

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

V 67 N 23 NOVEMBER 16 2018

Faith needs testing



**BLESSED ARE THE MEEK
TRUE NEED AND THE MINISTRY OF MERCY**

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

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

2018 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

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2018 ADVERTISING RATES

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Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch.
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PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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We acknowledge the financial support
of the Government of Canada.



Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Our lead article of Issue 23 comes from our editor, Dr. James Visscher. "Joy in Suffering?" The article asks if perhaps the apostle James got it wrong – can we really "count it all joy" when life can be very hard?

Following up from the previous issue, we have the second half of Rev. Peter Holtvliwer's "Discerning True Need in an Age of Entitlement." There is also an article from Dr. Karlo Janssen, "Faith is God's Gift – But How?"

Regular columns this issue include Treasures, New & Old, Church News Review, Clippings on Politics & Religion, and *Clarion Kids*. In addition, there is Mission News, a letter to the editor, a book review, and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

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Joy in Suffering?

A tested faith leads to fruit

Long ago the apostle James wrote these words, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds” (James 1:2). What kind of words are they? To most unbelievers these are utterly ridiculous words. “How in the world,” they would say, “can you be full of joy when you find yourself in tough times?” To many believers they may not be ridiculous, but they are challenging, to say the least.

How can you be “joyful” when you have just visited the doctor and been told that you have terminal cancer? How can you be so if the police have just come to your door and told you that your son died last night in a car accident? How can you respond in this way when one of your children comes to you and tells you that they do not believe in God? How can you feel this when you are confronted with the ravages of war, the destructiveness of an earthquake or hurricane, the devastation of a terrorist bombing? Truly, there are so many situations in life that are nothing less than joy thieves. They sap you of all happiness.

Did James get it wrong?

So, is James mistaken? Did he somehow mistake the Holy Spirit’s leading? Not if you go on and read the rest of his letter. Consider his words in chapter 1, verse 12, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.” Or what about these, “Behold, we consider those blessed (happy) who remain steadfast” (James 5:11).

Perhaps James is out of step with the rest of the New Testament? Not if we read what Paul writes in Philippians 4. “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (v. 4). Did you catch the word “always”? Did you hear the command to rejoice no matter what? James can count on Paul for support. And he can also count on Peter, who writes, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it

comes upon you to test you. . . but rejoice” (1 Pet 4:12). Together, then, James, Paul, and Peter are singing the same song. They are all urging believers to be joyful when faced with trials.

But, of course, they are not the final authorities – Jesus is. And is his message any different? Not really! In the Sermon on the Mount he utters the following beatitude, “Blessed are you when other revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad. . .” (Matt 5:11, 12). So, how do you react to slander, persecution, and injustice? You react to these things, our Saviour says, with joy and gladness.

Is the gospel absurd?

In summary, one might be led to say, “Is the gospel ever strange, unnatural, unpredictable, unexpected, even absurd?” And in a way you are entirely right. It goes against the grain of our fallen human nature. According to it, we expect trials to be met with determination and resistance. We expect insults to be met with anger, sickness with frustration and desperation, death with bitterness.

Yet that is not the Christian way. And why is that? For an answer we need to delve a little deeper into the words of James. The opening words of his letter indicate that he is writing to struggling saints. He calls them “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (v.1). What he means is that the believers of his day are on the move. Perhaps at one time they had lived and put down roots in one place or another, but no longer. Persecution has driven them out of their homes. They have been spread like seed all over the Mediterranean world. It is all reminiscent of what we read in Acts 8:4, where Christians are called “those who were scattered.”

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of the Bethel United Reformed Church in Woodstock, Ontario

CHURCH NEWS

And that represents a hard life. Little wonder that James mentions “trials of various kinds” (1:2). Starting from scratch in a whole new place or country is not without trials and troubles. Making a living, settling into a new neighbourhood, finding a job, feeding a family all in a foreign place is no picnic. Ask any refugee.

Why, it is enough to cause one to become depressed. The temptation to cry out “woe is me, woe is me,” and to crawl into a shell or a hole in the ground is great. Nevertheless, that is not the way to react to these difficult circumstances. James urges us not to see them as insurmountable negatives. Rather look at them as positives. For these trials can also be seen as tests of faith.

Faith needs testing

Now, if anything in life needs testing it is faith. A faith that only knows comfort and ease is usually a shallow faith. A faith that never experiences any setbacks, sicknesses, struggles, troubles, or challenges is more often than not a superficial faith. A faith that has never had to sacrifice anything is often a fair-weather faith. To be strong, faith needs to be tested.

But not only that, for a tested faith leads to fruit. It has certain outcomes. James says that “the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (1:3). Now, what is that? It describes a person whose life has an anchor. You all know what happens when a hurricane barrels into town. The wind picks up and before you know it stuff is flying all over the place. Nothing seems to be tied down. A little wind comes along and it flies here and there and everywhere. Yes, and the same goes for our lives. This trouble comes along, that hardship hits us, and emotionally we are suddenly all over the place – up and down, this and that. We do not know where to turn or what to do.

Steadfastness?

Well, all of that is the opposite of steadfastness. A steadfast person does not panic, pull out their hair, and run for the hills. No, he or she stands firm. They take what life throws at them. How do they do that? They do it by getting down on their knees and calling on God. They do it by reminding themselves of what kind of a Saviour they have. They do it by turning to that Other Counsellor. They do it by opening all those letters from God found in the Bible. They do it by clinging to the sure and steadfast promises of the LORD. What a marvellous quality it is.

But, also, what a necessary quality, for James goes on to say that steadfastness is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a way to an even greater end which is one day becoming “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:4). You can sense here that James takes a long view of life. In doing so he is different from many of us. For so often we take the short view. Our concern is with the here and now. What matters is today. We look no further than the present.

Perfect people for a perfect world

And that is a sad way to live. For James wants to remind us that lives are meant for more than the here and now. They are meant for eternity. They are meant to have a glorious goal, and that goal is perfection, wholeness, completeness, and fullness. In short, we must not settle for our present broken lives. God wants us to realize that he has a plan and purpose for his people. One day we are going to live on a new heaven and a new earth, in a new Jerusalem, and we are going to live there as new people. As the kind of people that he originally wanted us to be. In the beginning, he made Adam in his image and likeness. He made him good. But Adam botched it. And in him, all of mankind botched it as well. But that is not the end. A permanent, fallen, sinful, struggling state is not the end.

No, a new day and a new world is coming, and it calls for new people. It calls, James writes, for people who are “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:4).

Now, that is the program. If you are a child of God, then you are part of this program. In addition, if you belong to him, you need to realize that God is doing a good work in you. Sure, trials and troubles and tribulations will come, but they are not meant to defeat you. No, they are meant to make you strong. They are meant to give muscle to your faith. They are meant to push your forward on that road that leads to perfection, completeness, and glory.

Well, when you embrace this kind of a perspective, what is there not to be glad about? Joy in suffering? Indeed, it's not a contradiction! It's a partnership. “Suffering is sure to come, and I am going to greet it not with despair but with hope. For I know that it will make me stronger and stronger in the faith and more connected than ever to Jesus Christ my Lord.”





Blessed Are the Meek

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5)

“Nice guys finish last” – that’s the world’s take on being meek. The Greek word which Christ uses for being meek also means being gentle, humble, considerate, and unassuming. The world, however, emphasizes self-assertion to the point of aggressiveness and says that, if necessary, you should even kick and elbow your way toward your goal. The world is about conquest. Grab what you want.

There is a progression of thought in the beatitudes, and the preceding two beatitudes lead up to this third beatitude. Christ first spoke about “the poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3) and “those who mourn” (Matt 5:4). The poor in spirit are those who realize that because of sin they are spiritual beggars who have no merits of their own to bring into the presence of God. And they are sorry for their sins and mourn over their sins.

Then Christ spoke the third beatitude. There is a shift in focus with the third beatitude. Whereas the two preceding beatitudes are about us and our attitude before God in confessing that we are sinners and having sorrow about our sins, the third beatitude is

about us in relation to other people. Meekness, gentleness, and considerateness are qualities that we display in relation to others.

Although there is a shift in focus, there is a strong connection. When we are poor in spirit and mourn because of our sins, this will impact for the better how we relate to other people. Having a correct view of ourselves as sinners who need redemption by Jesus Christ the Saviour will express itself in our attitude and conduct toward others. Since we live by the grace and kindness of God, would we not show kindness to others?

This meekness of which Christ speaks is not a matter of being the kind of person who by nature has a laid-back character. Christ is talking about a *norm* for the kingdom of heaven. All Christians should be meek, gentle, humble, considerate, and unassuming. This meekness can only come about in our lives by the working of the Holy Spirit. We ought to pray for this.

Christ is not teaching that we must be a doormat for others. We may stand up for ourselves. The Bible also teaches

justice and the defense of those in distress. But overbearing personalities who must always have their way, people who engage in one-upmanship – trying to outdo others in what they say and do – and those who retaliate when slighted, are out of synch with this beatitude. This involves a daily struggle against our sinful nature because it isn’t easy to give up selfish ambition, or to banish the desire to get even, or to bite our tongue in a quarrel.

The Bible tells us that Christ “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” (Phil 2:6, 7). Within that context, we are instructed: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil 2:3, 4).

In this beatitude, Christ promises a reward: the meek shall inherit the earth. An inheritance is received as a gift and is not obtained by conquest. Is anything we might kick and elbow for better than inheriting the whole earth?

For further study

1. Look up 1 Peter 2:23. What does this tell us about our Saviour as the supreme example of meekness as he lived on this earth and made his way to the cross for our sins?
2. Think of some scenarios in your life when you are not meek, gentle, humble, considerate, and unassuming. Reflect on how you can change your approach to people.





Discerning True Need in An Age of Entitlement (Part 2 of 2)

Note: This is a slightly edited version of a speech first presented at a Deacons' Conference in Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church several years ago. Some aspects of the oral address have been maintained in this written version. The previous article concluded with Paul's reference in 1 Timothy 5:3 to widows who are truly in need. This article continues to unpack what the apostle means in discerning such a needy person.

Criteria #1 – All alone

Paul mentions at least two criteria that we are to look for. The first comes in verse 5, where the widow who is truly a widow is described as one “who is left all alone. . .” – no husband, no adult children, no family to look after her. That's one major factor in determining people really in need of the church's help and something the deacons will need to look for and teach the people under their care. This passage makes it very clear that biological family members have the first duty to assist their needy relative. The closer the relation, the greater the obligation. Verse 8 lays it out plainly, “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Deacons are not called to be the first responders in a financial crisis, not when there is family that can help. Deacons may face this situation more and more, where church members would sooner call in the deacons than to approach family members because of a) their sense of entitlement (that's how “the system” works, this is what they are “supposed” to do), and b) the comfort of confidentiality and anonymity. Deacons don't usually know a person or couple and their circumstances in the same way that close blood relatives do, and some people are counting on that. Family members can know too much or be perceived as nosy. With these ministers of mercy there's a certain comfortable distance or arms'-length approach, as well as the assurance that the deacons won't tell anyone about it.

That's what we all like about government aid, right? It is more or less anonymous and comes without personal ques-

tions or having to answer to anyone for how the money is spent. What I might *not* dare ask of my family (because they know me, they see what I do with the money, and because they'll ask too many questions), I may seek from the deacons, who are one step removed and easier to deal with.

Family involvement

As deacons, if you encounter a person or couple that has not yet sought help from family, be aware that their mindset might be to deliberately avoid involving the family and then set out to gently instruct them to do so. Be compassionate, be understanding. Listen carefully, always. Be patient. It may require one or two visits to sort out. You may even see fit to provide short-term relief on the spot because the need is urgent, but still you should direct them to seek help from family. You may even need to help them bridge that gap by setting up a meeting or perhaps going to speak separately with the family members or speaking on the phone if they are some distance away. Deacons have a role here to teach, if necessary, both the needy person/couple and their family members. If the people involved love the Lord and want to live out of his Word, they will respond favourably to your direction.

Getting the family involved has at least a few benefits. First, it makes them active in the service of mercy and charity and they will be blessed in following in Christ's footsteps. Second, it will also make the needy person able to discern what he or she should be requesting help with, knowing that their own blood relatives will be sacrificing for them. If my brother-in-law or my father-in-law is going to provide two hundred dollars each per month so that my children can stay in the Christian school, am I really going to keep my satellite TV? Or my membership down at the Y? Individuals or couples may think nothing of asking for the deacons to help while they keep these things which are not truly needs, but it will be different when they know that close relatives are sacrificing to help them. Family involvement will help the needy couple become more focussed in

deciding what are needs and what are wants, what they should give up and what is a must, and therefore will become more careful in trying to live within their means.

Criteria #2: The devoted needy

For that ties in with the second criteria Paul gives here in verse 5, where the widow who is truly in need is she who “puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.” That’s quite a statement and quite a contrast!

The Holy Spirit tells us there are two kinds of widows, two kinds of people in need. Simply because a woman has lost a husband – and that could apply also to a woman whose husband has abandoned her, divorced her, or otherwise left her on her own – as grievous as that is, that in itself does not qualify her for the church’s financial support. The important question is: whom does she trust? Is the needy person looking to serve the Lord, to walk with the Lord, or to walk her own way? Is it personal pleasure she’s after or God’s honour? She not only must be truly in need but in her difficult circumstances, she must also be diligently looking to the Lord for help.

Strange as it may sound to us, Paul knew of widows who used their new-found singleness to seek their own pleasure. Some of them may have had their own inheritance, their own independent wealth which they were then using for themselves. In verse 11, Paul speaks of some younger widows being overcome by sensual desire – apparently to the point of wanting to marry outside the Lord. That’s what he means in verse 12, when he speaks of these widows bringing judgment on themselves by breaking their first pledge (more literally, *their former faith*; see ESV). Others were acting like busybodies and gossips, going from house to house and stirring up trouble in the church. Such widows were not to be enrolled on the list of the needy for diaconal assistance. Instead, they needed to be visited by the elders and admonished!

The widow who is truly in need of aid is the one who not only has little or no financial capability of her own but who nevertheless is dedicated from the heart to the service of the Lord – exactly like that widow whom the Lord Jesus observed throwing her last penny into the temple treasury. She’s not able to put food on her plate and has no money to pay rent. There is no way for her to earn an income. This is a desperate woman. She is on the edge of *not* making it! This is not someone who has the cupboards full of food, keeps paying for a cell phone, Internet access, and cable TV, but has long ago stopped giving anything to the church and now needs help making a school payment or mortgage payment and comes with their hand out to the deacons.

Educating the “needy”

Brothers, when you meet a family or person with this mindset, you must again set out to educate. Not in a tight-fisted manner, but in a spirit of generosity and love, you need to instruct them about the love we are called to have for God and how, like that widow in the temple, we are to direct even our tiniest resources to his service, trusting the Lord to provide. That widow didn’t keep anything back from God but instead put her very life into his hands.

You will need wisdom and tact for this, so be sure to pray before you go on your visits. People often call you in an emergency and so you may need to assist with the emergency, but have an eye for the bigger picture and the longer term. Where is this couple at? Where is this sister going to be in two or three months or a year? What is the husband’s outlook and perspective? How do they look at their own money and the money given them by the deacons? What is their plan to get back on their feet and be in a position where they can not only meet their own needs but also be able to give to help others in need?

Stewardship

Teach them about stewardship. Take the long view and lead them to see it for themselves, out of the Scriptures. They need to understand the difference between pleasures and needs, between desirable extras and what is necessary to keep them from living, as the Form says, “uncomforted under the pressure of. . . poverty.” As deacons, you have been entrusted with the financial gifts of the brothers and sisters in the congregation. They gave of their love to help those truly in need. They sacrificed something of their income, perhaps giving up certain of their own pleasures, so that those who are really in need may be helped. As deacons you may not dispense those gifts carelessly or wastefully, for you will have to give an account to the Lord for your management of these resources.

You also would not be helping such people in the long run for the true need they have is to get the right, biblical perspective on financial resources, on God’s blessings and our service to God. You should make the people you are trying to help aware of all these things and put it to them: how can you receive the sacrifices of your brothers and sisters and not be willing to sacrifice anything yourself?

In short, God did not give deacons to enable church members to “keep up with the Joneses” or to maintain their chosen standard of living. Deacons are given to the church to show the mercy of Christ by helping to keep God’s people out of the misery of poverty. It’s that gap between true poverty and desired life-style that you brothers will increasingly encounter in our age of entitlement and which you will need wisdom to bridge through careful aid and gentle but persistent instruction, born out of love for Christ and his church.





Faith Is God's Gift – But How?

Human life is filled with things we do. What makes us do them? Do *we* do them? Does *God* do them? I just poured myself a coffee. Sat down, grabbed my phone, went to RO, and am now reading this. What got me here? Did I? Did God? The interplay of divine and human activity is puzzling.

The activity of faith

For example, take the activity of faith. With Canons of Dort chapter III/IV article 14 the Reformed confess that faith is a gift of God “because it is actually conferred on man, instilled and infused into him.” It is a gift in the sense that God “brings about in man both the will to believe and the act of believing.” Does God do the believing? Or do I?

That faith is a gift of God is taught in Scripture. Note the following two texts.

Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” Regardless of whether “this” and “it” refer to “faith” or to “you-have-been-saved-by-faith,” faith is here presented as a gift of God.

Philippians 1:29: “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him” The fact that “to believe” has been “granted” indicates it is a gift.

That faith is a gift of God will be agreed to by any Bible-believing Christian. But *how* is it a gift? On that, convictions differ. To explain that I’ll use the analogy of Jim giving Jenny chocolate.

An analogy

Some claim that faith is a gift in that God “presents” faith to a person. A person will then have to choose by his own (free) will whether or not to believe. This is like Jim holding out the chocolates and looking for Jenny to accept them.

The problem is: after the fall into sin man’s will is not free but totally corrupt. It only chooses evil. And man’s actions are only evil. Jenny will never accept the chocolates. She does not want to. She never will as she cannot. She loathes chocolate. And she loathes Jim.

A variant on this view notes that God also has to empower a person to believe. Jim has to endear himself to Jenny. And he has to get her to like chocolate.

But still: man’s will is not free. Even if Jim gets Jenny to like him and to like chocolate, she will never accept the chocolates. She will never want to. The will needs renewal.

The Reformed confess that God “confers” faith on man. Jim actually deposits the chocolate in Jenny’s lap. If she doesn’t want the chocolate, she’d have to give it back. Can man give faith back to God?

No, for God also “instills” faith into man. Jim actually takes the chocolate and puts it in Jenny’s mouth. If she doesn’t want the chocolate, she’ll first have to remove it from her mouth. Theoretically still possible. But. . . .

God even “infuses” faith into man. Jim actually makes Jenny chew the chocolate and swallow it. Give it back? Impossible. Indeed, God’s faith-giving-grace is “invincible” (the ‘I’ of TULIP).

Everything that needs correction in man to have him believe is accomplished by God. The mind is enlightened. The heart is opened. The will is renewed. Faith is given. And then man believes.

Yes, man himself believes. God does not believe for man.

After all, no one will say that Jim ate the chocolate. . . .

This article has been previously published on reformedoutfitters.com.





Women in Office in Fifty Congregations in Dutch Sister Churches

The recent general synod of our Dutch sister churches (the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands – liberated, hereafter RCN), held in Meppel in 2017 decided to open the offices of minister, elder, and deacon to women. The September 29, 2018 issue of *Onderweg* (vol. 4, no. 18) informs us in its news column how this decision is being implemented in the churches.

About fifty congregations out of 265 have allowed women to serve in at least one of the ecclesiastical offices. Thirty-two of those congregations have opened up the offices of elder and deacon and most of those have also permitted women to serve as a minister. In general, most of the congregations which have implemented women in office took the decision very quickly after Synod Meppel. A few congregations have delayed implementation until 2019.

These congregations are mostly found in cities, places such as Alkmaar, Amersfoort, Amsterdam, Arnhem, Assen, Eindhoven, Enschede, Haarlem, and Maastricht. Some smaller places where this decision has been implemented are Dronten, Haulerwijk, Langerak, Nunspeet, Roden, and Zwijndrecht.

About twenty congregations have only implemented women deacons. Examples of these congregations include Capelle aan den IJssel Zuid-West, Delft, De Lier-Maasluis, and a few congregations in Hardenberg. In some of these congregations, and also in many others, discussions are ongoing as to whether to open the other offices to women as well. The results of these discussions would be known some time next year (2019). Some congregations which decided not to implement women in office did so because they already have women involved formally as pastoral workers.

It is expected that about fifteen to twenty churches (including Bussum-Huizen, Capelle aan den IJssel Noord, Vlaardingse, and Zuidwolde (Drenthe)) will ask Synod

2020 to revisit the decision to open the offices to women. According to the church order of the RCN, it is possible for the churches to request General Synod to convene earlier than the normal three-year interval. It is necessary for two classes to approve such a request. It seems, however, improbable that this will actually happen. Classis Hoogeveen and Classis Rotterdam have received such a request but it was not adopted by either classis.

It is most distressing to see this rush to do in the church that which goes against the Word of God. The Lord has given us clear directives in Scripture concerning the offices of the church, that they are to be filled by men only (e.g. 1 Tim 2:12). He has created men and women differently and therefore they also fulfill different roles in the church. Those are good directives in accordance with how he made and designed men and women. What God has said and done is good and right. We do not need to and cannot improve upon his clear words in Scripture.

As men in the church, we need to take full responsibility for leadership in teaching and in having authority in the church. If we, as men, are unwilling to serve in office, then practically speaking pressure can build for women to assume these roles by default. Let us stay vigilant in these last days and be faithful in the roles God has given us as men and women in the church. May the Lord also strengthen and encourage those in the RCN who do desire to be faithful to God's Word and show them the way forward in obedience to him.

C





Rome and Beijing Sign an Agreement

The Vatican and the Chinese government have apparently reached an accord. It is a secret agreement, the terms of which have not (yet) been released (as of time of writing, September 28). Lianne Laurence writing on LifeSite News notes that the understanding reestablishes “diplomatic relations between China and the Holy See after 70 years.”

Central to the accord is that “Beijing will acknowledge the pope as head of the Catholic Church in China but have final say in appointing bishops, although the pope has a veto.” Furthermore, “The Vatican has also agreed to recognize and consecrate seven illegitimate ‘bishops’ it has previously rejected and who were installed by the Communist controlled Catholic Patriotic Association.” In addition, “The Vatican has requested two bishops from the persecuted Underground church step down in favour of ‘bishops’ from the Patriotic church.”

When one considers these terms, it is easy to understand why eighty-six-year-old Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong, the most senior Roman Catholic cleric on Chinese soil, called the deal “an incredible betrayal.” His anger and frustration is evident when he also said: “They’re giving the flock into the mouths of the wolves.” This agreement clearly gives the Communist regime official, Vatican-recognized control over the Roman Catholic Church in China.

There are approximately twelve million Chinese Roman Catholics, divided between the underground church, which swears loyalty to the Vatican, and the Catholic Patriotic Association, which is under the control of the Communist Party. In an interview with international news agency Reuters, Zen thought that only half of the underground church would go along with the deal. What would happen to the rest? Though loyal to the Vatican, the Holy See had abandoned them. Clearly if this deal is signed as expected, Pope Francis would lose considerable credibility in China among those who consider themselves faithful Roman Catholics, free from Communist control.

From Beijing’s point of view, this deal is exactly what they wanted. As Laurence noted: “The Communist Party long been determined to force underground Chinese Catholics out of the catacombs so they can be brought under

strict Party control.” If the Vatican had involved people like Zen in the negotiations, things may have turned out differently. Zen, after all, is “profoundly and personally aware of the nature of the officially atheistic, oneparty dictatorship that rules China.”

China expert Steve Mosher, who has helped underground Roman Catholics to build churches and orphanages, agrees with Zen that the agreement is a betrayal.

Actually, it is a betrayal on several levels. It betrays the authority of the papacy by giving the Chinese Communist Party the right to name bishops. It betrays the underground Church in China, a Church which not only has survived decades of persecution at the hands of the authorities but is now, once again, under siege. And. . . because it is a *secret* agreement, it betrays the Truth by allowing both sides to misrepresent it.

Whose purposes are being served by signing a secret agreement? . . . A secret agreement keeps Catholics in China and around the world in the dark about whatever compromises the Vatican has made. Even worse, it also allows the Communist authorities to misrepresent the agreement to the Chinese faithful in whichever way they choose. They will surely use the borrowed authority of the Vatican to undermine the faith of believers in China in their own Church.

One can expect that this Communist victory for complete control over the Roman Catholic Church in China will further embolden the Chinese regime to demand the same power over all Protestant churches, especially those now worshipping underground. This control includes ensuring that what is actually preached from the pulpit is agreeable to the Communist authorities.

Sources used: Lianne Laurence, “Top Vatican cardinal rebukes critics of China deal” and Steven Mosher, “Expert condemns Vatican for ‘betrayal’ in secret agreement with Communist China” both on Lifesitenews.com and James Pomfret, “Leading Asian cardinal calls for Vatican foreign minister to resign” on Reuters.com. **C**

The Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11

Near the end of his life on earth, Jesus came to Jerusalem. He told his disciples to go ahead of him, where they would find a young donkey that had never been ridden. The disciples did what Jesus said. Then they brought the donkey to Jesus and threw their coats on its back. Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem and many people laid their coats on the ground in front of him. Other people cut leafy branches and laid them on the road in front of Jesus. The people who saw him praised him and shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

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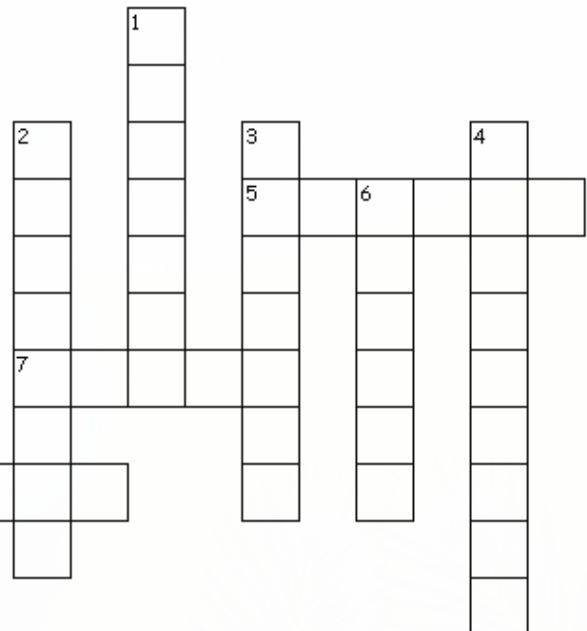
Crossword Puzzle

Across

5. The donkey had never been _____.
7. What the disciples put on the donkey's back.
8. Who Jesus sent ahead of him.

Down

1. The word people shouted when Jesus went by.
2. What people cut to lay on the ground.
3. The people _____ Jesus as he walked by.
4. City Jesus came to.
6. The animal Jesus told the disciples to find.



by Emily Nijenhuis

BOOK REVIEW

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***Little Known Little Gems: the Message of the Minor Prophets. A Lay-person's Guide.* (Aotearoa, New Zealand: MTL, 2018) by John Goris**

Additional Information: 55 pages; \$20 (NZ) + postage; 10 or more \$15 + postage; PDF \$10. Order from walter@matrix-typography.co.nz

Recognizing that the twelve Minor Prophets “are hardly known, hardly loved,” John Goris, a retired minister within the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, has set out to change that sad reality. To make Christians more appreciative of what God reveals in books that bear the names of prophets like Hosea, Obadiah, Zephaniah, and Malachi, Goris has written a fine and very readable survey of these twelve servants of the Lord. Actually, this book is more than a survey. After a brief introduction, the author gives a fine entry into the prophetic book which is being discussed by outlining the main ideas, paying particular attention to the message for its original audience and its relevance for today. Through it all, Goris shows how the Lord God revealed his love, justice, and mercy and how the prophets,



each in their own way, were pointing to the promised Saviour. It is remarkable that although these prophets often brought messages of doom and judgment, the gospel of God's consolation and love was never forgotten. Goris does a very good job of reminding his reader of this fact and how the prophetic message can impact our lives as well.

This book is not meant to be a detailed explanation of each of these prophets. Yet, it is packed with insightful comments and observations which draw the reader into this part of God's Word and makes one want to know more. Goris has also provided a helpful list of books which direct the reader to further resources for studying these prophets.

This short book, entitled, *Little Known Little Gems*, is actually a gem itself. It is packed full of good, solid, biblical insights and with its fresh approach provides in short compass a very attractive entry into each of the Minor Prophets. It is very useful for introducing the average church member into this rich but often neglected part of God's Word. Highly recommended!



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

It was with interest and gratitude that I read the speech of Dr. Arjan de Visser in *Clarion* recently. Like de Visser mentions, the idea of the church of Jesus Christ being our mother is not new. I just love the metaphor. de Visser quoting Calvin writes, “For there is no other way to enter life unless this mother conceive us in the womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, . . . she keep us under her care and guidance.” Throughout the article, de Visser refers to the church as “mother.” I love it. Reading this article, though, has stirred up a bee in my bonnet.

In 1995, I was teaching a grade 4 class at John Calvin School, Yarrow, BC. Our memory work included what was then Hymn 46:2. As I began to teach the students, some of the more vocal girls in the class objected to the use of the pronoun “it” as referring to the church. They argued that the bride of Christ is feminine and therefore ought to be referred to as “her” in the hymn. I suggested that they do the church orderly thing and address Synod 1995 (Abbotsford) with their concerns. They wrote a letter asking for the change in the next edition of the *Book of Praise* and Synod

decided to send the letter on to the Standing Committee of the *Book of Praise*. From the Acts:

Article 44: Observations:

K. *The students of Grade 4a of the John Calvin School of Yarrow ask Synod to change the references to the church in Hymn 46:2 from “it” to “her.”*

Article 44 Considerations:

L. *It is appropriate that requests regarding changes to the wording of psalms and hymns be submitted to the Committee. Seeing that the submission of the students of the John Calvin School has been passed on to the Committee, no further action is necessary. (Acts General Synod, Abbotsford, BC, 1995 Article 44, pages 21, 23)*

When the next edition of the *Book of Praise* came out in 2010, it was with some consternation among the class of '95 that the change had not been made. After some emails

back and forth with the chair of the committee, it was discovered that the letter of the Grade 4 class had been lost, and therefore never considered.

The article of Dr. de Visser brought all the angst of 2010 back again. I have an ongoing connection to those students of Grade 4a, John Calvin School, and I can say with confidence that there are quite a number that, when asked to sing the now Hymn 61:2, sing “her” lustily. I can say, too, that the students take Article 31 of the Church Order seriously as they (and their teacher) believe that the respectful and precise way to sing of the Mother who conceives us, gives us birth, nurtures us at her breast, and cares and guides us, ought to be referred to as “Her.” They believe the “unless” of Article 31.

God’s richest blessings,
John Siebenga, Houston, BC

*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.*



PRESS RELEASE

Press Release of Classis Manitoba held on September 28, 2018 at the Winnipeg Grace Canadian Reformed Church

Opening

On behalf of the Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg, Rev. H.J. Vanderhorst opened the meeting by requesting the singing of Psalm 33:5, 6, after which he read Ezekiel 34:1-16 and led in prayer. He welcomed a few visitors, in particular Rev. Todd De Rooy, a fraternal delegate of Classis Central URCNA.

Examination of credentials and constitution of Classis

The credentials of the delegates were examined by the brothers from the Winnipeg Grace Canadian Reformed Church and reported to be in order. All the churches were properly represented. Classis was declared constituted.

Appointment of executive officers

The suggested officer from Classis Manitoba March 2018, Rev. J. Poppe, was appointed as president. Nominated and appointed to serve as vice-president was Rev. S. Vandavelde and as clerk Rev. H.J. Vanderhorst. The president thanked the convening church for the organization of Classis. As memorabilia we noted that since the July Contracted Classis, Rev. S. Vandavelde was installed as minister of Emmanuel American Reformed Church in Denver, and that the church of Carman East remains vacant.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Seating of fraternal delegates

Rev. T. De Rooy, a fraternal delegate from the Classis Central of the URCNA, was seated with observer privileges. Rev. James Zekveld was seated as an advisor of Classis according to Art. 44 CO.

Reports

Classis received reports from the Deputies for Contact with Neighbouring Classes/Presbyteries. These reports brought Classis up to date with regard to Classis Central URCNA, the Northern Plains Classis of the RCUS, and the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC. Dr. A.J. Pol led in intercessory prayer for the deputies of Classis and for these neighbouring churches.

The Committee for Aid to Needy Churches presented their report. The committee's recommended level of support from the churches of \$50 per communicant member was approved by Classis. The Denver church spoke a word of appreciation for the support received.

Winnipeg Redeemer, the church for auditing the books of the Committee for Aid to Needy Churches, reported that they examined the books and found them to be in good order. The report was received with gratitude.

The Committee for Students of Theology also presented a report, which Classis received with thankfulness. This report named several young men who are preparing themselves for the ministry.

Proposals and/or instructions from the churches (Art. 33 CO)

Classis received a letter from the Church of Winnipeg Redeemer proposing that a church be suggested to propose a clerk, so that someone would be equipped for the task. Classis decided that the convening church be assigned an additional duty: to ensure that at least one of the delegates is prepared to serve as clerk of Classis.

Classis received a letter from the Emmanuel American Reformed Church of Denver requesting that Classis pass on a proposal to Regional Synod West to propose that Synod Edmonton 2019 approve the Psalms and Hymns of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* as adopted by the URCNA and the OPC for use in public worship as per Article 55 of the Church Order, in addition to the *Book of Praise*. Classis decided to forward the request to Regional Synod West 2018.

The Winnipeg Redeemer Church forwarded a letter from a group of members of the Carman and Winnipeg Canadian Reformed Churches and several other families living in Brandon, MB. This group requested Classis Manitoba to place them under the care of a neighbouring Canadian Reformed Church, according to Art. 41 CO. Classis assigned the Carman West Canadian Reformed Church to take care of the members living in the Brandon area. Classis also responded with a letter to the Brandon group to inform them of the decision of Classis and to encourage those who are not yet members of Carman West to place themselves under her supervision.

Question period (Art. 44 CO)

The president asked the questions according to Art. 44 CO. Each of the churches indicated that the ministry of the office bearers was being continued, and the decisions of the broader assemblies were being honoured. In closed session, several churches requested further help or judgment of Classis, which was followed with intercessory prayer.

Address by fraternal delegate

Rev. T. De Rooy passed on greetings from the United Reformed Churches of Classis Central U.S., expressing appreciation for the brotherly deliberations. He gave some updates on activities in that classical region including their church plants and mission work. Rev. S. Vandeveld led in prayer for the churches of this classis.

Appointments

The Winnipeg Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church will serve as the convening church for the next classis. It will be convened, D.V., Dec. 7, 2018 (if necessary), March 29, 2019 (spring classis). The suggested president for the next classis is Rev. S. Vandeveld.

The following delegates were appointed to Regional Synod West, November 5, 2018: as ministers, Rev. J. Poppe and Dr. A.J. Pol, with Rev. S. Vandeveld and Rev. H.J. Vanderhorst as first and second alternates; as elders, Talbot Bergsma and Henk Moorlag, with Ron de Ruiter and Ko Doornbos as first and second alternates.

Brotherly censure (Art. 34 CO)

With gratitude it was deemed not necessary.

Personal question period

Would Classis consider it acceptable for one of the churches to invite a licentiate (someone authorized to speak an edifying word) from a church with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship to lead the worship services? No objection to this was noted.

Adoption of the Acts and approval of the Press Release

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

Closing

The president requested the singing of Hymn 52:1, 2. The vice-president ended the meeting in prayer.

For Classis Manitoba,

Rev. S. Vandeveld

