to the best of our abilities. We can see that the Hungarian people and Christian Europe are in need of spiritual and intellectual renewal. . . . While working to enable Hungarians to live well, we are also making efforts to enable them to a more fair, happier and richer lives, with hearts uplifted. The Reformation also taught us that we should never set a good, fine human life against a life serving the glory of God. What is good for a community of people glorifies God the Creator and Redeemer. That which serves the glory of God is the best for the people – indeed it is the ultimate good. . . .

We not only want a future in which everyone has a job – we have almost achieved that – but a future in which the glory of God is also served by every form of work: from street sweeping to the country's governance. Sincere worship for God and service for men.

It is a breath of fresh air to hear statements such as those Prime Minister Orbán made. The heritage of the Reformation is still alive in Hungary.

Sources used: Zoltan Simon and Marton Eder, "Hungary's Anti-refugee PM who Warned Muslim Immigrants Would 'overrun' Europe Wins Fourth Term" *National Post* April 9, 2018. "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the national event commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation" November 3, 2017 10:00 AM on the website of the Hungarian government.





# The Great Reformation and Education: The Impact of Luther and Calvin (Part 1 of 2)

*Rev. den Hollander presented this speech at the CRTA convention, November 2017*

Dear celebrants of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Reformation of October 31, 1517, brothers and sisters,

Since covenantal and Reformed education has always had the love of my life, the invitation to address your Teachers Convention in this 500th anniversary on the topic of “The Great Reformation and Education, the impact of Luther and Calvin” makes this another highlight in my teaching career! Thank you so much for this opportunity to share with you an address which I first delivered at the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the FRSA, in Southern River, Western Australia.

## The sixteenth century and the schools

The sixteenth century started with poor-quality schools dominated by the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and an emerging economy in which people were encouraged to learn a trade and make money. Hence parents were inclined to withdraw children from school to learn a trade. Also, after October 31, 1517, parents started to withdraw children from the RCC schools. To Luther, however, there was a direct and important link between reformation in the church and in the schools. The well-known medieval RCC’s doctrine of nature and grace disconnected the realm of the spiritual and eternal matters from the realm of physical and temporal matters. Luther wanted to reconnect the two. Education also concerns the secular realm as it prepares for a life of spiritual service in this realm! For that reason, he saw a role for both the school and the home.

In Luther’s approach to reforming and restoring the education of the children of the church, he posed that schools must fall under the jurisdiction of the state, because it belongs to the secular realm. Luther’s strong reaction against

the RCC’s dominance of the schools moved him to take its control away from the clergy and entrust it to the leaders of the city. Luther believed the princes and town councils were responsible for education! He was convinced that vernacular instruction (i.e. education in the language of the children), with arithmetic, writing, music, and history in the primary school’s curriculum, and Latin, Greek, and Hebrew in secondary schools, facilitate the study of the Bible. For Luther, church and state had to work together rather like husband and wife.

Famous in this regard is Luther’s “Letter to All Council Men” (1524), in which he observes, “We are today experiencing in all the German lands how the schools are everywhere being left to go to wrack and ruin.” Also, “The great majority of parents unfortunately are wholly unfitted for this task. They do not know how children should be brought up and taught, for they themselves have learned nothing but how to care for their bellies. It takes extra-ordinary people to bring children up right and teach them well.” And, “The schools that have been maintained hitherto, even though they do not die out entirely, can produce nothing but lost and pernicious deceivers.” He concludes:

I have pointed out above that the common man is doing nothing about it; he is incapable of it, unwilling, and ignorant of what to do. Princes and lords ought to be doing it, but they must needs be sleigh riding, drinking, and parading about in masquerades. They are burdened with high and important functions in cellar, kitchen, and bedroom. And the few who might want to do it must stand in fear of the rest lest they be taken for fools or heretics. . . . Therefore dear sirs, take this task to heart which God so earnestly requires of you, which your office imposes on you, which is so necessary for our youth, and with which neither church nor world can dispense. Alas! We have lain idle and rotting in the darkness long enough; we have been German beasts all too long!

## Luther's priority for the education of the children

Taking this approach and doing so in this direct and forceful way, Luther became one of the first educators in history to emphasize the need for universal compulsory education! He did so mainly because he was so concerned that every citizen be able to read the Bible. In Luther's "Letter to All Council Men" (*An die Ratsherren aller Städt*"), he also said that there was not a sin greater in the world nor more worthy of greater punishment than this: "*Dasz wir sie (die Kinder) nicht ziehen!*" Translated: "That we don't educate, nurture, them (these children)." The parents, he observed, are either unable or unwilling to fulfil this task.

After his own struggle with justification, Luther recognized that it is through Christ that people regain their full humanity. Luther placed God in the centre (Theo-centric) and identified the gospel and the grace of God as fundamental to education. The task of Christian instruction based on the Bible is to prepare for service of God in the earthly and

heavenly realm. Regarding the necessity of education, he wrote, "Recall the command of God, who through Moses urges and enjoins parents so often to instruct their children;" as well, that Psalm 78 shows "how earnestly He commanded our fathers to teach their children and to instruct their children's children. Indeed, for what purpose do we older folks exist other than to care for, instruct, and bring up the young?!" Thus, regarding the goal of education, he wrote, "Let this, then, my dear sirs and friends, be the first consideration to influence you, namely that herein we are fighting against the devil as the most dangerous and subtle enemy of all. A city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength consist rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens."

In another appeal, namely Luther's "Sermon on keeping children in the school" (1530), he articulated his strong conviction that it was essential that the children learn the beginning of a scriptural understanding of what it means to be a Christian. For Luther, next to the Scripture, the catechisms were the most important items in the curriculum,



for they explained such things as the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles Creed, and basic theological concepts. Unique in his day was Luther's emphasis on music (and the Psalms!), which he esteemed as second only to theology. The Psalms, he believed, contain in themselves a summary of the Christian life and speak about the fear of God, faith, and good works. In 1525 Luther, together with Melancton (his student and follower), established the School Regulations of Saxon-Germany. In 1529, the great reformer, by his Larger and Smaller Catechism, improved the religious education. Together with Melancton, he equipped many excellent teachers for the primary and secondary schools.

### Luther's view of education

In Luther's view of education, his focus was on man being created in the image of God and their task on earth. There is *union* between teaching faith *and* their *task* on this earth. Instruction in the Bible makes the school a Christian school, as subject and permeating *all* subjects. Hence, as I mentioned, the Bible and the catechism are the main means of education. Luther sees man again as a totality standing before the face of God (*Coram Deo*). The image of God, he posed, is not a characteristic of man, a natural characteristic that shows in all men. The image of God is only characteristic for the believer, by the grace of God.

Again, in Luther's view, the crux of his educational philosophy was domestic training! Luther promoted the priesthood of all believers to remove the barrier between the clergy and the laity. If all believers were priests, the clergy could no longer claim special status. Luther also used this doctrine to show the *parental* task: if all believers are priests, then all believers must teach! Thus he, as did all reformers, stressed that all parents are bishops and must apply the Word of God in the home! One implication of this emphasis was that the Bible must be translated into the vernacular.

According to Luther, love was the sustaining norm of all human interrelations. The educational *implications* of the *love ethic* argue that all learning principles are good if they reveal God and evil if they hide him in any way. Since genuine love reveals God, it is an important aspect of education. Luther also taught that strict obedience should be tempered with moderation and love. Children should be

taught positively to internalize the Word of God and Christian theology. Reminiscent of his own experiences in the schools, Luther writes, "By the grace of God it is now possible for children to study with pleasure and play languages, or other arts, or history. Today, schools are not what they once were: a hell and purgatory in which we were tormented with *casualibus* and *temporalibus* ["cases" and "tenses," declining and conjugating], and yet learned less than nothing despite all the flogging, trembling, anguish, and misery." Luther asked, "Isn't it a crying shame that heretofore a boy was obliged to study for twenty years or even longer merely to learn enough bad Latin to become a priest and mumble through the mass? Whoever got that far was accounted blessed; and blessed was the mother who bore such a child! And yet he remained all his life a poor ignoramus, unable either to cackle or to lay an egg."

To be sure, Luther strongly recommended the study of languages (as did Calvin and the other reformers): "The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained. . . . If through our neglect we let the languages go (which God forbid), we shall not only lose the gospel, but the time will come when we shall be unable to speak or write a correct Latin or Greek. . . . A great many dreadful abominations arose because of the ignorance of the languages!"

At this point we should observe as well, however, that ideas on the education and schooling of European Reformed people were influenced as much by *humanists* as they were by the Christian roots of Lutheran and Calvinistic thought. That's due, especially, because the Renaissance had changed the culture generally, also affecting the education in colleges and universities. The most prominent humanist among them was Desiderius Erasmus, or Erasmus of Rotterdam, whose humanist and renaissance thinking began to influence the Christian schools as well. Regarding Erasmus, Luther said though, "I am afraid that he doesn't advance the cause of Christ and the grace of God sufficiently. Human things weigh more with him than the divine." To Luther, education should centre in reading, writing, thinking, and the study of Scripture rather than the classics (another obvious disagreement with Erasmus!).

*In the second part of this article Rev. den Hollander will discuss educational reform during the Great Reformation.*





# Clarion Kids

## The Parable of the Mustard Seed

**Luke 13: 18 - 21**

While Jesus was on earth, he often used stories called parables to teach the people. In one story he said the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. Mustard seeds are very tiny, but when you plant one and take care of it, it will grow into a large tree. It's just like taking a little bit of yeast in a whole batch of dough – a little bit can go a long way. When we help others, or tell people about Jesus, it may seem small but big things can come from it. Young or old, if we each do our small part in telling others about God, then his church will continue to grow.

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



### Word Search

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

Care  
Jesus  
Seed

Dough  
Mustard  
Tree

Grow  
Parable  
Yeast

### Matching:

Match the words and phrases from the story.

Seed	Story
Yeast	Old
Church	Dough
Parable	Tree
Young	Grow

by Emily Nijenhuis



*"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28*

Life can change in an instant. One minute someone is healthy, the next they are diagnosed with an illness. One day you get the happy news that you are going to be aunt or uncle. One minute you are driving in your car and then the world comes crashing around you. One minute you are feeling sad and then a friend calls and makes you feel loved and happy.

In each and every situation our Lord and heavenly father is in control. He has a plan for each and every moment in our lives. He is always there for us, through the good and the hard times.

May we always take the time to thank our God for the love that he shows us every day. Every gift is from him, whether it is getting a card in the mail, or having a conversation with a friend. The Lord also tests us sometimes, but we must remember to stay strong in him, knowing there is a reason for the difficult time. Always continue to pray to the Lord and seek him for guidance.

Every year we can celebrate is a blessing from the Lord; may we not take it for granted.

Terence, Philip, Rose, Jack, and Kristi we wish you all a wonderful birthday celebrating with family and friends. May the Lord be with you all in the year to come.

## August Birthdays

### 4 **TERENCE BERENDS will be 42**

c/o Lighthouse  
6528 1st Line, RR 3 Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

### 5 **PHILIP SCHUURMAN will be 59**

1156 Diltz Road, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W2

### 9 **ROSE MALDA will be 61**

Mt. Nemo Christian Nursing Home  
4486 Guelph Line, Burlington, ON L7P 0N2

### 23 **JACK DIELEMAN will be 46**

c/o Harbour Home  
42 Spadara Drive, Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3

### 31 **KRISTI OOSTERHOFF will be 28**

c/o Harbour Home  
42 Spadara Drive, Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3



## 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



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Re: You Asked: What does biblical forgiveness look like? June 1, 2018

#### Dear Editor,

I read Rev. den Hollander's answer to this question eagerly, as I've had ample opportunity to reflect on the nature of forgiveness. My immediate reaction upon reading his answer was, "Yes, but. . . ." I find the most challenging part of his answer is that you forgive someone after he repents from sin and shows sorrow over it. The question then becomes, "What do I do with the hurt and pain I feel if the person does not acknowledge his sin and does not show sorrow over it?" I cannot control that person and make him repent – only God can control that. But how then am I to respond to the hurt and pain I feel? Rev. den Hollander's answer leaves too much room for someone to become bitter and resentful if he/she has to wait until there is repentance and sorrow. And when there is bitterness and resentment, it is nearly impossible to come to someone humbly to bring him/her back in repentance – as Rev. den Hollander suggests needs to be done.

I agree with Rev. den Hollander that a sinner needs to be addressed humbly concerning his/her sin. But I've come to understand forgiveness of someone to be primarily a matter between me and my God. Once I forgive the sinner, I do not need to hold the sin against him any more. I have freedom, whether the sinner repents or not. There is also the difficulty that I may not know whether the sinner does repent and show sorrow before he/she dies. If he/she has, and there is no way of knowing, I'd be holding that sin or hurt against that person even when he/she has repented.

In Matthew 18 we read about how often to forgive someone his sin. When Peter asks Jesus how often he should forgive his brother for sinning against him, Jesus answers that it should be seventy times more than Peter suggests (Matt 18:22). Jesus then immediately launches into the parable of the unforgiving servant. In this parable a servant is called to account for ten thousand talents (three billion dollars or so in today's terms). He pleads for time to pay it back and is instead forgiven for the debt. There is no request for forgiveness either in Peter's question or from the servant called to account. Neither is there sorrow or repentance. However, despite being forgiven such an astronomical debt, when the servant finds someone who owed *him* 100 denarii (approx-

mately five thousand dollars), and the same plea is made to him that he made to his master, he deals harshly with that debtor. In the end he is punished for his harsh dealing by being required to pay his impossible debt.

Therefore, we ought to forgive others' sins on the basis of the forgiveness of our sins, not on the basis of the sinner's sorrow and repentance. This gives us our freedom in this life already! If, while were his enemies, Christ died for the forgiveness of our sins, how much more should we not do the same!

In closing, I'd like to rephrase Jesus' summary words for the parable into a question: "If you do not forgive your brother from your heart, why should your heavenly Father forgive you?"

Jason Van de Burgt

#### Response

Brother Van de Burgt brings in a *new* aspect in the matter of forgiveness and the process towards forgiving someone. He refers to "the hurt and pain he feels" and to the fact that someone becomes "bitter and/or resentful" while waiting for the other's repentance and remorse. This, too, is a spiritual matter, be it of a different nature. This being a spiritual matter, we need to seek the help of the Holy Spirit by prayer (Phil 4:6), that we may receive "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding," which will "*guard* your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." That is, his peace will guard against this bitterness and resentment! It is the *fruit* of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) to know of the love of God, the joy, *peace*, *patience*, etc. and to be healed from the hurt and pain you might feel while awaiting the repentance and remorse of the one who sinned against you. That's also the frame of heart and mind in which you follow the steps of Matthew 18! Then you don't have freedom and peace based on the sinner's sorrow, but thanks to the grace of God in forgiving you your own sins; you also receive *determination* wholeheartedly to forgive your neighbour (HC, LD 51). And if the neighbour does not come to this sorrow, the repentance and remorse over sin, but hardens his heart and remains impenitent, then it will also comfort and liberate to know that "it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Rom 12:19). In that way many a righteous one has been comforted in hurt and pain due to the sins of their opponents (Jer 20:10-13; Ps 31:10-19)!

*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.*





## Q How united or divided were the members of the synagogues?

*In our time there are various denominations (Baptists, Roman Catholics, Reformed, etc.) of which the members differ regarding certain points of doctrine. How was that in the days of the synagogues?*

*We read of Jesus or Paul attending the services in the synagogues, what were they like and how did they differ?*

A The word “synagogue” is a Greek word meaning “assembly,” and is like our word for church, referring to the “gathering” of believers and their “building.” The origins of the synagogues are shrouded in mystery, in the mist of the past. Although there may have been gathering places in every town, used for prayer and instruction (“schools” for the study of the Law) before the Babylonian exile, most scholars support the contention that the synagogues originated in exile and in Babylonia. They surmise that it began as spontaneous gatherings of Jews for Sabbaths and festivals, for communal worship and for mutual support (Ezek 1:1; 11:16). Since sacrifices could not be offered on foreign soil, prayer became a substitute; a “house of prayer” was serving as a substitute for (in Babylon) or in addition to the temple. The Talmud (Jewish book of “studies”) gives the number of synagogues in Jerusalem at the time of the destruction of the second temple (70 A.D.) at 480. These need not have been all special buildings but could also be assemblies convened in spacious private homes for prayer and study.

Synagogues flourished in the Diaspora (among the Jews living outside of Palestine, where Paul would start his missions) and in Galilee. The synagogues in Galilee are mentioned frequently in connection with Jesus preaching there. The central figure of the synagogue was the “Ark” or Torah Shrine, in which were kept the scrolls of the Law and the Prophets. Part of the synagogue service was an exposition (Midras) of the Scripture portion that was read. Jesus followed this custom (Luke 4:16-22; Matt 9:35). Authorities in the synagogues were the head or ruler (Mark 5:22; 13:14), the scribes, the minister (or interpreter), and the elders. The interpreter was responsible for interpreting the Scripture and the sermon, which meant not only translating it into the common language but expounding and explaining it. In a sense, the interpretation was a commentary on the scriptural passage. Questions of law, also, were decided in the synagogue, with subsequently the exercise of discipline on those who were delinquent. The officers of a synagogue could serve as a local Sanhedrin (council).

Already since the days of Ezra and Nehemiah there were distinct differences among the Jews, between the ones who strictly enforced the observance of the Law and



the more lenient. Later on, these two factions developed into the party of the Pharisees (i.e. separatists) and the Sadducees (named after the High Priest Zadok; a priestly elite). Among the rulers of the synagogues, too, there were those who sympathized with the Pharisees and those who held the views of the Sadducees. Most of the scribes, the teachers of the Law, belonged to the Pharisees, promoting an accurate and strict keeping of the Mosaic Law, with additions of the understandings and teachings of the ancient interpreters (collected in the Talmud). They pursued the letter of the Law, the traditional washings, sacrifices, Sabbath observance, tithings, etc.

The Sadducees rejected the traditions, and denied the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels. They did not believe in God's immediate and providential involvement in daily life and people's responsibilities (Deism). They condoned much of the Greek civilization (Hellenism) and did not "abhor" the Roman occupation as fanatically as the Pharisees did. A third party mentioned sometimes

were the Essenes, the "pious" or "devout," who lived spread throughout the country. Their influence was much smaller, since they kept themselves from daily life and civilization in the Jewish society. Finally, other sects that could be mentioned are the Herodians (Jews who associated freely with the Romans) and their opposites, the Zealots (who would have loved to revolt against the Romans and expel them violently). Hence, as in our time, these factions and parties had their followers among the Jews of their time.

*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



*Old city of Jerusalem*

**Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms – Devotional****Editor: Peter H. Holtvlüwer****Publisher: Little Angels Press, 2018; Hardcover, 395 pp. \$25 CDN****Note**

*The book is available now from a representative in most local Canadian Reformed congregations as a fundraiser for Mission Brazil, specifically the Reformed Reading Room in Recife. Coming soon to regular Christian book sellers.*

Early this year, a helpful church member placed some devotionals in our church library, with an invitation to take and read. My husband and I began to use one for supper time devotions, but after a couple of weeks we laid it aside. There is only so much allegorical interpretation of Song of Songs that a Reformed person can handle. So it was with hopeful anticipation that I received an advance copy of *Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms – Devotional* from Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer. He is the editor of this significant project by sixteen Reformed pastors, professors, and missionaries who tend their flocks in diverse situations and congregations in Canada, Australia, and Brazil. We have not been disappointed.

**Christ-centred focus**

Holtvlüwer notes that the Psalms are the part of Scripture that speaks instantly into our lives (p. vi). We turn to them for comfort and relief and use them as prayers when our own words fail. They form the backbone of our psalter as the church sings songs of sadness and lament, of joy and thanks to the glory of God. So, they're *our* Psalms. But they're more, a lot more. The Psalms reveal the character and deeds of God. They focus on his majesty, love, faithfulness, and saving grace, and then especially how these are revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the goal of this devotional. First, to highlight how the Psalms reveal Christ by showing how the saints of old were waiting and longing for him. Second, to discover the inseparable connection between Christ's human and divine nature by providing glimpses of Christ's suffering and glory as both Son of Man and Son of God. The Psalms are unique, both in that they help express our longings and prayers and in that they were perfectly sung, prayed, and fulfilled by our Lord Jesus. Fundamentally, the Psalms are *Christ's Psalms*.

**Year's supply of devotions**

The layout of this devotional follows a format familiar to many such books. However, it is not a topical devotional, but one that works its way sequentially through all 150 Psalms, typically providing two meditations per Psalm. In addition, there are three appendices dealing with special times of the year. There are the Christ-centred ones: Christ's birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost. Second, several meditations are offered on seasonal topics: springtime "crops and labour," Thanksgiving, and New Year's. And third, there are those relating to the Lord's Supper. Again, a psalm forms the basis for each of these meditations. How these seasonal devotionals are used is quite flexible, but it would make the most sense to read them at the pertinent times and return to the regular readings afterward. All in all, it would take about a year to make one's way through the complete book.

My approach to evaluating this devotional involved reading several of the meditations provided by each of the sixteen contributors. I wondered if having so many writers would lead to a disjointed, fragmented product. I'm happy to say it doesn't. In fact, the approach of exploring the Psalms with a focus on Christ Jesus ensures that the writers do just that. Each meditation encourages the reader to discover how the Psalm speaks of the Saviour. Did that become repetitious? In a sense, yes. But it seemed more like the writers were polishing a precious jewel, so that it glowed and shimmered ever more brightly. "That's the delightful marvel of the gospel" as we receive it in Christ (p. 277).

**Personal application**

It proves to be a beautiful thing to have a group of pastors collaborating. (How intimidating a task it would have been for one author to write three hundred and sixty-five meditations!) These shepherds bring a varied wealth of experience drawn from serving their congregations with all the attendant joys and struggles. The challenges they address are real: bullying at school, winning or losing hockey tournaments, sibling rivalry, blessings and temptations of new technology, breaking up with a girlfriend, divorce, illness, death. They use plain English, with only the occasional lofty theological term. The resultant meditations speak to the everyday lives of believers in a powerful and encouraging way. For example, the reflection on Psalm 51 suggests that every forgiven sinner can become a teacher.



“Me? Teach others?’ you ask in surprise. Absolutely. The Spirit of God who enabled Christ to go to the cross for you, has been given to you so that you can share the excitement of salvation with others” (p. 105).

The stipulation of one page per meditation may have been a challenge for some of the writers but proves to be a length well-suited to family devotion time. Typically, there is a mix of ages around the dinner table, and the younger ones have a short attention span. Wisely, each devotion suggests a ten to twelve verse Bible passage as focus. One suggestion perhaps: in order to stimulate family discussion, it might have been helpful to include a reflective question for each day.

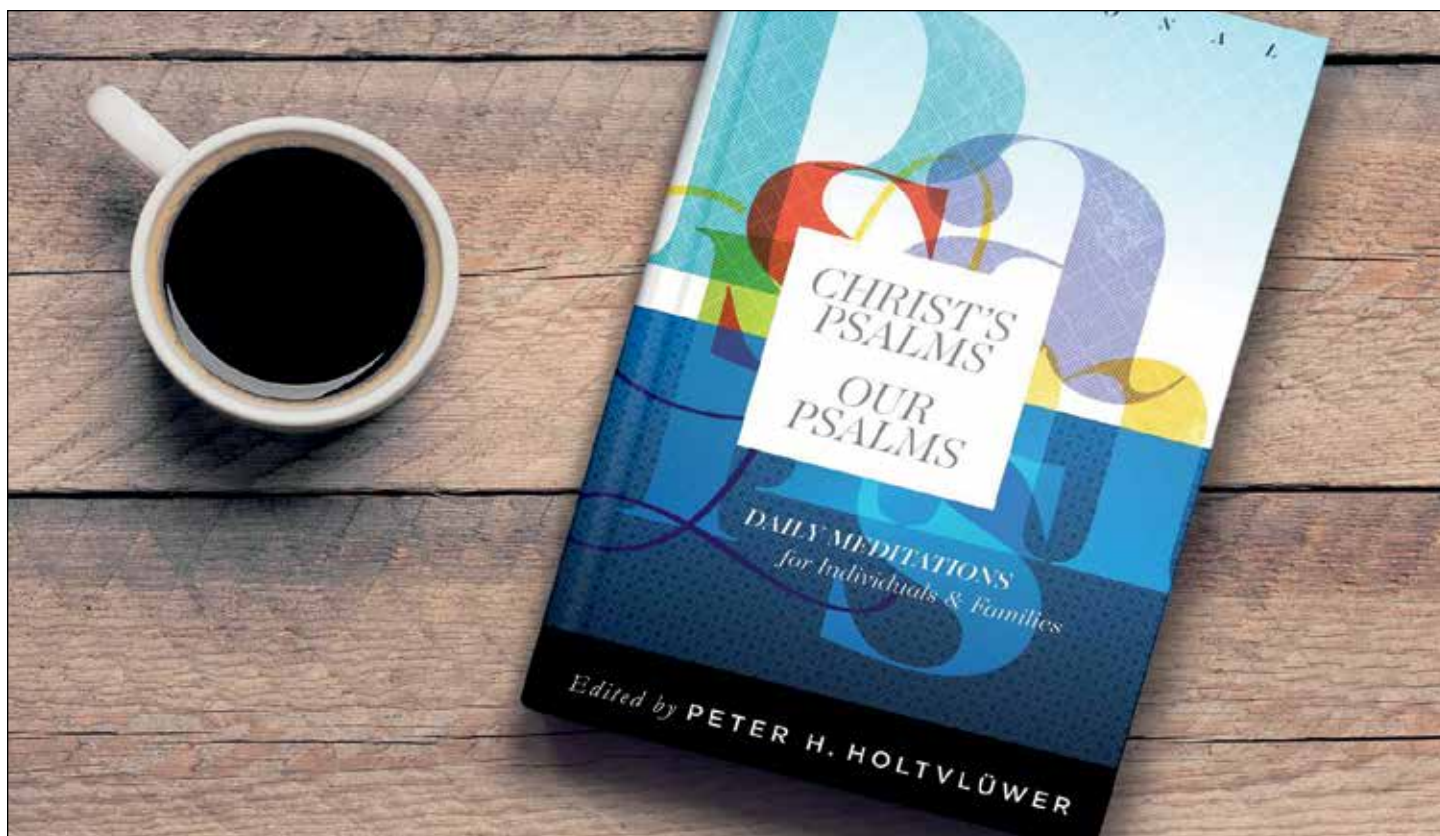
### Fresh insights

As any faithful student of Scripture can attest, each study brings new insight and understanding, even from a passage as familiar as Psalm 23. The writer’s focus on “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” brought that verse to life in a fresh way. He

writes, “Please note the word ‘follow.’ The psalmist says that God’s people do not just experience God’s goodness and mercy *occasionally*. . . . The idea is rather that God is following us around with the intention of bestowing his blessing on us all the time. Wherever we go, we experience it again. Whenever we turn a corner, we bump into God’s grace. We cannot escape it!” What an encouraging message! This devotional provides a good number of such “new” lessons.

*Christ’s Psalms, Our Psalms – Devotional* should make its way into all our homes to become part of daily family or personal devotional time. Such efforts will be rewarded with an ever-deepening appreciation of our Saviour who has experienced the very same human emotions and struggles we do. We will be reassured that he knows us intimately and is here, right now, to help us. My hope is that more such devotionals will be written by our pastors and teachers. It is obvious from this volume that they have a wealth of biblical wisdom and life experience to share with fellow believers.

C



## PRESS RELEASES

### Press Release of Classis Central Ontario, June 8, 2018

Classis Central Ontario was convened on June 8, 2018 in the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington. On behalf of the convening church of Rehoboth, Burlington, Waterdown, Rev. Clarence VanderVelde opened the meeting with singing Hymn 52:1, 2, reading Ephesians 4:1-16, and prayer. All the churches were properly represented and the classis was constituted. Rev. Tony Roukema served as chairman, Br. Warner Reinink served as vice-chair, and Rev. Jake Torenvliet served as clerk.

Rev. Anthony Roukema welcomed the Regional Synod Deputies. He noted that Rev. Ian Wildeboer received calls in this classis from Fellowship, Blessings, and Brampton / Toronto.

Classis proceeded with the request for advice from Fellowship on the retirement of Rev. John van Popta. Classis and Regional Synod support the decision to grant early retirement, effective September 30, 2018, due to health issues. Ottawa, Jubilee will officially represent CCO at the retirement service held September 9, in the pm service. Words of thanks for the twenty-five years of service in the ministry were spoken by Rev. Dick Wynia, on behalf of Regional Synod. Rev. Tony Roukema spoke on behalf of CCO and Rev. John van Popta took the opportunity to thank the delegates. Psalm 67:1, 3 was sung and prayer was offered. Opportunity was taken by each delegate to personally thank Rev. John van Popta.

Church Visitation Reports were given for the following churches: Ebenezer, Fellowship, Bethel, Rehoboth, Redemption, Jubilee, and Blessings. These reports were received with thankfulness.

Questions were asked as per Article 44 of the C.O. Each of the churches answered in the affirmative indicating that the ministry of the office-bearers was being continued, that the decisions of the major assemblies were being adhered to. No churches required the advice of Classis, except Fellowship church's request concerning Rev. John VanPopta's upcoming retirement.

Redemption Flamborough will be the next convening church for classis. Classis will be held, Friday, September 7, 2018, in Ebenezer. Should the agenda be overly large, the classis may need to be convened on the evening of Thursday September 6. The suggested officers are: Chairman: Rev. Jake Torenvliet, Vice Chair: Elder delegate from Redemption Flamborough, and Clerk: Rev. Bill DeJong.

Reports due next classis: Inspection of the Archives, Inspection of the Treasurers Report, and the Inspection of the books for the Fund for Needy Churches.

Question Period was made use of.

The Acts of Classis were approved.

Classis Central Ontario was closed with prayer and singing Hymn 52:4, 5.

### Short Report of Classis Niagara, June 13, 2018, held in Dunnville, ON

Rev. John VanWoudenberg, one of the delegates from the convening church of Dunnville, opened the meeting of the delegates in a Christian manner. After the credentials were found to be in good order, Classis was constituted. Rev. Clarence Bouwman served as chairman, Rev. Dick Wynia as clerk, and Rev. VanWoudenberg as vice-chairman. Rev. Ryan Kampen was seated as an observer.

After the agenda was adopted, the chairman asked each of the churches if the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued, and if the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. Each church answered in the affirmative. In closed session advice was asked for and received in two matters of discipline.

After examining the documents to ensure that all was in order, Classis approved the call that Dunnville Canadian

Reformed Church extended to Rev. Ryan Kampen to serve in a "special ministerial task" (C.O. 6). Rev. Ryan Kampen is already labouring for the Reformational Study Centre in South Africa. The chairman congratulated Rev. Ryan Kampen, who was present, as well as Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church, wishing both the Lord's rich blessings in the work for the gospel that will be done. The church of Dunnville took the opportunity to invite the churches in Classis Niagara to the installation service of Rev. Ryan Kampen scheduled for June 24, 2018, beginning at 9:30 AM.

In closed session, Classis dealt with an appeal against a consistory and received a church visitation report to the church of Dunnville.

Classis appointed Covenant Canadian Reformed Church of Grassie as the convening church for the next classis, to be held on September 12, 2018.

After personal question period, Classis was closed.

*John VanWoudenberg, vice-chairman e.t.* 