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“her children rise up
and call her blessed”



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What's Inside

Our issue is lead by Dr. James Visscher's article, "A Better Way." With so many opinions and preferences to singing in the worship services, he takes a look at the mandate given to the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise and opens a discussion on approaching the topic in a new way.

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam wraps up his two-part article on Who is this Woman? Listening to Proverbs 31:10-31 Today. There is also a report from Rev. Julius Van Spronsen on the recent CRTS Conference, "Discipling the Nations."

Issue 6 brings readers a Treasures, New & Old meditation, Ray of Sunshine, a Readers Forum article, a Canticle, and a book review.

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A Better Way?

There are some issues in our churches that just refuse to go away, and one of them has to do with the *Book of Praise*. For proof of this one needs only to pick up a copy of the *ACTS* of General Synod Edmonton 2019 and read the pages 153 – 184. They describe overtures from two classes and one regional synod, as well as letters from twenty or more local churches.

Many of them have to do with the question of whether or not the Canadian Reformed Churches should approve the use of the psalms and hymns found in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*. Others have to do with complaints about certain psalm tunes that are hard to sing. There is also a plea for additional hymns, both traditional and modern. Some churches reminded Synod Edmonton of the decision of a previous synod to cap the number of hymns at 100 so as to protect the primacy of psalm singing.

Another mandate?

What did Synod Edmonton 2019 do with all of these overtures and letters? It gave the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* a new mandate. Included in this mandate is the charge to seek input from the churches about including non-Genevan renditions of the Psalms and compiling a list

of suitable additional psalm renditions. As for the hymns, the committee was instructed to gather input about replacing and adding new hymns. It was, however, told that the final number

of hymns should not exceed 100. In the case of both psalms and hymns, the committee was told to use the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* as a primary resource.

Now, what is one to think of all of this? What conclusion should one draw? Does this decision of Synod Edmonton serve the churches well?

I, for one, have my doubts. I am not sure about you, but I am beginning to lose track of the number of editions, supplements,

and augments that we as members have had to get used to over the years. It just never seems to end. No sooner has a person committed to memory a particular version of the *Book of Praise* and he or she has to get to work on a new one. A local

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church puts songbooks in the pews at considerable expense and then after a few years it has to discard them and make way for a new offering. No wonder members complain that they are feeling like liturgical guinea pigs.

Yes, and now Synod Edmonton 2019 has insured that this feeling will not be dying any time soon. What do I mean? Its recent decision virtually guarantees the appearance of still another edition. Only it will be an addition with a twist, as Synod Edmonton 2019 has opened the door for non-Genevan psalms and tunes to be added to the collection. We are moving from a purist Genevan model to a hybrid or eclectic one.

What will it achieve?

Will this bring happiness at last? Will it put an end to the letter writing and produce musical harmony in our churches? Will we ever accomplish that? For my part I strongly suspect that as the number of local churches continues to grow, as the diversity in our churches increases, and as our churches become more North Americanized, it will become more and more difficult to silence all of the dissenting voices.

A synodical model

Now, some are of the view that we as Canadian Reformed Churches have sown the seeds for our own difficulties by choosing for a synodical model. What do I mean by that? It has to do with the fact that our Church Order makes singing in the worship services a matter of synodical jurisdiction. Consider what it says in Article 55, "The metrical Psalms adopted by general synod as well as the hymns approved by general synod shall be sung in the worship services." Hence, when it comes to what we sing in worship, the general synod is in both the adoption and approval business.

On what is this based? Are there some Scripture passages out there which say that what we sing in worship must be approved by a general synod? Honesty would have us concede that such passages do not exist. It also forces us to acknowledge that what we have here is a confluence of church history and church practice. In addition, one may also want to argue that this is all remotely connected to some Reformed principle which asserts that things that affect the churches in common should be regulated by our broadest assembly.

Still, one does need to be careful with that. Years ago, there was a lot of unrest in our churches about relations with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Part of that unrest was fed by the

impression that the polity of the OPC was hierarchical. Naturally, being allergic to hierarchy, we could not overlook that and had to object to it. In those years, I entered into a debate with a well-known figure in the OPC about this and he suggested gently, much to my surprise, that really Article 55 of the Church Order was proof of hierarchy in the Canadian Reformed Churches. He asked the fundamental question about the right of a broader assembly to determine what a local church could or could not sing in its worship services. Interesting!

So where am I going with all of this? I am suggesting that in our discussions about the *Book of Praise*, we may need to look deeper than new psalms and hymns, we may need to consider foundational matters, such as synodical control over what we sing. In addition, we may also need to reflect on giving local churches more of a say in what they sing.

The magic 100 number

Another matter to consider in connection with all of this has to do with the number 100. Synod Chatham was the synod which decreed that the number of hymns used in our churches should not exceed 100. Naturally this raises questions like, "What is so special about that number? Where did it come from? Is it divinely decreed? Is it inspired?" Again, one needs to concede that this is a purely human or ecclesiastical invention. Indeed, it is an especially *defensive* invention, as it is supposed to guarantee that our churches remain psalm-singing churches.

Will this work? Again, I am not convinced that it will. Picking an arbitrary number out of the air and hoping that it will safeguard a certain practice seems like a temporary stop gap measure to me. One is far better off maintaining and promoting the basic principle that the Lord our God has given us the book of Psalms for a number of reasons, one of them being to serve as the primary song book of the churches. If need be, this could even be stated in the following way in the Church Order: "The churches shall insure that the singing of Psalms has primacy of place in the worship services."

Perhaps by now you are thinking that I have wandered far from my original topic, namely what to do with the Book of Praise? Yet, the fact of the matter is that all of this is part of a larger picture and sets the stage for a different approach.

Leave well enough alone

What sort of approach is that? I would argue that our churches would be better served if we left the *Book of Praise* alone. In other

words, do not be so quick as to produce yet another edition and do not add non-Genevan tunes into the mix. Do not keep on adding to the existing hymn section.

I dare say that the present edition of the Book of Praise is a fine product. It is the fruit of many years of faithful labour and meticulous scrutiny. Its psalm section has only recently been improved and is a delight to use. Its hymn section is balanced and includes hymns of beauty and musical excellence. Its creed and confessions, as well as its forms and prayers, have been carefully updated. In short, this is a finished product, and we do well, except for some corrections, to leave it as such. Hence, let me repeat my plea: keep the *Book of Praise* as we currently have it.

In saying this, I am not against making changes to certain difficult melodies. Still, I am not convinced that this is as big a problem as some seem to think. A number of the psalms that are currently said to be hard to sing are hard because we rarely sing them. In such cases, more practice will no doubt lead to better results. In addition, the problem is not always with the tune but sometimes it has to do with the lyrics. Imprecatory psalms, for example, by their very nature are hard to sing and no tune change will make them more palatable. Finally, the call for the committee to change difficult tunes has been around for years but I have yet to see any concrete proposals, and I fear that I never will. Notwithstanding that, if real improvements are presented, I would certainly not be against their incorporation into the *Book of Praise*.

But what about additions?

But what about the voices of so many members and churches calling for other psalm versions and tunes, as well as more hymns? I would suggest a different approach to address those voices. In addition to the *Book of Praise*, Synod could give the Standing Committee a mandate to develop a permanent registry (supplement or augment, if you will) consisting of alternative psalms and additional hymns. This registry could then be used by the churches to supplement the Book of Praise.

Personally, I would love to see some of the Scottish psalm versions in this registry. I am thinking here of Psalm 23 sung to the tune "Crimond," Psalm 43 (tune: "Martyrs"), Psalm 103 (tune: "Coleshill"), or Psalm 136 (tune: "Crofts' 136"). Also, what about some selections from the *Book of Psalms* of the Reformed Presbyterian Church? As for hymns, what about *In Christ Alone*, *Come Thou Almighty King*, *How Deep the Father's Love for Us*, *Amazing Grace*, and so many more, both old and new?


And why make the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* the benchmark and ignore other songbooks such as the *Trinity Hymnal* and *Sing to the Lord*?

It should also be electronic in nature. This would allow churches to download psalms and hymns from the committee website and display them on the ever-increasing number of screens or monitors being used in our churches. If need be, local churches could also print them in their local bulletins or a printed version of what is in the registry could be made available for purchase.

How to add to the registry

But how would new psalms and hymns come to be included in this registry? Here I would be so bold as to suggest a practice used in our sister churches, the Reformed Churches in New Zealand (see: Faith in Focus, February 2020, p.23). They have a federation songbook called *Sing to the Lord!* Only it is not carved in stone or print. What happens is that if a local church is convinced that a particular alternative psalm or a new hymn is worthy of inclusion, it goes to the presbytery (classis) and seeks its agreement. Should the presbytery agree with the suggestions made, these songs are then added to the collection of psalms and hymns that may be sung in the churches. Perhaps such additions do not require a new printing of a songbook; let's take advantage of technology and list such additions electronically without automatically requiring a new songbook edition.

The beauty of this approach is that it allows for both federation and local input into what is sung in the churches. By using a common psalter or hymnbook, it promotes and maintains unity in the churches. By allowing for local and classical input into a continual but flexible registry, it honours two foundational principles, namely the principle that it is the consistory that governs the church also when it comes to worship and the principle that a local church does not function in isolation but together with other churches in its classical region.

Enough said for now. I can well imagine that many of you will need some time to wrap your heads around this proposal, and that is fine with me. You may even disagree with me, and that too is fine. Only be so kind as to keep in mind that I am putting this out there as a way to encourage a civilized debate on what is for many members a contentious issue. I am looking for a way forward that will enhance our unity in diversity. It is for this reason too that a question mark has been added to the words, "A Better Way?" 

Confession Brings Perspective

"Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly." (Nehemiah 9:33)

When difficult times come upon the people of God, we can often be surprised and shocked that God would allow something like this to happen to us. The questions rush through our head, "What did I do to deserve this? Why would God punish me in this way?"

Some in Israel probably asked the same questions when they saw their city walls torn down, their loved ones dragged off into exile, others killed. It was one of the darkest times in Israel's history. Thankfully, in the days of Nehemiah, Jerusalem gets rebuilt, and the temple and the walls go up. Then on reading the Word of God, the people come to a fresh realization of how terrible their sins were (Neh 8:9).

In Nehemiah 9, the people of Israel finally confess their sins. They start by realizing God's greatness, and in light of God's greatness they see just how deep their sin is. Most of the chapter details just how egregiously the Israelite ancestors acted in response to God's provisions. By the time the list ends, God's people in Nehemiah's time still want to plead for God's grace. But they also realize just how deserved the punishment was: "Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us..."


Christians today can easily become superficial in their confession of sins. Superficial confession is a quick listing of different words for sin like "trespasses," "shortcomings," or "failures," without any specifics about what has been done wrong. It avoids the real pain and hurt sin caused. For instance, it avoids confessing how unjust it was to treat God so poorly.

This is why sincere confession is such a gift from God. It brings perspective on why God would have every right to punish us even more than he has. It reminds us of how little we deserve even to continue living before God. It makes us marvel how he has not given up on us already. We know our sinfulness more deeply, and through that we see God's grace more clearly.

That does not mean we have no right to ask God to stop his punishment. The Scriptures are full of examples of people crying out in lament for the pain they are experiencing. But when

we confess our sins openly before God, we come to that lament in the right perspective, knowing that God is still righteous and good. He is much more gracious than we naturally think.

There may be times where we are tempted to put all the blame for our troubles somewhere else. "What did I do to deserve this? Why would God let this happen?" Let us understand that there are times that tragedies or losses are not punishments for particular sins that we have committed. Yet, practising sincere confession will remind us of the brokenness and tragedy of life brought about by the original sin of Adam and Eve, and by the sins that we and others commit on a daily basis.

Confession lowers our expectations for how we think we deserve to be treated. But it also raises our expectations for how God will still show his grace. For, the more we see our sin, the more we stand in awe of just how loving God was to give his Son for us, while we were still sinners. It is because of his love and grace to us in Jesus Christ that we understand he will surely also be using the sin-caused pains and hurts of this life to bring us closer to him, and then, eventually, to his very presence. 

For further study

1. What practical steps can you take to make sure your confession is specific?
2. How can you see confession of sin bringing perspective to David in 2 Samuel 12 and Psalm 51?
3. In what situations has your lack of confession hindered you from having the right perspective?



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Who is this Woman? Listening to Proverbs 31:10-31 Today (PART 2 OF 2)

According to our marriage form, husband and wife are to help “each other faithfully in all things that belong to this life and to the life to come.”¹ Besides being a helpmeet for her husband, a married woman with children has the awesome task of being a mother for their children.

Task as mother

Both husband and wife are responsible for educating their children in the fear of the Lord. Already at the beginning of Proverbs we read: “Hear my son your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching” (Prov 1:8). Similarly, we read in chapter 6:20: “My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching.” The importance of the education children receive in the home by both parents cannot be overestimated. The home is the bedrock educational institution. Here the foundations are laid for the rest of the child’s life.

Mothers, therefore, have a very important role – yes, a critical task. After all, a mother has a very special relationship to her offspring. This unique bond can be used for training the children in the fear of the Lord. A good thing to remember in this context is that what is most necessary in raising children is not to have them obey a set of rules (important as that may be),

but the important thing is reaching, touching, and molding their hearts. God said, “give me your heart!” (cf. Prov 23:25–26) That goes beyond mere outward obedience. Parents cannot make a child’s heart to be godly, but God does use parents, and perhaps especially mothers with their special bond and greater exposure to their children, to enable a child to love God and give their hearts to him. Also with respect to education in godliness, she is to be a helpmeet to her husband.

It is important to note how the teaching aspect is brought out in Proverbs 31. “She opens her mouth with wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue” (v. 26). The phrase “teaching of kindness” is difficult to translate because the original Hebrew term here translated as “kindness” is very rich and full of covenant overtones – faithfulness, loyalty, goodness, kindness. Now the word translated “kindness” does not mean covenant, but it characterizes the covenant relationship. In other words, the mother is to give not just kind words, but covenantal instruction. The context of verse 26 does not immediately associate this teaching with her children. The text simply says: “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and covenantal instruction is on her tongue” (v. 26). One gets the impression that she is full of God’s will for her life and talks about the Lord and his mercies most

¹ The second and final part of an abbreviated version of a presentation for the 58th Annual Women’s League Day held on Wednesday, October 23, 2019, in Hamilton, Ontario.

naturally and so instructs her servants and above all, her children. She lives the covenant and shows it to all around her. Her covenant relationship with God is the very essence of her life.

It is not always easy for parents, and now especially the mother, to imprint in her children the wisdom and ways of the Lord. Yet, it is perhaps especially mothers who have the most educational influence on their children while they are at home. She, after all, is with them the most and as an old proverb has it: give me a child for the first five years and I will have him or her for life. Indeed, Scripture says: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6). Children may not always appreciate it when they are young, but under God's blessing, as they get older, they are most grateful. Indeed, in Proverbs 31 we read: "Her children rise up and call her blessed!"

When children are endued with a love for the Lord and his agenda for their lives, then they start to take responsibility in seeking to live according to his will. With all the ups and downs typical of our world of sin, children who have had the seed of the gospel firmly planted in their early life will, by God's grace, not be able to forget their identity, namely that they are children of God! And if children, then heirs of all his promises (Rom 8:17).

It is the glory of mothers that they are usually God's daily instruments to instill in their offspring a sense of the privilege of belonging to God. Mothers can imprint on their children something of the glory of carrying God's name in their lives as a consequence of their heavenly Father's placing his name on them and claiming them for himself at their baptism. With that realization

comes a sense of responsibility to offer oneself as a sacrifice of thankfulness to the Lord (Rom 12:1). In other words, by God's grace there will be a desire to use one's gifts for God's glory. That will help determine their priorities and their eventual calling in life. It can happen that children do not respond positively to parental teaching and reject the way of the Lord. But godly parents need to remember that the seed of the gospel has been sown in the hearts of their children and we can continue to pray for their regeneration to new life in the Spirit.

Under God's blessing, children who know they have a heavenly Father will use that sense of identity and privilege to carefully consider where they can best use their talents to God's praise.

That might be in banking, in fixing cars, in selling real estate, in farming, in becoming a teacher, doctor, or lawyer - whatever! It can also mean considering the ministry as a possibility. Good office bearers, be they deacon, elder, or minister, receive their first education for the office in the home and probably mostly by mother. That is where they learned the meaning of loving and serving the Lord and giving of oneself to him. It started in the kitchen and living room. That's where the foundation of a life of service to the Lord began. That's where the desire to give leadership in the home and in church is born. And so "her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (v. 28).

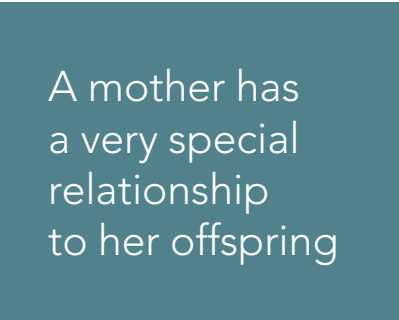
Unmarried women

Proverbs 31 ends with the words: "A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise in the gates" (vv. 30-31). This is also true of unmarried women. If the Lord God is the centre of our life, whether female or male, then we are truly equipped to do our office and calling.

Nowadays there is much talk about women in ecclesiastical office, but much of this debate assumes that women have nothing to contribute to the life of the church unless they are ordained in a special office. But nothing could be further from the truth. Scripture teaches only male ordination, but this restriction in no way limits the contribution that women can make for the well-being of the church.

Single women have many opportunities to use their God-given gifts. They may not have a family of their own, but they belong to the family of God, the church, in which we all find our home with the brothers and sisters in the Lord. Whereas the married woman has her first attention on her husband and children, those who are single know they belong to their extended family and to the larger fellowship of the saints, the family of God. The apostle Paul characterized the church as "the household of God" (1 Tim 3:15). Within this larger family, women, especially those not married or widowed or divorcée, have many opportunities to use their gifts.

Proverbs 31:20 speaks of the ideal wife: "She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy." There are many diaconal labours that women can undertake in the



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family of God and thus help the male diaconate leadership by freeing up some of their time. Some examples come to mind. Deacons can ask gifted women to give unofficial assistance in situations where it would be desirable and more appropriate to have feminine help. An office bearer may encounter a problem where assistance by a sister in the congregation would be most effective when issues best understood by another woman are involved. A widow who has the necessary gifts (cf. 1 Tim 3:11) can help in follow-up visiting and encouraging those who recently lost their husband and are now widows as well. There could be a dysfunctional family or marriage in the congregation. If those involved are open to having an older godly woman come in, such a person can train young women to be good wives and mothers (cf. Titus 2:3-5). When it comes to diaconal help, there are many ways that mature women in the church who have the necessary skill and time can assist office bearers and so support them.

A church has considerable freedom in engaging the help of women in the diaconate. Such help can be left to the discretion of the office-bearers or a consistory can appoint certain qualified women to assist the deacons as needed. 1 Timothy 3:11 suggests that women of the congregation help the deacons. These could be the wives of deacons or simply gifted women in the church. Also, a consistory can decide to enroll widows according to biblical criteria (cf. 1 Tim 5:9-14). The point is that women can and should use their gifts for the benefit of the church. Just because they are not in an ordained office, does not exclude them from serving the body of Christ.

Biblical examples such as the women ministering to Jesus come to mind as well. In Luke 8, for example, we read of women who provided for Jesus and his twelve disciples out of their means (Luke 8:1-3). They supported him in whatever ways they could and someone like Mary Magdalene stayed faithful to the Saviour and was also present at the crucifixion (Matt 27:55-56), saw where Jesus was laid in the tomb, and participated in anointing his body (Matt 27:61; 28:1). Another woman, Joanna who is also mentioned by name, was the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager. In other words, she came from high society and probably had financial resources with which to help Jesus. Our Saviour also honoured women who so faithfully served him. At his resurrection he appeared first to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18).

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There are numerous examples of women using their gifts in a complementary and supportive role in the New Testament church under male leadership. Women were involved in evangelistic activities. They were even the first to spread the gospel of the resurrection (John 20:11-18; Luke 24:1-11). Women continued to spread the good news. Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos privately about the faith (Acts 18:26). Euodia and Syntyche were women who laboured side by side with the apostle Paul (Philip 4:2-3). Paul also commended Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae (Rom 16:1). Precisely what her service for the gospel involved we are not told. We are informed that "she has been a patron of many and of myself as well" (Rom 12:2). Most probably she provided material support for Christians and hospitality for visitors, a service that seems to have been recognized by the church and so she is called its servant. The apostle Paul also mentioned other women in Romans 16: Mary, "who has worked hard" for the church, Tryphaena, and Tryphosa, "workers in the Lord" (Rom 16:6, 12). And there is also Persis "who has worked hard in the Lord" (Rom 16:12). We are not

told precisely what work these devoted women did, but it probably involved helping the apostolic work and the witness of the church in whichever way was possible for them.

Women today can also support the work of the church and kingdom in numerous ways: serving on committees, providing hospitality to visitors, helping church plants and mission posts with their gifts. They can also be engaged in organizations like pro-life groups, ARPA, and the like. Of course, occupations like teaching in elementary or higher levels also have an enormous impact for the cause of Christ. I am sure you can think of many more examples.


In conclusion

Scripture speaks very highly of the place of women, as mothers and also as individual women, married or not. Women can have enormous influence for good: mothers in the home nurturing their children in the Lord and those not married or empty nesters helping and supporting the church in its manifold work of promoting the gospel.

There is a striking passage in Proverbs 31 at which we should pause in closing. "Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come" (v. 25). A woman pleasing to

God is strong in the Lord, has dignity, and greets the future with laughter! What are we to make of that? This woman greets each new day with joy: new opportunities, new possibilities! She is upbeat and trusting and does not burden herself needlessly with worry about the future. Each day is a gift to be greeted with joy!

Women can greet the future with laughter for ultimately the reason is that God's promises are sure. In Proverbs 31

it is especially the mother, the wife, who can do so. Parents can often worry about the future of their children and fret about how things will develop. But, if we are faithful in our task and calling, we can greet the future with joy even if the world around us issues gloomy predictions. As women who are recipients of God's promises, we can face the future with a peace that is beyond understanding. The unmarried can do likewise and so rejoice in Christ and his work in their lives. 



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Discipling the Nations

The presentations of the CRTS/CRMA conference of 2020 made it abundantly clear that the church of Jesus Christ is in a spiritual war (cf. Eph 6:10-12). Discussing strategies to bring the gospel in the face of idolatry, witchcraft, persecution, confusion, and complacency, the presenters helped us to see how the battle is raging on many different fronts. One after the other, the presenters emphasized the urgent need for Reformed missions that focus on the sovereignty of God, the preaching of his Word, and the faithful pastoral care of Christians from every tribe, nation, and language in the world.

Reports of the Lord's work in Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin and South America, Africa, and North America, which is being

carried out by faithful churches all over the world, caused me to go home thanking my Lord Jesus for his gracious and powerful work! The Lord has heard our prayers to open doors (Col 4:3-4), and Reformed churches all over the world continue to be a part of our Lord's exciting work. When you listen to the conference speeches (which are available on the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary website: canadianreformedseminary.ca), you will get a taste of the burning missionary zeal that is found among faithful Reformed churches engaged in discipling the nations. Praise the Lord for excellent foundations of mission-loving churches and for the many opportunities that stand before you even today!



When Dr. Arjan de Visser explained the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, and Rev. Ryan deJonge highlighted the enormous number of people who have never heard the gospel (see also the Joshua Project), it was clear that the church's responsibility to foreign missions is far from over. Increased opportunities on the home front don't diminish the need for ongoing spiritual warfare in other countries. In fact, the opportunities in our own neighbourhoods that were highlighted by the Revs. Matthew VanLuik and Eric Onderwater (Brampton) and Rev. Tony Zekveld (Toronto) help us to appreciate even more how the Lord Jesus is simultaneously calling people to himself from all over the globe through several different means (cf. also Rev. Paulin Bédard's presentation). Canadian churches are finding themselves in a post-Christian country, other nations are coming to our doors, churches in other countries are asking for help, and there are millions of people in the world who have never even heard the gospel proclaimed one time! The LORD has also given the churches human resources, financial resources, and many useful instruments such as the Internet

which can be compared to the "Roman roads" of our modern age. It is certainly an excellent time to be prayerfully engaged in the work of mission both "at home" and "in lands beyond you."

The speeches we listened to on Friday gave many helpful insights concerning how missionaries can best fulfil their task. Rev. Ryan deJonge's speech on exposing worldviews made it very clear that true conversion includes a change in the way that people see the world, because their worldview is the lens that is used to shape their beliefs and values which are closely related to their customs and behaviours. A clear example of this was given by Jeremiah Mhlanga, who spoke to us through a video feed from his home in South Africa about the challenges of bringing the gospel to a culture that is dominated by a belief in witchcraft. Breakout sessions during the conference gave us an opportunity to grapple with different challenges that are faced by missionaries in Latin and South America, Africa and the Pacific. The lessons learned from Rev. Ian Wildeboer's speech concerning humility when training Christ-exulting leaders in foreign mission reminded us that the radical transformation

of the heart of those who are given the Holy Spirit, takes some time to manifest itself as it comes in conflict with other beliefs and values and perhaps even cultural customs that contradict or undermine God's gracious work. The speeches on Friday helped us to see the importance of being patient when we preach the gospel and when we train new spiritual leaders, ensuring that true spiritual transformation is evident and praised in Christ's church.

The reverberating consequences of a transformed heart are not always easy to identify and interact with. People immersed in their own national culture do not always perceive how they have been influenced by their own culture, and foreign visitors have difficulty understanding the full connotations of the values and cultural customs they are observing. The best way forward is to cooperate and to combine both an outside look and an inside look. Rev. Jim Witteveen's speech exemplified this cooperation as he investigated questions concerning the contextualization of worship. After allowing us to hear a short audio clip of the famous Brazilian singer Luiz Gonzaga (which brought back memories of the blasting music that played late into the night during the Brazilian carnival celebration), Rev. Jim

Witteveen shared that Brazilian church leaders did not think it would be appropriate to adopt this musical style for corporate worship in Reformed church services. The goal of contextualization is not to fit in like a hunter in camo gear, but rather it is to communicate to the world in its own language that you are different from them and stand out like light in the darkness (John 1:4-5; 3:19-21). Furthermore, if your goal is to adapt to the culture you live in, you will find that it is very difficult to do, since most countries have a combination of diverse cultures (cf. Brazil, Canada). When the church chooses one cultural expression over another (whether it be "Euro-centric," "Brazilian," or whatever), it becomes irrelevant to those groups who identify with other cultural expressions. The only way forward is to be governed in form and content by the content and principles of worship as these are found in Scripture. Then we will see that the cross-cultural message of God's grace and forgiveness is counter-cultural (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-2:16), because the Lord Jesus is a sign that is opposed (Luke 2:34). As Rev. Ryan deJonge's speech on exposing worldviews emphasized, in 2 Timothy 3:16 the Holy Spirit teaches us the value of a reproof or rebuke encounter (elenctics) as we bring the gospel into the world. The conclusion of all this is that although we must think carefully about how to communicate the truth to others in a winsome manner, the gospel will always stand out like light in the darkness and call people to repentance and a transformed life.

The final day of the conference consisted of a CRMA (Canadian Reformed Mission Association) meeting, at which updates were given about the work that Canadian Reformed churches are involved in. The list was impressive. There is a lot going on, and there is more to do. Both Rev. Richard Bout (Domestic and Foreign Missions Coordinator of URCNA) and Dr. Arjan de Visser (Professor of Ministry and Mission, CRTS) presented arguments that show the value of working toward more cooperation among the local churches in their mission efforts. The URCNA missions committee is recommending that their federation move from a "narrow congregational approach to a broader classical effort where the local church continues to have an important role." Dr. de Visser suggested that Kuyper's principles of foreign mission (1896) should be reconsidered, since they highlight the importance of the local church while also giving room for synod-appointed "mission deputies" who would help the sending churches with advice and facilitate consultation and cooperation. Seeing that both of the suggestions placed a strong emphasis on the ongoing active involvement of the local





Questions to Ponder

Do you feel any compassion toward the millions of people who do not know the gospel?

In light of the coming Day of the Lord, do you have a sense of urgency?

Have you ever spoken to your neighbours about Christ and/or invited them to your home and/or church?

Can you name some places where mission work is being done, and can you describe what that work looks like?

How about your children? Do you read books about mission to them?


Are you encouraging one another to serve the kingdom of God in places where a church planter could really use their help?

Why wouldn't you consider finding a job and raising a family in a place where the Lord is planting new churches?

What percentage of your household income is directed to reaching the lost and how does that compare with the money you spend on "little get-aways" or vacations?

churches supporting their missionaries, as well as a heavy emphasis on mission work that is "field-driven" (rather than board controlled), I was convinced that these suggestions would be helpful for our missionary efforts. I wonder if it is possible for both the URCNA and the CanRC to simply join forces with the OPC and cooperate with them as one praying, coordinating, training, supporting, and cooperating group.

The presenters at the "Discipling the Nations" conference encouraged church members to spend some time evaluating the level of our personal engagement with the work of mission. There are many different questions we can ask ourselves to help us correct our perspective concerning mission work and stimulate further engagement. Maybe you can sit down and try and answer these questions as a family around the dinner table one evening.

I really appreciated the suggestions that Rev. Ryan deJonge and Rev. Ian Wildeboer gave to people of all ages to help us change the culture of our homes, schools, and churches. It is my prayer that all God's people may have the opportunity to see regeneration, which the Scriptures affirm is not inferior in power to creation or the raising of the dead (John 5:25; Rom 4:17; cf. CoD, III/IV, Art 12). May our children and young people experience the catholic church in all its beauty! May we learn to love mission and give it a real and important place in our lives. Maybe you can begin this renewed focus by watching the speeches that were presented at the CRTS conference (canadianreformedseminary.ca). They are short and to the point. They will increase your zeal and love for mission work. They will encourage you to pray often for the furtherance of God's kingdom in Canada and in all parts of the world. 

I Am the Light of the World

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12) As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. (John 9:5) Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." (John 9:39)

George van Popta, 2019

Tune: Mozart (1756 - 1791)

78 78
MOZART, alt

1. I am the Light of the world. Come, fol-low me, the Light of life.
 2. Christ came to this dark-ened world so that the blind may see my face,
 3. Christ gave me sight by free grace. I once was blind but now I see.

9

Walk in the light af-ter me, set free from all the world-ly strife.
 But those who boast that they see will be made blind, to their dis-grace.
 I was a wretch lost in sin, but Christ freed me on Cal-var-y.

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Understanding the Church Biblically

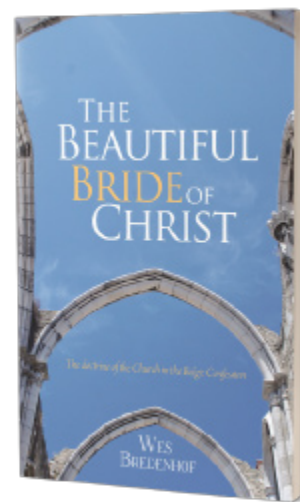
Two Helpful Books

It's the discussion that never seems to disappear: what is the church? What is and what is not the church? Is the true church/false church a biblical distinction? Are all Protestant churches the catholic church? Growing up I remember these discussions. These same issues loomed large in The Netherlands in the 1940s and at the earlier reformation movements of the Doleantie and the Secession in our Dutch church history. One's view of the church determines much of how we do church, and so perhaps it's no surprise that in our day this is once again a hot-button issue.

"Missional church" is a concept being widely discussed currently, and so our generation needs to grapple with its underlying view of the church and compare that to what Scripture teaches. As it happens, in our federation we already all agree on a summary of what the Bible teaches on the church and we have it spelled out in the Belgic Confession Articles 27-32. What we don't always agree on is: what do these articles actually say and mean? Are they still relevant for today? Those articles were written more than 450 years ago in (say some) a much simpler church situation – aren't we in a radically different context today with hundreds of denominations surrounding us? Also, many ask: from where in the Bible are the Confession's teachings drawn? What does the Bible actually say on this matter? What we need is clarity and insight into our confession on what the Bible teaches concerning the church.

I'd like to recommend two books to help us get started. The first is what I would describe as an excellent primer on the Confession's teaching that comes to us from the pen of Dr. Wes Bredenhof: *The Beautiful Bride of Christ: The Doctrine of the Church in the Belgic Confession*. The design of the book is straight forward: Bredenhof gives us one chapter each on the six articles dealing with the church. These chapters had their origin in both Rev. Bredenhof's Catechism sermons and later various conference lectures, occasions which elicited feedback which he then took into account in writing this book. The result is a booklet of easy-to-read chapters that address many current questions about the church while walking us through the biblical understanding of the church.

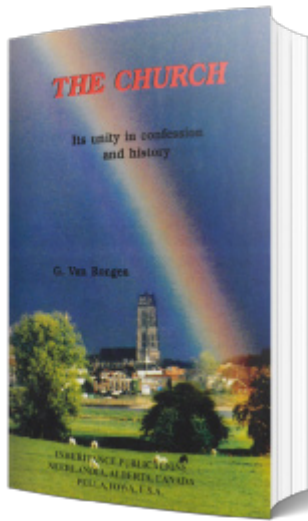
In his introduction, Bredenhof sets out to accomplish two things: 1) to provide "a readable treatment of the essential points of the Reformed doctrine of the church" and 2) to guide "the reader in seeing how our Confession speaks biblically about the church and ... which leads us to love her." In both points he succeeds admirably. While many of us will want to



The Beautiful Bride of Christ:
*The Doctrine of the Church in
the Belgic Confession*

By Dr. Wes Bredenhof

Providence Press, 2013,
88 pages, paperback US \$10



The Church:
*Its Unity in Confession
and History*

By Rev. G. Van Rongen


Inheritance Publications, 1998
240 pages, paperback Cdn \$21

jump to the chapters on the true/false church (Art 29; and you won't be disappointed), I found the chapters on church government (Arts 30-32) refreshingly timely and relevant. The passionate pastor in Dr. Bredenhof also comes out many times as he provides practical application for the truths under discussion and I found the latter chapters had some of the most helpful application.

Any Christian (teenager and up) can read this book with profit to get a basic handle on the Bible's teaching of the church. The chapters are not long (fifteen pages or so) and with only six of them this book could serve well at a Bible study group or a book club or for office bearer discussion. Unfortunately, it does not come with questions, but this topic generates its own discussions, so that should not be a problem! It's available at lulu.com for only \$10 (CDN) or contact your local Christian bookstore.

The other book I'd like to recommend, one which Dr. Bredenhof cites numerous times, is the more in-depth work by Rev. G. Van Rongen, *The Church: Its Unity in Confession and History*. It may be more than twenty years old, but its careful exposition of each line in Articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession is as up to date as ever. In Part 1 of the book (about 165 pages), Van Rongen provides invaluable insight into the biblical underpinnings of the Confession and the many connections to earlier church history. It may surprise us, but Guido de Brès was steeped in the study of Scripture and the writings not just of Reformers like Calvin, but also of the early church fathers. In an effort to be truly catholic, de Brès often summarized the truths of the Bible using expressions found in the writings of such respected men as Cyprian, Origen, and Augustine (among many others). Van Rongen traces the roots of certain ideas back to the early church which helps us see something of the catholicity of our confession. But most importantly, Van Rongen points out time and again the biblical basis for the various things we confess about the church. Anyone who is serious about understanding our own confession about the church will find a wealth of important material and explanation here.

As a bonus, Van Rongen adds two smaller topics to his explanation of Articles 27-29. In Part 2 of the book (about thirty pages), he deals with the question "under which conditions can we and shall we recognize other churches as faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ?" In Part 3 (also about thirty pages), he goes on to discuss the Liberation of the church, which took place in The Netherlands in the 1940s, and concerns our own immediate past as Canadian Reformed Churches. Here Van Rongen supplies a mix of his own experiences in and his own reflections on the significance of the Liberation, all of which helps shed light on our own inherited understanding of church as it was worked out in very difficult circumstances.

Unlike Rev. Bredenhof's book, Rev. Van Rongen's work cannot be described as for "popular consumption." Certainly any adult who is willing to dig into this treasure-trove can do so and will find it of great benefit, but it's not a quick read. It requires careful study - and I heartily encourage you to give it a go! I would say that, especially in light of today's discussion around the concept of church, certainly every pastor and elder should avail themselves of this resource and even consider studying it together as consistory. While it may be suitable for a book club with determination to wade into deeper waters, it's not something I would recommend for most Bible study groups. You should find it available through your local Christian bookstore or else on Amazon for \$21 CDN. *Tolle lege!* 



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April Birthdays

Happy birthday to the three of you celebrating a birthday in April!
We wish you the Lord's blessing in the coming year.

2 Derek Kok will be **50**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, Ontario
N1A 1T8

23 Arlene DeWit will be **59**
31126 Kingfisher Drive,
Abbotsford, British Columbia
V2T 5K4

29 Bryce Berends will be **45**
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR #3
Fergus, Ontario
N1M 2W4

Derek Kok

Hello, my name is Derek Kok. To start off, I have something very important to tell you: I am going to be fifty years old! I am no longer young; I am afraid I might be turning into an old, grumpy man. But I am very excited to celebrate my birthday with all of my family and friends; I am hoping lots of people will come over to celebrate with me!

I live at the Beacon Home in Dunnville. I shred paper at Bert Vis Flooring every Wednesday from 10:00am till 2:00pm. I pack my own lunch the night before; usually it is sandwiches, an apple, and a cookie. On Tuesdays, I help put the Sachem (our town flyer) together, putting the flyers inside the paper at home.

On Monday nights, we have men's society at the Beacon Home with Bert Vis and John Vandervleit. Tuesday nights I go to friendship at Dunnville URC church, where we do crafts, drink coffee, listen to a Bible story, and do some singing. Fridays I clean my bedroom, and once a month we do Fun Night where we go to one of the Anchor Homes, or host it here at the Beacon Home. Here we eat chips, drink coffee, socialize, and maybe play some games.

Every morning at 10:00am and 2:30pm I get a delicious cup of coffee, double double, and nighttime a nice warm cup of tea.



I am looking forward to Anchor Camp at Campfire again this summer. Every year I get into trouble, I love to pull pranks on my counsellor or other campers. One summer I made a fake spider with my counsellor and we put it on Debbie's bed! I didn't end up scaring her, but we both laughed and laughed about it for a long a time! I enjoy the Bible stories; sing songs, and all the delicious food at camp.

At home I like to watch TV and especially Saturday night hockey when the Maple Leafs win. I also like watching movies in my bedroom; I have a large collection of them. I also enjoy playing games, especially the card games war and euchre.

I love it when my sisters Andrea and Anita come over. We talk lots about hockey, especially about the Maple Leafs. Anita likes a different team, so we always bet who is going to win. (The Leafs always win!) Sometimes we go to Squires and we get pizza, which is my favourite! I also enjoy going to out for coffee with members from my church or when they come for a visit here to the home.

I go to Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church. I enjoy singing during the church service and talking with the other members with a cup of coffee. I really love the Lord, and am thankful for this home he has given me, and all my friends and family.

By **Peter F. Riemersma**
peterfr1234@gmail.com

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another”

(Prov 27:17)

Some time ago, a very well written article was in *Clarion*, titled “Women’s Fellowship Day in Langley.” Congratulations to our sisters in the Lord who are mentors to one another and took the time to encourage one another in this way.

This article really got me thinking: do men in the body of Christ take time to do the same? Personally, I have been richly blessed and benefited from several brothers in Christ who have been mentors to me, and I highly recommend that men in the church build one another up in this way. I urge my fellow brothers in the Lord to seek the Lord’s will about if you should step into the life of a brother who may be raised in a dysfunctional home, or had an absentee father where he was physically present but mentally and spiritually not there. A man without a godly father to guide him desperately needs so much support and encouragement. Many jails and/or prisons are full of broken boys trapped in men’s bodies. Why were they never taught to seek the Lord and his whole armour, his wisdom to defeat our enemies, the flesh, the world, and the devil who seeks to devour ill equipped men (and women)?

Men need to encourage their younger brothers and sons in the Lord, too. Sadly, many boys, before growing to manhood, are not taught to live for Jesus Christ and/or to be thankful to God for the gifts he has entrusted to them as they may be unknown. Not learning these important, life-altering skills, they are not *reverent, obedient, compassionate, consecrated, trustworthy, pure, grateful, loyal, industrious, and cheerful*. They may grow physically, but never quite reach maturity, and are ill equipped to handle any responsibility. Many cannot lead by example of their personal life. These men have never been taught to live godly lives.

We live in a world where men and women are confused and struggle with sin. In Genesis chapter three, Satan tempts Adam and Eve to do the one and only thing God had asked them not to do – to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan tried to convince Adam and Eve to believe the lie that this one “no” must mean that God doesn’t

Encouragement for men to serve one another as well as the younger generation:

A Practical Guide to Informal Mentoring and Intentional Disciple Making (George G. Robinson)

Christian Coaching, Second Edition: Helping Others Turn Potential into Reality (Gary Collins)

Disciplines of a Godly Man (R. Kent Hughes)

Iron Sharpens Iron: Building Character in a Mentoring Relationship (Howard G. Hendricks and William Hendricks)

Raising a Modern Day Knight (Robert Lewis, founder of Men’s Fraternity, now known as Authentic Manhood 33 The Series)

Spiritual Mentoring of Teens (Focus On The Family) Complete Guide (Jim Weidmann and Joe White)

The Hole In Our Holiness (Kevin De Young)

What Every Man Wishes His Father Had Taught Him (Byron Forrest Yawn)

10 Things Great Dads Do: Strategy for raising great kids (Rick Johnson. He, like Patrick Morley, has written several very good Christian books helpful any man who desires to be an authentic man, a man after God’s own heart.)

These should be read alongside God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, infallible Word.



have their best in mind and is holding out on them. " So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Gen 3:6).

So, here is the question for us as men: Where was Adam in this critical moment? Where was Adam when his wife was being tempted by Satan? You might want to believe that he wasn't around when it happened, that maybe he was out hunting for food or building something. Unfortunately, the Bible makes it clear that he was right there "with her," being a silent bystander. He passively stood there while his wife was under attack by Satan. In a moment when he could have spoken up and stepped into the situation and acted courageously to protect his wife, he just stood there.

Men have been living in Adam's shadow ever since. Rather than being strong dads, men often just choose the easy, lazy path. Why is it that so many men are so decisive, focused, and effective in areas of life that don't really matter, but tentative, uninspiring, and passive in some of the areas that matter most? And that if

we don't actively fight it, we'll default to being passive, another broken individual, and tomorrow's man trapped in a boy's body.

A man like this is poorly equipped to be the leader of his family and should not be called on to serve as an office bearer within the Reformed church. Sadly, we have far too many separations and/or divorces in our own midst! Simply put, he has not been taught to *reject passivity, accept responsibility, lead courageously, and invest eternally.*

Different things in my life have been helpful for me as a man. The Calvinist Cadet Corps has and continues to be a *huge* part of my life. Early on and today it has helped me know Christ better, and make him known to a fallen, dying world. This Reformed organization (ministry) assists a parent or parents in laying the foundation for a boy to have a life-long relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, Authentic Manhood 33 The Series has been a helpful program that I have participated in and still am intermittently, coming away stronger in my faith and as a man. Why are we not teaching tomorrow's men to "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Cor 16:13, 14)? 