



Clarion

349 THE GLORIOUS ZEAL OF OUR GOD | *352* REFORMED IN THE MARITIMES

356 NO NEED TO PADDLE SOLO | *368* PULLING WEEDS | *376* SYNOD 2025: PRESS RELEASE

what's inside

This issue should find most northern readers basking in the heat of summer, perhaps reading *Clarion* on the beach or in the shade with a cold drink. We hope you'll find our offerings refreshing too, beginning with matters related to our recent General Synod Aldergrove 2025. The press release (near the back) gives a very accessible overview of the many impactful decisions of this assembly and John Siebenga's reflections as an observer help give you a sense of being there. John has joined our regular writing crew as our "Western Reporter," a counterpart to Ilse VanderMeulen, our "Eastern Reporter"—welcome aboard, John! In that capacity, he also offers a piece summarizing the Fraser Valley's "Men of Integrity" Conference. Ilse, for her part, goes about as far east as one can in Canada and describes for us something of Reformed church life in Prince Edward Island.

Our editorialist Jason VanVliet proffers his reflections on how much of the preacher should be in the preaching while Clarence VanderVelde meditates upon God's unchanging covenant relationship with changing humans who live in a fallen, ever-changing world. Vince VanBeelen, using the arresting imagery of paddling into unknown waters, encourages readers to move through life connected to and supported by fellow church members. Rick Ludwig offers some thoughtful insights on Christ's parables involving weeds and Wes Bredenhof tackles a review of a book by Gavin Ortlund on the challenging issue of "theological triage." Jan DeGelder's column *Governing the Church* returns to discuss the not-so-mundane topics of church records and archive-keeping. There is a veritable potpourri here for your summer reading!

Last but not least, we are pleased to note that this year marks the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed. What triggered the writing of this creed? Does it remain relevant for today? Jeff Morris helps answer these questions in a two-part article commemorating the writing of this ecumenical creed, the first installment of which is inside. Enjoy perusing Issue 9!

Peter Holtvliuwer

CONTENTS

346	WHAT'S INSIDE
347	EDITORIAL <i>Jason Van Vliet</i>
348	TREASURES, NEW & OLD <i>Clarence VanderVelde</i>
349	THE GLORIOUS ZEAL OF OUR GOD <i>John VanWoudenberg</i>
352	REFORMED IN THE MARITIMES <i>Ilse VanderMeulen</i>
356	NO NEED TO PADDLE SOLO <i>Vince VanBeelen</i>
358	THE COUNCIL OF NICAIA (PART 1) <i>Jeff Morris</i>
361	GOVERNING THE CHURCH <i>Jan deGelder</i>
364	MERF NEWSLETTER
366	MEN OF INTEGRITY <i>John Siebenga</i>
368	PULLING WEEDS <i>Rick Ludwig</i>
371	CLARION KIDS ASK <i>Laura Veenendaal</i>
372	BOOK REVIEW <i>Wes Bredenhof</i>
374	SYNOD 2025: VIEW FROM THE PEW <i>John Siebenga</i>
376	SYNOD 2025: PRESS RELEASE

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

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor in Chief: Peter Holtvliuwer
E: pholtvliuwer@clarionmagazine.ca
Managing Editor: Anna Nienhuis
Contributing Editors: Eric Kampen, Jason Van Vliet, Matthew VanLuik, Calvin Vanderlinde

CONTENT INQUIRIES

E: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADMINISTRATIVE INQUIRIES

W: clarionmagazine.ca
E: publisher@clarionmagazine.ca
T: 204-663-9000

ARCHIVE

Search and read past volumes online at clarionmagazine.ca/archive

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

E: letters@clarionmagazine.ca
Letters to the Editor must not exceed 300 words and are to be written in a Christian manner.
See clarionmagazine.ca for guidelines.

SUBMIT AN ARTICLE

E: submissions@clarionmagazine.ca
Only articles which agree with Clarion's guidelines will be considered for publication.
See clarionmagazine.ca for guidelines.

SUBMIT A BOOK REVIEW

E: bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca
Reviews should be 600-700 words and concern books which fit with Clarion's purpose.
See clarionmagazine.ca for more.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

clarionmagazine.ca/subscriptions

	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada	\$ 59	\$ 104
USA (USD)	\$ 74	\$ 134
International	\$ 104	\$ 178
Digital	\$ 40	

Digital can be added to print subscription at no cost.

Taxes extra for Canadian subscribers.

Subscription renewals will be invoiced unless written subscription cancellation is received.

ADVERTISEMENTS

W: clarionmagazine.ca/advertisements
E: ads@clarionmagazine.ca
Full page \$434 | ½ \$234 | ¼ \$119 | ⅛ \$64
We reserve the right to refuse ads.

Clarion

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

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

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

THE PREACHER IN THE PREACHING

Should the preacher refer to himself in his sermon? When he preached, the apostle Paul was determined to focus on “Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). Yet in his letters he also refers to himself quite often. How should we think about this?

HERALDS

John Calvin once wrote, “Nearly all the wisdom we possess... consists of two parts: the knowledge of God *and of ourselves*.¹ So how should the preacher think of himself? Our Lord uses the Greek word *kerux*, or herald, to describe the preacher (2 Tim 1:11).

A *kerux* was much more than just another courier or mailman. Usually, a *kerux* was appointed by the king to hold an official position within the royal court. He served as the king’s special envoy, delivering messages from the monarch. Often international relationships were at stake or terms of peace needed to be established after war. Clearly, every word counted! National security and prosperity hung in the balance.

When a pastor steps behind a pulpit every week and looks out at more or less the same group of people, he may not always feel like a royal *kerux*. Let’s be realistic: he may be inclined to view himself more as one sheep among many sheep. After all, he and they belong to the same congregation. After worship, they and he enjoy a cup of coffee from the same percolator. Moreover, to be an effective pastor he must *not* come across as aloof or elite.

To be sure, there remains a distinction. Most often, unlike the rest of the congregation, the pastor went to seminary. Added to that, he has spent hours studying a passage and crafting a sermon. So, he certainly has something valuable to share.

PROCLAIMING AND RESTING

Still, whether you look in Scripture, our confessions, our Church Order, or our liturgical forms, the most common action word for preachers is *proclaim*. One dictionary defines *proclaiming* as declaring a message “publicly, officially, and solemnly.” That’s more than sharing. Our King, Jesus Christ, has a royal message: the holy gospel. *This* is what the *kerux* must proclaim.

A closer look at 1 Corinthians 2 sheds light on a crucial connection. Paul, the preacher, is not preoccupied with superior speech techniques or profound human insights. Of course, every preacher should do his best to speak clearly, winsomely, and logically. But he

has a higher priority. Christ did not ordain preachers to be polished keynote speakers on the conference circuit. Yes, a conference with great speakers can be a real blessing. But the *preacher* has a distinct calling. As a special envoy of the King, he is appointed to proclaim the testimony of God, centering on Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:1-2).

Why? As the apostle explains, “so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:3). Here we come to the crux of the matter. The public proclamation of the gospel should be so dominated by an explanation and application of the sovereign, gracious work of our Triune God that the congregation exits the pews with their faith resting even more exclusively and solidly upon God’s power. Preacher-heralds need to be aware that piquing the curiosity of their listeners with intriguing references to, or anecdotes about, themselves can detract from the congregation’s focus on God from whom, through whom, and unto whom are all things (Rom 11:36). We need to be realistic about *that*, too.

Now, it would go too far to say that a preacher can never refer to himself on the pulpit. The connection between pastor and congregation must remain a personal one, and yes, also the apostle Paul refers to himself in his letters. At the same time, we should hasten to add that 1 Corinthians, along with the rest of the Pauline epistles, are precisely that: *letters*, not sermons. When Peter preaches on Pentecost Day (Acts 2) or Paul proclaims the gospel in Athens (Acts 17), it is noteworthy how infrequently they refer to *themselves*.

Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (Rom 10:17). The Spirit uses sermons to work and to strengthen faith in our hearts (LD 25). Visually speaking, the preacher is front and centre on Sundays. But spiritually speaking, let him be off to the side so that our faith continues to rest entirely in the power of God. 📖



Jason Van Vliet

Principal and Professor of Dogmatics

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

jvanvliet@crtcs.ca

¹ Calvin’s *Institutes* 1.1.1

Of Transitoriness & Constancy

They will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end

– Psalm 102:27

Life is full of change, and sometimes it is negative and painful. Good things come to an end. Perhaps you are dealing with the loss of a job or a business, separation and divorce, or the death of a loved one.

Psalm 102 speaks about the transitoriness of life—the passing nature of life—and does so by saying that the earth and the heavens “will perish . . . ; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away” (102:26). At the same time, Psalm 102 contrasts that with the constancy of God by saying, “but you will remain; . . . but you are the same, and your years have no end” (vv. 26–27). The message is that, when faced with the transitoriness of life, our comfort lies in the constancy of God.

We don’t know the author of Psalm 102 but the heading above this Psalm is “A prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.” It’s very possible that the Psalmist lived during the time of the Babylonian exile, when Jerusalem had been captured and destroyed and God’s people had been carried into exile (vv. 14, 18–22). That was a time of tremendous upheaval. The Psalmist suffered under this national distress and was reduced to skin and bones (v. 5) and lay awake at night (v. 7).

Psalm 102 uses the imagery of a garment to express the transitoriness of this world. It’s apt imagery because the heavens and the earth are the fabric of God’s hands—God made them (v. 25). They will wear out like clothing because the fall into sin led to the transitoriness of life.

The psalmist doesn’t despair but cries out to God (vv. 1–2). He fixes his hope on the constancy of God, knowing that it implies the constancy of God’s covenant promises. It’s noteworthy that the covenant name of God—the LORD (Yahweh)—is used throughout this Psalm. The covenant God will not forget his people. That awareness allows the psalmist to conclude by saying, “The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you” (v. 28).

How is this covenant relationship with God possible, and how is it that God’s faithful people have a secure future? It’s because

God sent his Son into the world to die for our sins and to rise from the grave as the victor over sin and the resulting transitoriness of life. The psalmist’s words about God hearing the groans of the prisoners and setting free those doomed to die (v. 20) are answered in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. God visited and redeemed his people by sending Christ, who came “to proclaim liberty to the captives...to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Lk 4:18). The writer to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 102:25–27 and applies it as referring to Jesus Christ (Heb 1:10–12).

We may build our lives on the constancy of Jesus Christ, who is our Saviour God! “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). This earth is subject to decay, and we experience the transitoriness of life, but Christ laid the foundation for a new earth where there will be no more transitoriness. Because of his work, believers have “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (1 Pet 1:4). We share in it by grace, through faith. We may look forward to that as we deal with the transitoriness of life in this fallen and broken world. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus! 📖

FOR FURTHER READING

Psalm 102, especially v. 25–28

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What is the meaning of the covenant Name “LORD” (Yahweh) used throughout Psalm 102, and what does it tell us about the constancy of God?
2. What does it say about God that he is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (v. 25)? Of what comfort is this to you?



Clarence VanderVelde

Minister

Rehoboth Canadian Reformed Church, Burlington-Waterdown

cjvandervelde98@gmail.com

THE GLORIOUS ZEAL OF OUR GOD

Understanding the Law of Jealousy (Numbers 5:11–33)

JOHN VANWOUDENBERG



Some passages of Scripture are difficult to understand; some are difficult even to stomach. Perhaps Numbers 5:11–33 is foremost among these, striking us as unfair and even misogynistic. It seems to fly in the face of “innocent until proven guilty.” Even before being proven guilty, a woman suspected of adultery has to go through quite a humiliating ceremony. However, instead of simply avoiding or dismissing this passage, we should consider it more closely—and with an attitude of positive anticipation. Does not our heavenly Father have great zeal for our instruction, encouragement, and hope as his children? Is that not why he has given us every passage of Scripture (Rom 15:4)?

CASE LAW FOR THE ELDERS

The scene painted by our passage is one where an Israelite husband “has a spirit of jealousy come over him” (Num 5:14). He is virtually certain that his wife has cheated on him. She denies it, but he just cannot accept that. However, he has no proof for his accusation.

We are told that the husband could go to the elders in this case, knowing what the holy God has said in his law: “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (Lev 20:10). But this husband has a problem: he cannot prove it since there are no witnesses! Yet he simply cannot shake the conviction.¹

¹ We might be concerned that such a man may be very suspicious by nature, someone who “sees a devil behind every tree.” But note how verse 14 speaks of the spirit of jealousy “coming *over* him”; it does not come “from *within* him.” It could be that rumours persist, that certain explanations of his wife are hard to accept, that his wife is pregnant even though they have had very infrequent sexual relations, or that their relationship has lately grown very cold—something most would have expected when there was adultery.



Imagine being the elders in the gate. How should they handle this? Adultery, especially in the camp of the holy God, is serious. The husband comes across as genuinely convinced and perhaps there is circumstantial evidence. But there is no proof. This is likely an example of the kind of case that the elders could bring to the priest for judgment (see Lev 5:29). That judgment could then become part of the considerations that the elders would use in future cases with similar dynamics—particularly the dynamic of jealousy (see Deut 17:8).

HOLY JEALOUSY

The term “jealousy” occurs multiple times in our text and its proper understanding is key to understanding the whole passage. “Jealousy” has a very negative ring in our ears. We teach our children not to be jealous. But consider what our God says in Exodus 34:14: “You shall worship no other god, for the LORD, *whose name is Jealous*, is a jealous God.”

This should not surprise us. In the 2nd commandment, God forbids the making of images precisely *because he is jealous*. He also informs us of the importance of following his commands: God will “visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me” . . . but will “show steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex 20:5–6). Woe to his people, down through the generations, who persist in sin! How blessed his people, down through even more generations, who love him and keep his commandments! Clearly our God, as a jealous God, has great zeal for the covenant relationship he established with his people. The health of that relationship is very important to him.

In creating us in his image, God created us to reflect him also in having a healthy sense of jealousy and zeal for relationships. This is particularly true of the marriage relationship, which he specially designed to serve as a reflection of his relationship with his people (see Eph 5:32). God created us with a special sensitivity to relationships going bad or being under attack. If a wife commits adultery and tries to hide it from her husband (or the other way around), it is not surprising if a “spirit of jealousy” comes upon the offended party.

ISRAEL’S HOLY MISSION

In Numbers 5, this “spirit of jealousy” comes upon the man at a very key time. God has just shown his great zeal for his people by majestically rescuing Israel out of Egypt and adopting Israel as his special treasured nation in this world. In Numbers 1, God takes a census of his people. In Numbers 2, he organizes the army to get ready for a special mission in his service—the mission of establishing his saving kingdom in the promised land.² Just before this passage about jealousy, God underlines (as it were), “My people, as you set out with me on my holy mission, make sure you do not tolerate uncleanness in the camp” (see Num 5:1–4).

Now put yourself in the shoes of the husband. He has just been recruited into the army of God, about to embark on a special mission. He is keenly aware of God’s holiness. He knows how God had struck down Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, when they offered unholy fire to the Lord (Lev 10:1–3). He is aware of the special nature of sexuality—and how important marriage is for children and thus for the future and growth of God’s holy nation in this world.³ In that context, the “spirit of jealousy” comes upon

² This explains why the passage focuses on the jealousy of the *husband*: only men served in the army.

³ Cf. Mal 2:15. Note also what will happen if the wife is exonerated: she will conceive and bear children (Num 5:28). The matter of “seed” is highlighted (Num 5:13).

him. How can he “just let things slide,” particularly given the zeal of God for the holiness of his camp?⁴ Would he not jeopardize the mission? Would he not thereby put the entire camp at risk?

By giving this law of jealousy, our God comes to the help of this husband. He also comes to help this wife if she has in fact *not* committed adultery. If there is uncleanness or guilt, this indeed needs to be dealt with. If not, that spirit of jealousy needs to be decisively answered and the relationship needs to be restored, also to serve well in the camp and in the army of our God in this world.

INSTRUCTION FOR TODAY

How relevant and instructive this passage is for us today! Is our holy God not even closer to us today than in that time? After all, since Pentecost, God lives within individual believers and within his church (1 Cor 3, 6). And are we not also on a special mission in this world? Are not “godly offspring” still so relevant for the cause of our God today? (See Mal 2:15; 1 Cor 7:14.) Are not godly and healthy marriages still designed to specially illustrate, to our watching children and to a watching world, the amazing zeal of our God and our Saviour for his people?

Are not godly and healthy marriages still designed to specially illustrate, to our watching children and to a watching world, the amazing zeal of our God and our Saviour for his people?

How comforting to note this amazing zeal of our God for his people! How fitting to have his Spirit renew in us a healthy jealousy, especially for our marriages! How appropriate to pursue your spouse with a love and intensity that reflects the zeal of our God! How important this is for the promotion of the saving kingdom of our God!⁵

OUR SAVIOUR

Consider the great zeal of our Saviour Jesus Christ and how he displayed that on Good Friday. He, as it were, brought his wife to

the temple—and then interrupted the ceremony! As the woman was having her hair loosened, and as the priest was holding in his hand that cup of jealousy, he, as her husband who had experienced that spirit of jealousy coming upon him, tapped his adulterous bride on the shoulder and said to her, “Step aside. Despite your unfaithfulness to me, I cannot bear to see you go through this. I have come to take your place in this ordeal.” In her place, he faced public humiliation. He was mocked, flogged, stripped of his clothing, hung on a cross.

In the words of Psalm 75:8, “in the hand of the LORD there [was] a cup with foaming wine, well mixed” that he had to “drain it down to the dregs,” as revolting as that was (see Matt 26:39). Though he could have come down from the cross, he stayed there for three long hours, to gag that cup down to its very last dregs, till he could indeed say “It is finished” (Jn 19:30).

Did his thigh then fall and his body swell (Num 5:22)? Yes—but much worse! He died as a cursed man, hanging on the cross, completely childless, with no offspring (see Isa 53:8).

Yet he in fact was not unclean at all.

Why did he do that? So that the holy God could say to his people, “Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more” (Isa 51:22). In its place he puts another cup in our hands, the cup of blessing, the cup of salvation (Ps 116:13). And in light of these amazing developments, Christ did not end up childless! In the words of Isaiah 53:10, “Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, *he shall see his offspring*; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

As believers today, *we* are the offspring of Christ! Is that not amazing?! Is that not also so incentivizing? Let’s reflect the zeal of our God! If married, give your spouse a big hug—a life-long hug! Let’s be filled with zeal for our brothers and sisters. Truly there is nothing more fitting and more important for the promotion of God’s saving kingdom in this world. ☐



John VanWoudenberg

Minister

Trinity Canadian Reformed Church, Glanbrook

jvanwouden@gmail.com

⁴Nb. the zeal of God evident also in Num 5:3–4: “if someone is unclean, send that person away, *male and female alike*.” Cf. also vs. 6 which specifies “a man or a woman.”

⁵Consider, more generally, also the relationships in the communion of saints. In 2 Cor 11:2 Paul speaks of his jealousy for the Corinthian congregation, “For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” A major part of our calling in his service is to reflect his holy zeal for good and healthy relationships, particularly in the communion of saints. This is so important for his saving mission in the church, in our families, in this world.

REFORMED IN THE *Maritimes*

ILSE VANDERMEULEN





The three ladies who organized the 2025 URC Women's Conference in Charlottetown: Kelsey Slaa, Gertrude De Boer, and Suzanne Brouwer

Many who travel to the beautiful East Coast of Canada take the opportunity to worship with one of the local Reformed congregations on Sunday. While most Canadian Reformed believers are part of larger church communities with several sister congregations nearby, the churches in the Maritimes are smaller and more spread out. Yet, these congregations are vibrant and growing, evidence that the Lord Jesus continues to gather and build his church, even in places where numbers may be few.

ISLAND CHURCH LIFE

Gertrude De Boer and her husband Solke have lived on Prince Edward Island for three decades. Solke, a retired plant pathologist, originally hails from the Fraser Valley. Gertrude grew up in Burlington, ON and traveled to British Columbia in her twenties, where she met her husband. Solke De Boer worked for twenty years at a research station for Agriculture Canada in Vancouver, before budget cuts caused the closure of the station. Solke then accepted a position at a new potato testing station in Charlottetown and the couple moved there with their four sons in 1996.

Prince Edward Island, currently counting a population of close to 180,000, has no lack of churches. It is sprinkled with picturesque churches, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. However, in the late nineties, several families, including the De Boers, longed for a church that preached the truths of the Protestant Reformation and worshipped according to the Reformed tradition.

“At the time, the Free Church of Scotland on the island consisted of a few older people and that was not a good fit for our young family,” says Gertrude. “The Christian Reformed Church was very alive and welcoming, but over the years we became concerned with

the direction that church was going in theologically.” Solke added, “We knew we had to do something: either take early retirement and move to Ontario or start another church.”

The De Boers and other concerned families reached out to the nearest United Reformed Church, which was Ebenezer Orthodox Reformed Church in Brockville, Ontario. “Their minister, Reverend Roke, and his small church enthusiastically supported our efforts, and he led the first worship services in 2007 when we started as church,” recalls Solke, who has basically been an elder in the URC in Charlottetown since those early beginnings. “All the churches in the classis in Southern Ontario prayed for us, encouraged us, and kindly loaned us their pastor for a Sunday or two. We have been richly blessed by the solid Reformed preaching provided by many different ministers on our pulpit, mostly from the URC, but also from Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Church of Scotland, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and from the Netherlands, the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk.”

Over the years, two ministers served the small congregation in Charlottetown: Rev. Nick Alons and Rev. Nathan Zekveld. In January of this year, the congregation welcomed a new minister, Rev. Maurice Luimes.

BLESSINGS AND CHALLENGES

There is no doubt that being a small, remote church brings some special challenges. The elders have to make sure they coordinate their time off-island to ensure there are enough remaining to have a worship service. “But,” Solke adds, “as an office bearer, I can say that the workload is very manageable in a smaller church.” Gertrude mentioned the variety of church backgrounds and

nationalities in the congregation, which can come with different theological backgrounds as well. This, she says, “is both enriching and challenging at times.”

The congregation in Charlottetown has seen its numbers rise and fall over the years as people move to the island but also leave. The church currently consists of around fifty members, including several students at the University of PEI. The congregation in Charlottetown is a tight knit community where a cup of coffee or tea after the morning service and heartfelt Maritime hospitality has become a staple for every guest visiting the church.

MEMBER PERSPECTIVES

Kenton and Kelsey Slaa moved from Winnipeg to Prince Edward Island in 2024, when Kenton decided to pursue his Bachelor of Education through the accelerated one-year program offered at the University of PEI. “We were so warmly welcomed into the URC congregation,” says Kelsey, who grew up attending Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church in Winnipeg. “Coming from a church of nearly 400 members to a small, close-knit congregation was a neat experience. Our brothers and sisters in Christ, both young and old, soon became wonderful friends and we enjoyed socializing with them over coffee or a potluck meal each and every Sunday. We are so thankful to the congregation for helping us feel ‘at home’ and will look back on our year on PEI with nothing but affection!”

Suzanne Brouwer moved to PEI with her husband Matt in 2022 from the Elora Canadian Reformed Church and also felt very welcome. In no time, Matt was asked to be an usher and Suzanne ended up on the calling committee. “Moving into a small congregation was a big adjustment. With fewer members but the same amount of work to keep things moving in the church, everyone is called to serve and contribute to the moving gears that helps a church do what it does. There is no hiding—your gifts and talents are called upon and put to good use!”

Suzanne enjoys meeting other believers from Reformed churches. “Since the church is smaller, you pull together with other Reformed churches. This has led to interesting exposures to other Christians and good discussions with those with different walks in the Reformed faith. Young people events, conferences, and Bible studies are often organized together to build the Reformed community here.”

WOMEN’S CONFERENCE

In April of this year, 56 women from eleven different church denominations gathered in Charlottetown for the annual Women’s

Conference organized by the United Reformed Church (URC) of Prince Edward Island. Women came from the URC, Canadian Reformed Church, Free Church of Scotland, several Presbyterian churches, and Reformed Baptist churches.

Gertrude De Boer has been spearheading this conference in the Maritimes for years. She shared how much she enjoys the fellowship with other Reformed believers who come to the conference. “This is the ninth time we’ve organized the conference, and we had a record number of participants from all over the island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick,” she said. “There are differences between our churches culturally and in church government, but I believe we can support each other and attend each other’s events, like this conference and the ARPA meetings for example.”

The Women’s Conference started off with a Friday evening session where the men joined as well. Dr. Arjan DeVisser and his wife Inge DeVisser were the invited speakers. Dr. DeVisser taught about Christian discipleship on Friday evening and on Saturday Mrs. Inge DeVisser encouraged the women to serve each other in various ways at church, in their families, and in the community. Through several activities and sessions, the topics of discipleship and servanthood were further discussed. Dr. DeVisser also led the worship services at the URC on Sunday. The weekend was a highlight for Reformed believers on the island.

REASONS FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

The De Boers felt the Lord had a task for them when they moved to PEI and they are encouraged by the new growth and enthusiasm in Charlottetown. Gertrude says, “God is so good. It is his church. These young families are really committed; not to just having a social club to have fun together, but they have a strong desire to be faithful. And I love seeing that. It feeds us as older people too.”

To train the new generation of leaders, council recently started a group study of the book *Called to Serve: Essays for Elders and Deacons*. Solke said, “We were so pleased to see that most of the men are willing to come. It is very encouraging. Life here is not as busy as in Ontario or the Fraser Valley, with all the events and amenities, but we have been so blessed living on this beautiful island!” 



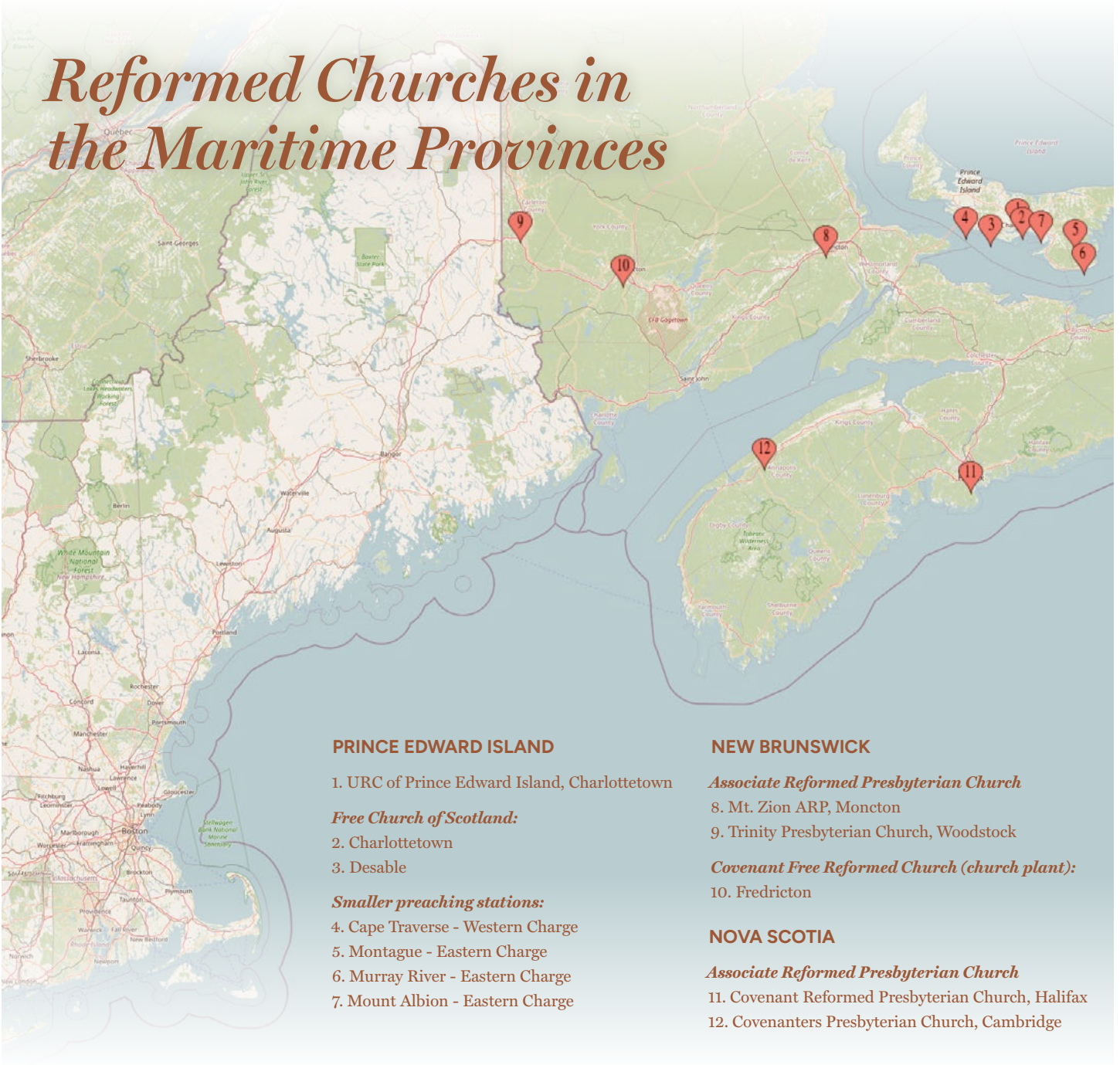
Ilse VanderMeulen

Elora, Ontario

ilsevandermeulen@hotmail.com



Reformed Churches in the Maritime Provinces





NO NEED TO *PADDLE SOLO*

Imagine a crystal clear, gently flowing river with steep shores that rise against majestic evergreen-topped cliffs. A mighty golden eagle glides effortlessly by as it calls out to the morning in its search for prey, and all is peaceful. The air is fresh and clean, the sun is shining, and the sky is a deeper blue than you've ever seen. You are in a canoe . . . all alone.

The river seems peaceful, and you barely notice the current that's making your paddling so much easier. You continue drifting along, giving little thought to the water's behaviour—until your

canoe suddenly bounces off a boulder just beneath the surface. You glance over the side but press on, ignoring the rocks below and the faint, dull roar in the distance. You reason that you can always turn back if danger appears. After all, you're enjoying yourself.

Then, as you round the next bend, your heart skips a beat and your hands begin to tremble. Just ahead lies a rushing stretch of rapids—giant boulders and tree snags jut into the river, ready to impale an unprepared passerby. A surge of adrenaline floods your veins as you swing the canoe around. But the current is too

strong, and the steep cliff faces on both sides mean there's no place to beach your canoe.

You realize you've been "asleep at the paddle" and chastise yourself for not turning around when you had the chance. You paddle with all your strength, but the current has taken control. In a final act of desperation, you cry out for help, praying someone will hear you before it's too late.

A DIFFERENT RESULT

Imagine how the story might change with just a few adjustments. This time, you're not alone. A friend sits in the canoe with you, someone who has traveled this river before and knows the dangers ahead. He warns you that the current up ahead is too strong, so you tie your canoe to a second canoe filled with friends heading in the same direction. They tie off to others and before long you've formed a flotilla of canoes bound together. Now, you're all paddling upstream, encouraging one another and pulling together.

CHURCH FLOTILLA

Think of your local church—the body of believers—as that flotilla of canoes, with you in their midst. You may not know the person in the lead canoe, or the one several boats over, but you're still connected to them. So, how strong is your knot? How secure is your lifeline?

Is your connection strong enough that you'd ask for help from the person in the canoe beside you? Or does your lifeline resemble a thin piece of yarn, suitable only for shallow conversations about news, sports, weather, politics, or the latest doctrinal controversy as you drift past one another?

Are you settling for *pubship* instead of *fellowship*? Is yours only a casual camaraderie rather than the deep bond God designed his church to have? These brothers and sisters can paddle with you toward safer waters. Why not ask the ones ahead how to avoid those submerged boulders? Elders, deacons, mentors, pastors—people who have already navigated treacherous waters—are there to help.

Others can also teach you proper technique, so you paddle more wisely. Maybe you've already hit a boulder and suffered damage. Someone a canoe or two away might know how to patch your boat. Spend time with them. Learn from their God-given wisdom. Share how God is at work in your life and invite them to do the same.

HOW WE'VE RAFTED UP

Your church likely offers ways to foster fellowship: Bible studies, accountability groups, mentorships, visits, or casual meetups at a

coffee shop or on your deck. But is that fellowship deep? Or is it limited to sporadic theological debates and surface-level concerns? What does deep fellowship that reflects the living body of Christ look like?

In my home congregation, we've added some layers to our men's Bible study group, calling it *Forged*, inspired by Proverbs 27:17. This disciplined group meets weekly, year-round. Each meeting, we identify and confess the lies we've believed during the week. We then apply scriptural truths to those lies, sharing how they've affected our hearts and relationships. We commit to one specific change for the coming week and resolve to encourage at least two other members with a phone call or visit.

These weekly check-ins are more than casual chats. They are a way to navigate the next stretch of rough water together. We share our struggles and fears, ask for help, and paddle as one. In encouraging others, we ourselves are encouraged. We become the living body of Christ "... joined and held together by every supporting ligament, growing and building itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph 4:16). Or, as the writer of Hebrews exhorts us: "... encourage one another every day, as long as it is called 'Today'..." (3:13).

This is a tall order in today's individualistic, iPhone-centered culture. But God is building a masterpiece—his church: "You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor 12:27).

CONCLUSION

On this river of life, our natural tendency is to drift downstream alone, wherever the current takes us. If you're not paddling, you're floating toward the rapids. If you're only paddling lightly, you're matching the current... but going nowhere. You could be pointed upstream toward the lake but all the while floating back toward the rapids if you're not connected to others.

Don't paddle solo. Recognize your deep need for the body of believers. Embrace the Holy Spirit's work through others in your life. Paddle with the saints toward a destination of eternal beauty: "... the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city" (Rev 22:1).

Let us each put intentional effort into enjoying rich, meaningful fellowship, right where God has currently (pun intended) placed us. 

Vince Van Beelen

Vernon, BC

Celebrating 1700 Years

THE BIRTH OF THE NICENE CREED

JEFF MORRIS

In AD 325, bishops from across the Roman empire gathered in Nicaea for the first ecumenical council. The Council of Nicaea was a watershed moment for the church, both politically and theologically. May 2025 marked the 1700th anniversary of that important council, and this two-part article series will commemorate the event by reflecting on its outcome. In Part I, we will recall the crucial theological dispute that led to the council and see how it was settled. In Part II, we will consider the aftermath of Nicaea, and how further theological pressure led to the revised Nicæan-Constantinople Creed that we, along with churches around the world, confess to this day.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL PRESSURE

The council of Nicaea was a critical political and theological moment for the church. It was politically crucial because, in the centuries leading up to Nicaea, Christianity was illegal in the Roman empire. Persecution, while sporadic, could be brutal. By

the 4th century, in part due to the fact that many Christians faced martyrdom with courage and joy, Christianity had grown substantially. In 311, after a savage bout of persecution, the emperor Galerius changed course and decreed Christianity to be tolerable. This decree was upheld and extended by Constantine and Licinius in 313, who declared Christianity legal in the Roman empire through the Edict of Milan. The perception of Christianity was changing rapidly, and the council of Nicaea would soon give Christians a radically new societal status.

The early church not only faced external pressure from the Roman empire, but it also faced internal pressure to clarify its doctrines. We live 1700 years after the council of Nicaea, so it can be difficult for us to appreciate the theological pressure on church fathers such as Alexander of Alexandria and Athanasius. At the time, extremely powerful Greek philosophical ideas flourished, and these ideas influenced how theologians interpreted the teachings of Scripture. For example, philosophers such as Plato

taught that the source of all things is “full perfection of being.” The Greek philosophers considered multiplicity a deficiency, so a being that is “full perfection of being” must be one in the sense that “full perfection of being” is devoid of all parts, whether physical or metaphysical. Further, the philosophers argued that a fully perfect being cannot change, for if it could, it would not have been “full perfection of being.”¹

The notion that the source of all things must be one and cannot change might seem like needless philosophical speculation to some Reformed Christians. That’s partly because Reformers like John Calvin were more interested in the practical application and benefits of Christian living than in metaphysics. But the influence of Greek philosophy in the ancient world meant the church fathers had no choice but to confront and clarify the metaphysical commitments of Christianity, paving the way for thinkers like Calvin to prioritize other matters.

GREEK PHILOSOPHY

Like today, theologians in the early church were often educated in philosophy. This was beneficial for a number of reasons. For one, Scripture is not a textbook on metaphysics. Further,² awareness of Greek philosophy also allowed theologians to present the faith to philosophically trained non-believers and to defend Christianity.³ Still, Greek philosophical ideas also led to a significant problem that Nicaea would address.

In particular, a priest named Arius, who had been trained in philosophy, believed from Scripture that God is the source of all things. Of course, if God is the source of all things he is full perfection of being. We know from Greek philosophy that there is no multiplicity, nor change, in full perfection of being, which implies that God is one and he cannot change. Scripture confirmed to Arius that God is one (Deut 6:4), and he cannot change (Exod 3:14). So, Arius adopted this Greek metaphysical framework of God and then read the rest of Scripture having in mind that God is one and cannot change. This led Arius to surmise that, if God is one and cannot change, then Jesus Christ cannot be of the same essence as the Father. If Jesus Christ is of the same essence as the Father, Arius reasoned, there would be Father and Son, so God is no longer one. Further, God becoming incarnate is ruled out by the fact that full perfection of being cannot change.

Now, if Jesus Christ is not of the same essence as the Father and God cannot become incarnate, then what are we to make of the Son’s relationship to the Father? According to Arius, the Son is God’s first created being. Further, Arius taught that after creating the Son, the Son created the rest of creation, so the Son is unique and supreme among created beings and responsible for creating everything other than himself.

CHANGING POLITICS

If you feel disoriented by Arius’s teachings, you are not alone. The early church was equally muddled. The church had been preaching the gospel, baptizing the nations, and establishing governance, liturgies, and worship practices, all while defending against brutal physical attacks and outside religious influence. Now, one of their own had combined powerful insights from Greek philosophy with Scripture to explain God’s relationship to the Son in a way that had not yet been explored. Given the complexity of the subject matter and the sophistication of Arius, an internal conflict developed among Christians across the Roman empire over whether Arius was correct. The venue for settling that question was the Council of Nicaea.

Emperor Constantine was sympathetic to Christianity and did not appreciate the disruption Arianism caused throughout his kingdom. So, he called all the bishops in the vast territory of the Roman empire to convene a council at Nicaea to settle the Arian controversy. For the first time in history, with many still carrying the scars of persecution, the universal scope of Christianity became apparent to the 300 bishops from across the empire who met in Nicaea in May 325. While some Bishops had previously corresponded and all of them shared the same faith in Christ, this was their first universal face-to-face gathering, and it was held under the blessing of the emperor of Rome.

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

There were many items on the agenda for the Council of Nicaea, but the most pressing matter was Arianism. Constantine himself presided over the council, but otherwise only bishops were permitted to attend the proceedings. Since Arius was a priest, Eusebius of Nicomedia presented the Arian view. Many bishops, unfamiliar with the details of Arius’ teachings and without any

¹ Many theologians would eventually agree that God does not change in this way, as Augustine writes, “For that which is changed does not retain its own being; and that which can be changed, although it be not actually changed, is able not to be that which it had been; and hence that which not only is not changed, but also cannot at all be changed, alone falls most truly, without difficulty or hesitation, under the category of being.” (Augustine, *On the Trinity*, Book V, Ch. 2) Still, they would reconcile God’s unchangeability with creation, the incarnation, and the trinity.

² Augustine incorporated many neo-Platonic views into his systematic presentation of God, while Thomas Aquinas helpfully articulated the Christian faith on the framework of Aristotelianism.

³ Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria are famous for successfully presenting Christianity to pagans through the lens of Greek philosophy, while Irenaeus is known for his stellar defense of the faith against Gnosticism, enabled by his training in philosophy.

existing doctrinal statement regarding the relationship between the Father and the Son, assumed the council would accept some compromise between Arian and anti-Arian parties. But when Eusebius presented the notion that the Son was created, the bishops erupted with outrage, declaring in unison “heresy!” before tearing up Eusebius’ written statement and stomping on it.

Although the bishops did not have a formally articulated doctrine of the incarnation or the Trinity, they unanimously agreed that the rule of faith passed down from Jesus through the apostles was that the Son is not created because Jesus is God. Thus, to counter the Arian heresy, the council developed what has become the universal standard of orthodoxy, namely, the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed represents the earliest systematic account of the orthodox Christian faith that was adopted by the universal church. It is a standard maintained to this day, with every major Christian denomination including Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglicans affirming its truth. Its core

confession is that the Son of God is light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one essence with the Father.

AFTER THE NICENE CREED

Unfortunately, although the Nicene Creed officially rejected Arianism and established that the Son is God, Arianism continued to advance across the empire, also denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Next time we will review arguments of Athanasius for orthodoxy that eventually won the day, and how the Cappadocian Fathers defended the divinity of the Holy Spirit, resulting in the revised Nicene-Constantinople Creed that we recite to this day. 



Jeff Morris
Theologian for the Reformational Study Centre and adjunct lecturer in philosophy at Redeemer University
Streetlight Christian Church, Hamilton
jeffbmorris@hotmail.com

GIVE THE GIFT OF CLARION

Subscribers get **25% Off** the first year of a gift subscription!

Go to clarionmagazine.ca/giftpromo to sign up or contact your local Clarion correspondent. You can choose to have the subscription roll over to the reader (at regular price) after one year.

»	MY FRIEND
»	MY BROTHER
»	MY CHILD
»	MY GRANDCHILD
»	MY NEIGHBOUR



Worth Remembering

JAN DEGELDER

Do you remember your birthday? Of course! How can you possibly forget with a festive reminder every year? Do you remember the day you were baptized? Uhhhh . . . no! Should I? Would that be important enough for an annual celebration? Let's think about this a bit more.

Some of us have come to faith and were baptized as adults. That was an important moment on an important day in your life. You will remember the water on your face. If you were baptized as a baby, you won't remember the water on your head, but that does not make the event less important. If you don't know the date, try to find your baptism certificate. If you cannot locate it, or if

you never received one, ask the person who keeps the records of your church. After all, we do have Article 64 in our Church Order, which says: "The consistory shall maintain church records in which the names of the members and the dates of their birth, baptism, public profession of faith, marriage and departure or death are properly recorded."

It reads like a simple, practical rule—keep track of church statistics. This helps the elders remember who the communicant and the non-communicant members are under their care and allows for a smooth transition when members move and join another local church. But there is more to it than just administrative interest.



MORE THAN STATISTICS

The deeper reason for Article 64 comes out more clearly in the location and wording of this stipulation before the revision of our Church Order in 1983. At that time, the article about church records was Article 60. The old articles 56–59 all spoke about baptism, and then Article 60 said: “The names of those baptized, together with those of the parents and witnesses, and likewise the date of Baptism, shall be recorded.” It says nothing about recording other events—just baptism. This goes straight back all the way to the Church Order of Dort (1618/19).

However, since the 19th century, in most countries it is the civil authorities who register births, marriages, and deaths. This makes sense. Such data has legal ramifications in public society. Only the church continues to record the date of your baptism (and, since 1983, also your profession of faith). Why is that?

In Article 57, the Church Order speaks about baptism as “sealing the covenant of God.” In other words, by recording your baptism the church acknowledges the significance of God’s grace and faithfulness in your life. Your baptism certificate is proof that, then and there, God assured you who you are and who you belong to. Old Article 60 also required recording the names of the parents. After all, they are the ones who promise to instruct you in the doctrine

of God’s Word, so that, by God’s grace and the Holy Spirit, you learn to respond in faith to what God has promised you when he included you in his covenant.

When you understand what it means to be baptized and you recognize the impact of your baptism, recording this event in your life becomes extremely meaningful. You are incorporated, or grafted, into God’s covenant and congregation! (see Lord’s Day 27.) This goes way beyond collecting statistical data. It was the day that God publicly declared: “I am your God and you are my child.” That makes it the most beautiful day of your life, really. Perhaps celebrating (or at least remembering) the day of your baptism is not as weird as it sounds.

GOD MADE THE FIRST MOVE

From the day of your baptism onward, your life is marked by that covenant relationship. That’s why we don’t say: “*I have been* baptized,” but “*I am* baptized.” This is how God’s children go through life. To be sure, in your baptism God also calls you to believe in Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, to put your faith in the Saviour’s sacrifice for the forgiveness of all your sins. Baptism does not remove the need to be born again. But the records of the church confirm that God’s love came first.

The records of the church remind you of what identifies you today. Remembering your baptism is remembering the day that God proclaimed your new identity. Never think of yourself as separate from Jesus. I am his and he is my Lord.

You can try to deny this and ignore your baptism, but you can never undo your baptism. If you attempt to do so, the records of the church will testify against you. What did you do with God's promises? How did you respond to God's love?

All of this underlines that what we have agreed upon in Article 64 of the Church Order is important, not just for practical, statistical reasons, but for spiritual reasons. Is it not liberating to know that I don't have to find out on my own who I am, what my identity is? We can confidently confess that, "I am not my own but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ" (Lord's Day 1). This is what God himself confirms in your baptism. He determines who I am, before I could even think or say something about my identity.

Therefore, "the consistory shall maintain records with the baptism dates of all the members." Most of our churches use the Church Social app and I would encourage the app's creators to add under "membership information" the date of baptism. I do remember from the past, and occasionally I still hear it, that an attestation came in without the date of baptism. "We couldn't find it. . . !" That's a shame. Those records should be kept carefully, so that they are complete and accessible.

JUST STUFFY STUFF?

This brings me to another one of those often-overlooked church order articles, Article 43: "The consistories and the major assemblies shall ensure that proper care is taken of the archives." How important is that? Apart from a few serious history buffs, who cares about archives? The Bible says that everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved (John 3:16; Romans 10:11-13). Is that not what the church is all about? How do archives fit into this picture?

Imagine a consistory meeting in, let's say Lystra, in the second half of the 1st century. There have been some controversies in the congregation about what is required in order to be saved. A long-time elder, br. Nestor, says "many years ago we got a letter from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this. I remember that it was very helpful and encouraging" (Acts 16:4-5). "I didn't know that," says br. Jason, who is much younger, "Is that letter still around?" "I don't think so," br. Nestor replies. "At that time br. Hermes took it home, but he is gone."

The reality is that some issues will come back, perhaps in a different format or context. That's why in the old Church Order

we had Articles 45 and 46. The intention of these articles was to prevent matters from being discussed and decided that had been dealt with already at previous assemblies. Since the 17th century already, several synods have emphasized how important it is to be aware of previous decisions. Indeed, the church is in the business of proclaiming and teaching the gospel of salvation by grace alone. But that includes the responsibility to guard this gospel, to refute false doctrine, and to stay the course of faithful submission to God's Word.

Today we have this rule against unnecessarily revisiting past matters in Article 33 CO, but to facilitate this, Article 43 has been added about caring for the archives. That's not the only function of archives. Henry Ford is famously quoted as having said "history is bunk" (although historical nitpickers will tell you that he actually said, "history is more or less bunk"). But his point is clear: don't bother with the past. However, God's people know there is more to it than that. Archives allow us to tell the story of when and how the church, or the churches, have been faithful or have become unfaithful in times past. To put it differently: archives allow us to recognize and tell the next generation how the Lord has gathered, defended, and preserved his church throughout the ages.

WHO'S YOUR ARCHIVIST?

Major assemblies usually appoint an "archive church." But who is responsible for this in your local church? You need an archivist who is genuinely interested in keeping the archives in good order and who is willing to learn how to do it. A lot of material comes to the table of consistories and major assemblies. Discerning what exactly has historical significance and what does not is somewhat open for interpretation. That makes it helpful to give clear instruction as to the materials that should be kept.

I know the archives of a local church in Canada or elsewhere are only a very tiny part of the history of the great church gathering work. But that's not a good reason to become sloppy and negligent when it comes to taking proper care of the documents that have historical significance for the history of the local church or the federation. 



Jan DeGelder

Minister Emeritus

Redemption Canadian Reformed Church, Flamborough

jdegelder8@gmail.com



www.merf.org

MERF News

June 2025



Middle East Reformed Fellowship—“Declaring the Whole Counsel of God”

“Faithful, Fruitful and Cost-Effective Indigenous Missions!”

Praise & Prayer



MERF-Indonesia online & in-person Sunday school teacher training and children ministry

Evangelism & Church Extension

Indonesia Media & Children’s Ministries – Praise God for online Sunday school and Sunday school teacher training blessing many children in distant communities and remote islands. Pray for upcoming in-person MERF Vacation Bible School and teacher training events.

Arabic Media Ministry – Praise God for MERF’s uplifting Arabic gospel radio & internet programs reaching suffering families in areas of insecurity and armed conflict in Sudan, Yemen, Syria, the West Bank & Gaza. Thank God for the witness of Arab Christians living in these places. Pray especially for the hundreds of thousands recently made homeless,

hungry, injured, orphaned and/or having lost family members to find hope and peace in Christ.

Farsi Media Ministry – Praise God for enabling Iranians, Afghanis and other Farsi-speakers who have never heard God’s Word to hear it over social media. Please pray for those hearing the gospel for the first time and for the Lord’s provision of a qualified man to lead the team.

Ethiopia Media Ministry & Evangelism Support – Praise God for good responses to the MERF Amharic, Oromo & Somali language gospel radio broadcasts as well as translation and distribution of a Westminster Shorter Catechism course for youth. Pray for the Ethiopian churches with whom MERF partners in supporting rural pastors &

evangelists.

Lahore, Pakistan Bible-believing Churches & Calvin Schools – Praise God for faithful witness to Christ in very needy communities through Christian schools & Bible literacy programs in Lahore and neighboring towns. Pray for wisdom, perseverance and unity in living as a light for Christ among the Muslim majority.

Please pray for the Lord’s provision of a qualified pastor/evangelist for Cyprus.

Biblical Training

Lokichoggio, Kenya – Despite serious tribal conflicts in neighboring South Sudan, praise God for:

1) the safe return to home churches of the first 2025 East African grads from the MERF Center inten-

sive 3-month Augustine Program of biblical training course

2) the safe arrival of the second 2025 group of trainees, mainly from across the vast country of South Sudan from different tribal churches. Praise God for the peace in Christ between trainees from tribes who are traditionally enemies.

Mwanza, Tanzania – Praise God for the third year of



MERF Arabic Gospel Media Ministry team includes full-time staff & volunteers

See MERF’s 3-minute video & 12 issues of MERF News: powerofchristatwork.net



MERF Augustine Program Biblical Training in Mwanza, Tanzania

Tanzanian biblical training in the Swahili language by MERF Lokichoggio grads. Pray for the two groups of church leaders receiving training in alternating sessions.

Ethiopia – Praise God for various regional biblical training conferences along with translation and distribution of sound Christian books for church leaders in Muslim majority areas in the Amharic, Oromo and Somali languages.

Java & Sulawesi islands, Indonesia – Praise God for the many keen participants in MERF biblical training online from many islands and also in-person at MERF ministry centers.

MERF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support! Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through

www.merf.org/support
e-transfers:

merfcanada@gmail.com

Pray that what they learn will enable them to more faithfully serve Christ in their home churches and communities.

Please pray for the Lord's provision of two experienced, English-speaking Bible Teachers with vision for long term service. ONE for EAST AFRICA & ONE for INDONESIA.

Diaconal Aid

Lebanon – Praise God for MERF's partnership with volunteers from Lebanese churches to meet basic needs of southern Lebanese families from several churches displaced from near the southern borders, along with neighbors to whom they are witnessing. Pray for the Lord's provision for the needs of many Syrian Christians who had to flee for refuge to Lebanon after Islamists suddenly took over Syria. Pray for those remaining in the country and for lasting peace and stability.

Bethlehem, West Bank Palestine – Praise God

for MERF's partnership with Baraka Church to meet basic food needs of church families and others suffering due to the economic crisis from continuing military activities.

Ethiopian Churches in Muslim areas – Praise God for the faithfulness of persecuted Christians and that the MERF-Ethiopia team can encourage them from God's Word and address their needs. Every year several church buildings are burned down by Muslim extremists. Thank the Lord that MERF can assist in rebuilding them. Pray for the Lord's protection and for His grace and wisdom

for these Christians to love and forgive their Muslim neighbors.

MERF ministries of *Evangelism & Church Extension, Biblical Training and Diaconal Aid* faithfully and cost-effectively equip Christians and churches in Arab and Muslim lands to bring the gospel to their neighbors. God is blessing and many are coming to faith in Christ, just as He promised to Abraham – “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (Genesis 3:15)

Thank you for your fellowship and partnership through prayers and support.



MERF-Ethiopia diaconal aid to suffering churches

A photograph of a man with glasses, wearing a dark suit and a white shirt, standing at a wooden podium. He is gesturing with his hands while speaking. The background features large windows looking out onto a green landscape. A large black speaker is visible on the left side of the stage.

MEN OF INTEGRITY CONFERENCE

In 2011, five men from the Langley Canadian Reformed Church got together to begin a men's conference in British Columbia. The aim was to host a conference for men of all ages who wanted to grow in their service of God in the contexts of church, home, and work. Under the name "Men of Integrity," the first men's conference was held in February 2012. On April 11–12, 2025, Men of Integrity held their 13th conference.

Held on the grounds of the beautiful Stepping Stones Retreat in Deroche, BC, the 2025 conference brought together approximately 160 men of all ages to be energized by and motivated by the guest speaker, Jojo Ruba, a Christian apologist from Calgary, AB. Though the majority of the audience was Canadian and American Reformed, there were also participants from a Mennonite church, an Alliance church, many from the United Reformed Church, and some from the Free Reformed churches.

The theme for Mr. Ruba's talks was *The Gospel in Action: Conversations that Matter*. In the first session on Friday evening, he took the men through "Six reasons to trust the Bible":

- the Bible is filled with prophecies, of which the majority have been fulfilled,
- the Bible, with 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament, together comprising 66 books, has an amazing unity

- the Bible answers the BIG questions of life: why we are here, what went wrong and how that is fixed
- the Bible is historically correct and verifiable
- the Bible actually changes lives
- the Bible is powerful.

These six reasons to trust the Bible, Ruba pointed out, ought to move believers to step out and talk to their neighbours. A question that Ruba wanted the men to ponder was "How much do you have to hate someone to not tell him/her the gospel that would save them from eternal destruction?" That question rested heavily on the audience as they moved into discussion groups to contemplate this and some of the other points in Ruba's talk. After a time of Q & A and praise and worship, the men retired for the evening.

At 8:00 the next morning, the men gathered over breakfast, preparing themselves to be challenged once more and they were not disappointed. The second session dealt with "Conversations that Matter." Ruba reminded us from the outset that we are ambassadors of Christ—the only living letter of Jesus Christ that an unbeliever may ever read. He reviewed the hostility that is in our world, between different groups but especially toward Christianity. Using Jesus's interaction with the rich young ruler recorded in Mark 10:17–22, Ruba highlighted four traits that we ought to keep

in mind as we talk to our unbelieving neighbour: content, context, communication, and character.

In relation to the first point, content, Ruba congratulated the Reformed churches for their insistence on knowing the catechism and their Bible. On that basis, Christians share their faith knowing that Christianity is a true reflection of reality. The second trait is context, or what you know about the person you're speaking with. Jesus addressed the rich young man as one who knew the law, therefore conversing with him on that knowledge. The third trait to keep in mind in a conversation is communication. *How* the truth is shared will have a profound effect on the one hearing it. The fourth trait is character. Mark records that Jesus loved that rich young ruler. That quality of love in a Christian's character has to be evident in conversation with unbelievers. That was clearly shown in how Jesus gave to the rich young ruler exactly what he needed to hear at that moment. It was noted too that Jesus did not

ask the rich young man to do something that Jesus himself had not already done—he had given up everything to save humanity.

Session three focused around group discussion of several specific scenarios that Ruba had come across in his ministry. This took what was just taught and asked the men to put the essential four traits into practice.

As he summed up the sessions to wrap up the conference, Ruba left the men with this question: what are unbelievers reading when they read you? One hundred and sixty men returned to their homes rejuvenated and challenged. What a blessing! 

John Siebenga

Chilliwack, BC

jbsiebenga@gmail.com





PULLING WEEDS

JOHN LUDWIG



Like many others, the summer job that got me through post-secondary education was landscaping. On my first day, I joined a large maintenance crew tasked with getting a corporate complex ready for spring annual planting. As my foreman introduced me to the first of what seemed like an unending string of garden beds, he told me that I would be weeding for the day. As I stared down at the jumble of plants in the beds I naively asked, “Which ones are the plants and which are the weeds?” He smiled as he carefully explained that they are actually all plants, just some of them are undesirable where they are, which makes them weeds. After identifying a few different plants, he suggested I weed carefully so as not to harm the plants that were to stay. It’s probably good that he mentioned that as I was thinking it might be just as easy to turn the whole thing over and start fresh. This was going to be hands and knees work, painstaking and labour-intensive. It felt like a day that would never end. Interestingly, on my next shift I was “promoted” to the construction crew. I always imagined that the foreman saw more potential in me than just a weed puller. Many years later I’m beginning to second guess that assumption.

MESSY GARDENS

Weed pulling in the Bible is closely connected with the fall into sin. One of the repercussions of Adam’s and Eve’s transgression is that the natural, God-given harmony of the garden is ruined. Thorns and thistles erupt from the earth and seek to choke out the good plants. Perennial weed pulling is the plight of mankind as we strive to have dominion over the earth and subdue it. Weeds not only make more work; they also make work frustrating. Now it is by the sweat of the brow and I imagine callouses, bruised knees, and sore backs are all part of that. Weeds are emblematic of the messiness of human life after our banishment from Eden. The seeds of sin sprout up in us and all around us.

The Lord Jesus talked about weeds during his ministry in two contrasting parables. The well-known parable of the sower (Matt 13:1–23) illustrates how the gospel goes out to everyone. Jesus likened it to a farmer distributing seed that falls in and around the garden. The seeds that did best put down deep roots and grew well in the most well cultivated soil, free of competing weeds, hardened ground, or rocky shallowness.

Like my patient foreman, Jesus needed to explain this further to the disciples for them to get the meaning. In doing so, Jesus also elaborates on the significance of weeds. He explains that the weeds that choke the gospel are *the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for other things*. We have to admit that these are not far off also for us today. I’m sure Jesus and the disciples were also well aware of the proverb about the neglected and overgrown vineyard (Prov 24:30–32). His parable serves both as an encouragement and



a warning for us to not be lackadaisical about keeping up with our personal weeding. Keeping the soil of our hearts cultivated and weed free is spiritually intensive work. With the help of the Spirit, we need to keep weeding our patch for ongoing growth and a fruitful harvest.

CAUTIOUS CULTIVATION

Strikingly, following the parable of the sower, Jesus shared a parable of weeds with a much different emphasis. He compares the kingdom of heaven to a landowner sowing good wheat seed, but while he is sleeping his enemy adds weed seed throughout the field (Matt 13:24-30). Eventually, as the wheat came up so did the weeds. The plants grew side by side and were seemingly hard to distinguish from each other. The workers are alarmed at the messy fields and reported the damage. Naturally, they ask if they should get busy weeding the field to protect the wheat. The landowner recognizes the enemy's hand in this but also sees the potential for collateral damage. He tells the workers that they should not weed now because they will risk uprooting good plants. He chooses to let them grow alongside each other until the harvest. Then it will be clear what is a fruitless weed and what is fruit-bearing wheat.

This parable tells us that the kingdom of heaven comes into our communities, not apart from them. It is not easy for us to tell weeds from wheat, and Christ tells us to bear with weeds now for the sake of his full harvest in the future. We should be cautious about uprooting or writing off others before the final harvest is here. The church and its members have to be careful not to work at cultivating their own patch while weed-spraying their neighbour's. Jesus speaks a lot about loving and caring for and doing good for our neighbour in his name and for the sake of the gospel. Why? He waits patiently to discern the weeds from the wheat. He allows time for growth and maturing. He does this for you and for me and for our neighbours.

GLORIOUS GARDENER

That gets me back to reflecting on my foreman's decision so many years ago. I was sure he saw more potential for me with hammer and chisel and rock than fiddling around in the garden bed pulling weeds. I thought he was promoting me to more serious work. Now I am beginning to understand I wasn't actually ready for weeding. I was too brutish, unaware of the sensitivities of the plants and the need for careful attention. I lacked the finesse necessary to tend the beds, to discern my own weeds, to respect the tender roots of the fledgling plants alongside the plants that may not belong there. I needed to learn when and what to pull and when to leave well enough alone. I needed to grow more myself first.

Now when I bend down, my knees crack a little more and it does not take long for me to feel my back tighten up, but my eyes are a little clearer to see what is growing, and my aging hands are more cautious. I'm learning to look at the garden with the loving eyes of my Saviour. And when I do, I don't only see a jumble of plants. I see tender shoots coming up that need care and time to grow, and I see my weeds that need plucking. I take the time to breathe in the fresh air and marvel at what is actually all going on in the garden. It still is God's beautiful and harmonious work in Christ. 



Rick Ludwig

Streetlight Christian Church, Hamilton

rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com

CLARION KIDS ASK!

Why does the minister raise his hands at the end of church?

- Lukas, age 12

Hello Lukas,

When the minister raises his hands at the end of the church service, he is giving the congregation the *benediction*. You might not know that word. "Benediction" comes from two Latin words: "bene" means "good" and "dicere" means "to speak." The benediction is *God's good word*—spoken to his people! We also call this a *blessing*.

The reason that your minister raises his hands in the church service started already in the Old Testament. When Aaron the High Priest would bless the people of Israel, he would lift up his hands. In Numbers 6:22–23, you can read that it was God who told Aaron to bless the people. And if you keep reading, you will read the words you hear every Sunday when the minister raises his hands! God's good word promises his people that he will bless you and keep you, he will watch over you and take care of you, and he will give you peace.

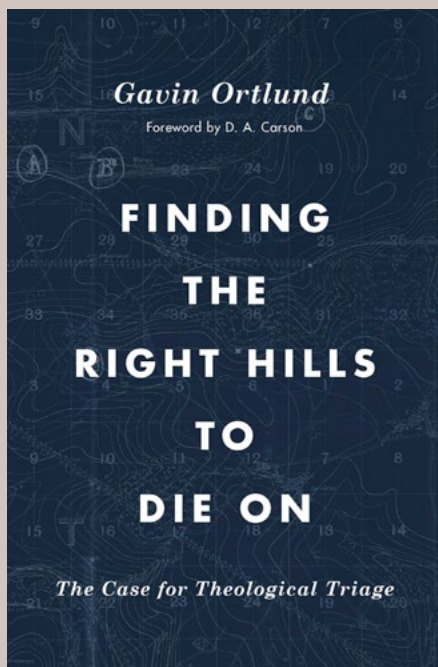
When Jesus ascended into heaven, he also lifted up his hands and blessed the disciples! You can read that in Luke 24:50. Even though Jesus was leaving them, he promised the disciples his love and strength and grace.

So, when your minister raises his hands at the end of a church service, he is saying God's words of blessing. He is reminding you that God promises—no matter what happens that week—he is with you!

Till next time,

Mrs. Veenendaal

Email your question to editor@clarionmagazine.ca
and watch for the answer here in the *Clarion!*



“BUT IT’S NOT A *salvation* ISSUE!”

Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage, Gavin Ortlund.
Wheaton: Crossway, 2020. Paperback, 163 pages.

This book tackles a thorny issue: which Christian doctrines are “hills to die on”? Are some doctrines more important than others? Is it legitimate to look at some doctrinal differences and say, “Well, that’s not a salvation issue, so we shouldn’t get hung up on it”?

These aren’t new questions. Ortlund mentions Calvin’s discussion of this in the *Institutes*, as well as Francis Turretin’s later discussion in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Many other Protestant theologians spilt much ink on these questions too. Post-Reformation theology clearly distinguished between fundamental and non-fundamental articles of faith. This distinction was often made in the context of pursuing unity between various Protestant factions.

RANKING DOCTRINES

Gavin Ortlund suggests we adopt a four-fold ranking of Christian doctrines:

- First-rank doctrines are essential to the gospel.
- Second-rank doctrines are urgent for the health and practice of the church. They’re often a legitimate reason for separation.
- Third-rank doctrines are important to Christian theology. They don’t justify separation.
- Fourth-rank doctrines are unimportant to gospel witness and ministry collaboration.

An example of a first-rank doctrine, according to Ortlund, would be the Trinity. Baptism (paedo- vs. credo-) he lists as a second-rank doctrine, along with spiritual gifts (continuationism vs. cessationism), women in ministry (egalitarianism vs. complementarianism), and Calvinism vs. Arminianism. As examples of third-rank doctrines, he mentions creation days (old earth vs. young earth) and the interpretation of the 1000 years in Revelation 20 (premillennialism vs. post- and amillennialism). Fourth-rank doctrines would include musical instruments in worship or the number of angels.

How does Ortlund suggest we discern whether something is a first-rank doctrine? He offers four basic criteria:

- How clear is the Bible on this doctrine?
- What is this doctrine’s importance to the gospel?
- What is the testimony of the historical church concerning this doctrine?
- What is this doctrine’s effect upon the church today?

Using these criteria, Ortlund argues that another two examples of first-rank doctrines would be the virgin birth and justification by faith alone.

There is undoubtedly something appealing about Ortlund’s approach. For people in our Reformed tradition (“Liberated”/CanRC), it perhaps represents a more nuanced alternative to some of the old black-and-white thinking about theological differences, where every difference was in danger of being elevated to a heresy.

Further, I appreciate how Ortlund wants to be careful in avoiding doctrinal minimalism while also striving for maximum unity with other believers. He provides many caveats and anticipates many (but not all) objections.

UNEASY DISTINCTIONS

There is biblical support for the general idea of “theological triage.” Ortlund points out how Jesus spoke of “the weightier matters of the law” in Matthew 23:23. Just as there are weightier matters in the law, there are also weightier matters in the gospel. There are matters of first importance (1 Cor 15:3), implying that there are those of lesser importance. Herman Bavinck pointed out how, when Protestant theologians were challenged about the biblical basis for the fundamental/non-fundamental distinction, they appealed to passages like Matthew 16:16, 1 Corinthians 2:2; 3:11ff., Ephesians 2:20, Galatians 6:14, and 1 Peter 2:6.¹

Nevertheless, I have some major concerns. First, Ortlund’s criteria for first-rank doctrines aren’t going to automatically result in a broad consensus. For example, using his criteria, I could argue that infant baptism is a first-rank doctrine. I believe it is clearly taught in Scripture. Infant baptism presents a beautiful picture of the gospel of grace shown to a helpless sinner. The historical church at its best has always affirmed infant baptism. Excluding children from God’s covenant and baptism has a dramatic effect on how we think about the church of Jesus Christ and how we conduct ministry. Since it fits all the criteria, it is a first-rank doctrine.

Next, Ortlund doesn’t discuss the place of reason in determining first-rank doctrines. Some doctrines are deduced by what the Westminster Confession (1.6) called “good and necessary consequence.” Does a doctrine so deduced mean that it is any less clearly taught in Scripture?

The third concern isn’t unique to Ortlund; it’s an issue that goes back to the post-Reformation discussions on fundamental articles. I haven’t been able to find anyone considering the role the creeds and confessions might play in theological triage (at least not amongst the Reformed; it does appear to be a factor in Lutheran discussions). Ortlund mentions creeds and confessions occasionally, but they don’t factor into how he thinks a doctrine might be ranked. This threatens to separate a theologian’s work from the confessions of the church.

My final concern has to do with the history of fundamental articles in Reformed theology. Ortlund mentions Francis Turretin’s discussion, but he doesn’t mention what Turretin’s son Jean-Alphonse did with the question of fundamental articles. The younger Turretin took his father’s work on this further, drastically minimizing the scope of fundamental articles. According to Martin Klauber, “Jean-Alphonse Turretini so reduced the scope of the fundamental articles that many of the distinctive Reformed doctrines were relegated to nonfundamental status.”² Richard Muller adds, “. . . the younger Turretin’s views were more characteristic of the age and its increasingly rationalistic approach to theological issues, together with its tendency to remove or to lessen the strictness of standards of subscription to the confessions.”³ What resulted was a decline in confessionality. My concern is not only that this history is ignored, but that Ortlund offers no safeguards against this development in our own day.

USING THE CONFESSIONS

There is a need to retrieve the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles, but in a confessional manner, perhaps tacking more along historical Lutheran lines. Perhaps we could distinguish between *doctrines that are fundamental relative to the individual and salvation* and *doctrines that are fundamental relative to the church and its unity*. The former could take its starting place from what we confess in Articles 2 and 42 of the Athanasian Creed (“Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold to the catholic faith...”); the latter from both the creeds and confessions held by the church.

Finding the Right Hills to Die On raises important issues deserving careful thought and further exploration. While I struggle with Ortlund’s approach, my hope is that, by standing on his shoulders, others will see further and more clearly. 



Wes Bredenhof

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston

bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca

¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Vol.1) (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 613.

² Martin I. Klauber, “The Drive Toward Protestant Union in Early Eighteenth-Century Geneva: Jean-Alphonse Turretini on the ‘Fundamental Articles’ of Faith,” in *Church History*, 61 (1992), 348.

³ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Vol.1) (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 430.



SYNOD 2025: A PEW VIEW

While anyone who wants to know what happened at Synod 2025 can go to the Canadian Reformed website, what comes next are some observations from the pews looking in, as I had the pleasure of attending in person in Aldergrove, BC.

PRAYER SERVICE

Pre-synod preparation formally kicked off with a prayer service led by Rev. J. Ludwig of Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church in Fergus, Ontario. Based on 1 Timothy 3:15c, Ludwig exhorted and reminded those gathered that the church is to be a “pillar and a bulwark of the truth.” God’s word is truth and we need to continually return to what God’s word reveals about the truth. The brothers were encouraged to be watchful and careful in their deliberations, ensuring that they proclaim and confess only the truth.

This opening was a sharp reminder to the twenty-four elders and pastors delegated to synod that they (and we as God’s people) have been chosen by God to be this pillar of the truth. God’s choice in his people cannot be taken lightly. The church of Jesus Christ is a living letter of God’s love and faithfulness to a broken world. God could have had his salvation proclaimed by angels, but he has chosen to use broken, sinful people. It is through God’s people

that his salvation shines through most clearly and beautifully, for they know their need for salvation.

Preserving and defending the truth are no small tasks, as the devil, the world, and men’s own flesh war against the truth of God. The brothers appointed to Synod 2025 were called to test the spirits, hold fast to the truth, mightily defend the truth, and let God’s word shine through all discussions, debates, and decisions.

SYNOD TAKEAWAYS

A key takeaway from Synod 2025 was a deep sense of gratitude for the passion and love that the delegates had for salvation, for our Saviour, and for the Scriptures. References to what the Lord of the Church had to say on certain topics was so often at the forefront of discussions and provided the context and foundation for the reports, the considerations, the observations, and the decisions. Yes, there was a deep sense of gratitude to the Lord that brought these men together.

A second thing noted was the camaraderie of the brothers. Twenty-four men came together from differing parts of the country, with different strengths and weaknesses, with different perspectives on some very important matters that affect the entire



federation. Yet, with all the differences, there was an amazing unanimity around the table. One local high school student who attended a morning session was a bit disappointed to see that nobody raised their voices, nobody pounded the table, and nobody raised a fist at another delegate! All was harmonious—something to be very thankful for.

Twenty-four men came together from differing parts of the country, with different strengths and weaknesses, with different perspectives on some very important matters that affect the entire federation.

Finally, the delegates saw God's hand at work among them and were quick to encourage one another with the Word. One delegate commented on the fact that, compared to all the smart

people around the table, he felt completely out of sorts. Another delegate was quick to remind him that it was the Lord who had chosen him to be at this synod, and the other delegates needed his down-to-earth perspective and ability to write reports and decisions that were understandable to all.

Synod 2025 is over. There will be positive and negative reactions and repercussions to the decisions of this synod, and that is to be expected in a federation. But we can be confident that the one who preserves, defends, and gathers the church from all times and places is the one who brought these men together for the good of the Canadian Reformed Churches. May God bless those men, may God bless their decisions, and may God bless the Canadian Reformed federation of churches. 🇨🇦

John Siebenga
Chilliwack, BC
jbsiebenga@gmail.com



Press Release:

GENERAL SYNOD ALDERGROVE 2025

MAY 6 – MAY 16

The night before Synod 2025 started, a prayer service took place at the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church. Rev. John Ludwig, chairman of the previous synod, preached on 1 Timothy 3:15. His theme was: “The church of the living God is the pillar and buttress of the truth.” The message focused on the church’s calling to confess and preserve the truth of the gospel in the world. Following the sermon, the worshipers prayed for God’s blessing on the upcoming synod.

OPENING

The next morning, the twenty-four delegates met in the church building at 9:00 a.m. On behalf of the convening church, Rev. Rob Schouten welcomed everyone. He also led the opening devotions. He read Colossians 1:1–20 and gave a meditation on verse 18a: “And he is the head of the body, the church.” The delegates joined in prayer, asking for God’s guidance over the deliberations and decisions of Synod.

The convening church examined the credentials from Regional Synods East and West and found them to be in good order. Rev. John Louwerse was elected as chairman, Rev. Rob Schouten as vice-chairman, Rev. Karlo Janssen as first clerk, and Rev. Peter Holtvliuwer as second clerk. Rev. Schouten then declared General Synod 2025 duly constituted.

The chairman expressed gratitude for the extensive work carried out by the convening church. This included receiving correspondence and organizing a vast agenda, arranging hospitality for all delegates, coordinating three meals per day for delegates and fraternal representatives, and providing the necessary technical setup. As Synod progressed, the diligence and care of the host church became more and more evident.

Following a short adjournment, Synod formally adopted the agenda. The executive suggested a way to conduct the business of synod. Five advisory committees were appointed, each assigned a portion of the agenda. These committees were tasked with summarizing the issues, analyzing submissions, and preparing



recommendations for discussion in plenary session. Much of the early part of Synod was occupied with committee work in preparation for those deliberations.

The main decisions of General Synod 2025 are summarized in the following paragraphs. For more details, readers should check the official *Acts of GS 2025*. You can find the provisional Acts at www.canrc.org. In time, the official *Acts* will also appear there.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS

In keeping with the mandate of the previous synod, the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) proposed a revision to Article 50 of the Church Order. The previous wording referred to relations with “churches abroad,” a phrase that no longer reflects the global and regional realities of our ecclesiastical ties. The CER recommended the following revised wording:

“Ecumenical relationships with other churches of Reformed confession shall be entered into where feasible and be maintained according to the rules adopted for this purpose by general synod. On minor points of ecclesiastical governance and practice churches shall not be rejected.”

Synod adopted this proposal.

Synod also approved a new classification system for ecumenical relationships. Churches with whom we have formal ecclesiastical fellowship (commonly known as “sister-church” relationships) are now categorized as either Category A (“intense contact”) or Category B (“less intense contact”). This distinction does not affect mutual recognition but reflects the level of interaction and the allocation of limited resources. In God’s providence, closer ties have developed with some churches than with others, and these categories simply acknowledge that reality.

In addition to these two categories of ecclesiastical fellowship, a third category called “ecclesiastical contact” was affirmed. This

category applies to churches of known Reformed character with whom full ecclesiastical fellowship is not yet feasible. In such cases, a relationship of mutual respect, dialogue, and cooperation is pursued with the goal of eventual closer fellowship.

Beyond these three levels—governed by what is now called “Rule 1”—Synod adopted a new provision referred to as “Rule 2.” This allows for more flexible local ecumenical engagement in cases where no formal ecclesiastical fellowship exists. Rule 2 permits the following, in accordance with adopted protocols:

1. Pulpit fellowship with the concurring advice of classis;
2. Reception of members at the Lord’s Supper according to local regulations;
3. Reception of members into the local congregation according to local regulations;
4. An account of these ecumenical activities to be given to the appropriate classis.

NEW SISTER CHURCHES & GREETINGS

A highlight of Synod was the decision to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches (The Netherlands) – GK, a new federation formed by the merger of two church groups that had previously separated from the Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (GKv). In 2019, our churches were compelled to sever ties with the GKv, and it was therefore a joy to recognize and enter into fellowship with a faithful Reformed federation in the Netherlands (Category A). Rev. Rik Douma attended Synod as a credentialed delegate of the GK, addressed the assembly, and expressed gratitude for this newly established relationship.

Synod also decided to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), designated as Category B. While based largely in the United States, the ARPC includes twelve congregations in Canada, located in Ontario and



New Brunswick. These Canadian churches are working toward forming their own federation. Rev. Aaron De Boer represented the ARPC and was given the opportunity to address Synod. Delegates rejoiced in the evident unity of faith and shared commitment between the two church bodies.

Fraternal delegates were received from a number of sister churches, including the Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in the United States, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the Reformed Churches of Quebec (ERQ), and the United Reformed Churches of North America.

In addition, letters of greeting were received from the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), the Reformed Churches in Indonesia, the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea, and the Reformed Churches of Brazil. Observers from the Free Reformed Churches of North America, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and the Heritage Reformed Congregations were also present and given the opportunity to address Synod.

Our confessions speak of the catholicity of the church, and this truth became tangible as Synod received greetings from churches across the world. It was a joy to hear about the worship and witness of Christ's church on virtually every continent.

OUR SEMINARY

Synod 2025 received the report of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) with thankfulness and approved its recommendations. Permission was granted to the Board to reappoint Dr. J. Van Vliet as Principal for another three-year term (2025–2028). Synod also acknowledged the importance of faculty succession planning, as three of five professors are expected to retire within a few years of one another, around the year 2035 (DV).

Several changes to the seminary's bylaws were adopted. These include: clarifying that all governors must be men eligible to serve as office-bearers in their local church; simplifying the process for appointing substitute governors; extending the time limit for completing a degree from five to seven years; and allowing adjunct professors to hold an appropriate master's degree rather than requiring a doctorate.

Synod approved the creation of a new bursary, the Advanced Theological Studies Assistance (ATSA), designed to help academically gifted CRTS graduates pursue further theological education with a view to potential future service as professors.

For many years, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) have strongly supported the work of CRTS. Synod took note that they continue to value CRTS highly but are exploring the possibility of establishing their own seminary—Australian Reformed Theological Seminary (ARTS)—though not before 2040.



Of the four models under consideration, the FRCA is currently focusing on a partnership model in which ARTS would function as an affiliate of CRTS, overseen by an advisory committee rather than joint governance. This model avoids the need for legislative amendments in Ontario.

Synod also appointed new governors, approved financial reports, and expressed gratitude for the ongoing support of the churches, including contributions from the FRCA and the Women's Savings Action. A suggestion from the Toronto-Bethel church to add a sixth professor was noted but not adopted, as it had not followed the usual ecclesiastical route of church discussion.

REVISION OF ARTICLE 30, CO

For many years, the churches in our federation have discussed how new matters may be brought to a general synod. The previous protocol required churches to follow the "ecclesiastical route": first submitting a matter to classis, then to regional synod, and only afterward to a general synod. This practice was based on Article 30 of the Church Order, which governs how matters are placed on the agenda of major assemblies.

In response to an overture from Regional Synod West 2024, Synod Aldergrove 2025 decided to revise the final sentence of Article 30. It now reads:

"A new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly and is common to its churches may be put on the agenda by one of its churches."

This change means that a local church may submit a new matter directly to a major assembly—such as a general synod—provided the matter pertains to the churches in common and has not already been considered at that level. The *Guidelines for General Synod* were updated to reflect this change.

HYMN CAP?

Synod 2025 made a significant decision in determining that the cap of 100 hymns in the Book of Praise was for the duration of past revisions only, and affirmed that the cap is currently null and void.

Seven churches had appealed Synod 2022's decision to maintain the cap, arguing that it lacked a solid basis and unnecessarily limited the churches' ability to include edifying hymns and alternate Psalm settings. Synod agreed, concluding that Synod 2022 had improperly placed the burden of proof on those seeking change by requiring them to demonstrate that the 2004 decision was erroneous—a standard that does not apply to overtures proposing something new.

Synod further judged that supporting the singing of Psalms does not require restricting the number of hymns, and that expanding the hymn section can serve the churches while continuing to honour the place of the Psalms.



REVISION OF ARTICLE 55, CO

Synod 2025 received overtures from both Regional Synod East and Regional Synod West requesting a revision of Article 55 of the Church Order, which governs the use of psalms and hymns in worship. After careful consideration, Synod adopted a new version of the article, as recorded in Article 115 of the Acts. The revised wording reads:

“The 150 Psalms of the Bible are foundational to the church’s worship, and are to be sung frequently in the worship services. General synod shall adopt metrical versions of the Psalms and shall approve hymns for inclusion in a song book which shall, as a rule, have the principal place in the worship of the church. The Consistory may also approve the singing of alternate settings of the Psalms and additional hymns, provided they are in harmony with the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity.”

Synod approved the inclusion of nineteen alternate psalm settings. Thirty-one hymns previously tested by the churches were also approved for inclusion. These selections will be published in an authorized *augment* to be used alongside the existing *Book of Praise*. These new songs may be incorporated into a future edition of the Book of Praise when it is reprinted.

FROM “CONFESSIONS” TO “APOSTLES’ CREED”

In Article 184, Synod 2025 considered an overture from Blessings Christian Church and Classis Central Ontario requesting changes to the wording used in the Forms for Public Profession of Faith, Infant Baptism, and Adult Baptism. The overture proposed a return to language used prior to 1983. At that time, the first question in the Profession of Faith Form read:

“Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?”

In 1983, this was changed to:

“First, do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church?”

The 2025 overture argued that the change made in 1983 was not merely a shift in terminology but introduced a different emphasis. It recommended a return to a formulation more consistent with historic Reformed liturgies, which present the Apostles’ Creed as the primary summary of the Christian faith. Synod agreed and adopted a revision of the phrase “summarized in the confessions” to “summarized in the Apostles’ Creed” in the relevant liturgical forms.

While reaffirming the church’s expectation that members adhere to and are bound to both the ecumenical creeds and the Reformed confessions, Synod concluded that the revised wording more faithfully reflects the original intent of the profession and baptismal questions and provides greater clarity in a pastoral setting.

SHORTER FORMS FOR THE LORD’S SUPPER

In response to a mandate from Synod 2022, Synod 2025 evaluated two proposed shorter forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, prepared by the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise (SCBP). These forms were designed to be Reformed in character, aligned in content with the existing forms, and significantly shorter than the current abbreviated form.



Synod decided to provisionally adopt both Short Form #1 and Short Form #2 for use in the churches. These forms are to be used on a trial basis and are not yet final. Churches are encouraged to make use of them and to submit feedback based on their experience. A newly established ad hoc Committee on Liturgical Forms has been tasked with collecting and evaluating that feedback, refining the forms as needed, and reporting to the next general synod with recommendations regarding their adoption, revision, or discontinuation.

FORM FOR INFANT BAPTISM

Synod 2025 considered an overture from Regional Synod West proposing a revised Form for the Baptism of Infants. The overture expressed concerns about the current form's sentence complexity, formal tone, length, occasional lack of clarity, and outdated language.

Recognizing that many of the concerns raised were valid, Synod determined that a formal revision process should be entrusted to a synodically appointed committee, with input from the churches. Synod also observed that similar issues likely exist in the Form for the Baptism of Adults, given its parallel structure.

Accordingly, Synod mandated the previously mentioned Committee on Liturgical Forms to review both baptism forms. The committee was instructed to evaluate clarity, language, structure, and doctrinal fidelity, to consider consistency with related forms, and to propose revisions. A draft version is to be distributed to the churches at least 15 months before the next general synod, with the final report submitted no later than six months before synod convenes.

FOOTNOTE TO THE APOSTLES' CREED

Synod 2025 considered an overture from Regional Synod East requesting that an explanatory footnote be added to the phrase "he descended into hell" in the Apostles' Creed (and Hymn 1). The overture proposed clarifying that these words do not mean that Christ descended to the place of eternal torment after his death, but rather express the depth of his suffering, as understood in Lord's Day 16 of the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 44).

After discussion, Synod decided not to adopt the proposed footnote. While acknowledging that the phrase has long been a subject of theological discussion, Synod judged that adding a footnote to the Creed itself was not the best way to address the concern. Instead, such matters are better handled through faithful preaching, catechesis, and instruction in the confessions.

CONCLUSION

The work of Synod was completed in ten days. We give thanks to the Lord for granting perseverance to the delegates. The meetings were conducted in a spirit of brotherly harmony and mutual respect. We express appreciation for the gracious leadership of Rev. John Louwerse as chairman. It is our prayer that the decisions made at Synod will serve the well-being of Christ's church and contribute to the unity and vitality of our federation in the years to come. *Soli Deo Gloria.* 🇳🇱

R. Schouten

Vice-chairman of Synod 2025

