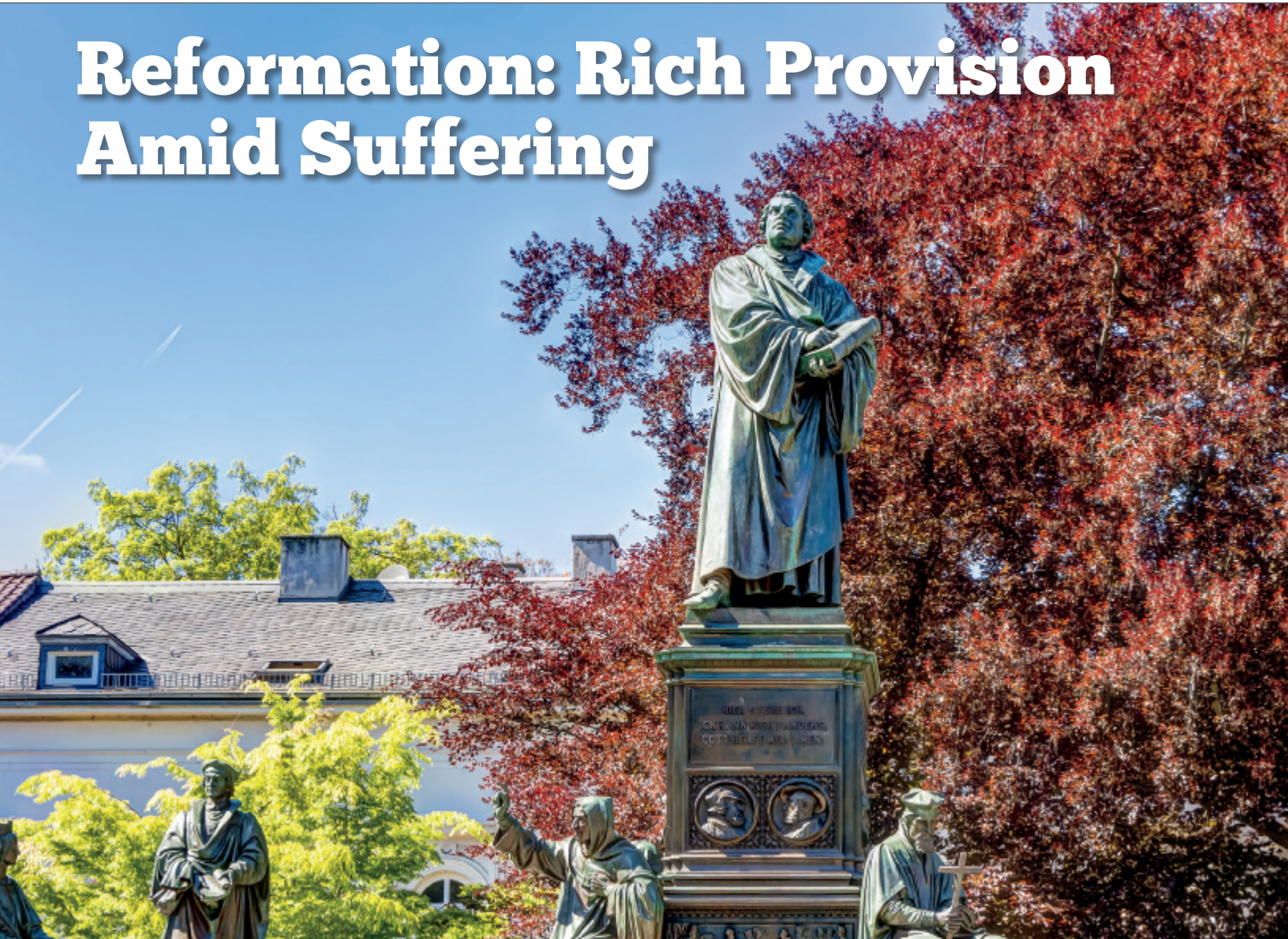


Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE: TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

Reformation: Rich Provision Amid Suffering



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AN UNUSUAL MIGHTY FORTRESS
TYNDALE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL GRADUATION

Clarion

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Our Reformation Day issue leads with a guest editorial from Dr. Ted Van Raalte, where he shares the beautiful and comforting teachings of Martin Luther regarding persecution and the Word of God. In addition, Dr. Cornelis Van Dam also shares a Reformation Day article: "A Mighty Fortress with Living Water."

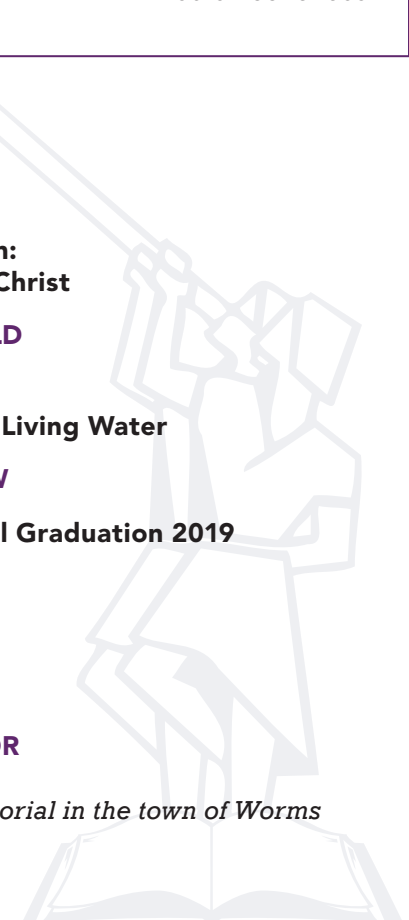
This issue brings readers many of our regular columns as well: Treasures, New & Old, Church News Review, *Clarion Kids*, Ray of Sunshine, and You Asked. There is also a graduation report and letters to the editor.

Laura Veenendaal

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Cover: Martin Luther Memorial in the town of Worms





The Cost of Reformation: How to Suffer Well for Christ

*Consider in your heart whether you think you have
a faith worth dying for*

We celebrate the Reformation, but do we count the cost? Do we remember the men and women of sixteenth-century Europe who gave their lives for Christ and his church? Persecuted by Roman Catholic authorities, about 4,000 Protestant Christians gave their lives between 1523 and 1603. The Word and Spirit of God had led them to understand the gospel of God's saving grace, and they would never again let go of their new-found freedom in Christ, no matter the price. In order to encourage the church that remained, brothers of ours in the sixteenth century, such as Jean Crespin, Antoine de Chandieu, John Foxe, and Theodore Beza, published records of the persecutions, trials, and deaths of hundreds of these believers. They also reflected upon how Christians should receive persecution.

In this editorial I am going to rely mainly on the very first writing on persecution by Martin Luther.¹ My prayer is that our readers might be strengthened in faith and conviction, for Luther's account is deeply moving and truly edifying. Why? Because it is biblical. As you read this reflection, consider in your heart whether you think you have a faith worth dying for. What are the riches of the gospel worth to you? And consider how you would respond when you suffer opposition, threats, and worse.

Just a disputation?

On October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther first opposed papal indulgences by posting his Ninety-five Theses, he seemed to think that he was just provoking a disputation between scholars. But in less than a year he was charged with heresy and needed the protection of Elector Frederick III. Soon comparisons were being made between Luther and

John Huss, who had been burned for opposing the papacy a hundred years before. In 1521, the Elector had Luther "kidnapped" to save his life and for a time Luther took to growing his beard and changing his name. The history of the Reformation would ever after include a long record of suffering. The cost of reformation could be counted in confiscation of property, exile, torture, and death.

The first martyrs

The first martyrs were two Dutchmen, Hendrik Vos and Johann van den Eschen. They were Augustinian monks in Antwerp who were rounded up by soldiers of Margaret of Austria, the regent who ruled the Lowlands. She had heard reports that they were reading Luther's writings sympathetically. All the monks, except for Vos and Eschen, recanted and were spared. Vos and Eschen were burned to death in Brussels on July 1, 1523.

Luther prepares the church

Luther, who was also an Augustinian monk, immediately wrote a report of these burnings in a little pamphlet that quickly became a bestseller. Luther was ready for this event because he had expected himself to be the first martyr. Already the year before, while he was translating the Bible into German in 1522, Luther had written a pamphlet entitled, "A Letter of Consolation to All Who Suffer Persecution." He wrote it as a reply to a German nobleman named Hartmut von Cronberg. This man had been present at the Diet of Worms where Luther had said, "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason and not by Popes and councils who have so often contradicted themselves,

my conscience is captive to the word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. I cannot and I will not recant.” Cronberg had then rallied to Luther’s cause and begun publishing tracts in support of Luther’s teachings. Luther was deeply touched by this support and here is what he began to write in reply. May his words provide biblical direction for us in 2019 as we see the shadow of persecution loom larger and darker.

More joy over one righteous than fear over many opponents

Luther begins by praising God for giving true faith to Cronberg, not just a faith of the lips, but of the whole heart. Only someone who is likewise endowed with the Holy Spirit can recognize this, he says. Now, Luther had never personally interacted with Cronberg, even though Cronberg had been present at the Diet of Worms. Thus, he writes,

Therefore I could not refrain from visiting you in the spirit with this letter to tell you of my joy. For I can truthfully boast that the condemnation and persecution of the pope and all the world do not offend and sadden me as much as I am strengthened and delighted when I hear that a person grasps and praises the tender truth. How much more it comforts me when I discovered and daily do discover that this truth has been recognized so zealously by you and others of your class, and is openly confessed. God mercifully permits me to see that his Word does not go forth in vain, as he declares in Isaiah 55:1, in order to comfort me so that my faith will grow stronger and so that I will not have only sadness. . . . It is the nature of the divine word to be heartily received by a few, but to be persecuted ruthlessly by many (LW 43:61-2).

We know that our Lord told us not to be surprised by persecution. In fact, he declared us to have found the secret of life and joy when we suffer for him. “*Blessed are you* when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because greater is your reward in heaven!” (Matt 5:11-12).

Pray for those who persecute you

God had deeply touched Luther’s heart with a concern for all of Europe, lost in so much darkness. He writes next that God’s noble Word naturally brings a “burning hunger” and “unquenchable thirst” in the true believer, that is, a burning desire for everyone else around him or her to know Christ as well. David said, “I believe, therefore I speak” (Ps

116:10). Paul then said, “We have the same spirit of faith, therefore we, too, speak” (2 Cor 4:13). This thirst, says Luther, is not diminished through persecution, but increased!

This thirst not only is not slaked by speaking [about Christ], it is even made worse with gall and vinegar [added to it], as was the thirst which Christ experienced on the cross (John 19:29). St. Paul felt such a thirst, when he wished that everyone were as he himself – except for his chains (Acts 26:29). In Romans 9:3 he wished to be cut off from Christ for sake of his brethren, the Jews (LW, 43:62).

Such a thirst for the salvation of others is one of the signs of true faith, states Luther.

Death has been conquered

When Luther thinks about the power of threats against Christians, he writes,

If they were as smart as they are stupid, they would threaten us with life [i.e., death]. It is a shame and disgrace to try to threaten and terrify Christ and his Christians with death for, after all, they are lords and victors over death. It is just like trying to frighten a man by bridling and saddling his horse and bidding him to ride on it.

The persecutors’ problem, he says, is that they don’t believe that Christ, having risen from the dead, is Lord over life and death. He continues,

But we are happy and confident because we know that Christ rose and that death is no more than the end of sin and the end of itself. . . . Our wretched foes do not know such happiness and joy in Christ. And they are angry with us because we want to communicate this joy to them and offer it to them (LW 43:63).

Luther then speaks of one of his fiercest opponents, without naming him. He says, “Certainly I have prayed for him with all my heart, and I felt very sorry for him because of his dreadful attacks. I hear however that his long-deserved judgment is making itself felt” (LW 43:64). He asks Cronberg and those with him to pray for this man; perhaps God will snatch him from being a Saul and turn him into a Paul. Astonishingly he writes, “The perishing of such miserable people is not to our advantage.”

Is persecution a punishment for our sins?

One of the hardest trials for Luther was in-fighting between the new believers in Wittenberg. Early on, certain Anabaptistic ideas created problems. Luther himself soon after this was partly responsible for the horrific destruc-

tion of many rebellious peasants. But as he sees these kinds of difficulties arising and his heart is deeply saddened over them, he wonders whether God is meting out punishment upon him and his patrons. He examines his own conduct: had he failed? He acknowledges his shortcomings. But then he answers with gospel comfort:

But be that as it may, whether we sinned or did right, we must for all of that be undaunted and unafraid. For just as we do not boast of our good deeds, neither do we despond in our sins. Rather do we thank God that our faith transcends both good deeds and sins. For the Father of all mercy has granted us faith, not in a wooden but in a living Christ, who is Lord over sin and over innocence, who can support and preserve us even if we fell into many thousands of sins every hour. Of this I have not the slightest doubt. And even if Satan would tempt us still more sorely and severely, he will not weary us, unless he succeeds in tearing Christ from the right hand of God. But so long as Christ remains enthroned there, we will also remain lords and masters over sin, death, the devil, and everything. Nothing can undo that (LW 43:65).

Look to Christ

Luther truly finds comfort in Christ, both as the resurrected, ruling Lord, and as the one who bore all our sufferings. He writes, “Our cause has not dropped to as low an ebb as did that of Christ in his own day, when even Peter denied him, when all the disciples fled from him, and when Judas betrayed and captured him.” Even if things worsen, still, says Luther, Christ’s cause will never be lost. Rather, “the strong will be confirmed, the weak strengthened, the confirmed praised, and the false believers revealed.” Those who reject God’s Word will be hardened (LW 43:66).

Christ’s cause will never be lost

It is this hardening of the heart which the believer must ever guard against. In our tribulations, we so readily think first of ourselves and come to feel like all of God’s arrows are aimed at us. We are in danger of hardening against him instead of looking to Christ. Luther prays, “Lord, heavenly Father, if we must fall into sin, let us fall into any other sin, but deliver us from a hardening of the heart, and keep us in him whom you appointed Lord over sin and innocence. If we

PEREMPTORY EXAMINATIONS

Candidate Cody Swaving has sustained his peremptory examination in Classis Niagara and classis approbated the call extended to him by Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville.

Dr. Jeff Temple sustained his peremptory examination in Classis Ontario West and classis approbated the call extended to him by Providence Canadian Reformed Church (Hamilton).

Candidate Jeremy Segstro sustained his peremptory examination in Classis Pacific West and classis approbated the call extended to him by the Canadian Reformed Church at Cloverdale.

CHURCH NEWS

do not deny him or lose sight of him, all sin, death, and hell will not harm us. Yes, what is there that might harm us?” (LW 43:67). Christians need to have gentle and submissive hearts that worship God even more in the storm, not less.

Luther wrote this while in the midst of translating the Bible. He did not know whether he would live to see it published, especially with the whole machine of the Roman Catholic Church and numerous temporal authorities ready to capture and kill him. But God preserved him till his natural death in 1546. More importantly, God preserved him in a gentle but strong faith so that he could equip and bless the church, even now as we read this.

Concluding exhortation

We have unearthed some truly beautiful and comforting teaching from our dear Martin Luther. He adds that true Christians adhere to this because it is the Word of God, and would still adhere even if Luther denied it (God forbid, he adds). They believe in Jesus Christ. As you read this, are you in the right frame of mind to take the scriptural teachings into your heart? Are you amazed at the strength of faith that God gives his people, and do you prayerfully ask him to uphold you to the end? Would you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you? This, you say, takes great faith. Yes, but all faith that is true faith has that strength because all faith that is true faith has the Spirit of God as its author. All faith that is true faith has the power of Christ within it. All faith that is true faith holds onto the imperishable, unfading, and immortal Christ who will sustain us to the end.

¹ Martin Luther, “A Letter of Consolation to All Who Suffer Persecution,” in *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 43, pp. 59-70. I will make some small alterations to the translation without noting them, for the sake of better understanding.





Knowing God

"But the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action." Daniel 11:32b

The church of Jesus Christ is a struggling church in this world. She is constantly under attack from without and from within. The Reformation struggles of past history have taught the church the useful principle *semper reformanda*, a Latin phrase which means that the church must always be reforming. The one who originally coined this phrase was a Dutch minister in the Reformed Church in The Netherlands in the seventeenth century by the name of Jodocus van Lodenstein.¹ He did this in a devotional book in 1674, and what he meant with this phrase is that each member of the church must be constantly reforming his heart before God. The church can only continue on in its struggle faithfully when the members of the church take heed to the direction of their heart and serve God with their whole being. Empty formalism and apathy as well as uncritical acceptance of worldly, unbelieving culture is very dangerous for the well-being of the church.

This has always been the case, also in the time before the coming of Christ. In Daniel 11 we find a lengthy prophecy about what would happen to Israel in the future. It is generally agreed that much of this prophecy (Dan 11:21-35) refers to the actions of Antiochus IV Epiph-

anes when he launched a strong spiritual attack against the people of Israel. He tried to make the Israelites become Greek in their thinking and enticed many in Israel to forsake the covenant of the Lord and go after false gods. How can the Israelites resist such an attack?

We find the answer in our text, "But the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action." The best way and the only way to persevere in the faith and to resist sin and evil is to know God. The Hebrew word for "know" is a deep and rich concept. It is much more than only intellectually knowing someone or something, but it also includes having a relationship with someone. Knowing God is about knowing who God is, what he has done for us, and it is about having a living and vibrant relationship with God. Knowing God results in praising him and glorifying his great and holy Name. Knowing God results in obedience and an eagerness to serve him and love him.

We live in a hostile world which seeks to pull us away from the Lord. We can only stand firm, remain faithful, and make it to the end of the race set before us by focussing on our God. May we truly stand in awe of him and delight in his holiness and goodness. May we never forget that we have been made in his

image and that he has a very high calling for us to fulfill. Let us grow in knowledge of him through reading and meditating upon his holy Word. It is his love letter to us. In it he shows us the depth of his love in Jesus Christ his Son.

When we do not live by faith but rather by sight only, then we can easily be intimidated and overwhelmed by the world in which we live, by its trials and also by its temptations. But when we live by faith, seek God constantly, continually pray to him, and desire to obey him in our life, then we are strengthened and encouraged by his Holy Spirit who fills our hearts. Then the temptations and allurements of the world lose their attractiveness for us because they are exposed in the bright light of God's Word and our knowledge of him. Knowing God leads to a life of true love (1 John 4:7-8). Then we do not lose ourselves in selfish lusts (1 Thess 4:5) but instead live honourably, centred on our service of God and our love for him, Jesus Christ and others. Then the church will constantly be reforming and endure to the end.

¹ See the article by Dr. W. Robert Godfrey at <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-semper-reformanda-mean/>



For further study

1. In what sense should the church always be reforming?
2. What kind of temptations in the world try to entice us away from serving Christ?
3. How do we remain strong and holy in the face of trials and temptations?



A Mighty Fortress with Living Water

One of the most famous hymns coming out of the Reformation is Luther's "A Mighty Fortress is our God (see sidebar)." This song was conceived during an extremely difficult period in Luther's life as he was pounded by theological and political storms. The dreaded plague had also come to Wittenberg and death was everywhere. Later looking back on these events, he wrote to his friend Melanchton:

I spent more than a week in death and hell. . . . Completely abandoned by Christ, I labored under the vacillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against God. But through the prayers of the saints [his friends], God began to have mercy on me and pulled my soul from the inferno below.

Luther also struggled with depression and even questioned the very basis of his faith. It was a very bleak time for Luther and for the Reformation. Satan was on the offensive.

Around 1527, when everything seemed so dark and gloomy, God enabled Luther to grasp anew the gospel of his grace. Luther turned to Psalm 46 and was inspired to compose his famous hymn. Many of the themes mentioned in this psalm are reflected in Luther's hymn; but there is one element that is not mentioned in any direct way, namely, Psalm 46:4; "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High." In this Reformation issue of *Clarion*, let us seek to honour the Reformation's rediscovery of the Word of God as normative for all of life by focussing on some of the riches of this passage.

An unusual fortress

Psalm 46 speaks of Jerusalem as the city of God. It was a mighty fortress. "Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels" (Ps 48:12-13). This city could be easily defended. It was on high land and surrounded by valleys on three sides. One might think: we hardly need God. We are secure.

But that was not at all the case. God had made sure that this city would need his protection. Without God, Jerusalem had a fatal flaw when it came to withstanding a siege. It lacked an abundant supply of water. Within the context of

the ancient world, it was plain foolishness to have a capital city without a guaranteed supply of water. All the other important cities of the time were located on rivers, ensuring access to water in case of a siege.

But Jerusalem was high and dry in the hill country. Her water supply was comparatively meager. Its source was the small Gihon spring which was not even inside the city but outside its walls in the valley below. So valuable and critical was this spring for the security of the city that King Hezekiah had hidden this spring and diverted all its water into the city through a tunnel cut through over 1,700 feet of bed rock. Humanly speaking, water was Jerusalem's salvation so to speak in case of siege.

But even with this tunnel, it was not an ideal source of water. The flow of the spring was intermittent. In a time of drought, the sluggish flow from the spring could even stop and water would need to be brought in from elsewhere. Small wonder that when the water was insufficient people grumbled and the Gihon spring was despised (cf. Isa 8:6-7).

With such a vulnerable and relatively small water supply, why did the LORD choose Jerusalem? The LORD never makes a mistake. He picked this location for his dwelling place to teach Israel that they had to rely not on their fortifications and physical water, but on the LORD, for he and not the water would sustain the city! They had to learn to live by grace and not their own works. They had to put their trust in God who would provide. They had to know that ultimately the LORD would sustain and save them and not the fortifications or the water.

The river

Believing Israel understood this central truth. Therefore, when the sons of Korah thought of the Jerusalem water supply, they did not lament the smallness and sluggishness of the Gihon spring, but they sang: "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God!" (Ps 46:4). In faith, they praised God for his bountiful provision. They did not call the water flow from the Gihon a little stream, a creek, a trickle. No, they called it a river! God provides.

HYMN 53 **A Mighty Fortress Is Our God**
 Ein Feste Burg Martin Luther, 1529

1. A might-y for-tress is our God,
 a bul-wark nev-er fail-ing;
 our Help-er he, a-mid the flood
 of mor-tal ills pre-vail-ing.
 For still our an-cient foe
 doth seek to work us woe;
 his craft and power are great,
 and armed with cru-el hate,
 On earth is not his e-qual.

The waters of the Gihon spring spoke of abundant blessings coming from God. There was a direct connection between the Gihon waters and the LORD's provision. This connection was made very clear in Israel during the annual Feast of Tabernacles. Early each morning of the week of the feast of Tabernacles, a priest would lead a procession with other priests, Levites, musicians, and worshippers from the temple down to the Pool of Siloam into which the waters of the Gihon Spring flowed. When they came to this Pool, about half a mile down from the temple, the leading priest would fill his golden pitcher with Gihon spring water. The procession would then go back to the temple. There the priest would mix this water with wine and pour it into a funnel which led to the base of the altar of burnt offering. From there it would flow down into the Kidron Valley. When the people saw the water flow from under the temple altar, they would rejoice. This ceremony reminded Israel that all the blessings of life come from the Lord God and his holy Temple where he resided in the midst of his people. From that temple came symbolically not just a small stream, flowing softly from under the altar, but in faith they saw that from the LORD God came a river of blessings!

This ritual climaxed on the seventh day. As the priest poured the water, the trumpets sounded, the Levites sang,

and the people would wave their palm branches and chant the Hallel, Psalms 113-118. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD!" (Ps 118:26). It was a cry for the coming of the Messiah, the final great blessing of the Lord!

It was precisely on this final climactic day of the Feast of Tabernacles that the Lord Jesus stood up in the temple grounds (John 7:28) and cried out, "If any one thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37-38). And John went on to note that Jesus said this about the Spirit of God whom those who believe in him were to receive (v. 39). So, Christ related the water running from the temple to himself and to his Spirit. Indeed, Jesus is the water of life. Had the Lord not said earlier in his ministry to the Samaritan woman: "Whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

Having considered all this, we now need to go back and consider the fuller meaning of that "river whose streams make glad the city of God" (Ps 46:4).

The living water

When the Lord Jesus identified himself with the waters coming from the temple, he showed that he was the fulfillment of the water associated with the Feast of Tabernacles and the temple.

The Feast of Tabernacles reminded God's people of their forty-year desert journey to the Promised Land. During that time, the Lord had told Moses to take his staff and strike the rock on which the LORD would stand in the presence of Moses. When Moses hit this rock, water miraculously poured out (Exod 17:6). That water coming from the presence of the LORD pointed ahead to Christ. The apostle Paul wrote about this miracle that all the Israelites "drank from the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them and the Rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4). Also, this water in the wilderness, coming from the presence of the Lord, made glad the people of God!

There are more Old Testament allusions and indications that help us to understand the full meaning of Psalm 46 when it speaks of "a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High." Notice the close connection between the river and God's habitation, the temple. We find a similar close association in Psalm 36, where David praises the steadfast love of God and how people can take refuge in the shadow of his wings. He then continued:

They feast on the abundance of your house,

and you give them drink from your river of delights.

For with you is the fountain of life! (Ps 36:8-9)

Israel may not have a great river running by the front door of her capital, Jerusalem, but she has the living God in her midst! He is the fountain of life. He is the God of life who will give life to his people with “a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.” He provides for his people.

This same point is made in Joel’s prophecies when he encourages a despondent people that the LORD dwells in Zion and “a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord” (Joel 3:18). The abundance of life with the living God is dramatically pictured in Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple. Coming from under the threshold of the temple, south of the altar, was water. It started off as a small stream, but it gradually became larger and deeper until it was a vast river so wide that no one could cross it. This river gave life and brought vitality even to the Dead Sea so that the water became fresh and full of fish. On the banks of this river were fruit trees of all kinds. Their leaves were for healing (Ezek 47:1-12). The prophet Zechariah also prophesied of living waters flowing out from Jerusalem (Zech 14:8).

All this abundance of waters of life, flowing from the temple and its altar, pictures the blessing of God’s presence with his people. He is the God of life. This holy God can dwell with his sinful people because the temple is the centre of reconciliation. The sacrificial service was fulfilled with the great Lamb of God, who saved his people of grace alone. The wonder of God’s grace includes the replacement of the temple in Jerusalem as God’s home among his people with his new dwelling place, his sanctified people. Believers, collectively and individually, may be his temple, the dwelling place of God. God with us, Immanuel, because of the indwelling Spirit.

When we recognize God’s river of blessings in Christ, the overflowing fountain of life (cf. Jer 2:13; Zech 13:1), we can also see his blessings in even the smallest tokens of his grace. That is of great encouragement for us as we as Reformed churches, families, and individuals move forward into the future.

Our surety for the future

Sometimes God’s gifts seem too small, a mere trickle, to meet the pressing needs of the day. But we can say in faith: “There is a *river* whose streams make glad the city of God!” In spite of appearances, the Lord always gives his children what they require. Like Israel of old, we too need to learn to live from grace from the hand of our God for all our needs.

With Luther in his time of extreme stress and upheaval, we can affirm “A Mighty Fortress is our God” and assert in the full assurance of faith:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble

We will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea
though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains
tremble at its swelling.

There is a *river* whose streams make glad the city of God!
(Ps 46:1-4).

The Spirit-filled people of God can draw on “the spring of living water,” the LORD God himself (Jer 2:13). In his grace he calls us to participate in his gifts. There is no need to go parched for water! “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters” (Isa 55:1).

As the Lord Jesus made clear, drinking from the living water means receiving the Spirit and so sharing in Christ (John 7:37-39). The implication of all of this is staggering. The life of the Spirit is nothing less than being placed in communion with the living God himself. It is to be in Christ and to share his anointing. We may have personal fellowship with the living God and receive the life that savours the glory of his presence (cf. Rom 8:1-17; Gal 5:22-25).

Although we may sometimes imagine that we have only a small Gihon spring of water, in faith we see that there is indeed a river which makes glad the city of God – a river of blessings of life with God in Christ! And, what we enjoy in our life with God now is only a very small foretaste of what is to come (cf. 1 Cor 2:9-16)! The apostle John saw the Jerusalem of the future. He saw the river of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the city and the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:1-2). There will be no more curse and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will see his face (Rev 22:3-4; 1 John 3:2). Life with God in fullness!

This picture of the future encourages us to celebrate the life with God at all times – yes, so we can be thankful also when it seems that the springs and wells seem to be too meager. Yet we know in faith that “there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God!” (Ps 46:4). God will provide.

Reason enough to celebrate the Reformation. It reminds us that God will never abandon his church. He did not do so in the sixteenth century and he will also not do so today.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!





FCS General Assembly 2019

The July/August issue of *The Record* (the monthly magazine of the Free Church of Scotland, hereafter FCS) was largely devoted to reporting on the General Assembly which was held in Edinburgh this past May. The moderator this year was Rev. Donald G. Macdonald, a minister in Dunvegan on the Isle of Skye. As the General Assembly got underway, the moderator set the tone by giving an address about God's imagination. In his speech, he reflected upon the rich variety in creation. We are amazed at the depth of God's imagination, that he conceived of so much variety in his mind and then created it all. He also conceived of us, men and women, in his mind, as physical creatures which he would make, bearing his image. We are the only creatures God has made who share in his gift of imagination. Macdonald says, "God-given imagination removes dullness and not only allows us to see and create beauty and magnificence, it gives us the capacity to picture the not-yet, to make that picture a purpose, and to realise the purpose through a plan. It is the driving force behind everything. And ultimately its intended function was always to reveal the glory of God" (18).

Macdonald's purpose in speaking about the gift of imagination at the General Assembly was to appeal to us as Christian leaders, "to be more 'mightily governed' by our imagination when it comes to our Christian living, our pastoral care, our preaching and teaching and our mission" (19). Imagination allows us to empathize with others in their struggles and prevents insensitivity which can be so damaging to those in our care. As preachers, we are called to use our imagination to communicate the gospel effectively. As far as mission goes, the FCS has imagined planting new churches for quite a few years but now in recent years a plan was drawn up and this is happening more and more. Existing church-

es which are in decline will need to use their imagination to come up with fresh ideas to reach those who live around them with the gospel message. Just imagine that the time is coming when every knee will bow to Jesus and every tongue confess him as Lord! This is the goal for which the church works and plans and strives to be faithful to her Lord and Saviour.

The various FCS committee reports shared the progress of their work at the General Assembly. A dominant note was the need for more labourers in the vineyard. Half of existing congregations in the FCS do not have a minister. More ministers are also needed for the work of church planting and evangelism. The Board of Ministry states in its report, "It seems unlikely that God is failing to call a new generation of gospel workers for his Kingdom work in Scotland, so we as a Church should be deeply concerned as to why so few candidates are coming forward for service in the Free Church" (7). They also note that theirs is not the only church federation to face this challenge and that it would be desirable to have more focused discussion of this problem in order to come up with solutions.

From the Mission Board report and Edinburgh Theological Seminary report, it is clear that there is a desire to make the FCS a more mission-minded church. There is so much work to be done in Scotland and church members can benefit from specific training to overcome reluctance in sharing the gospel with others. An example of an initiative for this training can be found at the website generation-mission.org.

It is clear that we share in similar struggles in our own churches. May the Lord bless the FCS as they seek to be a faithful church of Jesus Christ in an increasingly secular environment.



Tyndale Christian School Graduation 2019



On June 15, 2019, Tyndale Christian School held their graduation ceremony for the largest class in its history. It's an exciting time for the school for a number of reasons, with a couple of large classes on the upper end, a growing high school program, plans in the works for a gymnasium and classrooms addition, and a twenty-fifth anniversary celebration in the coming year. Our Heavenly Father is good to us, and his care and provision over TCS is no exception.

The graduation events began with a dinner hosted at Bethel United Reformed Church and proceeded to the formal part of the ceremony in the same building. As their theme text, the graduates chose Joshua 1:9: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." This theme text tied in well with the school theme, heroes of faith, studied throughout the year at TCS.



The evening started with welcoming remarks from the principal, Mr. Justin Raap, encouraging the graduates to be uncompromising in their faith as they leave the safe confines of Tyndale. Using the story of Daniel, the last hero of faith studied at the school, the graduates were reminded to be careful and cautious in service, resisting the work of the devil and our own flesh, instead finding strength in God's provisions and promises. The story of Daniel 1 is a perfect picture of this, as Daniel and his friends resist the assimilation efforts of Babylon and outlast Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. Thanks be to God!

Following this, the graduates welcomed their former principal, Mr. Ed Hoogerdyk, as their keynote speaker, speaking in more detail on their chosen graduation text. He focussed in on the aspect of fear, and Joshua's command to not be frightened. Instead of being compliant, codependent, and cowardly Christians, he encouraged the grads to





take the command issued by Joshua and move towards being committed, contagious, and especially courageous. He reminded them to fill themselves with love, based on the grace of God as they move on from Tyndale Christian.

The valedictorian, Lydia Kok, first expressed appreciation for the Tyndale staff and her classmates. Moving on from there, she encouraged her class to reflect on how our Heavenly Father has consistently lifted us up through challenges in the past, and will continue to do so, allowing for a future without fear and uncertainty, as stated in Joshua 1:9.

The program moved into the awards and bursaries component, sponsored by a number of local donors and businesses. The award winners are listed below. Following the diploma presentation, the board chairman, Mr. Tony DeWit, closed the evening with congratulatory remarks on behalf of the school board, before ending the evening in prayer.

Especially in Alberta, where we have faced much economic, political, and provincial legislative uncertainty throughout the course of the year, these graduation ceremonies served as a testament to our Father's unchanging faithfulness and have provided this church and school community here with motivation to continue in his service in the work at Tyndale Christian School. Praise be to God from whom all blessings flow!

Awards Recipients

TCS Faith in Action Award: Rachel Pasveer

Remuda Building Award: Ian deHaas

Christian Credit Union Banking Award: Rachel Pasveer

Convverge Inc. Scholarship: Kent Jacobi

TCS Academic Excellence Award: Cassidy Schriemer

Governor General Award: Cassidy Schriemer



Clarion Kids

The Armour of God

Ephesians 6:10-20

In our daily battle against sin and temptation, we are called to put on the armour of God. Paul describes in Ephesians what this means. We are to put on the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. Our shoes are to be the readiness of the gospel of peace. We are also to take up the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation. Finally, we have the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God, and we are to continually pray. These images clearly show how we are to equip ourselves for life in this world. God wants us to be ready to defend his Word and stand up for our faith in Jesus Christ.

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



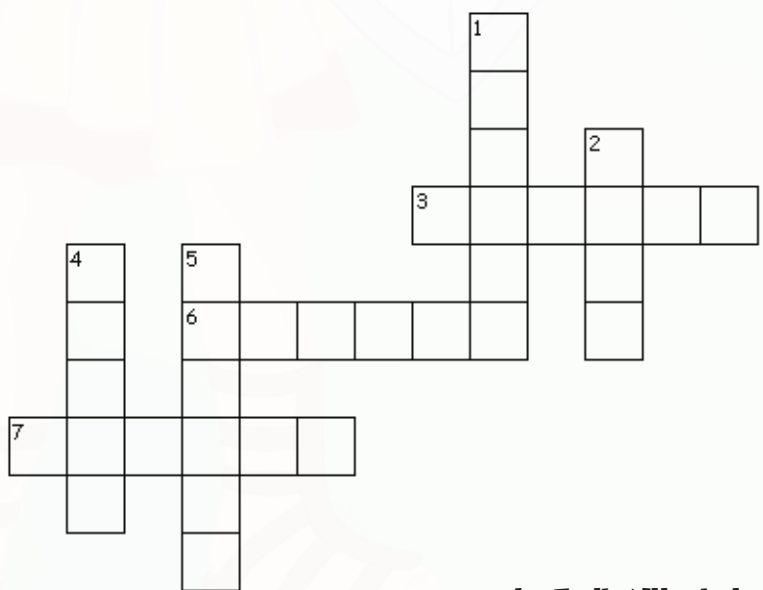
Crossword Puzzle: Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

Across

3. Put on the _____ of God.
6. _____ of salvation.
7. We have to be ready to _____ our faith in Jesus.

Down

1. Sword of the _____.
2. The sword of the spirit is the _____ of God.
4. Our _____ are to be the readiness of the gospel of peace.
5. _____ of faith.



by Emily Nijenhuis

In loving memory of Leona Barendregt



As a member of the Ray of Sunshine community, I would love to take some time out of my day to bid farewell to a dear good friend and a sister in Christ, Leona Barendregt. This past summer in early August, the Lord took home to himself in his infinite wisdom Leona Barendregt.

Leona as we all knew loved to be an active member within the Special Needs community; she especially loved partaking in her Special Olympics of British Columbia. Leona cherished and loved her friends and family dearly, but most of all she cherished and loved her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Leona faithfully read her Bible and praised God in songs of worship with all her heart.

Leona loved receiving cards for her birthday from all over the country within the communion of saints within our Reformed circles. She also loved receiving emails for her birthday from all over through many congregations.

It was the love and compassion she showed me that made me join the Ray of Sunshine community within *Clarion*. At the time I was twenty-nine years old; Leona reached me personally through Facebook and I would love to share with you all what she said to me in her own words: "My dear friend Joel have you . . . considered being part of. . . the Ray of Sunshine community." I replied to her comment by saying, No I haven't Leona. Then Leona went on and said, "Joel you can. . . experience the love of communion of Saints and feel God's love through their love as brothers and sisters in Christ." I told her that I will think about it. Just about four years ago I joined the Ray of Sunshine community, just before my thirtieth birthday. Leona, I thank you for coming to me personally to join the Ray of Sunshine community.

I also knew Leona in my early years of my life when I moved to Houston, BC in 1988 from Hamilton, ON. I was three years old at the time, and when I was old enough and strong enough to walk on my own, I attended Ebenezer Canadian Reformed School in Smithers. I attended many

remedial classes with Leona to do my schoolwork in a quiet setting after the instruction from my teacher within the classroom.

When it was my first day at a new school, I was a bit worried and scared starting a new school if I was going to fit in and make new friends; Leona came over and introduced herself to me and welcomed me within my new school. She told me you don't have to be worry because my sister-in-law Peggy will make your day fun at school, especially her secret door to the passageway to Mrs. Bee's classroom. I didn't feel so worried afterwards. I was excited about this passageway to a secret doorway. I couldn't stop talking about it to my parents when I got home, that I made new friends, and especially made a special friend that was born with some disability too, her name is Leona. These are some of my fond memories of Leona.

I would like to take the time to say: Farewell Leona until we will meet again. I would also like to pass my sincere condolences to all the Barendregt family and also all the extended family of Leona; may God strengthen you all in the comfort of his Word in the years and months ahead.

I will end this tribute for Leona from God's Word in the prophecy of Isaiah: "A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken'" (Isa 40:3-5).

Written by Joel Slomp

November Birthday

3 Wilma Van Drongelen 62

31892 Horizon Street, Abbotsford, BC V2S 3J4

Happy birthday to Wilma this November! We wish you the Lord's blessing in the year to come.





Q Who is the beast that has a fatal wound (Revelation 13:3)?

In Revelation 13:3 we read about this beast with one of its heads seeming to have a mortal wound. I wonder if this is the “head” (power) that was stopped by the Lord and with the help of the crusaders, and if this is the Islam that’s gaining momentum across Europe and also in Canada.

A From the outset I should caution against the attempts to identify who or what is meant with the ten horns or with the seven heads. That would go too far and be beyond our ability; the identification has also changed throughout history. What should be looked at, however, is the image as such, the image that depicts a fullness of power and aggression by the “child” of the dragon that shows the image of the dragon. The word “beast” is the name of the anti-Christian power. It showed itself in the Roman world power (the *last* real world power according to the image of Daniel 2:40) in its trampling of the Christian church under foot in John’s days. It symbolizes all powers that arise from the “sea of nations” (cf. Isa 17:12; Rev 17:15) during the time from Christ’s ascension into heaven until his return (forty-two months), claiming absolute control and demanding unlimited obedience; as if they are god! One of those powers that have threatened the Christian church has been the invasion of Europe by Islam in the eighth and sixteenth century. The “beast” will again manifest itself in all its worldwide powerful deception in the coming man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:8-10); the very last anti-Christian power when Christ appears.

The beast shows the image of the dragon, the devil, that we read about in chapter 12. The beast sustained a mortal wound, which could well have been inflicted by his defeat

at Golgotha and the subsequent battle with Michael and his angels when it was cast from heaven. Its mortal wound, however, was healed. Although it had been “slain unto death,” as it says literally, which reminds us of the Lamb in Revelation 5:6 that is standing “as though it had been slain,” it is healed, it rises, also in imitation of the Lamb. Then the whole world marvels as they follow the beast; they worship the dragon who had given his authority to the beast, and they worship the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” Then we read that the beast “*was given*” a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words. Four times this expression is used: “was given,” “was allowed,” God himself, in Christ, allowing this resurgence of a worldwide power that shows its hatred against God, against his dwelling place, and against his saints. That’s the son of destruction who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, proclaiming himself to be god (2 Thess 2:3f.).

Hence, it’s not so much *one* of the powers in the world that will arise against God and his chosen ones (e.g. Islam), but rather God’s permission that the *man of lawlessness* will be revealed this way! When God, who still restrains the revealing of the mystery of lawlessness, then allows the man of lawlessness (i.e. like we use the expression “the man of the twenty-first century”) to be deceived by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, then the Lord Jesus will kill him with the breath of his mouth and

bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. What should keep us alert and vigilant today, therefore, is the spirit of rebellion and of lawlessness that manifests itself worldwide, the strong delusion God is sending that makes people believe what is false and take pleasure in unrighteousness. While the world marvels as they follow the beast and worship him, let those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life endure and continue in faith!

*Is there something you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for?*

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Response to Dr. Arjan de Visser

Re: Impressions From a Visit to the Dutch Churches (Vol 68, No 15, July 26, 2019)

While I appreciate the article from Dr. de Visser and of course I realize that these are only "impressions" from a visit to the Dutch churches, I nevertheless would like to offer some critique.

Dr. de Visser states that "I remember being shocked when I heard about this decision [all church offices open to women]. I had expected Synod to take a cautious approach, perhaps open the office of deacon for women and appoint another committee to study the question whether women can serve in the offices of elder and deacon."

I ask: Would it have been a "cautious approach" to allow deacons in the office first, presumably as a test case? Not sure if Dr. de Visser was serious. I did not see an emoji with tongue in cheek. When we look at the scriptural norm in 1 Timothy, we should all agree that allowing women to serve in the office of deacon is far from a "cautious approach." They may as well go the whole way!

I would continue to argue that deacons are an integral part of the consistory/council and belong in a leading and governing role. Shortly after making this case at a Bible College presentation, a pastor said to me that he could agree

with this position, but deacons today are not the same as those in Bible times. I went away thinking: if we go there, then what prevents us from arguing that any office should be open to women because after all, all the offices, minister, elder are not exactly as they were in Bible times. This sounds a bit like "trajectory hermeneutics!" Change the criteria for the office and make it fit today's culture and – bingo – we can have the women serve in the offices! Pastor Bill DeJong in his "Personal Reflections on his Return Trip to Kampen" (<http://episcopos.blogspot.com/>) writes positively about "The Trajectory of Scriptures," a tool the Dutch have used to justify their position, although Pastor DeJong stops short of accepting women in office and cautions the Dutch brothers against it. But he also reminds us, "Most theological disputes involve pitting one set of texts against another. Here the Canadian Reformed must remember that there is more in the Bible than simply 1 Timothy 2." Really!? Are the Canadian Reformed only reading 1 Timothy 2 when it comes to the role of women? I am not convinced!

Is it possible that a "trajectory hermeneutic" just might have migrated here as well? Not sure if "the new hermeneutic in Kampen" is unique to the GKv as Dr. de Visser suggests.

This quote from John Piper may be worth repeating: "The 'trajectory-setting hermeneutic' seems to effectively strip the Bible of its final authority" (<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/are-new-testament-ethics-final-or-trajectory-setting>).

So, in answer to Dr. de Visser's question "Are we on solid ground or are we living on top of a sinkhole that can implode at any time?" . . . I am not so sure. It is not only the younger generation who perhaps have a more secular worldview, but it is also that some theologians/church leaders are facilitating or even leading the charge for change through "creative hermeneutics."

We can be thankful that ultimately none of us are "in charge," but I pray that the Lord will keep us ever watch-

ful and that we do our part, and yes also pray for the GKv. I am reminded of a recent visit to Pearl Harbour: during the short film presentation, we saw the radar watchers of the day quietly dismissing the signs of the incoming enemy planes and soon half the harbour was destroyed.

*Blessings,
Aubrey Vandergaag*

A Roomy Front Seat

The editorial offering in the August 23, 2019 edition of *Clarion*, "Objections to Psalm Singing," makes the case "that hymns should take a backseat to the Psalms in all our worship." The article further asserts that honouring God will best be done "by singing first and foremost his songs, the Psalms." Such a conclusion leaves little room for one to conclude anything other than the merits of exclusive psalm singing. Why would one take a chance singing any other song if God would be offended by an inferior thank offering of praise?

The Reformed churches have a rich tradition of psalm appreciation and singing, which lines up well with a determined effort to preach the whole counsel of God using both Testaments. This tradition does not pit Old Testament revelation against New Testament revelation, as they equally express God's will and decree for his people all revolving around the coming of Messiah, Jesus Christ. We can agree that the Psalms are prophetic and express truths about Christ and give us insights into his life, suffering, death, and resurrection and in turn speak to the realities of our lives in Christ. (Christ's psalms are our psalms!) When the church sings them with the benefit of gospel revelation hindsight, the Psalms are further charged with broader and deeper meaning. They are a "book of praise" for both the old and new dispensation.

The Psalms do not tell the complete story, however, as the New Testament is equally full of God's revelation to his people. Here we find expanded elucidation about matters

such as the coming kingdom, the gathering of the church, the end times, etc. We also find rich apostolic teaching in respect to fundamental doctrines including the Trinity, the sacraments, election, and the work of the Spirit, to name a few. Hymn writing that provides faithful New Testament teaching is equally profitable for the church and brings as much glory to God.

New songs have always been written and sung at epochal moments in the history of the church even in the Old Testament. (Exodus 15: Song of Moses and Miriam after crossing Red Sea; Numbers 21: Song of Wells upon receiving ample water for God's people; Deuteronomy 31: Song of Moses and Joshua at the recommissioning of God's people before entering the promised land; Judges 5: Song of Deborah and Barak after killing Sisera; 1 Samuel 18: Song of Victory when David slays Goliath; 2 Samuel 1: The Song of the Bow upon hearing the news of Saul's and Jonathan's deaths. These are only some examples of thirty-five new songs sung to mark significant Old Testament events.) Although the New Testament does not contain a book of hymns, there is an expository tradition recognizing that the apostles used hymns to teach and explain doctrine to the early church (Phil 2:5-11, Col 1:15-20, 1 Tim 3:16, Heb 1:1-3, and 1 Pet 2:21-25). In addition, the Revelation includes eleven hymns revealing and extolling the Lamb of God who was slain. With this in mind, it would seem almost anachronistic that the people of God would be fundamentally restricted to Old Testament Psalms without license for New Testament expressions of

faith by way of hymn writing and singing that is borne out of New Testament Scripture. At the fullness of time the pinnacle event took place in the history of redemption which both deepened our understanding of Old Testament Psalms and songs and also demanded new lyrics to proclaim the fuller revelation of God's amazing work of salvation by grace through faith.

Relegating hymns to the back seat is an unnecessary seating assignment, as there is plenty of room for both

psalms and hymns in the front seat of God-honouring worship for the church to enjoy! I hope the federation of churches will come to recognize this together as we continue to expand the complement of psalms and hymns in the *Book of Praise* to declare the whole counsel of God in song.

*Kindly submitted,
Rick Ludwig*

Response

There seems to be a misunderstanding here. The letter quotes the line, "Hymns should take a backseat to the Psalms in all our worship" but then asserts that this promotes "exclusive psalm singing." Logically, that does not follow. When the editorial says that we should honour God by "singing first and foremost his songs, the Psalms," that does not exclude hymns. The letter did not quote the opening line of the same paragraph which indicates the opposite, "This article is not making a case against hymns or the writing of new songs for worship." The lines quoted simply prioritize the Psalms over the hymns.

And that, it would seem, is the underlying concern of the letter. It is looking to get away from the idea that the Psalms should be given primacy ahead of hymns. It indicates this by adjusting the image of the editorial from placing hymns in the "backseat" to instead placing both psalms and hymns in the "front seat," suggesting that they are both to be used without any sense of priority. In this respect the earlier article by Rev. D. Wynia, "Why Do We Sing Mostly Psalms?" (Vol 68, No 10) does not appear to have been taken into consideration. There the case for the *primacy* of singing psalms over hymns is amply put forward, a case to which the present editorial was simply a follow-up. Rev. Wynia's article points out, among other things, that among orthodox Reformed and Presbyterian churches it is "almost universal practice . . . that the psalms are given 'preferential treatment' over hymns."

The letter goes on to suggest in its concluding paragraph that our federation of churches recognizes an equivalency of usage between hymns and psalms. However, this is patently not the case. Several times our synods have spoken about the "predominant" place of the Psalms in the church's worship. Synod Chatham 2004 decided to "set the limit at 100 hymns since Psalms have a predominant place in the liturgy of the Reformed churches" (Acts, Art. 115, 6.2.1; cf. GS 2013 Art. 173; GS 2019 Art. 142). What else does "predominant" mean in this context but that psalms are to be sung more frequently than hymns? The Canadian Reformed Churches are not alone in making such statements. This is also what the United Reformed Churches hold to when they say in their Church Order, "The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches" (Art. 39). I may also add that this very line was recently proposed by Classis Central Ontario as part of revising Article 55 of our own Church Order (Acts of CCO Sept. 6, 2018). The priority of the Psalms over hymns is all that the editorial meant with the line, "Hymns should take a backseat to the Psalms" in our worship. To state it positively, sound biblical hymns have their place in our worship but, as we've agreed together as churches, we should be singing more psalms than hymns. See Rev. Wynia's article for reasons why.

*In reciprocal kindness,
Peter Holtvliuwer*

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions can be sent to editor@clarionmagazine.ca and need to adhere to a 750-word limit.*

