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Augustine and Luther at the Synod of Dort



DENVER FAMILY CAMP

WHY DO OFFICE BEARERS SIT UP FRONT?

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

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
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Phone: 204-663-9000, Fax: 204-663-9202

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Our lead article, "Luther and Dort" is from our editor Rev. Eric Kampen. From Dr. Ted Van Raalte, we have "'Free Will'? Augustine and Dort." As you can see we are focussing both on Reformation Day and the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort.

Issue 21 contains many of our regular columns: Treasures, New & Old, Clippings on Politics & Religion, You Asked, *Clarion* Kids, Education Matters, and Ray of Sunshine. There is also a report from Denver congregation on their annual Family Camp and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

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Cover photo: Monument of Martin Luther in Eisleben, Germany



Luther and Dort

November 13th is the 400th anniversary of the start of a synod held in the Dutch city of Dort

As heirs of the Reformation, October 31 is a special day. On that day, we commemorate the publication of Luther's Ninety-five Theses in 1517, in the German city of Wittenberg. This event played a large role in bringing reformation to the church. October 31 is not far from November 13. If we are history buffs, we will right away know that November 13th is the 400th anniversary of the start of a synod held in the Dutch city of Dort.

There may be a century separating the events in Wittenberg and Dort, but Luther and Dort are a lot closer than we might realize. We need to be aware of this. We live in an age that seems to fall over itself to apologize for the actions of previous generations, self-righteously condemning their actions. As the church is so easily influenced by culture, there is the danger we lose interest or even become embarrassed by the teachings adopted by this synod. Before you know it, we might be ready to offer an apology for their decisions, rather than seeing the Canons as an apology in the sense of 1 Peter 3:15. When it comes down to it, if you deny Dort, you deny Luther and the Reformation. At bottom, you deny the gospel. This becomes clear if you realize the common denominator between Luther and Dort in their teachings about the free will of man in the process of salvation.

Luther and free will

Martin Luther's significance is his rediscovering the doctrine of justification by faith. This stands in contrast to justification by works of the law. The contrast is erased, however, when faith is seen as a human work. When faith is a work that man must do, you can still speak of justification by faith, but your understanding of grace and God's sovereignty has shifted. Luther detected this in the writings of Erasmus on the free will of man.

The difference between them came out when, in 1524, Erasmus published a book concerning free will. Erasmus

defined man's free will as "a power of the human will by which man may apply himself to those things that lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from the same." As one author puts it, in Erasmus' view, "God shows grace not in saving man, but in making it possible for man to save himself." In this we can hear what is called the semi-Pelagian view. Pelagius, who lived around 400 AD, had argued that man's will was pure and free when he was born, and was only corrupted by outside influences. Sin was seen as a matter of nurture, not nature. This went too far for many, who admitted the fall had severely affected man's will, but man was considered capable of the meritorious act of accepting God's offer of salvation. This modified view has been termed Semi-Pelagianism.

Over a year after the publication of Erasmus' book, Luther responded in a book entitled, *The Bondage of the Will*. For Luther, for grace to be truly grace required denial of man's free will in responding to the gospel. He saw the need for the renewal of man's corrupt nature by the Holy Spirit. This means that faith is not man's action. Ultimately, faith is a gift of God, a fruit of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

The Belgic Confession and free will

Luther's denial of man's free will in the process of salvation finds an echo in Article 14 of the Belgic Confession, which speaks of the creation and fall of man and his incapability of doing what is truly good. The article acknowledges that fallen man lost all his excellent gifts. It states, "He has nothing left but some small traces, which are sufficient to make man inexcusable." They are not sufficient, however, to embrace Christ. The article concludes that "there is no understanding nor will conformable to the understanding and will of God unless Christ has brought it about. . . ." This article sets the stage for the confession of divine election

unto salvation in Article 16. This reference to the Belgic Confession is important to realize how fundamental an issue man's free will was to the overall teaching of justification by faith.

The Canons of Dort and free will

When you study the history leading up to the Synod of Dort, it becomes clear that the Remonstrants, with James Arminius as their leader, had a problem with the teaching about free will and God's election in Articles 14-16. The Synod defended this doctrine. The Canons are simply an elaboration on Articles 14-16. They explicitly refute the free will of man, show the need for the regenerating work of the

Ultimately, faith is a gift of God, a fruit of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit, and make it clear that even the faith by which we embrace Christ is a gift from God. We read, for example, in the Canons of Dort (hereafter CD) I 17, that as part of salvation "[God] decreed to give them true faith in him. . . ." In CD I 9 it is stated that "election . . . is the fountain of every saving good, from which

flow faith, holiness and other savings gifts. . . ." In CD III/IV 3, it is stated that man is totally incapable of any saving good and "without the regenerating Holy Spirit they neither will nor can return to God, reform their depraved nature, or prepare themselves for its reformation." In Article 10 of the same chapter, it is stressed that God gives faith and repentance. Article 11 gives a description of how God does this marvelous work. Article 12 underlines the powerful working of God when it states that it is not the case that "after God has done his part, it remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not regenerated, converted or not converted."

Scriptural basis and the use of the means

It is not hard to think of some Scripture passages that support that man's will does not have the power to consent or respond to the gospel. We can think of our Lord's words to Nicodemus in John 3 about the need to be born again. Only the Spirit can give this birth. We can think of our Lord's words in John 6:44 that no one can come to him unless the Father draws him. We can think of Paul's words in Ephesians 2, how we by nature are dead in our sins and trespasses, and God makes us alive. Further, we can think of Paul's extensive discussion in Romans 9-11 about God's election and predestination.

At the same time, we also know from Scripture how God goes about his regenerating work. There is the command to the disciples to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Triune God and teaching them. In the very same section of Romans (9-11) where Paul writes about God's election and predestination, he writes about the importance of the preaching of the gospel (10:14-17). Faith comes through the hearing of the gospel of Christ. Peter also speaks of being born anew through the living and abiding Word of God (1 Peter 1:23-25).

Implications

By this point it should be clear that Luther and Dort are about the same issue, the doctrine of justification by faith. Dort's contribution to the understanding of this doctrine is the way it shows that the faith by which we embrace Christ is not in any way man's contribution to salvation. By nature, we are dead in sin and do not have the will power to respond to the gospel. As part of the gift of salvation, God has to make our will alive. CD III/IV 12 concludes by stating that when God makes the will alive, "the will itself also acts. Therefore man himself is rightly said to believe and repent through the grace received."

At the same time, Dort shows the subtle efforts to undermine the gospel that Luther dealt with in the early years of the Reformation. The articles of the Belgic Confession indicate the ongoing threat of Semi-Pelagian thinking some fifty years later. The need for the Synod to deal with this issue indicates its recurring effort to rear its ugly head. We would be naïve to think that it is no longer an issue today. It also lies close at the door of our own heart. Our confessions may explain it clearly, but in our thinking, we are prone to think that we are saved *because* of our faith, with faith seen as our action by which we accept the gospel, rather than seeing faith itself as a gift of God. It is subtle, but there is a difference between being saved *by* faith and being saved *because* of faith. The first gives honour to God, the second gives honour to man.

Challenge

We do well to see the link between Luther and Dort. When we see that, we will be more equipped to resist any temptation to be embarrassed by Dort and feel the urge to apologize for the clear language of the Canons. Instead, we will appreciate Dort as defending Luther and the Reformation about justification by faith.

Why not find a quiet half hour soon and read through the Canons of Dort? You will be better "prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15).





To Search Things Out is the Glory of Kings

"It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out." (Proverbs 25:2)

Scavenger hunts are a real favourite at children's birthday parties. Boys and girls love to go out and explore and hunt for things. There is a real thrill in the search and a feeling of satisfaction in the discovery of what was hidden. The parents who organize these scavenger hunts are delighted to see the enthusiasm and happiness of the children. Hiding something for someone else to discover is a fun and loving thing to do.

Proverbs 25:2 begins by saying that "it is the glory of God to conceal things." God knows all things. Nothing is hidden from his sight. His divine power and perfect knowledge of everything means that he never needs to investigate something or try to figure something out. He is truly all knowing.

God shows his glory in his inscrutability. As the psalmist says in Psalm 97:2, "Clouds and thick darkness surround him." It is his prerogative to conceal things from us according to his sovereign wisdom. Some things he has hidden from us, waiting for us to find and discover them (for example, the many treasures in creation itself), other things he reveals to us as the history of salvation progresses while still other matters remain part of God's secret things (cf. Deut 29:29). It is up

to God what to conceal and what to reveal. God is sovereign and it belongs to his glory to hide things from us.

The proverb we are looking at continues, "But the glory of kings is to search things out." In contrast to God who is infinitely wise and all knowing, man, even if he is a king, is fundamentally different. He needs to search things out in order to acquire knowledge. In the first instance, this proverb refers to the task of kings in Israel to administer justice in the cases brought before them. To render judgments which were sound and just, the matter would need to be carefully investigated. Not a stone was to be left unturned to get to the bottom of it as much as possible. Only then would judgment be rendered.

We may not be earthly kings needing to administer justice, but as men and women made in God's image, we have received the calling to have dominion over creation and subdue the earth. To do this well in whatever place in life we might be, we search things out and make judgments about how best to proceed. To search things out is part of what it means to be human. We are not all knowing and do not possess infinite wisdom. But God has created us with a mind to use and to develop.

It is our glory to search things out, to grow in knowledge and to keep learning about all the riches which God has placed in creation.

As those who have received the Spirit of God, we are privileged to also investigate the things of God. We have been given God's Spirit "that we might understand the things freely given us by God" (1 Cor 2:12). We may exercise spiritual discernment and so grow in the knowledge of the things of God. In fact, as Paul writes at the end of 1 Corinthians 2, "We have the mind of Christ." As those who share in Christ by faith, let us eagerly search out the wonderful depths of the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is "God's mystery" which has been revealed to us; in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:2-3). These treasures have been hidden by God in order that we might find them and grow in knowledge and joy at how amazing God is. This is the essence of eternal life, that we might know God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). Life everlasting will be a continual treasure hunt as we learn more and more about the treasures of our infinite God. And as we do so, God will rejoice over us with gladness (Zeph 3:17).





“Free Will”?

Augustine and Dort

The problem of free will has a will of its own, it seems, for it never goes away. If God is all sovereign and controls everything, how can he justly hold me responsible? Or, if I am responsible, I must have a free will, and God must not be sovereign over it. Scripture seems to uphold both sides: He is sovereign and I am responsible. How is that true? Is this just a mystery, even a paradox? There is mystery, but there’s also more we can say, in line with what we confess in the Canons of Dort. As you read what follows, if you can keep in mind three things, you will have the words to describe some of the mystery and avoid the false either-or dilemmas in this discussion. The three things are: (a) God made humans with wills/hearts that are distinct from stones and animal instincts; (b) God upholds the nature of our wills as wills that choose and are accountable; and (c) God, in his own secret way, directs these wills to do his will, but doesn’t violate their nature as wills.

God works in us “to will”

Scripture teaches us in Philippians 2:13 that God is at work in believers, “To will and to work according to his good pleasure.” He forms in us not just our will, but works in us *to will*, that is, he moves our wills *to will*, forming in us the willingness that conforms to his will. This means that God works at the level of the *choices* of our wills. The text assumes that God has made us with the *faculty* of will and it states that in believers he even moves this faculty to make its *choices* in accordance with his will.

Yet, whatever he does, doesn’t leave us feeling like pre-programmed robots. We experience a life full of meaningful choices: meatball marinara or spicy Italian? Chevy or Ford? University or college? More importantly: Obey my parents or not? Attend church on Sunday or not? Find the way out of temptation or not? Repent or not? Pray or not? In fact,

even when Paul wrote that God is at work in us, he was using that as support for his command that we ourselves should “work out our salvation with fear and trembling, *for God is at work*. . .” (Phil 2:12). God sovereignly works in us, and we *therefore* are held responsible – at least, that’s how Philippians 2:12 and 13 relate to each other. Let me now acquaint you with the church father Augustine’s answer, written around A.D. 426.

Augustine: Why did Rome fall?

In his monumental work called *The City of God*, Augustine develops an answer to those pagans who charged that the Roman Empire fell because it had turned away from the traditional pagan deities to follow the Christian God. *The City of God* is divided into twenty-two “books” (I will hereafter cite it by book and chapter, e.g., 5.11). In the fifth book Augustine works out the teaching that God has included in his meticulous providence all “the kingdoms of men and their lordships and servants” (5.11). Whether pagan Rome, Christian Rome, or Visigoth Rome, all were in God’s control. Augustine develops his argument for God’s meticulous providence in dialogue with writings from the Roman statesman and orator of the first century before Christ, named Cicero.

Either free will or providence, not both?

Cicero denied any divine providence because he was determined (pun intended) to maintain human free will. Either the one or the other; not both. Not only did Cicero deny the power of pagan divination to discover the future, but he denied that anyone – human or divine – can have certainty about anything future. The future is open. There is no providential plan. If the human will is truly free to choose either a Ford or Chevy, no one can know beforehand

what it will choose, for then its choice would not be truly free. Cicero added that the will must have freedom of choice in order for it to be held accountable justly for its choices, in order for the person to be either praised and rewarded or blamed and punished. Cicero's position was like an open theist today: free will, yes; divine foreknowledge, no.

The opposite position, that of absolute determinism or fatalism, has attracted many Reformed philosophers in the past and present. In their view, human choosing is little more than an illusion. We imagine and think we are choosing, but really we are not. But Augustine refused to accept this dilemma between either divine willing or human willing, and I think we too should refuse it.

Both divine will and human choice

Augustine states, "The religious mind, however, chooses both, confesses both, and confirms both by the faith of godliness." He argues, "Even if a certain order of causes does exist in the mind of God, it does not follow that nothing is left to the free choice of our will. For our wills are themselves included in the order of causes which is certain to God and contained within His foreknowledge. For the wills of men are the causes of the deeds of men" (5.9).

Here you see Augustine working towards a brilliant solution. He does not deny freedom of choice, nor does he deny God's foreknowledge. Rather, he roots freedom of choice in divine foreknowledge, arguing that if God foreknows a human choice to be a free choice, then it must be free, for God's foreknowledge is correct, true. And in this case, we must understand "foreknowledge" as implying foreordination, or, the plan of God: "Therefore, whatever power [humans] have they have most certainly; and whatever they are to do they will do most certainly: *for* He Whose foreknowledge cannot fail foreknew that they would have the power to do it and would do it." Again, "Far be it from us, then, to seek freedom of the will by denying the foreknowledge of Him by Whose aid we are and shall be free" (5.10).

Wills were made to will

Basically, Augustine argues his point from the definition of what a will is and does. The will is the soul's faculty by which it chooses between options. That is what it is, and thus that is also what it does. Augustine simply observes that humans will this and will that, or nil this and nil that. They exercise their faculty of will all the time, whether choosing a Ford or a Chevy, or by choosing neither (nill-

ing), or choosing to obey their parents or not. We can see this faculty of will quite obviously developing in the so-called "terrible twos." Augustine, in his *Confessions*, even observed the sinful will asserting itself as one child who could not yet speak glowered with livid fury at another, because the other was enjoying sustenance at the breast while it was not (*Confessions*, 1.7.11).

Wills cannot be coerced

When we exercise our faculty of will, we do so without being forced to do so by someone else. Our bodies can be flogged and imprisoned against our wills, but no one can force our wills to stop being wills that make their own choices and have their own desires, unless perhaps they drug us. If we were to will x because we were "forced" to will x, still we would ourselves *choose* to will x because of the external factors around us, and it could not be said that someone actually forced our wills to choose x. We willed x. Even if we had a gun to our head, we would still be responsible for what we willed when the gun was held to our head. Our wills, by definition, make free choices, or they are not wills. That's how God made us, and God works with what he made according to the natures of the things that he made.

This is the very way in which God always achieves what he wills: by giving our wills the power and will to will what we will. There is not just a *compatibility* of our wills with God's will, but a secret way in which God moves our wills so that our wills will what they will, choosing freely. God upholds the human will to be a will so that it arrives at its acts differently than, say, a dog's instinct moves a dog, a tree's branch grows, or a stone is made to fall. The will has a certain power or ability of its own that distinguishes it from blocks and stones.

The human will in the Canons of Dort

There's a lot more we could ask and try to explain, but I would like to go straight to the Canons of Dort, to show

This is the very way in which God always achieves what he wills: by giving our wills the power and will to will what we will

that what Augustine taught is echoed in the Canons. We confess in the Canons III/IV 1 that God created humans with an upright will but that by the fall into sin we made our will stubborn and rebellious. Man did not lose his will altogether. He still has a will that chooses, but his will-in-sin always chooses what is sinful and rebellious. By our own deliberate (de = out of, libertas = freedom) choice we turned against God in Paradise (HC, Q/A 9) and now all of our freely-made, in-sin choices are displeasing to God. But the marvel of regeneration includes the renewal of these stubborn wills. In order to renew the will, God doesn't force or coerce it like one might force a stone to move. Rather, he works with it so that its nature as a will remains, and it acts as a will acts, choosing what he secretly but powerfully moves it to choose. We confess in the Canons III/IV 16,

Man through the fall did not cease to be man endowed with intellect and will; and sin. . . did not deprive man of his human nature. . . . So also this divine grace of regeneration does not act upon men as if they were blocks and stones and does not take away the will and its properties, or violently coerce it, but makes the will spiritually alive, heals it, corrects it, pleasantly and at the same time powerfully bends it. As a result, where formerly the rebellion and resistance of the flesh fully dominated, now a prompt and sincere obedience of the

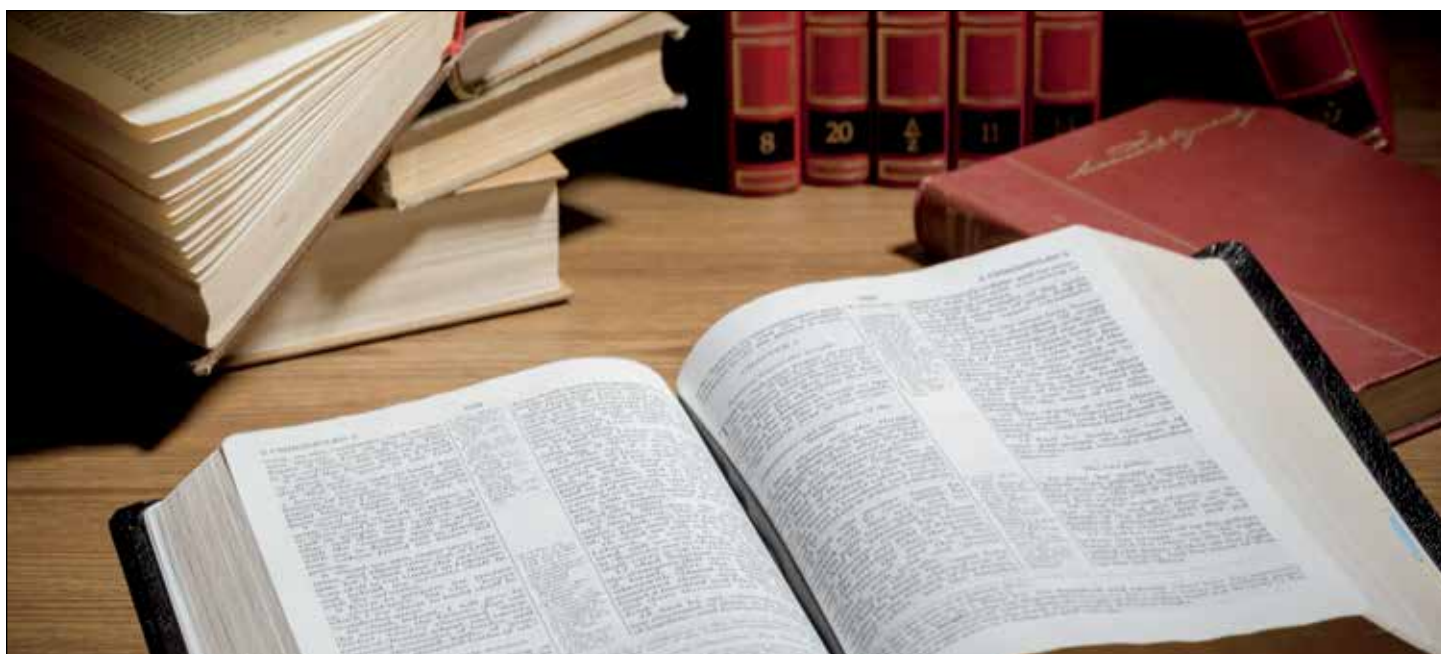
Spirit begins to prevail, in which the true, spiritual renewal and freedom of our will consists.

Experiencing this power of God

Freedom is not the freedom to choose and to do anything at all, but freedom to choose what is truly and eternally good, what honours our Maker, the Father, imitates our Saviour, his Son, and displays the power of our Renewer, the Holy Spirit. Our hearts should be full of delight, delighting in God himself and in all his instruction. We also confess,

All those in whose hearts God works [regeneration] in this amazing way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively regenerated and do actually believe. And then the will so renewed is not only acted upon and moved by God but, acted upon by God, the will itself also acts. Therefore man himself is rightly said to believe and repent through the grace he has received" (CD III/IV 12).

I pray that each reader would now reflect upon God in thankfulness. May you be filled with the life of the Spirit and the love of Christ, with a heart that loves and desires the Lord above all! Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, *for* it is God himself who is at work in you, to will and to work for his good pleasure.





The Coming Digital Totalitarian State

The extent to which the Chinese Communist Party is willing to go in order to control the Chinese people is astounding. In a remarkable article on Gatestone Institute's website, Gordon G. Chang, a Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Institute, details what the Communist regime is planning for China.

By 2020 Chinese authorities hope to have about 626 million surveillance cameras functioning throughout the country with one of their purposes being to "feed information into a national 'social credit system.'" This should be operative in two years. It "will assign to every person in China a constantly updated score based on observed behaviors. For example, an instance of jaywalking, caught by one of those cameras, will result in a reduction in score." However, more is in view than jaywalking. The regime wants conformity to its political demands.

Experimental social credit scoring systems have already been operating in more than three dozen locations in China. In Rongcheng in Shandong province "each resident starts with 1,000 points, and, based upon their changing score, are ranked from A+++ to D. The system has affected behaviour: incredibly for China, drivers stop for pedestrians at crosswalks." Citizens have apparently embraced the social credit system.

Chang notes that "as technology advances and data banks are added, the small experimental programs and the national lists will eventually be merged into one countrywide system." The process has already started with the government rolling out its "Integrated Joint Operations Platform, which aggregates data from various sources such as cameras, identification checks, and 'wifi sniffers.'" The purpose is to "allow the trustworthy to roam everywhere under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step." Indeed, as a result of this growing surveillance of its citizens, since April 2018, the authorities have "blocked individuals from taking 11.14 million flights and 4.25 million highspeed rail trips." Why? Because they had a low social credit rating.

But such travel restrictions are just the beginning. The punishments handed out for citizens not complying with Communist expectations can include being unable to buy property or not allowing your child to go to a private school. "Discredited people deserve legal consequences." The totalitarian government can designate any punishment it pleases to force the population to conform to its expectations. A hardline approach can be expected so that people may not even get a second chance to redeem themselves. "President Xi Jinping, the final and perhaps only arbiter in China, has made it clear how he feels about the availability of second chances. 'Once untrustworthy, always restricted'" [in terms of one's freedoms and privileges].

The arm of the Chinese Communist Party is long and powerful. No other Chinese administration has ever kept such meticulous records of its citizens as the current dictatorship and "computing power and artificial intelligence are now giving China's officials extraordinary capabilities." Indeed, "there is no question that technology empowers China's one-party state to repress people effectively."

The Chinese Big Brother wants absolute control over society and uses digital surveillance to monitor the behaviour of its citizens. This digital totalitarianism does not bode well for Christians and it has the potential of increased oppression, effectively making them second-class citizens if their social credit scores are low. That would probably happen if church attendance, even in government approved "churches," is added to your digital profile. After all, in an atheistic society there is no need to pay ultimate honour to anyone besides your benign earthly ruler who demands total obedience as lord of your life in return for providing you with the necessities of life.

Whether the Chinese government will be successful in forcing its will on virtually every aspect of Chinese life remains to be seen, but it is clear that confessing Christ as ultimate Lord of life could come at a significantly increased cost.

Sources used: Gordon G. Chang, "China's 'Digital' Totalitarian Experiment" on the Gatestone Institute website.



Denver Family Camp

As I am writing this article it is the time of summer when Denver congregation usually finishes the final touches in preparation for the annual church camp. This year, however, there is no such rush of activity, but only a reflection on another wonderful camp! My Camp Eden mug, filled with steaming coffee, is sitting next to me on the desk to help me organize my thoughts to try to put on paper another fantastic camp!

The Denver Church Camp has shifted from the second weekend in August to the weekend in July that falls just after the Fourth of July. This year the Fourth of July fell on a Wednesday, so for many the festivities already began mid-week. Quite a few of our out-of-town visitors joined us for some American patriotism and fireworks shows. It was great to spend this extra time with brothers and sisters from Canada and elsewhere! It always strikes me how

brothers and sisters in Christ have an instant kinship that allows for close fellowship. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

The beauty of Camp Eden never ceases to amaze; even to us locals it is awe-inspiring and a reminder of God’s glory! It is always a perfect setting to reflect on God’s Word, and this year there was specific focus on our task as church of Christ to witness Christ Jesus to the world. “Church arise, and make Christ known!” Rev. Ian Wildeboer, who has done missionary work in Papua New Guinea, explained what this means in terms of a church community knowing her calling, a church community living her calling, and a church community circumspect about her calling. Are we witnessing Christ to our neighbours, at work, in the community? Are we in constant prayer for our unbelieving neighbours?





Do we invite our unbelieving neighbours into our homes where Christ is loved and his love evident? Do we invite them to church, and is our church a welcome environment, without compromising our faith and doctrine? Rev. Wildeboer exposed biblically what it means, and the importance thereof, to be a church that makes Christ known.

We had quite a few visitors from Canada this year, as well as from Washington State. The kids and youth connected immediately, and I heard parents commenting, “I hardly see my children, did we bring them?” The answer (I think) was that they were having so much fun engaging with each other and the fun activities at camp. Nine Square in the gym is a big event every year. This year was no different with some, really displaying their competitive side, although it was decided that those with height had a definite advantage. Something that notably stood out this year was the Canadian zeal for hockey! There were a few very focussed and competitive hockey games! So happy we were when one of our own, who rivals Canadian hockey skills, showed up at camp Saturday and gave some contest!

Needless to say, there is no Denver Church Camp without those zip-lining memories! We just have to look at past camps’ pictures to see the enjoyment that both young and old get from zip-lining. Of course, sometimes the enjoyment is more on the side of the spectators than that of the zip-liner.

While we had to vacate Camp Eden this year on the Sunday afternoon due to a conflict they had, it did not take away from the fellowship that Sunday evening. After the afternoon worship service we moved to a reception hall just down the road where the men grilled burgers and hot dogs and the ladies prepared a delicious meal with sides and ice cream bar for dessert. Voices filled the hall with songs of praise and hearts were full of joy and thanksgiving! “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forever more” (Ps 133:1-3).

My Camp Eden coffee mug is empty, so I will leave you with this: we give thanks to our heavenly Father each year for his provision, his grace, his mercy, his unbounding love, and his unfailing Word! Camp means a lot to our small community, it takes a bit of work to put together each year, but the rewards far outweigh this small effort. We are thankful and continually encouraged by our brothers and sisters who come from Canada and elsewhere. Lord willing we will come together again next July for another wonderful camp!





English Conference 1: In Pursuit of a Safe Book

This report is the first installment covering a first-ever, two-day English Conference for teachers from Christian schools, supported by the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches.

In May, many of the twenty-three participants from the East and the West descended from the skies into friendly Manitoba, onto the James Armstrong Richardson Airport's runway, in eager anticipation of a wonderful two-day conference for Language Arts or English teachers of upper elementary to senior high grades. We united with five colleagues from Dufferin (Carman, MB) and Immanuel (Winnipeg, MB) Christian Schools, and with two presenters: Dr. Deanna Smid, from the University of Brandon, MB, and Dr. David Slomp, from the University of Lethbridge, Alberta.

Why did we meet together? Language Arts and English teachers were invited by Reformed Curriculum Development Committee (RCDC) to collaborate and learn together, not just to improve our personal knowledge of each other, but to discuss and share commonalities, issues, and approaches in our subject

Our not-so-innocent children and teenagers need tools to read, to discern, to become wise

specific areas of language arts. As we shared and learned from each other, and as we learned and interacted with our two presenters, we all were motivated to take to our school what we have learned, to share with our staffs, and to continue in our professional development. Obviously, we could take a

professional conference closer to our own homes, but that wouldn't allow us to collaborate beyond our province, or more specifically, with Reformed colleagues who teach in similar Christian schools. Perhaps in Ontario or in the Fraser Valley teachers are privileged to do so, but in other areas of Canada, teachers have a harder time to share and work

together with teachers who teach the same grade and the same subject as you do, and who struggle with the same issues and situations as you do. The face-to-face collaboration is most ideal to share, learn, and grow from each other. It also promotes continued meaningful e-collaboration in curriculum work, something that RCDC really wants to promote. It is the RCDC who not only invited us to this conference, but who also financed the majority of this conference. A big thank you to RCDC.

Dr. Deanna Smid entitled her presentation, "Selecting Literature to Promote Critical Thinking" or "In Pursuit of a Safe Book." She quickly informed us that a safe book does not exist. Not even in our carefully selected Christian school classrooms or libraries. We are all sinful writers and we are all sinful readers. Placing warning labels in books is not the answer to a safe read either, as good as the label may be.

So, what do we do in our school libraries? She urged us to develop a better focus. Our focus should not be in "protecting" a child and in "creating" a safe place for the child. If we do only that, then our child will not read critically, but blindly; not discerningly, but blissfully ignorant of the sins that can be overtly or covertly written on the pages of the book.

We are people of the printed word, and so Christian teachers want to inculcate the desire to read among our students. Not only that, but we want to encourage a lasting desire to read throughout elementary, high school, and beyond. True, words can be so convincing, words can move a person to action, words can be harnessed for good or evil, and words (stories) are powerful; but read, we must! Dr. Smid argued that many of us, Christian parents and teachers, are operating under an incorrect theological premise: sins are in the book so we need to protect our innocent children from them. This argument, she says, is a fallacy: Innocence in children is a myth. Our not-so-innocent children and teenagers need tools to read, to discern, to become wise. Does the Bible blot out sins? No. Why not? To move us

to *right* actions. To inspire *good*. Parents and teachers need to do likewise.

To read rightly, Dr. Smid continues, we need to consider the *point of view* of the book and *our own* point of view. Do the authors want readers to revel in sinful actions, or do they want readers to reject the sinful behaviours, seeing how troublesome, devastating, and far reaching the effects of sins can be? Do we want to revel in sin as we choose and read a book, or do we want to grow in knowledge and wisdom and service as we read the book?

Parents and teachers must teach children how to read for intellectual and character growth, which includes spiritual growth. How? We need to have discussions with them about a book. Ask open questions about the good parts, the bad parts, or ask them what was sinful in this story. Ask them what they like about the book, or what they learned from the book. Share or let them share the good things in the story.

Talking and conferencing about what they read will make children reflect and will guide them in critical analysis.

Oh yes, there still is room to reject a book; there still is censorship. Not all censorship is bad, but “what we read is only a tiny and secondary question.” The more important and vital consideration is how we read and teach our children to read, with *faith* rather than with *fear*, looking for a book’s purpose and point of view while we make sure that our own purpose and point of view is aligned with Christ (God’s Word). We and our children may never be just passive consumers of literature. We need to understand the book’s world view. We need to teach that too.

Dr. Deanna Smid, after entertaining questions, comments, and deeper discussions from the audience, stepped aside for Dr. David Slomp to take over. This will be covered in the second part of our article, to be published in the next issue of *Clarion*.

C



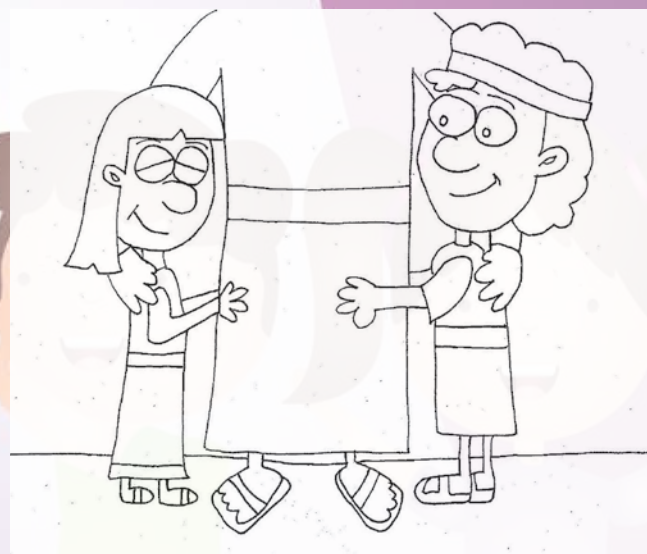
Clarion Kids

Let the Children Come to Me

Matthew 19:13-15, Luke 18:15-17

There were mothers and fathers who believed in what Jesus was teaching them, and they wanted to bring their children to Jesus so that he could bless them and pray for them. When they brought their children to Jesus, the disciples tried to send them away. Jesus told the disciples not to send them away, but to let the children come to him. He said that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them as well. That means that Jesus wants you to come to him as well. Children (including you!) are a very important part of the church and of God's work.

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



Letter Tiles:

Rearrange the letter tiles in the empty boxes below to unscramble some of Jesus' words.

R	T	.	"	G	D	O	F	O	M	E	,	F	H	E	N	S	A	I		
M	E	D	,	T	O	K	I	N	A	S	B	E	L	R	E	N	E	A	V	
H	E	U	C	H	O	S	"	L	E	T	L	E	M	O	E	S	E	L	I	T
C	H	C	O	T	H	J	E	S	H	E	I	L	D	S	T	O	N	G		
U	S	T	T																	

by Emily Nijenhuis

All About Lindsay Kottelenberg



Hi. My name is Lindsay Kottelenberg. I am twenty-eight years old and I just celebrated my birthday this past October. I have been living at the Lighthouse in Fergus for over five years. Last year, my sister Shaelyn moved to the Lighthouse too. I love having her here! There are eight residents at the Lighthouse. The staff are wonderful, and it is a great place to live.

I grew up in Orangeville. My parents still live in that area. As a baby, I was diagnosed with Joubert Syndrome. Part of my brain didn't fully develop. This affects my vision, speech, muscle tone, balance, and intellectual abilities. I can walk on my own, but I walk with a walker outside or if there are a lot of people or objects around. For longer distances, I use a wheelchair. I have to wear splints on my feet. I use a CCTV (Closed Circuit TV) to read.

Even though I have different abilities, there are many things that I love to do. I love to laugh and joke around with the staff at the Lighthouse or anyone else who likes to joke around! I enjoy going to the ALAS adult day program in Orangeville on Mondays. I volunteer at Mission Thrift Store on Wednesdays, where I sort books. I help with collecting recycling at Maranatha Christian School and with delivering papers in the neighbourhood. I also help with chores at the Lighthouse like dishes, cleaning my room, and doing my

laundry. Several different people take me out during the week for various activities including shopping, swimming, visiting, and crafts. I go to Women's Society and I love to sing in the Church Choir. In the summer, I really enjoy Anchor Camp and camping or going on other trips with my family. I love to visit people, especially my family, including my Dad and Mom, my sisters and their families, and my Opa and Oma. I have six nieces and nephews. I love to make cards and other crafts, play games, read on my CCTV, or socialize and play games on my iPad. I also love to watch movies on Netflix or on my TV.

I am so thankful that God has provided the Anchor Homes for people who need assistance with living as adults, and that he has allowed me to live at the Lighthouse! I am also thankful for all the people who support the Anchor Association. If you are ever in the town of Fergus, come visit us. You will be more than welcome!

November Birthdays

3 WILMA VAN DRONGELEN will be 61

1892 Horizon Street
Abbotsford, BC V2S 3J4

Congratulations on celebrating your birthday this month Wilma! We wish you a blessed day and years ahead in the Lord's loving care.

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





Q Do office bearers have to sit up front?

In some churches the elders and deacons sit with their families, while in other churches they sit in a designated set of seats. Is there a biblical reason that they should be sitting together up front?

A The questioner adds to this question some points she is wrestling with as a consistory wife. “It seems to me it creates an unnecessary burden on their families, especially the wives, to not have the heads of their households sitting with them. Often there are multiple children in the family and having Dad there just helps Mom be able to focus on the sermon better. Plus, the Dad is gone a lot with his work and visits. . . . So, in my opinion, Sundays are a good day to sit together in church.”

It’s not the first time this question has come up. It has been raised in meetings of councils and consistories; our own daughters have wondered about it aloud as they sat with their 7, 8, or 9 children by themselves with hubby in the elders’ pew; I have been queried about it by a few office bearers’ wives in a pastoral visit. As pastor I had very little to say since my own beloved wife did the same for many, many years, yet without even the possibility of finding a solution in which her hubby could assist. . . ☺. Thankfully, I’ve never had to come off the pulpit to reprimand one of my own dear children (sinners nonetheless)!

As far as doing some research on the question, I found little with which I could work in formulating an answer. Looking for a “biblical reason,” as the questioner wonders,

I could make reference to the Old Testament passage of Nehemiah 8: 4-13, where Ezra the priest/scribe brought the Law before the assembly and “stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose.” And beside him stood six leaders on his right hand and seven leaders on his left hand. That would give you a picture much like the front of the auditorium in our Reformed church buildings, which may have been a biblical inference for the set-up of our leaders’ position in the assembly.

As for the New Testament, another inference could be adduced considering one of the Greek words for elder, namely overseer, *episcopos* (from which the English word “bishop” is derived). The office bearers have “oversight” over the congregation. On a raised platform, in pews enabling them to oversee the congregation, they are in a position of having oversight so as to ascertain the members’ presence and participation. Of course, such oversight is rather limited, but their position could also be considered *symbolic* for their supervision. It also provided the congregation a view of the leaders, “knowing them that labour among you.”

Another consideration for this practice could be the message projected by their position, namely that the worship service is not something in which the minister organizes the service, or operates as a “one man show” as is sometimes alleged. The council of the church is in charge of the service and by their handshake at the beginning of

EXAMINATION SUSTAINED

Examined by Classis Pacific West on September 18, 2018, and declared eligible for call:

Br. Iwan Borst

PREPARATORY EXAMINATION SUSTAINED

As per Article 8 of the Church Order, after receiving approval from Regional Synod East

Dr. Jeff Temple

sustained his preparatory examination and has been granted permission to speak an edifying word in the churches of Classis Ontario West

CALL DECLINED

Declined the call extended to him by the Canadian Reformed Church at Cloverdale, BC:

Rev. R.J. den Hollander

of the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church in Grassie, Ontario

CHURCH NEWS

the service they mandate and authorize the minister to administer the Word and the sacraments. This, too, is mostly symbolic, in which the handshake as well has a more historic meaning and background. Nevertheless, the position of authority which the office bearers have in the congregation can thus be visibly recognized.

These observations and considerations, however, cannot be adduced as a biblical reason for the understanding of the practice. At best, it may give some practical, symbolic, and historical context. Having said this, I am sure that

some of this can be maintained, while also showing empathy to mothers like our questioner, accommodating such mothers by making exceptions upon request, or by way of a rotating schedule, or by having just the “serving elder” and an “accompanying elder,” together with some serving deacons sit up front (as is practised already in some congregations). Thus the symbolism, the biblical overtones, and the presentation of the minister’s fellow-servants will all be maintained, while the mothers of restless children are helped and enabled to focus on worship and listening! **C**



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. denHollander
denhollanderw@gmail.com**

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0

Press Release for the Classis Central Ontario meeting held on September 6-7, 2018, in Burlington, Ontario

Evening Session, Thursday, September 6, 2018 at 7:30pm

It was a warm summer evening in September as eager delegates representing the various Classis Central Ontario churches gathered together in the Ebenezer, Burlington church building. Rev. Jake Torenvliet, on behalf of the convening church of Redemption Canadian Reformed Church, cordially welcomed all delegates, as well as the visitors in the gallery. He opened the meeting by way of requesting the singing of Hymn 84:1-4; the reading of Galatians 2:1-10; and prayer. In addition to requests for God's continued grace and blessing on the proceedings, a number of additional matters were remembered in prayer: the birthday of Rev. John van Popta, his ongoing health concerns, and his impending retirement. It was also noted with praise and thanksgiving that Rev. Ian Wildeboer had recently accepted the call extended to him by the Blessings Christian Church of Hamilton to serve as pastor in a second location in East Hamilton. Finally, petitions were laid at God's throne of grace with respect to the upcoming pastoral vacancy in the Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church.

The executive consisting of Rev. John van Popta as chairman, Rev. Jake Torenvliet as vice-chairman, and Rev. Dr. Bill DeJong as official clerk, took their respective seats. Classis proceeded to the first exciting matter on the agenda: the requested *colloquium doctum* for Rev. Ian Wildeboer in connection with the transfer of his ministerial credentials from the Free Reformed Church of Australia in Armadale to the Blessings Christian Church of Hamilton, member church of the Federation of Canadian Reformed Churches.

Judging his *colloquium doctum* to be satisfactory, Classis approbated the call to Rev. Ian Wildeboer. Classis sang a song of blessing: Psalm 134:3; Rev. Dr. Bill DeJong led the body in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Rev. Jake Torenvliet of the neighbouring congregation of Redemption Canadian Reformed Church was appointed to represent Classis at the installation of Rev. Ian Wildeboer on September 16, 2018 during the 10:30 am worship service.

In the time remaining, Classis reviewed with thanksgiving the various annual reports: Report on Archives; Report on the Audit of the Books of the Treasurer; Report on Needy Churches; Report on the Books for the Fund for Needy Churches.

At 9:30pm, Classis adjourned for the day by singing Hymn 78:1, 3. Rev. John van Popta closed in prayer.

Session Two: Friday, September 7, 2018 at 9:00am

Rev. John van Popta called the meeting to order. He led a meditation on Psalm 90; invited the body to sing from Hymn 54:1, 3, 8; and opened with prayer.

Classis received with thanksgiving the Financial Report of the Treasurer for Classis Central Ontario. The classical assessment fee for each communicant member has been set at \$3.00 per communicant member (\$2.00 for Regional Synod assessment; \$1.00 for Classical assessment).

Regarding a request from the Rehoboth Canadian Reformed Church concerning Redemption Canadian Reformed Church's interpretation of the Church Order, Articles 53 & 55, Classis unanimously decided that "only songs approved in Article 55 be sung in public worship service," and that "consistory has the freedom to observe days of commemoration in alternate ways that would not be regarded as public worship services, for which Article 55 would not apply." Delegates from Redemption and Rehoboth abstained from the vote.

Regarding a proposal from Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church to modify Classis Central Ontario regulations, Classis adopted amendments (a) to reflect the names of all member churches in alphabetical order, (b) to include prayer as an agenda item after each church visitation report is tabled at the June Classis meeting, and (c) to give opportunity at the September classis for each church to report on their mission activities, both locally and abroad.

Regarding a proposal from Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church to modify Classis Central Ontario Regulations, Classis adopted amendments concerning (a) clarity of language in connection with articles pertaining to the cancellation of a Classis meeting, (b) voting procedures, (c) the circulation of church visitation reports to appointed delegates prior to the meeting of Classis, and (d) the approbation of calls in relation to a *Classis Contracta*.

Classis adopted an amended overture from Bethel Canadian Reformed Church to overture General Synod Edmonton 2019 via Regional Synod East “to revise the forms for celebration of Lord’s Supper by replacing gender specific pronouns intended to include both genders with gender inclusive pronouns.”

Classis adopted an amended overture from Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church for submission to Regional Synod East to be sent as an overture to General Synod Edmonton 2019 to amend Article 55 of the Church Order to read: “The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in public worship. The metrical Psalms and hymns adopted by General Synod, as well as songs approved by consistory that faithfully reflect the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, shall be sung in public worship.”

According to the questions stated in Church Order, Article 44, each church was able to answer that the ministry of the gospel is being maintained, that the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured, and that the judgment of Classis on matters related to the governance of their church was not needed.

Blessings Church was appointed to convene the next classis meeting to be held on December 14, 2018 (alternate date March 22, 2019). Suggested officers for the next classis meeting: Rev. Dr. Bill DeJong as chairman; an elder of Jubilee church as vice-chairman; and Rev. Gerrit Bruintjes as clerk.

According the Classis Central Ontario Regulation, Article 7, new appointments were made to the following posi-

tions: Rev. Clarence Vandervelde and Rev. Dr. Bill DeJong were appointed to the Committee of Examiners; Rev. Clarence Vandervelde (convener), Rev. Dr. Bill DeJong, Rev. Anthony Roukema, and Rev. Gerrit Bruintjes (as alternate) were appointed as church visitors; Ebenezer Church was appointed to take of the archives; Fellowship Church was appointed to inspect the archives; Rehoboth Church was appointed to audit the books of the treasurer, and to audit the books of the Fund for the Needy Churches; Jack Spithoff was appointed as treasurer (Harry Sloots as alternate); Leo Kampen, Kent Baartman, and Ed Jans were appointed to the Committee for Needy Churches; Rev. John van Popta was appointed church counsellor for Fellowship Church.

For the upcoming Regional Synod East to be held on November 14, 2018 at the Ebenezer-Burlington church building, the following were appointed as delegates: As primary minister delegates Rev. Dr. Bill DeJong and Rev. Clarence Vandervelde; as first alternate minister Rev. Anthony Roukema, as second alternate Rev. Winston Bosch; as primary elder delegates John Jager and Gerald Boot; as first alternate elder delegate Chris van Popta, and second alternate Cornelius Broersema.

Personal question period was held.

Censure according to Church Order, Article 34 was not made use of.

After adoption of the Acts and Press Release Rev. Jake Torenvliet closed the meeting with thanksgiving prayer.

Jake Torenvliet, Vice-chairman **C**

