

Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE | TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE



Asking God to Curse
an Enemy—Should I?

Clarence Bouwman

Doctrinal Literacy

Jason Van Vliet

"This food... Christ has
ordained only for his believers"

Rob Schouten

What's Inside

Welcome to summer! Canadians everywhere are enjoying warm temperatures and hopefully some time to relax and refresh. May the offerings of our little magazine help bring nourishment to your soul as well.

Do you struggle to pray or sing the curses we encounter in the Psalms? Clarence Bouwman's piece on imprecatory petitions will help put them in a gospel light and show how they fit with loving our enemies. Forgiveness for enemies is something Jesus himself prayed for and is worth meditating on as Clarence VanderVelde helps us do in *Treasures New and Old*. Prayer is a daily habit for every Christian but are we careful with what we pray for? My editorial probes the oft-heard expression, "I prayed about it."

What the Bible teaches is critical for every Christian so that we may faithfully follow our Saviour. Are we as Reformed believers growing in our knowledge of doctrine? Jason VanVliet walks us through that discussion while Rob Schouten unpacks one particular doctrine, namely, whether Scripture teaches that children of believers may partake in the Lord's supper. Meanwhile, Eric Kampen explains some of the key doctrines of the Mennonite Brethren Church in his latest instalment of *Outside the PARC*.

Lyn Metzlar Leyenhorst—our new western correspondent for *Witness at Work* features—introduces us to a young Veterinarian Technologist and asks how her Reformed faith guides her daily work. The *Ray of Sunshine* column presents us with a new special needs child for whom we may pray and otherwise offer support. Don't miss two book reviews as well as two fresh songs for use in praising our God. Enjoy summer's change of pace!

Peter Holtvliwer

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor in Chief: Peter Holtvliwer
E: editorinchief@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

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E: bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca
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"I prayed about it"

In my pastoral ministry I regularly meet with people who face challenges. When we discuss how they are managing, many times they say, "I am praying about it," which of course is an excellent thing to do. From Scripture they have heard God say, "Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you" (Ps 55:22) and "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16). They consciously follow God's will by praying for his aid in accordance with his Word. It's a beautiful privilege for me to join them in prayer, helping to lay their burdens before our heavenly Father.

Sometimes, however, I meet with believers who come not with a struggle to share but an announcement to make. They have arrived at a certain decision and want to relay that to me as their pastor and have me accept it, even approve it. One common example is the decision to pursue a serious romantic relationship with someone outside the church. Another is the decision to withdraw church membership and attend elsewhere, based on personal preference. Often before I can ask how they came to that decision, I am informed, "I prayed about it. I've thought about it for a long time and done *lots* of praying about it." The implication is plain: because they've prayed about it, therefore their decision is good and right.

WHAT AM I PRAYING FOR?

But is that true? A believer might be very sincere in bringing the matter up in prayer, but each of us should ask, "What am I praying for?" Am I looking for God to rubber stamp a decision I've already made? Am I simply looking for him to bless this budding relationship or my departure to another church, or am I open to learning what God's will is in these things? Or do I assume that I know God's will? When I ask whether the person spent time searching the Scriptures for guidance, virtually every time the answer is silence. It seems there is a disconnect here. On the one hand we want to follow Jesus Christ but on the other hand we don't always want to seek out his will. We keep the Bible closed and pray with vagueness.

But the mere act of prayer is not what our Saviour is after, is he? Rather, our Triune God wants a heart that is devoted to him in

thankful obedience. As Samuel said to Saul, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. . . . For rebellion is as the sin of divination and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam 15:22–23). In the Great Commission the Lord Jesus also clearly taught Christians to obey *all* of God's commandments. He underlined that elsewhere, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words" (John 14:23–24).

Doesn't the Lord Jesus want us to seek his will *before* we make up our mind about a matter? This is where a pastor (or elder) can be a great help—they would love to open Scripture with you.

GOD'S WILL BE DONE

When the Lord commands us only to marry someone who is united with us in the Lord (1 Cor 7:39) and not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14), what is it but disobedience to Christ to pursue such a courtship? And when we vow at profession of faith to "firmly resolve to commit [our] whole life to the Lord's service as a living member of his church" and to "submit willingly to the admonition and discipline of the church" is it not defying God's will to walk away from that faithful church simply because of personal preferences? Does not Jesus teach us to let our yes be yes, our no be no, and to keep our promises (Matt 5:37; Eccl 5:4–5)? Can we expect God to answer our prayers about such things and bless our lives when we ignore his will? Scripture is clear: "If we ask anything according to his will he hears us" (1 John 5:14). But if our requests run contrary to God's Word, he does *not* hear us (Is 59:2).

Prayer is certainly a beautiful gift. We may pour out our hearts to our faithful heavenly Father and seek his help in all situations. But then let's be sure to search out God's will in Scripture and pray in line with it, for only then may we expect his blessing to follow. 



Peter Holtvlüwer

Minister

Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church

pholtvluer@gmail.com

Father, Forgive Them

And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” — Luke 23:34a

The acclaim Christ had received from the Jewish people as he entered Jerusalem quickly turned to opposition when he did not meet their expectations. The cheers of the crowds became jeers and soon they were shouting, “Crucify him!”

The good news of the gospel is that the Son of God is our Mediator who brought about reconciliation between us and God the Father. A mediator is someone who intervenes between two parties and brings them together. Jesus Christ did this by his death on the cross.

The first of seven sayings Christ spoke on the cross shows us Christ praying as Mediator: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” As Mediator, Christ interceded for all those involved with crucifying him—the Jewish leaders and people, the Roman soldiers and Pilate—because none of them knew what they were doing (Acts 13:27; 1 Cor 2:8). As Isaiah prophesied, “. . . he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors” (Is 53:12).

How could Christ pray for forgiveness when he had just spoken about judgment to the daughters of Jerusalem as he was walking to Calvary (Luke 23:28-30)? Moreover, is there forgiveness without repentance?

There is no forgiveness without repentance. Christ, however, was indicating that he would also take upon himself the punishment for the sin of crucifying him *for those who would repent*. Christ was praying that the Father would give those who crucified him time to come to faith and repentance and thus be forgiven. They needed to hear from the preaching of the gospel after Christ’s death and resurrection that Christ was indeed the Promised One who came to take away the sin of the world. If they then repented, they would be forgiven and reconciled to God. Then not only their specific sin of crucifying Christ, but *all* their sins would be forgiven!

This prayer of Christ the Mediator was answered positively by the Father because the gospel was proclaimed to them later in Jerusalem. Christ died, was buried, and arose. Christ ascended into heaven. Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon the church and the apostles began to proclaim in Jerusalem the gospel of Christ crucified and risen. Peter proclaimed that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 3:15), and then said: “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in

ignorance, as did also your rulers” (Acts 3:17). And then came the call to repent and the promise of forgiveness: “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).

Many did repent, of whom a great many were priests (Acts 6:7). They received forgiveness by grace through faith. This was the answer to Christ’s prayer.

Jerusalem was given about forty years after Christ’s crucifixion—forty years in which the gospel could be proclaimed! Not only was there repentance and faith but also much opposition by the Jews. Then the judgment of which Christ had spoken came when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 because of their rejection of Christ as the Promised One.

And what about us? Do we believe the gospel? Every successive generation is called to faith. Covenant children and young people must grow up to believe. God gives us time to come to know the gospel and receive it in faith. We hear it in the preaching every Sunday. None of us knows how much time we have left in our lives—elderly people die of heart attacks and young people die in car accidents. Nor do we know when Christ will return. Then we will have to give an account to God of what we have done with the gospel. Are you ready for that? ☛

FURTHER READING:

Luke 23:36–49

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

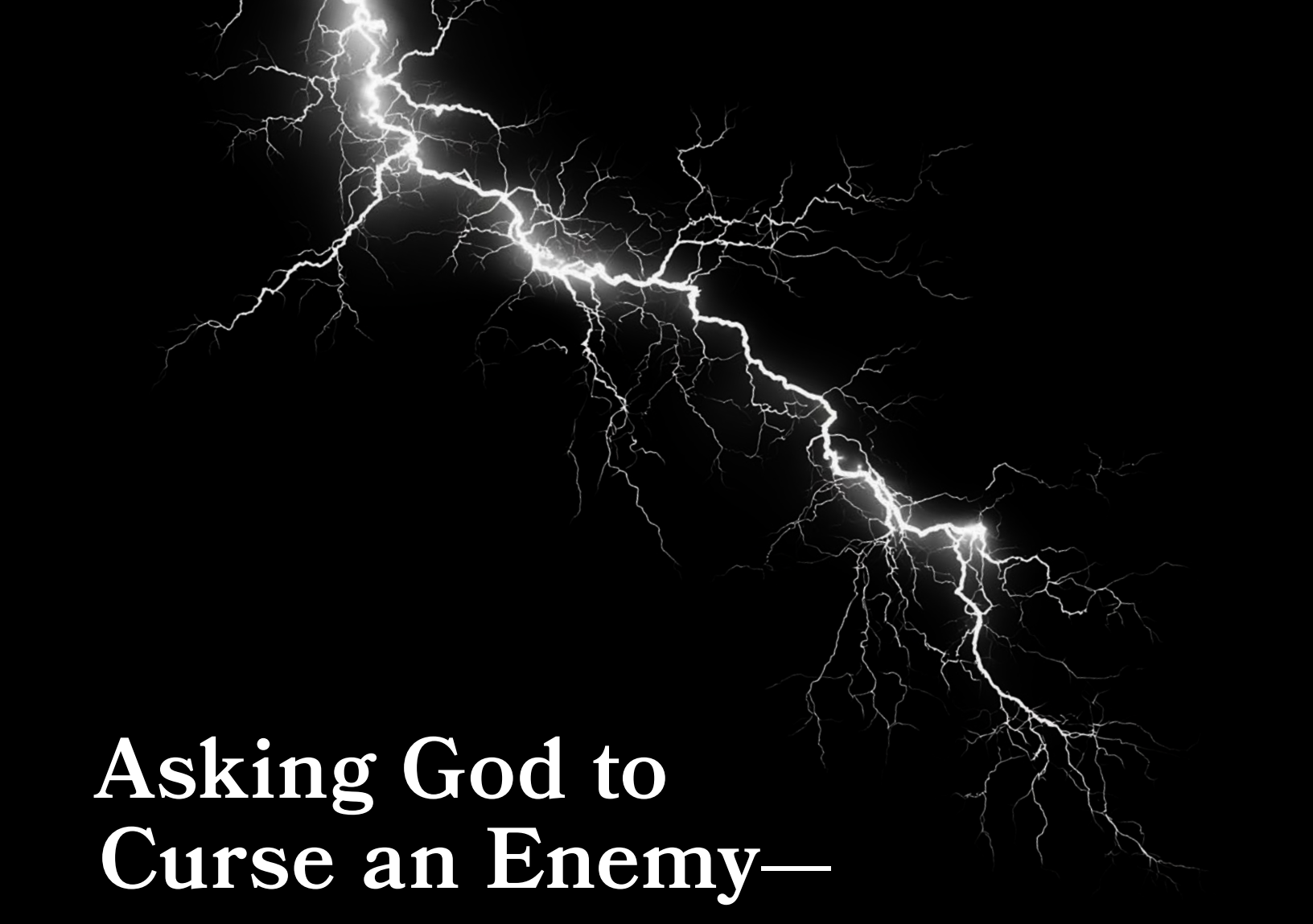
1. Why is it significant that the name of the man who carried Christ’s cross is mentioned? (See Lk 23:26)
2. Christ was crucified at a location called “Calvary” or “Golgotha.” What do those terms mean? (See Matt 27:33) What languages do those terms come from?



Clarence J. VanderVelde

Minister

Unity Canadian Reformed Church (Burlington)
cjvandervelde98@gmail.com



Asking God to Curse an Enemy—

Should I?

CLARENCE BOUWMAN

We Canadians pride ourselves on being polite people, tolerant, and non-judgmental. We attract a chuckle from international guests to our fair land because we'll say "sorry!" for (as they see it) any frivolous reason. So, I suspect few of us would be quick to ask God to please curse the neighbour who dishonours us (whether he live nearby or far away).

Indeed, our aversion to praying for a curse on someone is considerably heightened when we remember Jesus's words: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:43–45). We further remember that Jesus set the example when he prayed on the cross for the Father to please forgive his tormentors (Luke 23:34).

BUT THE CATECHISM . . .

Our reluctance to ask God to curse persecutors receives a sharp correction from the *Heidelberg Catechism*. That confession acknowledges that when we pray the second petition of the Lord's Prayer ("Your kingdom come") we're actually asking God to "destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against you, and every conspiracy against your holy Word" (LD 48).

"Destroy . . . every power . . . and every conspiracy" sounds to me very much like a plea to God to destroy not just evil plans but also the persons making those plans. Of necessity, those are people with faces who live in our spaces. That doesn't sound very polite or tolerant. Very unCanadian, in fact.

IMPRECATORY PSALMS

Readers of this periodical are no doubt aware that there are several psalms in the Bible containing pleas to God to curse someone. They're known as imprecatory psalms (the term means "to invoke evil," or "to curse"). Think, for example of Psalm 5, where David prays concerning "evildoers": "make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels" (v. 10). Or Psalm 58: "O God, break the teeth in their mouths! . . . Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime" (vv. 6, 8).

Perhaps the petition that bothers us the most is David's prayer in Psalm 139: "Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!" He then voices the underlying thoughts of his heart: "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies" (vv. 19–22). Truly, we can easily find David's words to be sub-Christian and can experience difficulty joining the psalmist in singing such psalms. It fuels the thought that these Old Testament texts are so *harsh*.

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLELS

It's disconcerting to discover, then, that there are ample New Testament texts that are equally imprecatory. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself uttered numerous "woes" on his enemies (Matt 23:13ff), and what is a "woe" other than invoking evil on another!

The Spirit of Jesus Christ moved Paul to write: "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed" (1 Cor 16:22). Elsewhere the apostle writes: "If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:9). When God, in response to petitions such as these, poured out his judgments on evildoers on our planet, we discover that the heavenly hosts burst out into songs of praise. To quote the twenty-four elders before God's throne: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty. . . . The

nations raged, but your wrath came" (Rev 11:17ff; 19:1ff). Clearly, imprecatory petitions are very much part of the fabric of the New Testament too. The church understood that and so worked a petition of curse into its treasured Catechism.

A TROUBLING QUESTION

I think this raises a troubling question. If imprecatory petitions are part of the fabric of the entire Scriptures, why do we recoil at praying curse petitions? Or, for that matter, singing imprecatory psalms?

I wonder whether it's because we have an insufficiently elevated appreciation for how God himself feels about his people. When the LORD set Abram aside to be his, he shared this promise with him: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse" (Gen 12:3). Embedded in that promise is an implicit revelation of how emotionally the LORD is tied up with the well-being of the people upon whom he has set his love.

When Pharaoh and his men many years later enslaved Abraham's descendants in Egypt, God sent the ten plagues—a deed very much in step with the promises he'd given to father Abraham. When Pharaoh's law (and his soldiers) obligated those oppressed Israelites to throw their baby boys into the Nile, would it have been wrong for them to remind God in prayer of his own promise to curse those who dishonoured them? In fact, would seeking God's vengeance on their oppressors not be an implicit confession that they knew God's love for them to be so deep that he would curse those who were dishonouring his precious possession?

Similarly, when the people of Israel saw all those dead Egyptian soldiers on the banks of the Red Sea, should they have recoiled at God fulfilling his promise? Or should they have rejoiced at this display of his love for them? As it turns out, they responded with *praise* to God: "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song . . . and I will exalt him. The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name" (Ex 15:1–3). Appreciation for the LORD's great love for his people translated into joyous celebration when he fulfilled his promise to curse their enemies before their very eyes.

CALVARY

Would such celebration not be even more fitting when God publicly cursed Satan through Christ's crushing victory over the evil one on the cross of Calvary? God was so touched by the plight of this world that he sent his only Son (John 3:16) to "destroy" our oppressor (Heb 2:15) and to "throw" him out of heaven (Rev 12:9), even to "bind" him (Matt 12:29; Rev 20:2)—and on the cross, Christ

We Canadians may be known for politeness and tolerance. We Christians would rather be known for thinking in step with our Maker and Redeemer.

Jesus succeeded in doing that, even delivering God's own from Satan's bondage (Col 1:13–14).

Clearly, God hated the devil who hated him so much—and loved those for whom he sent his only Son. Those of us who have tasted the love of God in Jesus Christ for Satan's slaves cannot help but delight in God's Calvary answer to David's petition, "Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!" We rejoice that he crushed the head of the seed of the serpent, and we love God all the more precisely because of this display of love for us.

It follows that we also share the inverse thought as David voiced it: "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies" (vv. 19–22). It's the drift of the prayer Jesus taught us to pray: "Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done." Lord, keep doing in our day what you did on the cross: "disarm the ungodly rulers and authorities [of our world], and put them to open shame" (see Col 2:15). Keep showing us how deeply you love us, how bothered you are when your enemies dishonour your people; curse, Lord, those who hurt the saints for whom Christ has died!

YOUR KINGDOM COME

The more sharply our antennae are tuned in to the glory and holiness of the God who loved us enough to send his only Son into our world to redeem us, the more space there is in our hearts and prayers to petition him to curse those who dishonour him and his cherished people. Adoration for God's great love will turn well-known words (e.g., "your kingdom come") into specific petitions concerning real-life persons and powers: "destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against you, and every conspiracy against your holy Word." Destroy, turn to slime, render powerless those cultural forces today that abort the helpless, that euthanize the weak, that mutilate the confused, that hate all things Christian. Curse, Lord, those who oppress the ones whom you love, who persecute those who treasure the gospel, who afflict those who act righteously in our communities. Lord, I love how deeply you love us, and so I hate those who hate you. Sweep them off this earth soon into their righteous penalty; "Come, Lord Jesus!"

VENGEANCE?!

Perhaps you wonder, then, what's become of that text about praying for our enemies and loving them? Ought we not to pray for

the Lord to cause the message of the gospel to expand mightily in our communities and country and world, even for our enemies' salvation? Yes, yes; yes indeed! In fact, that same Lord's Day of the Catechism that explains the second petition by means of an imprecatory prayer has an earlier reference to "preserve and increase your church." It's very much the emphasis of Scripture that, since the Lord loved us while we were his enemies (Rom 5:8, 10) and so sent his Son for our redemption, we too will love our enemies and do good to them. That includes asking God to open doors for the gospel, also into the hearts of those very persons who today dishonour those whom God loves. If by his grace such persons embrace the gospel, the curse they've earned ends up on Jesus Christ—and there is forgiveness for their hatred of God just as there was forgiveness for us.

What we will *not* do is take vengeance on our enemies ourselves. The Lord told Israel explicitly that vengeance is his department (Deut 32:35; cf. Rom 12:19–21). He will keep his promise to curse those who dishonour those whom he loves. He may do that in this life or in the life to come; he may do that through cursing the sinner himself or through transferring that curse to Jesus Christ. Either way, we leave vengeance to God himself to execute.

IN SUM

For our part, we treasure the unfathomable depth of his great love for us. We Canadians may be known for politeness and tolerance. We Christians would rather be known for thinking in step with our Maker and Redeemer. He richly blesses those who bless his loved ones but has no stomach for those who disgrace the ones he redeemed through the blood of his only Son. We seek to pray—and walk—in step with our Master. ☪

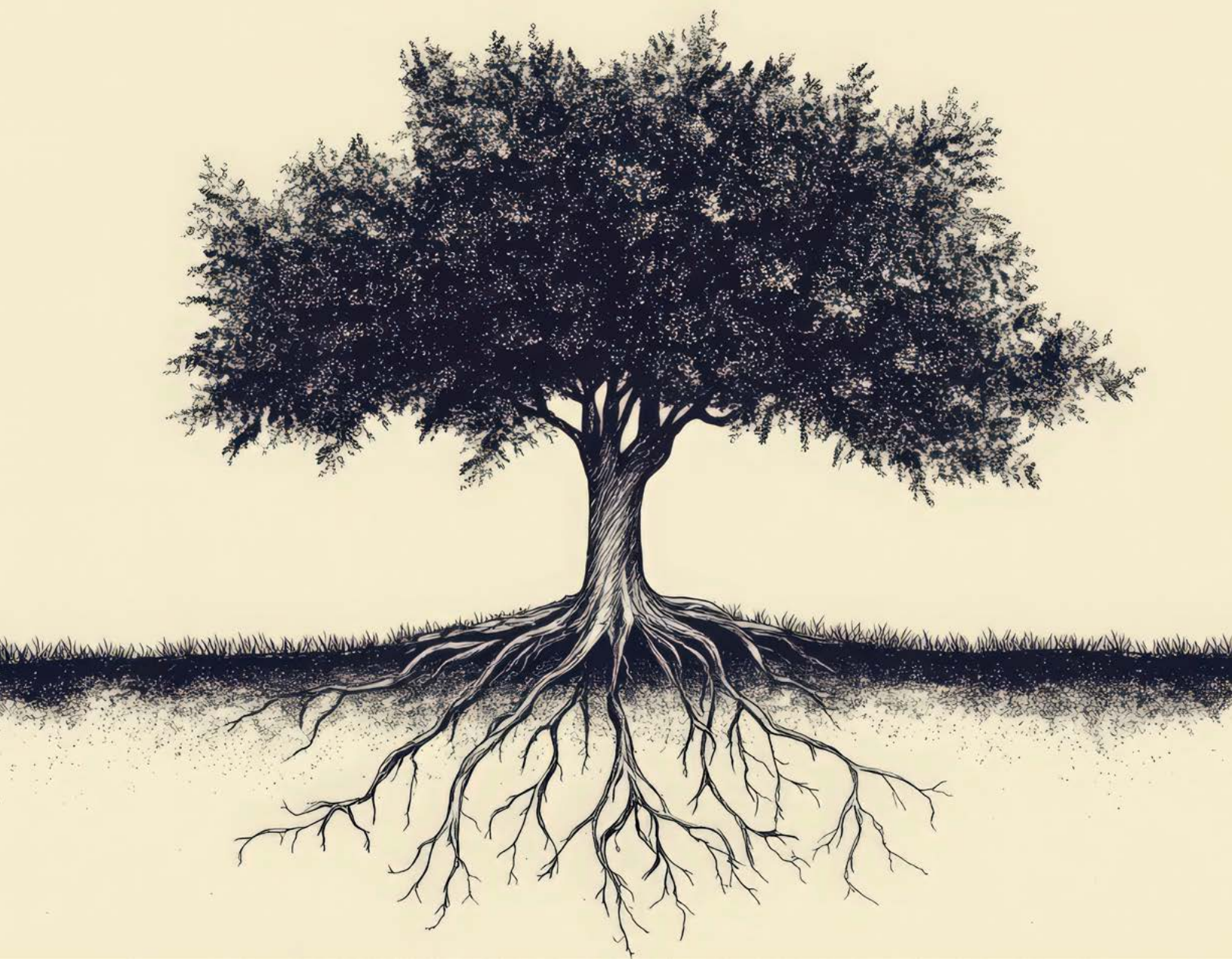


Clarence Bouwman

Minister Emeritus

Smithville Canadian Reformed Church

clarence.bouwman@gmail.com



Doctrinal Literacy

DR. JASON VAN VLIET

Did you know that Canada ranks well when it comes to literacy? Several years ago, high school students around the globe took a test. Canada came in eighth place.¹ Apparently, our country achieves better results in literacy tests than at the podium during the Winter Olympics!

However, when we look at the data more closely, the shine dulls and concerns emerge. Since 2000, the reading literacy scores in Canada—and most other countries—have been sliding downwards. More unsettling still, the rate of decline appears to be accelerating as time goes on.

Added to that, on a six-point scale, 82% of Canadian students obtained Level 2 or higher, while only 14% managed to read and comprehend at Level 5 or higher. At Level 2, readers “can identify the main idea in a text of moderate length . . . and reflect on [its] purpose.” By comparison, Level 5 requires that readers “can comprehend lengthy texts . . . based on a deep understanding of extended pieces of text.”²

Are you thinking what I am thinking? For the well-being of Christ’s kingdom, yes, we are concerned with general reading skills, but we are also eager to see *doctrinal* literacy flourish. In the church, both older and younger need to be able to understand and apply God’s Word, not just at the basic Level 2 but moving toward the deeper understanding of Level 5.

So, how does the church best equip everyone in God’s household to continue growing into higher levels of doctrinal literacy? Before we answer that question, let’s define this kind of literacy more carefully. For the purposes of this article, doctrinal literacy is *the ability to comprehend rightly, to confess faithfully, and to apply steadfastly the inspired truth of God’s Word as the household of God matures “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:13; 1 Tim 3:15).

THE NEED

Keeping things simple has a certain appeal. If people sincerely love Jesus Christ as their Saviour, isn’t that enough? To be clear, we are not asking what quantity of doctrinal knowledge someone needs to be eternally saved. We best leave that decision to the Saviour himself, who knows each one of his sheep personally and perfectly (John 10:14–15). Instead, we are asking why the church should seek to maximize doctrinal literacy, as much as reasonably possible, for every child of God. At least four reasons come to mind.

First, God himself commands that this ought to happen. “Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on

to maturity” (Heb 6:1). To be sure, a rudimentary understanding of Scripture’s truth is profitable. We all have to start somewhere! Accordingly, this “elementary doctrine of Christ” is the place to begin but not the place to end. The Lord of hosts himself directs us: move on to maturity.

The apostle Paul even grieves over the Corinthian congregation that was still stuck on a doctrinal diet of milk and was not even ready to begin eating solid food (1 Cor 3:2). It would be to our collective shame if this apostolic lamentation would be expressed over us, Reformed congregations with centuries of doctrinal heritage behind us and instructional gems like the Heidelberg Catechism in the pew in front of us.

Second, robust doctrinal literacy helps God’s people cut through the winds and waves of false teachings rather than being buffeted all over the theological map (Eph 4:13–14). The possibility that Christians absorb error is higher than ever before simply because we are exposed to so much more. There was an era when most of our doctrinal diet was served up by our pastor, our parents, and whatever theological books happened to be on the family bookshelf. That era is long gone. Between hyperlinks, algorithms, and AI, the average church member is digesting all kinds of different theological content on their devices. Some of it is faithful; much of it is not. If the level of doctrinal literacy remains low, how will God’s people ever distinguish faithful from unfaithful while surfing the veritable flood of online content?

Still, life consists of more than sifting truth from error. This fallen world is saturated with sufferings and sorrows. Consequently, everyone needs a firm grip on who our God is and what he is doing if they are to grow stronger through trials rather than sink under them. This is a third reason for promoting strong doctrinal literacy. For example, the God of providence—including all the hard and painful stuff—is not just *a* God. As we confess in Article 13 of the Belgic Confession, he is *this good* God who as Father has adopted us, as Son has betrothed us, and as Spirit dwells within us. Just that single doctrinal truth makes a vital difference when “the waters plunge and leap,” threatening to drown us (Psalm 42, Genevan). Solid doctrinal knowledge fortifies us and our (grand)children to face the storms of life.

Finally, increasing our doctrinal literacy ultimately means getting to know our Lord better. We easily forget that the teaching of God’s Word is teaching about God himself. As we confess in Article 2 of the Belgic Confession, “. . . he makes himself more clearly and fully known to us by his holy and divine Word.” Even more, to know our

¹ <https://www.datapandas.org/ranking/pisa-scores-by-country#full-data>

² <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/pisa2022/docs/DescriptionsOf2022ProficiencyLevels-TableI33.pdf>

heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, through the instruction of the Holy Spirit is to taste the sweet glories of life everlasting, already here and now (John 17:3; HC Q&A 58). Who wouldn't want that?!

THE CHALLENGES

Cultivating doctrinal literacy is a necessity, not a luxury, but that does not make it easy. To begin with, doctrinal literacy and reading literacy are connected. Due to dyslexia and other challenges, some people struggle to read well. We should support them the best that we can. But, as the global high school test indicated, four out of five Canadians can read well . . . at Level 2. However, the Bible is a "lengthy text" that requires higher levels of reading literacy to discern the profound truths that the Holy Spirit has breathed out on its pages (2 Tim 3:16).

Thankfully, we have creeds and confessions to help us. At the same time, dear parents and teachers, please keep up, or even enhance, the good work of cultivating readers in God's household. *Tolle lege!* Promoting higher levels of reading proficiency not only opens various career options but, more importantly, it preserves and increases doctrinal literacy.

Next, we do well to discard false dilemmas. People often associate doctrine with complex, abstract, and potentially restrictive truths that some ecclesiastical authority forces upon them. But going back to the basics, doctrine is simply another word for teaching. The teaching of Scripture is the holy gospel (Q&A 19). So, God's gospel is doctrine, and God's doctrine is the gospel. No false dilemma. Moreover, in his gospel, God teaches what we ought to believe and how we ought to live. These are the credenda and agenda of the Christian life. Again, no false dilemma.

Last but not least, we need to subdue "expressive individualism"—hat tip to Carl Trueman's *Strange New World* for the phrase—with a healthy understanding of the church, not as an organizational *it*, but as the grace-adorned she, the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:23; Rev 21:2).

Fault-finding against an *it* is easy. Organizations tend to be big, impersonal, and clumsy. If you are searching for "specks" to criticize, you will likely find a lot of sawdust. But the problem intensifies. So long as we merely regard the church as an organizational *it*, we may also feel comfortable disparaging its instruction and confessions. "Well, sure, that's what the church teaches but personally I feel . . ." Be careful, the "log" of expressive individualism may become lodged in our own eye (Luke 6:41–42).

However, when we cherish the church as the Bride of Christ—*a she*, not an *it*!—then two truths immediately come into focus. First,

the church is not made up of one individual believer any more than a bride consists of just one body part. Expressive individualism is utterly illogical when we confess the church to be the beloved betrothed of God's own Son. Second, body parts work best together (Eph 4:15–16), also when it comes to doctrinal literacy. For this reason, the apostle Paul urges us to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love for us "together with all the saints" (Eph 3:18). To briefly mention only two examples, in the text of the confessions and in the dynamic of catechism classrooms we receive a parcel of that together-with-all-the-saints blessing.

ACTION PLAN

So, yes, we face challenges. But spurred on by the urgent need for doctrinal literacy, how do we ensure the church's ongoing and growing ability to comprehend rightly, to confess faithfully, and to apply steadfastly the inspired truth of God's Word?

Preachers, parents, and pupils all have a role to play in this work. Let's begin with preachers. As churches, we have covenanted together that "the consistory shall ensure that, as a rule, once every Sunday the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is proclaimed" (Art 52, Church Order). Please note the verb *proclaim*. The Minister of the Word has a duty "thoroughly and sincerely to proclaim to the congregation the Word of the Lord" (Art 16, Church Order), and that includes catechetical preaching. Yes, he has another duty to "instruct the children of the church," but from the pulpit he ought to herald forth (i.e., *proclaim*), the doctrine of salvation as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism.

Remarkably, when Wilbert Van Dyk analyzed this whole matter of theological literacy, he discovered that the most common aversion to catechetical preaching was that it was "long and boring."³ How can a preacher ever be boring about our "only comfort in life and death" (LD 1) or our assurance "in my greatest sorrows and temptations" (LD 16)? Dear ministers of the Word, please *proclaim* the life-giving doctrine of salvation, as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism. Dear elders, please *ensure* that this happens *as a rule*.

Next, preachers are also teachers in the catechism classroom. All classrooms have a vibe; some are inspirational, but others feel disheartening. The mood in the room does not rest solely on the teacher's shoulders, but he does still have a leading role. Pastors, and all other catechism teachers, are warmly encouraged to bring their A-Game into the classroom. Youth are not easily fooled. If their instructor is genuinely enthused about what he is teaching,

³ Wilbert M. Van Dyk, "Preaching the Creeds and Confessions of the Church: The Case for Theological Literacy", *Calvin Theological Journal* 47 (2012): 227.

the youth will pick up on that and, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, find it contagious.

Closely related to the catechism classroom is the regular classroom. Every day our children, “pupils of Christ” (BC 13), are busy learning Bible, church history, English, math, science, and social studies. That fills the weekly schedule quickly enough. But dear teachers, please seize the natural moments that arise to speak about God’s providence, the sacrifice of Christ crucified, the Spirit’s sanctification, and the hope of life everlasting. Do not hesitate to open our catechism and confessions in the flow of your lesson. Repetition is the mother of learning and doctrinal literacy will increase when teachers invite students to “take your *Book of Praise* for a moment and turn with me to Lord’s Day X.”

The final place of honour in this action plan goes to parents. Having rid ourselves of the false dilemma driving a wedge between doctrine *and* life, parents obviously have a vital role to play. After all, parents are deeply engaged in their children’s *lives*. To mention only one common occurrence, when your teenagers are wrestling with temptations seemingly too strong to resist, reaffirm them in the glorious truth that “Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit” (LD 32). What divine mercy is this? Holy living is not our own accomplishment for Christ but rather Christ’s work within us! True doctrine not only educates, it also liberates.

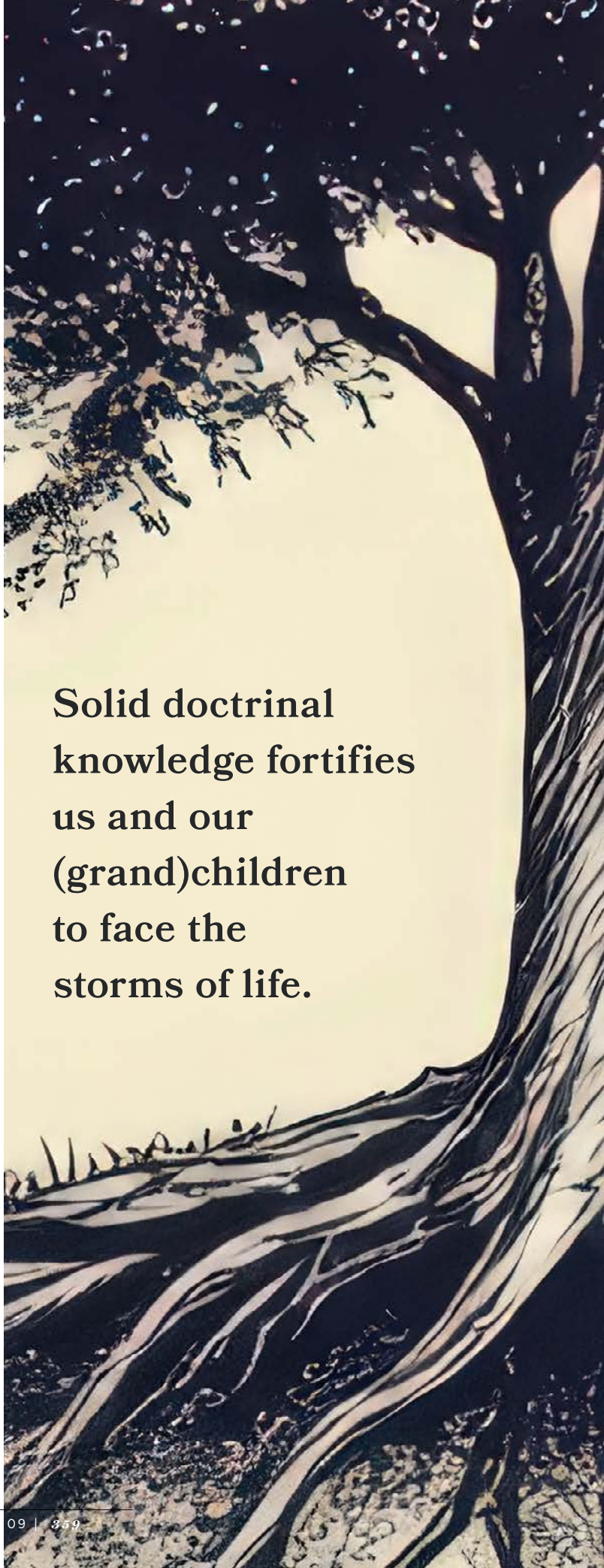
Drawing our thoughts to a close, Canada ranks well in the global reading tests. Eighth place is respectable. But under the hood, the literacy engine is not running as smoothly or as powerfully as it should. If only 14% of Canada’s high schoolers can effectively digest lengthier documents, then the dashboard warning lights should not be ignored.

But what about doctrinal literacy? Compared to many churches around the globe, the doctrinal literacy in our Reformed congregations is probably still quite respectable. But let’s pop the hood and take a closer look. Without consistent catechetical preaching, vibrant confessional instruction, supportive Christian education, and parents who apply scriptural truths in the lives of the next covenant generation, our doctrinal literacy may develop the same downward trend found in Canada’s reading literacy. Let’s pray and work to turn the slow slide into a steady ascent. 📖



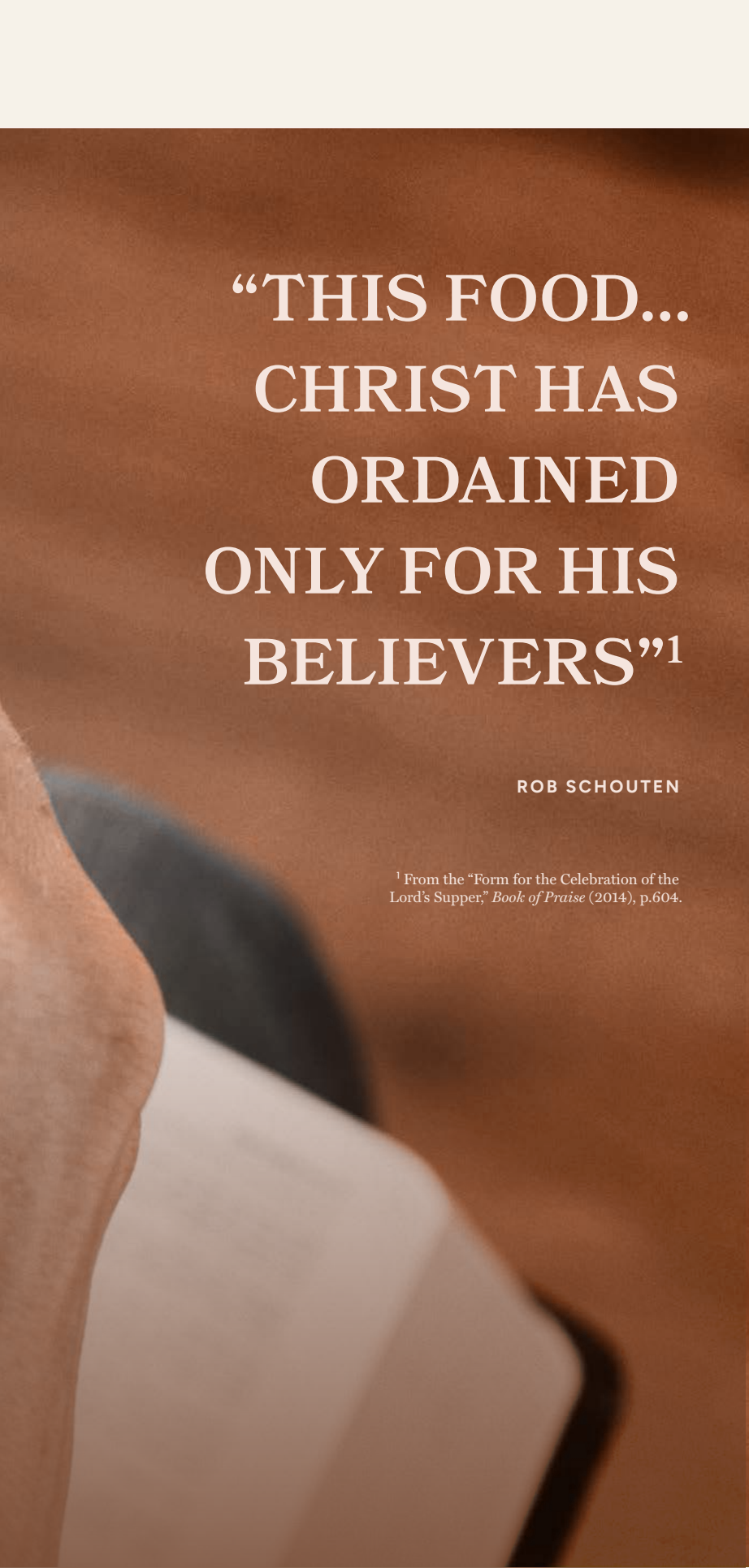
Dr. Jason Van Vliet

Principal and Professor of Dogmatics
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
jvanvliet@crtcs.ca



**Solid doctrinal
knowledge fortifies
us and our
(grand)children
to face the
storms of life.**





“THIS FOOD... CHRIST HAS ORDAINED ONLY FOR HIS BELIEVERS”¹

ROB SCHOUTEN

¹ From the “Form for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper,” *Book of Praise* (2014), p.604.

The call to admit the children of believers to the Lord’s supper often rests on a simple claim: they belong to the covenant, and therefore they should share in the covenant meal. At first glance, that claim appears compelling. It seems to honour God’s covenant and the place of our children within the church. However, it depends on an assumption that must be examined—namely, that inclusion in the covenant and participation in the Lord’s supper are governed by the same considerations.

In what follows, we will see that covenant inclusion does not automatically entail participation in the Lord’s supper, and that this sacrament, by its nature, is given to those who can receive it in the way Christ has appointed.

A CONGREGATION OF TRUE BELIEVERS

The New Testament consistently describes the church as a body marked by faith in Christ. It is composed of those who believe in Christ as Saviour and Lord. As Paul writes, “everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God” (1 John 5:1). This faith is the defining mark of the congregation. It is as Christ states, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

The early church operated on this standard of faith. Acts records that “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Likewise, “more than ever, believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (Acts 5:14). The church grows by the addition of those who receive the Word and believe.

In the letters of the apostles, the church is similarly defined by its active faith. It consists of “those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:2). As Peter notes, those who come to Christ are “like living stones . . . being built up as a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5).

For these biblical reasons, the Reformed churches summarize the matter this way in Article 27 of the Belgic Confession: the church is “a holy congregation

of true Christian believers.” The nature of this faith is well-described in Lord’s Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

True faith is a sure knowledge
whereby I accept as true
all that God has revealed to us in his Word.
At the same time it is a firm confidence
that not only to others, but also to me,
God has granted forgiveness of sins,
everlasting righteousness, and salvation,
out of mere grace,
only for the sake of Christ’s merits.
This faith the Holy Spirit works in my heart
by the gospel.

INCLUSION OF COVENANT CHILDREN

Even as we define the church in terms of faith, Scripture is clear that the children of believers belong to this church. They are not outsiders. They are addressed as part of the covenant people. The apostle Paul states plainly: “Your children are holy” (1 Cor 7:14). Sons and daughters of believing parents—whether biological or adopted—stand within the covenant promises given to believers and their children (Acts 2:39).

These two truths stand together without tension: the church is a congregation of those who believe in Christ, and the children of believers truly belong within that congregation. The presence of covenant children is a reason for joy. At the same time, it does not redefine the church as something other than a congregation of true Christian believers.

THE CHURCH AS CONFESSING CONGREGATION

The Scriptures also make clear that what is believed in the heart is confessed with the mouth. Paul presents this confession as necessary for those who belong to Christ: “Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (Rom 10:9–10). Christ himself underscores this necessity: “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 10:32). Likewise, Christ establishes his church upon the bedrock of Peter’s confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16–18).

The same pattern appears elsewhere. “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15). And the writer to the Hebrews exhorts the congregation,

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (Heb 10:23).

The point is clear. The church is defined by faith, and this faith is not merely held inwardly but confessed openly. And that confession is personal.

PERSONAL CONFESSION

Paul exhorts his younger colleague Timothy as follows: “Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim 6:12). Timothy’s confession was a conscious, public acknowledgment of Christ as Saviour and Lord.

The same pattern appears elsewhere. Peter confesses to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). Thomas, confronted by the risen Lord, declares: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). In each case, faith is not assumed or expressed by others—it is personally confessed.

This pattern reaches its highest point in Christ himself. Paul speaks of “Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession” (1 Tim 6:13). Standing before the governor, Christ bore witness to the truth. No one spoke for him. He himself confessed.

For that reason, profession of faith is also the fitting and necessary response to baptism. In baptism, God speaks first. He places his name upon a child, sets him apart within the covenant, and gives his promises. But those promises call for a response. As the baptized child grows and is instructed in the Word, he is brought to the point where he must personally embrace what was signified and sealed to him. He must say, in his own voice, that he believes the promises of God and entrusts himself to Christ.

Profession of faith is the answering word of faith to what God has spoken in baptism. God declares; the believer responds. God promises; the believer embraces those promises. Without such profession, the promises of God are not received in faith and therefore do not benefit the one to whom they are given.

Having established that the church is defined by faith and that this faith must be confessed, we now ask: Is personal faith necessary for participation in the Lord’s supper? For centuries, the Reformed churches have answered in the affirmative. We now turn to that question.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

The Lord’s supper is a feast of remembrance. In the Bible, remembrance is an activity of faith. It’s not just mental recall but a conscious, believing engagement with what God has done. To

remember in this sense is to call to mind the saving work of Christ and to embrace it as true and personally significant. The one who eats and drinks does not simply think about Christ's death but receives its meaning, rests in it, and takes it to heart.

This understanding is reflected in the "Form for the Lord's Supper" used among Reformed churches. Those who come to the table are called to "fully trust" that Christ was sent for them, to understand that his body was given and his blood shed for their sins, and to receive the bread and cup as a sure pledge of his love and faithfulness. The Lord's supper directs faith to Christ's sacrifice and requires that the participant take hold of that reality for himself.

For that reason, remembrance in the supper cannot be separated from understanding and faith. To remember Christ in this way is to know what is being remembered and to embrace it as true. The supper, by its very nature, requires a self-conscious participation in the gospel it sets forth.

DISCERNING THE BODY

The same requirement for understanding and faith appears in what the apostle Paul says about "discerning the body." He writes, "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor 11:29).

To discern the body is to recognize what is set forth in the supper—the body and blood of Christ given for sin—and to grasp its significance. It is also to recognize the body as it is present in the gathered church, the communion of those who belong to Christ. These two belong together: Christ's sacrifice and the unity of his people.

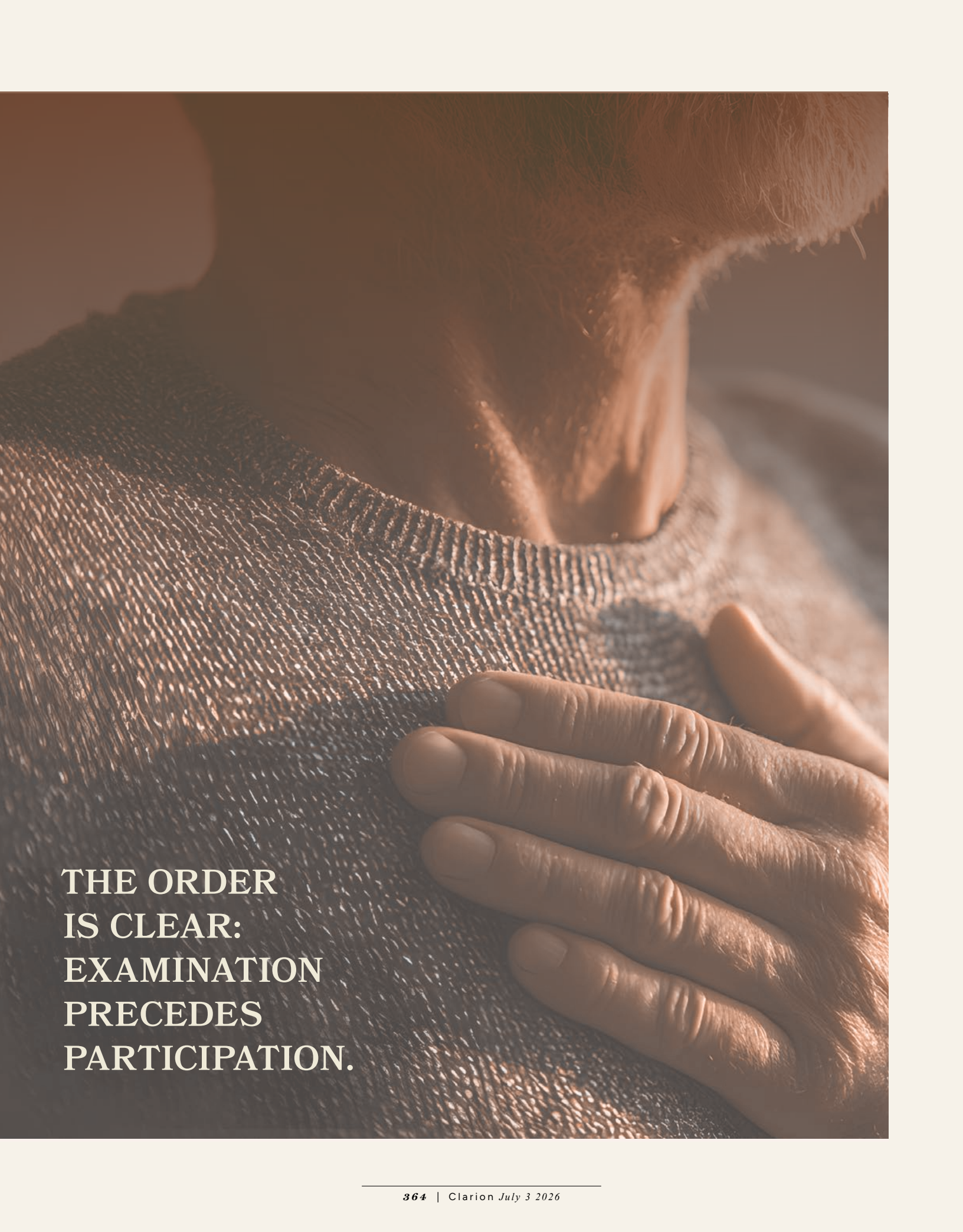
The situation in Corinth shows what happens when this discernment is absent. What was taking place there could no longer even be called the Lord's supper: "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (1 Cor 11:20). Some were eating ahead of others, some were left hungry, others were drunk, and the gathering exposed division rather than communion (vv. 21–22, 33–34). Their failure to recognize one another as members of the body revealed a deeper failure—they were not rightly recognizing Christ in the supper itself. What appeared in their conduct toward one another exposed a failure to grasp the meaning of Christ's death.

For that reason, Paul issues a warning: "Whoever . . . eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27). The supper can be received in a way that incurs guilt and judgment. It is not a neutral act.



**THE SUPPER
CAN BE RECEIVED
IN A WAY THAT
INCURS GUILT
AND JUDGMENT.**

**IT IS NOT A
NEUTRAL ACT.**



THE ORDER
IS CLEAR:
EXAMINATION
PRECEDES
PARTICIPATION.

EXAMINING YOURSELF

To prevent further desecration of the sacrament, the apostle gives this instruction: “Let a person examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (v. 28). The order is clear: examination precedes participation.

This examination is not a mere formality or a brief exercise. Paul uses the same word elsewhere: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves” (2 Cor 13:5). The point is that believers are to take stock of their faith, recognizing their sin, discerning the body and blood of Christ set forth in the sacrament, and considering their relation both to Christ and his people. These matters belong together. To fail in one is to fail in all.

CONNECTION WITH BAPTISM

A common assumption in arguments for paedocommunion is that the two sacraments must be administered in the same way. If children are admitted to baptism, it is said, they must also be admitted to the Lord’s supper. That conclusion only follows if the sacraments have the same purpose and are administered in the same way. Scripture, however, does not treat them that way.

Baptism is the sign of admission into the covenant community. It marks entrance into the visible church and is administered once, to those who are being brought into the household of God. Because its purpose is to signify God’s claim and promise, baptism is something that is given rather than something that is actively taken. The one baptized does not act; he is acted upon. The name of the Lord is placed upon him, and he is marked out as belonging to God’s people. For that reason, baptism may be administered to one who is passive. This corresponds to circumcision, which was likewise administered to infants as a sign of entry into the covenant.

The Lord’s supper is different. It is not a sign of entrance, but of ongoing participation. It is given repeatedly, not once. It is not administered to bring someone into the covenant, but to nourish those who are living within it. For that reason, it requires action. The participant takes and eats the bread and drinks from the cup. The form of the sacrament itself requires conscious participation. It cannot be received apart from the response it calls for.

This difference is reflected in the apostolic instruction. Baptism is administered on the basis of the covenant promise, extended to believers and their children. The Lord’s supper is administered with the requirement that the participant remember Christ, discern the body, and eat and drink in a worthy manner (1 Cor 11:28–29). These are not secondary details. They belong to the nature of the ordinance. The two sacraments, therefore, must not be collapsed into one pattern of administration. Baptism marks the beginning of life

within the covenant. The Lord’s supper belongs to the ongoing life of that covenant. Baptism may be administered to one who does not yet understand. The Lord’s supper requires that the participant know what he is doing.

WITHHOLDING A GOD-GIVEN PRIVILEGE?

It is a common error to assume that if a person belongs to the covenant, he must have immediate access to every privilege and function of that covenant. Scripture and ordinary experience alike show that status and function are not identical.

Within a human family, children are full members. They belong in the home, they carry the family name, and they are cared for and protected. At the same time, they are not treated in every respect as adults. A small child does not sit in on financial decisions, sign legal documents, or take the keys to the family car. He may be present at the table, but he is not handed a glass of wine or a beer, nor is he given a cigar. These are not signs that he is less a member of the family. They show that he is still growing into responsibilities and privileges that require understanding and maturity. A good parent does not say, “He belongs, therefore he should have everything now.” A good parent says, “He belongs, and therefore we will give him what is fitting at this stage and prepare him for what will come later.”

The church operates on this same principle. To belong to the covenant—to be “holy” by virtue of God’s covenant with one’s parents which he graciously extends to said child—is to have a real place within the household of God. But the Lord’s supper is given to those who have come to a personal, professed faith. It requires the ability to examine oneself, to discern the body, and to join in the confession of the congregation.

Withholding the supper from a child is not an act of exclusion from the covenant. It is a recognition that the child is still being taught and formed, and has not yet come to that personal confession of faith which the supper requires.

PASSOVER AND LORD’S SUPPER

A common argument runs as follows: children in Israel partook of the Passover; the Lord’s supper replaces the Passover; therefore, children should partake of the supper. There is an element of truth in this reasoning. The Lord’s supper does stand in a kind of continuity with the Passover. Both are covenant meals. Both proclaim redemption through sacrifice. Both are given by God to his people. But the conclusion does not follow.

The New Testament does not leave participation in the Lord’s supper to be inferred from the Old Testament. It speaks directly about how the supper is to be received, and those instructions must govern

the practice of the church. Paul does not appeal to the Passover to regulate participation in the Lord's supper. He gives specific directives: "Let a person examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor 11:28), and again, "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself" (v. 29). These are not incidental considerations. They define what it means to partake of the supper rightly.

The issue, therefore, is not whether there is continuity between Passover and the Lord's supper. There is. The issue is whether that continuity overrides the explicit requirements given in the New Testament. It does not.

To argue from Passover participation to supper participation is to reason from analogy rather than from command. It places a deduction above a directive. But when Christ institutes the supper and his apostle explains its use, the church is no longer left to inference. It is bound to what has been revealed.

It is also worth noting that the Passover itself was not an unreflective meal. It involved instruction, questioning, and understanding. There is no evidence that infants or very young children partook. The children who did partake were capable of asking, "What do you mean by this service?" (Ex 12:26). Even there, participation was joined to understanding.

In the new covenant, that connection is made explicit. The supper is given in the context of the full revelation of Christ's death and calls for a conscious participation in that reality. For that reason, the practice of the church must be governed, not by inference from the Passover, but by the instruction given for the supper itself.

CONCLUSION

What is at stake in this discussion is not a minor matter of practice, but the clarity of the church's confession. The movement to admit those who have not yet made a personal profession of faith challenges our understanding of the church. If it gains momentum, it would weaken our confession that the church is a congregation of believers—those who know Christ, confess his name, and live in fellowship with him. Paedocommunion shifts the emphasis from faith as confessed and exercised to something like implicit faith. In doing so, it risks altering the character of the church as a confessing community.

It must also be said that paedocommunion stands at odds with the confessions of the Reformed churches. These confessions give expression to what the churches have understood Scripture to teach. For that reason, views that contradict them should not be advanced

within the church, and especially not by those who hold office and are called to uphold and defend that common confession.

At the same time, this discussion about paedocommunion should not be confused with the question of when a young person ought to make profession of faith. That is a separate matter worthy of discussion. The church must encourage her young people to come to a timely and sincere confession of Christ, and to grow into the responsibilities and privileges of communicant membership. But whatever conclusions may be reached on that question, the principle remains: participation in the Lord's supper belongs to those who personally confess their faith in Christ.

The church has long expressed this conviction about who is to come to the table of the Lord in the following way: "Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life. But hypocrites and those who do not repent eat and drink judgment upon themselves" (HC, Q&A 81).¹ 



Rob Schouten

Minister

Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church

robert.a.schouten@proton.me

¹ Helpful reading on this matter can be found by searching for "paedocommunion," "self examination" and related terms at christianstudylibrary.org, cpjournal.com, and the-highway.com.

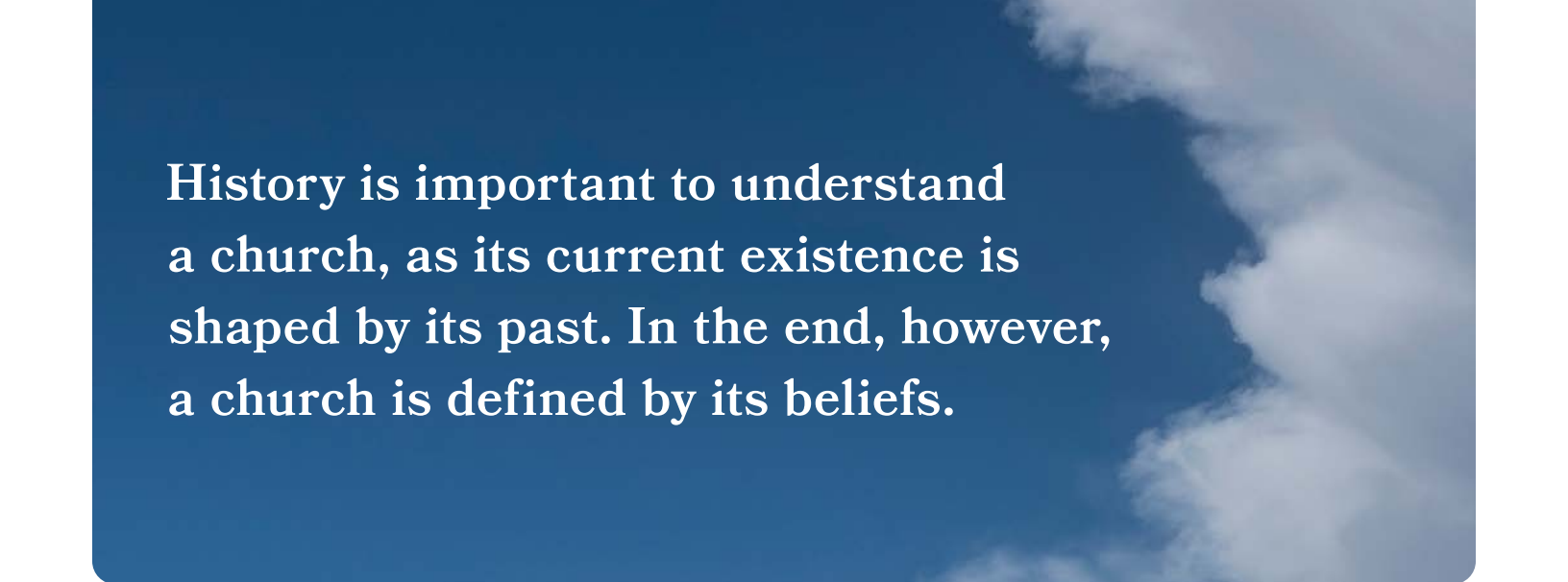
The Mennonite Brethren Churches

ERIC KAMPEN



In looking at various churches outside the PARC, it did not take too long to make historical and doctrinal connections. These connections opened the way for reflection on whether they might in some way fit in at the PARC. When it comes to the Mennonite Brethren Churches (MB), however, it may appear that we have gone too far from the PARC. There may be an historical connection in how these churches trace their origin back to the Reformation of the 16th century, but there is a doctrinal divide as they are rooted in what has been called the Radical or Left Wing of the Reformation, more commonly known as the Anabaptists.

This group, nevertheless, does merit our attention. There is an ethnic connection in the way these churches are named after Menno Simons, a key figure in the Anabaptist movement. He was born in the province of Friesland in the Netherlands, the country of origin for the founders of the Canadian Reformed Churches as well. More relevant is how these churches are familiar to many of the readers of *Clarion*, especially in Western Canada. Of some 225 Mennonite Brethren Churches in Canada, 189 are in Western Canada, with nearly half of those in British Columbia (as of 2024). For many readers, these are churches where their neighbours and acquaintances



History is important to understand a church, as its current existence is shaped by its past. In the end, however, a church is defined by its beliefs.

are members. So yes, we are far from the PARC, but we are also now in our own neighbourhood.

While our focus will be the Mennonite Brethren Churches, it should be mentioned that they are the largest of about twenty-two Anabaptist groups in Canada. Total membership in these churches in Canada is over 150,000. It is not possible within the scope of one article to include all these groups or bring out the differences. The MB churches are chosen because they are a familiar neighbour for many.

EARLY ANABAPTIST HISTORY

A study of the history of the Mennonite Brethren quickly suggests Russian roots and the use of the German language. This, however, is misleading. This comes out by briefly reviewing some developments in the Anabaptist movement in the sixteenth century.

The Anabaptist movement began during Ulrich Zwingli's ministry in Zurich, Switzerland. Some thought Zwingli was not moving fast enough in his efforts at reforming the church. A major point of contention was the idea of Christendom, which assumed that if you were born in Western Europe, you were automatically a member of the Church. Those disagreeing with Zwingli wanted to establish churches made up of only those who had consciously decided to believe. This was connected to the push for believer baptism. Other key tenets were the refusal to participate in military service and the swearing of oaths. Likeminded groups arose in Germany as well as the Tyrol.

The Anabaptists experienced cruel oppression from both Roman Catholics and Protestants. A small segment adopted revolutionary tactics, leading them to take over the city of Munster, Germany. This met with a violent end at the hand of a combination of Protestant and Roman Catholic armies in 1535.

With the Anabaptist movement in disarray by the mid-1530s, Menno Simons was won over to their cause and became one of the leaders of the movement. He rejected the violent tendencies that had led to the Munster debacle. The result of efforts by him and others led to a strong presence of Anabaptists in the Netherlands.

LOOKING FOR REFUGE

In the 16th century, there was not yet freedom of religion. As a result, many Anabaptists fled their home country for a place that would give them freedom to worship according to their convictions. At first, many found refuge in northwestern Germany, where there was some freedom of religion. Menno Simons also lived in that area for a while. They were welcomed there in part because of their expertise in draining marshy land and farming.

Later, as Lutheranism became firmly established in the region, many Anabaptists were forced to move again. They often moved as a community, finding refuge in part of what today is known as Poland. Again, their expertise in farming gave them favour with the local authorities. Their communities flourished well into the 18th century. During the later stages of their stay there, they changed from the Dutch language to German. One author mentions that the German language was "not an integral part of the Anabaptist heritage . . . the constant identification of true Mennonitism with German language and culture created serious problems for the faith and mission of the church."¹

By around 1750, the situation in Poland became less tolerant. New opportunities presented themselves in Russia. The Anabaptists were offered land in what today is the border area between Russia and Ukraine. Once again, it was a case of people moving as communities. These communities grew to a considerable size.

While they prospered, spiritual complacency set in as their existence as distinct communities led to a loss of the idea of a church

¹ J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, p. 14.

of the converted. This led to a renewal movement and a group seceded (withdrew) in January 1850 to return to the principle of a church of the converted. This seceded group is the background to the Mennonite Brethren.

EMIGRATION TO CANADA

In the 1870s, the Anabaptists again experienced a change in the mindset of the authorities. Hostility arose against all who were not ethnically Russian. The government also began to introduce compulsory military training. Many began to look for another place that would welcome them. Between 1874 and 1880, about one third of the community, some 18,000 people, emigrated to the Americas, with about 8000 settling in the Red River Valley of Manitoba. They had received guarantees from the Canadian government that they would be exempt from military service.

The first Mennonite Brethren Church was established in Burwalde, Manitoba in 1888. Initially, there was only a modest increase in numbers. This changed with a large influx of Mennonites from Russia to the prairie provinces between 1923–1930, fleeing Russia after the Revolution of 1917. Many of these new immigrants belonged to the Mennonite Brethren Church. A final influx came between 1947–1952, after the Second World War.

The first Mennonite Brethren Church in British Columbia was established in 1929, in Yarrow. The number of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Western Canada grew rapidly over the next decades. In 1960, there was a merger with a Mennonite Brethren group in Ontario with roots in Crimea, but the numbers in Ontario and the other Eastern provinces are small compared to Western Canada. According to the 2024 Statistics, the total MB membership is about 31,300 across Canada, with an average weekly attendance of almost 50,000 people.

A CONFSSIONAL CHURCH

History is important to understand a church, as its current existence is shaped by its past. In the end, however, a church is defined by its beliefs. The MB Confession of Faith consists of eighteen articles. They can easily be found on their website (mennonitebrethren.ca). These articles are prefaced with a series of Frequently Asked Questions which explain how this Confession functions and why they have a more extensive Confession rather than a short creed. A perusal of this section shows that the MB is a confessional church with confessing membership. It is confessional in that it expects all the churches and their leaders to subscribe to this Confession. At one point it is stated, “A very diverse MB family that shares only some short universally agreed on confessional affirmations

has little to guide the preaching, teaching, and mission within our MB family; little to contribute to the larger Christian family; and little to anchor us as a denominational entity.” While the goal is that all members would also subscribe to the Confession, this is not required for membership. As for membership in general, one can only become a member upon confessing one’s faith.

The eighteen articles of the MB Confession of Faith cover their theological and ethical beliefs. Looking at the headings of the Articles, the split is about half and half for each. The articles are accompanied by Explanatory Notes as well as Commentary and Pastoral Application. This is a refreshing contrast to many churches with such minimalist statements that one has difficulty determining what they really believe. The MB is a church that is unapologetic about its convictions. This clear statement of faith also makes it possible to highlight some differences from Reformed convictions.

SOME DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES

First, in speaking of the Triune God, the MB Confession of Faith mentions, “Through Jesus Christ, the Father adopts all who respond in faith to the gospel, forgiving those who repent of their sin and entering into a new covenant with them. God gives the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, to all his children” (Art 1). This gives the impression that God saves and adopts because one believes, with God being dependent upon the decision of man. It is the basic question of whether we are saved *because we have faith* or, we have faith *because we are saved*. It touches on the question of election and free will. In Anabaptism, there was always the element of voluntarism, in the sense of man, of his own free will, accepting the offer of salvation. This is also reflected in the insistence on personal conversion before baptism and church membership. Having said this, there is some ambiguity. Elsewhere it is stressed that we are saved only out of grace by faith.

Second, in speaking about the Revelation of God, mention is made of how God reveals himself in creation and in his Word. It then adds, “The Holy Spirit continues to make God known to individuals and the church; this revelation is always consistent with the Scriptures” (Art 2). In the explanatory notes it is said that revelation did not stop with the completion of the Bible. We may speak of the ongoing *illumination* by the Spirit, but it essentially goes back to Rome’s position of Tradition and Scripture by speaking of ongoing *revelation*.

Third, in dealing with Creation and Humanity, it is mentioned that human nature became distorted (Art 3). While elsewhere it is said that it is not in humanity’s power to save itself, distortion is not the same as being spiritually dead.

Fourth, in confessing the Church, it is stated that, “People who respond in faith are united with the local congregation by the public confession of baptism” (Art 6). There is no view of God establishing his covenant with believers and their children.

Fifth, the articles about Baptism (8) and the Lord’s Supper (9) portray the sacraments as actions of the believers toward God, to express their faith, rather than as actions of God toward believers, to strengthen faith.

Finally, in the articles dealing with Society and State as well as Love and Non-Resistance (12 & 13), they state their position on not swearing oaths and refusal to be involved in active military service, while being ready to give alternate service where possible.

POINTS TO BE APPRECIATED

Despite important differences, there are many aspects of the Confession that can be appreciated, such as what is said about Discipleship (10), Marriage, Singleness, and Family (11), the Sanctity of Human Life (14), Stewardship of the world in which we live (15), and Work, Rest, and the Lord’s Day (16). It shows they take their faith seriously. Their position on marriage is firm, evident in how, a few years ago, three MB churches were expelled from the Conference due to their stand on LGBTQ inclusion and same sex marriage.

MEETING IN THE PARK

The above underlines that it is unrealistic to expect members of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations to meet Mennonite Brethren at the PARC. It is realistic, though, to picture CanRC and MB members, especially in Western Canada, meeting in their

local parks and neighbourhoods. It is good to be aware of the trials and tribulations that led their forefathers to move around Western Europe, changing to the German language, ending up in Russia, all before moving to Canada. We should empathize with the desire for freedom of worship.

It is also good to be aware that while there may be agreement in some of the basics of the faith, there are significant doctrinal differences. Awareness sets the stage for meaningful conversations. At the same time, there is something refreshing about their commitment to being a confessional church, with the expectation of a sincere confessing membership, growing in their understanding of and commitment to the confessions of the church. That should find a sympathetic echo in our midst.

In all this we repeat what has been said in previous articles, that where the Word is, the Spirit is working, and so we conclude once again with the prayer for the Church Universal found in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*:

Most gracious God, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth; in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where any thing is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen and confirm it; where it is in want, furnish it; where it is divided and rent asunder, make it whole again; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. 



Eric Kampen

Minister Emeritus

Canadian Reformed Church of Orangeville

rev.e.kampen@gmail.com



READ AND SEARCH OLD VOLUMES

of **Clarion**

clarionmagazine.ca/archive

The banner features a dark blue background. On the left, there is a stylized, light blue line-art illustration of a person standing and holding a long staff or pole, with an open book at their feet. The text is centered and right-aligned in white, using a mix of serif and sans-serif fonts.



Caring for the Animals

LYN METZLAR LEYENHORST

According to some sources, almost 80% of Canadian households include at least one pet, with an estimated 29 million pets in Canada. While these numbers are just estimates, Canadians do appear to love their pets! And with that rate of pet ownership comes the need for people to work in careers related to pet care.

Today, I'd like you to meet Lorien Vandergugten, a Registered Veterinary Technologist (RVT) from Chilliwack, BC. She graduated from Thompson Rivers University in 2025. Since graduation, she has been working at the Sardis Animal Hospital, a general practice clinic, where she mostly works with dogs and cats. She lives nearby with her parents, brother, grandfather, and her own two large dogs, Cypress and Luka. They attend Sardis Canadian Reformed Church (well, not the dogs!)

What exactly is an RVT, and what does a typical day at work look like for you?

Registered Veterinary Technologists can be compared to Registered Nurses. Our training and work responsibilities are similar but I work with animals instead of people. At a general practice, we do a lot of different things. In the mornings we usually have surgeries, so I'll make sure the machines are working properly, prep the patient, and monitor the patient during the surgery and recovery. In the afternoon we have appointments for sick patients, new pet visits, monthly injections, things like that. I begin the appointment for the doctor: take the patient's history, check their vitals, and give estimates for the visit. Treatments might include bloodwork, x-rays, or getting fluids or medications. After that, we send home our surgery patients, so I go over discharge instructions with the owners.



Why and when did you decide to go into this field?

I always had a love for and interest in animals and wanted to go into a field where I could help them. In high school, I decided to pursue veterinary studies, but after one year at Trinity Western, the thought of eight more years of school wasn't very appealing. My cousin was preparing to apply to the vet tech program at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and suggested that we apply together, so we did just that.

Since your training is similar to nursing, why work with animals and not with people, particularly since there is such a nursing shortage at the moment?

That's a good question. There is some overlap with how we diagnose and treat animals vs human patients, but overall it comes down to your interest and passion. For most people going into this work, their first interest is the animals, not the nursing care. The Lord calls each of us to use our gifts and talents as ambassadors of his kingdom, and I do have the gift, the personality, to advocate for animals that don't really have a voice of their own.

In Psalm 145:9 it says: "The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made." Animals are part of God's handiwork and we should show love to them too. When I graduated from TRU, I received the Animal Wellness Advocacy Award, not just for basic care but for going beyond in being invested in animal wellness and enrichment opportunities, helping develop their brain as well as their bodies. I was happy that my instructors and classmates could recognize the compassion I have for all God's creatures.

What are some of the emotionally difficult situations you've encountered in school and at work?

In school, we had to perform a spay on a pregnant dog, which included aborting the puppies, and that was a difficult thing to grapple with for some of us. Obviously, abortion for humans is wrong, but planning on that situation for an animal felt wrong too. With euthanasia, we consider quality of life, and even though the value of their life is different than human life, it's still sometimes very difficult and emotional.

What are some misconceptions that your friends may have about your work?

Sometimes people downplay the difficulty of the job: it's just animals, not humans. But surgery can still be very high pressure. Sometimes people think I spend much of my day euthanizing animals, or they think I just spend the day playing with them. And then, some people think we're just in it for the money, but it's definitely not a high paying job!

So what do you, as a Christian, bring to your work that a non-Christian colleague might not bring?

The main thing I notice is a general work ethic; I'm always working hard because I know that whatever I do, I do for the Lord. In school, some students chose the field because it was only a two-year course and that seemed easy. But I also think those things have a lot to do with personality.

What advice would you give to somebody in high school who's trying to decide what to do as a career?

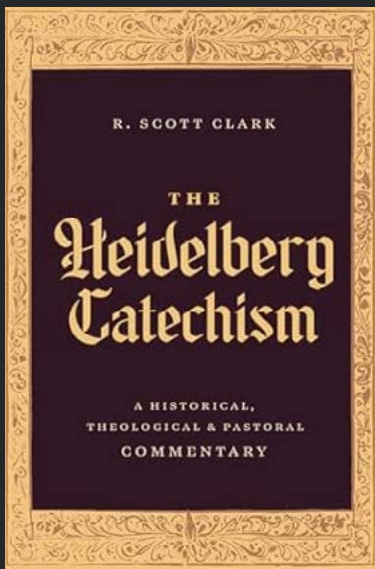
The first thing I would say is that they should look at their interests and passions and let that lead them. If you choose RVT, be prepared for high emotions; school is very intense, and so is working in a clinic. Be prepared to get into the program by taking the right prerequisite courses. At the time of my application, you needed 80 hours of volunteer and/or work experience in the veterinary field, so that's something you should start working on in high school already.

Any final comments?

In Proverbs 12:10 it says: "The righteous care for the needs of their animals" (NIV). We are called to steward the animals in our care. If this is something you'd like to spend your days doing, maybe a career as a Registered Veterinarian Technologist is one you should consider!

Lyn Metzlar Leyenhorst

Cloverdale, BC
lmllanguagearts@gmail.com



A Must-Read for Heidel-lovers

The Heidelberg Catechism: A Historical, Theological & Pastoral Commentary, by R. Scott Clark. Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2025; Hardcover, 1060 pages. \$80.11 CDN.

It's a strange thing that even though the Heidelberg Catechism is one of our confessions, so little has been written on it. Sure, we hear sermons on it each Sunday, but where are the commentaries digging deeper into some of the theological issues? We have had books of catechism sermons published (e.g. Stam, Wieske) but, so far as I can tell, there has never been a true commentary from our circles.

While R. Scott Clark isn't Canadian Reformed, he is a minister in the United Reformed Churches, sister churches of the CanRC. He recently retired from teaching at Westminster Seminary California. He is well-known for his website, the Heidelblog and its associated enterprises.

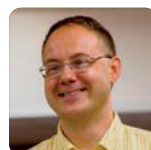
This commentary is a massive achievement—over 900 pages of exposition and interaction with the Catechism. It explains the historical background of each Lord's Day. Clark is especially concerned to give authority to the voice of Zacharias Ursinus, the principal author of the Catechism. He tackles all the usual questions and issues, but also addresses newer ones. Here's a list of some that I found interesting:

- What about some who reject thankfulness as the source of the Christian life? (p. 34, 601)
- How should we evaluate the rejection of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son? (p. 236ff.)
- What about cremation? (pp. 288–289)
- What should we think about postmillennialism? (pp. 339–342; 873–874)
- What about a two-stage doctrine of salvation, where justification is by faith alone, but “final salvation” is through works? (pp. 390–392; 421–422)
- How should we evaluate presumptive regeneration? (pp. 510–513)

- Does the Bible give warrant for the practice of intinction in the Lord's Supper? (pp. 534–535)
- Is it accurate to call the Lutheran view of Christ's presence in the Lord's supper “consubstantiation”? (pp. 544–545)
- Does the Heidelberg Catechism misrepresent Roman Catholic teaching in QA 80? (pp. 554–561)
- Is paedocommunion Reformed and biblical? (pp. 563–565)
- What about theonomy? (pp. 651–652)
- Is it permissible to have images of Christ for the instruction of little children? (pp. 682–688)
- Does our Catechism teach that we must always correct everyone who abuses the name of the LORD? (pp. 705–706)
- May we pray to the Son and the Spirit or to the Father only? (p. 857)

I agreed with Clark on most of his answers, but with a book this large there are always going to be some places where confessionally Reformed people can and will dissent. Clark isn't afraid to touch on today's controversial issues, so I do wonder why he didn't discuss theistic evolution when treating Lord's Day 9.

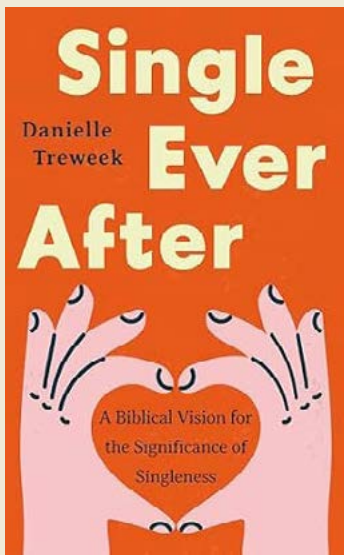
So, who is this book for? Anyone who loves the Heidelberg Catechism! It's written by a theologian and it's theologically responsible, but it's also accessible to a wider audience. Especially those who teach and preach our Catechism will undoubtedly find it to be a useful resource. Perhaps it will inspire someone from our circles to write a commentary as well. 



Wes Bredenhof

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston, AU
bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca



A Single Community

Single Ever After: A Biblical Vision for the Significance of Singleness, by Danielle Treweek. The Good Book Company, 2025, paperback, 174 pages. \$23.99 CDN

I grew up in a time that predated a tiered preschool system. Before we were catapulted from the safety of our home onto the school bus, *Sesame Street*, a mainstream television show for kids, was a primary help to get us ready. One of the games that they regularly played on this show involved singing a song, “*One of these things is not like the others*” and you had to figure out which item didn’t fit before the song came to an end. If you were struggling, Bert or Ernie or the Cookie Monster might give you a clue. Reading Danielle Treweek’s book on singleness in the church made me think about that game. From her perspective, along with the input of many single people, little help is needed in determining who doesn’t seem to fit in and who is not like the others.

Intuitively I was aware of this, but alongside many others have clumsily tried to navigate smoothing out the disconnect between married couples and single adults in the church. What I love about this book is that it is open, forthright, and engaging of everyone involved in the conversation. Treweek launches with the biblical truth that we all start out single before God and end up “single ever after” in a great community of faith, all finding our fullness and completion in Jesus Christ.

With this as her footing, Treweek works her way through a number of passages on marriage and singleness and how they have been interpreted and applied over the history of the church to help build up unnecessary expectations and awkwardness in this relationship. She identifies a vibrant community of believers, where marrieds and singles benefit from each other’s experiences and personal growth and help each other navigate the challenges of life together. In that sense, this book is not only for singles or particularly aimed in their direction. It is for everyone who is part of a single community before God.

Treweek playfully uses popular song titles for each chapter and subdivides them in a theoretical discussion followed by application

for living it out. I appreciated her candour in many areas, not only in the realm of spiritual and emotional wellness but also sexual awareness and desires.

Her writing is both engaging and revealing, confronting difficult discussions with humility and ease. As an example, she identifies the spectrum that single people may find themselves in with respect to their singleness, which can change over time. This can range from contentment, searching, frustration, discontentment, hoping, settling, etc. She wisely balances this with the reality that married people can find themselves on the same spectrum of experience in their marriage, only with the added responsibility that they have covenanted themselves in a relationship to one other person. She does a good job of reminding the reader that individually we are much the same, whether married or single, and we need each other.

One other teaching that stuck with me regarding the reality that marriage relationships are not carried forward into eternity is the truth that marriage is intended to reflect, for all people, the eternal relationship between Christ and his church. Likewise, singleness in the church also serves as an illustration for all, a vision of what eternity will be like, finding personal fullness in the body of believers in a relationship with Jesus as the head of the church.

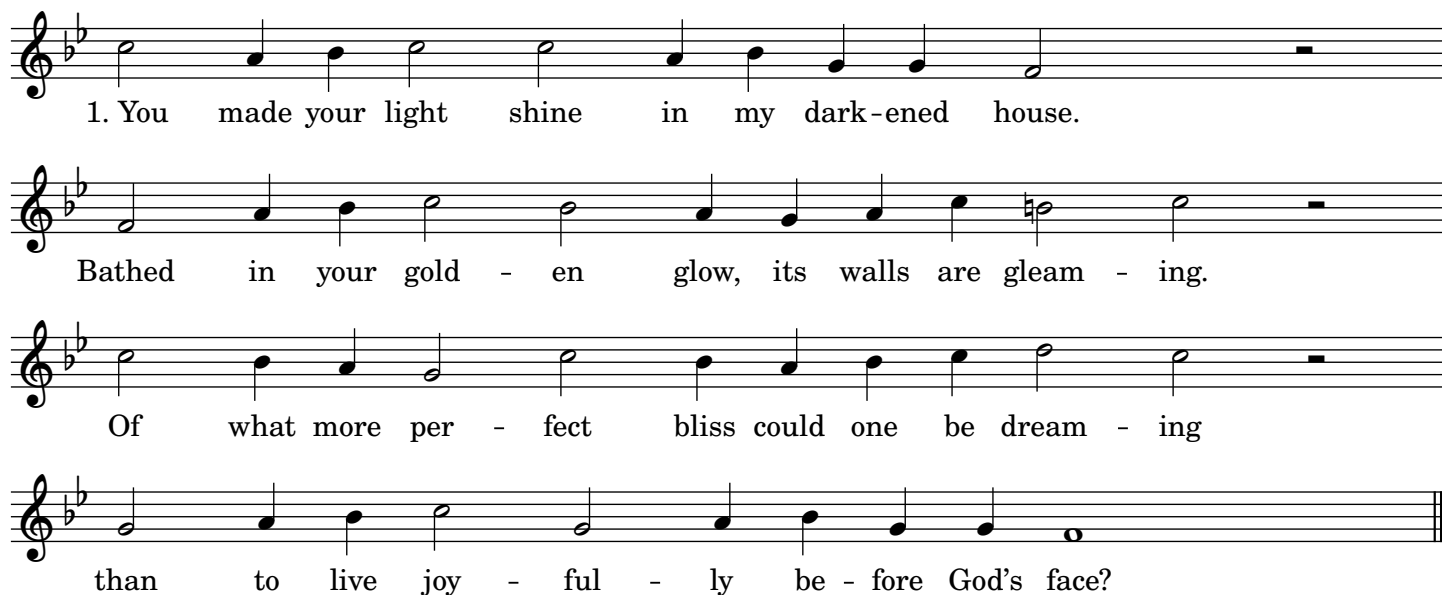
Treweek does well in easing the pressure on being single or married in the church by replacing it with an emphasis on being in relationship together as the full community of God’s people. I heartily recommend this thoughtful book for pastors and overseers as well as anyone else who has felt and contributed to the unhelpful awkwardness between marrieds and singles in the church! 



Rick Ludwig

Streetlight Christian Church
rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com

Prayer of Thanksgiving



1. You made your light shine in my dark-ened house.
Bathed in your gold - en glow, its walls are gleam - ing.
Of what more per - fect bliss could one be dream - ing
than to live joy - ful - ly be - fore God's face?

2. My deaf ears you have touched with power to heal.
Now birdsongs I as songs of praise can follow.
Mere humdrum daily things your smile has hallowed.
My overflowing cup your love reveals.

3. I thank you for this life lit by the sun,
below the heavens bright with your good pleasure,
a blessing marvellous beyond all measure –
joy of eternity, in time begun!

Text: William Helder, 2023

Translation of "Dankgebed," by Geeske Wiersma-le Grand (1927–2022)

Tune: Genevan 116

The Book of Books

Capo 1: A D Bm E A D

1. When o - pen - ing the Book of books, Re - mem - ber,
 2. Here hu - man wis - dom would be vain, And dil - i -
 3. Be - fore you set - tle down to read, In hum - ble -
 4. Ask for the bless - ing to re - ceive The heart and

Chris - tian, day and night That all those pon - der -
 gence would not suf - fice. For - sake smug in - sights
 ness to and God sub - mit. May ho that - ly fear and
 ears and eyes you need So that in joy as

ing God's Word Must nev - er put their trust in their own light.
 of your own, For you must learn to see with dif - f'rent eyes.
 rev - er - ence Per - vade your in - most mind and gov - ern it.
 well as grief You in His Word Je - sus Him - self may meet.

Music: Michael E. Owens, 2025

Text: Isaac da Costa, 1835; tr. William Helder, 2025 © 2025, wllmhldr@gmail.com

DIFFERENT EYES

8 8. 8 10.

MEET GAVIN NICHOL



Gavin is a sweet, loving, and energetic boy! He will be 12 on the 4th of July. When Gavin was small, he grew and met all his developmental milestones. When he was 18 months old, Gavin experienced a blood clot (cavernous sinus thrombosis) in his brain which put pressure on one of the optic nerves, causing his eye to deviate. He was put on blood thinners for six months of his little life. This helped stabilize the blood clot, but it unfortunately caused permanent eye

deviation. This then caused the other eye to deviate as well to compensate for the impaired vision. Gavin eventually required bi-lateral eye surgery to repair the deviation.

During this period in Gavin's young life, he began to regress in skills and speech. Gavin went from saying about 20 words to being completely non-verbal. He was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder at 2.5 years of age.

Gavin has been receiving Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) therapy since he was three years old. During the early years of ABA, Gavin received 40 hours

of learning a week. This therapy has taught Gavin many skills like readiness, listening, and social skills as well as fine motor skills, colour recognition, and counting. He has also learnt many self-help skills. As parents, we are so proud of all the accomplishments Gavin has made over the past decade!

We were incredibly blessed to have been introduced to his therapy team through Joanne VanBrederode (his great aunt) and Denise Ravensbergen many years ago. This team has become an extended part of our family, and we appreciate all they have done and continue to do for Gavin. He currently continues ABA learning 12 hours a week on top of a full week at school.

As Gavin is non-verbal, he communicates using an Assistive Augmentative Communication (AAC) device. ABA has taught Gavin how to communicate effectively using his AAC device. Not only does Gavin use this device to ask for things he wants or needs, but he is also using it to communicate when he is not feeling well. Gavin has grown in leaps and bounds over the past year and is beginning to read by whole word recognition and spell relevant 3 and 4-letter words.

Even though he works harder than any child we have ever met, Gavin is happy, affectionate, and an overall blessing to be around. He continues to grow socially and loves a high-five or a hug. If you ever see Gavin around town, feel free to say hi! He truly appreciates everyone he meets.

From Gavin's mother

JULY BIRTHDAYS

4 Gavin Nichols will be 12
38 Killins St
Smithville ON
LOR2A0

4 James Buikema will be 65
c/o R. Jager
627 Maple Ave
Burlington, ON
L7R 1M7

11 Jeffrey Jansema will be 29
158 Lane Road,
Dunnville, ON
N1A 2W1

14 Sarah Vandergugten will be 31
23 Jane Street
Smithville, ON
LOR 2A0

20 Charlie Beintema will be 51
64 Llydican Ave
Chatham, ON
N7L 3E5

20 Derrick VanderHorst will be 39
c/o The Landing, 75 Law Drive
Guelph ON
N1E 7J6
Email: derrickvanderhorst@gmail.com

25 Joel Slomp will be 38
316 Church Rd, Apartment 102
Spruce Grove, AB
T7X 0G2
Email: joelrslomp@gmail.com

25 Julie Ostermeier will be 35
484 Millen Rd, Unit 5
Stoney Creek, ON
L8E 6G4

Happy Birthday to the many of you celebrating a birthday in July! What a blessing it is to celebrate another year. May you all have a great day celebrating with family and friends.

We also welcome Gavin to our Ray of Sunshine list! Thanks to his mom for writing an introduction to Gavin so we can all get to know him. May God also be with his family and support system as they care for him.

Rachel Vis
tom.rachelvis@gmail.com

