



# Clarion

*561* WANNA TRADE? COVENANT ...OR DISCIPLESHIP? *569* 50<sup>TH</sup> CONVOCATION OF CRTS

*573* THE PREACHER'S PROGRESS *583* FAREWELL TO PASTOR STEVE VAN LEEUWEN

# what's inside

As is customary this time of the year, we offer you a number of reports and articles to do with our beloved seminary in Hamilton. This year marks the 50th convocation and 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting of CRTS (it all started in 1969) and so you'll find a short report of the event, the Principal's survey of the last year, a Board of Governor's admittedly lengthy press release, a report from the Women's Savings Action, and a copy of the convocation's key-note address by Dr. Reuben Bredenhof on "The Preacher's Progress"—you don't want to miss that one. As a federation we have in our seminary many reasons to thank our heavenly Father as the board and professors continue to work faithfully and diligently to train future ministers of the Word.

Other articles bring us different important things to think on: Matthew VanLuik's editorial puts a spotlight on marriage and asks us to re-evaluate this ancient institution; Bill Slomp meditates on how not to kick against the goads; Jeremy Segstro challenges us to keep discipleship and covenant closely bound together; Rick Vanderhorst gives a helpful corrective to a wrong way of thinking about God's providence in our lives; and Jan DeGelder helps us better understand the practicalities of asking for and working with attestations in church life. Thanks brothers for your edifying pieces!

Elsewhere you can find the account of Calgary's farewell to Pastor Steve van Leeuwen, a report on a visit to the RCUS Synod, *Clarion Kids*, and three book reviews. Last but not least let me mention the opinion on children at the Lord's table as expressed in the *Readers' Forum*—a respectful and substantive interaction with two recent articles written by Dr. VanVliet. May the Lord use such interaction to bring biblical clarity and conviction to us all. God bless!

Peter Holtvliwer

**Correction** In the *Discipling the Nations* column of Volume 73.12 the update from Henry and Rita Versteeg's visit to Papua was incorrectly labelled as an update from Papua New Guinea. It was an update from their visit to Papua, Indonesia.

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#### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor in Chief: Peter Holtvliwer  
E: [pholtvliwer@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:pholtvliwer@clarionmagazine.ca)  
Managing Editor: Laura Veenendaal  
Contributing Editors: Eric Kampen, Jason Van Vliet, Matthew VanLuik, Jim Witteveen

#### CONTENT INQUIRIES

E: [editor@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:editor@clarionmagazine.ca)

#### ADMINISTRATIVE INQUIRIES

W: [clarionmagazine.ca](http://clarionmagazine.ca)  
E: [publisher@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:publisher@clarionmagazine.ca)  
T: 204-663-9000

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## Clarion

A trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

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:

**C**onfessionally Reformed  
**L**oving in manner  
**A**ttuned to current issues  
**R**eadable and Reliable  
**I**n Submission to Scripture  
**O**pen to constructive criticism  
**N**urturing Christian living

# TO MARRY OR NOT TO MARRY

*Are marriage vows necessary?*

Is marriage something that we should still treasure, or has it become an old tradition that has lost its value? Perhaps one may feel it is one of those quaint traditions that we should maintain for no other reason than nostalgia. What is the value of marriage when the majority end in divorce? And isn't it arbitrary to refrain from sexual relations until the wedding day? If a couple is in love, isn't that enough for them to begin to live together?

Views on marriage and sexuality continue to shift in our society as our culture experiments with different forms of relationships and deals with the reality of many kinds of blended families. Should Christians continue to hold on to the old values or is it time to embrace the new realities of our society? The answer will be determined by your view on how God relates to us as his people.

## LOVE THAT BLOSSOMS

In the Song of Songs, a young couple finds love that blossoms into a growing desire for each other. The woman invites the man she loves to consummate the relationship saying, "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills" (2:17). He doesn't act on her invitation until after the wedding day: "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense" (4:6). On the wedding night he says to his bride, "You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride" (4:12). The garden is a reference to her body, which she has kept locked up for the one she loves. She invites him in saying, "Let my beloved come into his garden and taste its choice fruits" (4:16). He then expresses his delight: "I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice . . . I have drunk my wine and my milk" (5:1).

## INTEGRITY

This couple did not let their growing desire for each other destroy their anticipation for the wedding night. They maintained their integrity so they could enjoy their wedding night without guilt. On that night they could delight in one another without any shame. Is this just an old-fashioned value? Don't we live in a different time with modern values?

No, God was addressing the same issues in those days as we are facing today. The Teacher says, "There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl 1:9). The Lord is teaching us an enduring principle in this song.

The Song of Songs gives a reflection of God's own relationship with his people Israel. God speaks about his people Israel as his bride whom he loves (see Ezek 16; Hos *passim*). He says, "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" (Exod 6:7). When God enters a relationship with us as his people, he does not just speak about his love for us; he enters into a covenant bond with us. His love for us rests in his promise to always be faithful to us. Hebrews 6:13 reminds us that when God made a covenant promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater by which he could swear, God swore in his own name.

## SECURITY

God's love and faithfulness to us as his people rests in the covenant bond he made with us. We trust God will be faithful because he has made an oath to do so. If God is not faithful to his love for us, his integrity as God will be destroyed. God will no longer be God. The Lord now applies that same principle to the relationship between a man and woman who seek a loving relationship. Such a relationship cannot be based on love, but on the commitment that a man and woman make to each other. The marriage vow becomes the foundation on which we form the covenant bond with each other.

Our integrity rests in being faithful to those vows. The love in a marriage relationship can grow and flourish because husband and wife rest secure in the promises that they made to each other under the sight of Almighty God. If God deems it necessary for our security to give his promise under oath, how much more should we not seek to protect our marriage relationship with our marriage vows? Within those safe boundaries we seek the consummation of our love as the couple joyfully did so in this Song, the greatest of all love songs. 



**Matthew Van Luik**

Minister Emeritus

Grace Canadian Reformed Church, Brampton

[mhvanluik@gmail.com](mailto:mhvanluik@gmail.com)

# KICKING AGAINST THE GOADS

*I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” And I said, “Who are you, Lord?” And the Lord said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting”*

– Acts 26:14–15

Paul, originally known as Saul, tells us that God sends a powerful delusion to those who embrace false beliefs (2 Thess 2:11). This was true of Paul himself before his conversion. He was firmly convinced that he was righteous in God’s eyes and that God was pleased with him due to his good works and zeal to defend God’s cause against perceived heretics.

He was proud of his heritage and boasted of the fact that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews and of the offspring of Abraham (2 Cor 11:22). He saw himself as a pillar of the truth who knew the Scriptures well. He had sat at the feet of the great rabbi Gamaliel, and his superiors had noted his knowledge and abilities.

Paul was deeply sincere in his words and actions. He wasn’t a hypocrite, pretending to be someone he wasn’t. He believed he was doing the right thing by opposing Jesus of Nazareth and his followers. He was convinced that this was what God wanted him to do.

But now, the Lord Jesus confronts him on the road to Damascus and describes him as kicking against the goads. That’s what an ox does when he does not want to do as his master commands. A goad was a sharp stick used to prod oxen to be more compliant. Feeling the goad, they would sometimes kick back and thereby wound themselves. That describes how Paul behaved.

Having hardened himself in his sin, he acted with a stubborn obstinacy. The testimony and martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 22:20), along with the steadfast witness of other saints who had suffered because of him, surely pricked Paul’s conscience. No doubt Paul also grappled with the emptiness and shortcomings of Judaism and his own inability to fulfill the demands of the Law.

Paul took pride in his accomplishments, which was precisely what Satan wanted—for him and for all of us. He wants us to think that our good works contribute to our salvation. And once Satan gets you in his grip, he does not easily let go. Only a miracle can snatch you out of his clutches.

This is what happened to Paul. On the road to Damascus, Jesus stopped him dead in his tracks. And the words he spoke to him were not, “Follow me.” Those words Paul had rejected when he refused to listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ which Stephen and

others spoke. No, his words were, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” It was the voice of judgment.

Paul stood condemned. Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had declared and believed to be dead and buried, now stood before him alive, in heavenly glory. And his finger is pointed at him in accusation.

Paul realizes that he is guilty, which is why he humbly asks, “Who are you, Lord?” He seeks confirmation, no longer speaking with the arrogance of the Pharisee he once was. He knows that he is doomed. He is stripped naked before his Lord and Master.

That once proud Pharisee lies prostrate on the ground. He is a totally defeated man. He is entirely at God’s mercy. All that he has ever done means absolutely nothing. His “good works” are a total and complete failure. All he has to offer God is rubbish (Phil 3:8).

That is the point he had to come to. And here, on the road to Damascus, Paul gains Christ. Thankfully, the Lord God does not consume him in his anger. No, having humbled him, he sends him out into the world to proclaim the wonderful gospel of salvation, obtained through grace alone without any merit of our own. 

## FURTHER READING:

Acts 7:54–8:3; Acts 9:1–9; Acts 26:9–20

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. What was Paul’s powerful delusion?
2. What should we be mindful of to avoid falling into a similar trap?
3. What does it mean to “kick against the goads,” and how can you avoid doing so?



**Willem B. Slomp**  
Minister Emeritus  
Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church, Edmonton  
[willemb.slomp@gmail.com](mailto:willemb.slomp@gmail.com)



# WANNA TRADE?

## *Covenant . . . or Discipleship?*

JEREMY SEGSTRO

### THE QUESTION

What would you trade for intentional and passionate Christian discipleship? You might think the answer is obvious. As believers we have to be willing to trade *everything* for the pearl of inestimable price (Matt 13:45–46). We have to be willing to leave behind father and mother (Matt 10:37). We have to be like the Ephesian converts in Acts 19, burning their spell books, worth 7.5 million dollars!

There is nothing in this world that is more valuable than Jesus. Nothing in this world that is worth more than living as his disciple. And that's the right answer . . . but what do we do then when we are confronted with the following situation?

### DISCIPLESHIP VS THEOLOGY

What if the choice was between intentional, passionate, and effective discipleship and right theology?

Someone posed this very question to me a few months ago. Although he believes in infant baptism, although he understands baptism as a sign of the covenant, given to children as well as to adults, this young man has left our churches and now attends a community church. When I gently challenged him on this, this is what he said: “I know that they have baptism wrong. I do. You don't have to worry about me PJ. But I'm being challenged, I'm growing in my faith here. I'm supported and I'm disciplined. And that's a trade I'm willing to make.”



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## *You can never be “unbaptized”*

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And so that takes us back to our original question: What would you trade for intentional and passionate Christian discipleship? Would you trade in *orthodoxy* (right belief) for *orthopraxy* (right conduct)?

But, as you probably know, this isn't the right question. It is, however—unfortunately—a fair question.

### **A FAIR QUESTION**

This is something that we have to grapple with as a federation. Not just as pastors. Not just as office bearers. Each and every one of us has to look in the mirror and ask ourselves the question: *Does our covenant theology get in the way of discipleship?*

And before we rush to answer, “Of course not!” just pause and think for a moment. Think of things that you have heard said. Think of things that you yourself have said.

“Well, he’s a covenant child! He’ll come around!”

If you’ve ever said these words—I’m sorry to tell you . . . you might very well be part of the problem.

This is not to remove the immense comfort we can have in knowing that our children are claimed by the Lord—claimed, even before baptism, claimed *already in the womb* as his covenant children. This is such a wonderful blessing, that our children are raised in the church, hearing the gospel proclaimed to them, making use of that wonderful three-legged stool: church, home, and school.

It is a precious blessing that we can plead with God on account of his covenant promises if our children go astray: “Gracious God, you made these promises at her baptism! Draw her back to you now! Work the faith in her heart to respond to your promises! She is your child!”

### **A SPIRITUAL CHILD LEASH?**

But these promises, these blessings of the covenant are not a spiritual child leash. Have you heard of these? Some parents in crowded places have their children in a safety harness of sorts, attached to them, or to a backpack, or something else, so that the child can’t run off and get lost.

We may wish baptism was a spiritual version of this: that no matter how far our children may go astray we don't have to do the hard work of discipleship because, as a baptized child, he will come around. As a covenant child, she will make her way back to the church.

And maybe that's true. *Maybe* our children will make their way back to the church—baptism does, after all, leave an indelible mark upon the soul. You can never be “unbaptized.” You can be a rebellious covenant child, a covenant child who is far off, but you can never “un-covenant” someone.

And yet, covenant is not salvation. The two words are not synonyms. “Once baptized, always baptized” is true. But “once baptized, always saved” is not. And deep down we know this. We know that there are two parts to a covenant—promise and obligation—but so often we act as though the waters of baptism are all that is needed for raising covenant children.

In this, we make the same mistake that adult-only baptists make: we see baptism as the end of the road. But what if covenant wasn't detrimental to discipleship? Rather, covenant is foundational for it.

Because the community church that my friend now attends views discipleship as fundamental, as necessary, for baptism to happen. They disciple because they *don't know* if a young man, if a young woman, is a child of God—if God has reached out and given promises of welcome, of covenant status.

They disciple because they don't know. They disciple out of ignorance.

But do you know what is better? Do you know what is stronger? Do you know what is the best foundation for discipleship? The fact that we *do know*! The fact that God has so claimed our children, already in the womb, but claimed them publicly in the sacrament of baptism. It is because our children belong to God that we have a duty to disciple them!

## A DUTY TO DISCIPLE

Baptism is only the beginning. It is a glorious beginning, to be sure, but only a beginning nonetheless. No matter how much we may wish it, baptism does not lock the doors of the house of salvation, trapping us inside. Though we may wish it did, this is not the reality.

Instead, all throughout Scripture, our God speaks: not only of the wonderful promises he makes to his covenant children, but

also of the seriousness with which we should view the status of the children he gives his people.

With baptism comes the promises. With baptism comes the public acknowledgement of the glorious status of our children. But with baptism, with that covenant status, also comes the responsibility to train up our children in the way that they should go. To teach the commandments, to teach the glorious deeds of the LORD diligently—talking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk along the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

To slightly alter a quotation of Pastor John Piper (to make a point he wouldn't approve of), “Covenant doesn't make discipleship pointless, covenant makes discipleship possible.”

To live your life, discipling your children out of fear that maybe God is for them, maybe he isn't—to disciple young people, teaching them “not to drink or spit or chew, or go with those who do” so that maybe, perhaps, they might earn the favour of God, so that they might gain his attention and earn salvation from his hand—this is a miserable and exhausting way to live! Never sure, never comforted, never secure. This is building on a human foundation. Building a house upon the sand.

But to build upon the foundation of the promises of God—that he is for your child and loves your child! That salvation is available for your child, having been won by Jesus Christ . . . this is building on a divine foundation. Building a house upon the rock.

Here's the thing—we have to build! We have this foundation, and it's not enough to walk around the foundation, to admire the foundation, to write books about the foundation, to gather together crowds to marvel together at the foundation. A foundation is not a house. A house takes hard work for us to build, but our God has entrusted us to do it. He has given us the foundation. He has given us the blueprints of the house in his Word. He has even given us his Spirit to work wisdom and godliness and strength in our hearts.

So, what are we waiting for? Let us work to bring about that intentional, passionate, and effective discipleship in our own circles so that the thought would never occur to our children to make that trade. 📖



**Jeremy Segstro**  
Minister  
Yarrow Canadian Reformed Church  
[jeremy.segstro@gmail.com](mailto:jeremy.segstro@gmail.com)



# GOD'S PROVIDENCE *Is Not Our Bible*

RICK VANDERHORST

Some of you might be wondering about the title of this article. “God’s providence is not our Bible? What does that mean?” Let me explain. I gleaned this gem of a line from Sinclair Ferguson’s commentary on the book of Ruth, *Faithful God*.<sup>1</sup> Expanding on this concept, Ferguson states about Boaz:

Boaz understands that the providences of God in our lives are not, in and of themselves, self-interpreting. They must always be interpreted in the light of the teaching given to us in God’s Torah, his trustworthy word. Scripture . . . provides the lenses through which we interpret and respond to every providence of God (p. 87).

What is Ferguson getting at here? The issue is this: God, by his providential control over all things, leads and guides our lives here on earth so that nothing happens to us by chance (see Lord’s Day 10). Knowing this truth is a deep comfort because we can trust that all things come to us in life by God’s fatherly hand. At same time, this truth can be misused to our own hurt. This will happen when we use God’s providence as a means of making life decisions and conclusions about God *apart from God’s Word*.

## THE GUIDING LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

We confess in Article 7 of the Belgic Confession that Holy Scripture “fully contains the will of God and all that man must believe for salvation is sufficiently taught therein.” We find this teaching expressed in passages such as Psalm 119:9, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.” Or Psalm 119:105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Or 2 Timothy 3:16–17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be *complete*, equipped for *every* good work” (emphasis mine). These passages show that God’s Word is the ultimate guiding tool for us. While God does lead us through life by his providence, this doesn’t mean we may use his providence in the place of Scripture. It’s the Bible which gives us God’s revealed will so that we may know the right path to follow. Let’s look at some examples from God’s Word to see this in action.

<sup>1</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *Faithful God: An exposition of the Book of Ruth*, (Brynffirion: Brynffirion Press, 2013), 88. I can highly recommend this exposition of the book of Ruth as excellent devotional reading.

## BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

We see some interesting examples in the lives of Saul and David. For a long time, Saul pursued David in order to kill him. In 1 Samuel 23:6, Saul was told that David had entered the city of Keilah. In response, Saul said, “God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars.” To Saul’s eyes, it looked like God’s providence was leading to the downfall of David and towards Saul’s victory. The problem, however, is that this went completely contrary to God’s commandments and to God’s previous message through Samuel, that God was tearing the kingdom away from Saul. Thus, Saul failed to use God’s Word as his ultimate guide and instead made conclusions based on how he interpreted God directing things.

In the very next chapter, David and his men were hiding from Saul in a cave. Not long after, Saul just happened to come into that same cave to relieve himself, oblivious to the fact that David and his men were right there. It was the perfect opportunity for David to kill Saul and finally be free from this man who was seeking his life. Indeed, David’s men interpreted the circumstances in just this way. They said to David, “Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you,’” (1 Sam 24:4). It’s easy to see why they reasoned in this fashion. It appeared that everything was lining up just right and that God’s providence was leading David to take Saul’s life. The problem was, however, that taking Saul’s life in this way would go against God’s revealed will.

What did David do in this situation? He was guided by God’s Word! Even though it might seem that God’s providence was leading to this moment in order to kill Saul, he instead stayed his hand. Saul was God’s anointed king and so God’s Word prevented David from taking Saul’s life. Furthermore, God by his Word had already promised to give David the throne. David had to trust this message and that God by his providence would ultimately fulfill what he promised. This was the right approach.

## APPLICATION TO OUR OWN LIVES

There are a number of ways we can apply this principle to our own lives. If we allow God’s providence to take the place of Scripture, it could lead us to make unwise and even sinful choices which we believe are in line with God’s will.

For example, imagine a man in the process of making some big career decisions. As he prays about the situation, a series of events all seem to line up in the direction of taking a certain well-paying job. At the same time, certain factors about the job show that taking the job most likely will be spiritually detrimental to his family and will also mean compromising his Christian life at certain points. However, the man reasons that the significant events lining up in the way they did show that God had opened this door for him as a result of prayer and that God was even “calling

him” to this task. Thus, the man takes the job concluding that this was the path God wanted him to take. Where did he go wrong? He used God’s providence as a reason to choose certain actions that went against God’s revealed will in the Bible.

As another example, imagine a young woman who is prayerfully seeking a spouse. As she prays, she has a number of encounters with an attractive young man at university that she concludes just cannot be coincidental. Could this be the person God is bringing into her life in answer to her prayers? The only issue is that even though the young man seems respectable, he is not a Christian. Despite this, the young woman reasons that the circumstances leading to their meeting seem providentially directed. Perhaps it means that God was even using her to bring this young man to faith, and so she enters the relationship. The problem with this thinking, however, is that her actions go directly against God’s revealed will in Scripture, which states clearly that believers must only marry “in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39).

Another similar issue can arise in all this: Even though someone may not use God’s providence to make decisions contrary to God’s revealed will, a Christian can still get into a pattern of always looking for “signs” from God when making decisions. The problem with this approach is that God hasn’t promised to lead us in this manner. Furthermore, while God certainly can use external circumstances to guide our way, continually seeking “signs” can just as easily lead us down an unwise path. Looking for signs can also lead to anxiety because we can’t be sure we have interpreted the signs correctly.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Now, all this being said, there is nothing wrong in itself with seeing God’s providential hand in events that happen in our lives. At times we might also conclude that God is opening a door for us in a certain area of life, such as making a career decision. We can pray and then seek his guiding hand also through his providence. But none of that denies the importance of being guided by biblical wisdom, seeking the counsel of faithful Christians, and using principles from God’s Word to guide us in making good choices. The providential circumstances of our lives must always be checked against the revealed will of God in the Bible lest we take a path that directly contradicts God’s teaching in Scripture. Rightly using Scripture, which is our infallible guide, will ensure we stay on the path of obedience and wisdom. 



**Rick Vanderhorst**  
Minister  
Smithers Canadian Reformed Church  
[rick\\_vanderhorst@hotmail.com](mailto:rick_vanderhorst@hotmail.com)

# More About ATTESTATIONS

In the previous installment we looked at Article 62 of the Church Order: “Attestations”—or, as I would prefer, “Testimonies.” At that time I promised to come back to this topic. Consistories sometimes struggle with specific questions about issuing and receiving such testimonies. It is also good that as church members we know what to expect when it comes to asking for, receiving, and presenting such a testimony as meant in Article 62.

For a better understanding of the rest of this article, it might be helpful to emphasize that Article 62 functions within the agreement we have adopted as federated churches. The testimonies that Article 62 refers to serve a particular purpose within a group of churches that have recognized and publicly acknowledged that they are united in faith by subscribing to the Reformed confessions: the Canadian Reformed church federation and its sister churches. These churches have agreed to this process.

As a pastor I was sometimes asked to write a testimony for a church member who wanted to enroll in a Christian college or university, or who had applied to work as volunteer for a Christian charity. Usually, the organization that asked for such a document had specific questions about that person’s faith and church involvement. Anyone can do this for anyone, provided you know the person. But that’s not what Article 62 is about.

## YOU WON’T GET AN ATTESTATION

Can or should a consistory ever refuse to issue an Article 62 testimony?

The short answer is “no.” When a member is actually moving and has expressed his intention to join a sister church elsewhere, he has the right to be given a truthful testimony to support his request for membership in that church. That’s why this testimony is addressed

to that particular church, with the request to admit him as a member and take him under their pastoral supervision and care, honouring what they read in the testimony about him.

But what if someone does not move? What if he wants to leave his local church and go elsewhere out of spite or frustration, because of a conflict, or just because he thinks he’d feel more at home there? In that case, a consistory should be very hesitant to accede to the request. Are we not called to face those problems and deal with them, instead of walking away from a conflict just out of frustration? That being said, with the (in my view) unfortunate and apparently increasing lack of respect for geographical church boundaries, it may be difficult for a consistory to refuse if someone insists.<sup>1</sup>

## WE DON’T ACCEPT YOUR ATTESTATION

Can a consistory ever refuse to accept an Article 62 testimony from a sister church?

Language is significant here. It is not a matter of refusing or accepting a testimony. A testimony is something you take note of. The real question is: can a consistory refuse to admit someone as member, based on the testimony he presents, issued by a sister church within the federation? The answer is “no,” except in one specific situation.

As mentioned earlier, the unity of faith among the churches is rooted in submission to God’s Word and mutual acceptance of the Reformed confessions. When that unity is so broken that we can no longer trust the testimony of other churches in the federation to be reliable, such a testimony becomes invalid, and cannot serve as basis for admission as members. In that case the consistory can still receive into membership people that present

<sup>1</sup> In a previous column I explained why I think this is not a good development. See *Clarion*, Vol. 73, No. 08, p. 338–339.

such a testimony, but then based on its own research and examination of their doctrine and Christian life, and not based on the testimony they presented.

But, apart from this rare scenario, a consistory can never refuse membership when someone presents an attestation given by a sister church. Even if the testimony is unfavourable, even if the brother or sister is under discipline, every request for membership, supported by a testimony, regardless of how positive or negative, from a church within the federation must be accepted. No consistory is looking for more work; refusing membership of a brother with a testimony that signals trouble as the easy way out can be tempting. However, a consistory that would decide to do so is in fact excommunicating this brother without due process, conveniently skipping all the steps we have agreed upon in Article 68. As consistories of sister churches, we accept pastoral responsibility and extend pastoral care when someone in trouble arrives with an attestation.

The reality is that not all the sheep of Christ's flock are equally loveable. They can be difficult and cause trouble. Sometimes they need to be admonished and even disciplined. But, without any exception, they all need to be shepherded with the love of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> After all, the goal in the church he joins remains the same: reconciliation and forgiveness.

## AN ATTESTATION IN THE SHREDDER

What should be done when someone who has been given an attestation never presents it to the elders of the church where he was going? This can be rephrased as the pastoral question: How can we prevent people just leaving the church in this way, without anyone noticing it? Unfortunately, this can be intentional sometimes. If someone simply wants to disappear without causing a stir, he can request a testimony, get it, move away, put it through the shredder, and never ask for membership elsewhere.

I think our churches would do well to adopt the practice that is explicitly stipulated in Article 59 of the church order of our Australian sister churches: that the consistory of the receiving congregation shall be notified in due time that an attestation had been given. In the end, when someone wants to withdraw from the church and the supervision of the elders, no one can stop him or her from doing so. But there is much spiritual benefit when there is good communication between sister churches, so that pastoral care can be passed on from one church to the other. Again, even those who try to get away need to be shepherded by the elders with the love of Christ.

## YOUR ATTESTATION EXPIRED

How long is an Article 62 testimony valid?

Given the idea of an attestation, not just as a document that gives the dates of your baptism and profession of faith, but as a testimony of what you believe, and how this shows in your lifestyle, it makes sense that this kind of testimony has a limited "shelf life," so to speak. It captures what can be said about these things at some point in time in your life, but it is impossible to predict what this will look like a few years from the date it was issued, or even less than a year. It is being issued to serve a specific purpose, which is indicated in the document: it is meant to support a request for membership in another Reformed church, or a sister church where you want to join at that time.

All this means that after a while such a testimony will be outdated. But there is no general rule in the Church Order, or made by synods, for how long it should be valid. Your attestation does not come with a "best-before-date" stamped on it. In practice, it varies between three months and half a year. But it's not a law. There can be extenuating circumstances that call for pastoral wisdom in dealing with an "old" attestation. However, under normal conditions, why would anyone keep such a testimony somewhere in a drawer? In fact, a delayed attestation becomes a matter of pastoral concern. Why was it presented more than half a year after it was issued?

## AN OPEN ATTESTATION

Can an Article 62 testimony be issued without being addressed to a specific church?

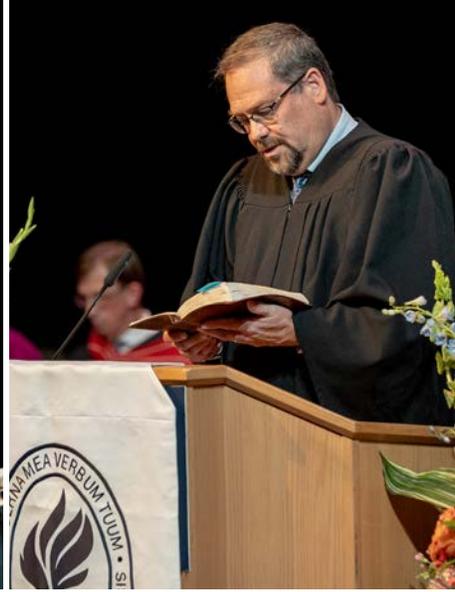
That's only possible if someone moves to a country where our churches don't have a sister church. The fact that the Canadian Reformed churches do not have sister churches in Paraguay, Laos, or The Gambia does not mean that there is no faithful church in any of these (or other) countries.

It then becomes the responsibility of the member(s) that move there to do their own research and by God's grace find and join a faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ. In that context, a request for a testimony about people's doctrine and Christian lifestyle cannot be refused on the grounds that we don't have sister-churches in that country. It can be called an "open attestation" in the sense that it is not addressed to a particular church.



**Jan DeGelder**  
Minister Emeritus  
Flamborough Canadian Reformed Church  
jdegelder@cogeco.ca

<sup>2</sup> VanDellen/Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary (Grand Rapids 1941)*, p. 337





## CONVOCAATION OF CRTS

JOHN LOUWERSE

In thankfulness to our good and gracious God, many came together in the auditorium at Redeemer University in Ancaster for the 55th Anniversary meeting and 50th Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) on September 6, 2024. Those who could not join in person in this venue were able to join in online from around the world.

The festive evening began with a processional and opening song of praise, after which the chairman of the board, Rev. John Louwerse, welcomed everyone. In prayer he gave thanks to God the Father for the many blessings which come through his Son Jesus Christ. One such blessing is CRTS and the completion of yet another academic year. Gratitude was expressed for the sparing of the life of Dr. Ted VanRaalte, who had successful surgery after a recent heart attack and is recovering well. The professors emeriti and their spouses and widows were also remembered in prayer.

After the opening prayer, excerpts from letters of encouragement and congratulations from the deputies for training for

ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and from the host for the evening, Redeemer University, were read.

The chairman read from 1 Timothy 4:6–16, a focal passage in the inaugural address of Dr. Reuben Bredenhof, the featured speaker of the evening. After the chairman officially declared the anniversary and convocation evening opened, Dr. Jason VanVliet as Principal presented his annual report, the contents of which can be read elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. In his report he expressed much gratitude for the completion of the office renovations at CRTS. He also noted the arrival of eight new students from around the world for the first year of instruction. He also made mention of the publishing efforts of the active and emeriti professors. Following this positive report, the gathering sang Psalm 119:37, 38.

Dr. Bredenhof gave his inaugural address entitled “The Preacher’s Progress,” which is included elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. This address gave a deeper scriptural insight into the



growth of preachers as well as many practical ways in which this could be encouraged.

After singing from Psalm 81:1, 2, 7, the degree of Master of Divinity was conferred on Jacob Baijal, Taylor Bredenhof, Jakob Mars, Joshua Peters, Zachary VanderPloeg, Kevin Wattel, and *in absentia* on Tony Zheng.

Kevin Wattel spoke on behalf of the graduates. He expressed thankfulness to many people in their lives and to God for receiving these years of instruction and seeing their work crowned with the granting of this master's degree.

The Woman's Saving Action gave a brief screen presentation about "change." Some things in the CRTS library change while other things do not. Thanks was expressed for the financial contributions which came in from congregations far and wide. Sister Karen Schuurman presented the amount of fifty thousand dollars to the seminary library. Dr. VanVliet expressed the seminary's gratitude for this important contribution by the sisters of the WSA.

The collection this evening was for the Publication Foundation, a fund which provides the necessary financial assistance for the

faculty to produce published works for use in the churches. During this collection, Mrs. E. Bonura played the piano while singing "Speak O Lord." This song was most fitting in light of the previous address.

Rev. Jeff Temple led in closing prayer, expressing much thanks for the blessings given and focusing on the future of the graduates and the work of the seminary in the upcoming year. As is customary, the assembly concluded with the hearty singing of the national anthem "O Canada." After the program, everyone had an opportunity to congratulate the graduates and their wives. You are welcome to view a video recording of this evening at CRTS's website ([canadianreformedseminary.ca](http://canadianreformedseminary.ca)). 



**John Louwerse**

Minister

Covenant Canadian Reformed Church, Grassie

[john.louwerse@canrc.org](mailto:john.louwerse@canrc.org)

# CRTS

## *Principal's Update*

Our faithful, covenant-keeping Lord has blessed CRTS in many ways since my last report. Allow me to share a few highlights with you as of this September.

### **RENOVATIONS . . . ALSO UPSTAIRS NOW!**

Last year everyone thoroughly enjoyed our renovated seminary building. The entire lower level had a brand-new look and feel, and so much more space. But there was one part of the renovation that had to be carried over until the summer of 2024: the office area of the upper level.

Now it's all done and it's fantastic! The upper level now has the same fresh, bright, updated look as the lower level. Also, the modern HVAC in every office is whisper quiet and circulates fresh, well-conditioned air—good for the body, especially the brain!

On behalf of everyone in the building, we want to say a heartfelt, “Thank you!” to the Board, especially the Finance and Property committee, to the general contractor and tradesmen, and to all those who are donating extra funds to make this possible.

### **FACULTY & STAFF**

Dr. Reuben Bredenhof joined us last year as the new professor of Ministry and Missions. By all accounts, he has settled into his role very well. He is teaching a full course load and, beginning with this academic year, he is also taking over from Dr. de Visser in the role of Director of the Pastoral Training Program, organizing all the internships for students. We continue to wish him the Lord's blessing as he works his way into serving at our seminary.

Dr. Ted Van Raalte suffered a mild heart attack in August (2024) and, as a result, he needed to have heart surgery. With deep thankfulness to the Lord, I can mention that the surgery went well, that Dr. Van Raalte returned home soon after the surgery, and that he is also recovering well. In the Lord's providence he

was already on a regularly scheduled sabbatical this semester, so he has time to recuperate, and classes will carry on as originally planned. We pray that our heavenly Father will continue to bless Dr. Van Raalte and his wife Christine and their family with all that they need at this time.

The rest of the faculty and staff continue with their regular teaching and administrative work. We acknowledge the Lord's goodness in directing all things so that training for the ministry continues unhindered at CRTS.

We are also grateful that our retired faculty remain active in publishing, in giving speeches and leading seminars, and in helping out in various congregations. Our thoughts and prayers are with Dr. Cornelis Van Dam and his wife Joanne, Dr. Jerry Visscher and Teny, Dr. Arjan de Visser and Inge, as well as our sisters Marg De Jong and Dinie Gootjes. You might be interested to hear that some former Korean students of Dr. Niek Gootjes have organized a special conference in memory of him and they have invited sr. Gootjes to the conference. Clearly the appreciation for Professor Gootjes remains strong in Korea.

### **STUDENTS**

By the time you read this, seven students will have graduated this year: Jacob Baijal, Taylor Bredenhof, Jakob Mars, Joshua Peters, Zachary VanderPloeg, Kevin Wattel, and Tony Zheng. Some have become eligible for call, accepted a call, and are busy with final classical examinations and transitioning into ordained ministry. Others are spending several additional months in a congregation before becoming eligible for call, D.V. You can always learn more about our graduates on our website. Look under “News” and then “Student and Graduate Profiles.”

This year we are welcoming *eight* new MDiv students: Albert Bijker and Arco Klapwijk (South Africa), David Kroeze (Tasmania),



John Moesker (BC), Rodrigo Quezada Reed (Germany), Jeff Uriarte (Philippines), Aaron Westrik (ON), and Tyler Witthoef (BC). Some of them are joining our seminary community as single men; others are married, and some have children. We extend a heartfelt welcome to all of them!

This puts the total student body for this year at thirty-one: twenty-eight in the MDiv program studying for ordained ministry, two in BTh program studying to serve the church in other ways, and one part-time student from South Africa taking some courses online. The need for ministers remains great and we should never rest on our laurels in this regard, but we should pause for gratitude. Having a student body around thirty is great blessing.

## NEW WEBSITE ON THE HORIZON

We are working with a local company to update our website to modern standards and appearance. We will also include a new section called “Considering the Ministry?” that will help brothers in the Lord, along with their wives if they are married, walk through prayerful considerations as to whether studying for the ministry is for them. We hope the new website will be ready at some point in 2025.

## PUBLICATIONS

Finally, I would like to highlight some recent work on publications. This is always risky because various professors are at various stages of writing this or that book or article. So let me offer apologies to my colleagues if this report does not mention your particular writing project. (Hopefully we will do that in a future report.) Right now, I would like to highlight three publications that became

available in the last year. First, Dr. Van Dam has a book out called *In Holy Service* that covers three topics: “The office of all believers, ecclesiastical offices, and women in special service.”

Second, Dr. Bredenhof published a book called *Thank God* that, as you would expect, is about living a life of gratitude.

Third, I draw your attention to a special issue of a scholarly journal. Back in 2021, in the middle of COVID restrictions, we had a special retirement symposium for Dr. Jerry Visscher. It was called “Faith Rejoices in the Promise.” Our intention was to publish some of the presentations from this symposium in an academic journal. Well, it took a while, but the journal just arrived at the seminary a few days ago for Convocation. The latest issue of *Unio cum Christo* (translated this means *Union with Christ*) has a special section called “Panel in Honor of Gerhard H. Visscher,” with essays by Cornelis Van Dam, John Smith, and William den Hollander, along with an introduction from myself.

In addition to training men for the ministry, which is certainly our foremost task, we also aim to produce both popular and scholarly resources to edify God’s people around the world.

In closing, then, thank-you brothers and sisters for all your support in every way. May the Lord bless our seminary for the glory of his awesome Name and the progress of his holy church. 🇨



**Jason Van Vliet**

Principal and Professor of Dogmatics  
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary  
[jvanvliet@crtts.ca](mailto:jvanvliet@crtts.ca)

# *The*

# PREACHER'S

# *Progress*

REUBEN BREDENHOF

In the past academic year, a significant part of my work at CRTS was managing the weekly Sermon Session. In two separate groups, all our students participated in these sessions. Over the course of the year, there were around sixty sermons to listen to and evaluate: usually two, sometimes three sermons per week.

Reflecting on a year of Sermon Session, I may offer a few observations. First, this is a setting in which our students thrive. They are engaged and eager to see their classmates succeed. They work hard to exegete their passage. They wrestle to formulate a theme and points that clearly captures the message of the text for the Lord's people today.

But even when fine exegetical work has been done, a substantial challenge remains: how will he convey this message effectively? For instance, one student's sermon has grown heavy with detail, becoming unwieldy and difficult to steer in the right direction.

Another student is keen to apply his text to the lives of his hearers—and sometimes leaps there too quickly, before he has laid down a solid ground of explanation. Another student seeks to illustrate his message with a story or comparison, but he lets his good illustrations crowd out his exposition of the text. Too many illustrations—or none at all. And then there is the student's good impulse to preach Christ, but how, and when, and where is a sure line to the gospel in this particular text?

Even a single sermon requires so many elements to be held together in sometimes delicate balance. You are balancing law and gospel, promise and obligation, poetry and precision, exposition and application, to say nothing of delivering a sermon in a way that is intentional yet still comes across as natural.

Without a doubt, the preaching task is a formidable exercise. So, it is heartening to see a student grow. He develops from those first



tentative efforts into presentations of the gospel that are mature in insight and powerful in delivery. Especially the summer preaching internships pay dividends, as our students come back after several consecutive weeks of preaching with abilities that have noticeably developed.

## TRAINING PREACHERS

Over this year of sermon sessions, I have pondered often the task of training preachers. From the perspective of the homiletics professor, what are the non-negotiable aspects of a sermon? Are illustrations nice but not necessary? Is personal application absolutely required? And then there is the question of delivery: is a preacher's style of sermon delivery inseparable from his character or temperament, or where can we push someone to step outside of himself to be a more effective messenger?

The conundrums around training preachers are many. This reality led John Broadus to say in his classic work on homiletics: "It is a solemn thing to preach the gospel, and therefore it is a very

solemn thing to attempt instruction or even suggestion as to the means of preaching well." What sinful and broken man dares tell another how to be an ambassador for the preeminent Christ? Yet we must.

It is a solemn task—teaching preaching—and for centuries this training has been part of a formal theological education. Students will receive lectures in homiletics (or the study of preaching), just as they will receive lectures in dogmatics, and church history, Old Testament history and Greek grammar. Yet historically, instruction in preaching has always been a hands-on endeavour.

We see indications of this already in the early church. In those first centuries, the church favoured an apprenticeship model for developing new preachers. Augustine, for instance, "urged that preachers learn from other preachers, coming under the tutelage of an experienced man to learn how to preach."

Against that background, it is unsurprising that sermon sessions are by no means unique to CRTS. At seminaries the world over, students get hands-on practice in what is more commonly called



comment. In his reminiscing, the student described the college building in London which contained “the famous room at the end of the corridor where trial sermons were preached and many tears [were] shed.”<sup>1</sup>

## LEARNING TO PREACH IN SCRIPTURE

On our subject of training preachers—getting them on the road to progress—we should ask whether we see this activity in Scripture. During the time of the Bible, how did God raise up messengers for his people? Some were called outright; think of Isaiah and Jeremiah, both commissioned by God for prophetic ministry. But were there other pathways into the work of preaching?

Some commentators point toward the “sons of the prophets.” We meet them in 2 Kings during a time of apostasy in Israel. The “sons of the prophets” seem to have been groups of men who lived communally and dedicated themselves to the teachings of the LORD’s true prophets. They are often described as a prophetic guild, or a school of prophets. They were “sons” who received the instruction of another prophet as their spiritual “father.”

In connection with the “sons of the prophets,” John Calvin spoke about how there were in Israel “colleges for prophets.” About them he asserted in his commentary on Amos 7:14, “These colleges were instituted for this end—that there might be always seminaries for the Church of God, so that it might not be destitute of good and faithful teachers.” It is true that some prophets, including Elisha and later on Isaiah, collected men around themselves as disciples. But was this practice, as Calvin suggests, an early form of seminary or theological college? Unfortunately, the evidence is rather thin on the question of what the “sons of the prophets” actually did. There is no indication in Scripture that the prophetic office would normally be handed down from one person to another.

More directly relevant for preacher training are the first and second letters of Paul to Timothy. The young Timothy had been entrusted with the difficult task of leading a congregation that was beset with a number of problems, not least of which was a critical attitude towards their pastor. So, Paul has been discipling Timothy, his spiritual “son,” teaching the attitudes and activities that are essential for Christian ministry. Paul’s assumption is that Timothy will, in turn, be training others for this work (2 Tim 2:2).

## LET EVERYONE SEE YOUR PROGRESS

In the context of Paul apprenticing his younger colleague, he says something significant in 1 Timothy 4:15: “Practice these things,

a “preaching lab.” The title “preaching lab” communicates the applied focus of the class. It is like a laboratory where we bring all those diverse elements together into a careful combination, where experimentation is done, and the testing of results takes place. And hopefully we can avoid any explosions!

I was interested to read an account of preaching practice as it took place at Spurgeon’s College in London. The name of Charles Spurgeon is well-known, together with his honorary title as “the Prince of Preachers.” One of the many ministries to which Spurgeon devoted his energy was a college for training men for the ministry. A student at Spurgeon’s College back in the nineteenth century included in his memoirs an account of the college’s course for preaching. In an approach that sounds remarkably like our own at CRTS, the students would prepare sermons, then deliver them under the watchful eye of an experienced preacher in front of the entire class, after which fellow students were invited to

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Breimaier, *Tethered to the Cross: The Life and Preaching of C. H. Spurgeon* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2020), 223.

immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.” The apostle has just reminded Timothy of the heavenly gift which has qualified him for ministry, a gift symbolized in the laying on of hands. Now Paul urges Timothy to be diligent in the exercise of his ministry in order that he may progress.

For any teacher, the question of student progress is paramount. For the Grade 1 teacher, what does it mean for a student to progress in reading, and how can that progress be achieved? No less for the homiletics professor: What does it mean for a student to progress in his preaching, and how can that progress be achieved?

Let’s first consider what Paul means when he says to Timothy, “So that all may see your progress.” Progress in what? One essential aspect of desired growth was in his Christian faith and character. A few verses before, Paul exhorted, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (4:12). He is to grow in virtue. Notably, Paul expects that Timothy’s spiritual progress will be visible. He will show himself to others as a model of holy conduct, a servant of Christ (4:6), a man of God who pursues “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” (6:11). This is the kind of progress that everyone should be able to see in the young minister: progress in sanctification.

Besides developing in godliness, a second growth area for Timothy is in the competencies of ministry. “Until I come,” the apostle has also just said, “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (4:13). Front of mind for Paul is the work done in the pulpit: reading the Scriptures well, teaching them faithfully, bringing exhortations boldly. To this activity, the preacher must be earnestly committed. One writer puts it this way: “When in the pulpit, the preacher is to be riveted on the task at hand, faithfully proclaiming the Word of God. When he is out of the pulpit, he is to be planning, preparing, and praying about his next sermons.”<sup>2</sup>

In short, a young preacher must pursue growth in both character and competence. Maybe Timothy’s obvious progress in faith and ministry will shut the mouths of his critics; more importantly, it will bless his congregation and glorify God. The word for “progress” in 4:15 is interesting for being so rare in the New Testament. One other place it’s found is Philippians 1:25, where Paul speaks of continuing his ministry “for your progress and joy in the faith.” A related word in Luke 2:52 describes the progress of Jesus, his growth in wisdom and stature and favour with God

and man. Even our Lord had to grow, and so must every child of God, and every preacher.

## OUR GROWTH

For a seminary student, for a pastor—and for a seminary professor—progress surely ought to comprise the same two aspects as in 1 Timothy: character and competence. Regarding *character*, a preacher ought to be growing in his righteousness, advancing in godliness, increasing in love for other people, in steadfastness in trials, developing a spirit of trust. And surely this kind of progress in godliness is inseparably connected to his progress in *preaching*. It’s when a preacher sees more clearly the implications of the gospel for himself that he will preach the gospel more urgently, more attractively. When a preacher is himself walking closely with Christ, he will be prepared to teach others to do the same.

For progress in competence, and progress in character, we depend on the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Yet there remains a responsibility for which we must answer: “Immerse yourselves in these things,” says Paul to Timothy; in other words, “You’ve got an assignment here!” This is what we desire for our students, that they strive for progress: in godliness, and in the discipline of preaching—that they will get better at teaching sound doctrine, that they will grow in their use of language, and become more pastoral in application, and always be attentive to preaching Christ. By God’s grace, when they work hard, they will progress as preachers.

At the seminary, we are privileged to witness this growth. The nervous and stammering Freshmen who arrive at our doorstep in Year 1 have become bold and articulate graduates by Year 4. We can see that they have learned, and not just about homiletics and the other areas of ministry. They have learned a little better the ways of the Lord through the weekly chapels, Monday prayer groups, mentor visits, countless conversations, through the sanctifying process of four years of sometimes very hard work, internships, and involvement in their local congregations. We see progress in character and competence, and for this we thank God.

But what is four years? Maybe you can track progress in preaching over the course of an MDiv program, as a C in Sermon Session slowly becomes a B+. What about when our students leave seminary and enter ministry? Will they continue to practice these things, being immersed in them, so that everyone may see their progress? Or do we ministers tend to stagnate: hit our peak and then plateau, even decline? That’s how we’ll conclude, with the notion of the preacher’s continued progress.

<sup>2</sup> Steven J. Lawson, “The Passion of Biblical Preaching: An Expository Study of 1 Timothy 4:13–16,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002), 79–95, citing 90.

## CONTINUED PROGRESS

At the seminary, we aim to give our students the best start possible for ministry. But in truth, we are merely laying foundations. So how can pulpit progress continue? How can the young preachers, the middle-aged preachers, even the senior preachers maintain a growth mindset? Allow me to make a few suggestions.

First, we as preachers should periodically devote time to reflecting on our craft. This means carefully evaluating our own preaching to see whether we are truly growing. In this activity, we should not be guided by our fluctuating moods. Neither should our assessment be tied to the variable responses of the congregation. But we should “evaluate our preaching as a servant anticipating our Master’s evaluation.”<sup>3</sup> This is reflecting humbly in the sight of God, and by the measure of his Word, whether we are progressing.

Second, we should listen to excellent preachers. This is what Augustine said, “Men of quick intellect and glowing temperament find it easier to become eloquent by reading and listening to eloquent speakers than by following rules for eloquence.” In our time, we are blessed with access to a wealth of solid expositional and Reformed preaching. We won’t all be John Piper or Sinclair Ferguson. But we can learn from them and many more. What makes their sermons effective? What makes their delivery compelling? Watch and learn.

A third suggestion for the preacher’s progress relates to the task of the elders. The elders are charged to direct the affairs of the church and to maintain sound doctrine. Supervising the preaching is an important aspect of this. Sermon review is essential, yet many consistories agree that sermon feedback is hard to do well. Comments on six months of past preaching can be too general to be helpful. Comments on one specific sermon can be too small a sample size to be accurate. But there are other approaches to productive sermon review. For instance, a well-developed sermon rubric can facilitate good dialogue about the preaching. Another approach is to carefully solicit sermon feedback from a representative group. How are the young people hearing the preaching? Or how are the applications landing in the families? The elders taking the lead in this task does not mean that feedback cannot also be given by other wise members of the congregation. We understand that good feedback is so valuable for growth.

Related to this is how it can be helpful to find a community of fellow preachers. Take one of your sermons and share it for another preacher to read. As men who do it all the time, fellow preachers have good insights. They will surely help us to grow.

Finally, it is good for preachers to keep reading about preaching. A good book on preaching can refresh you in the fundamentals of the craft and help you make adjustments to your style. A good book on preaching will also impress you anew with “the theology of preaching,” how Scripture presents this human activity which God marvelously uses to generate saving faith. I know some colleagues who read a new book on preaching every year to prompt deeper thinking about the most important part of their work. A preacher should not think he is done learning Homiletics once his time at seminary is finished.

In all this, I understand the time pressures of ministry. Meanwhile, it is almost always uncomfortable to have our preaching probed and appraised. But we preachers should remember the Spirit’s words, “Immerse yourself in these things, that everyone may see your progress.” Negatively put: Don’t coast. Don’t live off the glowing praise that you received last year. Don’t think you’re done learning. But pursue excellence, to the glory of Christ and the good of his people.

I trust it is clear that this topic is relevant not only for ministers and elders, but for all the members. God has given preaching an integral place. Faithful preaching will build up the congregation. Strong preaching will attract some of those who are still strangers to Christ, or who are searching for a more faithful church. So, it is right for preachers to keep reflecting: How can I progress in the pulpit? And it is right for elders and congregations to keep reflecting: How can we help our preacher to progress?

## CONCLUSION

Earlier we heard about Spurgeon’s College. This is how Charles Spurgeon put it to his ministerial students in one of his lectures, “I give you the motto, ‘Go forward.’ Go forward in personal attainments, forward in gifts and in grace, forward in fitness for the work, and forward in conformity to the image of Jesus.” Forward! Not just for these four years, but for a life of ministry, if God is willing. 



**Reuben Bredenhof**

Professor of Ministry and Mission  
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary  
[rbredenhof@crtcs.ca](mailto:rbredenhof@crtcs.ca)

<sup>3</sup> Joel R. Beeke, “How to Evaluate Your Sermons,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 3 (2011): 255–78, 257.



# WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION

FUNDING THE SEMINARY LIBRARY

## CHANGE

*The Women's Savings Action theme for the 2024 Convocation was "Change" and included a slide show. Below is a written summary of the presentation.*

## CHANGE IS INEVITABLE

The seminary library began its life in 1969 in a beautiful heritage building in downtown Hamilton. As time went on, change was necessary. The LORD blessed the seminary in such a way that a move was made "up the mountain" to a much more suitable renovated building that accommodated the needs of the growing student body. Library needs have changed and the Women's Savings Action as an organization has changed along with the times, including the adoption a new logo tag line. Teaching aids have changed as well—as digital forms have increased in usage, topping out in 2023. Perhaps in 2024, the students felt some nostalgia for the printed page! Proportionally, expenses for electronic resources take up more of the library budget, which has itself substantially increased since 1969. Thankfully, the number of supporting churches has also changed, from twenty-five in 1969 to the current seventy.

Of course, people come and go as well. The board welcomes Joyce VanAmerongen as the new secretary and Corinne VanWoudenberg as the new treasurer. Joyce is very busy serving in many ways in the church community and has also added us to her list of service duties. Two little children of one of the seminary students call her grandma. Thank you, Joyce, for answering our request to join the Women's Savings Action Board with a "yes." Corrine works as an accountant and is happy to share her talents

with us as our new treasurer. She already helps the Teacher's College by being on their finance committee and now joins our board to keep our numbers in good and legal shape. Thank you too, Corrine, for your kindness to the Seminary to serve in this way. May God bless you both with wisdom and enthusiasm for this work. Deb Alkema and Karen Schuurman are not leaving our board quite yet but would like to stay on for the year of transition. Thanks, ladies, for your service too! We also thank our many reps! A couple of new reps have been added to our list. A hearty welcome to them as well!

## SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE

Wearing convocation gowns, for example! Most importantly, the Great Commission never changes. As long as this world exists, the need for seminaries to train young men to bring the gospel message to the world will not change. The need for teaching tools and resources to educate them will not change nor will the need to fund them. The way we collect has changed, but the need has not.

Most of all, the gospel itself—the Word of God—never changes. Our triune God is the same forever.

It is with tremendous thankfulness to our unchanging heavenly Father for moving many hearts during the 2024 collection year. We can report to you that our reps have collected \$46,492.83 this past year. Because of our God's faithfulness and the loving work of our reps, we may present a cheque for funding the Seminary library for \$50,000. 📄

*To view the slideshow, please use the following link: <http://p.remier.ca/81djHC>*

# CLARION Kids LORD'S DAY 52

Let's pretend there was a beautiful dress at the store. You tried it on. But it was not modest. So, you should put it back and look for another one. But it's so pretty! You want to ask your mom to buy it anyway. Now, this example is going to help us talk about temptations. Because you were tempted by a worldly dress to do something wrong before God. This shows us that things and people in the world around us can tempt us. But someone else is tempting you in this example, too. Who might that be? Well, it is you. You want to ask Mom to buy it! So, this shows that we can tempt ourselves to do wrong! And we know that the devil tempts us, too. Does this sound overwhelming? It is. We cannot fight these temptations. We need the Holy Spirit to help us! That's why it's so good that the Lord Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

**What does the catechism say about how much strength we have to fight temptations? Go to Lord's Day 52, Question & Answer 127 in the *Book of Praise* to fill in these blanks.**

In ourselves we are so \_\_\_\_\_ that we cannot  
\_\_\_\_\_ even for a \_\_\_\_\_.

**Unscramble the words to find out what other things can be temptations for us.**

(oprsst) \_\_\_\_\_ may become more important than worshipping God.

The (adior) \_\_\_\_\_ may have such a good sounding song, but the words may be displeasing to God.

(emnoy) \_\_\_\_\_ is something that we may want to keep all to ourselves! But we need to remember to give back to God.



**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](mailto:deboerca@gmail.com) and find your question and an answer in Clarion!

**AMANDA DEBOER**



# RCUS

## *Synod 2024*

WILL GORTEMAKER

**Z**ion Reformed Church, in the small town of Menno, SD, was the host church for the 278th Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), held from May 20–23, 2024. This congregation was a special host in that it is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. In the 1800s, many Germans—mostly farmers—immigrated from Southern Russia to this part of the United States. Those of Reformed belief who settled near Menno and Freeman, SD—then known as the “Kassel” and “Johannesthal” communities—were soon organized into congregations, due in large part to the work of schoolteacher-turned-pastor Jacob Orth. In 1874, the congregation in Menno began holding services (in the German language) in the barn of a local farmer. Maybe you see in this description shades of early Canadian Reformed history, though our earliest members were from a little further west in Europe and ended up a little further north in North America. You may also notice that, while 150 is a big number, “278th Synod” suggests an even longer history. More on that later.

Synod proceedings began with a worship service on Monday evening. After a supper during which many delegates and local congregants renewed acquaintances, we received the Word of God and responded in song, offering, and prayer, especially for a blessing on the work of synod.

The Stated Clerk then took roll call. Each congregation’s *primarius* or *secundus* elder delegate, and all active ministers, are expected to be in attendance; the Excuses Committee of Synod reports near the end of Synod on any absences and whether

legitimate reasons were given for them. In total, the assembly included about thirty-five elders and thirty-five pastors. With this done, synod was declared open. Immediately, a motion from the floor was made, seconded, and unanimously and emphatically carried—to adjourn until Tuesday morning.

Synod’s business took place over the course of these next three days. Besides me, one fraternal delegate from each of the URCNA and the RPCNA, and two from the OPC, were recognized. Seven new ministers in the federation (since Synod 2023) were recognized and given the right hand of fellowship. One of the brothers said, “This large a number is not normal!” and the assembly recognized this to be an answer to many prayers.

### **EMMANUEL’S NEW HOME**

The synod President noted a 3.2% increase in number of communicant members since last synod. Three new churches were received into the RCUS. I took special note of the newest of the three: Emmanuel Reformed Church in Westminster, Colorado, supported by Rev. George Horner (retired). It was received into the RCUS at a special classis meeting immediately preceding synod on Monday. Many members of this congregation formerly belonged to Emmanuel American Reformed Church in Denver, which had to discontinue its affiliation with Classis Manitoba of the CanRC in July 2023.

I was given opportunity to address the body. In my remarks I expressed joy that this small group has found a new home in the



Clockwise from top: Home of Zion Reformed Church in Menno, SD; Canadian Reformed fraternal delegate addressing the body; Bottom: Delegates to RCUS Synod 2024.

RCUS. I thanked the RCUS for the relationship we enjoy both at the federative and more local levels and encouraged increased cooperation as we hold to the truth and light of the gospel in darkening societies. I was asked how we deal with the limitations and policies of the Canadian government, and about our foreign and domestic mission activity. Finally, I was asked to bring greetings to the Canadian and American Reformed Churches from the RCUS.

### MISSION WORK AND 300 YEARS

The RCUS continues to take significant steps to expand their Home Missions activity. They have a standing Welcoming Committee that seeks out and supports core groups, individual churches, and groups of churches interested in the Reformed faith. A newly adopted Home Missions Manual codifies the role of Missionary, a role focused on working with multiple groups of believers in a broader area. If a group is ready to move forward, then an Organizing Pastor would be brought in. These changes are examples of a deliberate and ever-growing openness to mission and outreach from their own churches and in their own backyards.

The Special Committee for Tricentennial presented its plans and proposals. That's right—2025 is the occasion of the RCUS's *tricentennial*—their 300th anniversary. Plans are coming together for several very special events and celebrations.<sup>1</sup> Their 279th synod meeting is planned for June 9–11, 2025, in Rapid City, SD. The official 300th anniversary celebration is to be held, D.V., on June 12th at nearby Mount Rushmore.

My wife and I were blessed with a warm Midwest welcome, and we enjoyed many conversations with the local congregants and delegates and their family. I received several words of appreciation for the attentiveness and diligence of the CanRC in attending their assemblies and initiating opportunities for fellowship. Pray that God will continue to bless these churches and by all means look one up if you're on a road trip in the States! 🇺🇸

*Will Gortemaker*  
Member of the Committee  
for Ecumenical Relations

<sup>1</sup> Read more about the rich history and the upcoming celebration at [rcus.org/tricentennial/](https://rcus.org/tricentennial/)

# *Farewell*

TO PASTOR STEVE VAN LEEUWEN

LYNDON KOK

## **FINAL SERMON**

On the afternoon of Sunday, June 23, 2024, Pastor Steve van Leeuwen preached his final sermon as minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Calgary. He chose as his text the well-known vision of the dry bones found in Ezekiel 37. In his sermon he showed how only God can bring life to the dry bones. We must be born again, but this happens not because of the man on the pulpit, but by the Holy Spirit, working through the preaching of the gospel, centred on the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ promised to instill new life in us, and this was fulfilled at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out. The glorious gospel message is that our hope is secure, and our future certain, if we heed that gospel message.

## **FAREWELL EVENING**

The following Friday, church members together with a number of guests gathered in the school gym (the church auditorium is currently undergoing some much needed renovations) to bid farewell to Pastor Van Leeuwen, along with his wife Kryna, and their daughters Helena and Carmen. After six-and-a-half years, they would soon be leaving Calgary to serve the congregation in Kerwood, Ontario.

Lyndon Kok opened the evening by reading from 2 Timothy 1:3–2:7 and praying. After the singing of “How Great Thou Art,” co-MCs Lyndon and Diny Kok welcomed everyone. Lyndon explained how Pastor van Leeuwen was ordained by Rev. J. Huijgen, who preached on 2 Timothy 1:11–14 (with Joshua 1 serving as the



Scripture reading), how Pastor van Leeuwen chose 1 Timothy 2:1-7 as text for his first sermon as Calgary's minister, and how he ended his time here by preaching a series of sermons on Paul's first letter to Timothy, followed by a series on Joshua. In this way he bookended his time among us by preaching on these two books.

Different study groups in the congregation gave gifts and presentations, including the College and Careers group singing "Go Preaching Down in Kerwood" (to the tune of "Go Tell it on the Mountain"), a game of "Scripture or Shakespeare," pitting Pastor van Leeuwen against a group of grade 9 and 10 students (who, after a hard-fought battle, narrowly eked out a victory), and an audience participation game, where the van Leeuwens had to guess what various groups of audience members had in common.

### CLASSIS COLLEAGUES

Rev. Gerard Veurink offered words of farewell on behalf of the church at Barrhead. He expressed appreciation for the times that Rev. van Leeuwen preaching in Barrhead during their recent vacancy and wished him the Lord's strength and blessing as he takes up his calling in Kerwood. He also thanked Rev. van Leeuwen for his contributions at meetings of the churches in Classis Alberta and wished the congregation at Calgary the Lord's blessings as they entered a time of vacancy. He also expressed his thankfulness that after four years of seminary together and numerous years of serving together in Alberta, Rev. van Leeuwen finally learned how to correctly pronounce his last name (Veurink, not Veerink).

Delegates also spoke on behalf of the churches at Coaldale, Taber, and Neerlandia (Hope), and letters were read from the churches at Edmonton (Providence), Edmonton (Immanuel), and Neerlandia.

Mike de Groot, chairman of consistory, then spoke on behalf of the congregation. He spoke of how the Lord, in his providence,

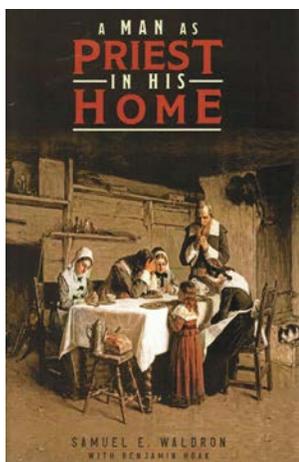
brought Pastor van Leeuwen to Calgary almost seven years ago. Through the good times and the bad times, Pastor van Leeuwen preached the full gospel of salvation, always pointing us to the work of Jesus Christ. He taught catechism classes, pre-confession classes, visited members (and others) in the hospital, serving the congregation and looking out for its well-being. He thanked Kryna, Helena, and Carmen for their presence in the congregation and their contributions. He then expressed a desire that Pastor van Leeuwen would care for the flock in Kerwood as he had cared for the flock in Calgary. Finally, he presented the Van Leeuwens with a gift from the congregation, a beautiful metal print photograph of Upper Kananaskis Lake in spectacular Kananaskis Country.

### FINAL GOODBYES

Finally, it was Pastor van Leeuwen's time to say goodbye. He related how he came out of the Christian Reformed Church at age 18 and, with his parents, started attending a Canadian Reformed Church; how from not wanting to be there and not liking the music, he came to love the songs; how the Lord used this to start the process of him becoming a minister of the Word. He spoke of the treasure that we have in the Word of God, and that it had it been his privilege to bring it to the congregation in Calgary, and thanked the consistory, council, and the congregation for their support over the past six and a half years.

The evening closed with the singing of Hymn 85 and prayer, after which the guests engaged in a time of refreshments and fellowship. As congregation we will miss the Van Leeuwen family, but it is our fervent prayer that they will be as much of a blessing in their new congregation at Kerwood as they were in Calgary. 

*Lyndon Kok*



# A BOOK'S COVER

*A Man as Priest in His Home*, by Samuel E. Waldron.  
Second Edition. (Greenbrier: Free Grace Press, 2023).  
Paperback. 115 pages. \$13.95 USD.

George Eliot encouraged readers to not judge a book by its cover. I couldn't help but raise my eyebrows a little when I saw the title and cover picture of this little book. Yet, I was intrigued to take on the challenge of reviewing it. It turns out to be a second edition of the same book published in 2012 that the author acknowledges met with some criticism: that it "might lead to the oppression of wives by husbands and contribute to a culture of domestic abuse." He admits he was surprised by the gist of this criticism as he wrote the book with every intention of showing a biblical way of "a kinder and gentler male headship." His response was to publish the same book again with a new forward. Only five pages in, my interest was piqued accompanied by an overriding amazement about his boldness in republishing without changing the rest of the text at all!

## HEADSHIP AND PRIESTHOOD

Sam Waldron, President of Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary, and one of the pastors in a Reformed Baptist Church begins his booklet on the basis that the teaching of male biblical headship as understood in orthodox Reformed theology is a given. From there he uses the example of Job as a priest-like figure in his family, offering sacrifices continually for the sanctification of his children. Next to that he explores the attributes of Christ's priestly office and then connects them to the apostle Paul's teaching about the love of a husband for his wife "as Christ loved the church." With this as his foundation, he lands in Hebrews 5:1-4 as the template for a man's role as priest in his home. It seemed to me that some theological creativity was used to pull this all together. Nevertheless, he provides a number of chapters to build the case followed by a description of the five roles for the man as priest in his home: Intercessor in Prayer, Director of Religious Worship, Mediator of Divine Blessing, Instructor in Sacred Scripture, and Judge in Holy Things. A serious and heavy list! Each chapter includes scriptural explanation and concludes with some practical application for in the home.

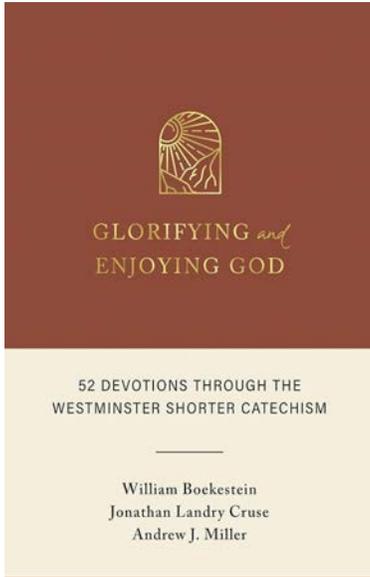
## QUESTIONS

While the message and sincerity of the book is clear, it left me with many questions. The most significant one is related to the teaching of the priesthood of all believers. While Waldron elevates the priestly role of the father in the home, he pays little or no attention to the reality that all the members in a Christian home have a priestly role they are maturing into. The father in the home is not unique in this. The apostle Peter sets all relationships, including family ones, in this context in 1 Peter 2 and 3. To make a strict connection from the teaching of headship to the priestly role seems to create a ranking or division that unnaturally complicates the role of the husband and father in relation to his wife and children rather than lovingly rounding it out in a Christian home environment. This clumsiness comes to the fore regularly in the book and makes the applications awkward for today.

As a husband and dad, I wanted to take this book seriously but at many points it felt like I was being teleported back a few centuries. It is not that there is no truth in it, but it is often overstated and over-weighted. It comes across as patronizing and out of touch with today's family life. I can see why women and children would squirm when reading it as I also felt uncomfortable many times with the way things were written. The author would have done well to engage with the criticism he mentions receiving on the first edition and reworked the second edition. At first blush I wondered why Scott Schaller designed the book's cover the way he did. I now conclude his reading of the book was his inspiration. It actually captures it well. 



**Rick Ludwig**  
Streetlight Christian Church, Hamilton  
[rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com](mailto:rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com)



# WHAT IS OUR CHIEF END?

*Glorifying and Enjoying God*, by William Boekestein, Jonathan Landry Cruse, Andrew J. Miller. (Reformation Heritage Books, 2023). Hardcover. 229 pages. \$39.00 CDN.

Good questions can draw out good answers. This is a key assumption in the church's use of catechisms. Through teachers asking the right question and through children and new believers being trained to give a faithful answer, growth occurs.

When we survey the collection of Reformed catechisms, there are a couple whose opening questions have become renowned for their simplicity yet profundity. One is the Heidelberg Catechism, which opens this way: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" It is an essential question answered well by the Catechism, not just with the beloved words of Lord's Day 1, but with every subsequent Lord's Day, right up to #52. This is our only comfort, and it is founded on the redeeming works of the Triune God.

Another acclaimed question that is pregnant with meaning is posed by the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC). It too is the very first question asked: "What is the chief end of man?" Put another way: Why am I here? This good question evokes this beautiful answer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." You could spend a lifetime meditating on the deep truth of this statement.

To help us study God and his Word through the WSC, three Reformed pastors have written a very fine devotional, *Glorifying and Enjoying God*. In this work, William Boekestein, Jonathan Landry Cruse, and Andrew J. Miller explore the teachings of the WSC in a way that is sure to deepen your knowledge of the Triune God, and hopefully also your love for him. The authors have taken the 107 Q&As of the WSC and divided them into 52 short units for weekly devotions across a full year.

Now, beyond the well-known Q&A 1, it is probably safe to say that the WSC is not a confession with which many of us are familiar. Several of our sister churches have the Westminster Confession

of Faith and Catechisms as their confessional statements, but we have our own Catechism, of course, among the other Forms of Unity. Nevertheless, any Reformed Christian will feel very much at home in the WSC and in this devotional.

The meditations offer clearly expressed teachings that are rich with Scripture and enhanced with the wisdom of Christian thinkers past and present. The WSC (and this devotional) cover topics such as the doctrine of God, Scripture, mankind, sin, salvation, sanctification, faith, preaching, the sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. In keeping with the spirit of the WSC, the meditations also illustrate how the doctrines of God's Word can powerfully impact our lives as his children and church.

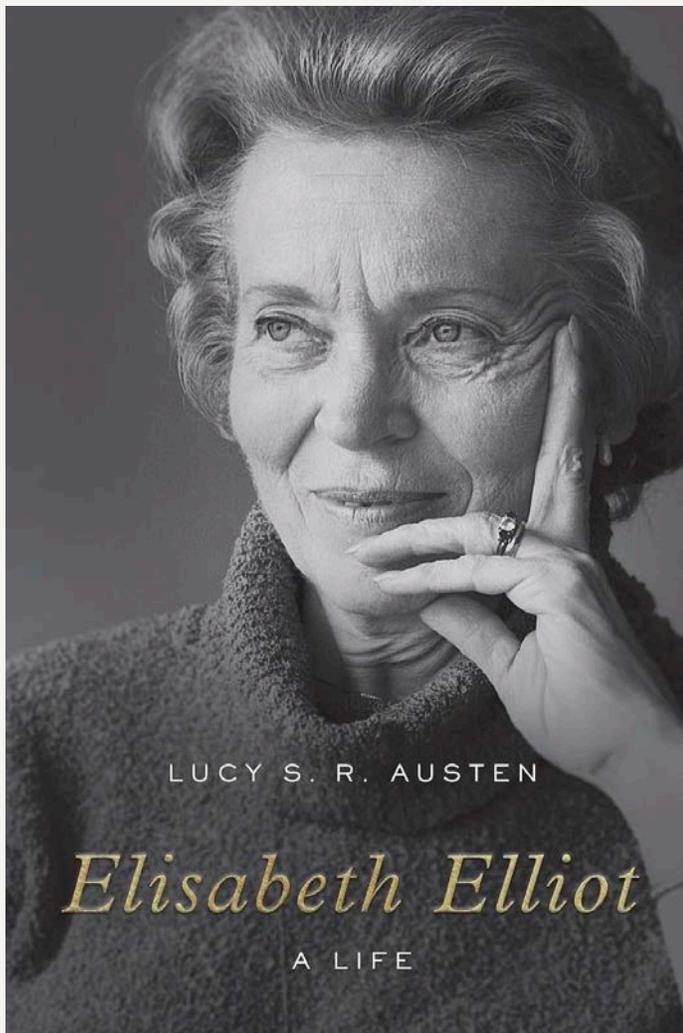
This devotional could be put to multiple uses. You could read it with great profit in family worship, provided that your children are a bit older and have already learned some of the language of the faith through Catechism classes. It would also be beneficial to office bearers seeking to dive deeper into Reformed doctrine, and to pastors who are busy with weekly preaching and teaching. I'm confident that anyone who reads this devotional will be helped in meeting the chief end of our lives: to glorify and enjoy God forever. ☑



**Reuben Bredenhof**  
Professor of Ministry and Mission  
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary  
[rbredenhof@crtcs.ca](mailto:rbredenhof@crtcs.ca)

# NEVER MEET YOUR HEROES?

WES BREDEHOF



Elisabeth Elliot (1926–2015) first surged to global fame in 1956. On January 8 of that year, her husband Jim and four other American missionaries were killed by Waorani warriors along a remote river in Ecuador. After careful preparations, they had landed on a sandbar to establish contact with the reclusive Waorani—a people about whom little was known except their reputation for fierce violence. The story of their martyrdom became headline news all over the world. Elisabeth’s response to her husband’s death was part of the story. She was grieving—naturally—but she wasn’t bitter or angry at the Waorani. In fact, the next year she and their daughter Valerie were living among the Waorani, studying their language and hoping to share the gospel with them. That brought even more attention to this remarkable woman.

In the following years, after her repatriation to the United States, Elliot became widely known as a writer and speaker. She wrote fiction and non-fiction, both books and articles. Her book *Passion and Purity* is widely credited as one of the leading influences on evangelical “purity culture.” Later in life, she hosted an extensively syndicated daily radio program, Gateway to Joy.

*Elisabeth Elliot: A Life*, by Lucy S.R. Austen. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023). Hardcover. 612 pages.

This isn't the first biography of Elliot. Ellen Vaughn wrote a biography published in two volumes in 2020 and 2023. There are some differences between these biographies that make it worthwhile to read both if you're interested in getting to know Elliot as well as possible. One is that Vaughn's biography was authorized by Elliot's family. As such, it tends to be a somewhat more sympathetic portrayal, sometimes glossing over its subject's faults. Austen's biography was written in consultation with Elliot's family, but she obviously had a freer hand in what she included. Austen's biography is still sympathetic, but more scholarly and critical; it's a bit more at arm's length, you could say. It's the kind of biography which really does justice to the complexity of its subject.

### WHAT WAS SHE LIKE?

This biography isn't just about the life story of a person—it's about the nature of that person. What was Elisabeth Elliot really like? There was her public persona, but what about in private? Austen does a fine job of unravelling that, using letters, journals, and interviews with people who knew her. She highlights her good Christian qualities, as well as some of her faults, foibles, and inconsistencies. This biography cannot be described as hagiographical—it's the kind of honest biography Elisabeth Elliot herself tried to write about R. Kenneth Strachan in 1968.

There were a few points that stood out. One was that Elliot's early years often reflected the weaknesses of her evangelical origins. When she went to Ecuador with her husband, they went as Plymouth Brethren Christians. However, they weren't responsible to any Plymouth Brethren church (that idea being foreign to them), nor was there any accountability to *any* organization. Jim and Elisabeth both believed that God had directly called them to Ecuador, and they went without being formally sent by a church. This isn't the New Testament picture of Christian mission.

Some of Elliot's beliefs were in flux, reflecting her origins in evangelical primitivist Christianity where confessions don't exist. At one point, she wrote to her mother unsure of what happens to the soul of a believer after death (p. 356). According to her brother Dave, she once said, "I'm not even sure if there are any absolutes in life . . . unless it be love, maybe love is an absolute. But everything else is not an absolute" (p. 392). That was in 1964. Later her stance on absolutes would become firmer. Something similar can be said for her views on homosexuality/same-sex attraction.

### ATTRACTED BY CATHOLICISM

Perhaps most surprising for me was her gravitation towards the Roman Catholic Church. After her brother Tom Howard became Episcopalian (Anglican), she followed suit in 1970. While some Anglicans adhere closely to the Calvinistic-leaning 39 Articles, it doesn't appear that Elliot ever did. Throughout the years, Elliot often read and quoted favourably from Roman Catholic authors. Reacting against their individualistic upbringing, both Tom and Elisabeth found a high liturgy and authoritative church structure appealing. In 1985, Tom became a Roman Catholic. Some years later, Elliot was asked why she didn't follow. She replied that it was cowardice, saying, "My listeners and readers simply would not understand" (p. 495). She was afraid to "swim the Tiber" because she didn't want to lose her audience.

Elisabeth Elliot was married two more times after being the widow of Jim Elliot. Some of the details of her third marriage (to Lars Gren) have garnered this book media attention. To say it was a difficult marriage would be an understatement. The word "abusive" might be more accurate. She was a strong proponent of complementarianism, but her third marriage appears to be a cautionary tale of how this position can be perverted to the detriment of women.

They say you should never meet your heroes because you'll soon discover they're human too. Elisabeth Elliot hasn't been a hero of mine, but I can imagine she is for some of you reading. In Austen's biography, you're going to meet Elliot and some things about her are going to be uncomfortable or disconcerting to hear (as a Christian did she really read *Playboy!*?). Regardless, her resilience, faith, and communication skills inspired many Christians during her life and still today. Despite whatever personal or doctrinal issues she had, more than a few believers became missionaries because of her impact. For that fact alone, you might want to meet her and get to know her character and life story. 



**Wes Bredenhof**

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston

[bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca)

# DO CHILDREN BELONG AT THE LORD'S SUPPER?

**A**lthough very difficult to do in few words, I'd like to respond to Dr. Van Vliet's recent articles on children at the Lord's Supper (Vol. 73.7 & 8) in the hopes of stimulating further discussion and searching of Scripture.

*Defining Paedocommunion.* Dr. Van Vliet outlines three approaches to paedocommunion; I will focus on the second approach, "normal-meal paedocommunion" (hereafter, PC) which I believe aligns with Scripture.

*Which Meal? Which Mouth?* Dr. Van Vliet argues that faith is necessary prior to partaking in the NT covenant feast, unlike the OT feasts. However, OT feasts were always to be celebrated in faith, not merely to satisfy hunger. OT feasts also never excluded children. In the NT, faith is a necessary requirement before one is baptized, but we do not withhold this sacrament from our children. We ought to be consistent in our application of the covenant signs. Besides, who says our children do not have faith? Psalm 22. Our children, as members of the covenant, are part of the regenerating work of the Spirit (CoD, III/IV, 12).

*Passover and the Lord's Supper.* Dr. Van Vliet acknowledges that children participated in the Passover. Not only were they included in the Passover, but other OT covenant feasts as well; access to these feasts was granted by virtue of membership in the covenant. The new covenant, being more inclusive, should not exclude children from the Lord's Supper.

The early church understood this and practiced PC until the late Middle Ages. The practice was abandoned due to doctrinal errors (e.g. transubstantiation). The Reformation corrected many errors but did not fully restore PC. We need to be willing to return to Scripture (always reforming!).

*Communion in Corinth.* 1 Corinthians 11 is often cited to exclude children from the Lord's Supper. Paul does condemn the Corinthian church for celebrating the Supper in an unworthy manner, being divisive and gluttonous. However, Paul's solution was not to exclude children, but to correct the adults' behaviour. He reprimands the adults, holding them responsible for partaking unworthily. Similar reprimands are found in the OT, where prophets called for self-examination and repentance, without thereby excluding children from covenant feasts.

"We all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16–17): Dr. Van Vliet suggests that "all" does not include children, but where is the scriptural evidence for this exclusion? Calvin writes re: 1 Corinthians 12 "that we drink, all of us, of the same cup . . . that we may have life in common with [Christ]—which we truly have." Our children are members of Christ's body and should partake of his body to reflect reality. The Holy Spirit also works through the sacraments to strengthen faith, and denying children access to the Lord's Supper impoverishes them.

*When Should Young Believers Be Admitted to the Lord's Table?* Dr. Van Vliet argues for spiritual maturity before partaking in

the Lord's Supper, citing 1 Corinthians 11. Again, however, this passage should be understood in the context of the entire letter. He then cites Acts 2:41–42 and argues that while there is a natural progression from faith to baptism to communion, the instruction to commune was only for adult converts. But this ignores verse 39! If we use this passage to exclude children from communion, then we must exclude them from baptism as well.

*Oaths and Vows.* Dr. Van Vliet argues that not everyone is ready to make a vow at the same age, citing marriage. However, our children participate in covenant vows at baptism—they become “married” to Christ without their knowledge! They become part of the Bride of Christ, are initiated into the covenant, and should therefore be included in the covenant renewal feast.

*Clearing Up a Misconception.* It is understandable that a misconception exists about when children become church members, because our practice and theology do not line up. If our children are full members of the covenant, we ought to treat them as such. The Lord's Supper is a sign of the fellowship and

peace we have through Christ, which our children also enjoy. Is not feeding our children a normal, beautiful way to show our children (although they don't understand the intricacies of where the food came from) how it was prepared, etc., that they are loved and that they belong? How would our children feel if they were consistently prevented from coming to the family dinner table?

*Conclusion.* Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:14). Although these covenant children were not able to clearly articulate their faith, Christ considered them full citizens in his kingdom, and affirmed their right to approach him. And where is Christ today, that we may approach him? He is at his table, awaiting us. Christ's kingdom, and the feast of his kingdom, are for his citizens . . . all of them. The table of the Lord belongs to the family of the Lord. **C**

Peter Harthoorn  
Lethbridge

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# CRTS BOARD OF GOVERNORS' MEETING

## OPENING AND ROLL CALL

On September 5, the chairman of the Seminary Board, Rev. John Louwerse, welcomed all present. He led in opening devotions. All governors were present. This includes Revs. John Louwerse, Joe Poppe, James Slaa, Jeff Temple, Clarence VanderVelde, Julius VanSpronsen, and brothers Adrian Bartels, Alan Datema, Herman Post, Peter Vandersluis, and Kasper VanVeen. Dr. Jason Van Vliet was present as Principal and administrative assistant Leanne Kuizenga was present to take the minutes of the meeting.

## MEMORABILIA

Information was shared about the personal circumstances of emeriti professors, as well as widows and families of professors. This includes sisters Deddens, DeJong, and Gootjes, and Drs. and sisters deVisser, Van Dam, and Visscher. Of particular note, we may report that sister Dinie Gootjes has been invited to attend a symposium hosted in honour of Dr. N. H. Gootjes by former students of his in Korea. An update was given on how Dr. Ted Van Raalte is recovering well after quintuple bypass heart surgery.

## MINUTES AND AGENDA

The minutes of the meeting held on January 11, 2024 were approved. The agenda for the meeting was established. The action log was reviewed.

## DECISIONS, REPORTS, AGENDA ITEMS

1. Since our last meeting, Dr. Jannes Smith has accepted his appointment as Vice-Principal for two years. A Memorandum of Understanding with the churches in South Africa concerning the support of their students was updated. It was adopted after a small change. A proposal was presented for the process of finding a new Vice-Principal, recognizing that it is advantageous for someone to serve as Vice-Principal before filling the Principal role, if possible. The Board adopted this proposal for inclusion in the Handbook.
2. A decision was made by email resolution to approve a new CRTS handbook structure. This gave those appointed to work through the Handbook opportunity to do a thorough revision of the Handbook and come with proposals to this meeting. The decision to review the Handbook with all our policy governance documents is part of our commitment made to the Association for Theological Schools (ATS) to do a full review of all CRTS's policies and procedures (report due November 2025).
3. A decision was made by email resolution to approve of the 2023 audited financial statements for the seminary, to have them submitted to the Canadian Revenue Agency by June 30.
4. Since our last meeting the Board gave approval for our principal to sign a letter to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. This letter was signed by twenty-two accredited degree granting post-secondary Christian institutions across Canada, opposing some of the new limits set on student visas for international students. These limits have the potential to prevent international students from entering our BTh program, but international students are still able to join our MDiv program. Both masters and doctoral programs are exempt from the new limits on visas. No response has been received from the government.
5. Dr. Reuben Bredenhof sent the Board a response to its inquiries about the workload of administering the Pastoral Training Program. Since he has not been in this role long enough to fully know the workload demands, he proposed to allow him to administer the program for a full year before sending in a review. This was gratefully accepted.
6. A 2024–25 email address list of all those involved with CRTS was distributed.
7. The seminary's strategic plan was reviewed. Faculty succession remains an area of concern for the Board. There is a real need for ministers and graduating students from CRTS to pursue further studies to get training to potentially serve as future professors. We have three of our five professors reaching the age of retirement in the next ten to fifteen years. A letter has been sent to the church councils about this, and an article has been printed in Clarion to raise awareness. The Board decided that it would be beneficial for the Senate to identify graduating students and ministers deemed suitable for further studies and for faculty and governors to reach out to them and personally encourage them to consider further studies. The Senate was also asked to develop a pathway document that would provide some guidance for how prospective doctoral students figure out where to study and who might be

available as doctoral supervisors. The Board reviewed input from the survey it had sent out to the councils of the churches earlier this year, asking how financial support for further studies should be organized. There was a strong sense that the federation should support this, at least in part. Therefore, a committee was appointed to investigate how to structure a bursary fund for those pursuing further studies. The Board plans to submit a supplementary proposal to Synod 2025 about this.

8. A letter was received from the Australian deputies communicating the decisions of the recent Australian synod. In this letter the Australian synod expressed its deep appreciation for the work undertaken by CRTS in the training of men to faithfully serve as ministers of the Word. Synod also made a decision about the potential development of an Australian Affiliate Campus. This decision makes clear that this is a longer-term project that requires a collaborative approach. We expect to hear further from the Australian deputies about this as they deal with their mandate given by synod.
9. The Board decided to conduct the next strategic planning session in September 2025 and made some arrangements for this.
10. The minutes of the Academic Committee meeting held on September 3, 2024 were presented for information. Revs. James Slaa and Julius VanSpronsen reported on lecture visits to CRTS in March 2024. They also reported on visits with the professors and students. The Board received this report with thankfulness.
11. The Finance and Property Committee presented an annual report on their activities. They presented the CRTS proposed budget for 2025, and it was approved. The Board approved the transfer of \$16,000 from the general fund to the library fund (a standard, annual transfer). The Finance and Property Committee formally presented the financial statements for 2023; these had already been approved by email resolution. With thankfulness it was noted that the renovation of faculty office areas was completed this past summer. The annual assessment for 2024 was set at \$101 per communicant member, a \$1 per cm increase from last year. Minutes of the Finance and Property Committee's meetings since our last Board meeting were presented for information.
12. CRTS's health and safety policy was reviewed to ensure that the entire CRTS community fulfils CRTS's occupational health and safety commitments.
13. Margaret Alkema joined the meeting to provide background and answer questions regarding: our contact with the Association for Theological Schools (ATS); her role as assessment coordinator; and the material concerning governance since she contributed to the work on this. A draft report was submitted regarding how CRTS deals with diversity. This report was already presented and our stance on diversity was already approved at the last meeting (see January 2024 brief report). This report is approved for submission to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). The Board decided that members serving on the Board of Governors must be male communicant members in good standing (since their responsibility includes supervision of our faculty who are ministers of the Word). This decision will be sent to General Synod 2025 with explanation for affirmation.
14. The Board took note of the ATS Institutional Peer Profile and a Strategic Information Report, comparing CRTS to other similarly sized seminaries. The Board discussed the Annual Report of the Assessment Coordinator, minutes from assessment day 2024 and a metrics report we use to gauge how the seminary is doing in specific matters. These reports were received with thankfulness. The Board noted that (also) preparatory exams are now being dealt with by different classes in the federation. Policies between various classes are not consistent, especially with respect to the specifics of how exams are organized. We recognize that each classis has its own authority to regulate how they administer exams. Yet for the sake of our seminary students the Board requested the Senate to take up contact with the exam organizers of various classes so that there is some more consistency in how examinations are administered.
15. The Governance Committee proposed a series of changes to the CRTS Handbook due to a comprehensive review of our Handbook. Any policy in the Handbook that had not been reviewed or updated in the past five years was reviewed. A long list of proposed changes was adopted by the Board (with some minor modifications). The Bylaws of CRTS were updated. Part of the reason for this was to bring our bylaws into compliance with the Ontario Not-for-profit Corporations Act. Much of the material that was formerly in the Bylaws was included in the Handbook (when the bylaws were first adopted, we did not have a Handbook). There were changes made to reflect our actual practises and to update language. The Bylaws will be sent to General Synod for affirmation. Margaret Alkema was thanked for all her work and left the meeting.
16. Dr. Jason Van Vliet presented a principal's report. He highlighted the thankfulness of faculty for their renovated offices. He updated the Board on the health and work of professors (including our retired professors) and staff. He gave an update on the students expected in September (see Registrar's report below). He updated what books faculty and retired professors are working on, including some material recently published or close to publication. He outlined plans for the seminary to connect with the churches and prospective students. He reported on ways in which he has worked to

reduce the principal's workload. His report was received with thankfulness.

17. The chairman reported on an evaluation of the principal's work. Fruitful discussions were held with faculty and staff. With Dr. Van Vliet's input, an action plan was adopted to help him further hone his leadership of CRTS. The Board is very thankful for the competent leadership Dr. Jason Van Vliet provides at CRTS.
18. Dr. Jannes Smith presented a proposal for a full sabbatical, which would begin in January 2025. Our principal provided an evaluation of the proposal. The Board adopted the proposal wishing Dr. Smith a productive but also restful time as he is relieved of most of his day-to-day teaching responsibilities. The Board arranged for the reassignment of some of his administrative tasks during his sabbatical.
19. Our faculty provided a report on the courses they taught in the 2023-24 academic year. This fourteen-page report provides a comprehensive report on the primary function of our professors in teaching and preparing men to serve in the ministry. This report was received with much thankfulness.
20. The Registrar, Dr. Arjan De Visser, provided a report on student enrollment. Seven senior students are graduating this September, and eight new students are enrolled in the freshman class beginning their studies. The Lord willing, we will have thirty full time students and two part time students at the beginning of the 2024-25 academic year. This includes twenty-eight students in the Master of Divinity program, as well as full and part time students in the Bachelor of Theology and Diploma of Theological Studies programs.
21. Our librarian, sister Margaret Alkema provided a Librarian report. A total of about \$59,000 was spent on the library this past year. A significant portion of the funds are used to support digital subscriptions. This report was received with thankfulness.
22. The Website Committee reported on the use of the CRTS website, CRTS's social media presence, and the Heidelberg Catechism website, which continues to be used widely throughout the world. Plans for a major update of the CRTS website and possibilities of providing catechism resources in languages such as Karen and Spanish were shared. This report was received with thankfulness.
23. Minutes of the Convocation Committee were provided. An update was provided by the Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund

Committee. The Publication Committee reported on the upcoming publication of a book by Dr. Cornelis Van Dam on education.

24. The Foreign Student Bursary Fund presented their report. With thankfulness they reported that the churches, as well as various individuals, have responded very generously to the special request for financial support for the South African students. They reported that during the past three years about \$182,000 was raised from the churches and \$191,000 from individuals. Gratefulness was expressed for the positive response to this need among the South African and other students. The balance of the fund was about \$346,000 on June 30, 2024, and it is estimated that about \$144,000 expenses in the coming year. Funds will continue to be required for these and other new students attending CRTS in the coming years.
25. A draft report to Synod 2025 was presented. It needs to be finalized and submitted to the convening church by November 5, 2024. The Board decided that it will review this report before it is submitted to synod.
26. Dr. Ted Van Raalte reported on a tour of the churches in British Columbia. Dr. Gerhard Visscher reported on a conference for pastors he attended in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. William den Hollander reported on his attendance at the Timothy Trust Conference held in Ottawa, Ontario. Our librarian, Margaret Alkema reported on her attendance at an Association of Christian Librarians Conference held near St. Paul, Minnesota. Dr. Reuben Bredenhof reported on his attendance at the Association for Biblical Counselling in Fort Worth, Texas. These reports were received with thankfulness.

## **PRESS RELEASE AND CLOSING**

The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the vice-chairman in consultation with the Executive and the Principal. Brother Adrian Bartels closed the meeting with prayer.

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the  
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,  
*Rev. Joe Poppe*  
(Vice-chairman/Corresponding Clerk)



