

YEAR END 2022

Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE



TO ALL OUR READERS,

Best Wishes

AND THE

Lord's Blessings

IN THE YEAR

2023

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Christmas

A TIME FOR REJOICING

ERIC KAMPEN

Christmas time stands out for its exuberance and joy. We are helped in this by the multitude of Christmas hymns and carols. Indeed, there are so many, you can't really get them all in every Christmas.

While there is no specific command to sing so much about the birth of our Lord, we can understand why Christmas is a time for joyful singing when we consider the events in the fields near Bethlehem on the night our Lord was born. Luke's account of an angel appearing to shepherds, followed by the appearance of a multitude of angels, and then the shepherds heading to Bethlehem, brings out the reason for praise and gives us a model of praise, echoed in the many joyful Christmas songs.

book of Judges that when Israel fell into sin, was punished by the LORD, and then repented, that the LORD raised up saviours—deliverers. At the point in history when our Lord was born, Israel was again in such a time of oppression, as they were under Roman rule. What news to hear that a Saviour had arrived on the scene!

Next, we note that this Saviour was born in “the city of David.” Ever since David, the hope of a deliverer had been inseparably linked to the house of David. There was the promise that the Messiah, the Christ, would come from David's line, who would be lord over his people. Zechariah had spoken of the Lord God raising up a horn of salvation in the house of David. The angel speaks the same language. Salvation language was very much

It is a message that speaks to the world


THE REASON FOR PRAISE

The reason for praise comes out in the words of the first angel who said that he was bringing them a message of good news of great joy (Luke 2:8–14). Perhaps to our surprise, that joy is not put in terms of the miracle of God entering into human flesh. The joy is in the fact that a Saviour has been born in David's city, who is Christ the Lord.

These words are loaded with meaning. The word “Saviour” suggests images of the time of the judges. It is a refrain in the

“Israel” language and “David” language. Salvation was seen as the restoration of Israel. We should also note that it was good news for all the people of Israel, meaning it was news of interest to both rich and poor in Israel, to anyone waiting for redemption, including shepherds.

At the same time, while the message was expressed in what we might call “Israel” language, it is a message that speaks to the world. This comes out in the words of the multitude of angels, “On earth peace among those with whom he is pleased” (v. 14). By



this act of sending his Son, God has established peace on earth. In Scripture, peace is not merely the absence of war. Rather, it points to all around well-being, to a wholeness of life, which can only come when there is peace with God. The angels understand that this is what the coming of the Son is all about. That's why elsewhere the Saviour is called "Prince of Peace."

We also should note the phrase, "Among those with whom he is pleased." This phrase ties in with what the angel said about the good news being for all the people. The people with whom God is pleased does not refer to people who have something pleasing in themselves, but they are the people upon whom God has set his

The church cannot remain silent

love, his covenant people, who have a special relationship with him out of grace. When our Lord was born, that was especially the people of Israel. They had been set apart out of grace, not because they were better or more numerous. We know from God's promise to Abraham that this grace would be shown to all the peoples of the earth. The nations may share in the blessings of Abraham.

So, the good news of great joy was that the Saviour of the world had been born. The joyful nature of this news is underlined by the way the one angel was joined by a whole army of angels. These angels did the most important thing angels are supposed to do, namely, praise God! In doing so, they present themselves as models of praise.

MODELS OF PRAISE

While popular perception has the angels functioning like a giant choir, singing away, that is not said explicitly. Luke puts it in terms of them "saying." Whether said or sung, there is no doubt that we have words of praise. The first thing they said was, "Glory to God in the highest." God is to be praised for sending his Son into the world. He is to be praised not merely for sending his Son into our human flesh, but in thus setting out to redeem his people. We can read in Job 38:7 that the angels praised God when he laid the foundations of the earth. As the angels were privileged witnesses of God's work at creation, they were now witnesses of his work of recreation and redemption, and they praise him for it.


It should be noted that the angels praise God even though they do not personally benefit from the work of Christ. They do not need him as a redeemer, for they were spared from falling. In this

respect, they are a model to us of praising God simply because he is God, and his works are worthy of praise. This is pure praise for the sake of praise. They delight in serving God just because he is God. They delight in praising him for all he does.

AN ECHO OF PRAISE

We read that once the angels had gone, the shepherds wasted no time going to Bethlehem, where they found the baby as they had been told. After they saw the child and told what they had experienced, they went home glorifying and praising God. How much the shepherds understood of the significance of our Lord's birth, we are not told. Considering how little the disciples understood various things during the Lord's ministry, we need not assume too much. They knew as much as they could, with the revelation they had from God. Whatever the extent of their knowledge, just like with the angelic host, the result was that they glorified and praised God for all they had heard and seen. Those men of the field had enough spiritual sensitivity to know this was an event of tremendous significance for Israel, and for that they glorified and praised God.

Unlike the angels, however, we are not told exactly how they praised God. Maybe they sang the same words heard from the angels, "Glory to God in the highest. . . ." Whatever and however they did it, it is with that earthly echo of the heavenly praise that the birth account of our Lord closes. We could say Bethlehem's hills were alive with the sounds of praise to God. It is that aspect of praising and glorifying God that should impress itself upon us whenever we think about our Lord's birth. The angels could not remain silent. The shepherds could not remain silent. Really, the church cannot remain silent, for the birth of our Lord was and is good news of great joy to us also today. It was a great and might wonder when God sent his Son into our human flesh. It is such a pivotal event that we can never cease being amazed about, God sending his Son into our human condition to be our deliverer.

So, as we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, it is only fitting that our churches and homes be filled with songs of joy, praising our God for the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. 



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Merry Christmas Everyone!

May the joy of the Lord be ours as we commemorate the incarnation of the Son of God, the start of his journey to the cross, and all for our salvation! It truly is a wonder to ponder, and in this Christmas *Clarion* we offer you plenty of opportunities to do just that as you sip your hot chocolate or bite into a *lecker ollie-bollen!*

Our thanks go out to contributing editor Rev. Eric Kampen for gathering the Christmas/year-end articles this year. In addition, Mr. Rick Ludwig presents thoughtful insights on how having suffered loss changes our experience and expectations of the Christmas season, and how to navigate that. You can also read how in 2022 another faithful servant of the Lord has entered emeritus status, Rev. Douwe Agema—we wish him and his wife God's continued blessing in a new chapter of service! The beautiful work of mothering comes to the fore during Christmas and so it's fitting to present a podcast review on this very noble calling by guest reviewer Mrs. Rachel Van Tol. The Bredenhof cousins provide us with three helpful book reviews and Mrs. Amanda DeBoer nimbly walks the kids through the precious truths of Lord's Day 23. Dr. James Visscher gives us both a press release (of the recent ICRC) and a sizeable year-end review of life in our federation. As this will be his last such review, we'd like to offer our thanks to him for taking the considerable time and effort over twenty-two years to put such overviews together—thank you brother! And let's not forget to extend birthday greetings to our special brothers and sisters listed in the Ray of Sunshine column—happy birthday all!

Whatever difficulties we've experienced in 2022, our Saviour was with us every step of the way. And he will continue to be so in 2023, as he moves history forward ever closer to the day of his return. God bless you all!

Peter Holtvlüwer

- 735** Christmas: A Time for Rejoicing, *Eric Kampen*
- 738** TREASURES, NEW & OLD, *Clarence J. VanderVelde*
- 739** FROM THE PUBLISHER, *William Gortemaker*
- 740** Birth Changes Everything, *Clarence Bouwman*
- 743** Unto Us a Child is Born, *Winston Bosch*
- 745** Jesus Christ and the Coming of Truth, *Rick VanderHorst*
- 747** Great Expectations, *Rick Ludwig*
- 751** 2023: To Be or Not to Be Afraid?, *Ben Schoof*
- 754** Retirement of Rev. Douwe Agema, *Dianne Westrik, Duane Westrik, and Kim Hutten*
- 756** "Behold, Your God!" *Amanda DeBoer*
- 758** RAY OF SUNSHINE, *Rachel Vis*
- 759** CLARION KIDS, *Amanda DeBoer*
- 760** PODCAST REVIEW, *Rachel Van Tol*
- BOOK REVIEW
- 761** When Home Hurts, *Wes Bredenhof*
- 762** My Father's Journey, *Reuben Bredenhof*
- 763** Do You Believe, *Wes Bredenhof*
- 764** Press Release (ICRC 2022)
- 767** Year End Review 2022

Clarion

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THE FIRST CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

“And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.’”

LUKE 2:10, 11

Suddenly an angel appeared to the shepherds watching their flock by night, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. The shepherds were filled with great fear. However, there was no reason to fear because the angel had come with good news! Gospel! The angel proceeded to deliver the first Christmas message. Then there appeared a multitude of angels praising God, as a doxology to the message proclaimed.

The angels on the night of Christ’s birth were not an ornament; they were essential. How else would the message of Christ’s birth have gone out? The Christ-child looked no different than any other child in Bethlehem that night. Joseph and Mary knew that this was the Promised One, but could they have announced his arrival themselves? Therefore, heavenly messengers came to get the word out. Their heavenly glory offset the simplicity of the baby lying in the manger.


The angels did not come to people in the town of Bethlehem, but to shepherds. That’s significant because shepherds were considered to be on one of the lowest rungs of society. They were generally unrefined people who didn’t count; they had such low standing that they could never testify as witnesses in legal cases. Yet, they were privileged to hear the angelic message and witness the heavenly host, with the intention that they testify to it and pass it on! In this already, we see that Christ came to seek what is low and despised in the world. The gospel does not take into account distinctions of class, education, or economic status; the gospel is for sinners, whatever position we may have in life.

The shepherds were filled with fear. No wonder! When sinful people are in the presence of heavenly glory, fear is the reaction. But the angel immediately put them at ease: “Fear not.” Why? Because the angel had come with good news of great joy! Their fear could turn into joy.

Christmas time is the season of joy. We say, “Merry Christmas.” French-speakers say, “Joyeux Noël.” That’s because the angel’s message was about the birth of the Saviour who would bring salvation from sin, the brokenness of life, death, and Satan. That’s reason for joy!

That first Christmas message was riveting. The economy of words gives it punch. Translated very literally, it reads like a very

compact and direct text message: “Born to you today, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David.” Every word reveals an important element. The opening word is “born,” the key word serving as the opening exclamation. God’s covenant people had been waiting centuries for this birth, and now it had come to them (“you”). The long-awaited day had finally come, “today.” The “Saviour” was here! He is “Christ,” that is, the One ordained by God the Father to be our chief Prophet, our only High Priest, and our eternal King. With the title “Christ,” the entire work of the Saviour is in view. He is “Lord,” that is, the One who came to ransom us with his precious blood, to free us from the power of the devil, and to make us his own possession. In him, we are delivered from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of light. And this birth had happened “in the city of David,” Bethlehem, because the Promised One would be the royal son of David.

The gospel of salvation went to God’s people Israel in the first place, and since Pentecost it goes to all nations. It has come to us. The first Christmas message—as with every sermon—had to be received in faith. Faith is the avenue to sharing in the joy of Christmas and Christ’s saving merits. It’s this call to faith in Christ the Saviour which comes to us every time we hear a Christmas sermon. 

FURTHER READING

Luke 2:1–20

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. To whom does “all the people” in 2:10 refer?
2. What did the shepherds do after they had received this angelic message? What does this say about the shepherds?
3. What is your response to the gospel message?



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Dear reader: What a year it's been for *Clarion*! At the beginning of 2022, Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer assumed duties as our Editor-in-chief. This is no small task, but the transition went smoothly, and for that we once more thank our outgoing editor Dr. Visscher, as well as Rev. Holtvlüwer, our managing editor Mrs. Laura Veenendaal, and the rest of our editorial and design teams.

You will have noticed that, while our mission remains the same, we introduced changes and new features. We have some new regular columns or new writers providing them. Mrs. Amanda DeBoer has taken children through much of the Heidelberg Catechism for *Clarion Kids*; Mr. Lucas Holtvlüwer brings podcasts to our consideration; Ms. Ilse Vandermeulen adds a level of journalism with her varied articles on church news; Mr. Mitchell Bosveld provides updates on the persecution of Christians; Rev. Jan DeGelder is renewing our appreciation for the Church Order; and Dr. Wes Bredenhof reflects and recommends in his book reviews. Thank you to these brothers and sisters, and to our regular contributors and coordinators. We hope our readers enjoy the changes.

There will be a major change for the new year as well. We have received some feedback that our biweekly magazine comes perhaps a little bit *too* often. We considered the internal commitment this schedule requires of our editorial team, designer, and production team. And *Clarion* is not immune

to the large increases in the cost of paper and production. In response to these pressures, we have decided to move to a tri-weekly schedule beginning in 2023. The plan is to fit the same amount of content over the year but in fewer issues. So you can expect *Clarion* to arrive every three weeks, with more pages than the biweekly issue.

This change represents some savings in production cost. However, we have to pass on a small part of the increased cost by way of the first increase to subscription rates in many years. The new rates are published at the front of the magazine. We thank our readers and advertisers for your ongoing support.

We pray that *Clarion* may continue to be a blessing to you. Your feedback is most welcome! Please take the opportunity to pass it on to our editors. May all this serve for the good of our churches.

Finally, we remember “the reason for the season” – the grace of God in sending the perfect Saviour for us: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things... he had to be made like is brothers in every respect... (Heb 2:14,17)” May our remembrance of the coming of the Messiah result in much praise and thankfulness to God! On behalf of the Premier Printing team, we extend our warm greetings to you and our prayer for the blessings of our Father in the New Year.

William Gortemaker





BIRTH CHANGES

Everything



CLARENCE BOUWMAN



walls of the womb pressed on our son, squeezing to the point of ejecting him into a new world, one hitherto unimaginable, a world with new opportunities, new challenges, new responsibilities, light. Now the baby must breathe and drink. Now he would cry, stretch, and eventually crawl, walk, run, etc. *Born* represents a new world, or better: a greatly improved perspective on reality, a worldview the unborn could never begin to fathom. *Born* represents a *widening* of horizons. Birth changes things profoundly.

CHRISTMAS

That was true of Jesus's birth also though in a far bigger way. Like each of us, after the normal nine months of gestation, his mother's womb contracted upon him to squeeze him out into a bigger world, a new world—one providing this baby with an improved, expanded understanding of reality. But unlike each of us, with Jesus there was a unique backstory that made the change experienced in his birth infinitely more profound. John records that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). John wanted us to know who this Word is: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made through him” (1:1, 3). John's point? He who became “flesh,” who was born, was the very One who years earlier had created galaxies in remotest corners of the universe and equally created tiniest atoms hidden miles beneath the crust of the earth—and everything in between. As Creator he was the One who controlled the explosions of supernovas seemingly countless lightyears away and the one who caused electrons to spin ceaselessly around their protons in a virtual nanosecond. Galaxies and electrons: this Word is *beyond*, *outside* the restrictions of space, of distance, of time. John would have us know that he's *above* our ability to grasp.

The angel told Mary that nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37). That includes that *this* Word became “flesh,” a creature, finite, mortal, passing (see Isa 40:6). How incomprehensible: he who is above time and who is not confined to one place entered a womb as a microscopic embryo, a growing fetus. And during a gestation of nine months, he developed into a full-term baby that *had to* exit the womb to survive. The Creator of all became a creature, subject to all the changes and unpredictabilities of this broken life. From the glory of heaven to the floor of a manger; from the praise of angels to the abuse of Herod . . . and of pesky neighborhood kids and eventually of self-righteous religious leaders and Pilate . . . and a cross.

It doesn't strike us as proper. But this happened. The Word, who is God himself, became flesh: one of us. It's too awesome for me to grasp. His incarnation represented a profound *change*.

By God's grace, my wife and I received six children. For a number of months, we “watched” them grow in the womb. Of course, we couldn't really watch the development, for they were being knit together in secret, in “the depths of the earth” (Ps 139:15). But there came the day when they were brought forth and we could meet and greet, in awesome wonder, the children God entrusted to us. Especially with the arrival of the firstborn, our lives changed, profoundly.

But consider for a moment the radical change birth represents for the child. For a period of months his world had been small, with the walls of momma's womb forming fixed limits no kick could penetrate. Inside the womb was warm and dark. It was all the infant knew, his comfort zone. But on the day of birth the

Birth changes things profoundly

CONTRACTION

What did Jesus-the-baby recall of the glory of his heavenly pre-existence? Much has been written over the centuries in an attempt to answer that question. But let's refrain from speculation and content ourselves with what we know. The Word became flesh: the all-wise, all-knowing Creator became a creature, a baby like his brothers in every respect (Heb 2:17). Of necessity that means the Son of God underwent an enormous change, one profoundly incomprehensible to us. He who was eternally omnipresent restricted his presence to one place: first a womb, then a manger, then a house and a town, and finally a single cross. He whose vision of reality from eternity encompassed all things adopted a vision of reality limited to Mary's womb, then the manger, a back-country community, a passing culture. From seeing over horizons of time to include every detail of existence (2 Chron 16:9) and from riding above space so as to be limited in no way, shape, or form, he *contracted* his perceptions and observations and understandings to our size; he became like his brothers, before birth and after birth.

It's a self-imposed shrinking, a change I cannot grasp. Being "flesh" myself, I understand what "flesh" is. But I've never been eternal, omnipresent, divine, above time or space. So, the contrast between what characterizes the "Word" and what characterizes "flesh" is beyond me. I can't begin to grasp the profound dimensions of the miracle known as Christmas. Immanuel: *God with us*—I can only marvel. And marvel we must! Glory to God in the highest!

CONVERSE

But I must try to grasp something of the profound change that Christmas represented for the Son of God, for the *change* that Christmas represented for him is the antitype of the change that is ours. The apostle Peter says that his readers had been "born again" (1 Pet 1:3). We understand the word "again" to refer to a second birth, their spiritual birth. In their preborn spiritual state, his readers' worldview was limited to (might I say) the walls of this world where reality is measured by what the eye sees; life is marked by the two boundaries of birth and death (beyond which science discovers nothing) and so the focus is the *here and now*—a peering in the dark, grasping to make sense of life. But like birth, being spiritually born opens delightfully new vistas on reality, perspectives one could not have imagined while yet spiritually unborn.

The vista includes, says Peter, "a living hope . . . an inheritance that is . . . kept in heaven for you" (1:4), one so glorious angels long to look into it (1:12). And it's yours, Peter adds, because of

"the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1:3), a resurrection clearly impossible had the Son of God not first become flesh. Through his resurrection he broke down the boundary of death so that we can look far past the grave into a world without end, without tears, without pain, without hopelessness. In faith we may see a world characterized by the visible nearness of God himself: the New Jerusalem where God dwells with us and we with him, Father with his children and children with Father. Being in the Father's house, part of his family, eternally tasting the goodness of the Lord and enjoying the pleasures of God's presence, all of that is such a bigger, better, more wonderful world than the spiritually unborn could ever imagine!

And it's all because of Christmas. The Son of God *shrank* his worldview from Creator to flesh, so that we may receive an infinitely *expansive* worldview from flesh to family of God. Truly that is a change most profound!

CHALLENGE

The challenge is to live, think, and act in a fashion consistent with the blessed expansive worldview that's already ours as a result of being born again. My abiding sinfulness has me so inclined to think and act as if I'm still in the womb, unborn, as if the walls of this life define reality. So, my focus is so easily on the *here and now*, on the dark of this world and its hopelessness. But had my son, after he was born, insisted on retaining the worldview of the womb (declining to breathe, drink, move etc.), he could not have survived. Birth comes with privileges and responsibilities. It is equally so for a reborn person. To claim rebirth and at the same time to think and act as if the walls of this life define reality is a guaranteed recipe for spiritual death. As Christ Jesus emptied himself, became one of us, and adopted our limited worldview for our redemption, so I may and even must embrace his *expansive* worldview today already and think, talk, and act as one already outside the womb of *this* world.

Birth changes everything. It did for our son. It did for our Savior. It does for us. 



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UNTO US

A Child is Born

THE ZEAL OF THE LORD OF HOSTS
HAS ACCOMPLISHED THIS

WINSTON BOSCH

IRONY

Every Christmas in the town of Renfrew, about an hour west of Ottawa, a local church committee sets up an outdoor nativity scene. They build a mock stable, put some hay bales down, and light it up with some attractive Christmas lights. There is a fake cow and a smiling donkey beside some wise men shivering in the snow. And then of course the serene figures of Mary and Joseph looking down at baby Jesus, who, in Renfrew, is a life-size, locally-handcrafted paper mâché doll. It is the classic kitschy (but somehow cute) Christmas crèche of the small-town Canadian winter.

But in early December a couple of years ago the town of Renfrew woke up to find tragedy had struck. An early morning walker stopped to observe the quaint nativity scene only to discover that the manger was empty. Mary and Joseph were staring blankly at the vacant spot in the hay, the nativity baby nowhere to be seen. The local church committee, horrified at this Christmas crime, reported the missing doll to the police. The small-town constables were more than happy to help, but they couldn't resist having some fun with it. They put out a police press release asking people to help them find baby Jesus, whom they described as 15lbs and wrapped in swaddling cloths, last seen in the manger on Main Street.

As you can imagine, this story created some giggles around Canada as it spread through the news. And then, a week later, in the early morning hours, a city employee on the way to work found the missing baby on the ground behind a building. It was kind of a haunting picture, a bit grotesque even. A paper mâché doll of Jesus dumped out in a dimly lit parking lot from a moving car, as if the doll was a victim of a gang-style killing. Baby Jesus, clothes ripped shamefully off, dirty and bruised, dumped and destitute, forsaken, mistreated, and abandoned in the dark.

If you are willing to pause and reflect, there is something poetic about these events. Think about it. At Christmas we sing: "A great a mighty wonder upon the earth was done, when Mary virgin mother, gave birth to God's own son." That is Jesus in the manger, surrounded by his loving parents; this is the nativity scene we like at Christmas. The baby in the manger makes us smile, it suits our tinsel celebrations and eggnog libations, the miracle of a new birth, the wonder of a cute new baby.

But at Christmas we also sing words like this: "He bore the weakness of our human frame, and he obedient unto death became, for on a cross he died, in bitter shame." No tinsel or smiles here. This is Jesus dumped, not outside the town hall in a dark parking lot, but outside the gates of Jerusalem, bloodied and bruised, clothes ripped off; he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, grotesquely cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of God's people.

These Christmas events in Renfrew, if we let them, give us pause in the middle of our often all too culturally cute Christmas experience. The abandoned baby Jesus in the parking lot helps us set aside for a moment, if we are willing, the twinkle of the lights in the snow, the halls decked with boughs of holly, and the smiling donkeys of the local nativity scene. The dirtied and abandoned paper mâché doll is a poetic reminder that Christmas isn't really about a cute child in the crèche. Christmas is incarnation for crucifixion. Christmas isn't kitsch, it is the Christ taking on flesh, only to die a hellish death on the cross, dumped naked outside the gates, forsaken, mistreated, beaten, writhing under wrath, dying under the weight of judgment. Reflecting on this is not to be a Christmas killjoy. On the contrary, it helps us discover the deeper joy of Christmas.

Christmas. Unto us a child is born... The zeal of the LORD of hosts has accomplished this.

THE ZEAL OF THE LORD HAS DONE THIS

Here is what I mean. The words of Isaiah 9 are well known and often repeated this time of year: “Unto us a child is born, to us a son is give, his name shall be Wonderful Counsellor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” So far so good, we know those words well, we sing them too. But then follows a phrase that we often fail to read: “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this” (v. 7).

My dictionary describes zeal as “great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective.” A zealous person is someone who is singularly focused on a particular purpose. He is all in, no holds barred. A zealous person has his heart, mind, and will firmly fixed on his objective. A zealous person has an all-consuming concern or fervent desire or aim that she diligently works hard at with all her breath and being. Zeal is a very strong word. In Scripture it is related to the word jealousy, but in the positive sense: a passion that accepts no rival, an uncompromising concern for someone else’s best.

Zeal is an attribute usually given to people, but here in Isaiah 9:7 we have one of the rare biblical instances where God is described as zealous. *The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.* God does not do everything with zeal. God created this amazing world, but Scripture does not describe him being zealous in his creative act. He flung the stars into space with his words, he created the earth and all that is in it, he brings forth the snow and turns the world on its axis. God’s work of creation is amazing and wonderful and breathtaking, but it was not the zeal of the LORD of hosts that accomplished this. Our Almighty God upholds all things he has created with his ever-present power, governing them by his providence so that all things come to us by his fatherly hand. But it is not the zeal of LORD of hosts that accomplishes this.

There is one thing the LORD Almighty is zealous about, there is one thing to which he has directed his greatest energy and enthusiasm, his zealous singular focus, the diligent, all in, no-holds-barred, all-consuming, uncompromising concern and fervent love of his mighty will and power. There is one thing the LORD of Hosts has lovingly and zealously committed his unwavering dedication to:

Christmas. *Unto us a child is born . . . The zeal of the LORD of hosts has accomplished this.*

But the zealous saving love of God was not to send Jesus to stay a cute child in the manger. The zeal of the LORD of hosts was

that this baby in the manger came to die the hellish death of Jesus the man on the cross, dumped naked outside the gates, forsaken, mistreated, beaten, suffering the wrath we deserved, dying under God’s judgment against our sin, so that we could be forgiven. For God so zealously loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. This is not to be a Christmas killjoy, it is to deeper joy of Christmas. This is what the zeal of the LORD accomplished.

DEEPER JOY

So this year, by all means, celebrate the cute baby in the manger. Go ahead and deck the halls with boughs of holly, give gifts, wrap your house in tinsel, and enjoy the holiday eggnog. And hey, if smiling donkeys are your thing, knock yourself out. But don’t let the cuteness and kitsch of the culture and crèche distract you from the deeper joy of Christmas. Remember and celebrate that the Christmas baby became a man, that Jesus left the nativity to die outside the town hall, that Mary who looked at him in the manger also saw him on the cross. This is where the joy is! Sing with the angels: “Glory to God in the highest!” but remember the zealous chorus of Christ on the cross was: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The Christmas child crucified, for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Back in Renfrew the baby Jesus doll was cleaned up and put back in the manger. The local church committee wired him in this time, tied him down tight to keep him there. Let’s not make the same mistake. Jesus was never meant to stay in the manger. You can’t wire him in with all the tinsel of the world, and you can’t tie him down with strings of lights. He came to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, he came to be stricken, smitten by God, afflicted on the cross. Not unlike a doll cast out of a moving vehicle in a dark cold parking lot. This is salvation, this is Christmas joy. This is the love of God. This is worth celebrating. The zeal of the LORD of hosts has done this! 📖



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Jesus Christ

AND THE COMING OF TRUTH

RICK VANDERHORST



At Christmas time we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus into the world, and for good reason. We rejoice that God did not leave us in our sins but sent his very own Son to suffer and die in our place. The Son of God, who is true and eternal God, took upon himself our human nature so that he might redeem us from sin and death. When we think of the coming of Christ into the world, we probably think of these things first and foremost. This is entirely fitting, as these things are at the heart of the good news of Christ.

That being said, there is perhaps an overlooked part of the good news of Christ's coming: the coming of God's Son into the world brought the coming of truth. Jesus himself alluded to this when he said to Pontius Pilate, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth" (John 18).

A CRISIS OF TRUTH

The coming of truth in the coming of Christ is such good news because there is a crisis of truth in our world. Just search the internet and you can find so much conflicting information that sounds equally convincing. Everyone on earth can post nearly whatever they want on the internet, and many don't care if what they post is true. Coupled with this is the ability technology gives us to manipulate photos and videos in such a way that what is fabricated can be made to look so real. If you so desire, you can photoshop your own face onto Mt. Rushmore! Added to this chaos is the polarization of

media outlets in our time. Various media outlets war against each other with both sides accusing the other of posting fake news. Isn't all this what caused so much strife during COVID-19? There was a sea of information out there with much of it giving conflicting claims about the facts.

The effects of this truth crisis can be devastating. After a while people don't know who or what to believe any more. Perhaps we

*Some might even go so far as to say
the truth cannot really be known*

might be tempted to just give up and not even bother trying to know the truth. Some might even go so far as to say that the truth cannot really be known. Another more subtle problem is we can subconsciously teach ourselves to be leery of all truth claims. People have lost faith in the trustworthiness of so many voices in our world. As a result, we begin to hold our convictions very lightly, even convictions about God. This might be one of the greater challenges facing the younger generations. When convictions about God are held so lightly, it becomes easier for the devil to dislodge any certainty of faith we do have and to leave us swimming in an ocean of doubt.

We don't need to be overwhelmed by the crisis of truth in our world

CHRIST IS THE TRUTH

This brings us back to the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. One reason he came into the world was to speak the truth and to make the truth known, especially the truth about God. This is something God himself promised in Deuteronomy 18. In that passage, the LORD proclaimed through Moses, "I will raise up a prophet for them like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command to them."

The gospel of John picks up this theme: "From his fullness we have received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace *and truth* came through Jesus Christ," (1:17). Christ came with the same ministry as Moses to speak exactly what God the Father told him (compare Deut 18:18 with John 7:16; 8:28; 12:49; 14:24). As a result, when Jesus spoke to the people, the people began to wonder if Jesus was the prophet promised through Moses (see John 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17). Not only that, but Christ continually emphasized the truthfulness of his words (John 7:18; 18:37). The truth was so central to Jesus's person and ministry that he even told his disciples, "I am the way, the *truth*, and the life" (John 14:6). He spoke the truth, witnessed to the truth, and embodied the truth without one drop of falsehood within him. He spoke with absolute certainty in everything he said without ever speaking out of the side of his mouth. This is why the apostle Paul plainly states, "The truth is in Jesus" (Eph 4:21).

DISCERNING TRUE & FALSE PROPHETS

Now, all these statements in themselves do not necessarily make a person true. One can speak with conviction but still be false. Added to this, many false prophets have arisen throughout history claiming to speak from God all the while speaking lies. However, Deuteronomy 18 helps us again at this point. The LORD directed his people to identify a prophet as false if the word he speaks does not come to pass or come true (v. 22). This is the test for determining a true prophet from a false one. True prophets would make predictions that unfaillingly came true.


The good news is that our Lord Jesus passes this test for a prophet. We have examples where he predicted future events that unfaillingly came to pass. In Acts 1:8, Jesus told his disciples, "You will be my witnesses in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." This is exactly what happened. The apostles did go out and they preached about Christ all over the known world. This is why Christianity became so widespread after the time of Christ.

Another example I love to point out is found in Mark 14:9. Some people chastised the woman who anointed Jesus's feet with an expensive perfume saying it was a waste of money. In response, Christ rebuked them and told them, "Truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her." Even the most hardened atheist must confess that this has happened just as Christ predicted it would. Jesus Christ passes the test of a true prophet from God; he came into this world to speak the truth.

THE BENEFITS FOR US

This Christmas, we can rejoice that we have the truth in Jesus our Lord. We don't need to be overwhelmed by the crisis of truth in our world. Rather, we can shut out the noise of the world, breathe deeply, and relax because our Saviour is the truth (John 14:6). In God's Word and in Jesus Christ we have the truth upon which to build the foundation for everything else in life.

This knowledge also helps us to grow deeper in our convictions and stronger in our faith. Because Christ is the true prophet from God, we can trust completely what he tells us about salvation. When Jesus says in John 3:16, "Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life," we can know his words are completely trustworthy. We can be certain that if we do believe in him, we too will have eternal life. Christ also stated in John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." Hearing these words from the lips of our Saviour, we can be certain that if we do believe in Christ we too have passed from death to life. This steadies our faith and helps us to stand firm against the attacks of the devil, who wants to insert all kinds of doubt into our minds.

Finally, as we give thanks for the birth of Jesus Christ this Christmas, let us also imitate him by aiming always to speak the truth in our own lives. As Ephesians 4 teaches us, as the truth is in Jesus, so we too are to put away falsehood and to speak the truth with our neighbours. 



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The background of the page features two lit purple candles in a dark holder, positioned on the right side. The candles are lit, with bright yellow flames. The background is dark, and there are numerous out-of-focus, warm-toned bokeh lights scattered across the right side, creating a festive and cozy atmosphere.

Great

EXPECTATIONS

RICK LUDWIG

As a child I can remember that one of the most exciting things about the Christmas season was the *expectation* of what was coming. Knowing that plans were in the works for family dinners and parties, gift exchanges, Christmas programs, Christmas baking, and of course the leisure of holidays was enough to create a whole level of energy and excitement for me before it even happened. Christmas was not just a day, but a whole season of expectation!



As I became older, I began to realize that it is not only this way for Christmas, but also for many other highly anticipated family events, like birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, and even family holidays; the rising expectations were often at least half of the joyful experience. This is something we may all have in common, that our expectations are an important part of our daily experience, and they are closely linked to the development of our hopes and dreams and even our aspirations. When our expectations are jointly shared with those closest to us, that raises them up to a whole other level. Our lives and relationships are constantly being fuelled with great expectations.

And yet, as people who are mourning the death of our loved ones, we may find ourselves particularly challenged with this oncoming Christmas season. We recognize keenly that we are missing someone we have loved, whether for a long period of time already or only for the first Christmas season. We miss their presence. We miss their closeness. We may miss the sharing and caring, the giving and taking, the touching and the talking. We miss the loving. And many of these feelings we may have already been carrying with us for a while. Yet Christmas has exposed another level of missing, a whole new feeling of loss . . . and that is the loss of our expectations. At Christmas time we may find ourselves taking stock of the relationship between the pain of our grief and our dashed expectations.

We are all destined to grieve in this life

LOVE'S COST

The late Queen Elizabeth II once spoke a word of comfort to the Commonwealth by stating that our *grief is the price we pay for love*. Perhaps, more emphatically, we could add that grief is our God-given response to the loss of love. When we invest the energy of our love into another person, we are created to respond with grief when we lose that loving relationship. If you like, grief is the unwinding of a loving relationship, the personal sorting out and letting go that needs to be done in order for us to survive our losses and even begin to flourish again. As we start to explore this more deeply, if we consider how God the Spirit daily reshapes our hearts to become more loving towards each other, we see that we are all destined to grieve in this life. Loving people become grieving people as long as death exists. As long as there are beginnings and endings we will be faced with new loves and lost loves and the accompanying burden of our grief.

Can you be intentional with those you share Christmas with, and let them know that this year requires something new?

It is important to understand then that our grieving is our normal response to loss and, as such, our grief is not like an illness. Grief is not the array of symptoms that indicate that something is wrong with us. Our grief is actually both a testimony to our love and also to God's healing path to recovery and renewal. "Grieved" is the state we need to be in when we are bereaved. Our grieving is the only way we know how to really process and cope with our lost love. Coming to a realization and acceptance of this truth is the first step in lightening the burden of grief. Knowing this begins to free us from the accompanying feelings of shame, weakness, isolation, faithlessness, craziness, and even despair that often shadow our grief. It is so normal and so healthy to grieve our losses. We do not need to hide from our grief or fight to suppress it. Grieving is the natural and most therapeutic outworking of lost love.

GRIEF'S COMPANION

Tied closely to this truth about grief is the reality that grief does not function alone. In that way it is very much like its partner, love. Love does not function alone either. No one has ever been described as a loving person if they have no interaction with any other being. Love is not a self-evident attribute or feeling because it can only be shown and expressed in relationships. God does not call us to fulfill the law of love without giving us a target for that love: himself and our neighbour. It is the same with grief. Grief is expressed in relationship with others, and we may also say that its target is God and our neighbour! Grief has no value or purpose when it is internalized. It only really functions when it is expressed, and as such it always requires an audience. You can see then that this realization is also another step forward. Step one: my grief is the normal reaction to lost love. No need to hide it or fight it or feel ashamed of it. Step two: my grief needs to be shared with others. It is good to speak it and cry it and show it and release it with those we trust. We can trust God and we can trust some of our neighbours.

WORKING IT OUT

These are two principal truths about grief. And there is much more that can be said, but as we move back to our initial concern about our broken expectations, we need to focus in on one other grief reality. Our grief is multi-dimensional. That means when we face the death of a loved one, we are actually facing multiple losses.

There is the primary loss of missing the one that we loved who is no longer present with us. And then there are many secondary losses. Let's consider some examples. A wife or husband who loses their spouse also loses their social standing as being married as they become a widow or widower. Instead of being a couple, now they are single; instead of having two incomes, they only have one; instead of sharing a bed, they sleep alone; instead of planning retirement together, they now face it alone; instead of looking forward to travelling together, they now plan travel on their own or have to seek a travelling companion. You can go on and fill in the blanks.

You can see how our grief over our lost loved one has a trickle-down effect and spawns many more secondary losses along the way. You can work this out in all the relational losses in varying degrees along the spectrum: children losing parents, parents losing children, sibling loss, friend loss, grandparent loss, grandchild loss, and also prenatal loss. You can fill in the blanks for your own particular loss as you identify how it changes your life. And as you begin to take stock of all these losses and you begin to explore the secondary losses, you realize that much of what is lost has to do with your expectation: your understanding of what you expected it would be like for your lives together in this relationship and how that the loss of the relationship impacts your hopes and dreams and aspirations for the future. We begin to see that our relational losses force an unwanted change in our expectations, and we need to mourn that too.

CHRISTMAS WITH GRIEF

Now, why is this loss of expectation suddenly pushed to the forefront during the Christmas season for those who are grieving? This is because Christmas is the season of families coming together, of the anticipation of joy and fun and fellowship and the intermingling of past traditions and the ongoing expectations of reliving them; and dropped right in the middle of it is a glaring empty space which threatens to ruin everything. Things won't be the same. We can no longer expect them to be the same. Our Christmas expectations have been hijacked and there seems to be no way to recover them. Now tag on the new year falling in close behind and suddenly the expectations for the future seem very bleak. How can there be a happy new year with the prospect of more broken expectations coming along the way with birthdays and anniversaries and family

celebrations and holidays? There seems to be no escape. Christmas seems to bolster an endless cycle of lost expectations.

And now for the real kicker. We have to admit that this is our reality. This is not a temporary illusion. No Christmas miracle here. With the death of our loved one many things have changed and there are many things that require grieving. And grieving is hard and tiring work. And yet, this is a grief truth that does come with a ribbon of hope. It is actually the experience of our grief, and the slow untying of that package of love that we so carefully crafted for the one we are missing, that begins to allow us to turn slowly and develop *new expectations*. We saw at the beginning that are lives are fuelled by expectations. We are generally forward-looking people, while always keeping an eye on our past. In this Christmas season our grief brings with it an opportunity. That opportunity is to take the broken expectations and slowly unravel them and begin the development of new expectations. The relief that comes with sharing our grief is the ability to begin to shape a new reality, with new expectations of a life without the one we are missing, but still a life worth living. A life with meaning, and hopes and dreams and aspirations anew.

A CHANGE OF PLANS


If that all sounds too theoretical for you, let's take another moment to unwrap it further to see what's actually inside. Perhaps your Christmas plans can change this year, so they don't just turn out to be a self-fulfilling disappointment. Can you be intentional with those you share Christmas with, and let them know that this year requires something new? That there needs to be some way to acknowledge that someone is missing. Some way to admit that life has changed for you.

Maybe you don't cook the turkey dinner and invite everyone to your place this year. Could it be that you let someone invite you into their home to look after you? Perhaps you let the kids know that the gift exchange should be different this year to honour the one who is missing. Possibly this year you give gifts to those in need instead, as a special remembrance to the one you all loved. Maybe the trip to Florida for the winter break needs to be different than it always was. Consider that attending the Christmas concerts this year may be too public and a night at home with a

close friend, listening to your favourite Christmas songs, will be a helpful admission that this year is different for you. Perhaps you take some extra time out of your work schedule to be intentional in sharing your loss with those closest to you. Maybe you even take the risk to draw another person into your confidence to share your deepest griefs. Don't choose just any person, but one you really trust and who knows how to listen and to avoid attempting to cure your grief. One who can sit with you in your *sackcloth and ash*. Reshaping our expectations will take some energy and some purposeful grief work.

NEW EXPECTATIONS

And what good can come out of all of this, not only this Christmas but throughout the year? As you work with your grief, you meet your broken expectations, and you put words to your loss in conversation and prayer, and through these purposeful activities you begin to reshape for yourself *new expectations*. New expressions of love, deeper appreciation for the moments, and increasingly intentional relationships. And this may all sound very risky as you are also aware that there are still mornings and evenings, starts and stops, and beginnings and endings and more griefs along the way. And yet there is a special hope for the follower of Christ in our ongoing grief. There is hope in a greater and *unchanging expectation* that is foreshadowed at Christmas with the birth of Jesus.

The Father sent Jesus to be born into the world and embrace a life of sorrow. He grew up to be the one most acquainted with grief. He willingly gave up his life to bring an end to death. He is the one who breaks the cycle of our broken expectations. The Bible teaches that there is a second coming on the way. That coming ushers in an end to sorrow and grief and tears, and fixes on the horizon our greatest expectation, the desire of the nations, our Lord Jesus who will bring us safely home forever. That is an advent expectation that is precious to cling to as we make our way through this Christmas season. 



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2023

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

afraid?

BEN SCHOOFF

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

WHAT WILL 2023 BRING?

From a global perspective, things look bleak. Suddenly, after a hiatus of thirty years, the Cold War is back! Words like Armageddon, nuclear war, and MAD are back. And we're all affected by inflation, rising interest rates, stock market downturns, and more.

How does the Bible teach us to think?

Many around us choose one of two reactions. They are either anxious, frightened, and panicked or they are fatalistic and apathetic. They'll just wait out the storm, or just retreat into their shell, ignoring events since we don't control the future anyway.

As Christians too we may wish to go through life in blissful ignorance, ignoring whatever is going on in the wide world. Or, fed perhaps by too much news and social media, we may be in a constant state of panic at the trouble and conspiracies going on around us.

Which of these should we be? How does the Bible teach us to think?

BE ALERT

Scripture tells us that whatever is happening in our physical world—wars, poverty, etc.—is mirrored by a spiritual reality. As part of his plan and judgments, God allows famine, death, and even Satan to have power on the earth and over its inhabitants.

In response the Bible gives us a two-sided message. In 1 Peter 5:8, the Holy Spirit warns us to “be sober-minded, be watchful.” Christians should not live in a state of blissful ignorance. We are called to be like night watchmen. They would never drink alcohol or do anything that clouded their minds. Rather they would stay awake and fully alert. And they would work hard to be informed of all the possible ways the enemy might attack, constantly peering into the darkness to see and recognize danger.

And the danger we are on watch for is the devil himself. The Holy Spirit does not minimize his threat. “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8).

A ROARING LION

He is a triple threat. First: he is a roaring lion. Fierce and strong, Samson may have been able to rip a fully grown lion in half and then eat honey from its carcass. But if you or I meet a lion, the exact opposite will happen. *We* will get torn apart and devoured. So, Satan is far stronger than us.

Second: he is prowling around seeking someone to devour. If Satan were a sleeping lion, a fully satisfied lion, we wouldn't have so much to worry about. But he is not. He is on the hunt. And when he sees prey, he will search for weaknesses and then pounce and devour.

Third, and worst of all: he is looking for *us*. He is, says our text, *our* adversary. He's not looking for just anyone to feed on. He is hunting specifically for God's people. Searching for weakness in our faith: shameful deeds, guilty consciences, unconfessed sin, and lusts of the flesh, which he can exploit to drag us down and destroy us.

No wonder Revelation says “woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (12:12).

WOE TO THE EARTH

And so, when we look to the future, we face a strong temptation to be afraid! Satan works with ungodly people and powers to try to accomplish his plans. And from a human perspective he seems to be succeeding:

- ❖ Pop culture is indoctrinating children, pushing homosexuality and transgenderism even in children's entertainment.
- ❖ Higher education is rabidly anti-Christian, trying desperately to destroy the faith of Christians who attend.
- ❖ The government is passing censorship laws, giving them the power to control what we post and see on social media, and restricting many personal freedoms.

Satan is behind all these things. And signs for 2023 are that they will continue to get worse!

However, our text does not counsel us to be afraid but sober-minded and alert. If we are alert, we will see these attacks going on. If we remain sober-minded, we will be prepared.

RESIST HIM

Instead of fear, 1 Peter 5 gives us two comforts. The first is verse 9. “Resist [Satan], standing firm in your faith. . . .” That this is even possible is a great comfort. We can resist Satan! You and I can stand in the face of his lion charge and survive. This sounds unbelievable, but it is not really us that do it.

We will resist *if* we are “firm in the faith.” It is Jesus Christ himself who has defeated Satan. And so, when we trust in him, *his* strength enables us to prevail even over the devil. To confirm this fact, Peter points to the sufferings experienced by our Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world. They are suffering too.

It is actually a sign of pride to be unduly anxious about the future

In fact, in many other countries things are much worse for Christians. They're being beaten, robbed, imprisoned, tortured, raped, and murdered for their faith. And yet they are standing firm because they know Christ, and trust that his blood shed on the cross has washed them clean from sin and opened the way to perfect blessedness for eternity. So, they stand firm until the chief Shepherd appears and they will receive the unfading crown of glory (v. 4).

If *they* can stand firm, resisting Satan's severe persecutions, we can join them in watchfully resisting all his fury, knowing it will all come to nothing.

CAST YOUR ANXIETIES ON GOD

And a second comfort is found in verse 7: "Casting all your anxieties on [God], for he cares for you." We have no need to panic. And any anxieties about the future can simply be given over to the Lord in prayer. He is caring for us, and he will not let any ultimate harm come upon his people.

Verse 7 is a favourite, printed on many walls and repeated in hard times. But in context with verse 6 we discover that "casting our anxieties on God" is linked with "humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God."

It is actually a sign of pride to be unduly anxious about the future, to panic at the way everything is going. Such anxiety suggests that it is only through our hard work that we will prevent Satan from succeeding in his plans. But as we've seen, we have no chance of resisting him in our own strength.

We need to humbly admit that we're not strong, brave, or wise enough to resist on our own. But such humility does not lead to fatalism and apathy, because we're humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand. When we cast all our anxieties on God, we remember that he cares for us. And he will give us the strength to stand firm in our faith, and he will give that same faith to our


brothers and sisters throughout the world who are experiencing the same kinds of attacks.

WHAT ABOUT 2023?

How should we approach the New Year? 1 Peter 5 encourages us to take a middle road between blissful ignorance and anxious panic. Satan is going to attack. He's busy masterminding evil conspiracies on a worldwide scale. Right now, he prowls around like a roaring lion seeking lonely Christians whom he can devour. So, we must be prepared and watchful to resist him and stand firm in our faith.

But there is no need for us to be afraid or panic, whether in person or on social media. It is God who must give us the strength to stand firm. And he certainly will. So whatever positive things you have planned for 2023, be prepared! Do not neglect to humbly pray for God's blessings.

And whatever your anxieties for this upcoming year, cast them all on the Lord, knowing that he cares for you. He will not allow you to suffer without purpose but will turn suffering into hope, and all evil to your good. And he does not allow you to suffer alone, but you can be comforted knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brothers and sisters throughout the world.

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen." 



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Retirement

OF REV. DOUWE AGEMA

DIANNE WESTRIK, DUANE WESTRIK, AND KIM HUTTEN



After over thirty-eight years in active ministry, Rev. Agema has retired. By God's grace, so many have benefitted from his faithful preaching, teaching, and pastoring during the past four decades. In God's grace, Liz could be the helper fit for him, a pillar of support—and in God's grace, they have reached this milestone together.

Rev. Agema came to Living Word Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph in 2012, following a vacancy after institution in 2011. To quote Rev. Agema's words spoken at that time, "I have the best job in the world; I may spend the entire day in the Word of God, studying it and preparing to share its amazing message."

Well, after ten years of his faithful preaching, we have certainly witnessed our pastor's love of being busy in the Word. We have been able to hear the Word proclaimed to us week after week with very little interruption, even during challenging times. Especially during these times, Rev. Agema was determined to preach as often

and as much as needed (even four times per Sunday), to be certain his flock was encouraged by the precious words of our Father.

CELEBRATION

On Saturday, May 28, 2022, Living Word hosted an open house for Rev. Agema and his wife Liz, to celebrate years of faithful work. Guests, friends, and members from congregations where Rev. Agema served earlier travelled from other parts of the province to commemorate his ministry and celebrate this milestone. It was a special treat to welcome several vans filled with Anchor Home friends who brought good cheer and fond memories of the Agema family. Guests mingled with one another, reacquainted and made new connections, comparing stories of how the Agema family was a part of each of their lives!

Emphasizing just how many lives were touched throughout his ministry, the hall was beautifully decorated to highlight this fact.

*Please join us in wishing Rev. and Mrs. Agema
a joy-filled and peace-filled retirement, experiencing many new
and wonderful beginnings, under the continued
blessing of our Heavenly Father.*

There were images of water droplets hung high throughout the room, each representing a couple whom he married. Bunches of colourful paper flowers were perched around the room; each flower representing a baby that he baptized, not to overlook the hundreds of congregants whose lives were tended by this godly gardener. A large watering jug hung from the ceiling, and the paper waterfall poured down onto a plaque which read, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plants, but God made you grow. It is not the one who plants or the one who waters who is at the center of this process, but God, who makes things grow” (1 Cor 3:6, 7).

Thanks to Liz, an avid photographer and scrapbooker, who faithfully captured and documented so many special moments and experiences, there were many albums as well as a slideshow for guests to enjoy. Many found photos of themselves within the pages and were brought back to days gone by. Wedding pictures as well as photos from each synod he attended through the years could be viewed while guests enjoyed coffee and a light lunch.

FAREWELL

On Sunday, May 29, 2022, Rev. Agema preached his final sermon as our active minister. Drawing from Romans 11:33-36, he used as theme, “For from him and through him and to him are all things; to him be the glory forever.” With this text, Rev. Agema reminded us once again that God has been gracious to both him and the Living Word congregation over the past ten years: that he was able to preach, teach, and show the wonders of God’s love and grace to us all. He spoke from his heart, expressing the deep privilege he received to open the Word each week and be connected to the congregation. We grew together in our joys and our sorrows, we went to the Word for direction, comfort, and wisdom.


Following the afternoon service, the congregation celebrated with a program as an expression of gratitude for Rev. and Mrs. Agema. Their children and grandchildren were present to provide

us with family anecdotes. They even sang a few songs for us. Brothers from previous congregations, Attercliffe and Fergus Maranatha, came forward to express congratulations. Brothers from Classis Ontario North, representing Emmanuel and Arthur, were present and letters from Orangeville and Fergus North were read each expressing gratitude for Rev. Agema’s counselling, guidance, and wisdom, so willingly assisting especially during times of vacancy. Clearly, God was working through our pastor for the local church and beyond.

On behalf of the Living Word consistory, chairman Harry Linde presented a framed portrait of our first minister, the first to be hung our new building. As a formal thank you for his leadership, the entire council came forward to give Rev. Agema a final handshake and farewell on behalf of Living Word. On behalf of the congregation, the Agemas received a gift of a holiday in an Algonquin Park Resort, gift cards relating to their hobbies of wood working and gardening, and a handmade tray made by one of the members of Living Word. Rev. Agema reciprocated with a very fitting gift—a gavel for Council bearing the inscription, “To God be the Glory.”

After several additional presentations, Rev. Agema had the opportunity to address the congregation and guests. He reiterated that his strength came only from the Lord, and his work was all intended for God’s glory. Rev. Agema also shared his appreciation to his wife and helper, Liz, who for the past forty years has been at his side as he fulfilled his task and calling.

A generous potluck was shared together with the Agema family, the congregation, and special guests, enjoying one last opportunity to fellowship as congregation. This brought our farewell proceedings to a close.

Please join us in wishing Rev. and Mrs. Agema a joy-filled and peace-filled retirement, experiencing many new and wonderful beginnings, under the continued blessing of our Heavenly Father. “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you” (Num 6:24, 25). 



Photos: Dave Koning

TRINITY CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Behold, Your God!

AMANDA DEBOER



August 14, 2022 dawned a beautiful, sunny day. On the quiet Tisdale Road in Binbrook, Ontario, vehicles were making their way one by one toward the newest building: a beautiful, white church. Inside the vehicles, there was a sense of extra joy and thankfulness, for this was our very first Sunday in our very new church building after twenty-one years! What a blessing! In addition to that, God perfectly planned another wonderful event to happen on this day. After more than three years of vacancy, our new minister, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, was about to be installed. Indeed, “Behold, your God!”

THREE BIG EVENTS

This is where our focus was centred in the installation sermon from Dr. Jason VanVliet on Isaiah 40:9–11. Dr. VanVliet had us imagine a book. Trinity’s book. Each year of Trinity’s existence was one chapter. There were twenty-one chapters now. And as we began chapter twenty-two, there were three big events. We received a new church building and a new minister was about to be installed. How incredible! How humbling. But the third event is far bigger than the other two: the gospel. Dr. VanVliet summarized the entire gospel using three words from our text: “Behold, your



Outside of new church building



Taken from the foyer into the sanctuary; an organ will be installed behind the pulpit D.V

God!” We, people, are sinful. If we look back over the chapters of Trinity’s book, we will see the same thing: sin, again and again. So, during the sermon, Dr. VanVliet implored Rev. VanWoudenberg not to come each Sunday with human solutions to our sin, but to continually show the congregation “Behold, your God!”

This was also the message that the delegates expressed after the service. Delegates from Classis Ontario West, as well as from neighbouring churches, took a part of Scripture to encourage minister and congregation alike. They reminded the congregation to uphold our minister in prayer. One delegate, a nephew of Rev. VanWoudenberg, couldn’t stop his grin as he took his jacket off and laid it along the back of the minister’s chair behind the pulpit. This is something we, as congregation, are quickly learning that Rev. VanWoudenberg does often!

In the afternoon, Rev. VanWoudenberg preached his first sermon as our minister on 2 Timothy 4:5. “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” Rev. VanWoudenberg mentioned that he would be preaching particularly to himself, as ministers should. This was especially appropriate because, during the morning service, he was reminded of his charge. He then put our text into the context of Paul’s life, as well as in the context of the book of Timothy. Rev. VanWoudenberg explained that in order to be sober-minded one must be gospel-centred. As a minister, he must be sober-minded. He needs to be focused on the Saviour. And so, Rev. VanWoudenberg asked for our prayers so that he might fulfill his ministry. Rev. VanWoudenberg also mentioned the ways of our world today, which are very much against Christianity. So, he warned us all to be sober-minded. It was a timely sermon.

WELCOME EVENING IN THE NEW BUILDING

Then, on Saturday, October 10, we enjoyed a welcome evening—yes, in our new building. This was an evening balanced with fun and laughter, as well as praise to God for gifting us with Rev. VanWoudenberg and his family. The first entertainment on the list was (perhaps the traditional) last name story. After this, Council sang two songs: “All Creatures of our God and King” and a song of welcome to the tune of “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee.” We then enjoyed a beautiful introduction to Psalm 108 on stringed instruments and piano, after which we joined in to sing verses one and two. Rev. and Mrs. VanWoudenberg were then challenged by a matching game—trying to match the right child with the right parent! The Young Adults had a game up their sleeves as well, namely the Ninth Commandment Game. The VanWoudenberg family, along with some members of the congregation, had to figure out which statement was untrue about the Bible. A Jeopardy game about our congregation (including a topic on Dr. VanVliet’s Bible Bafflers) was enjoyed by all. The Council presented the VanWoudenbergs with the gift of a new barbeque. Finally, we sang “Yet Not I” accompanied by another group of talented musicians. After all that, there was still more to come! Desserts and drinks were waiting for us in the foyer to enjoy during a time of fellowship.

God was truly with us during our time of vacancy and in the challenge of finding appropriate places to worship during the COVID restrictions. He has been so good to us. So, in response to what he has done, we, as Trinity Canadian Reformed Church, say to you, “Behold, your God!” 📺



Merry Christmas TO ALL OF OUR READERS!

Today we have some letters for you to enjoy from the grade 6 classroom at Dufferin Area Christian School. Their teacher did a writing project with them, and they all wrote a letter to someone from the Ray of Sunshine celebrating a birthday in January. I had a hard time picking, but here are a few letters for you to enjoy. Thank you Grade 6 for sending these letters—I am sure there will be many happy recipients! This is a great idea for other schools to consider doing too.

Dear, Katherine Nijenhuis

Happy 57th Birthday! I hope you have a good birthday! Hi, my name is Lucy. I am in the gr 5/6 class of Dufferin Area Christian School.

Remember when we come over for a field trip? Aunt Joe brought a lamb and it was cute. We sang songs, chatted, and explored the apartment, the quiet room was cool. Aunt Joe let you and other people hold the lamb and we got to see you exercise. It was fun and nice to see you.

Do you like taking long walks? I kind of do. What is your favorite food? My favorite food is spaghetti, pizza, and chicken burgers.

I don't know much about you but I just want you to know that we care for you!

Sincerely, Lucy Doekes

Dear Ben, Happy Birthday!

My name is Raeann Kottelenberg.

Did you know that my birthday Jan. 21!

Do you like the snow? I love playing in the snow and throwing the snow balls!

Did you know that I have a paper route? I have 3 paper routes! I have to do them every Thursday! I also walk a dog named angel and get \$10 each time. Do you have any jobs?

I also like watching funny movies and family movies, like "How to Train Your Dragon" the 3rd one. Do you like watching funny movies?

Do you have a pet? I have a hamster named Teefee, she really fun to hold and have fun with. She's pretty fat and fluffy!

I heard that that you like shuffle board. I've never played it before. Is it when you shuffle a board?

Do you go on any field trips? I go on field trips at the end of the year of school. Last year we went to marine land!

What is it like at your home?

Love, Raeann Kottelenberg!

January

6 Jason Herrewynen will be **49**

c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3

7 Christine Breukelman will be **51**

2225-19th Street
Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

13 Ben DeJong will be **32**

c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3

14 Stephen Dykstra will be **40**

Box 3573
Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0

17 Henry Driegen will be **67**

PO Box 2532 Station A
Abbotsford, BC V2T 6R3

19 Edwin Schutte will be **39**

844 Bowman Road
Abbotsford, BC V3G 1S9
northchilliwackhome@bethesdabc.com

19 Janine Smid will be **53**

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

26 Katherine Nijenhuis will be **57**

c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line
RR 3 Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

30 Tyler Hoeksema will be **34**

6755 Lorne Dr
Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

CLARION KIDS

AMANDA DEBOER

LORD'S DAY 23

Righteous. Someone who does not sin. God looks at us and sees this. But, wait a minute . . . today I was angry at my friend! Today I did not do the dishes very cheerfully. That is sin. And I sin every day. I sin against all God's commandments! Not only that, I am still going to sin later today. How can I be righteous in God's eyes? Well, praise God! He is so merciful. (Do you still remember what *mercy* means?) God decided that he wanted to be gracious to us, his children. He gives us the righteousness and holiness of Christ! Christ's death is enough. And God gives these to me like I never sinned in my life. There is only one thing that I have to do; and the Holy Spirit is the one who works it in me. I must accept this gift in faith.

Remembering what you just read about being righteous before God, what word do you think is the very last word of this verse? Look up the passage to see if you are right!

Romans 1: 17: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by _____.'" [it is the gospel, God's Word]

Fill these phrases on the correct lines:

does not have life

has life

1 John 5:12: "whoever has the Son _____; whoever does not have the Son of God _____."

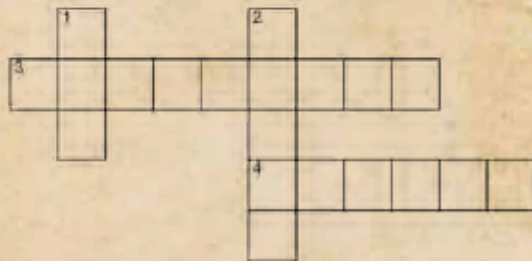
Crossword

Across:

- Someone who does not sin is called
- He died so we can be righteous

Down:

- This displeases the LORD
- God's loving kindness



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



RISEN MOTHERHOOD

OVERVIEW


The Risen Motherhood podcast is co-hosted by sisters-in-law Laura Wifler and Emily Jensen, who live in Iowa with their husbands and children. They began the podcast in 2016 as young moms, gearing their conversations to fellow moms with the goal of gospel application in everyday moments. The podcast covers common topics and struggles, highlighting how the lens of Scripture changes one's perspective. Initially releasing twenty-five-minute episodes, they have pivoted to publishing episodes as part of a mini-series with the goal of digging deeper into certain topics. Emily and Laura published a book—also called *Risen Motherhood*—in 2019. According to the acknowledgements in the front of their book, they are members of Grand Avenue Baptist Church and Naperville Presbyterian Church (PCA). What started as just a podcast has grown into a nonprofit organization and even has a board of governors. The website lists a ton of resources and articles for new and seasoned moms alike. One of my favourite resources on their website is called the Abide Method (also known as the Inductive Bible Study method), which is an outline for personal Bible study which has transformed my own day-to-day Scripture time.

CONTENT

As the primary goal of the podcast is gospel application in everyday motherhood moments, many of the early episodes cover seemingly mundane topics such as self care, body image, potty training, mess, and snack time. These episodes usually follow the model of Creation—Fall—Redemption—Consummation. Later episodes feature seasoned moms as guests in a series on faithful motherhood. They have also covered hard topics such as miscarriage, traumatic birth, anger, and postpartum depression. Other mini-series cover fear, obedience, prayer, work, and social

media. The most recent series (What We're Still Talking About) has revisited some of the popular past episodes and shown how the conversations are still relevant a few years down the road. Occasional past guests include Tim Challies, Nancy Guthrie, Hannah Anderson, and Gloria Furman. As with everything found online or in print, keep the glasses or earbuds of discernment firmly on! I find most of the theology to be well founded scripturally, but there are some Baptist/non-Reformed leanings to guard against.

GEARED FOR MOMS

Each episode opens with the following: “Motherhood is hard. One second we think we’re doing a good enough job; the next, we feel like the worst mom on the planet. Which is why we need the refreshing truth of the gospel to be repeated over and over again, giving us hope in the everyday moments.” Even if you don’t consider motherhood as hard as the next mom, everything we encounter is affected by the Fall. The good news is that we live in light of the resurrection. We take this truth in hand and look forward to when all things will be made new. Risen Motherhood takes on a variety of topics—maybe they don’t apply to you, but they probably apply to someone you know. Listening may equip you with an ear of empathy. If you find an episode particularly applicable, the good news always comes immediately following conviction. The gospel does apply to everything. Whether you’re drinking a cold cup of coffee or doing a sink full of dishes, I hope you find truth, encouragement, and laughter here. 



Rachel Van Tol Stay at home mom of two, member of Living Word Canadian Reformed Church in Guelph
rachelgvantol@gmail.com



ENOUGH ABUSE ALREADY

When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church.
By Jeremy Pierre & Greg Wilson. Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2021.
Paperback. 279 pages. \$21.73 CDN.

I hate talking about abuse. I hate writing about it. However, as long as it's happening, we must continue to face up to it. The church that puts its head in the sand is doing irreparable damage to its members. This book is about the particular problem of domestic abuse. This is abuse happening in the home, often from a husband towards his wife.

The authors are experienced and well-qualified in the field of counselling for domestic abuse situations. Jeremy Pierre is a professor of counselling at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a pastor. Greg Wilson is a licensed professional counsellor in Texas. Both of them share a commitment to the authority of God's Word and an emphasis on the gospel. Theologically, there's nothing in this book of concern.

The book is divided into three sections: How to Understand Abuse, How to Respond After the Initial Disclosure, and How to Care in the Long Term. In each section, the authors bring biblical and practical wisdom to bear on helping both victims *and* abusers. The last chapter is entitled "Leading Your Church to Respond with Wisdom and Compassion." Pierre and Wilson give a template for communicating about domestic abuse situations. I'm unsure about how well this template would work in tightly-knit church communities, but it's not meant to be the final word on the matter. The authors recommend using "the highest level of discretion and only bring in the parties that need to know" (p. 213).

Many other books have been written on this topic, but this one stands out as being especially practical. Its usefulness is evident when you crack it open to page 11 and there's a Quick Reference Guide. Let's say you're dealing with a situation and have a pressing question—perhaps: "How do I determine if someone is being abusive?" The QRG tells you to where to find an answer: chapter 3, page 65. Helpful, no?

When Home Hurts also has six helpful appendices:

- ❖ FAQs on Domestic Abuse Care
- ❖ FAQs on Separation, Divorce, and Reunification After Abuse
- ❖ A Sample Church Domestic Abuse Policy
- ❖ A Sample Role Description for a Domestic Abuse Care Advocate

- ❖ When Wives Abuse Husbands
- ❖ National and State Domestic Violence Resources

The last appendix above is focused on the United States. There are two resources mentioned from the UK and Australia, but nothing from Canada. If anyone in Canada is in immediate danger, they should call 911. Otherwise, text HOME to 741741 or call 1-800-668-6868.

To get the flavour of the book, check out these snippets:

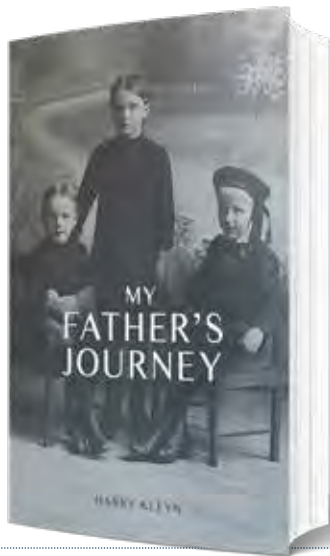
- ❖ A woman alleging abuse "shouldn't have to prove anything to be taken seriously and offered protection and guidance in the form of a safety plan" (p. 66).
- ❖ "The impulse to 'get both sides' is the wrong impulse when it comes to an initial response to domestic abuse situations. Both sides will eventually come out. For now your focus should be on the immediate safety and welfare of the abused spouse and any children in the home" (p. 83).
- ❖ "Sadly, most abusive men do not change" (p. 175).
- ❖ "The goal is reconciliation [of the abuser] to the Lord, not reconciliation of the marriage" (p. 208).
- ❖ "You should not pressure an abused wife to trust her seemingly repentant husband" (p. 244).

When Home Hurts is realistic, based on the counselling experiences of the authors. But it's also informed by what the Bible teaches about human nature and the dynamics of change.

All church leaders ought to read this, both pastors and elders. In some churches, there are mentorship programs. Mentors too could benefit from *When Home Hurts*, as would anyone coming alongside victims of domestic abuse. Let's make our churches safer and more supportive for those who've been hurt in these horrible ways. This book can definitely help in achieving that goal. 📖



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MY FATHER'S JOURNEY

My Father's Journey by Harry Kleyn. (Self-published, 2022).
Paperback. 411 pages. Available through many online retailers.

One of a pastor's privileges is getting to listen to the sundry stories of God's children. They're not always happy stories, tales of undiminished good and satisfactory endings. Neither do we expect that. The privilege is hearing these personal accounts, often inclusive of much sin and struggle and heartache, yet ever tempered with the conviction that God is faithful and works all things for the benefit of those who love him.

To the many colourful testimonies of God's care as told by elderly parishioners I've responded not a few times with the suggestion, "You should write a book!" For even a seemingly ordinary life can present a compelling picture of God's extraordinary mercy. These are valuable stories worth sharing. Perhaps not many will have either the opportunity or the ability to write such an account. And it's regrettable to think that if they're not recorded, these stories will soon disappear.

This book, *My Father's Journey*, is not a first-hand account. Harry Kleyn doesn't tell his own story here (though he makes a cameo appearance now and again), but he has endeavoured to narrate the story of his father, Cornelis Kleijn, together with that of his wife Willempje. Kleyn is to be credited for this worthwhile contribution to our migrant history.


It is a lively tale that grips the reader for many of its 400 pages. What quickly becomes clear is that Kleyn has thoroughly researched his father's life story. The narrative is punctuated with extracts from sources as diverse as personal letters, church bulletins, mental asylum records, newspaper articles, and interviews—all woven together to give a cohesive account of a dearly loved father and mother.

Within the first few chapters we learn about a shocking event, one that rips apart a young family and has enduring repercussions. Dramatic events mark the Kleijns' subsequent years too, including

a world war and foreign occupation, many months spent in hiding, and then the difficult decision to migrate to a strange new country.

Cornelis and Willempje chose to move to Australia in the early 1950s. It was a time when many other Dutch folks were weighing up which country could become a new home. The general contours of the Kleijns' experiences are probably relatable to many in that generation, whether they sailed to South Africa, Canada, the United States, Australia, or elsewhere. The story is a vivid account of the gut-wrenching decisions and acute challenges faced by many of our grandparents and great-grandparents as they settled in unfamiliar lands and pioneered new ways of life.

Together with the inadequacies of early tin-clad homes, the challenges of learning to speak English/Australian, and adjusting to blazing heat in summer and flooding in winter, the Kleijns had to contend with strife in the newly founded congregation, trade union conflict, and family stresses. There are trials recounted here that nobody would choose for themselves or their children, yet *My Father's Journey* has the constant undertone of hope in the Lord and his unflinching grace.

Such is the delight of hearing the stories of an older generation, one that makes so worthwhile their retelling—and their recording. It is the Father's care that always shines through in *My Father's Journey*, which might be the chief benefit to gain from such a book: an encouragement in our time too, to trust in God and hold fast to him. 



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DISMANTLING THE DANGEROUS DICHOTOMY

Do You Believe? 12 Historic Doctrines to Change Your Everyday Life,
By Paul David Tripp. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021).
Hardcover, 478 pages. \$42.87 CDN.

J. Gresham Machen, one of the founders of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, once wrote: “If our doctrine be true, and our lives be wrong, how terrible is our sin!” (*Christianity and Liberalism*). In this book, Paul Tripp is addressing this “dangerous dichotomy.” It so often happens that there’s a disconnect between what we say we believe and how we live each day.

Paul Tripp hardly needs an introduction. He’s the author of numerous books and articles. He’s one of the main figures associated with the Christian Counselling and Education Foundation in Philadelphia. He’s renowned for his biblical wisdom and superlative communication skills, traits well-evidenced in his latest offering.

In *Do You Believe?* Tripp surveys twelve key Bible teachings and explains how they ought to impact our lives. These are the twelve doctrines covered:

- ❖ Scripture
- ❖ God
- ❖ Holiness of God
- ❖ God’s sovereignty
- ❖ God’s omnipotence
- ❖ Creation
- ❖ Image of God in man
- ❖ Sin
- ❖ Justification
- ❖ Sanctification
- ❖ Perseverance and glorification of the saints
- ❖ Eternity

As you can tell, this isn’t a comprehensive systematic theology text. But at nearly 500 pages, it gives the reader plenty to chew on with just these twelve teachings.

Every doctrine in the book is covered in two chapters. The idea is that the doctrine is explained in the first chapter and then applied in the second. However, readers will find that the “doctrinal” chapters are also full of applications to life. We benefit from the fact that Tripp just can’t help himself.

Each doctrinal chapter begins with the author’s paraphrase of a relevant section of the Westminster Confession of Faith. What follows in each chapter, both doctrinal and practical, is

consistent not only with the Westminster Confession, but also the Three Forms of Unity. In other words, this is a book containing Reformed theology. That said, regrettably some things are left out or minimized. For example, in his paraphrase of the Westminster Confession on creation, Tripp leaves out “in the space of six days.” Why? I can see several ways that this aspect of the Bible’s teaching on creation might impact our lives. When we teach the doctrine of justification, it’s important to stress its legal character. Justification pictures a courtroom proceeding. While Tripp defines justification as God’s declaration that we are righteous in Christ, the legal character of justification is just barely there. Again, I can think of several ways that understanding its legal character can be transformative for us daily.

Overall, however, this was a *wonderful* book. The writing is felicitous, the theology beautiful, and the applications thoughtful. Let me tell you how I’ve used this book already and how I plan to use it in the near future. On page 83, there’s a powerful section about how God’s attributes confront and expose us for who we are in ourselves. That section inspired a prayer of confession I used recently in a morning worship service. I keep a file on my computer of sermon illustrations and ideas—Tripp’s book gave me several new ones. Like many consistories, ours goes through a book regularly. When we’re done our current one, I’ll be proposing *Do You Believe?* as the next. I’ll also be using it in the regular leadership training we do in our church. To sum it up, I’m going to be sharing it with as many people as I can. It might really help bridge that deadly gap between creed and conduct. 📖



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ICRC 2022



The 10th quadrennial meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) took place from October 13 through October 18, 2022, at the Windhoek Country Club Resort in Windhoek, Namibia, hosted by the Reformed Churches in South Africa. This meeting was originally to take place in October 2021 but had been postponed due to global travel restrictions on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

BASIS

The basis of the ICRC is “the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).” The purpose of the ICRC is:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the Member Churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches;
3. to facilitate and promote cooperation among the Member Churches in such areas as missions, theological education, and ministries of mercy;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the Member Churches;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

MEMBERSHIP

At its start the ICRC was composed of the following thirty-four Member Churches.

1. African Evangelical Presbyterian Church (AEPC (Kenya))
2. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC (USA & Canada))
3. Calvinist Reformed Churches of Indonesia (CRCI (Indonesia))
4. Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)
5. Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (CRCN)
6. Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)
7. Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW)
8. Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (EPCI)
9. Free Church of Scotland (FCS)
10. Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCS-C)
11. Free Church in Southern Africa (FCSA)
12. Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)
13. Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA)
14. Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC (USA & Canada))
15. Independent Reformed Church of Korea (IRCK)
16. Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCK)
17. Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC (USA & Canada))
18. Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)
19. Presbyterian Church of Uganda (PCU)
20. Presbyterian Free Church of India (PFCI)
21. Reformed Church in the US (RCUS)
22. Reformed Churches in Brazil (RCB)
23. Reformed Churches in Indonesia (RCI (Indonesia))
24. Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA)
25. Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) (RCN(I))
26. Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)
27. Reformed Churches of Spain (RCS)
28. Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI (India))
29. Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI (Ireland))
30. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
31. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India (RPCNEI)
32. Sudanese Reformed Church (SRC)

33. United Reformed Churches of Congo (URCC)

34. United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)
For diverse reasons, the FCSA, PCEA, and RCS were not able to be present in person at this conference. Several delegates of churches in attendance were also unable to attend last minute, many for health reasons.

NEW MEMBERS

Applying for membership, and thus also represented at the Conference, were:

1. Anugraha Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bangalore, India (ARPCBI)
2. Evangelical Reformed Church in India (ERCI (India))
3. Reformed Churches the Netherlands (RCN)
4. Reformed Presbyterian Church of Africa (RPCA (Uganda))
5. Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe (RPCCEE (Hungary, Ukraine, Romania)).

Admission for membership requires compliance of the church with the conditions described in the ICRC Constitution and being sponsored by two member churches of the ICRC. All churches met these requirements.

MEMBERSHIP TERMINATION

At the ICRC 2017 the membership of the RCN(I) was suspended as its practice with respect to office bearers was no longer in agreement with the Basis of the ICRC. Upon direction of their broadest assemblies, the CanRC put forward a motion, which the OPC seconded, that the membership of the RCN(I) in the ICRC be terminated as the RCN(I) continued to be at odds with the Basis. Almost all member churches in good standing present at the ICRC 2022 voted in favour of the motion, one church abstained, and no churches voted against the motion. The decision was taken with a heavy heart, as the RCN(I) had been instrumental in the formation and running of the ICRC since its beginnings in 1982.

With the termination of one Member Church and the admission of five Member Churches, the total number of Member Churches now is thirty-eight.

APPOINTMENTS

Appointed to the executive of the ICRC for the duration of ICRC 2022 were:

As Chairman, Rev. Dr. Douw Breed of the RCSA, the hosting church of ICRC 2022.

As Vice-Chairman, Dr. Aaron Bae of the KPCK, the designated hosting church for ICRC 2026.

As Corresponding Secretary, Rev. Dr.

James Visscher of the CanRC.

As Recording Secretary, Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen of the CanRC (filling in for Rev. Dr. Peter Naylor of the EPCEW, who resigned from his position for health reasons in 2020).

As Treasurer, Mr. Kyle Lodder of the CanRC.

As Coordinator of Committees, Elder Mark Bube of the OPC.

For the period following the ICRC 2022, Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen was appointed Corresponding Secretary and Rev. Dr. Albert Coetsee of the RCSA was appointed Recording Secretary.

DEVOTIONS

A prayer service was held on the evening of October 12. Local pastor, Rev. Henning Venter, welcomed delegates and described the Reformed Churches in Namibia. Local pastor, Rev. Dr. Paul de Bruyn, preached on Ephesians 4:7-16, proclaiming how the mission of all, and thus also of church leadership, is to serve each other, how we are challenged by childishness in fulfilling this mission, and how in Christ we grow to maturity, so as to speak the truth in love.

On the morning of October 13, the outgoing Chairman, Rev. Dr. Dick Moes of the URCNA, led the opening devotions. His message focused on Genesis 2:1-3, pointing out that our goal is the eternal Sabbath where heaven and earth meet, and thus our focus on earth should be to reflect God to one another, made possible in Christ.

Each day was begun with devotions led by a minister serving with the hosting church, the RCSA. Throughout each day God's praise was sung with songs chosen from the Anglo-Genevan Psalter and the Trinity Psalter-Hymnal.

PAPERS & PANELS

A core activity of the ICRC is the presentation of several papers centred around a theme. These papers are presented in the evening, followed by a panel discussion on the paper on the morning of the next conference day.

The theme for the ICRC 2022 was Theological Education. The following papers were presented:

- ❖ "Seminaries: A Centre for Theological Education, Ministry Training or Spiritual Development" by Rev. Dr. Mohan Chacko, professor at Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Dehradun, India.
- ❖ "Models or Alternate Strategies for Ministry Training" by Rev. Dr. Douw Breed, emeritus minister of the RCS of

Waterkloofrand in Pretoria and extra-ordinary researcher of the North-West University in Potchefstroom, South Africa.

- ❖ "The Authority of the Scriptures in Diverse Situations and Ethical Contexts" by Rev. Dr. Henk van den Belt, professor of Theology at the Free University in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Panelists fielding questions from the floor served well to assist the member churches in equipping the saints for the ministry of mercy, for building up the body of Christ.

REPORTS

The ICRC 2022 received the following reports with gratitude: The Corresponding Secretary and the Treasurer; The Theological Education Committee; the Diaconal Committee; the Missions Committee; The Publications Committee responsible for the ICRC website and the publication of the quarterly *Lux Mundi*.

Following each report, opportunity for discussion was given. Some detailed attention was given to the functionality of *Lux Mundi*. The Diaconal Committee was given a more manageable mandate.


ENCOURAGEMENT

Time was set aside each afternoon of the conference to allow delegations from churches to meet bilaterally or multilaterally. Thus, churches could encourage one another, strengthen their ties with one another, and become acquainted with each other.

HOSTING

The ICRC enjoyed the gracious hospitality of the Windhoek Country Club Resort and the two RCSA congregations in Windhoek. The Conference experienced warm and joyous fellowship with fellow delegates, observers, and other guests.

PROCEEDINGS AND NEXT ICRC

The Proceedings of the ICRC 2022, reports to the ICRC 2022, and papers presented to the ICRC 2022 will be published as soon as possible on the ICRC website: www.icrconline.com. The next meeting of the ICRC is scheduled for mid-October 2026, to be hosted by the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea. 



Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen
ICRC 2022 Recording Secretary



Believe it or not, but another year is coming to a close. It seems that it was not that long ago that we said “farewell” to 2021 and now we are about to do the same with 2022. Another new year is dawning.

THE LARGER PICTURE

Before we get to that, however, we need to look back over the time gone by. What shall we say about 2022? It was another turbulent year. The first shock came when in the spring Russia decided to invade its neighbour, Ukraine. Now, an invasion is never pleasant, but this was more like a devastation. Day after day we saw pictures of people fleeing, cities bombed, towns destroyed, corpses lying in the streets, and burned-out tanks littering the landscape. And the worst may not be over as there is now talk from the Russian side about using nuclear weapons.

Is all of this real? We are supposed to be living in the civilized 21st century, but this is nothing less than barbarianism revisited. It just reminds us once again that while times may change, human nature does not. It is just as much in need of redemption and renewal as ever.

Still, war was not all that came our way in 2022, bad weather came along too. Talk to the people of Pakistan as they continue to deal with the aftermath of horrific flooding. Visit the east coast of Canada and see with your own eyes the destruction that Hurricane Fiona has wrought. Travel south to Florida and gaze at a former paradise littered with ruined homes, wrecked boats and endless debris after Hurricane Ian paid a visit. Our planet is being pummeled on a regular basis.

But then if weather is not busy doing us in, we are in danger of also doing ourselves in. It was bad enough in past years as more marriages ended in divorce, single parent numbers increased, families fractured, and immorality took hold. Abortion, same-sex marriage, incest, polyamorism—it is all becoming OK. In 2022, however, the bad news was turned up another notch as human sexuality itself came increasingly under the microscope of libertarianism. Surprise, surprise, it now turns out that human plumbing does not matter. You may physically be a male or a female, but that is now just a mindset. If you look like a male but feel like a female—guess what? You are now a female! We have made casualties of marriage and the family and now we are doing the same to our very own humanity. Truly, the foundations are being destroyed. So, all in all, 2022 brought us a lot of bad news.

And yet the sky was not all dark. COVID numbers started to go down and in many countries government restrictions were lifted. Old age homes could be visited again. People started to travel once more. The economy revived. Church life as well returned to normal. Of course, not all of the pandemic wounds have healed. There are still some noses out of joint on both sides and some hard feelings abound, but time does heal and fences are being mended. It is hoped that in 2023 we will see both better health and better relations.

But enough of the world, what about the church and what about our Canadian (American) Reformed Churches in particular? As always there is lots to report as we review the events of 2022.

CHURCHES & PASTORS

British Columbia and Washington

This time the West comes first and we begin by turning our attention to British Columbia and Washington. At present, there are only two vacant churches in this area, and that represents a substantial improvement over previous years. Up north in the Bulkley Valley both churches received new pastors and teachers. The church at Houston welcomed the Rev. Han Gil Lee. He came from the United Reformed Church of Bowmanville, Ontario but is no stranger to our federation as he was trained for ministry



Prince George Provisional Council, John Siebenga, Tim Schouten, Ty Voorhorst, Thomas van Leeuwen, Sheldon Rogers

at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario. Next door in Smithers, they cast their net a little wider and managed to convince a new pastor from Albany, Western Australia to accept their call. It should be added that in the future he will be part of a two-man team, the Lord willing. Now, it also has to be said that “new” does not mean “unacquainted,” as Rev. Hendrik Alkema began his ministry some years ago in nearby Houston. So, in some sense this is a bit of a homecoming.

Further south in the Fraser Valley, the church at Chilliwack saw a long vacancy come to an end with the arrival of the Rev. Ben Schoof and his family as they moved up valley from Surrey. The new church at Sardis also sported a new face on its pulpit as Candidate Tim Veenstra became Rev. Tim Veenstra. He and his family made the big move in the fall of the year from Ontario to BC.

Close by, the church at Yarrow became vacant when Classis Pacific East approved of its request to grant the Rev. Ted VanSpronsen early retirement for health reasons. Needless to say, this is a deeply disappointing development for our brother and his family, as well as for the Yarrow congregation. One always hopes and prays for recovery but when it is not forthcoming then sadness sets in. May the Lord continue to strengthen and guide both pastor and congregation and grant better days. Not so far

away the church at Abbotsford has also been walking with their pastor as he struggles with his health. If all goes well, Rev. Dave DeBoer hopes to be back at work in the coming months.

Going further west the Maranatha Church at Surrey, the longest established church in our federation in BC, is faced with challenges. Due to changing demographics and sky-high house prices, members have been moving further into the Valley and thus their membership numbers have gone into serious decline. In addition, their pastor Ben Schoof accepted a call to Chilliwack and moved away with his family. At one point the church's Council was recommending that the church consider dissolution; however, that has since changed and the membership now wants to keep going and re-invent itself as a missional church. May the Lord bless their efforts and help them find a new pastor and grant them an infusion of new enthusiasm and commitment.

South of the 49th parallel, the churches in Lynden and Nooksack Valley are both doing well. For some time already, Pastor Bill Wielenga has held the record of being the longest serving pastor in one church (Lynden) in our federation, and in 2022 he continued to add to that record. It is now thirty-one years and counting! Soldier on, brother, being a blessing and being blest!

Newly instituted Elm Creek church (below)

Alberta

We go across the Rockies, and we come to Alberta, the land of wheat, oil, cattle, and some more churches. At present there are two vacancies in the province. The church at Barrhead continues its attempts to find a new pastor and teacher. A little south the new church of Devon is looking for its first pastor and teacher. Both churches extended calls recently to candidates but were unsuccessful.

Needless to say, that can be disheartening. Some churches issue call after call and get decline after decline. Meanwhile, the elders try their best to serve the needs of the congregation, but they can only do so much. As well, the members can get down on themselves and begin to wonder, "what's wrong with us?" What is needed in such cases is a good dose of perseverance and a firm conviction that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who governs his church and that he will see her through the barren years. It may also cause such a church to find some temporary help in the person of a retired pastor who is still able and willing to serve, although without all of the meetings and the pressures.

Manitoba

Until recently all of our churches in Manitoba had a pastor, but that suddenly changed when the church of Elm Creek was instituted. Where is Elm Creek? Dr. Google tells me that it is located about 50 kms west of Winnipeg and about 35 km southeast of



Portage la Prairie. So, now you know, and now you can stop by when you are traveling west or east. I am assuming that agriculture is the big thing in Elm Creek, and dairy farming in particular.

I do not know much about farming, but I think that this place has a future and can grow. All it needs is a sales office in the Netherlands where nitrogen emitting Holsteins are no longer popular. Welcome, Elm Creek to the federation! You are church number sixty-eight. (By the way, in the back of the *Yearbook* you will find a list of more than sixty-eight churches; however, some of those are still un-instituted and thus cannot be added to the grand total yet.)

Ontario

Once upon a time there was a classis in Ontario that had no vacancies among its nine churches. Do you know what happened to that classis? It saw a sudden exodus of pastors moving to BC and PNG, going into retirement, as well as a new church plant starting up. And do you know what? The exodus is not over as a few more senior pastors are heading for the hills next year. So what classis am I referring to? It is Classis Northern Ontario. The moral of the story: always count your pastoral blessings when you have them, because the situation can change quickly.

Now for the details. The church at Owen Sound remains vacant after the departure of Rev. David Pol. The newly instituted church at Arthur remains vacant. Thankfully the church at Grand Valley received a new pastor in the person of Candidate Bryan Vanderhorst. He has since become Pastor Vanderhorst. Not too far away the Maranatha Church of Fergus remains vacant as does the Emmanuel Church in Guelph. The other church in Guelph called Living Word welcomed the Rev. Jeff Poort from Kerwood, Ontario. In 2023 it is expected that two more vacancies will occur as both Rev. Eric Kampen and Matthew VanLuik will be reaching retirement age. Needless to say, all this represents a lot of vacancies. Thankfully, there are any number of theological students, professors, and retired pastors able to assist with the preaching.

In the neighbouring classis of Central Ontario, after 25 years of waiting, raising funds, and working through government red tape, Redemption church moved into their new, beautiful, and very spacious building in the township of Flamborough—congratulations! The vacancy situation in this classis is enviable. At the moment, all the churches have pastors, although that is slated to change later in the new year when the Rev. Winston Bosch moves from the church at Ottawa to the inner Hamilton city mission work at Streetlight. Meanwhile, a new church has been instituted in East





Ambassador Church, Niverville

Hamilton (McQuesten) called Mercy. Pastor Ian Wildeboer is the founding pastor of this congregation. Meanwhile, the members of Blessings Church have a new face to look at on Sunday as the Rev. Dr. Greg Davidson left the local Presbyterian Church and was examined and admitted into the federation and installed as pastor alongside Pastor Bill DeJong. Welcome both Mercy Church and Pastor Greg Davidson!

Classis Niagara continues to grow as well. The church at Dunnville decided to split into Dunnville East and Dunnville West. As such this is a good development. What is not so good about it is that Pastor John VanWoudenberg accepted a call to serve the Glanbrook church. Hence instead of one vacancy, there are now two. Still, a word of welcome is in order to the new church in Dunnville, but is it East or West? Getting back to Glanbrook church, it should be mentioned that not only did they get a new pastor, they also got a new building. I have not seen it, but the word is that it is a beautiful place to worship the Lord. Elsewhere in this same classis, the church at Grassie remains vacant and the church at Smithville is still looking for a pastor to work alongside Pastor Cody Swaving. Not too far away, the church at Lincoln is undergoing some long needed extensive renovations and this means that the congregation will be worshipping elsewhere. Now, that is a nuisance, but the good thing is that they have something to look forward to in the form of a newly rejuvenated house of worship.

Finally, we come to the churches in Classis Ontario West. At present there are vacancies in the churches at Kerwood and London, although the latter church hopes to welcome a new pastor in the person of Candidate Tim VanBeek before the end of 2022. From last year's *Yearbook* I gleaned that Pastor Ken Kok serving

the church at Grand Rapids will also reach a certain age that will allow him to sleep in, slow down and put his feet up. Whether or not he will do so in 2023 remains a mystery to me but hopefully not to himself or his wife.

For the curious among us who are wondering about the total number of vacancies in the federation, the number stands at fifteen—close to 30%. Obviously, as churches and members we should keep praying for more young men to enter into the ministry of the gospel. We need them!

CHURCH PLANTS

Thus far we have been dealing with instituted churches, but we also have a number of church plants. One that comes to mind is Prince George, where Pastor Tim Schouten is hard at work. Thankfully he is helped a great deal by br. John Siebenga and his wife Betty who come from Houston on two-week stints. In addition, there are also others who pitch in and go out of their way to connect with new contacts and newcomers.

Then too there is the Chinese Reformed Church meeting in Cloverdale. Of late this church has been seeing steady growth with new members coming from China and elsewhere in Canada. The result is that they now have a really talented core group of members that augurs well for the future. This past summer one of the Chinese students at CRTS came over and assisted their missionary/pastor.

In Manitoba, Pastor James Zekveld continues to labour in Niverville. As such the work is both exciting and frustrating. Often it means two steps forward and one step back. Those of us who are members of established churches are not always sensitive to the challenges of what it means to start a church from scratch. How do you go about getting a church off the ground? How do you explain

the gospel to unbelievers? How do you graciously tell believers in adult-only baptism that they are wrong? How do you get people living in a materially obsessed society to realize that there is a critical spiritual dimension to life? All of this and more requires courage, patience, and wisdom from above. We wish James and all those labouring in this area of ministry every blessing!

In the east, Streetlight Ministries that meets in downtown Hamilton is waiting patiently for their new building to be completed. At the same time, they are also waiting for Pastor Winston Bosch to come from Ottawa to assist Pastor Paul Aasman. Hopefully they will have some productive years working together as they do this most challenging work. Downtown Hamilton is one of those centre city areas in which many people live who are dealing with poverty, mental health, and drug addiction. The government throws a great deal of money at these problems, as well as an army of emergency and social workers, but the situation keeps on declining. It is becoming increasingly obvious that their only hope is the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, pray for this vital ministry as well.

RETIRED MINISTERS

As far as I am aware the only colleague to join the ranks of the emeriti (sounds a bit like a Mafia club, doesn't it?) is the Rev. Douwe Agema, who last served in Guelph but now lives in Elora. A blessed retirement to you and Liz! As indicated already, it looks like more members will be joining this club in 2023.

The passing of Elisabeth ("Lies") Jantina Mulder

On October 14, 2022, the Lord called home his beloved child Lies Mulder at the age of 96. She was the wife and widow of the Rev. Johannes (Hans) Mulder, the mother of two sons, Carl and Paul, a grandmother and a good friend to many. Together with her husband, she served the churches of Carman, Coaldale, Cloverdale, Toronto, and Burlington-Waterdown. In all those churches she was much appreciated and truly loved as a lady blessed with a true Christian character, a warm disposition (like her husband) and a welcoming smile. She will be truly missed but there can only be gratitude to the Lord for finally receiving her into his holy habitations.

GENERAL SYNOD GUELPH

Having thus far looked at happenings in the life of churches and pastors, it also good to consider the federation as a whole. In that regard, 2022 was a synod year, meaning that it was once again time for a general synod of the churches to be convened. Such

an event happens every three years, and this time it took place from May 10–23, in Guelph, Ontario, and in the building of the Emmanuel church.

The fact that the brothers could finish their work in two weeks is to be commended. (I was once clerk of a synod that lasted for five weeks!) Hopefully, the days of a synod dragging on for weeks on end has become a thing of the past.

Another item that may prove to be commendable is the new way of recording decisions. Synod Guelph took the daring step of moving away from the old approach of structuring decisions along the lines of material, observations, considerations, and recommendations and decided to go with material, decisions, and grounds. Is it an improvement? Does it shed new light on dark matters? You decide. Go to the *Acts* on the federation website, start reading and let your church council know what you think.

In that two-week span just mentioned, a lot of work was done and a great many items were dealt with: appeals, church relations, seminary, song book, foreign students, a new professor, hymns, liturgical forms, and the list goes on. Now, this is not the place to enter into an exhaustive examination of the decisions made. Nevertheless, it may be beneficial to deal with some of the highlights, as well as to interact with a few decisions.

One of the highlights at Synod 2022 was the presence of so many foreign delegates and representatives from sister churches and others. They came from Australia, New Zealand, Korea, Indonesia, South Africa, as well as from the USA. You can read their speeches in the back of the *Acts*. The presence of delegates from some not so familiar churches as the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America is to be noted. Also, the fact that both the Free Reformed Churches in North America and the Heritage Reformed Church were represented was a reason for thankfulness. What is striking too is the fact that the United Reformed Churches in North America received a lot less attention than at previous synods. It would seem that our living together is becoming almost normalized.

In connection with relations with other churches, Synod decided to re-structure the committees. Formerly one committee took care of relations with churches in North America and another handled churches abroad. It has now been decided to go back to one committee and call it the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER). It will be composed of twelve members.

Another highlight of Synod has to be with the appointment of a new professor. Due to the impending retirement of Prof. Dr. Arjan de Visser, Synod took up the task of appointing his replacement, namely Rev. Dr. Reuben Bredenhof, who currently pastors the Free



General Synod, Guelph 2022

Reformed Church of Mount Nasura, Western Australia. If all goes according to plan, he will take up his duties sometime in the new year and be the new Professor of Ministry and Missions. Welcome, brother Bredenhof, and happy retirement, brother de Visser!

Perhaps not a highlight but a topic that took up a great deal of synod time had to do with all matters connected to the *Book of Praise*—songs, forms, psalms and hymns, as well as hymn cap. Before getting into any of that, however, a word of thanks is in order to the Standing Committee on the *Book of Praise* for their prodigious labours. Apparently in three years time or less, they had over 100 meetings. Can you imagine that? It should also be noted that most of their work was adopted and a lot of it will likely be incorporated into future editions of the *Book of Praise*.

Still, matters are not all settled on the liturgical front. For the fact is that for the first time in our history a general synod decided to reject an overture coming from *both* regional synods. In the past it was not unusual for one regional synod's overture to be defeated, but it was unheard of to defeat an overture coming from both Regional Synod East and Regional Synod West. Well, the unthinkable has happened. To what am I referring? It has to do with asking Synod to set aside the decision of Synod Chatham

to cap the number of hymns in the *Book of Praise* at 100. Synod Guelph decided to deny both overtures and keep 100 as the magic number. According to this decision, the churches will find 100 hymns in future songbooks, and no more.

Now, aside from whether or not this is a good decision, it does present us with some real problems. Synod Guelph also decided to adopt provisionally close to forty new hymns and to ask the churches to test them for another three years. Remember the testing process was supposed to have happened over the last three years, but a number of churches claimed that COVID upset the musical applectart. In any case, churches can expect a new supplement in their mailboxes containing the new psalms and hymns.

But, if you are like me, you may wonder how this is all going to pan out. At present the *Book of Praise* has eighty-five hymns and, if we maintain the hymn cap, we have room for fifteen new hymns. Yet, all the while we are being asked to test another forty that have been approved. Now, my math skills are nothing to boast about, but even I know that eighty-five plus forty equals 125. So here we are testing forty hymns but only fifteen hymns will pass the test and be included. Now it is always possible that several of the proposed hymns will not make the grade but for more than

twenty to be discarded because of a rather arbitrary cap raises some serious questions.

Indeed, will that actually work? By the time the next synod comes around some churches will have been testing these new forty hymns anywhere from three to six years but then that synod comes along and says, “Sorry, churches, but of all those that were adopted provisionally only fifteen made the grade.” Of course, there is another way to do this, namely by removing some of the current eighty-five hymns. But will that lead to happiness? I am concerned that Synod Guelph’s decision on this matter has the potential inadvertently to cause disagreement and division in the churches.

Now, it may be that I am looking at all this too pessimistically, and I certainly do not want it to take away from all the other good work that was done by Synod Guelph. As with all matters of controversy, these too need to be committed to the Lord for wisdom and guidance.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

Since we have been dealing with church gatherings, it may be good to mention that a church gathering of a different sort met in Windhoek, Namibia, from October 12–19. It was the 10th General Meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). Note that this was a “conference” and not a “synod,” meaning that it has no power to direct the affairs of member churches. Still, more than thirty churches came together and discussed especially the future of theological education, meaning, “How should churches go about training men for the gospel ministry in the 21st century?”

In addition to training, time was also spent on the relationship between Scripture and modern culture. As well, many church delegations took the opportunity to meet one another, to get acquainted, to learn about each other’s challenges, and to discuss ways of supporting and assisting each other. Indeed, this may be the greatest task of the ICRC, namely, to act as a body that facilitates contact between well-established Western churches and small struggling churches in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

The ICRC also admitted new churches to membership: the Anugraha Reformed Presbyterian Church of India, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe, the Evangelical Reformed Church in India, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Africa (Uganda), and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The Reformed Churches (Liberated) of the Netherlands had their membership terminated. The

member churches decided that the decision of these churches to admit women to all the offices in the church, and the underlying hermeneutic that they used to accomplish this, was a bridge too far. The ICRC thus has thirty-eight member churches from all five continents. The next general meeting is to take place in 2026 in South Korea under the auspices of the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea.

CANADIAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

From ministry to seminary is a small step. As such 2022 was a good year at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). The students Tsijbbe deJong, Rodney den Boer, Dathan Pleiter (in absentia), Timothy vanBeek, Anson van Delden, and Bryan Vanderhorst graduated with a Master of Divinity degree. Eight new students will grace the halls of CRTS. Three international students from Korea will spend a year in Hamilton. Two students are enrolled in the BTh program. Four of the current students are





Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) 2022 graduates: Bryan Vanderhorst, Tsjibbe deJong, Tim vanBeek, Anson van Delden, Rodney den Boer. (Missing: Dathan Pleiter)

from South Africa. In total there will be thirty-four students (an increase of two over the previous year).

On the staffing side, Dr. Reuben Bredenhof will join the teaching staff sometime in the new year. Br. Raoul Kingma will continue to serve as a teaching assistant. Catharine Mechelse, Margaret Alkema (Librarian), and Leanne Kuizenga will again form the administrative staff.

And then there is the physical plant. The present building was never meant to house so many students and staff, with the result that something had to happen—either a new building or a renovated one. The Board decided on the latter course. The church members contributed generously to the “Partnership in the Gospel” Fund. The architects and engineers went to work. The construction people took over. The hope is that all of the renovations will be completed by the end of the year and that a more functional building will result to serve one and all.

Of course, this leaves a problem, namely where to teach while construction is going on. Hammers, skill saws, and drills are not exactly conducive to a great teaching environment. Thankfully,

Page Opposite: Dr. Reuben Bredenhof and family.

the Maranatha Free Reformed Church which is located nearby offered the use of their new and spacious church building. Kudos to great neighbours!

Mention also needs to be made of the work of the ladies who are involved in the Women’s Savings Action. More than fifty years ago, sr. G. Selles came up with the idea for the women in the church to collect money for the seminary library. Some of the older members may even remember the little blue tins which often stood on top of the fridge or table in which pennies were regularly deposited. Well, from pennies we went to loonies to cheques and now to e-transfers. I am sure that since those early years more than a million dollars has been donated by the church ladies and their families from across the land. A well-stocked library is very much a tribute to them all.

On the health front, it may be reported that Dr. Ted Van Raalte continues to recover after his devastating accident. Patience, however, is required as brain injuries take time. On the retired front, our hearts continue to go out to Dr. Niek Gootjes, and especially to his wife Diny, and family, as he continues to be cared for at Shalom Manor in Grimsby. Also, Dr. Gerhard Visscher has had his health struggles since he retired, and we hope that he may experience better days.



Mission to Papua New Guinea

MINISTERIAL GATHERINGS

One of the sure signs that the COVID restrictions are over is that different gatherings are again taking place. At the end of October, the brothers in the east both CanRC and URC came together for a ministerial retreat. Pastor John van Eyk of the Lethbridge URC was the main speaker. Knowing him, I am sure he had some fitting words of wisdom to impart. In the beginning of November, the ministers in the west came together in Aldergrove, BC. Dr. Alan Strange of Mid-America was the keynote speaker. Since this is a repeat appearance, some of us knew what to expect and were not disappointed. How great it is that local churches encourage their pastors to come together to share, learn and fellowship. Seeing that some of them labour in isolated places, it is a real treat to have this time together. Blessings brothers, east and west!

FOREIGN MISSION

Brazil

In the west, the church of Aldergrove continues to be the sending church for mission work in Brazil. At present Pastor Jon Chase is living and working in Recife, where he is teaching courses at the seminary, mentoring church leaders, and assisting fledgling congregations. Increasingly his focus is on assisting churches in the south of Brazil. His partner, Pastor Jim Witteveen, is still in Canada, where he too continues to be involved in the affairs of the Brazilian churches by means of Zoom. His daily schedule is filled with long distance teaching.

At the same time Pastor Jim and his wife Nallely are also burdened. Some time ago the three native children that they have been fostering for years and had hoped to make part of their family

were taken away from them by the government and the Indian band. Needless to say, this has caused a lot of pain, especially as they consider the future spiritual well-being of these children. Whether or not these children will ever be returned to them remains unknown. Kindly remember them and pray for them and their children in this hour of need!

In the east the church of Hamilton also continues to spearhead work in Brazil. Recently Pastor Bram de Graaf was on furlough, and we hope that it was refreshing and stimulating. Upon his return he will continue do what he has been doing for many years, namely, training church leaders, translating books and articles, as well as planting new churches.

China

No country in the world has been more zealous in their attempts to eradicate COVID than China. Zero tolerance has been the government policy for some time, and it continues. With it come closed borders, unexpected lockdown, and great uncertainty. Needless to say, this has also had an adverse effect on the ability of Missionary X and his helpers to travel there so as to meet, train, and support churches there.

Nevertheless, this has not brought the work to a standstill. Indeed, in many ways the work has continued to grow and expand. More churches and church leaders have taken up contact with Missionary X. Material keeps on being translated and uploaded to the website. Preaching seminars have been held and are expanding. Churches are being encouraged and guided daily.

Realize too that all of this is happening as severe persecution grips China. The government remains zealous in its attempts to

control, if not eradicate, Christian churches. The current President of China is determined to gain the upper hand over the followers of Christ. Yet, as throughout history, he is fighting a losing battle. No man, no party, and no government, no matter how powerful, can take on the Holy Spirit and win. Indeed, the blood of the martyrs continues to be the seed of the church.

Living as most of us do in Australia, Canada, and the United States, let us be mindful of the life and challenges of our Chinese brothers and sisters. Let us pray for them daily. At the same time let us count our blessings. No country on earth is perfect but some are closer to perfection than others. Treasure your freedoms and grow a tender heart for those who are oppressed.

Papua New Guinea

Am I the only one who is enjoying the regular briefings and videos from the mission field in PNG written by Mark Mulder? I hope not. If you are missing out, then you need to read them as they appear regularly on reformedmissions.net. Mark is the Principal of the Reformed Bible College. He works very closely with Pastor Cornelis Kleyn, the missionary sent out by the Bethel Church of Toronto.

Together they, with the help and assistance of others, are busy teaching and training indigenous students and pastors. As such, there are a growing group of church leaders going out to grow and pastor local churches throughout Papua New Guinea.

Realize as well that these men and their wives (Liz and Greta) are labouring in one of the poorer nations on the face of the earth. Every day they face the challenges of high humidity, poverty, unbelief, and social deconstruction.

Mexico

On the other side of the world br. Scott Bredenhof, together with his wife Annemarie and their growing family, are living in Queretaro, Mexico. There they are renting a house owned by Pan de Vida, the orphanage situated in the Santa Barbara suburb (not Santa Barbara, California). As Scott writes in his posts, this work requires a lot of patience. They are planting roots, however, and are hoping to make an impact not just in their neighbourhood but also in the wider area. To that end they are learning the Spanish language and becoming more and more acquainted with the culture.

At present the Mexico work is mainly supported by the churches of Abbotsford and Vernon, although there is word that the Willoughby church will soon come onboard as well. In addition, other churches and individuals support this work through offerings and donations.



Scott and Annemarie Bredenhof in Queretaro, Mexico.

South Africa

Some years ago the church at Dunnville (now East and West) took on a special mission work that originates in South Africa. Pastor Jopie Van der Linden, who deals with some unique health challenges, was led to start a website to support poor and isolated African pastors with study material. In time Dunnville called Pastor Ryan Kampen to assist in this work. Today, he together with a group of volunteers, are still busy translating existing material and creating new material that helps pastors in Africa and elsewhere around the world. The amount of material that is uploaded continues to grow daily and now supplies needy pastors with an abundance of biblical and theological resources.

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MISSIONS ASSOCIATION

Some year back the various mission endeavours throughout the country came together and formed the Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA). Some viewed this organization with suspicion and thought that it was the beginning of a new hierarchical structure that would take over mission planning in our circles. Those of us involved in setting it up, however, never saw it as a dangerous endeavour. And neither have all the churches involved in foreign and home mission as they are now all members of this association. As such it creates a forum to discuss mission matters, to update ourselves on mission developments and trends, to share documents, and to learn from one another.

This past September the CRMA held another annual meeting in Hamilton where delegates listened to Dr. Lloyd Kim of the

Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) speak about Mission to the World, the missionary arm of the PCA. Currently it sends out 700 missionaries to every area of the world. He spoke about his organization and its set up, as well as about newly emerging challenges in the field of foreign missions. It was all very instructive and informational. It acquainted us with what another NAPARC church is doing on the missionary front.

It also reminded the delegates once again that the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few. In addition, it highlighted the fact that on a seminary teaching level far too little attention is paid to foreign mission. How great it would be if the present department of ministry and missions at CRTS could be split in two, with one man to teach all the diverse subjects of ministry and another to teach missiology in all of its facets. I know, I know, I am dreaming. Still, sometimes God does turn our dreams into reality. Does he not?

MAGAZINES

Having been the editor of *Clarion* for many years, I have a soft spot for magazines. In a world that is more and more visually oriented and digital, the printed page often struggles. This means that magazines are read less and less. Even in our churches where we prize our printed Bibles, our eyes are moving more and more from the printed page to the screen. Is that bad? Not necessarily, but it does make life challenging for magazine editors and printers everywhere.

In that connection I would like to put in a good word for those who write, edit, design, and print *Clarion*. On a regular basis they give you a steady and edifying diet of meditations, articles, and news on religious developments. They also keep you in touch with what is going on in the churches.

And that too is important. We live in a day and age where the local church receives a lot of loyalty but in which federational loyalty is waning. In some churches you can hear comments to the effect that “what matters to me is my local church and not the federation.” Such a statement makes it a matter of either-or, whereas, in reality, we need both. We need to be involved in and committed to our local church, but we also need to be humbly thankful that our local church is part of a larger federation of faithful churches of our Lord. Do not play the one over against the other.

Hence, I am all for subscribing to *Clarion* and I would urge the readers of this article to consider doing so if they are not already on the subscription list. Read it! Discuss it! Criticize it! Contribute to it!

Oh, and by the way much the same can be said of *Reformed Perspective*. Of course, I know that it is much more concerned



about local, national, and international issues, but that too is good. We are in the world, even if we are not of the world, and it behooves us to know what is happening, where this world is headed and what kind of a witness is needed. So, hats off not only to Pastor Peter Holtvliwer and his crew and but also the br. Jon Dykstra and his band. Keep the good stuff coming and may the music play on!

There is one more magazine or quarterly circulating in our churches that you may not be aware of. It is called *Diakonia* and targets pastors, elders, and deacons. For more than thirty years it has been providing office bearers with pertinent material. And that too is not always easy as few pastors write articles. Still, the work goes on and over time a wealth of material has been compiled and is at the fingers tips of those who need it. All they need to do is look it up and read it.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Upon visiting Ontario in September, I was told that Guido de Brès High School in Hamilton is moving. Apparently a larger, phased out public school facility has been purchased that will better meet the needs of a growing secondary school. No doubt before the transition happens a lot of work needs to be done and we wish the volunteers well.

News has also reached me that the Credo Elementary Christian School in Woodbridge, Ontario, is shutting down due to a lack of students. This is a sad development. None of us ever want to see a church or school close their doors, as they are vital components of our faith community. Still, shifting demographics is a reality that we cannot avoid and need to address. May the alternative plans being put into place in the Brampton and Toronto congregations prove effective in training the youth of the church.

In Calgary too there is a lot of activity connected to the school as it is being renovated and enlarged. More classroom space is needed, and no doubt in time more teachers as well. I am not sure how this will impact the church, as presently church and school share the same premises; however, I am sure that there is a plan for that as well.

In the Fraser Valley it has been decided to build a new high school in the Abbotsford area; however, there are some real challenges. In the first place, you need to be able to find land that is suitably located and zoned right. In the second place, you need to

be able to pay for it. Currently, land prices in the Abbotsford area are in the stratosphere so it will be a miracle indeed if something can be found for a reasonable price.

The Covenant Canadian Reformed Teacher's College (CCRTC) celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2022 and held another graduation in May, and six students completed their course of study. Many of them will no doubt have found places to teach by now, especially in Ontario schools. Also, among the staff there has been a changing of the guard as br. Keith Sikkema retired after nine years of teaching and sr. Donna van Huisstede retired as office administrator after thirty-five years of faithful service. Joining the faculty is br. Mark den Hollander, who now labours full-time besides Dr. Christine van Halen-Faber, Dr. Jack Huizenga, and br. Menco Wieske. They in turn are joined by a number of sessional lecturers. In addition, it may be reported that CCRTC continues to travel down the arduous road of accreditation with the Ontario College of Teachers. We wish them every success in this pursuit and in this new academic year!

SPECIAL HOMES

Thankfully the needs of special and elderly members are not forgotten. Throughout BC, an organization called Bethesda continues to operate an increasing number of homes for the physically and mentally handicapped in the broader Christian community. It also offers respite for those caring for these children and adults at home. Summer camp is also a highlight for many. In Alberta, Rehoboth continues to operate a number of homes and special places throughout the province. In Manitoba there is an organization called Cornerstone that does the same. Meanwhile, in Ontario, there are various care organizations, although quite a few of our special members are living in Anchor Homes that are located throughout the southern part of the province.

In addition to these homes, there are also an increasing number of homes for the elderly. As the Canadian population ages there is more and more pressure on governments and communities to consider the needs of our senior citizens. I will not mention all the places where these homes are found for fear of omitting some, but I am sure that as you look around in your local community you can list any number. In most of these one will find great care, although adequate staffing seems to be an ongoing challenge.

It may also be mentioned that funding for both special and elderly homes varies from province to province. In some places a partnership of sorts exists between a special society and the government. In other places societies are formed but they go it alone. Needless to say, neither is an easy course to follow. In the

case of the former, a home often has to deal with a mountain of paperwork and regulations. In the case of the latter, it has to deal with ever increasing costs that become almost impossible for individuals, families, and local faith communities to shoulder alone. The reality is that in many cases there is a need to turn to the government and its much deeper pockets to assist in the funding of these homes. Also, even if a home decides to go it alone, it still cannot escape government regulations regarding standards of care. Hence, while blessings abound, they are not without challenges.

YOUTH CAMPS

Perhaps no group in our community was happier to see COVID restrictions lifted than the young people. For them it meant that youth camps could open again, meaning that facilities could be dusted off, counsellors could be recruited, and young campers could be signed up. The result was that Campfire! in Ontario, Sunset Point Teen Camp in Alberta, and Stepping Stones in BC had marvelous weeks. These camps enjoy wonderful facilities thanks to the generous donations of many.

In addition, these camps, along with many others, are having an impact on our young people. Some time ago I was speaking with a high school teacher, and he commented on the fact that he could pick out the students who were involved with youth camps. On the whole, they were more committed, more involved, and more open about their faith. Now, all of those are wonderful things and those of us who are among the more senior members of the community who have grandchildren attending camp could not be more thankful.

THRIFT STORES & RELIEF AGENCIES

In this edition of Year End Review, I am including a new category called "thrift stores." I am doing so because across the country I am hearing that more and more of our senior members are volunteering in these special stores that assist the needy and contribute to causes local and international. Some are involved in the efforts of the Salvation Army, others in Mission Thrift Stores, and still others in independent stores. Taken together these stores are making a difference in their local villages, towns, suburbs, and cities. Closer to where I live members of several Canadian Reformed churches are heavily involved in a store that has raised more than one million dollars for orphanages and soup kitchens in Mexico.

On a larger scale, we also have the work of the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (CRWRF) and Word & Deed. Both organizations are directing their efforts not at needs in North America but in many other parts of the world. Whether it be the



ARPA, thriving in the midst of change.

displaced in war-torn Ukraine, the poor in Malawi, the starving children in Indonesia, the work of mercy goes on and grows. In such a world it is great that we who have been so richly blessed can assist those who are living on the fringes.

POLITICAL & SOCIAL ACTION

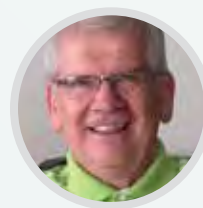
Our review would not be complete without mentioning the work done by ARPA and WeNeedaLaw. Needless to say, theirs is challenging work, and it is becoming ever more so. As our society continues down the road of secularism and self-indulgence, it is becoming more and more resistant to gospel norms. If you champion the cause of the unborn, you are accused of attacking women. If you disagree with homosexual marriage, you are said to be promoting hate. If you have serious reservations about the transgender movement, you are called a bigot. The list of accusations goes on and on. In the eyes of many in our society failure to embrace the new social and cultural norms makes you an outcast.

It is in this kind of world that ARPA and other organizations of biblical witness function, and they deserve our respect and support. At present ARPA is adjusting to a new executive director, namely br. Will Faber. After many years at the helm, br. Mark Penninga decided that it was time to hand over the reins and move on to other challenges. We wish him well, and we wish Will every help and support as he takes on his new responsibilities. At WeNeedaLaw (now a part of ARPA), br. Mike Schouten continues to be hard at work. For him 2022 has been a most challenging year, as his young son Markus died of cancer. May our prayers continue to support him, his wife Jennifer, and family!

Still, in spite of change and sadness, the work goes on. ARPA is not under the illusion that somehow it can bring about the perfect society, but it does bear a burden for our nation as it heads down its increasingly godless road and on to demise and destruction. History offers up abundant proof that those nations that reject God's holy will do not prosper but instead are courting disaster. So may their efforts in Parliament, among Members of Parliament, in the courts, at gatherings and conferences, through the media, and by other means be used by Almighty God to bless our nation.

IN CLOSING

I have once again reached the end of my review. I hope it has given you a picture of people, churches, organizations, and events in our Canadian Reformed community during 2022. As always, my apologies if I have forgotten something important. And that also reminds me, that not only is this the end of this review, but this is also the end of my annual efforts in this regard. The Lord blessed me this year with seventy-five years of age and fifty years of ministry and that means it is time for me to hand the pen over to someone younger. It has been rewarding as well as beneficial in keeping my brain working, but it is time to say . . . adieu and God bless! 🇨



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Seasons Greetings

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