

Clarion



What's Inside

We are thankful for another guest editorial from one of our CRTS professors, this time by Dr. Arjan de Visser, who writes about the new psalms and hymns that have been tested out by our federation over the past few months.

There are two articles that continue from last issue. First, Dr. Van Dam's third article in his series about "Being a Christian." This is followed by the second half of Keith Sikkema's series on "Remaining Reformed in America."

Issue 17 also contains the Treasures, New & Old and Ray of Sunshine columns. Orangeville reports on their completed building renovation. There is also a letter to the editor and a book review.

Laura Veenendaal

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Clarion

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LEAD ARTICLE



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Moving Forward with New Psalms and Hymns

For the last six months or so, the Canadian Reformed Churches have been testing new psalms and hymns. At least, that was the idea. I suspect that the COVID-19 lockdowns have seriously hampered the testing efforts. It is hard to practice an unfamiliar song when there is only a handful of people in church and the rest of the congregation is participating through livestream!

Be that as it may, the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* (SCBP) has requested the churches to test the proposed additions to the songbook and to submit comments by the end of July 2021. This means that by the time this article appears in print, the committee should have received the responses from the churches (I'm not holding my breath).

Let's rehearse quickly: Synod of 2019 mandated the SCBP to seek input from the churches concerning additional non-Gen-evan psalm renditions and additional hymns and to compile a provisional list of songs for testing by the end of 2020. The committee worked hard and managed to send a list of thirty-nine psalms and forty-three hymns to the churches by January/February this year. It was very helpful that the committee provided PDFs of all the proposed songs.ⁱ

The churches have been asked to submit their comments by July 31. No doubt, there will be pressure on the committee to extend the deadline. This will put the committee in a difficult position as they are expected to evaluate all the responses and submit a report to the next synod by the end of this year. We wish the committee wisdom and discernment!

In the meantime, it is important that there should be some discussion and evaluation with respect to the proposed songs. After all, the songs that Synod 2022 is going to authorize will be on the lips of Canadian Reformed people for many years to come, and they will influence the beliefs of our people. There is an intimate connection between worship and theology. What we sing in church should be in line with what we believe.

ⁱ See <https://resource.bookofpraise.ca/proposedsongs2022.aspx>

We are moving in a good direction

Appreciation

In this article I would like to offer some observations regarding the character and the quality of the songs that are being proposed. Overall, I'm quite happy, but I have a few concerns. At the outset I want to express my appreciation for the work of the SCBP. From the hundreds of suggestions received from the churches, the committee made a selection that will expand the Canadian Reformed song repertoire while still respecting the character and the tradition of Reformed psalmody and hymnody. We are moving in a good direction. The Canadian Reformed psalter hymnal will be more in line with what orthodox Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America are singing, while still maintaining its distinctive of having all 150 *Genevan* psalms and a number of hymns that have been translated from the Dutch tradition.

The committee has honoured Synod's wish to use the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (TPH) as the primary source for additional songs. From an ecumenical perspective, this is laudable. It is good to have a shared song tradition (or at least, a tradition that overlaps) with the URCNA and the OPC, the church federations that are closest to us on the North American continent. Unfortunately, many songs in the TPH contain archaic language. I appreciate the fact that the committee has consulted other hymnals and, in a few cases, has presented more modern versions. By way of example, the version of the hymn "Crown Him with Many Crowns" that is proposed is an improvement over the version that is found in the TPH.

As indicated, I would like to make some comments about the quality of the psalms and hymns that are being proposed. The committee has suggested that the churches use the principles and guidelines for selecting new songs that are found in the Acts of the Synod of 2013.ⁱⁱ Those guidelines can be condensed to three categories: biblical quality, poetic quality, and musical quality. I will first comment on the psalm renditions, then on the hymns that have been proposed.

Psalms

With respect to the proposed psalm versions, it is great that some well-known classics are included, such as Psalm 8 ("Lord, Our Lord, Your Glorious Name"), Psalm 22 ("Amid the Thronging Worshipers"), and Psalm 23 ("The Lord's My Shepherd," on the famous Crimond melody). Personally, I would have liked to see even more of these well-known psalm versions included, for example Psalm 145C ("I Will Extol You, O My God"), but at least we have some.

It is also to be appreciated that we will have alternative versions of psalms that are sung often in worship, such as Psalm 51 ("God, Be Merciful to Me") and Psalm 103 ("Come, My Soul, and Bless the Lord"). The committee has also included alternatives for *Genevan* melodies that are difficult to sing (Psalm 59, Psalm 120).

Overall, in my estimation, the quality of the proposed psalms is good, but some versions are mediocre and there are a few that are even unacceptable. In the "mediocre" category I would place Psalm 11 (poetic quality is lacking), Psalm 30 (not a strong melody) and Psalm 104 (too bad the melody of "Ye Servants of God" was used for this one).

In the "unacceptable" category I would place the proposed version of Psalm 60. The melody that was chosen for this Psalm (Katushka) may work well for a German beer fest and the Russian military seems to like it too (as a search on YouTube will showⁱⁱⁱ), but it does not fit the message of Psalm 60.

Then there is the proposed Psalm 5. It is only one stanza, based on only one verse (verse 8, "Lead me in your righteousness"). This does not line up with the principle that our psalm versions should cover the whole or at least a significant chunk of a psalm. I would suggest that this song be included not in the psalm section but in the hymn section (following the example of the TPH).

Hymns

As for the proposed hymns, it is great that some classic hymns are included, such as "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," "Crown Him with Many Crowns," and "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." I also appreciate that some solid contemporary hymns are proposed, such as "Speak, O Lord" and "How Deep the Father's Love for Us." Again, I'm a bit disappointed that some other classics were not included, for example "By the Sea of Crystal" and "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less." But

ⁱⁱ See <https://canrc.org/documents/8404#page=45>

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjZrV4wbdnQ>

Let's strive for quality: biblical, lyrical, and musical

that's the way it is with hymnals: you never get everything you want, and you usually get some you didn't want.

Some proposed hymns I would put in the category of "acceptable but not great." To mention a few examples: The lyrics of "A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing" are beautiful but the melody is fluffy. This hymn needed a more majestic melody. Similar comments can be made about "Come You Faithful, Raise the Strain:" the melody is a bit jumpy and does not flow well.

In some cases, the melody is fine, but the text is rather mediocre. To mention an example, the lyrics of "Praise the Savior Now and Ever" are quite archaic (stanza 2: "Man's work faileth, Christ's availeth"). I'm not sure what we would actually gain by adding this hymn as we already have quite a number of good hymns on the death and resurrection of Christ. In this category I would also place "Worship Christ, the Risen King." In the second stanza of this hymn the tomb of Christ is personified and given a voice, as follows: "Death and I could not contain Him." One wants to be charitable and allow for some poetic freedoms, but to imagine a talking tomb ... that's a bridge too far for me.

There are a few proposed hymns that, in my opinion, should not be included in the *Book of Praise*. An example is the song "Come, Behold, the Wondrous Mystery." It's a nice melody and contains some beautiful lyrics in the first two stanzas, but then in stanza 4 it says: "Come, behold, the wondrous mystery, slain by death the God of life." Strictly speaking, this is a heresy (God


did not die on the cross). It would have been better if the lyrics said: "Slain by death the Lord of life." Also, in stanza 3 there is an unfortunate mixing of metaphors: "Upon the tree ... hangs the Lamb in victory" (a lamb hanging on a tree?).

Then there is the song "God Himself is with Us," which is a translation of Gerhard Tersteegen's "*Gott ist gegenwärtig*." The Wikipedia article on the German original informs us that "the hymn is regarded as an expression of Christian mysticism."^{iv} Tersteegen was a German pietist, seeking a mystical union with God by way of meditation and an ascetic life. The English translation may be less overtly mystical than the German original, but it still has problematic lines, such as "Him alone, God we own" (can we say that we own God?).

A song that deserves a closer look is "Yet Not I but Through Christ in Me" by CityAlight, a music group that is connected to an Anglican church in Sydney, Australia. I read an interview with two members of CityAlight, and I appreciate their stated mission to write hymns that have simple melodies and biblically rich lyrics.^v I'm less enthusiastic about their desire to write melodies "that carry emotion." In our Reformed tradition we prefer melodies that carry weight and dignity. The melody of "Yet Not I but Through Christ in Me" certainly evokes emotion, but it is perhaps too sweet. I have certain reservations about the lyrics too, but it is hard to summarize that in a few sentences.

Conclusion

I hope that further discussion and evaluation will lead to the *Book of Praise* being augmented with a number of solid psalms and hymns. It is worth putting effort into it. Let's strive for quality: biblical, lyrical, and musical.

There is one aspect that I have not commented on in this article: Synod has mandated the SCBP to keep in mind the limit of 100 hymns. I understand that this limit is being appealed and Synod 2022 will have to deal with the issue. With this in mind, it is to be appreciated that the committee proposed more than fifteen hymns in case Synod decided to remove or revise the limit. More could be said about this, but that would require another article. 

^{iv} See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gott_ist_gegenw%C3%A4rtig

^v See <https://www.challies.com/interviews/get-to-know-cityalight-and-their-new-album/>

A Two-for-One Deal

“And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”
(MARK 2:1-12)

Because the doorway of the house was filled with people, they burrowed their way through a roof made of beams, branches, mud, and tiles to lower their paralytic friend through a hole so that he could be healed by Jesus Christ. People will do almost anything to be healed. Today I see that same intense desire for healing when people suffer through the side-effects of treatments to fight cancer. Sometimes people travel to a faraway place to be treated by a renowned doctor, even at great financial expense. It's fully understandable.

In Mark 2:1-12, the paralytic and his four friends received a two-for-one deal: they came for healing, but they first received words of forgiveness. Christ used the healing of the paralytic to show that he has authority to forgive sins.

It's noteworthy that the gospels do not record any words spoken by the men, and it's safe to say that they didn't speak to Jesus: sometimes actions speak louder than words. I picture the paralytic looking at Jesus with eyes which said, “Please, Jesus, heal me!”

Imagine the surprise when Christ said, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5). That was not what anyone expected to hear – certainly not the men who had come for a healing! Christ, however, had not come into the world only to heal illnesses. He came to conquer the cause of all human misery – sin – by his death on the cross. Forgiveness is God's greatest gift to us.


Christ spoke with deep compassion when he addressed the paralytic as “son.” When a father addresses his child as “son,” ears perk up and there is a sense that this is important and that there is a relationship of love. The paralytic was a child of God whom Christ had come to save, and Christ spoke with the authority and compassion of his Father in heaven.

It's striking that the first recorded person in the gospel of Mark to receive forgiveness from Christ in Capernaum was this paralytic. The paralytic was someone who could not even approach Christ in his own strength! It tells us that we receive forgiveness only by grace through faith, apart from any works of our own.

Christ's declaration of forgiveness means that this encounter was personally meaningful for more than just the paralytic. If all Christ had done was heal the paralytic, there wouldn't have

been anything in it for the friends or anyone else. All five had faith – Christ saw “their faith” (Mark 2:5) – and Christ's declaration to the paralytic about forgiveness by implication applied to the four friends too, as well as to the believing bystanders, and to us today. Everyone who comes to Christ in faith receives forgiveness of sins!

In order to prove to the questioning scribes that he really is divine and has authority to forgive sins, Jesus then healed the paralytic (Mark 2:10, 11). The teachers of the law thought of Christ only as “this fellow” (Mark 2:7, NIV), but Christ raised the bar when healing the paralytic by referring to himself with the Messianic title “Son of Man” (Mark 2:10, 11; Dan 7:13, 14). This is the first occurrence of the Messianic title “Son of Man” in the gospel of Mark. And look, the paralytic got up, picked up his mat, and walked out before their very eyes!

Do you see why this encounter between Christ and the paralytic is so comforting for us today? Eventually the healed paralytic would die, but forgiveness goes with a believer even in the hour of death. Christ doesn't always answer prayers for healing today, but Christ does give believers the promise of eternal life through the forgiveness of sins. By his death on the cross for our sins, Christ has opened up for us a whole new world where there will be no disability, no sickness, no burdens of life, no death, and no sorrow. That's good news! 

For Further Study

1. How was the faith of the paralytic's four friends evident?
2. In what way is Daniel 7:13, 14 a Messianic text?
3. Why did the onlookers say, “We never saw anything like this” (Mark 2:12)?



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Early Christians

A Chosen Race, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation

In previous articles, we have seen how the early Christians functioned as prophets, priests, and kings in the pagan environment in which God had placed them. Now we consider how the Christians formed a nation.

The new "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16), the Christian church, functioned in a real way after Pentecost as a holy people with their own distinct identity. The apostle Peter reminded the Christians dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Pet 1:2) that as believers they now had status as a special people. They were not just scattered individuals. He told them:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet 2:9-10).

This unique identity as a holy nation, scattered throughout the empire, and yet united as God's special creation and possession, puzzled the Roman authorities. They did not really know what to do with this phenomenon - the Christian church.

The early
Christian church
was completely
counter-cultural

Counter-cultural

As a royal priesthood and a holy nation, the early Christian church was completely counter-cultural. This becomes obvious, for example, from a letter written, probably in the late second century AD, to a certain Diognetus, who had asked what Christianity was all about. In describing Christians, this anonymous letter states in part (in §5):



The Good Shepherd.

They live in their own countries, but only as aliens; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign.... They love everyone, and by everyone they are persecuted. They are unknown, yet they are condemned; they are put to death, yet they are brought to life. They are poor, yet they make many rich; they are in need of everything, yet they abound in everything. They are dishonored, yet they are glorified in their dishonor; they are slandered, yet they are vindicated. They are cursed, yet they bless; they are insulted, yet they offer respect. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; when they are punished, they rejoice as brought to life. By the Jews they are assaulted as foreigners, and by the Greeks they are persecuted, yet those who hate them are unable to give a reason for their hostility.

Notice how when they are punished, "they rejoice." This is a key characteristic of the early Christian church.

Joyous and patient

This joy was already evident at the very beginning, at the day of Pentecost. As they shared fellowship and food, they had "glad

and generous hearts." Their joy included praising God and being looked on favourably by all the people (Acts 2:46-47). Joy characterized the apostle Paul's letter to the Philippian believers even though he wrote it from prison. "Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me" (Phil 1:17-18). "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice" (Phil 4:4). That joy continued to be shown in the church, as we, for example, saw with Perpetua's martyrdom. She endured it with joy. So, while pagan society as a whole may grumble and mutter about lesser matters, Christians strived to show their joy in the Lord, regardless of what their present circumstances may have been like.

This joy was coupled with enormous patience. The apostle John described his Christian identity as being a "partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus" (Rev 1:9). It was this patient endurance for which the Lord had commended the churches at Ephesus, Thyatira, and Philadelphia (Rev 2:2-3, 19; 3:10). It was through enduring patiently that victory was assured, as the conclusion of Christ's letters to these churches indicate. Alan Kreiber, in his study on patience in the early church, also noted that the church

fathers consistently underscored the need for patience and even considered it crucial for their well-being and growth.ⁱ He compared the influence of Christian testimony to a process of fermentation, a gradual, unstoppable energy. Christians living lives of patient ferment meant that the gospel slowly but surely took hold where Christians lived. The church did not grow because of concerted evangelistic efforts. “Rather, it was primarily because the Christians and their churches lived by a habitus that attracted others. The Christians’ focus was not on ‘saving’ people or recruiting them; it was on living faithfully.” The growth of the church was considered to be God’s work and not that of the members of the church. “So they did not engage in frantic action to save those who were not baptized; instead they entrusted the outsiders to God.”ⁱⁱ The church was patient and lived their faith trusting that God would use their everyday testimony to attract and draw others in.

It is striking that the church did not make a concerted use of their worship services to evangelize. Because of persecution, starting with that of Nero in 68 AD, churches across the empire began to prohibit outsiders to join them in worship which became secret. The fear that some might attend in order to spy on them and report them to the authorities caused churches to keep their worship services hidden. By the late second century, the exclusion of outsiders from worship was widespread. Christians were of course far from being shy about their faith. They spread the gospel by patient personal contacts and lifestyle evangelism, but not by their church services. “We do not speak great things but we live them” Cyprian said in the mid-third century.

A unified nation

Christians lived and shared their faith with anyone whom God put in their life’s path. They formed a nation which was not defined by race or ethnicity, but by being born again as children of Father in heaven. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost brought with it a foretaste of the realization of the promise of a reunited humanity. God had shattered the initial unity of the human race in punishing the sin of the Tower of

Babel by destroying their ability to understand each other (Gen 11:1–9). But at Pentecost, the judgmental confusion of tongues was being reversed and replaced with the miracle that those of different languages and backgrounds could understand the gospel. Regardless of one’s ethnic or linguistic background, “we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11). All believers were citizens of the heavenly Zion, of which Psalm 87 spoke. The apostle John saw the redeemed, the church, “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb” (Rev 7:9).

In the meantime, this people of God, this in a sense invisible nation, is spread over the whole earth. They are all different, racially, socially, culturally, but they are one in Christ. There is, therefore, as the apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, “neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28; also Col 3:11). This unity overrides the diversity in importance. All God’s children have a common citizenship. No matter the background or ethnicity, Christians can say: “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20), the Jerusalem above, “She is our mother” (Gal 4:26). This sense of the overriding unity among diverse Christians was also experienced and reflected in the early Christian church. The church is even called “this new race” in the letter to Diognetus (§1), which was mentioned earlier.

Through their simple testimony of consistent Christian living, believers in the first centuries after Pentecost jolted the empire. They were like a growing invisible nation that showed that their first loyalty was to their risen Saviour. Eventually, God used their witness to overturn the pagan social order. Are there lessons here for us today? **C**

To be continued



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ⁱ Kreider, *The Patient Ferment*, 13–36.

ⁱⁱ Kreider, *The Patient Ferment*, 129–30.

Remaining Reformed in America (2)

We have traced the imperfect “Dutch Reformed Church in America” (RCA) in the New World during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They had good Reformed papers, but their loyalties were divided. Yet, by God’s grace, they remained.

In the Netherlands, meanwhile, the mother-church faced issues of its own. It was privileged and affected far more by the magistrates than the Synod of Dort had envisioned. Rationalism and “Enlightenment” thinking promoted tolerance for denigrating scriptural truth. Some members went through the motions of being Reformed while their heart was elsewhere (*cf.* Ps 50). In reaction, Second Reformation ministers implored people even with tears to get serious about God’s wrath and his call for repentance. Yet, in 1795, a prevailing mindset of “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” welcomed French revolutionary armies into the country. The Reformed Prince of Orange fled to England, fittingly commenting that “God has a quarrel with the Netherlands.” In 1813, his son returned from England to become King William I. He was deeply infected with Enlightenment ideas.

1816-1834: General Regulation and Secession

Since Dort, magistrates had influenced church matters, but the 1816 “General Regulation for the Governance of the Dutch Reformed Church” (DRC) made church governance a hierarchy controlled by the King. While the Church Order of Dort was decidedly anti-hierarchal, top-down control was now a key principle. Dort’s protections for remaining Reformed, like subscription to the Three Forms of Unity and the right of appeal, were rendered ineffective. Tolerance was required, the Canons of Dort were left out of the psalter and evangelical hymns were added, Bibles were banned from schools, and the faithful sought spiritual nourishment in Conventicles. Opponents were branded intolerant disturbers of the peace.

Rev. Hendrik de Cock (1801-1842) of rural Ulrum had studied at the liberal University of Groningen. He preached salvation based on civility, moral virtue, and tolerance; Jesus was a good example. Yet, when church member Klaas Kuypenga pointed out to him that “if I had to add but one sigh to my salvation I would

be eternally lost,” Rev. de Cock began to study the Canons of Dort and Calvin’s Institutes. He soon saw the corruptions in the DRC and started to preach accordingly. He re-published the Canons of Dort and the Compendium (a popular summary of the Catechism) and wrote pamphlets to explain his new insights – condemning hymns and calling some enlightened ministers “wolves.” Soon crowds of thirsting believers from elsewhere sought him out for preaching, catechism, and baptism. The DRC hierarchy pushed back, harshly: de Cock was intolerant, a disturber of the peace! In October 1834, most members of the Ulrum DRC signed an Act of Secession or Return. It outlined how the DRC had become false, refused to repent, “persecuted those who want to live devoutly in Christ Jesus,” and “bound the people’s consciences.” They would have no part in the DRC “until they return to the true worship of the Lord,” but “wish to exercise fellowship with all true Reformed members.” They returned to the Church Order of Dort, and Secessions soon happened elsewhere. Government responses included fines, billeting, imprisonment, and forbidding services with more than nineteen people. Persecutions formally ended in 1840, but social ostracism continued. Regrettably, Seceders remained internally divided for decades about things like church membership, government recognition, unity, and ministers’ training and attire.

1846: Emigration and essentials

In the 1840s, Dutch taxes were high, jobs were scarce, and, in 1845-1846 blights ruined staples like potatoes and grains. Food prices shot up, making this an additional incentive for destitute Seceders to look elsewhere to serve God and have Reformed schools. Led by Rev. Albertus Christian van Raalte (1811-1876), sixty Seceders left in September 1846 to start a colony in the USA. Receiving compassionate help from the Reformed Church in America (RCA), led by Revs. de Witt and Wyckoff, they arrived at the promising site of “Holland, MI,” bought land, cleared virgin forest, and built shelters in February 1847. Boatloads of settlers followed. When Rev. Wyckoff visited in 1849, he found 653 houses, seven churches, four ministers and three Christian schools. Rev. van Raalte visited the RCA in the East, finding sympathy and the Reformed faith, and experienced

brotherhood. By 1850, the Michigan churches joined the RCA: It maintained the Three Forms of Unity, was free from government control, and showed abounding support for the Dutch colonists. Also, the RCA was eager to expand in Michigan and beyond.

Some Dutch immigrants (like Gijsbert Haan) lingered in the East and learned (at least in part from the TDRC) that the RCA had different practices than the Dutch Secession churches. In extension of Belgic Confession 28 (to separate from those who do not belong to the church), Article 85 of the CO (CanRC, 50) was relevant here: “In non-essentials, foreign churches shall not be rejected for having a different usage.” “Essentials” were doctrines and practices directly based on or deducted from Scripture. It was essential to submit to Scripture, adhere to its principles for order, and uphold unity in confession. When the lingering immigrants moved to Michigan, they shared what they learned: The RCA had 800 hymns, catechism-preaching was sometimes, teaching often not done, piety fell short, homevisits were neglected, the doctrine of election was unknown or denied, baptism was occasionally done at home and the Lord’s Supper was poorly fenced – even admitting Freemasonsⁱ. Was this a matter of Dutch vs. American culture, or were they essentials and marks of the false church? In 1857, perhaps ten percent of the total Michigan membership, some 150 families, left the RCA. Despite much internal strife, they formed the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). It grew dramatically in the 1880s with new Dutch immigrants and transfers from the RCA, incorporating the conservative True Reformed Dutch Church (TRDC) as “Classis Hackensack” in 1890. That union ended in 1908.

Americanizationⁱⁱ in Michigan

The “Western” RCA also grew. When Hope College started in Holland, English-speaking Hope Church began in the early 1860s with college faculty and staff. To address overcrowding in Rev. van Raalte’s Dutch “Pillar Church,” Third Church began in 1867, and progressively pursued Americanization. While Pillar Church sang Dutch psalms only, Third Church added hymns in 1872 and a choir in 1874. A church choir was an American, not a Reformed tradition. In 1876, when Methodists held an American-style revival, Third Church did too, registering many new members. Third Church promoted English speaking public

ⁱ The history of Freemasonry, its incompatibility with Christianity, and the dissimilarity of European and North American lodges are debated, but joining a lodge implies denying Christ as the *only* Saviour.

ⁱⁱ See Bruins, Elton J. (1995). *The Americanization of a Congregation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

schools – rather than parochial Reformed schools envisioned in 1847. Its first minister (Rev. Utterwick) left in 1880, in part because they were not Americanizing fast enough. When lodge membership became a hot topic, Americanized Third Church deemed it okay, but Pillar Church mostly disagreed and left for the CRC in 1884. They kept their building.


While Holland remained quite Dutch, Third Church phased out Dutch services by 1896. During World War I, it embraced the American patriotic cause, encouraged members to buy liberty bonds and join the army, and celebrated the French ally's revolutionary Bastille Day. It still resisted dancing and regretted the decline in Sunday-evening worship attendance, but in the 1920s it added junior sermons, a church nursery, and a Boy Scouts troop. It also celebrated its success as the third largest RCA, its progressive mindset and its "conservative theology." By the 1930s, catechism-instruction and second-service attendance declined, and disappeared completely in the 1970s. "Christian education" shifted to topical classes, social action, and missional programs.

Sentiments of pride and success also prevailed at the RCA's tercentenary's celebration in 1928, with much attention for its expansive domestic and foreign mission and publishing efforts. After World War II, broad ecumenicity became a focus. It opened ecclesiastical offices to women in the 1970s. It softened its positions on Sabbath observance, social dancing, and divorce, and generally saw itself in competition with other main-line American churches. Today, on its website, it presents itself as a "fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world." This implies an optimistic "we'll do this" drive for successful church planting: "We're starting 1,000 new churches

in twenty years. We're planting these churches to introduce 100,000 people to Jesus and raise them up as disciples." This seems at odds with 1 Corinthians 3, but the RCA still claims Reformed roots, pastoral care and faithfulness to the ecumenical creeds, and references the Three Forms of Unity and the Belhar Confession. What this means emerges in the context of its closer ties with the CRCⁱⁱⁱ.

Conclusion

It is okay to be Dutch or American, but the goal is "the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ," as our "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:12-20). Earthly citizenship is but the context in which we serve as prophets, priests, and kings (LD 12, 32), which references 1 Peter 2:12, "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable... so... they may glorify God on the day of visitation." We've seen a church that started with good papers in 1628 struggle and gradually drift away from its original Reformed roots.

Pray for office-bearers when they lead and minister or meet in council or broader assemblies. Pray that led by God's Word and Spirit they may see the difference between essentials and non-essentials – so we may remain Reformed, in line with Scripture as summarized in the confessions, and the agreed-upon (and amendable) Church Order. 



Keith Sikkema

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ⁱⁱⁱ Vriesma, A. (2011). theaquilareport.com/crc-and-rca-the-fundamental-differences/

The Church at Orangeville Dedicates New House of Worship

It was around 9 AM on Sunday, March 7, 2021, that people began to arrive for worship. Our family was among the first to pull into the new parking lot (I have to admit, this early arrival was due to excitement and urgings from my husband, *not* to any natural inclination on my part to be early). The purpose was consistent with every other Sunday – to gather for worship. This time, the destination felt both different and familiar. Since August 2019, this church building had not been a gathering place of worship; rather, it became an evolving construction site, with the only guests the workers and those commissioned to bring it renewed life. While COVID-19 restrictions on the church reduced the number of those able to attend the inaugural service in person, it was with great thankfulness that the larger worship space allowed for half of the congregation to attend the first worship service and the second half to attend in the afternoon service.

Nowadays, the construction of a place of worship is not commonplace. It has at one time been noted in a sermon by our minister, Rev. Eric Kampen, that this is a rare “sight,” as there is a steady decline in communal worship. As other churches dwindle in size and doors begin to permanently close, we have been blessed to increase the size and efficiency of the building. This will accommodate our own congregation, visitors, and, with the Lord’s grace, others drawn to worship from the community.

This process was not easy. As the wife of a contractor, I will often hear about the ins and outs of a construction site and the challenges that invariably arise. My father-in-law, Bill DeGroot, and fellow contractor, Paul Janssen, managed the project, scheduling demolition and rebuilding, as well as upgrades for the part that remained, and everything that both entailed. Wonderful support could be seen within the congregation as volunteers came out to complete tasks whenever possible.



When the benches were pulled out and the organ removed, generous offers for storage of reusable items came pouring in.

Some years before, we had been made aware of a pipe organ in a church in Peterborough that was scheduled for demolition. Many volunteers with strong arms disassembled, transported, and delivered the parts to be stored. The skills and abilities within the congregation were tapped into as a valuable asset. I'm reminded of the builders of the temple and the variety of workmen that were utilized. The Orangeville congregation is very blessed to have so many of these trades readily available; plumbers, electricians, welders, carpenters, and more showed up when needed, eager to help. At the time of our first service, the "new to us" organ was still in the process of being installed. The congregational singing was accompanied by a "new to us" grand piano.

Accommodations for worship and other aspects of church life had been organized before the construction began. Finding an available space to fit our congregation was more of a challenge than one might expect. The Christian Reformed Church in Orangeville graciously rented their building to us, but it was a tight fit to get bums in seats and cars in parking spaces. Plans were literally drawn up for members so that this space could work. Flexibility for church times were needed, as well, to work around the CRC worship service. The 8 AM morning service was great for some (and tolerated by others), and the 1 PM service allowed for a variety of activities after worshipping. Bible study groups met at the church or in various homes, and Catechism classes were held in the basement of the manse for one year and in the shop space of a congregational family the next.


Things were going well, and excitement was growing. Then, in March 2020, the world seemed to stop. The COVID pandemic had countries around the globe locking down. Church worship as we knew it ceased.

In the midst of this, the church renovations were deemed non-essential, and the job site shut down. Uncertainty was the only constant, it felt. Finally, construction was allowed to restart, but delays ensued as restrictions made everything so much more difficult. Yet, it was with joy that members were able to drive by and see the progress on the building. Many

times, when my family stopped by to take a peek from our vehicle, others were already there, taking in any new progress.

The loosening restrictions also allowed a regulated number of members to again attend worship services in person, but the times of worship needed to be adjusted to accommodate for cleaning after the CRC morning worship service, as well as in between our two services. 12:30 PM and 3:30 PM worship services were promptly scheduled. As restrictions tightened, then fluctuated, worship constantly required ingenuity and flexibility amongst members. Livestreaming at Dufferin Area Christian School in the gym was set up to allow for greater numbers to attend communal worship. Near the middle of February, it became apparent that the jobsite was very close to receiving final touches. Painting was completed, flooring installed, bathrooms accessorized, and cleaning crews organized. A date was finally circulated to the congregation to mark in their calendars!

Throughout the inaugural worship service in the new building, the Lord's blessings on the work were visible and appreciated by all. While the minister preached behind a new pulpit, clean lines and calming colours were enjoyed by those listening from comfortable new benches. Even so, in all the superficial beauty of the building, we knew the bigger purpose of the last nineteen months. The opening song, Psalm 150, was chosen for the fitting circumstances, the joyous praise of all worshipping in one accord. We were reminded that this was also the final song we had sung in the old building - a fitting bookend. The theme of the sermon focused on the Lord's intention for his church: "By the images of salt and light, the Lord teaches about the nature and purpose of his church." Ultimately, we learned how we, *his children*, are the salt and the light, a status based on the Lord's calling.

This new building gives us a fresh start, a chance to recommit ourselves to this calling so that we can attract others to walk in righteousness. By God's grace, we can shine the light on the preserving work of the gospel. To mark the occasion, the service included a formal dedication of the building to our Triune God, asking him to bless the use of this house of worship so that his name will be praised and believers will be built up in faith. 

By Danielle DeGroot

Jerry Bontekoe



Jerry was born the second youngest child in his family. Jerry has lived at Anchor Home since the beginning, which would be 1986! Wow, that is a long time!

Jerry is a busy man, and likes to keep busy, but as he ages, he also has to take some quiet time, which he does not always enjoy. Jerry has a love for selling! He enjoys helping Mr. Rozema in making bird, bat, and recently owl houses. Jerry loves to keep in touch with his family members and shows

an interest in their daily activities. Jerry currently helps Mr. Rozema in his greenhouse in the mornings, usually four mornings a week. COVID has restricted many activities for Jerry and the others, and his social life has been very limited.

Jerry grew up in Hamilton and loves to go back just to see things. Jerry also helps with a paper route that is done by the residents, and he does enjoy going for walks. For the last two summers, because of COVID, we have been unable to go to Anchor Camp. At least this year a virtual camp was held, and we did some fun activities. We went to Safari Niagara, and we went to a staff member's place. We also went fishing, four wheeling, and had a barbeque supper. Hopefully next year we can go back to normal camp and we can see our many friends.

Jerry will be fifty-seven on his birthday and is thankful for all those who work with him and help him.

Happy birthday to all of you celebrating a birthday in September!
We wish you the Lord's blessing in the coming year, and a great day celebrating with family and friends.

September Birthdays

6 Katie Deboer will be **21**

34756 7 Ave
Abbotsford, BC V2S 8C4

8 Marsha Moesker will be **44**

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

14 Jerry Bontekoe will be **57**

c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

15 Cindy Blokter will be **32**

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

22 Nick Prinzen will be **49**

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

25 Dave Vanveen will be **51**

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

29 Paul Dieleman will be **52**

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

This past June, the Free Reformed Church of Australia (FRCA) held their general synod. On the agenda were reports from their Deputies for Sister Church Relationships, including a report on the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). And so, this provides us with an opportunity to learn how the FRCA views our federation.


As background, FRCA Synod Bunbury 2018 gave the Deputies for Sister Church Relationships the mandate to “monitor developments within the CanRC in relation to Blessings Christian Church in line with the questions expressed in the deputies report” (Article 47). These questions, which Synod felt were of sufficient concern, had to do with Blessings removing themselves from one classis without mutual consent and joining a neighbouring classis. (cf. Classis Ontario West, September 2017), that Blessings Christian Church has no defined church boundary or catchment area, and additionally specifies its members to give evidence of a commitment to mission/outreach. The deputies questioned how such developments function within the CanRC and whether they are consistent with the plain reading of the agreed Church Order.

The deputies reported to Synod 2021 that “these developments are part of a larger dynamic within the CanRC in which various matters of church polity and liturgy are being robustly debated.” Subsequently, the FRCA Synod 2021, while acknowledging that the CanRC gives evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order, also gave the deputies the mandate to “monitor and report to synod on developments within the CanRC in relation to areas of discussion about church polity and liturgy as mentioned in the deputies’ report” (Article 95). As grounds, Synod invoked the FRCA rule #2 for sister church relations, which reads “The churches shall mutually care for each other

that they do not depart from the reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy.”

If we take a look back, a recommendation from our own Synod Neerlandia 2001 was “to determine whether the CanRC should approach the sister churches in The Netherlands (*GKN*) in accordance with Rule 1 of the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship (*roughly equivalent to the FRCA rule #2*) with the warning that they are deviating from their Reformed basis in the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity.”

Already at the next Synod (Chatham 2004) there were calls from the churches to officially exhort the GKN. Synod did not agree that the time had yet come, however Synod Burlington 2010 did find it necessary to “speak the truth in love,” to “exhort our sister churches in The Netherlands” and to “express our prayerful concern for our brothers and sisters in the Lord that they be committed to the Reformed Faith” (Article 86). Less than ten years later, our churches found it necessary to terminate our sister church relationship with the GKN.

Within the CanRC, there is a push for increasing the number of hymns, or to remove the limit altogether. There is an increased use of visual aids in the worship services. There are calls from the pulpit to re-evaluate the role of women in the church with respect to the office of deacon. And it seems that the FRCA may have concerns about us which are similar to those that we had about the GKN some twenty years ago. I can’t help but wonder whether in 2024, or perhaps in 2027, the FRCA will find it necessary to speak the truth in love to us, and to exhort us as a federation to remain committed to the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy. I pray not. But if they do find it necessary, will we be humble enough to listen? 

Lyndon Kok
Calgary, Alberta

BOOK REVIEW

In the Beginning: Listening to Genesis 1 and 2

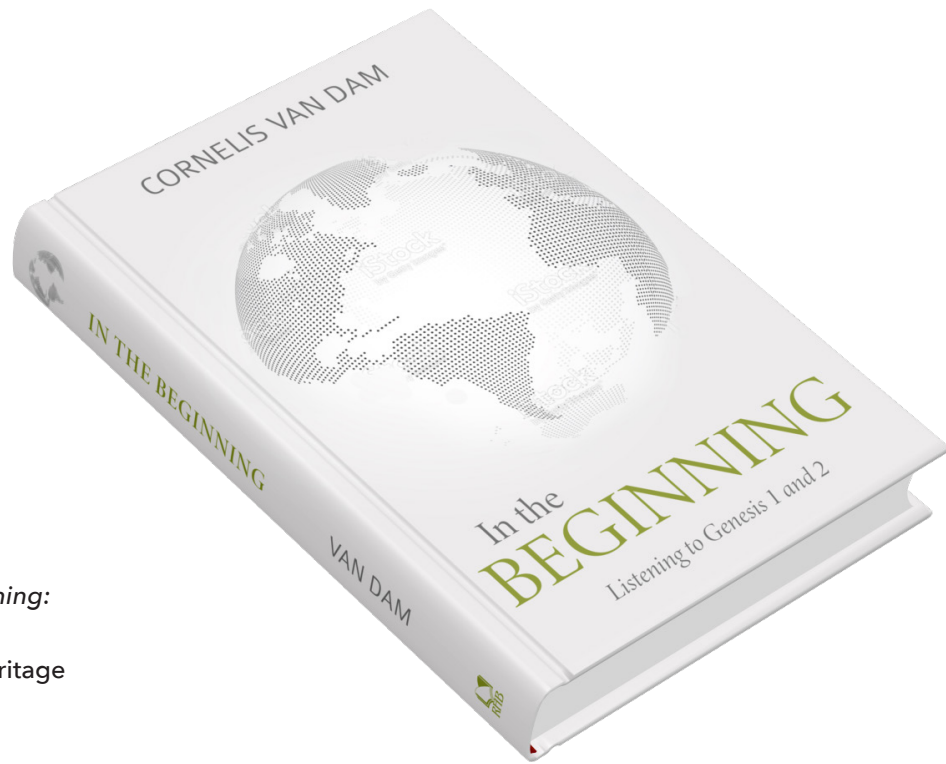
Long ago there was a time when Christians would read the biblical text and accept it as gospel truth. It did not matter whether you were a worker or a scholar, a tradesman or a teacher, a housewife or a scientist, your worldview was determined by what the Bible said. Today we no longer live in such a time. What the Bible says carries very little or no weight. This applies to many areas of life, and especially to origins.

What has happened? Some would say that Charles Darwin happened. Others point the finger at various philosophical influences. The rise of humanism, secularism, and scientism are identified as major culprits. Whatever the case maybe, we are now in an age where only a minority of Christians accept what Genesis 1 and 2 says about the beginning of life on earth and the creation of mankind. Most have surrendered to one or other form of evolutionary thinking, while some have opted for what is called “theistic evolution.” What is the latter? It is an attempt to somehow combine God’s revelation with any number of different evolutionary ideas. The result is a sort of hybrid approach.

Counteracting this way of thinking have been different organizations that still take the message of Genesis seriously. Some, such as Answers in Genesis, are geared for the Christian lay person, and others, such as the Creation Research Society, cater to Christian scientists and to the scientifically minded. Yet, some would say that what has been lacking in the mountain

of material produced is a detailed, careful, well researched, pastoral, and truly biblical treatment on the matter of origins. If that is the case, then I will be so bold as to go out on a limb and say “no longer.” Cornelis Van Dam, emeritus professor of Old Testament Studies at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, has stepped forward and written a splendid book called *In the Beginning: Listening to Genesis 1 and 2*.

This book, which spans almost 400 pages, gives us a clear explanation of Genesis 1 and 2. It warns us against thinking that the Genesis account was borrowed from pagan sources or that we need to look behind the text for its true meaning. Carefully and methodically, Van Dam explains the biblical text putting his deep knowledge of Hebrew and his familiarity with Near Eastern studies to work. He examines and defends the historicity of the first Bible chapters. He exegetes in detail each of the days of creation as to length and character and pays special attention to the Seventh Day. He gives us an extensive treatment of Genesis 2 and to the Garden of Eden. He weighs alternate theories of creation such as the gap, chaos, and framework with fairness, and does not hesitate to critique them. He sheds light on any number of issues relating to accommodation, genre, history, and science.




Cornelis Van Dam, *In the Beginning: Listening to Genesis 1 and 2*. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books), 2021, 371 pages.

Furthermore, he evaluates the approach of Christian creationists such as Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, and Christian theistic evolutionists such as John Stek, John Walton, Bruce Waltke, and C. John Collins. He interacts with the views of Augustine, Bavinck, Calvin, Dooyeweerd, Hodge, Keller, Kline, Warfield, and others. He makes critical reference to BioLogos, an evangelical organization that promotes evolutionary creationism.

Throughout these pages, Van Dam stresses that while the Bible is no scientific textbook, believers need to take seriously the integrity of the biblical text as it pertains to the beginnings of the universe and the origin of mankind. To the question “do the opening chapters of Genesis constitute real history or not?” Van Dam answers with a resounding “Yes!”

To see how Van Dam comes to this answer, I would highly recommend that you consider buying and reading this

important book. As you do, there may be things that you disagree with, but you cannot fail to be impressed with Van Dam’s scholarship, clarity, fairness, and devotion to the biblical text. He has done the entire Christian church a great service by directing us away from all sorts of theories and speculations about the beginning, back to Genesis 1 and 2 and that wonderful and powerful revelation of the living God.

Highly recommended! 



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