



Clarion

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what's inside

Instruction, meditation, opinion, reports, evaluations, an interview, and book reviews—Issue 15 has them all! We present Pastor Han Gil Lee's first article in *Clarion* in which he relates (with his own brand of humour!) his experience in first coming to know the CanRC—thanks, brother, for your thought-provoking perspective! Ilse Vandermeulen shares a *Witness at Work* interview with a Reformed English professor while Reuben Bredenhof enlightens us as to what a “vicariate” is and potentially how useful it could be to us. Have you ever tried to picture or illustrate the Trinity? Wes Bredenhof's article may convince you to stop trying. And in *Treasures, New & Old* Gerrit Bruintjes writes about the astounding nature of God's pursuing and persevering love.

With a general synod only months away, Jan DeGelder in *Governing the Church* explains some of the basics about delegation to and the running of such an assembly. Ryan Kampen shares some exciting developments in the unique mission work being undertaken by the Reformational Study Centre while elsewhere the CanRC Missions Association provides a short report of their recent meeting. Speaking of short reports, my editorial takes issue with the plague of vague press releases we are often subject to in our community (the aforementioned CRMA report being a welcome exception). Have you heard of the CREC churches? Eric Kampen gives a very clear and thorough overview of them in *Churches Outside the PARC*.

There's a few more nuggets toward the end of the magazine which I'll let you discover for yourself. May your reading edify you and bring glory to our God!

Peter Holtvliwer

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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:

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

USEFUL PRESS RELEASES

Does the above title sound like an oxymoron to you? Press releases (or: “short reports”) are familiar in our Christian community. They appear after every consistory and council meeting as well as after a classis, regional synod, and general synod. Christian school boards also regularly publish them. But how useful and timely are they? What meaningful information do you gain from reading them? As someone recently quipped: mostly they’re eight weeks late and say nothing.

Typically, our press releases present details on things we don’t need to know about (e.g., what song was sung, Bible passage read, and items prayed for) but are skimpy when it comes to consequential matters. In a council press release we read things like, “A letter was received and a reply will be given.” Is that helpful? Why not state who wrote in and what the topic was? Or a classis press release states: “A proposal to change a liturgical form was received and agreed upon.” But what change and why? The reader is left guessing. Does this encourage church members to keep up to date and stay interested in church life?

EMBRACE TRANSPARENCY

As churches and schools, we should embrace transparency as much as possible. Healthy churches and schools require engaged members. Open, clear, and timely communication is key to that engagement, especially when it comes to decisions of the governing body (or broader ecclesiastical assembly). When members know what’s being considered and can track with meeting discussions and their outcomes, they feel respected. They feel part of the process.

On the other hand, ambiguous or uninformative press releases can easily give the impression of elitism. Such documents send the subtle message that office bearers or board members are “in the know” and the reader isn’t. Readers are expected to be content with the bare-bones facts being communicated and simply trust those in charge to handle things. The membership gets the sense that it’s “them” and “us.” People quickly feel that they are deliberately being kept at arms’ length and that they shouldn’t ask too many questions.

Such a cloak of mystery does not engender trust and serves only to frustrate otherwise dialed-in people. When frustration mounts, people begin to lose interest and eventually check out of discussions. These chickens come home to roost when the governing body then expects the membership to embrace its guidance and decisions and wants the community to get on board with this or that initiative, but is only met with yawns, poor turnouts at member meetings, and lack-lustre participation. Church and

school society members have a need and indeed a right to be kept in the loop.

CONFIDENTIALITY OR OPENNESS?

Some might reply: but what about the need to keep things confidential? Don’t such governing bodies have the duty to deal with certain matters in confidence?

The answer to that is: yes and no. First, it’s important to keep in mind that meetings of any church assembly are in principle *open to all members of the church*. For instance, any member can attend a council meeting and listen in (please, try it sometime!). The same is true for the broader assemblies and as far as I know also for school board meetings. Thus, virtually every item on the agenda of these bodies is open for members to be aware of and track with. This includes letters coming in from other members, as well as new matters, or proposals intended for a broader assembly. It even includes appeals being heard at classis or one of the synods unless that appeal pertains to a personal matter (e.g. a discipline case).

And this is where confidentiality comes into play: when an agenda item concerns personal matters (e.g. home visit reports) then the meeting is closed to visitors. For this reason, large portions of a consistory meeting (i.e. elders only) are technically held in “closed session” and necessarily the press release is vague: “the elders report on their visits” or “the minister reports on his work.” People understand and respect that. But what tends to happen (even at the other much more open meetings) is that when sensitive or difficult matters come on the table, even though the matter is not personal in nature, the short report is kept vague so as not to ruffle feathers in the community. This unnecessarily frustrates people and is a turnoff to involvement in church or school.

Let’s respect church and school society members by plainly communicating the decisions of the body in our press releases. And can we make it a priority to do so within a week of the meeting? For short reports to be useful, let’s skip details not relevant to the membership and expand with clarity and tact on matters that impact the community we serve. 



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NOT AGAIN?!

And the Lord said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins”

– HOSEA 3:1

God’s steadfast love is extraordinary in many ways. His love is gracious, extended to undeserving sinners. His love is sacrificial, seen most clearly in Christ’s willingness to lay down his life. His love is unconditional, offered to the poor and needy who can never hope to repay. Yet, one aspect of God’s love truly baffles the human heart: his love perseveres.

Hosea offers a prophetic parable of God’s love for his unfaithful bride, Israel. In Hosea 1, the prophet is commanded to marry a promiscuous woman, known for her unfaithfulness. Hosea obeys, and in a remarkable reflection of God’s grace he takes Gomer for his wife. But perhaps the most shocking moment comes in Hosea 3:1, when God commands Hosea once again: “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress.”

One can almost hear a groan from the depths of a heartbroken Hosea: “Not again. Must I endure more heartache and pain? At what point does this endless cycle make me a mere doormat?”

There’s a familiar saying: “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” In earthly logic, there comes a time when wisdom says, “Enough is enough.” But is this the way of God’s covenant love?

When the disciples asked Jesus how often they should forgive a brother who sins against them, his response was astonishing: seventy-seven times (Matt 18:22). Even if someone sins against you seven times in the same day and repents, you must forgive (Luke 17:4). But when do we begin to doubt the sincerity of repentance? After the second time? The third? Surely by the fifth?

Yet, the Lord tells Hosea, “Go again. . . .” This command defies earthly logic. Divine love breaks all the rules we rely on to protect our hearts and lives. Who could possibly bear such a burden? None of us can truly carry such weight in our own spirit.

Hosea’s story is a powerful parable of the Lord’s unrelenting, covenantal love. From generation to generation, from day to day, from moment to moment, God returns to his chosen people with the same unconditional, gracious love. Even after a constant cycle of sin and rebellion, he doesn’t turn away in frustration or say, “Not again.” Instead, he promises to come again, fully prepared to pay the price for every mess, every mistake. Hosea 3 shows how

God’s electing love has the power to change a people. “Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days” (v. 5).

This was fulfilled in the sending of his Son, Jesus Christ. “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). Yet, he did not abandon them. Christ perfectly embodied God’s persevering love—even to the point of death on a cross. Though, in human terms, he may have seemed like the ultimate doormat, his sacrifice was the clearest act of true love the world has ever seen. God exalted him for it (Phil 2:8–9). Through his obedience many are made righteous (Rom 5:19).

Next time you’re tempted to groan, “Not again!”, remember the never-ending, covenant love of God that comes again and again to you in Jesus Christ. Only in this love of God do we have life. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Rejoice in his powerful love that makes all things new! 

FURTHER READING:

1 John (especially 3:11–17 and 4–5:5).

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Do you think Jesus Christ could’ve been labeled a “doormat”? Why or why not? Try to avoid giving the example of “Jesus cleansing the temple” in your answer.
2. Read 1 John 5:1–5. How does this passage encourage us to love in the power of God’s love?
3. How does knowing God’s steadfast, persevering love draw attention to our sinfulness and yet encourage us in our relationship with God?



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WHAT'S *a Vicariate?*

REUBEN BREDENHOF

When I lived in Australia, I learned many new words: arvo, tradie, bogan, and heaps more. A new word in the church setting was *vicariate*. I'd like to tell you about this word and how the concept of a vicariate could be helpful for some of our students at CRTS.

The word vicariate has several meanings, but in this case, it describes an extended internship for someone preparing to go into ministry. A vicar is a man who has completed his seminary training, is not yet ordained, and who is taken on by a church for a period of further ministry training and development.

The idea of a vicariate program came onto our radar in Australia through the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, our sister churches, who have used it for years and found it beneficial. The Australian churches have recently adopted this as a voluntary program for their theological students. There has already been a trial run of this program, when Rev. Dathan Pleiter (now in Elm Creek, Manitoba) interned for a year with Rev. Dirk Poppe in Southern River, Western Australia.

A TRIAL RUN

With his permission, I'd like to share a few excerpts from an article that Rev. Poppe wrote about their experience with the vicariate.

The central task as a minister of the gospel is preaching the good news to God's people. As a rule, Dathan preached once per week in Southern River and he also helped out in some other congregations. Dathan and I had a lot of conversations around sermons. In the first six months of the vicariate, I asked him to send his sermon through to me by Wednesday evening. That not only gave me time to review the sermon and offer feedback on Thursday afternoon, it also introduced him to the rigours of life in the ministry. In the last six months here, he preached the sermon on Sunday, and we reviewed it together the following Tuesday afternoon. This also worked very well. Initially he got a lot of feedback prior to preaching. Later he also appreciated the responsibility of preaching a sermon without first getting feedback. It was during these meetings that we discussed how to faithfully deal with the text in its context, practice exegetical precision, focus on Christ, and bring a message for God's people that is presented in a winsome manner. His emphasis on knowing the Lord and how to live in a relationship with God was sincerely appreciated. His preaching came with the authority of Christ and he was able to lay the truths of God's Word on the hearts of his people.

During the time of his internship, br. Pleiter conducted many visits in our congregation. Initially, I took him on a few visits. After that time, he went on many acquaintance, pastoral, and elderly visits on his own or with his wife Katrina. He also went along with the elders to about a dozen home visits. Visiting God's people is an important way of learning what lives in the congregation so that you can rightly use God's Word to comfort, encourage, and

admonish God's people. We reflected on how often it happens that the passage you are working on applies directly to the hearts and lives of God's people.

Consistory is an important part of congregational life, and it was good to have Dathan sit in and participate in our meetings. It's one thing to read the Church Order and study the biblical foundations of church government. It's quite another thing to chair a meeting in which it's your task to assist the brothers to work through their differences of opinion and conviction about various matters and come to a decision that is broadly supported by the whole consistory. It was valuable for us to discuss the breadth of the matters that have consistory's attention, how to provide faithful spiritual guidance and pastoral care while at the same time dealing with administrative matters efficiently.

Rev. Poppe also reflected on the blessing of the relationship that developed between them:

We had many encouraging conversations together. We read and discussed about a half a dozen books. On a weekly basis we also asked each other some personal questions about our own spiritual life. This accountability was delightful. Since the foundational qualifications for an office bearer are spiritual qualities and character, it was really good to explore together how we are walking in faith. We grew from a good working relationship into a friendship. The growing trust and rapport enabled us to have many frank and encouraging conversations not just about ministry but also about many other aspects of life.





In so many respects, it sounds like God blessed this internship/vicariate. Now, there is a financial cost involved with hiring a student intern for a year, including costs around accommodation, transportation, and insurance. In Rev. Pleiter's case, the church of Southern River gave full support to him and his family. However, the Australian churches can also make use of a federation-wide fund for student support.

A NEW WORD FOR CANADA?

Why tell you about this new word? Students at CRTS are required to complete a number of internships during the course of their study, including a ten-to-twelve-week stint with an experienced minister. This is often a formative experience for our students, helping them to really understand what is involved in ministry and what it takes to serve effectively. A vicariate program builds on this by giving a student an additional year of "on the ground" experience before pursuing ordination.

Should we adopt a program like our sisters in Australia and New Zealand have? It could be formalized as an option for our

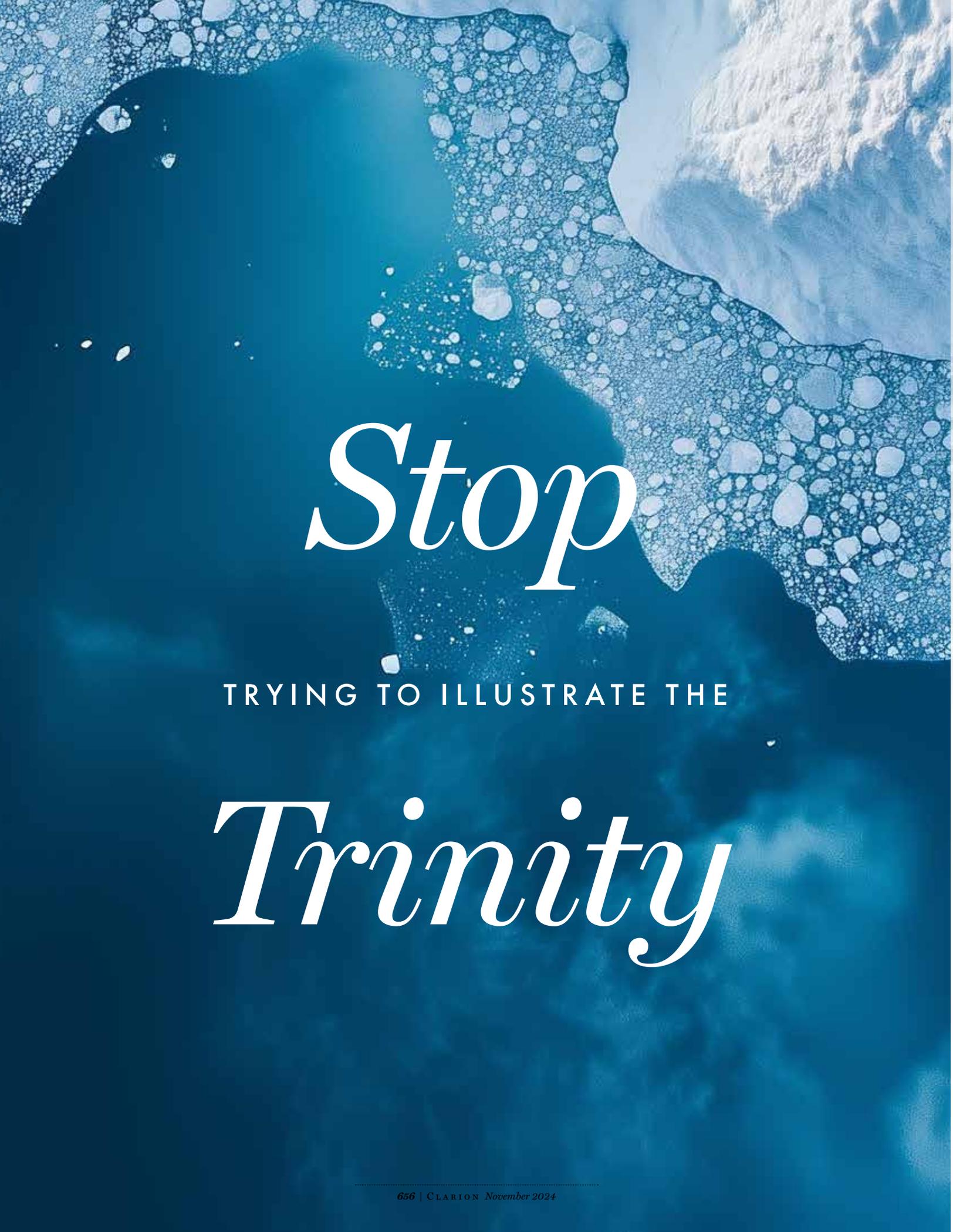
students, or it could develop more organically. In fact, there has already been more than one recent CRTS graduate who delayed the process of seeking eligibility for call in order to learn from an experienced minister for a year or so. One student might see a need to hone his abilities for ministry, especially in the weekly discipline of sermon-writing. Perhaps it has been suggested to another student that he spend another year getting better accustomed to Reformed church life and polity before pursuing ordination.

When a student defers for a year to gain more experience, the churches should not interpret this as a signal of general unsuitability for ministry. Rather, this can be a valuable part of a student's growth in character and competence before entering full-time ministry. Such growth can only be advantageous for the student and thereby for the churches. 



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An aerial photograph of a coastline, showing a dark blue sea on the left and a lighter blue, rocky shore on the right. The entire image is overlaid with a blue gradient that transitions from a darker shade at the bottom to a lighter shade at the top.

Stop

TRYING TO ILLUSTRATE THE

Trinity

John Eliot was an early missionary to the First Nations of North America. This was during the 1600s. He lived in present-day Massachusetts, on the east coast of the United States. John Eliot's missionary work involved the Algonquian First Nations people. He was instrumental in the conversion of many of them.

The story is told of an occasion where John Eliot was teaching some native people about the Trinity. He was trying to tell them how there is one God, but three persons. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are those three persons in the one God.

One of the men was listening carefully. He thought about what the missionary was saying. He said, "I believe I understand you, Mr. Minister. The Trinity is like water, ice, and snow. The water is one, the ice is another, and the snow is another. Yet they are all one water." It sounds like a good illustration of the Trinity.

MODALISM

When I was in seminary, one of our professors taught us how every illustration of the Trinity involves a heresy. This one of the water, ice, and snow is no different. This illustration involves a heresy known as modalism. Of course, the native man responding to John Eliot couldn't have known that. He knew nothing about the Bible, about Christian doctrine, or church historical struggles over doctrine. I'm not blaming him, not at all. He'd have to be taught further about who God is. Yet that doesn't change the fact that this illustration involves or leads to the heresy of modalism.

In church history modalism was associated with figures like Sabellius, Praxeas, and Noetus. Their form of the heresy is often referred to as "modalistic monarchianism." Whatever name we

apply, the heresy is still around today. Most prominently it's held by oneness Pentecostalism. The United Pentecostal Church is the most well-known example.

Modalism says God manifests himself in three different ways. It's like the one God has three different masks that he wears. Sometimes you see his Father mask, sometimes his Son, and sometimes his Holy Spirit mask. Similarly, a given quantity of water can only be one thing at one time. If I have a glass of water, it can only be water. It can't be a glass of snow or ice at the same time. But with the Trinity, the one God is always Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at the same time.

NO CONTRADICTION

That's why it's better to stay away from illustrations of the Trinity. They can mislead us about the truth of who God is. It's better just to stick with the facts. God is one and three. There are three persons in one being. There's no contradiction in that, because God is three in a way that's different to the way he's one. He exists in three persons and in one being. That's what the Bible teaches. Though we might struggle to understand it, it's the truth of how God has revealed himself. There's no need to go beyond that. **C**



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My Path to

LIBERATION

HAN GIL LEE

My name is Han Gil Lee and I was born and raised in South Korea. Though I grew up a Christian attending a Presbyterian church, I did not really come to know the Reformed faith until my university years. This article is about my personal story in coming to observe and eventually know the Canadian Reformed Churches first from an outsider's perspective and now as a pastor in a local CanRC.

As an aside, the title of this article has nothing to do with Rev. Douwe Van Dijk's book, *My Path to Liberation*. I am just borrowing his words without permission. His book is about his own experience in helping to form and later join the Liberated churches in the Netherlands in the 1940s. What follows is my story in joining the CanRC in the 20-teens.

ARRIVING IN CANADA

It was sometime in September 2012. I had just arrived in Canada to attend the theological seminary in Hamilton (CRTS). At that time I didn't know much about the CanRC. I didn't even know anyone in Canada! Coming to the new world, I felt a mixture of excitement and a little bit of fear. There was excitement because I was looking forward to meeting new people: professors who would give me lessons and classmates to talk with about theology. I also felt some fear because I'd never been to Canada.

The first CanRC person I met was someone named Rick Vanderhorst. He picked me up from the Toronto airport. To this day I still thank him, thinking: what if he hadn't picked me up? I probably would have walked around the airport and eventually

might have been deported back to my country. But thankfully Rick picked me up and brought me to his house.

Rick and I became housemates. There was another seminary student who was going to live with us. He wasn't there yet. Rick warned me about him—a guy from Alberta, proud of being a redneck, always wearing cowboy boots, driving a pickup truck, and doing redneck stuff. I had to look up “redneck” in the dictionary and I couldn't figure out how redneck and theology or sermon could go hand in hand. There was also another roommate who didn't go to seminary. I admired his bravery since he was willing to live with us seminary nerds. This dude, however, spoke a funny language but other than that he was a very nice guy. He was from Western Australia.

INTRODUCTION TO SUNDAY WORSHIP

I still vividly remember my first Sunday in Canada. In those days, almost all the seminary students went to either Providence or Cornerstone churches in Hamilton. I went to Providence because that's where all my housemates went. The church was full—packed, in fact. I was on time, but there was no empty spot to sit. Later I realized it was because the Lord's Supper was being celebrated. Yes, I remember seeing extra tables at the front with clean white sheets to cover the elements. If you ever visit Providence church you will see that there is a big aisle running down the middle of the building. The ushers placed some chairs at the back, but that was not enough. Then they started to fill the centre aisle. And I happened to sit right in the middle. I was a bit nervous. In my hand was an old, outdated *Book of Praise* from the 1960s. I don't remember how I got it, but that was the only copy that I had. A gentleman came up to me and gave me a new *Book of Praise* so that I could sing some hymns that were not in the old book. I still remember his big smile and bow tie.

Sitting in the middle, I felt like everyone was looking at me, including the minister. I am sure that was not the case. It just meant I was nervous. But much more than that, I was fascinated by the way worship services were conducted.

First, at the beginning of the worship service, I noticed several men walking down the aisle toward the pulpit. Most of them sat in the bench at the front. I guessed they were elders. Then, two men headed to the pulpit and shook hands. I had never seen that before. The man with glasses went up to the pulpit. He was the minister. The pulpit was pretty high. The service began. Again, for me, everything was new. I just did what other people did. When they stood up, I stood up. When they sat down, I sat down. When people

sang, I sang. When they ate candies or *dropjes* during the sermon, that I didn't do—since I hadn't brought any candies for myself!

SINGING

Speaking of singing, this was the first time I actually heard people singing with the organ. The sound was impressive, especially for someone like me who had never heard a big organ before. What impressed me more was how engaged people were when they were singing! I mean, people really sang. I had been to many churches before: Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, and university chapels. Many churches utilize various ways to lead singing but I never saw any congregation sing like this one.

One thing I noticed was that I couldn't hear the minister's voice. Not that he wasn't singing. His mouth was moving but the microphone was turned off. And I see the merit of turning off the microphone. Sometimes in other churches the sound guy doesn't turn off the microphone and the whole congregation has to go through the excruciating experience of hearing the minister sing. I guess it's the same reason why Reformed churches do not have choirs. It is because Reformed churches promote congregational singing. Some other churches have music bands. It's very easy to become a “performing” band rather than actually leading congregational singing. Back in my university years, many people didn't sing. They watched the “concert” during the chapel.

Also, I noticed in the *Book of Praise* that almost all the songs do not have a chorus. In contemporary music, songs are sometimes divided into various verses and one chorus. I am not saying that such a format is bad. But sometimes in contemporary evangelical worship, the worship band leads people to sing the chorus again and again, especially when the melody is very touching and emotional. Some worship leaders repeat the chorus intentionally to squeeze every bit of dopamine out of people's brains. Forgive me if my choice of the word “dopamine” is thought to be excessive or offensive. But what I say is a true fact. I know some music bands actually do this on purpose. I know this because I was once part of a band. In that sort of situation, people end up singing a few words repeatedly. The *Book of Praise* does not leave room for that.

One thing that impressed me about the *Book of Praise* is that you can actually remember the content of psalms when you hear the melody. When I hear the melody of Psalm 100, it reminds me of the phrase, “God is our shepherd and we are the sheep of his pasture.” Or take Psalm 24, “entering the gate;” Psalm 47, “clapping;” Psalm 84, “sparrow;” Psalm 118, “cornerstone,” and so on. As soon as you hear certain melodies, your brain connects to familiar

texts in the Psalms. That is very powerful! The same principle applies when you sing from the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* in the United Reformed Churches. It's a powerful experience that other churches do not have. And unfortunately, I have a feeling that some people who grew up in the Canadian Reformed Churches do not cherish this.

People were very engaged, not only in singing but also in listening. People showed their honour and respect to God, beginning with how they dressed. I saw the way people listened to the sermon and the way little children behaved. Even little things like eating candies right before the sermon began and also during the sermon, but not after the sermon. Also the way that the Lord's supper was conducted—truly everything was done in an orderly fashion! That was something that I had never seen before.

MANY QUESTIONS

Nevertheless, I had many questions. "Why does the elder shake the minister's hand before the minister goes up to the pulpit?" Much later, after finishing studies in the seminary, I was privileged to preach in some churches. Over time I had to shake the hand of many elders. And I thought to myself, "Perhaps elders shaking your hand only once means the elder didn't like the sermon. But he is still gracious enough to give you a pass. If the elder shakes your hand twice or more then perhaps it was a good sermon. But no handshake probably means I won't be invited to preach in this church again." Forgive me for my ignorance, but those are the things that were going through my head at that time.

I had many questions on liturgy as well at that time. Why do we have a certain format? And those were good questions not only for foreigners but also for those who were born and raised

in the Canadian Reformed community. And later I realized it has something to do with covenantal worship. I received a lot of help from books like *The Beauty of Reformed Liturgy* by G. Van Dooren.

So . . . this leaves us with some questions. Music and the way we worship is a big question these days. When people wish to join a Canadian Reformed church, what is it that they are looking for? The answer is simple. Our good shepherd said in John 10:16, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice." What attracts them is the Shepherd's voice, his Word—not some kind of entertainment, not programs, but God's Word.

I've noticed that some immigrant churches advertise themselves with all kinds of attractive "goodies." "We have lawyers, teachers, mechanics, and we have many programs that your children can join!" Our Reformed churches should not follow their path because when people come to Canada and look for a faithful church to join, they come to a Reformed church hoping for biblical worship. They look for songs that are richly filled with God's Word, Psalms, and sound doctrine. When people come to the Canadian Reformed churches, they admire the beauty of Reformed liturgy. It is my prayer that we continue to preserve this tradition. 📖



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A GENERAL SYNOD

is Coming to Town

JAN DEGELDER

2025 is going to be a general synod year for our Canadian Reformed churches (DV). Are you—dear reader—excited about this once-every-three-years event? That’s probably a bit too much to ask. But are you perhaps interested in what’s going to happen at this synod? Do you feel that what will be going on there is something that has to do with you or may even impact you?

In Church Order Article 29 the churches have agreed that the structure of the federation has classes, regional synods, and general synods. When Article 49 says a bit more about those general synods, it only describes the frequency of such gatherings, and who qualifies to be members. But how should such a gathering operate and what sort of matters is it supposed to deal with?

To begin with, the basic rules we agreed upon for the work of all assemblies, outlined in the Articles 30–36, also apply to a

general synod. Furthermore, throughout the Church Order several articles mention matters that must be handled by a general synod.

HOW OFTEN?

Early in the formative years of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands the need was felt to have regular general or national synods: meetings of delegates that would represent all the churches of the federation. Synod Emden 1571 set the frequency at every two years, whereas the next synod made it every three years. However, that did not work well. The churches had made themselves too dependent on the civil authorities, and political powers controlled many aspects of church life. The well-known Synod of Dort 1618/19 came twenty years after the previous one. After that, the authorities prevented another general synod from



Synod of Dort 1618 – 19

being convened for over 200 years. Only after the Secession of 1843 did general synods again become a regular part of church life every three years.

In the CanRC we faithfully maintain this schedule. It's a routine we're familiar with, but that does not mean that this is the only way it can be done. Some of our sister churches in the world have the same rhythm, whereas others have an annual general synod or assembly.

There are various pros and cons here. For instance, with an annual synod appellants would not have to wait so long before their case can be judged. It may also lead to shorter synods, and it might bring the work of a synod closer to the local church members.

The main argument against more frequent synods is the Reformed principle that the essence of ecclesiastical life is in the local churches, and not in the broader assemblies. A general synod is not "the church." It is a useful, temporary body that serves the churches in matters they cannot (or simply decide not to) do on their own. Is there a danger that a synod will take on more and more activities, and thus more power than it should have? That's always possible, but whether an annual synod poses a greater risk for this than a synod once every three years is hard to prove.

HOW MANY WILL BE GOING?

How do you become a member of a general synod? You can think of different methods, of course, but we have agreed in Article 49 that "each regional synod shall delegate to this synod six ministers and six elders." With two regional synods, this makes twenty-four delegates. That's not much compared to most general synods or assemblies of our sister churches.

Synod Emden 1571 stipulated that delegates should be sent directly by the local churches. Later it was changed to delegation by the classes, and, when there were enough regional synods, the Synod of Dort 1618/19 made the rule we have in our Church Order today. But in some of our sister churches, like the URCNA, it is still the practice to send two delegates from each church. With some 130 churches, it makes for a URC synod of about 250 members.

As such, it is not a matter of principle how often we have a general synod or how large of a gathering it should be. The question is: what is most beneficial for the churches, and—when it comes to the number of delegates—what is the size that is most effective, most workable? And that depends on the expectations.

Our synods are deliberative gatherings. Before making a decision, we expect a process of listening carefully to each other,

thoughtfully weighing the arguments, in a discussion where all members are involved. This becomes more difficult in larger groups. When a synod has 200 or more delegates, instead of twenty or forty, it changes the dynamics and the character of the meeting. Obviously this does not imply that a large meeting cannot make a good decision or that a small meeting can never make a bad decision. But how you come to your decisions is different.

WHO IS GOING?

Article 49 makes clear that the churches must delegate the same number of elders and ministers. This is crucial in our presbyterial form of church government. Reformed churches are (or should be) allergic to clericalism, or any form of ministerial hierarchy. But in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it took a long time to get to that point. At that time synods would usually see more ministers than elders.

And even today, whereas ministers who have been elected as delegates to synod will be given time by their consistories to prepare for and attend the assembly, it's a different matter for elders. Regional synods face the question: who is available? And that's often a limited number of retirees and men who can afford to be away from work for, let's say, two weeks.

Perhaps this could be an additional reason for thinking about ways to have general synods that are a bit larger, that are held more frequently, and that can be shorter. And an additional bonus could be that in that way the work of our general synods can indeed become a bit more alive and appreciated in our local churches.

But it is important to remember that a synod is a gathering of the churches. And thus, regardless of who sends the delegates or how many there are: when you have been delegated to a general synod, you represent not just the body that has sent you, whether it's the local church, classis, or regional synod; rather, you represent *all* the churches.

WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

The limits that define the matters a general synod can legitimately deal with are agreed upon in Church Order Article 30. To begin with: a synod can only deal with "ecclesiastical matters," things that pertain to the life of the church. Nothing else may come onto synod's agenda—although it may not always be immediately clear what is and what is not covered by this expression. Then Article 30 identifies two categories of entries that can be admitted and put

on the agenda of a synod: matters which could not be finished in the minor assembly and matters which belong to the churches in common. The result is that in practice a synod can be faced with roughly three groups of submissions: (1) appeals, (2) proposals or overtures, and (3) committee reports.

One question that often comes up is: what are things that belong to the churches in common and who determines that? Does a general synod have the authority to decide this on its own? No, it doesn't. Some things are already mentioned in the Church Order. For instance, matters of doctrine (Art. 26), changes in the Church Order (Art. 76), training for the ministry (Art. 19), ecumenical contacts (Art. 51), and a few regulations for worship (Arts. 52, 55, 56). Other than that, it can only be determined if it is clear that the implications of an overture will impact all the churches in the federation. The last paragraph of Article 30 describes the way to get to that point. It's often called "the ecclesiastical route."¹

HOW DOES IT WORK?

There is nothing in the Church Order as to how a general synod should operate. That does not mean that the brothers have to figure this out once they get together. Like the other assemblies, a general synod also has its own internal regulations, called "Guidelines for General Synods." You can find the latest version in the Acts of General Synod Guelph, 2022, Appendix 28.

The practice is that all the matters on the agenda are given to "advisory committees" made up of members of synod. Every member of synod is assigned to one of these committees, frequently six in total made up of four men each. They are to study the material given to them and produce a report with recommendations that can be voted on. In dealing with appeals, this is a good way of getting a handle on the—sometimes complicated—issues.

However, it does make for longer synods. Perhaps the reports of synodical committees, as well as overtures produced by churches, can present recommendations in a format that makes it possible to be discussed, perhaps amended, and then voted on directly by synod, without the detour of an advisory committee report. Who



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¹ I will not elaborate on this. Earlier this year Rev. Karlo Janssen wrote on this topic in this magazine. See *Clarion*, Vol.73, #2, 51-53 and #3, 95-96.

The
COMMUNION
of Reformed Evangelical Churches

ERIC KAMPEN

As we continue this series on Reformed and Presbyterian churches that are not members of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), our focus this time is on the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC). While there have been controversies and rumours surrounding the CREC, we should not evaluate based on rumours or the personal statements of individuals. Rather, just as we want to be judged by our public confessions and official statements, so we should judge others (cf. BC 29; CD Conclusion, 4th last paragraph). Most of the information contained in this article has been obtained from the official CREC website (crechurches.org).

HISTORY

The Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches held its founding meeting in January 1998. At that time, it consisted of three churches, all located in the Pacific Northwest of the USA. The name with which it identified itself initially was the Confederation of Reformed Evangelicals. This was later changed to the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches. The current name was adopted in 2011, replacing the word “Confederation” with “Communion” because it “was frequently misconstrued to imply certain cultural connotations that were never intended by [the] founders” (Message to the World Regarding the CREC

Name Change, 2011). This refers to associating the church with the Confederate States involved in the American Civil War.

The motivation for starting a new church can be gleaned from a Report on the History of the CREC (2004). This Report traces the deformation in US churches in the twentieth century and the reaction of fundamentalism and pietism. These reactions, it states, neglected to pay attention to the historical confessions of the church. On its website under “Our Story,” it is stated,

The CREC seeks to uphold traditional Reformed distinctives, resisting fundamentalist and modernist trends that dilute doctrinal purity and ecclesiastical structures. Throughout the 20th century, fundamentalism and modernism influenced American Protestantism, leading to a departure from historic creeds, confessions, and church polity.

Despite these trends, confessionalists within denominations like the Christian Reformed Church and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church remained committed to their doctrinal heritage. The CREC emerged in the late 20th century seeking to recover a Reformed Catholic vision, emphasizing the importance of creeds, confessions, and liturgies.

Since its inception, the CREC has grown from representing three churches to over 130 worldwide. . . .

As for its future, it states the CREC is

. . . committed to nurturing a humble yet bold ecclesiastical presence. Positioned at the forefront of cultural and political discourse, the CREC prioritizes the centrality of the church and Biblical orthodoxy. The denomination is dedicated to providing robust pastoral training and fostering a hospitable community that draws people to the life of the Church through shared meals and discipleship.

The CREC plans to deepen its theological foundations, ensuring that pastors are well-versed in Scripture and capable of engaging effectively with societal challenges. The focus remains on building a resilient church that balances tradition with active engagement with the public square, aiming to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus in every square inch.

By worshipping the Triune God, the CREC strives to be a beacon of hope and a source of meaningful change in the home, the Church, and culture while staying loyal to its Reformed heritage and submitting to the head of the Church, Jesus Christ.

While currently it claims to have more than 130 member churches in the USA, Canada, Central and Eastern Europe, Brazil,

and Japan, this number includes what are called Mission Churches, that is, congregations in the process of becoming full members. Based on information gathered from the previous version of the website (it was updated in June 2024), 30–40% of the total number may be mission churches.

Much of the increase in member churches has taken place in the last few years. In his 2023 Report, the Presiding Minister (Spokesman for the CREC for a three-year term) connects this rapid growth to COVID. He wrote,

The covid madness, with its vast governmental encroachments, has served to further unite us. Although the covid era was not the cause of creeping liberalism in the church, it was a revealing source. As churches got pushed around by the state, many complied too willingly and too long. This revealed an internal disease in the broader church, the desire to make peace with the surrounding culture and its power players. The disease continues to spread as liberalism, feminism, and sexual confusion are all gaining ground in the broader evangelical church. As this disease spreads into the previously conservative church, many Christians, pastors, and even entire churches, are finding their way to the CREC. What they find here is robust historic worship, bold biblical preaching, rejoicing in community, an emphasis on personal holiness in marriages and families. To us, perfectly normal Christianity. To a crumbling culture, a highly appealing haven of rest for God’s people.

CONFSSIONAL BASIS

The CREC holds to the primacy of the local congregation in church government, also in terms of deciding on its confessional basis. A church that wishes to be a member of the CREC must adopt in its local statement of faith the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon. Further, it must adopt into its statement of faith one of ten possible confessions. Besides the familiar ones such as the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Three Forms of Unity, there are also the London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) and the Reformed Evangelical Confession. Each church must also adopt into its statement of faith the Confessional Statement on Sex, Gender, and Marriage adopted by CREC Council on August 26, 2020 (See Article III of the Governing Documents).

As can be noted from this list, the CREC as a body has not adopted the Athanasian Creed. By adopting the Definition of Chalcedon, it has a confession dealing with the two natures of Christ. As for the confessions dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth century,

while there is fundamental agreement among many of them, the London Baptist Confession is a modification of the Westminster Confession to accommodate the teaching of believer baptism. As such, it falls outside the pale of a true Reformed Confession. The Reformed Evangelical Confession consists of a selection of the Shorter Westminster Catechism and a statement adapted from the National Association of Evangelicals. While it shows the influence of Reformed confessions, its brevity makes it a minimalist statement. While there is great freedom in terms of adopting confessions, there is no freedom in adopting statements on Sex, Gender, and Marriage.

DISTINCTIVES

When one peruses websites of these churches as well as a podcast¹ from those belonging to the CREC, it is evident that there are several characteristics or distinctives that are clearly articulated. Representative of this is what is found on the website of Christchurch in Moscow, Idaho,

Now all churches have distinctives, and ours is no exception. . . . In our case, some examples would be that we practice a weekly renewal of the covenant, which means that each service culminates with communion. We are postmillennial, which means that we believe that the world will be successfully evangelized before the Lord comes again. We sing psalms and hymns, which means that we believe our music should be God-honoring and rich in fiber. We believe in cultural engagement, which means that we hold the Christian faith is not a private mystery religion, but rather a public faith, claiming that the authority of Jesus Christ must be universally recognized by all nations . . .²

This postmillennial view, which believes the world will be successfully evangelized before the Lord comes again, is also evident in the statement on the website of a Canadian CREC,

As we watch our cities and nation make a vast yet focused attempt to rid our country of Christ, and our rich Christian heritage and history, we strive to unite with fellow believers in our own attempt, by the grace of God, to bring our nation back to its original vision of a united nation under one God. . . .

Inscribed in stone on our nation's Peace Tower building is a passage from Psalm 72:8 which reads - "He Shall Have

Dominion Also From Sea To Sea." We strive to work toward accomplishing this original vision, of Christ as sovereign ruler, for Canada in obedience to the Great Commission. . . .³

STATEMENTS

The CREC also has four Statements. One explains the name change, mentioned earlier. The other three merit mentioning as they highlight the commitment to cultural engagement mentioned earlier.

One is entitled "Religious Exemption to Mandatory Medical Procedures." The concluding paragraph reads, "Therefore, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we defend the rights and responsibilities of our members to research these issue . . . in order to make responsible decisions for themselves, including refusing vaccination or gene therapies on religious grounds." While it does not necessarily mean all members of the CREC will refuse vaccinations, what is striking is the authoritative declaration made "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

In a Statement on Sexuality, it makes clear its position on biblical teaching and then concludes with these words, "We exhort the broader Christian Church, and particularly Reformed Churches, to hold their churches and pastors accountable to faithful biblical doctrine in all areas of sexuality." The CREC not only takes on the world but also all churches.

A third Statement pertains to the Obergefell decision by the US Supreme Court, which requires all states to license marriages between same sex couples. The final paragraph reads, "In light of this decision, the CREC calls upon the leaders of these United States . . . to repent of this egregious and arrogant sin of attempting to define reality contrary to how God has defined it. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen."

In a way, this cultural engagement is not any different from churches mentioned in previous articles, who see it as the task of their synods and general assemblies to address the issues of the day. At the same time, by using phrases such as "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" and "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit," the CREC sees itself as *the* spokesman for God in this world.

CREC AND NAPARC

The articles in this series deal with churches that one might think would belong to NAPARC because of their Reformed or Presbyterian character. Previous articles dealt with churches that

¹ E.g. Chinook Podcast Episode #43: "What is the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC)?"

² <https://www.christkirk.com/our-church/what-we-believe/> Accessed June 11, 2024

³ <https://whitestonecrec.church/> Accessed June 11, 2024

have a long history as Presbyterian or Reformed churches but have drifted away from their roots. Here is a group of churches that seem to have returned to Reformed, Presbyterian roots, yet is not part of NAPARC.

It is not that the CREC is unaware of NAPARC. It even has some appreciation for it. This is evident in an appendix in its Governing Documents titled, “A ‘Golden Rule’ for Cooperation among Churches.” This is based on the “Golden Rule Comity Agreement” of NAPARC. It should be noted, though, that it wrongly calls this the National Association of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, rather than the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (pp 113–115). In this, it shows respect for and the legitimacy and faithfulness of other churches in honouring the discipline exercised by other churches, yet fraternal relations are not high on its radar. Based on Article XIII of its Governing Documents (Formal, Non-Binding Fraternal Relations), it appears that such relationships are left to local churches.

If the CREC would seek membership in NAPARC, it would not qualify. The constitution of NAPARC states that “we affirm the basis of the fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms.” These confessions are listed as possible confessions for churches belonging to the CREC, but neither the Three Forms of Unity nor the Westminster standards are the basis for *all* CREC churches. A CREC congregation can choose any of the ten permitted (see earlier). The NAPARC constitution, however, requires that the denomination seeking to join adheres either to the Westminster Standards or the Three Forms of Unity.

Aside from this confessional issue, the CREC is unlikely to be welcomed at NAPARC because of the view known as Federal Vision, which was promoted by some of the leaders of the CREC. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into that. It should be noted, though, that several members churches of NAPARC have adopted study papers taking issue with these views.

CONCLUSION

In considering all this, it is good to sum up the key concerns.

First, there is always reason for concern when those who claim to have discovered the Reformed faith see the need to start anew, rather than seek a faithful group of Reformed churches with which to fellowship. In this case, one can think of the possibility of seeking out, for example, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which is acknowledged in the CREC’s own documents as a confessionally faithful church. In this respect, the CREC appears no different than the many other groups that spring up on the ecclesiastical scene, which are shaped by influential leaders. By starting anew, one sidesteps the balancing influence of those who have walked on the faithful path for a long time. It is like reinventing the wheel, with the thought that it can be done better. In this way, the CREC is just another example of ecclesiastical entrepreneurship so prevalent in the United States of America.

Second, while the confessional emphasis is to be appreciated, the CREC is not truly a group of churches united by a clearly articulated confession of faith. Its only absolute confessional standards are the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Definition of Chalcedon, and one of the ten confessions listed. It can be as minimalist as the Reformed Evangelical Confession. It can also be a confession that rejects a critical tenet of Reformed teaching such as infant baptism. It is striking that it places more emphasis on needing to adopt the CREC statements on Sex, Gender, and Marriage than on having the same confessional basis. Its unity seems to lie more in its post-millennialism and in its view on sex, gender, and marriage, as well as its stand on Christian liberty. True confessional unity includes have a clear confessional stand, as well as uniting oneself with those who have been faithfully living by these confessions for a long time.

At the same time, we do well to remember that where the Word is, the Spirit is. By the grace of God, may the views grow more tempered and balanced and rather than seeing the need to call even the whole ecclesiastical world to task, may there be a willingness to listen to the broader community of Reformed churches such as that found in the (NA) PARC. 



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MEET CONRAD

Professor of English

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Clarion is interviewing various professionals in our Reformed community to highlight how they are serving the Lord in their particular industry or calling. In this issue we interview Conrad van Dyk (age 43) about his work as Professor of English at Concordia University in Edmonton, Alberta. Clarion is interviewing various professionals in our Reformed community to highlight how they are serving the Lord in their particular industry or calling. In this issue we interview Conrad van Dyk (age 43) about his work as Professor of English at Concordia University in Edmonton, Alberta.

BACKGROUND

Conrad moved from the Netherlands to Canada at age 12 and completed high school and his Bachelor's degree in British Columbia. He obtained his Master's and PhD at the University of Western Ontario. He holds a post doctorate degree at Cornell University. Conrad is Professor of English at Concordia University in Edmonton (CUE) where he received their top recognition for outstanding teaching in 2020, the Judith C. Meier Teaching Award. Conrad also received the John Hurt Fisher Prize for his significant contribution to the field of John Gower studies.

Conrad and his wife Suzanne have seven children (ages 5 to 21) and are members in the Edmonton-Immanuel church. He is an avid pianist and loves outdoor activities. Together with his wife, he organizes English-second-language classes at their church in Edmonton. He also hosts a children's podcast called "Sophie and Sebastian" (available on all major podcast apps).

WHAT DOES A PROFESSOR DO?

A professor's time is mainly dedicated to three things: teaching, research, and service. Service refers to committee work and administrative duties. At a big university most professors teach two courses. In the past I taught four courses and now I'm down to three per semester. This cuts into my research time quite a lot. I do most of my research during the summers. Unlike high school and elementary school teachers, professors have to book their holidays.

People might have this romantic idea of what a professor does, because of the British murder mysteries set in Oxford and Cambridge. Most of the time the criminal is the professor, so I don't know what that says about my profession [laughs], but all these ideas of professors having a lot of leisure time and drinking sherry is not accurate.

On days I don't teach, I mainly work on research. At present I am working almost exclusively on twentieth century writing, including G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and holocaust literature. The latter is bringing me back to my Dutch roots. I also maintain a writing website called *The Nature of Writing* and that involves a lot of work.

Academic research is important for all of us. Medieval monasteries preserved the knowledge of that time, and without it the Renaissance would not have happened. The reason we are here today is the preservation of knowledge. We are a product of all that has happened in the past. Research in the history of ideas is very valuable, as ideas shape the minds of young people today. Of course, it is true that there are many useless projects in research. Especially in English, professors use the literature as a platform

to talk about social issues that they have become interested in. But to me, the literature has to come first, instead of reading your own ideas into it.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR WORK?

I do love teaching. Receiving the Meier teaching award was very special. I have the opportunity to teach topics that I am interested in. To share them with different people is very rewarding. English is not only about literature; it is a crossroads of many different interests. People write poems and novels about things that interest them. You can talk about anything, whether it is philosophy or religion, and this is what I love; it gets people thinking. It challenges you on your worldview and perspective.

I must say though that the last couple of years have been challenging for teaching. It has been a big adjustment to understand the post-COVID generation and figuring out how to help them, because they need a lot more hand-holding. I'm not saying things were better in the past. Students always have certain struggles. But there are unique challenges that were not there before. Phone addiction is a big one, and not only for students. It is a huge problem that students struggle with reading. They lack the attention span.

Another problem in schools and universities is students using AI (artificial intelligence) to do their work. The difficulty with AI is that students do not necessarily see that it is problematic: everyone uses it, what's the problem? And how can you prove that a student has used AI instead of their own work? It is a new way of cheating. Our university is secular now (Concordia University used to be a Lutheran institution) and I cannot make an appeal based on religion or faith to address cheating. Eventually, we all need to work with AI, but if we don't train people to think for themselves, they won't have the skills to work with AI. That's the challenge we face.



TELL US ABOUT CHALLENGES YOU FACE.

We have a small department of five English professors. This means we have to teach a lot of different courses. Medieval literature is my specialization, but I also teach children's literature, literary theory, contemporary literature . . . a host of different things. This is fun, but it means you spread yourself a little thin.

It's also challenging for me that I don't have set hours and I would like to keep studying and reading and thinking, but I have to turn off my mind at certain times. On a Sunday, for instance, you need a break. Stress can also be a big thing for profs, with the deadlines and requirements of publishing. Professors can complain a lot, but it's good to remember the privileges we have doing this work.

Dealing with student reviews can be difficult mentally. Your reputation can be savaged online. And there are no repercussions for students, as online platforms are anonymous. We talk about it as faculty. First of all, we stop reading those comments all the time. It's often coming from a handful of people. But we do take constructive feedback seriously, as it helps us to adapt and make changes.

ANY ADVICE FOR THOSE CONSIDERING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION?

There is still great value in secular education. As a student you have the option to choose your courses, choose your professors, and pursue your own career path. There will be challenges and you will be faced with different perspectives, but that can also help you to figure out who you are and appreciate what you have. Sometimes when you shelter yourself, you might see the differences in this world in the starkest terms: you see the outside world as a dark place and you generalize about it, but you don't realize there is value in that space as well.

As a Christian student, it is important to be rooted in your own community. Find people you can talk to. And if you're an adult, when you talk to a student in your community, don't ask "What are you studying and when are you done?" but "What are you learning about right now?" Have a discussion about what text or reading is on their brain. That way students can have a conversation with people in their community. That mentorship is very important to young people.

At a secular university students face the culture wars a bit more directly, as they hear all the different issues being discussed. There is a certain amount of freedom of speech at the university level. I think it's fragile, but there is freedom, and I think it's very important for Christians to be in that space and be a witness. This is where ideas are formed and young people are shaped. If you don't step

into that space, then you are giving up on all kinds of areas of life, including politics.

As Canadian Reformed churches, we can do more in our communities to appreciate the value of higher education. What I appreciate in our churches is our focus on piety and daily living as committed Christians. However, we are not always very theoretical. The Christian Reformed churches for example, heavily rely on the Kuyperian worldview that emphasizes that every inch of the world belongs to Christ. They believe in reclaiming the world. Sometimes this leads to too much cultural optimism, but in our churches, we can do some more of that kind of thinking. Learning at a liberal arts university has centuries of wisdom behind it. I would say that as long as you go in with a critical mind and know where you stand, you can deepen your own faith and grow as a person. You can see the beauty of the gospel and also reach out to others in your life in order to build bridges.

HOW DO YOU LIVE OUT YOUR REFORMED FAITH AT WORK?

I can bring a Christian perspective to the classroom. Because I teach in a secular space said to be neutral, I present Christianity as one perspective among others. I see an opportunity to present what is worthy in Christianity and what is unique. Many students tend to see Christianity as some sort of orthodox belief that is old and stuffy, but I challenge them to see that Christianity is radical, for example in its love for the neighbour and its service to others. We compare Christianity to other philosophies and perspectives. We study works by Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, who has an atheist perspective that leads to a very cold worldview. Students sense there is something very different there than in works by an author like C. S. Lewis.

I am blessed in the sense that I have mostly Christian colleagues. Still, certain topics are difficult to discuss as there is a political correctness in Canada. The best thing I can do is be a witness and model Christian character in being reliable, being interested in the lives of my students, showing a passion for what I do, and being intellectually curious. Students do appreciate the personal relationships and comment on that even after they have graduated. You really can make an impact on someone's life and plant the seed of the gospel. 



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The Reformational STUDY CENTRE

RYAN KAMPEN

Have you ever opened WhatsApp on your phone and wondered, “Could this instant messenger be used for the worldwide spread of the gospel?” Most likely not, I suspect. That makes it a personal delight to share with you one way that the Lord is giving tremendous opportunities for the growth of the gospel through that app with its little green and white icon! Allow me, then, to update you on some of the recent work in one of the projects at the Reformational Study Centre. In the Lord’s goodness and mercy, he has increased the reach of the work over the past year, where now we are helping over 15,200 ministers in over ninety developing countries. May his grace in this way be multiplied, his kingdom come, and his name be exalted!

THE WORK OF GOD IN OUR USERS:

SHARING THE GOSPEL:

Monlecah (South Africa): With the women in our church and my friends I normally share the topic I am doing and send them the questions as well. And whenever I am in the taxi I share the message of hope with someone sitting close to me.

Francisca (Timor-Leste): I got your number from one of my friends at the office. There are now four of us at the office studying Lamad.

JOY IN THE GOSPEL

This message of salvation fills me with so much gratefulness and gratitude. How privileged we are!! Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death (Phil. 2) He suffered for us... For me... We are saved by His blood... We were bought at a price, therefore we must glorify God in our body and Spirit (1 Cor. 6) I want to sing and lift His praises for His mercy never fails. Psalm 103...

Lettie (Namibia): Woooo, thank you so much! You really built me spiritually. I am crying because of joy of what I could experience through the study of the Word. So many good explanations and notes for me to read. May the Lord bless you! I love you in Jesus Christ.

Samuel (Trinidad and Tobago):

HOPE THROUGH THE GOSPEL

When I face a problem, I need to first hold to the integrity of God’s word. Even though it can be challenging, difficult and hard in my life sometimes, I should not let conditions push me away from God. But instead, I need to call upon God in my trouble and allow his will to be done. It is better to allow God’s will to be done, if I allow God’s will, I am telling God: I trust you with my life.

Clarence (Liberia): Thank you. This article on the library was just what I needed today. The Lord has encouraged me to continue witnessing about him. He is the only Saviour and everyone must know him.

Ashwan (India):

A DESIRE FOR THE GOSPEL:

“Please start a branch of your church in Kenya”

“We want a church with this gospel in Burundi”

“People in the Philippines do not hear this gospel in their churches”

“We want someone from your team to be the main speaker at our gospel crusade” (Ghana)

“You are on the list to preach for us next week Sunday. Travelling is not a problem, you can do your preaching through video call. You are already booked for next week Sunday” (Pakistan).

LAMAD

In last year's *Clarion* update, I shared with you the news of a new project at the Study Centre, namely, Lamad. As a reminder, Lamad (Hebrew for "to learn" or "to teach") is our project where we are developing easy-to-understand courses for the lay pastors, office-bearers, and regular church members in the young church. Our app for this project can be found at lamad.app. The primary purpose of the courses is to help the users read and study God's Word and its teachings. Courses so far consist of subjects like the Trinity, heaven, who is Jesus Christ? (relating to Lord's Days 11–19), the fruit of the Spirit, marriage, the qualifications of an elder, worry, overcoming sin, comfort for a sinner like me (Lord's Days 1–7), and contentment.

The website has been up and running for over a year and a half now. The Lord has filled us with joy and amazement at how he has been using this project for the spiritual growth of its users! In his generosity he has also made it possible for the courses to be translated into French, which will be of tremendous blessing for French-speaking Africans (and beyond!).

Now where does WhatsApp come into view for this project? Well, since my update in mid-2023, the Lord has done a marvellous thing with Lamad, giving us yet more evidence of his generosity and grace! In his providence, he led us to the possibility of putting our courses on WhatsApp. As you can imagine, this latest development has opened up a massive opportunity for the gospel to spread to all people groups, and for us to have immediate, ongoing, and direct contact with those who take the courses—pastors and churchgoers alike! Now we can do Bible study directly with them and encourage them in their personal growth in the riches of God's Word. What a blessing! Thank the Lord with us for such a special opportunity he has given for the gospel to go out!

To give you an idea of how the users are experiencing the study on their phone, here is a sample screenshot (at right). At the end of a lesson, there is either a multiple-choice or an



open question. In this case it is the former. After the student taps his answer, he receives a response indicating whether he was correct or incorrect.

WhatsApp helps to give the student the feeling of constant interaction. Some responses are automated, and some are personal reactions to the answers of the students. And then we also send encouragement to the students.

It is our prayer that the Lord would continue to bless this project. We have already seen firsthand how the users of these courses are benefitting in a big way from the material. They keep coming back for more!

WOULD YOU LIKE TO GET INVOLVED?

As the project grows, the Lord keeps showing us more ways that it can help the young church. We would like to share some of those ways with you, to see if you might consider offering a helping hand.

1. Encouragers—Those who take the courses are typically young in the faith, and keen to grow in maturity. They are in special need of encouragement while taking their courses. We are, therefore, in need of helpers willing to directly engage the users of these courses.
2. Readers—As would be expected, Scripture passages feature prominently in the courses. We would love for helpers to come forward to read such passages for us, and the audio recordings will find their way into the lessons.
3. Searchers—Speaking of audio, some who could benefit from these courses are people who cannot read, or who want to learn a bit more about a topic. For them, we want to provide audio clips on the topic they are studying. We would appreciate helpers who would listen to audios (provided by us) to find clips on specific topics.
4. Imagers—We need some help in making the visual presentations of the lessons (through Canva). You would only need a basic knowledge of Canva.

Please pray with us that the Lord would receive all the glory for these exciting possibilities for his Word to go out in power throughout the world! 🙏



Ryan Kampen

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BEHOLD OUR *God!*

Recap of the Summit Reformed Youth Conference,
held August 5–9, 2024, in Calgary, Alberta

KEITH DAVIS

PHOTOS: David Visser and Kyle Vasas, (From Faith Inc).



Above: Mt. Royal University campus



Top: Q&A Session with Rev. Terry Johnson and Dr. Eric Watkins; above L to R: Rev's Mark ten Haaf, John van Eyk, and Aaron van der Heiden lead Break-Out Sessions

Monday, August 5, 2024, began as a beautiful day in Calgary—a perfect start to the 8th annual Summit Reformed Youth Conference. In the early afternoon, the 442 registrants began arriving on the campus of Mt. Royal University. Later in the afternoon, Summit staff were informed that youth groups traveling from Washington state and British Columbia were delayed by several hours. After that, things went from bad to worse.

After enduring an hours-long flight delay, their flights finally lifted off, only to have a violent thunderstorm strike Calgary around 8:00 p.m. The Calgary airport was hit so hard by hail that windows shattered, the roof sprung a leak, and sixteen WestJet planes on the ground were badly damaged and taken out of service. All incoming flights were diverted back to where they came!! Those poor young people had to go back to British Columbia.

After their return, some simply went back home. Others, however, made the return flight to Calgary and finally arrived on campus at 3:45 a.m. on Tuesday morning—over twenty-three grueling hours of travel!

MAIN SPEAKERS

But after that first stormy night, the rest of the week went smoothly. The 2024 Conference theme was “Behold Our God.” It focused on the identity and the attributes of God. Our two main speakers, Rev. Terry Johnson (who serves the Independent Presbyterian

Church in Savannah, Georgia) and Dr. Eric Watkins (Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Daytona Beach, FL), presented powerful and challenging messages. Terry Johnson kicked things off on Monday night with his wonderful talk on the study of God. He quoted a 20-year-old Charles Spurgeon who wrote: “There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. . . .”

On Tuesday and Thursday, Eric Watkins presented two very moving and powerful talks entitled: *The God who Loves* (the parable of the Prodigal Son from Luke 18), and *The God Who Converts* (based on Jethro in Exodus 18).

Both Terry and Eric were blown away by their week at Summit. Terry said, “The conference itself was an excellent balance of fun for the youth and serious Bible study. I came back to Savannah wishing that we had the equivalent in the south-eastern United States.”

Eric Watkins, who brought his son Carl, was equally blessed and impressed. “This was my first year at Summit. I came as a speaker, a pastor, and a dad. On all three fronts I was greatly encouraged. . . . It was an edifying week full of Bible-focused content, enhanced by lots of fun things to do. . . . If you’ve never been, you should go and take young people from your church. You’ll come home tired, and it will be completely worth it!”



Clockwise from top left: Attendees were told to “smile & wave” whenever they saw the camera; Summit Staff working hard to greet 442 people on Registration Day; waiting for another Main Session to begin; SpikeBall is a popular out-door activity; Mt. Royal Cafeteria offers a great variety of food; Cheering is as fun as playing! Young men catching their breath in between games; The 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament is a big hit at Summit!

BREAK-OUT SESSIONS

The young adults were able to attend four (out of a total of fourteen) break-out sessions, each of which concentrated on a different attribute of God. In addition to having Terry and Eric each lead a break-out session, we were blessed to have seven pastors from

the United Reformed Churches, four pastors from Canadian Reformed Churches, and Kristen Kottelenberg Alkema, wife of Rev. Hendrik Alkema (who spoke to the young ladies at Summit), lead sessions as well.

Some of the break-out session speakers shared their overall impression of their week at Summit.

"I found it an honour to be asked to speak at Summit, and a delight to participate. I was blown away by both the organization of the conference as well as the enthusiasm of the youth in attendance. Incredible!"

— **Rev. Hendrik Alkema (Smithers Canadian Reformed Church)**

"There were so many moving aspects to Summit. Worship, fellowship, friendship, joy and fun. But for me the highlight was seeing young people invest in growing their relationship with God and knowledge of who he is for their lives and for their salvation."

— **Kristen Kottelenberg Alkema**

"Summit Conference shows that faith and fun go hand in hand. This conference gives youth a wonderful opportunity to deepen their faith and develop relationships with fellow believers from across Western Canada and beyond. It is well planned, well run, and well worth a week of your summer!" — **Rev. Aidan Plug (Langley Canadian Reformed Church)**

"I am impressed with the high quality of the speakers that come to Summit. I was spiritually fed by the rich teaching about God. It is evident to me that the youth who attend are hungry to learn about God and his Word." — **Rev. Charles Van Hoffen (URC)**

"This past conference had a vibe about it where the young people were eager to learn, eager to talk, eager to encourage each other, and eager to grow in their knowledge of the Lord and walk with Him." — **Rev. Simon Lievaart (Bethel URC Smithers, BC)**

A FULL WEEK

As is the case every year, Summit offered a wide variety of fun activities for everyone: thrilling sports tournaments (volley-ball, soccer, floor hockey, basketball, and even dodgeball!). There was the ever popular nine-square, as well as spike-ball, swimming, a chess tournament, a showing of the movie *Prince Caspian*, the first ever "Summit Summer Games," and our mass choir. Of course, one of the highlights of the week was the talent show on Thursday night.

The out-day on Thursday featured some of the "usual excursions:" Calaway Park, the Calgary Zoo, hiking in the mountains, and everyone's favourite, white-water rafting. New to Summit 2024 was horseback riding in the beautiful Kananaskis country.

Something else new to Summit 2024 was a Q&A session. Using the Discord App, young people presented questions to Eric Watkins and Terry Johnson. It was well received. As always, we had our amazing daily videos compliments of Faith, Inc. (David Visser & Kyle Vasas). Their professional videography has become a main stay of the Conference week and Summit owes them a huge debt of gratitude.

All in all, this turned out to be one of the best Summit Conferences to date. A big reason for that was the amazing job done by the chaperones who attended. Every chaperone must sign

up to run various activities or events during the week. Some even assist with security checks at night. Without this kind of help and assistance, the week of Summit would not be possible.

A second reason that Summit 2024 went so well was due to the godly behaviour and conduct of the young people who attended. There was a wonderful spirit of obedience, attention, and respect among the young people—and this did not go unnoticed by many of the first-time attendees, chaperones, and speakers.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Summit 2025 "Come Let Us Worship" Conference will be held in Calgary on August 4–8. Dr. Joel Beeke and Dr. Jerry Bilkes will be the two Main Speakers. Due to dorm room renovations, our registration will be capped at 450. Registration will open March 10, 2025. 

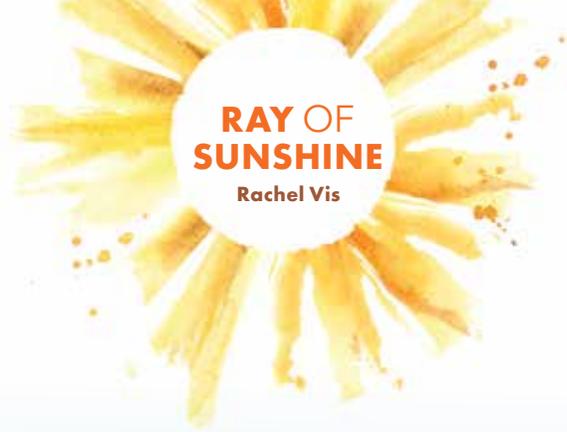


Keith Davis

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RAY OF SUNSHINE

Rachel Vis

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:4–9)

Happy Birthday to James and Ava, who are celebrating a birthday in December. May the Lord richly bless you both in the coming year.

Let us all continue to strive to rejoice each day in all that the Lord has given us, praising him in all that we do. Let us also be a support to everyone around us, including those in our communities who have a disability. God has given us so many riches and different talents, let us all use them to the honour and glory of his name.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- 10** James Kamminga will be **40**
Box 1125
Carman, MB
R0G 0J0
- 17** Ava Pierotti will be **17**
7761 Regional Road 20
Smithville, ON
L0R 2A0

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Do you have a question
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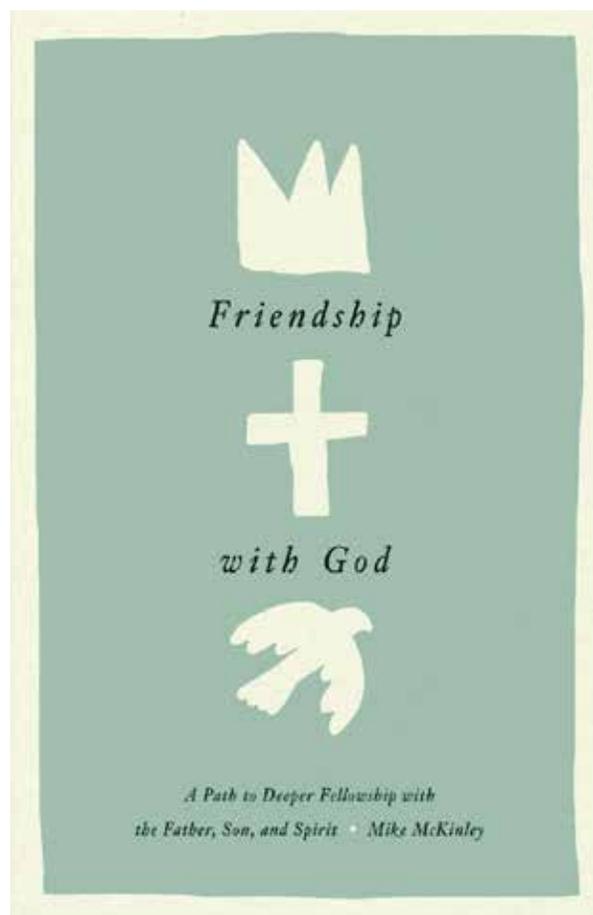
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RELATIONSHIP GUIDANCE

WES BREDENHOF



Friendship with God: A Path to Deeper Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit, by Mike McKinley. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023). Hardcover. 168 pages. \$26.61 CDN.

This is one of those books you wish you could have read twenty-five years ago. It's about our relationship with the Triune God and how we grow in that relationship. That's a topic many Reformed writers shy away from or treat in a superficial way. While it's easy reading, *Friendship with God* is far from shallow and it tracks Reformed straight down the middle.

In 1657, the Puritan John Owen published a landmark devotional volume, *Communion with God*. This book, based on a series of sermons, has long been hailed as one of Owen's best. There's just one problem with Owen: on the spectrum of Puritan writers, he's way over on the difficult-to-read side. For example, he never used an English phrase where a Latin or Greek one would suffice. I exaggerate, but only a little.

Enter Mike McKinley, a Baptist pastor serving in Virginia. While a simplified and modernized version of Owen's book was published by Crossway in 2007, McKinley has gone a step further, providing us with essentially a rewritten *Communion with God*. He writes, "My goal in this little book is to mine some of the most precious diamonds of Owen's spiritual insights and make them available and applicable to you as you grow in your enjoyment of the friendship of the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (p. 4).

What Owen called "communion," McKinley calls "friendship." It is "our daily awareness, experience, and enjoyment" of the gracious status we have in Christ. Our union with Christ and the status we have before God as a result comes to us as a gift of grace. Our communion with God is a living two-way relationship flowing from our union with Christ. While *Friendship with God* certainly encourages us with the gospel realities of what God does on his

side of this communion, the focus is on how we can best live it out on our side. As such, this is an extremely practical book, filled with spiritual application.

McKinley follows Owen's structure in explaining how friendship with God works. There are three main parts corresponding to each person of the Trinity. With each person of the Trinity, Owen explained that there is a particular medium or means of communion. McKinley follows suit. For example, with the Father the medium of our friendship is the Father's free, undeserved, and eternal love. On our side we're to conscientiously receive that love, revel in it, rest in it, and respond appropriately to it. McKinley explains what that looks like with concrete detail.

I did put a question mark on page 148 in McKinley's discussion of Ephesians 4:30. McKinley (and Owen) insist that it is technically impossible to grieve the Holy Spirit. Writes McKinley, "Because he is divine and lacking in nothing, he cannot be robbed of his happiness and joy. He is in no way influenced or disappointed by our actions, for that would imply weakness and changeability on his part." I'm not convinced, since the same could be said in relation to God's wrath. Do we rob God of his happiness and joy when we provoke his wrath (e.g. Deuteronomy 9:7)? If God can be

wrathful as an expression of his justice, why can't the Holy Spirit grieve as an expression of his love? That does not necessarily imply a change in the divine being or the addition of new characteristics to it. Owen was a giant of Reformed theology, but I wonder whether his understanding of divine impassibility was correct.

At times I can't help but wonder whether we Reformed folk have an allergy to the idea of a relationship with God. We seem to be more comfortable with God as a concept. Perhaps this is a reaction to the excesses of evangelicalism and its saccharine sentimentalism. But if we go back to Owen, we find a Reformed author unfolding a healthy and biblical way of understanding and living a relationship with the Triune God. As McKinley writes in his conclusion, John Owen's "*Communion with God* seems to be an antidote perfectly designed for what plagues us" (p. 159). And McKinley's *Friendship with God* delivers Owen in a palatable and lucid format. Get this book and learn to savour your relationship with the Triune God. 



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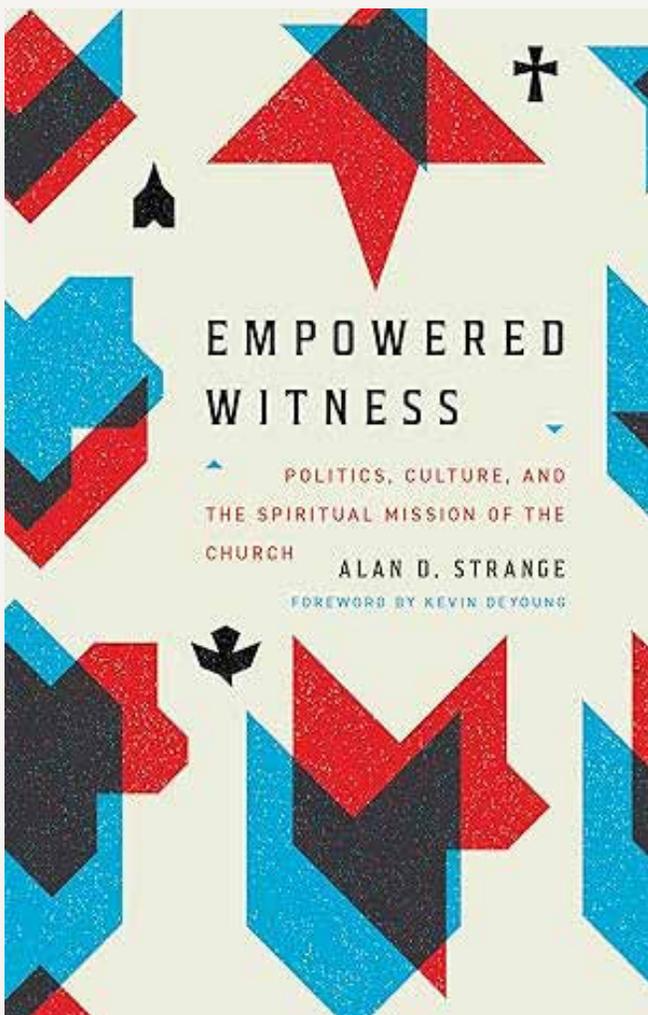
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A DELICATE DOCTRINE

RICK LUDWIG



Empowered Witness, Politics, Culture, and the Spiritual Mission of the Church, by Alan D. Strange. (Crossway, 2024). Paperback. 149 pages. \$23.99 CDN

One of the residual effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the related government public health safety restrictions on gathering was a resurged interest in the relationship between the church and state. Many hours were spent in church leadership meetings, video conferences, inter-church meetings, and on social media revisiting the biblical principles and church historical positions around this relationship in order to determine whether or not the church had a role in taking a stand from the pulpit and in the public square. While the energy around the debate has subsided, the traces of the lines drawn in the sand remain visible. Although Alan Strange’s recent book does not engage the pandemic crisis *per se*, the parallels are not difficult to envision.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH

Dr. Strange is a church history professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. *Empowered Witness* emerges from his doctoral dissertation which examines the doctrine of the spirituality of the church with focused attention on the work of Charles Hodge in the Presbyterian church in the United States during the years prior to and following the American Civil War. The premise of this book is to encourage “the church to be the church” and not subvert itself by lining up with political lobby groups or economic engineers in an attempt to help establish a renewed kingdom in this world. Strange asserts that the message of the church is spiritual and its focus is on the transformation of lives for the abiding and coming kingdom of Christ. While members of the church are called to spread the aroma of Christ throughout the culture (also in the political and economic sphere), the work of the instituted church is apolitical and has a particular eye for the great day of the Lord. This is in line with the teachings of Augustine on the church, further nuanced by Calvin and Beza. Strange angles to foster a kind of “mere spirituality” as a response to a social gospel that is emerging more and more on both sides of the 49th parallel.

MISTRUST AND ABANDONMENT

Things get a little fuzzier in respect to the application of this doctrine as he relays the complex battle between the Presbyterians of the North and the South around the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. The political tension related to the abolition of slavery spilled over into church polity with subscription proclamations generated from the North that abridged Scripture and confessions and responsive claims from the South that the slavery issue only engaged the political realm and was outside the church's purview. Charles Hodge's writings on the spirituality of the church were used and abused by both sides for political advantage and for post-war retribution. Ministers and congregations were defined and labelled by their positions in respect to the Emancipation Act. What resulted was quite a mess, a politically motivated splitting of the denomination, and a general mistrust of the carefully defined distinctions between church and state. The fallout continues as many remain willing to toss this doctrine overboard as can be witnessed in the current church/political turbulence in the United States as we face Harris vs Trump.

SECOND CHANCES

Strange encourages a sober second look at Hodge's work and its positive implications for the church today. Hodge was a moderate who laboured against extremism on either side (marginalization or politicization). The church remains the distinct voice of Christ, her head, in society. That voice remains still and small as it proclaims the message of God's love for the world in sending his Son. Necessary belief in the Son of God as Lord and Saviour is the clear call of the church of Christ for both personal redemption and for an emancipated kingdom. What became clear to me in reading this book is that the function of this doctrine requires deep humility as opposed to the political hubris and nastiness of the past that we also continue to witness today. Our Lord Jesus also sets a fine example for his church and her members in this. 



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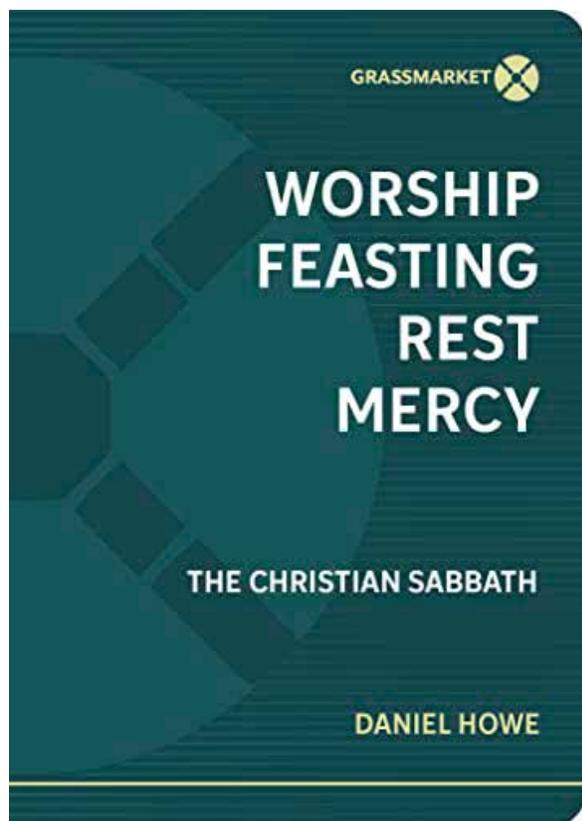
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>>	MY FRIEND
>>	MY BROTHER
>>	MY CHILD
>>	MY GRANDCHILD
>>	MY NEIGHBOUR



Forget John Mark Comer— READ THIS INSTEAD

WES BREDEHOF



Worship, Feasting, Rest, Mercy: The Christian Sabbath, by Daniel Howe. (Pittsburgh: Grassmarket Press, 2023). Paperback. 213 pages. \$10.00 USD.

I recently read John Mark Comer's *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. This book looked promising, especially since a quick survey of its contents indicated that "Sabbath" was one of the practices he was recommending for "unhurrying your life." However, this book is problematic in several ways, particularly in its promotion of contemplative spirituality. Moreover, when it comes to "Sabbath," it turns out John Mark Comer isn't really thinking about the Lord's Day or the Fourth Commandment. Doing a little further research on him reveals that he isn't a trustworthy author at any rate. Daniel Howe, on the other hand, is. And his book on the Christian Sabbath is a readable, reliable, and edifying approach to the same issue Comer was trying to address.

Daniel Howe is a Reformed Presbyterian (RPCNA) pastor in Rhode Island. This appears to be his first book. It's part of The Bedrock Series from RP publisher Grassmarket Press. This series "aims to provide clear, concise books on Christian doctrine and life from a Reformed and Presbyterian perspective." This is the second book I've read and reviewed in that series (the first being Nathan Eshelman's *Worthy*) and so far it's two for two.

Howe structures his book into two parts: Sabbath Why and Sabbath How. In the first part, he explains the Old Testament background to the Fourth Commandment and then ties it into what the New Testament says. One of the dangers when it comes to the Sabbath is legalism and I applaud Howe for how he connects the Sabbath with Christ and the gospel. As one might expect, the

second part is the more practical section with chapters dealing with worship, feasting, rest, and mercy.

As an RP pastor, Howe is committed to the Westminster Standards and they're mentioned several times. However, he does express some constructive criticism on the Westminster Confession. He writes, "It's one of the finest summaries of Christian doctrine ever written. But it's not perfect. This is my opinion, but it could use improvement in its statements on the Sabbath" (p. 113). He explains the polemical background to the Confession's "strong emphasis on what we should not do" (p. 115). He wishes that it would speak more to what we *should* do. After all, "the Bible gives a fuller picture of how to enjoy the Sabbath. It is about rest in a full sense, including feasting" (p. 115). Fair enough. Perhaps something similar could be said about our Heidelberg Catechism's treatment of the Fourth Commandment.

There are two features I think might especially interest (potential) readers. In chapter 8 on rest, he argues for a straight-forward interpretation of the Fourth Commandment: on the Lord's Day God calls us to rest from what we normally do. He answers four objections people bring forward against that understanding:

- The Sabbath was a law for the political nation of Israel, not the Christian church
- We don't see the early church keeping the Lord's Day as a day of rest
- We can rest spiritually without resting physically
- I can't possibly do everything I need to in six days!

He then goes into the real reasons we don't rest. What are they? Read the book and find out for yourself.

The other feature that might interest you is the appendices. The first one is on "Pastors and Sabbaticals." He notes that even if a pastor does take a day off instead of Sunday, it's still not the same as the Sabbath others get to enjoy. A regular sabbatical can be a way to compensate for this. The other appendix contains sample letters to employers asking for employees to be excused from Sunday work due to their Christian convictions. While these letters were written for an American context, I'm sure they can be adapted for other locales.

This is a positive, gospel-based, Reformed approach to the Lord's Day. Howe exudes joy about this gift from God. Yes, it's part of the Law of God, but when viewed from a Christian perspective it's a delight, not merely a duty. This book is well-written, witty, and practical. On this subject I used to recommend Walter Chantry's classic *Call the Sabbath a Delight*. But from now on it'll be Howe's *Worship, Feasting, Rest, Mercy*. 📖



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CRMA'S 2024 MEETING

Short Report

The AGM meeting of the Canadian Reformed Missions Association held on September 7, 2024 was opened in a Christian manner. Board members are Otto Bouwman, John Smid, Julius VanSpronsen, and now Ian Wildeboer, who will be replacing Dr. Arjan de Visser who retired after serving as vice-chair since its inception. The following boards were in attendance: Abbotsford/Vernon/Willoughby, Bethel, Dunnville, Hamilton Cornerstone, Hamilton Providence, Smithville, Hamilton Streetlight, Owen Sound, Asia, CRWRF. The following boards were not in attendance: Aldergrove, London, Smithers, Winnipeg-Redeemer. Edmonton-Immanuel, supporting Darren Versteeg as he shares the hope of salvation in the Edmonton community, was received as a member.

The boards present had the opportunity to share updates on their missions works. Rev. Victor Atallah, general director of Middle East Reformed Fellowship, also presented an update of activities with a focus on mission opportunities in Cyprus. He explained that there is a strong need for a mission board to support this project. He requested that Canadian Reformed churches see if a church could take this project under its wing. A 3-minute

MERF overview video can be found at the bottom of the MERF newsletter site: www.powerofchristatwork.net.

An *ad hoc* committee report was presented (*follow up the action item from the 2023 AGM "Ad Hoc committee to perform a SWOT and develop a strategic plan for how the various mission initiatives can work together and break down silos"*). The CRMA whose primary focus is on foreign missions has the following mandate:

- *to assist the members in the fulfillment of their respective roles and tasks;*
- *to keep one another informed of mission work being done by member churches and by other faithful Reformed churches (e.g. churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship, ICRC and NAPARC);*
- *to consult with one another about matters and issues of mutual concern;*
- *to promote missionary training, research, and development;*
- *to facilitate co-operation where there is geographical overlap or possibilities of mutual assistance;*
- *to sponsor conferences and seminars that will better equip members, churches, boards, missionaries, mission workers, and other personnel;*

- *to envision together possible target areas for future work within and outside of Canada and make suggestions to the churches;*
- *to have Canadian Reformed mission efforts represented at international mission gatherings sponsored by organizations, such as The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) or the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)*

In a discussion concerning the recent articles in *Clarion* by Dr. de Visser outlining some of the strengths and weaknesses of the CanRef approach to missions, the following weaknesses were noted: (1) Challenging to build up expertise; (2) Not geared to consultation; (3) Difficult to strategically view new initiatives/opportunities; (4) Limited communication among different mission boards and churches; (5) Lack of cooperation to resolve issues (on field, board/missionary etc). The *ad hoc* committee discussed if the CRMA could have a role in assisting growth in these areas under its present mandate and/or if it may be better to pursue other ways to promote cooperation and communication and proposed that the mission boards meet for further consultation on the question.

The members decided to have the CRMA host a Mission Consultation from April 10–12, 2025 in the Hamilton area with all the member-churches represented along with anyone with experience on the field that the boards are able to send. The purpose of the meeting will be to put together a proposal supported by all the sending churches on how to resolve the issues/challenges facing Canadian Reformed mission work. Each board will provide updates on structure/personnel, field, plans, and most importantly challenges. Guest speakers will be invited to speak on the topic of mission organization and cooperation.

Our webmaster Rev. George van Popta provided an update on mission communications and the following was decided:

- a. *Continue with the posts to www.reformedmissions.net linking them to the Canadian and American Reformed churches Facebook page*
- b. *Send a monthly PDF of the blog articles to consistories to distribute via Church Social. These illustrated stories are memorable and identifiable.*
- c. *Send weekly prayer requests to the consistories. On average, one email per month with related requests for each week of that month. The prayer request would be for a specific missionary/worker or pastor and include up-to-date prayer and praise requests for their work. Also, send this info to the churches for publication in their bulletins of that specific day and as (possibly) a PowerPoint slide for display in preservice (on-screen) church news updates. They would all follow this same format and so make it quite easy for someone offering the congregational prayer to include it. These measures should serve to raise the profile of our missionaries and their activities.*
- d. *To further investigate the support and feasibility of replacing the mission calendars with maps of where in the world our missionaries are living and working, which could then be distributed to all the churches.*

Otto Bouwman reported on the 2023 Statement of Financial Position along with the 2023 Statement of activities. He will send out a reminder to those members whose 2024 dues have not yet been received. The assessment for 2025 will remain at 0.2% of members' budgets.

The chairman thanked everyone for their attendance, cooperation, and participation. Deep gratitude was expressed for the outgoing vice chairman Dr. Arjan de Visser's service for so many years. The meeting closed with singing and prayer. 

