



Clarion

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what's inside

Are you a “meat and potatoes” person? If so, you’ll find its literary counterpart in the following pages in terms of timely topics and in-depth pieces. We serve up the second helping of Clarence Bouwman’s two-parter on the CanRC church concept—no light issue. Had any discussions recently about paedocommunion? It’s in the air again and Jason VanVliet walks us through it with clear, biblical reasoning. And an answer to the pressing question of why the Psalms have long been prioritized in the church’s singing is laid out by me. Lots to chew on in these articles.

Reader interaction is always welcome, and you’ll find two letters to the editor near the two book reviews toward the end of this issue. There is something new in the Ray of Sunshine column, a borrowed blog post about a young lad with a rare condition to whom the Lord has given an equally rare and precious spirit. Is your church without a pastor or missionary currently? Check out the profiles of the seven CRTS graduates! Perhaps one or more of them will join the mission work in Edmonton described in Discipling the Nations. There is much here to move us to praise God and also petition him for ongoing aid.

Pentecost is fast approaching (May 19), and Ben Schoof’s meditation helps us understand the multiple blessings given to the church on that day. Classes across our federation are often held in the spring and inside, just ahead of the ads, you’ll find clippings of the more recent meetings. Meanwhile the opening editorial makes the case for returning to a tried and tested method of formatting the decisions of a general synod (or really: any broader assembly). Got an opinion on that topic? Feel free to write us a letter. Enjoy your meat and potatoes!

Peter Holtvlüwer

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CLARION (ISSN 0383-0438) is published 16 times per year (tri-weekly) by Premier Printing Ltd., 1 Beghin Ave, Winnipeg MB R2J 3X5.

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To equip God’s people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed
Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

TRANSPARENCY & TRUST IN THE ACTS OF GENERAL SYNOD

We are about a year away from our next general synod (May 2025 DV) and one of the first things it will have to decide is how to format its decisions. Anyone who's read the *Acts of GS 2022* will know that a new style was used in which the decision is stated up front followed by grounds. For all the previous general synods (twenty-two!) the style was to give the decision at the end, after first listing observations and considerations of the matter at hand. Having read through these acts and having reflected on them with my council, I would like to argue in favour of returning to the previous format.

CONTEXT NEEDED

The single biggest downside to the decision-grounds style is the lack of context. Whether the matter is an appeal, a report, or an overture, there is no attempt to lay out for the reader the facts of the situation. What are the claims of the appellant? What are the reasons behind an overture? What are a report's recommendations? No summary is given. The reader is just thrown into the issue by the subject heading of the article followed very quickly by a decision and grounds where some of these things may be alluded to but certainly not all. It feels like learning how to swim by being thrown into the deep end.

Take for instance GS 2022's Article 78, which deals with an appeal.¹ Outside of the members of general synod and the appealing church, who can possibly make sense of the particulars? I am a minister who makes it a point to keep in the loop on the decisions of regional and general synods, yet I have a hard time making sense of the reasoning here. To grasp it all I would have to dig up the acts of the appropriate regional synod and also attain from the Church for the Archives a copy of the appeal in question. Which reader of the Acts is going to go to those lengths just to understand this decision? That would be a rare bird.

It would have been far better if a summary of the appeal and of the arguments of the regional synod had been presented as observations. From there the synod could have interacted with its observations in the considerations and reasoned its way to the decision. Then every reader and every church council could track with the issue, work out the implications, and consider if any action needs to be taken. As it is, Article 78 is obscure to most readers. I believe that transparency is paramount in church life

generally and at our broader assemblies in particular so that all may understand and accept the decisions (or appeal if required).

CLARITY NEEDED

Take another example. Article 31 on the Days of Prayer makes reference to a church seeking clarity on what constitutes the need to call for an official Day of Prayer. It's a question relevant to the whole federation. Apparently the church was answered by the two churches appointed to call a Day of Prayer and their reasoning approved by synod: "The rationale provided by Burlington-Rehoboth and Edmonton-Providence to Grassie for not calling a Day of Prayer is reasonable and balanced." But what is that rationale? It's nowhere to be found in the article. How helpful is that to the reader? If one of the tasks of the churches is to judge whether the decisions of general synod are in line with Scripture, the confessions, and the Church Order, how can they judge this ground unless they do all the legwork of digging through the archives of general synod?

BUILDING TRUST

Missing from the decision-grounds style are regular summaries of the letters from the churches. Each church has the opportunity to engage with every report or overture that is on general synod's agenda. Our synods are deliberative bodies where twenty-four men are delegated by the churches to make decisions for the churches. Many churches diligently work through all materials and send in letters for synod's consideration. Such contributions are vital and need to be given full respect and consideration. The long-standing practice of summarizing all the letters of the churches under observations does at least two things: the individual church is assured that its input is taken seriously (even if the decision goes the other way); and all the churches can hear and understand the thinking of their fellow churches. This kind of transparency goes a long way to building the local church's trust in the decisions of the broadest assembly. It also aids in developing understanding and respect for different viewpoints among the churches.

To me, these points favour a return to the observations-considerations format. 



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ANOTHER HELPER

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever

JOHN 14:16

Every year on Ascension Day we remember that Jesus left us physically. We remember he said, “It is to your *advantage* that I go away.” Perhaps we wonder: how is it better that Jesus has left? Like doubting Thomas, maybe we imagine our faith would be stronger if we could actually see Jesus. How wonderful it would be if he were here to perform just one more miracle.

Jesus tells us why it is to our advantage that he goes away: “If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

It is only because of Pentecost that we can celebrate and not mourn Ascension Day. John 14:16 tells us the Holy Spirit will be “another Helper.” Right now, Jesus is his disciples’ Helper. In Greek the word “Helper” is difficult to translate. Other translations speak of “Counsellor,” “Advocate,” or “Comforter.” Each translation gives good insight into how the Lord Jesus is a Helper.

As Helper Jesus comes alongside and supports his disciples. As Counsellor, he teaches them all that they need to know. As Advocate, he intercedes for them before the Father. As Comforter, he comforts them in their sorrows.

When the Holy Spirit comes he will do all that. He intercedes for us (Rom 8:26), he guides and teaches us (John 16:13). But the question still remains: if we had Jesus to be our Helper, why leave and send the Holy Spirit? Why not stay with us forever himself?

One answer is that Jesus goes to heaven to prepare a place for us (John 14:3). But there are also the practical difficulties that Jesus had during his earthly ministry. For instance, Jesus was mobbed by so many people it became impossible to reach him. The paralyzed man’s friends had to make a hole in the roof to see Jesus. Jesus would spend whole days healing, and still more came. Already in Israel not everyone could reach him or be healed. How much worse today when people worldwide want to meet him?

But mostly we need the spiritual power that the Holy Spirit works in us. Jesus stood and taught and performed boundless miracles. And did the Jews believe? No, their faith was not true and lasting (John 2:24; 6:27). What we need is not to see Jesus with our eyes. It’s to believe in him with our hearts.

The Holy Spirit teaches us spiritual wisdom and interprets spiritual truths for us. Without his work we cannot accept the things of God, and we will not believe (1 Cor 2:13).

The disciples themselves are the proof of this. They spent three years seeing Jesus with their own eyes, listening to his teaching, seeing his miracles, hearing his prayers. And yet they did not believe in him or truly understand until Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into their hearts. So, we do not just need Jesus as Helper *beside* us. We need the Holy Spirit as Helper *in our hearts*.

Finally, along with the Holy Spirit we also still have our Lord Jesus with us. We have not *lost* the Lord; rather we have *gained* his Spirit. Lord’s Day 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism teaches that Jesus’s divinity, majesty, grace, and spirit are still with us. 1 Corinthians 2 explains the result of the Spirit’s work within us: we have the mind of Christ.

So, we do not have the bodily presence of the Lord with us. But the Holy Spirit is working in our hearts and conforming us into the image of the Lord Jesus. The result is that we think like him, act like him, and love like him.

Truly then, we do not have to grieve at the ascension of our Lord. It is for our good that he has gone away. For he has sent us another Helper, the Holy Spirit, who is with us forever. 

SUGGESTED READING:

Romans 8

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Do you rejoice on Ascension Day?
2. If the Lord Jesus were here, how would he be your Helper? How does the Holy Spirit help you with this?
3. Reflect on whether we think too little about the Holy Spirit and his work.



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The Priority of Psalm Singing

REASONS

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In the previous article it became clear that Reformed churches have a long history of prioritizing the singing of the 150 Psalms above all other songs. While some Presbyterian churches advocated for exclusive psalmody, continental Reformed churches from the start regularly included a small number of canticles as well as the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer put to music. Beginning with Calvin, through the Synod of Dort, the Secession of 1834, and up to the first national synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches in 1954, a few canticles and free hymns have been sung alongside of the Psalms. Such hymns have historically been seen and used in second place to the Psalms—why?

The question before us comes down to this: what sets the Psalms apart as inherently different from canticles and free hymns which should then move the church to prioritize them in her singing? What biblical reasoning can be offered for such a stance? Starting where Augustine and Calvin started, I offer you the following reasons:

I. GOD WROTE THE PSALMS

Imagine if God wrote a number of songs and gave them to his people to sing—would that not be amazing? Would we not eagerly treasure such songs above all others? Well, we don't have to imagine this, for it was the Spirit of Christ who inspired David, Asaph, the Sons of Korah, and all the other men to write the Psalms so that these 150 songs are in a category of their own. Following Augustine, Calvin expressed this distinction eloquently: "Therefore, even after we have carefully searched everywhere, we shall not find better or more appropriate songs to this end than the Psalms of David, inspired by the Holy Spirit. And for this reason, when we sing them, we are assured that God puts the words in our mouths, as if he himself were singing through us to exalt his glory."¹

It is true that canticles are also the inspired Word of God put to music in a singable translation, and on that point they are on the same level as the Psalms. No free hymn, however, can claim God as its author and so such compositions are in a different category. Free hymns may be valuable expressions of a believer's

¹ *Book of Praise* (Winnipeg: SCBP, 2014), p. v.



biblically-based thoughts about God and our salvation, but since they lack the inspiration of the Holy Spirit such songs have historically been used by Reformed churches only sparingly.

2. GOD COMMANDS THE PSALMS TO BE SUNG

In Scripture we can find clear and undisputed commands for the church to sing the Psalms, but no such clear command exists for the singing of free hymns. In the Old Testament God inspired prophets such as David and those he appointed to compose the psalms for use in temple worship (1 Chron 16:7; 25:1–6). The Psalms themselves exhort God’s people to “sing praises with a psalm!” (Ps 47:7) or “Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him” (Ps 68:4), making reference to the inspired psalms² which David and his men were producing under the Spirit’s direct guidance.

In the New Testament God continues to command the same. James exhorts, “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms” (James 5:13 NKJ).³ Paul commands that Christians are to be filled with the Spirit and explains how to do that first by “addressing one another in psalms. . .” (Eph 5:19). Elsewhere he commands that

Christians are to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms...” (Col 3:16). Whatever else may be said of these latter two passages, it cannot be doubted that singing the psalms is commanded of us. It is also clear that the psalms are nothing less than the word of Christ and singing them an outworking of being filled with his Spirit.

What, then, about the rest of Ephesians 5:19, “addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart” (compare Colossians 3:16)? Does this not speak of songs other than the psalms, what we are calling “free hymns”? And would that not elevate such songs to the same level as the Psalms? For that to be the case, one would have to prove that each of these three terms refers to a different kind of song, and so far no one has been able to do that.

To be sure, there is ongoing debate about this passage, but some facts are clear.⁴ The word used in these texts for psalms is regularly used in the NT to refer to the canonical book of Psalms (e.g. Luke 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33). There is one passage

² The phrase “sing praises” is in Greek a form of the verb *psallō* from which the noun “psalm” comes. To sing praises is literally to sing psalms.

³ The Greek verb is *psallō*. See previous note.

⁴ See the essay by Rowland S. Ward “Psalm Singing and Scripture” in Joel R. Beeke and Anthony T. Selvaggio, *Sing a New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), p. 85–88.

Reformed churches have prioritized the Psalms

that is debated (1 Cor 14:26). There it could refer to a psalm from Scripture but, if not, it would be a psalm given by the Holy Spirit *as a revelation*, a special gift for that time which ceased with the completion of the NT canon. So, when Paul mentions the psalms in Colossians and Ephesians, few doubt that he is referring to the Psalms of the Bible.

Further, the three terms Paul uses in Ephesians 5:19 are all used multiple times in the Greek translation (the Septuagint) of the book of Psalms that was in common use among the Jews of that time. As these terms are used within the book of Psalms, there is little distinction between them and so they are regarded as synonyms.⁵ Given that Paul the expert Pharisee would have known the book of Psalms like the back of his hand (indeed, he quotes or alludes to the Psalms more than 30 times, most notably twice within the preceding context; see Eph 4:8 and 26), his use of these three terms as synonyms referring to the Psalms is a strong possibility. It becomes more likely yet when you consider that Paul elsewhere uses groups of three synonyms to communicate his point (2 Cor 12:12; 2 Thess 2:9). And if, as most scholars today believe, the adjective “spiritual” means “of the Holy Spirit” and applies not just to “songs” but to all three terms,⁶ would that not even more fit with a reference to the Spirit-inspired 150 Psalms? Regardless of how one understands the latter two terms, no one can reasonably doubt that God here commands the NT church to sing the canonical Psalms.

When it comes to canticles, there are a number of clearly marked songs in Scripture outside the book of Psalms (e.g. Exod 15:1; Num 21:17; Jud 5:1; Rev 5:9) but only one seems to have been *commanded* by God for Israel to sing: the Song of Moses (Deut 31:19). This puts it on par with the Psalms. Other Scripture songs or passages may certainly be edifying to sing but no command exists to sing them. Regarding free hymns, there is no command in Scripture for believers to create their own songs much less that the church is required to sing such new creations.

Does this mean that the church is *forbidden* to sing anything but the 150 Psalms plus the Song of Moses? Is the above an argument

for exclusive psalmody? Continental Reformed churches have never thought so. These churches have *prioritized* the Psalms and next to that the canticles found in Scripture itself and only next to that the free hymns based closely on the Bible’s teaching. On what basis have the churches sung canticles and free hymns? They’ve been sung on the basis that such songs are essentially either prayers to God, exhortations to the congregation, or public declarations of faith, just as many of the Psalms themselves are. Scripture regularly commands and commends prayer, mutual exhortation, and public declarations of faith, and these have never been limited to the 150 Psalms. But in the singing of the congregation, Reformed churches have historically placed their own free prayers, exhortations, and declarations next in rank to the Psalms so that the inspired and infallible songs of the Holy Spirit may form and guide the congregation’s response to God.

3. THE PSALMS ARE SUNG REVELATION

The metrical Psalms and canticles are the Word of God in a singable translation. As sung Scripture, these songs allow the congregation to thoughtfully take upon their hearts and lips what God has revealed about himself, ourselves, and our salvation. This flows from the Reformed principle of *sola Scriptura*, that is, that God’s people are to live by Scripture alone. Scripture is our supreme authority in all things pertaining to faith and salvation. The Reformed churches centre everything in the worship services around the Word of God, including keeping God’s Word predominant in their singing.

Further, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of God’s people by means of his Word so that, as psalms and canticles are sung in earnest faith, the Spirit works in his people the trust and obedience desired by God. In his survey of the Reformers’ approach to psalms and hymns, R. Faber concludes, “In placing the Word of God in believers’ mouths, psalm singing promotes the faith of the congregation.”⁷ The church is constantly being shaped by what it sings and so the Reformers also prioritized the Word of God in song.

Free hymns may well *reflect* on God’s revelation, but they are not the Word of God. Free hymns may teach important truths that come out of the Word of God and convey the congregation’s faith response back to God in sung prayer (all of which has value, to be sure), but they are not sung revelation like the psalms and canticles are.

⁵ For instance, all three terms appear in the Greek title of Psalm 76. See further Joel R. Beeke, *Why Should We Sing Psalms?* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015) p. 11 – 12.

⁶ P. T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Waco: Word, 1982), p. 209.

⁷ R. Faber, “The Reformers on Psalms and Hymns in Public Worship (part 2)” in *Clarion*, Vol. 50, No. 6, 2001, p. 161.

The truth God wants us to know and teach one another as we collectively sing to him are all captured in the Psalms

4. THE PSALMS REVEAL CHRIST

The 150 Psalms are not just inspired by the Spirit of Christ, but they are about Christ. They reveal Christ not just in the so-called Messianic psalms where specific prophecies occur about the coming Messiah, but in every psalm. David is a well-known type of Christ so that in his sufferings and his glorious kingship God was using David to reveal Christ in his sufferings and glory—and David wrote about half of the Psalms. The New Testament teaches us to see Christ as the “I” of every psalm when it puts the words of various psalms on the lips of Jesus.⁸ Christ is the singer in each psalm. In every lament Christ is crying out to his Father; in every psalm of praise or thanks Christ is exalting and thanking his Father; in every wisdom psalm Christ is teaching his people. Even when the psalmist is confessing his sins, it is ultimately the voice of Jesus speaking as our Mediator and High Priest who was “made to be sin” for us (2 Cor 5:20). Jesus himself pointedly mentions how the Psalms speak of him: “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).⁹

In fact, we learn more about the thoughts and emotions of the Lord Jesus from the Psalms than from the Gospels. Do we not feel the gut-wrenching pain of his heart in all the laments and his elation and joy in all the psalms of praise and thanks? How do we know what Jesus was thinking and feeling in the Garden of Gethsemane and while hanging on the cross? Read Psalms 22, 31, and 88 for starters. How do we know what Jesus was thinking and feeling on Easter Sunday? Read Psalms 18 and 30 for a taste. In the Psalms like nowhere else the Spirit shows us the inner heart of Jesus’s sufferings and triumphs.¹⁰ The Psalms do much more than contain isolated prophecies of the coming Christ; they reveal the person and work of Christ in a profound way for in them we hear the Saviour sing of himself.

Since canticles are God’s Word in singable translation and since Christ is revealed in all of Scripture, they too reveal Christ to us. Few of them, though, will come close to revealing the inner

thoughts and feelings of the Messiah like the Psalms do. Free hymns, because they are not revelation but the Christian’s *response* to revelation, are simply in another category. Certainly free hymns may speak of Christ accurately in accordance with Scripture and offer praise to him alongside of the Father and the Spirit, all of which is good and helpful. Yet this is not revelation but at best instruction based on revelation.

5. THE PSALMS ARE COVENANTAL

Whether it was David or his appointed men like Asaph and Heman or even Moses (Ps 90), all the Psalms were written within the covenant relationship established by the LORD with his people. By God’s design, they are written for both the individual believer and the whole congregation *at the same time*. Every psalm works within the framework of the covenant promises and obligations. Every lament, also those with prayers of cursing or imprecation (e.g. Pss 5, 35, 69, 109, 137), cry out for help and justice in accordance with the terms of God’s covenant of grace. Every psalm of praise and thanks expresses devotion and gratitude for who the covenant God is in his person and or for what he has done for his people and even for the world (e.g. Pss 103, 145). In every wisdom psalm the Spirit of Christ teaches us to both trust Yahweh’s covenant promises and obey his commands (e.g. Pss 1, 15, 37, 49).

Israel of the Old Testament was God’s church or covenant community in that era. The church after Pentecost up till today *continues* to be God’s covenant community for the same covenant of grace continues. The new covenant continues the old covenant, only with the presence of Christ come greater blessings and riches. One of those riches is the addition of believing people from the Gentiles to the believing people of ethnic Israel (Jews) making for an expanded and glorious “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16). When the church of today sings, it sings as *new* Israel, God’s covenant people, and the most fitting songs for that purpose remain the Psalms given to Israel by her God. Also, when the church sings the Psalms today, it sings in direct unity and continuity with the church of the Old Testament.

⁸ Psalms of David such as 18, 22, and 40 are placed directly on Jesus’s lips in Rom 15:9, Heb 2:12, and 10:5–7. Psalms by other authors are treated in the same way albeit indirectly. See Pss 78 and 102 in Matt 13:35 and Heb 1:10–12, respectively.

⁹ See P. H. Holtvlüwer, editor, *Christ’s Psalms, our Psalms—Study Resource* (Carman: Reformed Perspective Press, 2020), p. 2–8 for a fuller explanation of these points. For further study see G. Van Rongen, *Christ in the Book of Psalms* (WA: The Reformed Guardian No. 20, 2005) and Richard P. Belcher Jr., *The Messiah and the Psalms* (Scotland: Mentor, 2006).

¹⁰ For a response to some common objections to psalm-singing (e.g. that the name Jesus is not in the Psalms), see my article “*Objections to Psalm Singing*” in *Clarion*, Vol. 68, No. 17, 2019.

The canticles, because they put Scripture passages to music, will also be covenantal in nature because the whole of Scripture is covenantal in nature. Free hymns will be a mixed bag, depending on how diligent the hymn writer was in thinking covenantally while writing the song. On the other hand, only very few canticles and practically no hymns can claim the level of continuity of singing with the saints of the Old Testament like the Psalms can. Since the covenant runs from generation to generation throughout history, only the Psalms can claim to be perfectly covenantal *and* the most continuous with the church of all times and places. For this reason too Reformed churches have prized the singing of the Psalms over other songs.

6. THE PSALMS ARE WITHOUT ERROR OR IMBALANCE

Being the Word of God, there is no error whatsoever in the Psalms. There is not even the slightest doctrinal imperfection or imbalance. The truth God wants us to know and teach one another as we collectively sing to him (see Col 3:16) are all captured in the Psalms. Of course, we only gain the full benefit from this teaching if we sing the whole Psalter and not just stick to our favourites, but that's a problem on our side, not in the Psalms themselves. In the Psalms are themes that our sinful human nature recoils from such as an open confession of our sinfulness (e.g. Pss 32, 38, 51), man's depravity (e.g. Pss 14, 35, 120), divine retribution (e.g. Pss 109, 59, 137), and the antithesis between the children of God and the children of the devil (most laments; see also e.g. Pss 1, 101, and 118) and a love for God's law (e.g. Pss 1, 19, 119). By contrast, how many free hymns sing of these themes? Few and far between.

If the church begins to sing more free hymns than psalms, over time how much tolerance let alone appreciation will there be for the above teachings and the psalms they are found in? Already now in our federation, can our congregations stomach singing Psalms 11, 69, 109, 129, or 137 and others like them?¹¹ Do ministers dare to choose them, including the stanzas with imprecation? Or are they thought to be unchristian or anti-missional?

Let's consider: if we have trouble singing such psalms, is the problem with the Word of God or with us? Are we standing in

judgment over God's Word (by avoiding certain psalms) or are we willing to humbly submit to and learn from God's Word (by singing all the psalms)? It's not for nothing that so-called main-line churches like the United Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and the Reformed Church in America long ago jettisoned many psalms from their hymnals. When free hymns overtake the Psalms in church worship, the Psalms will gradually fade away in usage as history has shown.

Since canticles are faithful, singable translations of other parts of Scripture, like the psalms there is no inherent risk of error or imbalance provided they too are not sung in a one-sided way (choosing only certain themes or types of songs). Not so with free hymns. Free hymns, lacking the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will always be at risk for error or imbalance, where certain teachings or concepts may be elevated while others may be diminished or even avoided. While this does not mean the church may not use free hymns to offer prayer and praise, a great deal of care needs to be taken in choosing them to ensure complete fidelity. Singing mostly Psalms is a great aid to not only keep the congregation's doctrine faithful and balanced but also in choosing free hymns which match or fully resonate with the Psalms in their content. If the words of a hymn feel out of place next to singing psalms, they probably are—and such a hymn should be avoided by the church.

For at least the above six reasons the Psalms have always been seen in Reformed churches as having a place of their own above all other songs that may be sung by the church.¹² Canticles have much to commend them as being renditions of inspired Scripture. Free hymns which faithfully and fulsomely bring out the teachings of Scripture are also of value to the church. But only the Psalms are written by God and given by God as impeccable songs for his people to sing back to him, and so as churches we honour God and bless ourselves by prioritizing the singing of his songs. **C**



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¹¹ For a detailed explanation of how the imprecatory passages in the Psalms may be understood covenantally and with a view to Christ, see the previously cited *Christ's Psalm's Our Psalms—Study Resource*, Vol.1., p.19–27.

¹² For further insights into this prioritization, see the article "Why do we Sing Mostly Psalms?" by Rev. D. Wynia in *Clarion* Vol. 68 No. 10, 2019.

Church

IN CANADIAN REFORMED HISTORY

The 1950s

CLARENCE BOUWMAN

The immigrants who ended up establishing the Canadian Reformed Churches landed on our fair shores carrying with them specific ideas in relation to the doctrine concerning the church. I listed five distinctives in their ecclesiology at the end of the previous article (see *Clarion* Vol. 73, No. 6). I concluded that article with the statement that decisions made by the first synods of the fledgling Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) confirmed the fathers' embrace of these convictions. The challenge now is to demonstrate the accuracy of that statement.

INSTITUTION

The *Clarion* article I referred to last time¹ drew out how the first immigrants to the Niagara Peninsula made it their business to join the existing Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in St. Catharines and how in short order one of the brothers was ordained to the office of elder. In the course of time, the heads of four families (including this brother) wrote a letter to the consistory asking questions about the CRC's position on the developments of 1944 in the Netherlands. Promptly, with no discussion, the elder was

suspended from his office together with a note that the topic was not open for dialogue. Not surprisingly, these Liberated newcomers concluded that there was no place for them in the CRC. According to details provided in the first and second yearbooks of the CanRC, parallel experiences occurred elsewhere across the nation.² As mentioned in the same *Clarion* article, efforts to find an ecclesiastical home in the Protestant Reformed Church (PRC) also hit a wall. Seeing no faithful church they could join in good conscience, the fathers reluctantly concluded they had no option but to establish a new federation of churches.

In both of these instances, we certainly detect elements of the ecclesiology described earlier.

YEARBOOK 1952

The first Yearbook of the CanRC contains an insightful introductory article signed by D. M. Barendregt, living in Houston, BC at the time. He comments on how small and weak this fledgling federation of churches is and how much work needs to be done to strengthen the churches. Yet he marvels that in this "enormous

¹ Vol. 69, No. 12, p. 333–336

² For another source, see J. deHaas, *And Replenish the Earth*.

country” where the individual is easily lost, “now faithful preaching of God’s Word and pure administration of the sacraments” occurs, and adds:

With joyful amazement we observed the development of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the last two years and we thank our God and Father in Jesus Christ that He in His admirable faithfulness did not give us up to the confusion of the pluriformity concept that is so widely accepted here, which obscures sight upon the one catholic Christian church. We also thank God that we were preserved from and delivered from a system of thought that sought to approach or explain all things from God’s secret will, by which people thought to discover an “own truth” but in fact placed themselves above or beside the full truth and full light of God’s infallible Word.³

I find striking in Barendregt’s comment that he felt free to provide an analysis of what Canadian churches generally understood on the subject of ecclesiology. He describes the very Canadian (and, to be accurate, American) habit of letting all churches be equally acceptable in the Canadian fabric, irrespective of your specific doctrinal emphases. Yes, he attaches to that very Canadian concept a term he imported from the Netherlands, i.e., “pluriformity.” But it has to be granted: to the new immigrant the term reasonably described what he was seeing around him.

He further alluded to the deliverance God granted from a system of thought that sought to explain all things from God’s secret will. That’s a reference to what happened in Chatham in October 1951 when members of the PRC liberated themselves from extra-confessional binding. In a meeting held on December 1, 1951, this liberated group could be welcomed into the fold of the two existing Canadian Reformed Churches (Hamilton and Georgetown). Writing in the same yearbook, Rev. Loopstra explained that receiving this third church was an act of “true ecumenicity.” “After all,” he added,

All three churches could expressly declare that they placed themselves on the foundation of the infallible Word of God and on the Three Forms of Unity, viz, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Belgic Confession*, and the Five Articles against the Remonstrants, *without any addition* [“*aanvulling*,” the emphasis is original]. That is why both Canadian Reformed Churches represented at this meeting could receive the liberated Protestant Reformed Church into their federation with such joy and gladness and especially thankfulness to the LORD. (p. 36.)

In further elucidation of Barendregt’s editorial, the 1952 Yearbook also contains a report of the first major assembly of

the fledgling federation of CanRCs (at this point consisting of Georgetown in Ontario and Lethbridge, Edmonton, and Neerlandia in Alberta; this meeting occurred April 18, 1951 in Edmonton). This classis (as they called it) expressed its disappointment in the fact that relations with the PRC did not work out and resolved to write a letter to the PRC urging those churches not to adopt the Declaration of Principles on grounds that doing so would render a relationship between the PRC and the CanRC impossible. In that letter they expressed how it was that they had fervently hoped “that between you and us Scriptural unity could be achieved in the way of obediently seeking each other and holding each other to Scripture and Confession.” They further pleaded with the PRC not to bind the consciences of God’s people beyond Scripture and Confession. As to the details of what the CanRC had against the Declaration of Principles, the letter added: “We agree with what Prof. Dr. K. Schilder wrote in a series of sequential articles in *De Reformatie* on this material.” The letter concludes with this sentence: “Praying that not theological constructions but only the simple Word of our God and His Spirit give you guidance in your decisions, so that obedience may be found amongst you, so that also through your work Christ may gather his Church, we sign off with brotherly greetings.” (p. 50.)

Again we notice: the CanRC were not interested in isolation but sought to pursue true ecumenicity on the basis of the Word of God alone as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity.

YEARBOOK 1954

Rev. W. Loopstra provided for this yearbook a “Survey of the History of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Classis East (Ontario) (from April 1952 to about December 1953).” Predictably, he mentions new institutions, movement of ministers, construction of church buildings, etc. Relevant to our topic there’s also this:

Concerning efforts to greater church unity, reference may be made to what developed in Hamilton when in that city the CanRC could unite with the First Protestant Reformed Church. The Act of Union which was accepted by both consistories will receive a place in this Yearbook.

With great interest the consequences of the liberation in the Protestant Reformed Church in the United States are followed. There is no official contact. There are personal contacts, which might perhaps become fruitful. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, where the liberation in the PRC has its origin, there is a small Reformed group which comes together each Sunday and which are members of the CanRC of Chatham. A fervent and ardent

³ *Jaarboekje ten dienste van de Canadese Gereformeerde Kerken, Eerste Jaargang*, p. 3. All translation my own. This quotation is reprinted with approval in the 1954 Yearbook, p. 60.

prayer may go up that the Lord may remove every hindrance to greater ecclesiastical unity of all true Christian believers in this part of the world, by bending every human insight toward one another and overruling them through the Word of the Lord, and by breaking and overcoming every small (and ultimately arrogant) self-defense and shortsightedness.⁴

L. Terpstra, “Fieldman Can. Ref. Imm. Society, R.R.6, Edmonton,” provided for this yearbook an article about the growth of the church in Edmonton. He mentioned that at the time of his writing the church in Edmonton had some 400 members, their own minister, five young peoples’ societies, a school society, an immigration society, and a men’s and a women’s society. He added:

This is enough to silence a person. Silence, a worshipful silence, as one “sees” the great haste of the Lord Christ towards His great day. He is gathering His Church, and through that Church speaking His Word. Through this, in infinite compassion, He “still” directs [His Word] to a land and a people that has traded the true Gospel for the worship of carved images. Carved images as the Movement to Unity and Social programs, trusting in money and wealth. (p. 26.)

And: “The Canadian people really have no dogmas anymore. As a people they understand hardly anything of what God says through His Word. Religion is a matter of one’s own interpretation of the Bible.” (p. 29.)

As we read through the writings of these early Dutch settlers, we might be tempted to scoff at the measure of snobbishness we sense in the fathers’ thinking. I respectfully suggest, though, that instead of judging them from perspectives and values characteristic of the third decade of the twenty-first century, we ought to grant them the right to express freely what they saw happening through and around them. Then we can appreciate that they saw—with eyes admittedly formed by the crucible of the Liberation—the Lord at work using them to bring a scripturally and confessionally faithful gospel to the migrant society known as Canada. That they marveled at the privilege of being instruments of God to bring that heritage to a new country can only be applauded.

SYNOD 1954

This first general synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches provides a window into the thinking of the church leadership at the time. A couple of illustrations from the *Acts* can assist us.

1. Synod 1954 adopted a proposal from the churches to recognize the seminary of the Dutch sister churches as their own until

such time as the CanRC’s own seminary could be established (see Article 80).

2. As mentioned above, there was a break within the Protestant Reformed Churches. A decision concerning those who left the PRC reads as follows: “The Synod decides that delegates be appointed with instruction to contact the next synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches which do not subscribe to ‘Declaration of Principles’ any longer, to . . . probe the possibility of mutual recognition and correspondence as sister-churches” (Art 99).

The implication of the first decision is that the brethren back in 1954 had no confidence in any of the seminaries they were aware of in North America. That observation is in turn commentary on the fathers’ evaluation of the churches behind those seminaries. The implication of the second decision is that the brethren did not think in terms of God working only in their own midst; on the contrary, they actively kept looking for others who stood on the foundation of Scripture alone as accurately echoed in the Three Forms of Unity.

SYNOD 1958

The second synod of the young federation of the CanRC provides a further window into the ecclesiological thinking of those churches. Consider these matters:

1. A significant portion of the *Acts* of this synod concerned appeals from various parties in Ontario relating to the suspension and deposition of Rev. Loopstra from the church in Hamilton. (For the record, synod found that those objecting to the rightness of this deposition were correct; Rev. Loopstra had been wronged and then rightfully reinstated.) Striking in the decisions of synod is the respect synod expressed for the right of the office bearers of the *local church* to exercise church discipline.
2. In the attempt to prepare a psalter, the Three Forms of Unity, and a collection of liturgical forms in the English language, deputies had been appointed by Synod 1954 to examine the English equivalents in the CRC. Synod 1958 made decisions based on their report. What’s striking in the *Acts* is that there is no trace of the CRC work being rejected on the ground that this was work done in a questionable church federation. On the contrary, the CRC version of the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Canons of Dort* were recommended to the churches for trial (Art. 190)—evidently on the conviction that the churches should be master of their own possessions and so all be comfortable with what they were adopting.

⁴ *Jaarboekje ten dienste van de Canadese Gereformeerde Kerken, Tweede Jaargang, p. 22*

3. Despite the fact that the discussions with the breakaway PRC (as authorized by Synod 1954) had not gone as smoothly as desired, Synod 1958 mandated new deputies to continue efforts to come to unity with those churches—again on the basis of Scripture alone as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (Art. 290).
4. Altogether absent from the 1958 *Acts* is any trace of contact with any other churches across North America.

From the first point we may conclude that the newly established churches retained a clear love for the church polity lessons learned through the Liberation of 1944 with respect to the authority of the local church. The second serves as illustration that the fathers were not condemning of all things coming from a church that had wronged them (as outlined above). The third point underscores that these young churches shunned isolation; they wished to be unified with all who stood with them on the foundation of Scripture and Confession. The fourth point illustrates that these migrants of Dutch extraction were not yet able to look over their linguistic fence to appreciate what else might be happening in

North America. Synod 1962 begins the tale of that discovery—but one I will not at this point pursue.

CONCLUSION & POSTSCRIPT

The doctrine concerning the church played an enormous role in the thinking of the early Dutch immigrants to Canada. Efforts to join existing churches as well as the decision to establish their own federation are the direct consequences of the lessons the fathers learned through their experiences in the Liberation of 1944.

It is now more than seventy years ago that br. D. M. Barendregt expressed his profound gratitude that the Lord “in His admirable faithfulness did not give us up to the confusion of the pluriformity concept that is so widely accepted here.” I wonder: would the readers of this magazine say the same about the dominant thinking in the Canadian Reformed Churches today? 



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Do Children Belong at The **LORD'S SUPPER?**



JASON VAN VLIET

Should young children participate in the Lord's Supper along with the adult members of the church? Discussions about paedocommunion revolve around this question.

Those who answer "Yes" often point to the covenant. Children of believers belong to God's covenant and congregation, just as their parents do (Gen 17:7). Therefore, they also receive the sign of the covenant, baptism (LD 27). That being the case, proponents of paedocommunion call for consistency: if covenant children belong at the baptismal font, then they also belong at the Lord's table. After all, Lord's Supper is a covenant meal for God's covenant people (Luke 22:20).

However, in 1 Corinthians 11, the apostle Paul instructs us that participation in the Lord's Supper includes *remembering* Christ's atoning work for us (v. 25), *proclaiming* the Lord's death until he comes (v. 26), *examining oneself* (v. 28), *discerning* the body of our

Saviour (v. 29), and *judging ourselves* with integrity (v. 30). Very young children, yes even infants, cannot do this . . . at least not yet.

So, what is it now? Should young children participate in the Lord's Supper or not? Our Lord does not contradict himself, saying "yes, yes" and "no, no" at the same time. So, let's delve further into this question.

DEFINING PAEDOCOMMUNION

To speak simply of "children" at the Lord's table is too general. What kind of children are we talking about? Infants? Toddlers? Elementary school age? Early teens? It goes without saying that the difference—physically, mentally, and spiritually—between someone at fourteen *months* old and fourteen *years* old is enormous.

Broadly speaking, there are three different approaches to paedocommunion. The first is widely practiced in Eastern

Should young children participate in the Lord's Supper or not?

Orthodox churches. In their Divine Liturgy, *all baptized and chrismated* (i.e., anointed with sacred oil) *children, regardless of age*, receive the bread and wine of Holy Communion.¹ Often the priest will dip a wafer in the wine and allow very young children, even newborn babies, to suck on it. This is called intinction.

The second practice, adopted more recently by some Reformed and Presbyterian churches, is to allow children who are old enough to begin feeding themselves to join in celebrating the sacrament. For example, James B. Jordon advocates for “*normal-meal paedocommunion*.” According to him, “when the child begins to drink from the cup at home, he should be given a cup at church. When he begins to chew teething biscuits at home, he can be given bread at church. Not before. Not later on.”²

A third approach might be called *young-faith communion*. We find this approach described in a report to the 1988 General Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. “When children *begin* to respond to the gospel and *begin* to have an understanding of Christ and the salvation offered in the gospel, when they are able to see and appreciate the difference between ordinary eating and what happens in the Lord's Supper, even if only in an elementary way, they may be brought to the Lord's Supper.”³ If a church follows this approach, then a child may first participate in the Lord's Supper and then later, likely in their teenage years, publicly profess their faith with a vow.

Notice that each of these approaches sets a different expectation for partaking in the Lord's Supper. The only requirement in the first approach is *covenant membership and baptism*. Newborn babies can be baptized one Sunday and receive communion the next Sunday. The second approach adds something, granting admission to the Supper for those who are baptized *and have grown up to the point that they start to physically feed themselves*. Children learn this quickly, usually between six to twelve months of age. The third approach adds a different standard. It invites to the table baptised members of the congregation *who have spiritually matured to the point that they begin to express faith in Christ and start to understand what happens at the Lord's Supper*, likely at some point in elementary school years.

Different people have different questions in their minds. You may be asking, “If we have our eight-month-old at *our family's dinner table* at home, why wouldn't he also be *at the Lord's supper* in church, where the family of God meets to eat?” If that is your question, then this article seeks to answer it from Scripture.

But you may be asking another question: “Since children believe from a very young age, why can't my seven-year-old who loves the Lord and understands that the Lord's Supper is special, join in with the adults?” If that is your question, then please be patient for a future article that will address that matter, the Lord willing.

WHAT MEAL? WHICH MOUTH?

With a piece of bread in his hand, Jesus said, “This is *my body*” and gave it to his disciples to eat. Next, holding up a cup, he said, “This is the new covenant in *my blood*” and gave it to them to drink (Luke 22:19–20). Clearly, they were eating bread and drinking wine. But just as clearly, they were to be doing much more than that!

In fact, earlier in John 6, Jesus had already begun to teach the crowds that to have new and true life they had to eat his body and to drink his blood. They came around the lake looking for more bread and fish to fill their stomachs. But Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (vv. 53–54). What a shock! Is this cannibalism? What is more, the LORD himself had strictly forbidden drinking blood (Lev 17:14).

No, Christ Jesus is not promoting cannibalism or law-breaking. Instead, he is teaching God's people that, in due time, they will need to consume his sacrificed body and shed blood with the mouth *of faith* (vv. 29–30, 35–36, 40, 47). Mindful of our Saviour's instruction, we confess in Article 35 of the Belgic Confession that “we receive *by faith*, as the hand and mouth of our soul, the true body and true blood of Christ” and that “the manner in which we eat is not by mouth but in the spirit by faith.”

Consequently, if we have a regular meal at home or a potluck dinner in the church annex, then by all means let the children who are old enough to eat be given a (high)chair at the table. But

¹ <https://www.o.ca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-divine-liturgy/the-divine-liturgy>

² <https://theopolisinstitute.com/a-letter-on-paedocommunion/>

³ Agenda for Synod 1988 Christian Reformed Church of North America, p. 282; emphasis mine.

the *holy* supper is entirely distinct—not only from common meals but even from OT feast meals. Why? Because our True Food and Drink is not on any table in front of us but up in heaven, seated at God’s right hand. Our physical hands cannot reach him, and our physical mouths cannot begin to digest this Bread of Life. The only way to partake in this Holy Covenant Meal is to “come, take *by faith* the body of our Lord” (Hymn 59).

For this reason, the second approach to paedocommunion does not align with what God’s Word teaches us about the menu served (Christ’s body and blood) or the mouth used (faith) at this unique meal.

BAPTISM AND LORD’S SUPPER DIFFER

A pressing question still lingers, though, doesn’t it? Since God’s covenant children receive one covenant sign and seal, baptism, why don’t they receive the other one, Lord’s Supper? In short, it’s because God himself makes a difference between the two sacraments.

When the Holy Spirit speaks about baptism, he makes it abundantly clear that baptism is something that is *done to you*. In grammatical terms, the verb, *to baptize*, appears over forty times in the passive voice (Matt 3:6; Acts 2:38, 8:36, 16:15; 1 Cor 12:13, etc.). In everyday terms, no one, whether infant or adult, baptizes himself. The minister always administers this sacramental washing to us.

However, the Lord’s Supper is markedly different. Yes, the minister will break the bread and fill the cup, but all participants must actively eat and drink, by the mouth of faith, for themselves. At the first Supper, Christ did not tell his disciples to “be fed” and then proceed to put the food and drink into their mouths. On the contrary, gave it to them and commanded *them* to eat and drink (Luke 22:17, 19).

Beyond this, as mentioned earlier, the Lord calls us to several other spiritual actions, both leading up to and during this holy meal: *remembering* Christ’s work for us, *proclaiming* his death, *examining* ourselves personally, *discerning* the body of our Saviour, and *judging* ourselves (1 Cor 11:25–30). These spiritual activities cannot be done by all God’s people, regardless of age. A hungry two-year old is quite adept at devouring a plate full of her favourite food. But she simply cannot work through a spiritual examination of herself, let alone discern how a symbolic piece of bread might be connected to eating the crucified body of Christ. The Lord willing, that day will come, but it is not there at two years of age.

PASSOVER AND LORD’S SUPPER

Proponents of paedocommunion also draw a line of continuity between the Passover and the Lord’s Supper, adding that since children were part of the Passover celebration (Ex 12:3–4, 25–26), they should be at the Lord’s Supper table as well.

To be sure, there is a line of continuity between the Passover and the Lord’s Supper. Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7)! At the same time, we need to draw a nuanced line. The Lord did not require *all* his young covenant children to eat the Passover *all* the time. The amount of lamb prepared was “according to what each *can* eat” (Ex 12:4). A newborn baby cannot eat roasted lamb. (The unleavened bread and bitter herbs would be a tall order, too.) Teeth need to come in before meat can be chewed.

Added to that, when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the venue for the Passover changed from their various family tents to the one dwelling place of the LORD in Jerusalem (Deut 12:5). In those circumstances, the LORD only *required* the men to come for his feasts three times each year (Deut 16:16–17). The rest of the family could, but did not have to, join them at the feast.

Beside this nuance, though, we should draw other lines so that the biblical picture is complete. Many OT sacrifices and meals find their fulfilment in Christ and his Supper. Here is a partial list: the peace or fellowship offering (Lev 3), the sin offering (Lev 4), the guilt offering (Lev 5), the Day of Atonement (Lev 16), and the covenant renewal ceremony at the foot of Sinai, including the meal enjoyed by seventy-four office-bearers at summit of Sinai (Ex 24). Imagine if we drew an *unnuanced* line from covenant meal at Sinai to the Lord’s Supper (compare Ex 24:8, Mark 14:24, and 1 Cor 11:25). Then we might conclude that only the office-bearers should partake in the Lord’s Supper. But clearly that is an unwarranted conclusion!

Lines of continuity certainly run from the OT sacrifices and feasts, including Passover, to the Lord’s Supper. But as those shadows were fulfilled in the once-for-all sacrifice of our Mediator, the method of eating changed from chewing to believing. That, in turn, determines who participates in the holy supper.

COMMUNION IN CORINTH

To put it mildly, the congregation in Corinth faced many challenges. Sadly and sinfully, divisions, sexual immorality, lawsuits, and participation in feasts serving food offered to idols were all part of congregational life.

Speaking into this tangle of transgression, the apostle Paul teaches that “because there is one bread, we who are many are

one body, *for we all partake of the one bread*” (1 Cor 10:17). Does this “all” mean children partake of the one bread as well?⁴ After all, children are part of the one body, the church of Christ. How does this verse fit in the broader context of this letter?

To begin with, the word “all” can mean each and every person in a group, *without exception*. For example, “We must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor 5:10). Or “all” can refer to the whole group, *without distinction*. For instance, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are *all* one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26). In 1 Corinthians 10:17 the “without distinction” meaning comes to the fore.

Illegitimate distinctions were being made in this congregation, not between children and adults but between groups with different favourite preachers (“I follow Paul . . . I follow Apollos,” 1:12) and between the have-lots and the have-littles, socially and economically speaking (“do you humiliate those who have nothing?” 11:22). Even in their worship services, these differences in wealth and status became so pronounced that Paul exclaims, “When you come together, it is not the *Lord’s* supper that you eat” (v. 20)! At best they participated in a fractured fellowship meal; at worst some were turning worship services into boastful, gluttonous drinking parties (v. 21).

In *that context* the apostle gives two pointed exhortations. First, rather than fracturing your congregation into have-lots and have-littles, live out of the gracious truth that all, without distinction, have equal standing in the body of Christ just as you all eat from the same, simple loaf of bread at the Lord’s Supper (1

Cor 10:17). Second, when you celebrate the Lord’s Supper, then celebrate the *Lord’s* Supper as instituted on the night when he was betrayed. Don’t turn this *holy* supper into a common social meal. You can just as well eat that kind of meal in your home (1 Cor 11:22).

All this, though, does not diminish the apostle’s inspired instructions to participate in this sacrament only after first examining ourselves, then by discerning the body of Christ, and through it all proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes. Fulfilling these instructions in a *worthy* manner (1 Cor 11:27) requires more than an *initial* awareness of what is happening in the sacrament. Rather it involves a certain spiritual maturity that accords with the distinct and dignified holiness of this sacramental meal.

CONCLUSION

So, do God’s covenant children belong at the Lord’s Supper? Yes, certainly, *once they have reached the spiritual maturity they need to participate in a worthy manner* (1 Cor 11:27), they should seek admission to this blessed sacrament.

Of course, that leads to another set of questions. Where does the practice of publicly professing our faith with a vow come from? Also, at what age should covenant children publicly profess their faith? We hope to take up those questions in a future article. 



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⁴ For this understanding see Tim Gallant, *Feed My Lambs* (Pactum Reformanda Publishing, 2002): 33-34.



READ AND SEARCH OLD VOLUMES
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The graphic features a stylized blue illustration of a person holding a long staff or pole, standing on an open book. The background is dark blue with white text.

CRTS

Graduate Profiles

WILLIAM DEN HOLLANDER

It's my privilege as Dean of Students at CRTS to present to you the students who will be graduating this year. It's a special joy for me to do that because we all began together almost four years ago, in September of 2020—these seven brothers as new students and I as the new professor. Since then, God has been busy with us all, causing us to grow in our love for Christ, our delight in his Word, and our desire to serve his church and kingdom. In the profiles below you can hear from these brothers themselves how God guided them along different paths, from different countries around the globe, and with different testimonies to his abundant grace. From Western and Eastern Canada, from Australia, Asia, and Africa, their paths converged here for a time, and now God is calling them onward.

While each of these brothers plans to present himself to classis to become eligible for call, the Lord willing, five of them will do that already this June, and two will wait until after completing an internship. We are eager to see how the Son of God uses them as he gathers, defends, and preserves for himself, by his Spirit and Word, in the unity of true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life (LD 21)! Enjoy reading their profiles and please uphold them in prayer.

JACOB BAIJAL

We arrived in Toronto airport almost four years ago, excited but a little spent from the long flight from the land down under. My wife Kirsty, our not yet one-year-old daughter, and I were greeted by the heat and lush greenery of the Ontario summer, not to mention a fellow student who heaped us into his family van and off we went. So, the adventure began! But before all that, you might wonder how a non-Dutch guy (last name pronounced “buy-gel” not “buy-al”) ended up on a plane to Ontario in the first place.

My wife and I both grew up not in Reformed but in Baptist churches. In fact, we met in one such church during our university years, while I was completing a Bachelor of Arts. After seeing how keen Kirsty was to discuss the inerrancy of Scripture with me, I realized we just had to get married. And we did! Meanwhile, the

Lord continued to deepen my love for his Word and reform my faith and understanding. It was around this time that God planted in me a desire to preach his Word. Kirsty and I went through a mini reformation together, coming to the Reformed faith eagerly and early in our marriage. We became members of Rockingham Free Reformed Church of Australia and were delighted with the wonderful communion of church family and the biblical and confessional preaching. Before seminary and parenthood came onto the scene, we both worked for a few years, with me working in the trades while also beginning to study Greek under Rev. Dean Anderson. Having been encouraged by Rev. Anderson and our elders to pursue my desire for ministry, I buckled down and

Jacob Baijal and family. >

completed the biblical language prerequisites. Around that time, we welcomed our first child, Hope. And before we knew it, we were stepping off that plane in the Toronto airport.

During my seminary years, I have had the opportunity to teach catechism and to preach, to form friendships in church and at school, and also to plough through reams of reading. In my second year, I had the privilege of helping out at River's Edge Haven of Hope, volunteering as a mentor. I benefited greatly from my preaching internship with Rev. Vermeulen at Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church, where I soaked in all I could and reveled in the opportunity to proclaim God's Word. After another year zipped by, my third summer turned into winter (milder than previous winters!) as we headed south to Australia. There, I was able to dive into the work of ministry again at Rockingham FRCA. During this time, I also served for a couple of weeks on the mission field with Rev. Kleyn in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

While I was learning and growing, our family was doing some growing of its own. Since moving to Ontario with our daughter

Hope (now 4.5 years old), God has blessed us with two more children. We received our son Brody (now three) and another daughter, Sophia (soon to turn one). My wife Kirsty has these past four years enjoyed being involved in our church, Trinity Canadian Reformed Church (Glanbrook), and has also formed close friendships with other seminary wives. We can say with conviction that God has sustained us and even blessed us these past few years. He has built our bond as family and comforted us through our Christian brothers and sisters when extended family was far away.

In the Lord's kindness, we have learned, grown spiritually, and found joy in our Canadian years. At the same time, I have been confirmed in my own desire to serve the Lord in his church, if and when that door is opened, and so I will present myself for examination at classis in June to be declared eligible for call. Meanwhile, we continue to wait on the Lord, looking again and again to his mercy and grace!



TAYLOR BREDENHOF

Hello! My name is Taylor Bredenhof and the first thing I probably have to get out of the way is the question I get asked a lot. Yes, I am related (first cousins) to the other three Bredenhofs who have passed through the seminary before!

Having gotten that out of the way . . . in the picture, by my side, you'll see my dearest companion and fellow pilgrim, my wife Rebekah. With her is our rough and tumble three-year-old son Theo, and I'm holding our precious one-year-old daughter Eden. Rebekah and I both grew up in the Fraser Valley. I come from a farming family and Rebekah from a family of carpenters. I grew up in Cloverdale for most of my elementary years before the family moved to Aldergrove, where I spent all my catechism years with Pastor Rob Schouten.

If you asked me what I wanted to do when growing up you wouldn't have heard me say "study to be a pastor," or "study" period. After high-school I didn't have many plans; my life was quite directionless or, rather, I was wandering in the wrong direction. However, by the grace of God I somehow ended up at Providence Christian College where he worked repentance in my heart, and a renewed trust in Jesus Christ alone. I spent two and a half years at PCC studying, playing soccer, and growing with a great group of brothers in the Lord. Sometime after moving there, I also became a member of the Los Angeles Reformed Presbyterian Church, a small congregation that became like a family, a source of great comfort and stability for me. It was around this time I began considering the ministry. My pastor Nathan Eshelman helped guide me, including taking me along to presbytery meetings, and this strengthened my desire to serve Christ and his church.

While on summer break after my freshman year I met my wife. This led to our engagement, marriage, and a move back to Canada. I transferred to Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia, and I became a member at Christ Covenant Church of the Presbyterian Church of America. We still remember worshipping with the saints there with much joy. Our pastor Garry Vanderveen (who is also my wife's uncle) helped mentor and guide me, providing opportunities to prepare for seminary. While Rebekah continued working as a Registered Massage Therapist, I finished my studies and had the wonderful opportunity to fill in for a semester teaching at Credo Christian High School. After this we packed up our things and drove across the country to Hamilton.

During our time in Hamilton the Lord has been gracious in granting us our two children. All the west-coasters told us how bad the city of Hamilton (and its "mountain") was, but it has become our home and a place we will always love. In the summers I was always doing something different in a new place. For my first summer break I had a two-week orientation internship with my own pastor, Darren Feenstra, after which I landscaped back in the Fraser Valley. The next summer I was able to spend twelve weeks with the congregation in Lincoln under the mentorship of Rev. Wynia for my preaching and pastoral internship. Most recently, I spent ten weeks among the brothers and sisters in Surrey preaching and evangelizing (thanks to Pastors James Visscher, Doug Vandeburgt, and Karlo Jansen for your guidance in my sermon preparations). Rebekah and I have treasured our time living and serving in the churches during our internships. They were times where the Lord has shaped and encourage us in our "wanderings" across Canada.

These past four years God has graciously provided a church community of dear brothers, sisters, and friends at Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church. We were also able to grow so much among our seminary family. We will miss you all dearly! Lord willing, I will be going before classis in June to become eligible for call. We continue to trust in Christ as he guides us in our wanderings after that!





JAKOB MARS

I'm Jakob Mars, and this is my wonderful wife, Jolandi, and our precious daughter, Lisa, who is two years old. Jolandi and I have been married for five years and are both originally from beautiful Cape Town, South Africa, where we were members of the Free Reformed Church of South Africa in Bellville. We love fishing, mountain biking, board games, and *gesellig* sitting around the fire. After finishing high school, I didn't quite know what I wanted to do. I did my undergraduate studies in Psychology, Physiology, and Genetics and worked part-time at a computer shop and as a pizza delivery person. Around that time Jolandi and I caught each other's eye at church. She is a teacher by profession. During my studies I became increasingly uneasy with what I learned at university and the desire to serve God in the ministry began to grow in me.

And so, after doing my biblical languages, I enrolled at CRTS. Due to unforeseen circumstances I had to do my first two years

of seminary education online. During my seminary education, I had the privilege of doing various internships, including with Rev. Johan Brintjes in Cape Town, Rev. Erik van Alten in Pretoria, Rev. Dick Wynia in Lincoln, and Rev. Gerrit Brintjes in Toronto.

Currently, I'm in my final year of seminary studies, eagerly anticipating completion. We are also looking forward, Lord willing, to summer work at Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church in British Columbia. After Convocation we hope to return to Cape Town where I'll be doing a vicariate alongside Rev. Johan Brintjes for a year and a half.

In our journey, Christ has taught us to grow in our dependence on him, our appreciation of the community of saints, and our desire for the coming of his kingdom. We're deeply grateful for the opportunities we've been given and the support we've received along the way. Looking ahead, we're excited about the path that lies before us and the ways in which we can serve Christ in his kingdom.





JOSH PETERS

Hello everyone! My name is Josh Peters, and this is my wife, Debra, and our four children: Alyssa (13), Jonah (9), Shannon (6), and Hadassah (3). It is hard to believe that we have nearly completed four years at CRTS. How the time has flown by! Our family history begins in Neerlandia. I grew up just outside of this small hamlet in northern Alberta on a pig farm and attended school at Covenant Canadian Reformed School. Once I graduated from school in 2005, I began working for my uncle in construction installing eavestroughs, soffit/fascia, and siding. Outside of work, I enjoy

playing sports: hockey, baseball, soccer, and basketball. In 2007, I met my wife Debra (nee Chase) for the first time at a Calgary Study Weekend. We met again a few months later at a Neerlandia Study Weekend, and thereafter we met regularly. It was also during this time that I entered trade school at NAIT (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology) and eventually earned my Red Seal ticket in carpentry.

Debra and I were married in 2009 and welcomed our first daughter in 2010. As a couple, we became involved in helping lead youth group, and I began to attend a wonderful Saturday morning

men's Bible study. Our pastor, Rev. Louwerse, often mentioned the need for men in the ministry, and I began to think about it more and more. One day after work, I sat down with Rev. Louwerse, who encouraged me to study for the ministry. Before taking up studying, though, we took over my uncle's business which we operated for four years. In 2016, we sold the business and moved to Edmonton so that I could attend the University of Alberta. We had four wonderful years in Edmonton and experienced much growth during our time in Immanuel CanRC. We cherish the close friendships that we made during that time.

In 2020, we sold our home in Edmonton, took our four children (Hadassah was just two months old), and drove across much of Canada to take up residence in Hamilton. We are currently attending Providence church and we love the community here as well. I did my first internship (two-week orientation) with my old pastor, Rev. Louwerse, who had since moved to Hamilton from Neerlandia. In the summer of 2022, we drove back to Edmonton, Alberta, for the summer and completed a preaching and pastoral internship at our old church, Immanuel, alongside Rev. VanSpronsen. For our third summer, I completed a mission internship with Rev. Bultje at River of Life church in Niagara Falls. I am incredibly thankful for the wisdom, practical teaching, and time these three men offered me. I was also given the opportunity to teach catechism full-time for two years at our Hamilton home church, Providence, which allowed me to work through the entire catechism.

It is hard to believe that all these years of study are coming to a close. Yet, I look forward to the lifelong learning ahead of me. The Lord has blessed us richly during these years and has made it so clear that we are entirely dependent on him and his goodness. I am grateful to the seminary for all the valuable training I have received. The professors, staff, and classmates have become close friends whom we love. I will miss them all. I am particularly grateful for the support of my mentor, Dr. Smith. He has been a source of great encouragement to me. I hope to present myself for Classis this June, the Lord willing. We are excited to see where the Lord will have us serve him and his people. The harvest is plentiful!





ZACH VANDERPLOEG

Hello, brothers and sisters! My name is Zach Vanderploeg, and it's my joy to share with you some snapshots of the Lord's grace and guidance in my life over these last four years and, truly, all my life long!

The curtain opened on a dark and (probably) rainy afternoon in the Pacific Northwest. Born the fifth of six children, I grew up in the suburbs of Surrey, BC. I thank the Lord for the faithful and loving nurture of my parents, who have ever been a lifeline of Christ-like compassion and counsel, as well as for my siblings,

in whose footsteps I could walk through many years of covenant education, labour on the family vegetable farm, and into the halls of post-secondary education. These were big shoes to fill! My siblings passed along to me a love for sports of almost any kind, and as I laced up their hand-me-down athletics footwear, I looked up to them for (er . . . mostly) patient instruction. As the years have passed, these lessons have extended far beyond the court as they continue to be godly examples of service to Christ and his church.

As I neared the end of high school, a childhood desire to serve the Lord in pastoral ministry deepened. Armed with the encouragement of dear saints, I stepped into university studies in history, with a concentration in late-medieval Europe. These were spiritually-formative years, as I grappled in faith with questions about the God-breathed nature of Scripture and the lordship of Christ not only over my own life but also over my unbelieving classmates-turned-friends. Midway through this degree, I stepped away from formal study for a year in which I worked full-time on the family farm and took some courses at a Christian university. I returned with a mind refreshed to learn and a heart renewed to serve the Lord with whatever gifts he had given me, in whatever circumstances he placed me. Cue an additional year of learning the biblical languages, and I soon signed an application to CRTS. With fear and trembling (and not a few tears), I bid farewells and moved to Hamilton.

The Lord has been gracious and very near to me these last four years. He has given me many beloved brothers and sisters within and outside the walls of the seminary, in addition to the dear ones that I left behind in BC. He has impressed upon me that his Word is a wellspring beyond measure and that his saints truly are the excellent ones in the land (Ps 16:3). These lessons and joys have come on both near and foreign fields. I'm grateful to Rev. Arend Witten (London) and Rev. Joe Poppe (Winnipeg-Redeemer) in particular for their guidance during summer internships, as well as to Rev. Sungmin Hong for his oversight of an eye-opening mission internship through South Korea last summer. I have cherished the opportunity to speak of Christ and his gospel from many pulpits and with many saints who have opened their homes and hearts to me these last few years. I thank the Lord and continue in prayer for all of you!

The Lord is my guide and stay. In this truth, I look forward with three parts excitement and one part trepidation (the parts mix and match, depending on the day) to the next trail marker on this journey in the Lord's service. Once the school year ends, I hope to present myself for a preparatory exam back in Classis Pacific West. May Christ be all, and I be nothing!



KEVIN WATTEL

Hi, I'm Kevin, and the two beauties with me in this picture are my wife Josina and our vivacious little girl named Solace. By the time you pick up this magazine, settle into your armchair, cross your legs, sip on your coffee, and see who these new lads are from the seminary, our second baby will have been born, Lord willing. We are very excited about this new stage for our family and are eager to see where God will continue faithfully to lead us.

Josina and I met while working together at Campfire Bible Camp back in 2017. We both have a love for teaching youth about the amazing love of our Saviour Jesus. We are both home-grown Ontario kids. Josina grew up in Burlington and Smithville, and I enjoyed growing up in the flatlands of Kerwood. Josina is the brains in the family, with a BA in Psychology and a Master's degree in Theological Studies and Counseling. She has a gift and passion for music that she uses in our church and in teaching a number of piano students. Her big dream is to have a garden even bigger than her grandmother's and spend more time outdoors than indoors.

So, what made me want to go into ministry? Well, if at any point before 2016 you had told me that one day I'd be graduating from seminary and hoping to enter pastoral ministry I'd have found that hilarious and absurd. I grew up dabbling in several types of farming and working with my dad in masonry. To this day there's a sense of relief that comes over me when the familiar weight of a trowel sits in my hand and a satisfying sense of accomplishment when stones are worked together to create a piece of art. In my

early twenties, I pursued a career in sales and made a mess of my life. What changed my course was coming face to face with my own brokenness and experiencing the unbelievable grace of God there. With a newfound love for Christ, I've cautiously and slowly, with a lot of trepidation and prayer, gone down the path toward ministry.

As I mentioned earlier, I've always been drawn to working with kids and teens. I also have a love for bringing the gospel to those who have never heard it before. My wife and I love to get to know our neighbours and be involved in our communities. I have some experience in overseas mission work and have grown in my passion for church planting through interning in Grace Canadian Reformed Church (Brampton) and Messiah's Reformed Fellowship in NYC, and through my involvement in Mercy Christian Church in Hamilton, where we've been members these past few years. I am also forever grateful for the kindness and investment of time and wisdom given to me by both the pastor and congregation of Redemption Canadian Reformed Church in Flamborough where I interned in 2022.

So, what's next? With a new baby on the way and a desire to enter the calling process feeling prepared and energized as a family, I've decided to postpone my examination until June 2025. In the meantime, I'll be participating in a year-long internship at Mercy Christian Church to grow in preaching and discipleship. If, under God's blessing, I pass my examination, we are open to go wherever the LORD leads. It is our prayer that God would use our ransomed lives in any way he chooses, and we are eager to see what he has in store.

TONY ZHENG

Hello. I'm Tony (Zhiyong) Zheng (38), and this is my wife, Mindy Zheng (37). We have been married for nearly twelve years and have three lovely kids: Evangeline (9), Tyrion (7), and Toby (2). We were all born in China except for our son Toby, who was born in Canada.

I was born and raised in a small materialistic city (1.41 million population) in southeast China near Taiwan. My grandparents and mother took me to church when I was a child, yet the atheistic educational system misled me. I became a rebellious and secular young man who tried to please himself only. However, God graciously saved me from a sinful life when I was nineteen years old.

After finishing a short university life, I started my career at age 21 for about twelve years. During these years, I had opportunities to work in a software company, later an international trading company, and then briefly as a private school teacher. After that, I started translating Christian books from English into Chinese while serving part-time at a local urban house church.

So how did I come to CRTS? After I had become a serious Christian, I had always wanted to attend a seminary and become an ordained preacher. However, it took thirteen years for me to realize that dream. God's providence led me to know about CRTS through a Chinese Reformed friend. I was already convinced of Reformed theology beforehand, so I sent my application letter to CRTS, and the seminary graciously accepted me as a full-time student.

While at CRTS, I have learned so much that I couldn't have learned elsewhere. My professors have been instrumental in guiding me through the Bible and studying theology through God's

Word. I appreciate their humility and dedication in teaching and mentoring me, which has helped me grow spiritually.

In the past three years, I've completed several internships, including three weeks with Rev. Jeff Temple for my orientation internship, two months with Rev. Frank Dong and Rev. James Visscher for my mission internship, and eleven weeks with Rev. Douwe Agema (preaching) and Rev. Theo Wierenga (family visits and church meetings) for my preaching and pastoral internship. Through these internships, I've gained invaluable insights, and I appreciate my mentors' wisdom and guidance. But I still have so much more to learn and improve.

My plan for the near future is to move to BC and join the Chinese mission work in June after the preparatory classis exam. I will take a one-year internship to figure out whether this is the path that the Lord has chosen for me. As I look back on my journey, I am humbled and grateful for God's grace and the support of all my brothers and sisters in Christ. My family and I desire to serve our Saviour Jesus Christ faithfully, and we pray that his will be done in my life. 



William den Hollander

Professor of New Testament and Dean of Students
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
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Mission Work in EDMONTON

In the year of the LORD 2023, our gracious God richly blessed the efforts of the Edmonton Mission Board (EMB). If 2022 could be described as a formative and exploratory leg of mission work, 2023 was blessed by tangible fruit. Meaningful progress in sharing the gospel of grace was made in powerful ways.

Under the guiding principle of its mission, *To share the hope of salvation with our neighbours by sowing the seed of the Gospel in our community*, the EMB adopted formal strategies to take advantage of opportunities to share the gospel.

Mission worker Darren Versteeg and a collection of church volunteers brought Tim's coffee out to many construction workers in neighbourhoods of west Edmonton, striking up conversations and planting seeds of the Good News.

EMB presentations were made to various CanRC and URC churches in the region, and brother Versteeg was also equipped and inspired by attending an evangelism conference in January, hosted by the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, ON.

It is with great thankfulness that the EMB's work is blessed with prayer and/or financial support from the area's Reformed churches: Barrhead CanRC; Cornerstone URC Edmonton; Devon CanRC, Emmanuel URC Barrhead; Grace Reformed Church Leduc; Hope CanRC Neerlandia; Immanuel CanRC Edmonton; Neerlandia (North) CanRC; Parkland Reformed Church Ponoka; Providence CanRC Edmonton; Redeemer URC Lacombe; and St. Albert CanRC.

In September, the EMB hosted its second annual evangelism conference in Edmonton called, *The Redeeming Love Conference: Everyday Conversations on Sexuality and Gender*. The conference featured guest speaker Jojo Ruba, known to many in the Reformed community from his speaking engagements with ARPA Canada.

A presence is slowly being established on the campus of the University of Alberta. Under a promotional banner that asks "What or whom do you seek?" conversations are encouraged between the EMB mission worker, volunteers, and university students.

A website was launched in 2023: www.simplyGod.ca. This forum presents the basics of the Reformed faith through four pillars: Creation; Fall; Redemption; and Restoration. It shares the rich highlights of grace in a simple easy-to-follow language to the unchurched and those unfamiliar with the Bible.

The EMB is partnering with the Chapel of West Edmonton Mall (WEM) to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with shoppers and workers at the mall. The EMB is excited to be a key champion in this work because WEM is a rich field of potential gospel seekers:

a destination for three-million visitors annually, and the daily workplace of some 20,000 employees.

At Christmas time, for the second year, church volunteers carried out the Christmas Cookies Campaign, sharing cookies and Bibles with every store in the mall.

All in all, 2023 was a year of vibrant blessings from God, and the Edmonton Mission Board is very pleased to enter 2024 in his service. 🇨

The Edmonton Mission Board





General Synod

Aldergrove 2025

NOTICE OF CONVOCATION

We hereby extend an official notice of convocation of General Synod Aldergrove 2025, to commence DV **Tuesday, May 6, 2025**.

An evening prayer service has been scheduled, DV, for **Monday, May 5, 2025, 7:30 pm**, at the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church.

All hardcopy materials for Synod should be sent to:

Synod 2025 Steering Committee
c/o Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church
PO Box 809
Aldergrove, BC
V4W 2V1

Electronic submissions and materials should be sent to:

CorrespondenceGS2025@AldergroveChurch.com

In accordance with synod regulations set out by General Synod Guelph (2022):

All material for Synod should be received by the convening church in paper or digital format (searchable text PDF as much as feasible) no later than six weeks prior to the convocation date of general synod. Those submitting material shall ensure that one signed copy is available for the archives of General Synod. Material received after this date shall ordinarily not be added to the agenda unless Synod is satisfied that the reasons given for later arrival are reasonable.

Please NOTE: To facilitate placement on the Agenda for Synod, submissions should only address one agenda item.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Happy Birthday to Edward, Joan, Lars, Devon, and Beverly! May God's grace and love be your guiding light through the coming year.



ONE OF THE BRAVEST GUYS I KNOW

Could you ever face the world with one finger? Every day? That's what AJ does. AJ, one of the bravest, most courageous guys I know. And he's our boy.

You see, AJ is fully disabled from a debilitating disease called Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. Most of his external body does not fully function anymore . . . he has no use of his arms, his legs, his feet, his abdomen, his neck—nothing except for a little bit of hand use in each hand—still enough to use a PS5 game controller (good thing for some fun), and enough to operate his power wheelchair controller with one finger. One finger. That's how he faces the world each day. That one finger displaying the brave, and yet kind and loving heart he has. And don't let his physical condition fool you. He's a bright young fellow; keen, with a good sense of humour.

He needs that humour. He faces many people physically handling him—some regulars, some new, some excellent, and some . . . well, eyebrow raising and eye rolling. He'll look at me across the room in the midst of being handled by inexperienced hands and say with his eyes, "Dad, I need your help, this guy is not doing it right. But Dad, don't help just yet because he's trying real hard. Come back and check on me, but let's give him a chance." He's very intuitive, and considerate that way too. It's amazing what he

Today I would like you all to get to know AJ. He was fostered by Mark and Joanne Wanders for seven years. Mark wrote this blog post about him, and I am thankful that I can share it with you all here. Let us all remember AJ and the Wanders in our prayers as they walk this road ahead of them.



And what a great wheelchair operator AJ is. He rarely hits anything (unless he wants to). I've always told him he'd make a great excavator operator—he has amazing finger dexterity, and hand-to-eye coordination. He operates his wheelchair through doors with one inch or less to spare on each side, and whips through like he's speeding down the Waterfront Trail by Lake Ontario.

In November of 2023 he bravely joined his brother Nate in his first wedding party. Amazingly, it was just about two years earlier to the day that he had bravely faced death in the McMaster Hospital. As my wife and I went into his room to explain to him (just eleven years old) that he may not live through the week, we cried when talking with him about it, and there he was cracking jokes on the iPad (as he couldn't talk at the time) and consoling us! "Maybe God will give me 7 more years" was one of the things he typed, and smirked while showing us.

Interestingly enough he's been "our boy" for seven years. He came into our home just seven years ago from this February 1st, 2024. He was a spunky young lad who could still walk, although he couldn't do stairs that well. Early on he displayed his great sense of humour, but also early on I don't think he realized the gravity of the condition he had. He talked like he would grow up like all his new siblings (our kids) and get married, drive a car, and ride a motorbike. (Although I wouldn't put this beyond him just yet.)

It wasn't till the last couple years that he came to the realization he was getting worse rather than better. And many tears were shed as to the frustration around his physical deterioration. Sometimes you have to do that, just sit together with a loved one and cry, because, in the moment there is no clear way out. It is only after sitting and crying . . . and maybe crying some more, letting it all out, that you realize the dark clouds have lifted a bit, because this life is not all there is.

Sometimes it is with the eye of our mind that we look up, and sometimes we can physically look up. And we see Jesus. The One who went through more pain and suffering than we will ever have to endure, the One who completely understands—even more than we do—and the One also who leads the way out of the mess. He secured eternal life for us, beyond this world, through his suffering, death, and resurrection.

I have told AJ, Jesus knows what it feels like to have arms and legs that don't work—his arms and legs were nailed to a cross thus painfully rendering them useless. He knows your pain and

communicates with facial expressions. (I know because I ask him later and he tells me. We have this system, you see.)

Handling can include moving him, bathing him, dressing him, shifting him, and lifting him . . . out of bed into his wheelchair, administering meds, feeding him, brushing his teeth, wrapping him up, and packing him up for school . . . all of his stuff latched on the back of his wheelchair and sending him out the door to face the world . . . with one finger. One finger operating his power wheelchair, with all of his important belongings attached for the day.

That's bravery. Facing the world with one finger. Facing the world of looking out for everything wheelchair accessible. Some places are great, like his school—Smith Public School in Winona ON, which, by the way, he courageously attends most days (with their amazing support staff). But some places are terrible—where automatic door buttons don't work, ramps are steep or non-existent, and entries are tight. Caution: the wheelchair world is often only for the brave at heart and for the adventurous operators and care givers. (Keep that in mind next time you come across wheelchair folk.)

frustration! But through his great suffering he led the way out for any and all who would believe in him. One day, AJ, one day, you (and me too) will run with perfectly good legs and arms and a fully functioning body, when Jesus makes all things new and ushers in the new heaven and new earth.

So, all is not hopeless! We have this hope, as the song goes. We have this hope . . . that we have moved from death to life, the beginnings of it experienced now already, and are passing through this realm of tears into eternal joy.

But while we wait, and still suffer for a little while (as Jesus did too) it's guys like AJ that inspire us. To face the world with bravery! He does it with one finger, and hope in Jesus. And we . . . most of us facing the world with working arms and legs . . . best not complain! We can all face it with boldness and hope and in Jesus, despite our circumstances!

And now, we'll need it more than ever. A big test has just hit AJ and us. We were just notified that AJ now faces a big move, away from us his family, to Peterborough, ON. We currently live in Smithville, ON, so this move will be over two and a half hours away. Why? Well, with his condition, we are maxed out in caring for him in our family home, and in Peterborough, a bed came available in a LTC home for kids, called Stewart Homes. Beds rarely come available, and if we don't take it, another may not come free for a long time. If anything worsened in his condition and we couldn't handle it, it would be uncertain where he would go in such a case.

It was a very difficult moment informing him of the development. More tears were shed at this time than for a long time. "I don't want to go, I'll miss you guys so much," was his first reaction, which later settled into, "Ok, I guess I'll go . . . but, I'll always love you." We all can hardly handle it right now. I'm choking up even writing these things.

I really can't say where this will go. And it hurts the heart so much. And now, our brave little wheelchair warrior has got to go out there and face this whole new moving challenge, as he always has, with his big brave courageous heart, with one little finger. We all have to face it trusting. Trusting that God will lead us onward and upward into the things he has in store for us.

I wonder if there are people out in Peterborough that need to meet AJ, that need to be encouraged and inspired. Lifted by a

brave young fellow like this, with a big brave heart who faces the world everyday . . . with one finger.

AJ has been of so much encouragement and blessing to us as family. Sure, not without our squabbles, but then again, it wouldn't be family if there weren't squabbles. And he's been a blessing to the community as well. Right now, we can hardly comprehend being without him close by. Sure, we can visit back and forth and such, but right now it all seems uphill.

All I can think of is, "God thank you so much for the time we've had together. Would you lead us in the days of uncertainty ahead. Help us not to fear, but trust, because you are already there waiting for us to step into the good things you've prepared in advance for us to do. God help us."

And if you're out in Peterborough, you'll have to meet him, and get to know him, and be prepared to be inspired.

AJ, one of the bravest, most courageous guys I know. And he's our boy. 

JUNE BIRTHDAYS

- 16** Edward Bultje will be **28**
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3
- 17** Joan Koerselman will be **67**
2113-16 Ave
Coaldale, AB
T1M 1J8
- 20** Lars Huijgen will be **33**
2629 Aspen Drive
Coaldale, AB
T1M 0A2
- 26** Devon Niezen will be **24**
7000 2nd Line
Arthur, ON
N0G 1A0
- 30** Beverly Breukelman will be **62**
222 5-19th Street
Coaldale, AB
T1M 1G4

CLARION Kids LORD'S DAY 46

What are the very first words of the Lord's Prayer? "Our Father in heaven." Have you ever thought about how amazing that is? The Lord Jesus is the one who taught us the Lord's Prayer. And he commands us to call the God who made the universe our Father! And we may call God our Father because Jesus died for our sins. Fathers are people we can trust. Fathers are people we should respect. So, when we call God our Father, we should trust and respect him too, shouldn't we? But, at the same time, we must always remember that God is way above our earthly fathers! He is majestic and all powerful! And he never makes mistakes or sins. In order to remind us of this, the Lord Jesus added the words "in heaven." Heaven also reminds us that God, who rules from heaven, is able to give us everything we need. Indeed, how amazing it is that we can pray "Our Father in heaven."

**Think of at least three reasons why you trust and respect God.
Attach those words anywhere on the word Father below:**

F
A
T
H
E
R

**Draw lines to show what an earthly father
is and who our heavenly Father is.**

EARTHLY FATHER

HEAVENLY FATHER

YOUR DAD

GOD

POWERFUL

SINFUL

MAJESTIC

A CREATURE



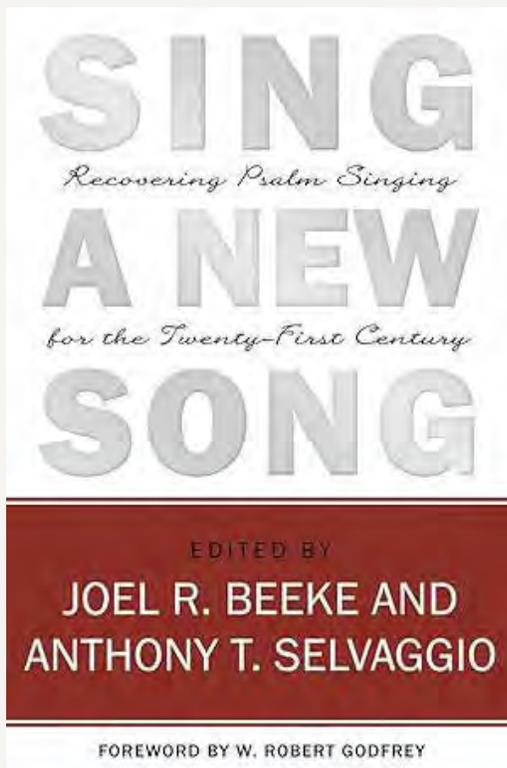
HEY KIDS!

Do you have questions about something you have read in the Bible or heard in a sermon? Maybe you are wondering about something you have read in a Lord's Day. We have a new column coming called KIDS' QUESTIONS. We warmly invite you to ask Mrs. DeBoer your question! With your parent's permission, email deboerca@gmail.com and find your question and an answer in Clarion!

AMANDA DEBOER

UNDERSTANDING PSALM SINGING

PETER HOLTVLÜWER



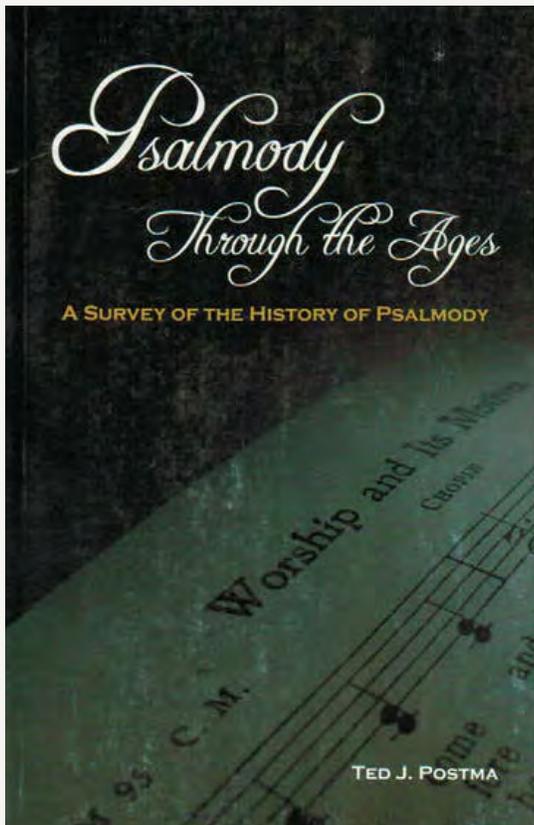
Joel R. Beeke and Anthony T. Selvaggio (eds.), *Sing a New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010). Paperback. 193 pages. \$13.50 USD.

Have you ever thought much about why we sing Psalms in church? Or why our Christian elementary schools have our kids memorize the Psalms? Are these practices worth continuing? The two books mentioned in this review are excellent resources to help answer those questions.

SING A NEW SONG

Joel Beeke and Anthony Selvaggio present eleven essays by well-known Reformed scholars and/or pastors on psalm singing. The first section focuses on psalm singing in history. Of the four chapters, one presents a big-picture overview of the church's singing since Pentecost by Terry Johnson and another a close-up view of Calvin and the Puritans by Joel Beeke. The history shows that both the early church and the Reformers knew of free hymns but consistently chose to prioritize singing psalms and canticles. The essays review the rationale for this as well.

The second section concentrates on psalm singing in Scripture with stand-out chapters by Rowland S. Ward and Michael LeFebvre. Have you wondered how you can possibly sing psalms containing cursing (imprecation)? David P. Murray's fine essay will give you a fulsome biblical answer and help you better understand them in relation to the Lord Jesus. The three essays of the third and final section of the book pay attention to how the church of the twenty-first century may continue to sing the psalms faithfully and fruitfully. For those who suggest that psalm singing leaves Christians stuck in the Old Testament era, Gerhardus Vos's study on the baked-in eschatology of the Psalter (summarized and supported by Athony Selvaggio) provides a profound and satisfying answer.



Ted J. Postma, *Psalmody Through the Ages: A Survey of the History of Psalmody* (Brantford: Free Reformed Publications, 2005). Paperback. 177 pages. \$12.50 USD.

PSALMODY IN HISTORY

Ted J. Postma has a Masters of Arts in Teaching and has served as a principal of a Christian school. Although apparently not a trained historian, Postma shows exceptional ability to research, sift, summarize, and analyze developments in church history as it pertains to psalm-singing and hymnody, a fact commended by Ray Pennings in his foreword.

In an overview fashion, Postma takes the reader from singing in the temple, to Jesus and the apostles, through the early church fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, right through to the onset of free hymns in the eighteenth century up to the present time. He gives most space to the period of the Reformation as well as the subsequent centuries when hymns began to appear in Presbyterian worship. Postma documents the facts and sets them in their historical context in an easy-to-read manner with his own apt commentary mixed in. What becomes eminently clear is that psalm singing dominated Christianity for the first 1800 years of the New Testament era but particularly since the time of Isaac Watts hymnody of various kinds has arisen to frequently displace the psalms. Accordingly, Postma also dedicates the final two chapters to analyzing the development of gospel songs and hymnody in North America. Every Christian—hymn or psalm advocate alike—can benefit greatly from his cogent summary and analysis throughout the book.

It is no secret that psalm singing in our churches is under duress. There is a strong desire to bring in many more free hymns into the worship services. For anyone who cares to know what the Bible and church history have to teach us about psalms and hymns, these short two books will provide a great service. *Sing a New Song* is likely available widely at Christian bookstores. *Psalmody Through the Ages* may be harder to find but is (like the first) available through Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario. Both are worthwhile! 

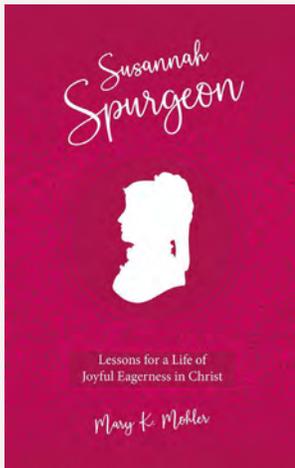


Peter Holtvlüwer

Minister

Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church

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MORE THAN A PASTOR'S BEDRIDDEN WIFE

Susannah Spurgeon: Lessons for a Life of Joyful Eagerness in Christ, Mary K. Mohler. (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2023). Hardcover. 159 pages. \$20.95 CDN.

Almost everyone knows the name of Charles Spurgeon. He was probably the most well-known Baptist preacher in history. He preached thousands of sermons, wrote dozens of books, and his quotes live on in Internet memestry. But far fewer people know of his wife, Susannah. She's often been reduced to a footnote in Spurgeon's biography, usually remarking how she spent most of their marriage in bed with chronic illnesses.

Mary Mohler will not have you be left with that lopsided impression. Charles was impressive, but Susannah was a remarkable woman in her own right too, despite her serious health challenges. Not only as this famous pastor's wife, but also later, as his widow.

Mohler tells the story of Susannah's life before, during, and after her marriage to Charles. She draws attention to her accomplishments. For example, Susannah was responsible for getting 200,000 books sent for free to pastors in need. The legacy of this Book Fund project lives on to this day, carried on by publishers like Banner of Truth Trust. They credit Susannah Spurgeon with inspiring them to provide free books to needy pastors around the world.

Susannah Spurgeon was also herself an author. She wrote a couple of books about her work for the Book Fund and also edited and compiled her husband's autobiography. She also wrote three devotional books and chapter 7 presents excerpts from these writings. Not unlike Charles Spurgeon's famous *Morning and Evening*, "Susie's trio of devotional books brim with sound biblical encouragement" (p. 135).

Mary Mohler brings a unique perspective to this biography. Other biographies of Susannah Spurgeon have been written, but this is the first by a woman. Like Charles Spurgeon, Mary Mohler's husband is also a well-known Baptist, Dr. Albert Mohler.

While currently the president of the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, Albert Mohler has also served as a pastor in several Baptist churches. Thus the author is a sort of kindred spirit with her subject and she frequently weaves her own experiences into the narrative.

As one might expect in a book about a Baptist by a Baptist, the issue of infant baptism does come up a couple of times. For example, Susannah wrote about the dedication of their twin infant sons, an event involving prayer and praise. However: "No ceremony was observed, no drops of 'holy water' fell on the children's brows." Mohler comments, "Susie made this last comment, ever vigilant of her Baptist theology. I had to smile as I read this quote since I too, a devout Baptist, would want all readers to know that this was not infant baptism" (p. 47).

Mohler intended this book "primarily for women married to men in ministry, but also to Christian women in general" (p. 13). This would be a great book to read and discuss at a book club. Each chapter has a brief section of Reflection with questions that would serve a group setting well. While Mary Mohler intended her book for women, I'd also recommend it for men as a good way to understand and appreciate your pastor's wife and the burdens she may be carrying. Finally, it's worth noting that Mohler has also written an illustrated children's book about Susannah Spurgeon—I'm sure it's worth checking out too if you have little ones. 



Wes Bredenhof
Minister
Free Reformed Church of Launceston
bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca

I read the article by Dr. de Visser with great interest and some disappointment. I have served on the Toronto Board of Foreign Mission for over twenty-five years and would like to respond.

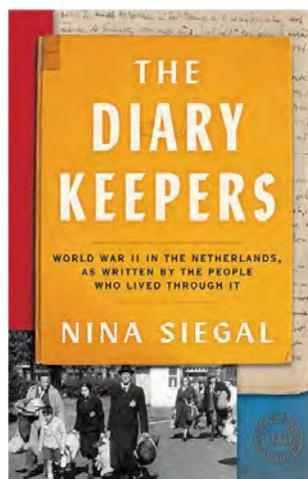
The point made about the connection between the mission team and other churches in the federation is true and, I believe, complicated. Sending churches email regular updates to supporting churches: prayer requests, delegate meetings updates, regular updates from the fields, etc. Do councils of the supporting churches keep the work in the forefront of the congregation? Is the work prayed for regularly off the pulpit? Are there council members enthused to come to the delegates meeting and report back in detail to their councils? Are the highlights of the meetings shared with the congregation via church social, bulletin or other means?

I disagree with his suggestion to appoint a standing committee on foreign mission and that synod should appoint mission deputies to help the sending churches with advice and to facilitate consultation and cooperation. Is this not the mandate of the CRMA (Canadian Reformed Mission Association) to which each sending church pays a percentage of their budget? They meet annually to discuss the work, the challenges and blessings, and discuss a particular topic. How will creating a hierarchy in the mission work, which likely will move the sending churches away from direct contact with the mission field, be a better solution? The beauty of the current structure allows the mission board to work closely with the mission teams and share their joys and burdens and be intimately involved in the work while developing close relations with the team.

I thank our heavenly father for the way he has guided the work in PNG and continues to guide other mission work undertaken in his name.

Carol Griffioen

Bethel Canadian Reformed Church, Toronto



I very much appreciated the review of *The Diary Keepers*. This is very much at the forefront of news today. It is important to realize and understand the Netherlands' role in either facilitating or resisting the Nazi regime, particularly within the Reformed community. I am very thankful that many family members were resistant and actually gave aid to Jews fleeing from the Nazis. A great uncle was executed in Westerbork for giving assistance to many who were fleeing. It is important in my estimation that we continue to keep the Jewish community in prayer within our congregations.

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written:

“The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.
And this is my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.” (Romans 11:25–27)

In him,

Jan Bultje

Eben-Ezer Canadian Reformed Church, Chatham

CLASSIS CLIPPINGS

What follows are clippings from the press releases of recent classes across the federation. They have been culled by the editor for the interest of our readers. Each press release can be found in full at canrc.org.

CLASSIS NIAGARA MARCH 20, 2024

The church of Dunnville East submitted a proposal to form a committee for student of theology to encourage men to enter the ministry. The proposal was not adopted.

Vineyard CanRC of Lincoln requested to approve the retirement of Rev. Dick Wynia. Concurring advice was given by the classis and the deputies of the regional synod.

Upon request by Vinyard CanRC of Lincoln, classis appointed Rev. Wynia as counselor for Vinyard CanRC of Lincoln.

In closed session church visit reports to the churches of Attercliffe, Dunnville East, Dunnville West, Grassie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara South, Smithville, and Tintern were received with thankfulness.

CENTRAL ONTARIO MARCH 22, 2024

Colloquium of Rev. Kwangyoung Park

The Chairman asked Rev. Kwangyoung Park to introduce himself to the assembly, which he did readily, and it was great to get to know him a little bit this way. Classis found all documents related to the call of Rev. Park to be in good order. Pastor Hilmer Jagersma prayed for Rev. Park before his examination. Rev. Park and Dr. Bill DeJong were asked to join the brothers at the table for Pastor Bill's examination of Rev. Park, and they did so. Dr. Bill DeJong proceeded to ask Rev. Park questions regarding doctrine, and then there was an opportunity for the delegates to ask questions of Rev. Park, which they did.

Pastor Ian Wildeboer examined Rev. Park on church polity, and there was an opportunity for the delegates to ask questions of Rev. Park this topic as well. In closed session, the delegates were given the opportunity to speak to the colloquium, and there was some discussion. With thankfulness, classis deemed that Rev. Park sustained his colloquium. In open session, the chairman informed Rev. Park of this decision. Elder Peter Wildeboer prayed a prayer of thankfulness.

There was a motion to approbate the call from Bethel to Rev. Park, and the motion passed. The chairman spoke words of welcome to Rev. Park and invited all the attendees to congratulate and welcome him.

An overture from Bethel church to remove the hymn cap was discussed, amended, and adopted.

Classis went into closed session to discuss matters arising from a request from Ebenezer (the archive church) concerning access to the archive of CCO.

CLASSIS MANITOBA MARCH 22, 2024

It was an historic moment, on Friday, March 22, 2024, when Rev. Dathan Pleiter, on behalf of the Elm Creek Canadian Reformed Church, welcomed all gathered for Classis Manitoba—for the first time, classis was being convened by and in the Elm Creek church. Rev. Pleiter especially welcomed Rev. Chris Drew, Pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church (OPC), Grand Forks ND, who was in attendance as a fraternal delegate.

The church visitors reported on visits to Carman East, Carman West, Elm Creek, Winnipeg Grace, Winnipeg Redeemer. Supplication and thanksgiving prayer was offered after each report. Question Period was held as per Article 44 of the Church Order. One church requested concurring advice in a matter of discipline. Prayer was offered for the member concerned, the family, church, and consistory.

Classis dealt with and agreed to a proposal from the Committee for Contact with Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries to organize combined meetings of classes and presbyteries with the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS) Northern Plains Classis and South Central Classis, the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) Classis Central US, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) Presbytery of the Dakotas. The meetings are proposed to be held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in the spring of 2026. Classis also dealt with and decided on a proposal from Carman East to revise the mandate of the committee for needy churches.

Our fraternal delegate Rev. Christopher Drew was given the opportunity to address classis. He explained to classis the geography of the fifteen churches and two mission works of the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC. There are 633 communicant members and 182 baptized members combined in all these churches. He shared some of the blessings and struggles that the presbytery is experiencing at this time. He expressed thankfulness for the warm welcome and hospitality he has received and promised to continue to pray for us. Rev. Drew fielded several questions. Rev. Poppe responded with gratefulness for his visit and led the assembly in prayer of thanksgiving and supplication for Rev. Drew and for the churches in the OPC Presbytery of the Dakotas. 

