

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

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Clarion

453 CAN WE TRUST NON-CHRISTIANS *458* IN MEMORIAM

466 GUIDO COMMENCEMENT 2023

WHAT'S INSIDE

One way or another, things are always changing in church life. Ministers come and ministers go, sometimes permanently as far as this life is concerned. We recently bid a final farewell to Dr. Niek Gootjes, professor emeritus of CRTS, whom the Lord took home following a lengthy period of suffering from Alzheimer's. Dr. Cornelis Van Dam provides us with an *In Memoriam*. Pastor Winston Bosch has moved from Jubilee CanRC in Ottawa to become pastor at Streetlight church in Hamilton, a story found in "Change and Stability." And have you ever heard of a mission field looking for a missionary? You'll find that story inside too.

A while back Wes Bredenhof wrote about dealing with sexual abuse in the church and in *Readers' Forum* you'll find some further discussion on this delicate but necessary-to-address topic. Wes contributes to this issue with both a thoughtful article on guarding against complacency and a book review pertaining to Puritan women. Dr. John Smith also supplies a book review of sorts, but an unusually lengthy one because of the unusually complex and scholarly discussion found in the book. Yet the topic is one all readers of Scripture have come across: what is Genesis 6:1-4 all about? See if the author's answers add up.

Eric Kampen tackles the issue of whether we can trust non-Christians in society and in the editorial Jim Witteveen discusses how much truth and reconciliation are actually going on in the annual Truth and Reconciliation Day here in Canada (Sept 30). In connection with this, Dick Wynia reviews a book that may help round out the picture of what actually transpired at the various Indian residential schools in Canada.

Along with our other regular columns, Guido de Brès High School's recent commencement ceremony is recounted, and we present another new song by Dr. William Helder, a rendition of the great *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6. May your reading be blessed!

Peter Holtvliuwer

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Clarion

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

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

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- L**oving in manner
- A**ttuned to current issues
- R**eadable and Reliable
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TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

September 30, 2023 marks the third National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a day on which the history and impact of Canada's residential school system is commemorated.

"Truth" and "reconciliation" are beautiful words, but what are we as Christians to make of this day, and everything it stands for?

Genuine reconciliation must be firmly rooted in truth, so these words do go well together. We know that through Christ, God has reconciled us to himself. He has given us the ministry of reconciliation, entrusting to us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–19). The Lord Jesus, through whom we have this reconciliation, declared that he is the way and the truth and the life. He told his followers, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32).

TRUTH IS ABSOLUTE

Clearly we should love these words and everything they stand for. Truth, however, is sadly lacking in Canada's Day of Truth and Reconciliation. God's Word tells us that truth is absolute, that there is only one truth, and that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the truth. We know that his word is truth, and that we are called to believe in the truth. Whereas Pontius Pilate could only ask, "What is truth?" (John 18:38), we trust that we can know the truth, walk in the truth, be sanctified in the truth, and be established in the truth.

We know that truth is not relative, but absolute. We may not have a full understanding of the truth. We may interpret evidence in different ways, because of our preconceived ideas or biases. Each one of us has to deal with the negative impact of sin on our understanding of the truth, in every context. But this does not mean that "The Truth" does not exist. There is such a thing as truth, and that truth is unchanging.

However, the "truth" that is proclaimed by those who are behind the Day for Truth and Reconciliation has nothing to do with the absolute truth of the biblically-informed worldview.

TRUTHS, HALF-TRUTHS, AND UNTRUTHS

In the first place, much of the recently emphasized "truth" about Canada's residential school system is, at best, half-truth. Grossly exaggerated statistics about disease, abuse, and deaths at residential schools are regularly cited to support the Truth and Reconciliation agenda. When those statistics are called into


question, or when anecdotal evidence is questioned, even by those who are largely sympathetic to the cause, those who ask these questions are vilified and classified as "deniers." If reconciliation and truth must go hand in hand, what kind of reconciliation is possible when the search for truth is actively discouraged?

Second, the understanding of truth that undergirded the work of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is itself serious flawed. The commission acknowledged that "without truth, justice is not served, healing cannot happen, and there can be no genuine reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada." However, it then went on to cite a Native elder, who asked this question: "When you talk about truth, whose truth are you talking about?" The assumption is that different truths can exist side by side, and that absolute truth is not something that can be sought, let alone found.

WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR RECONCILIATION?

Ultimately, it is Jesus Christ who is necessary for true reconciliation to happen between all men. In Christ we are not only reconciled with God, but we are reconciled with one another, and can experience true, joyful communion with one another. This is genuine, profound reconciliation, and as the church of Christ we have been entrusted with this message. As we consider the Day of Truth and Reconciliation and what it means for us, we should consider how we can be heralds of this beautiful message of reconciliation, proclaiming the gospel message to all nations, in fulfilment of the Great Commission.

All of us, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, are sinners. All of us need reconciliation. Our most desperate need is for God's forgiveness. Having been forgiven, we are also called to forgive. Where there has been wrongdoing, there must be repentance. And where there is repentance, there can be forgiveness.

This is the gospel. This message of truth and reconciliation is not the message being proclaimed by the world on September 30, or on any other day. But we have been given the privilege of proclaiming, and living, this message. May God empower us to proclaim this message boldly, in a world filled with lies and division. 



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¹ Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada." 2015: p. 12.

TRUSTING IN GOD WITHOUT NERVOUSNESS

“Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind.”

(PSALM 26:1-2)

Our greatest reason for thankfulness is our salvation in Christ. But have we truly grasped how complete our salvation is? Are we thankful enough? How does it make you feel to ask God to examine you all the way through? Nervous? Perhaps you have sung these words in church. Can you do so without cringing? Do they make you feel hypocritical?

Now, if you are nervous because of unconfessed or secret sins, good! That nervousness is guilt. The Holy Spirit is bringing sin to your mind calling you to humble repentance. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 33 is an excellent scriptural summary of what godly repentance looks like.

But what about if you examine yourself? And sure, you find everyday sins, but daily you ask God to forgive you. You have character flaws and weaknesses. But again, daily you fight against them and pray for God to remove them. They “remain in you against your will” (Lord’s Supper Form). Then, should you feel hypocritical? Nervous to ask God to prove and test you? The answer is no.

In the first place Psalm 26 describes our Lord Jesus Christ. For him, these verses are literally, perfectly true. He did no wrong his whole life. He always trusted in the Lord without wavering. The psalm often hints about Christ. “I do not sit with men of falsehood . . . I will not sit with the wicked” (v. 4). Jesus is in fact accused of breaking this psalm during his ministry, for he “ate with tax collectors and sinners.” But Jesus’s reply was that rather than joining them in sin, he was calling them to repentance.

Verse 6 reads “I wash my hands in innocence.” This of course reminds us of Pilate, washing his hands to make himself innocent of Jesus’s death. In truth, Jesus alone could wash his hands in innocence, and Pilate had wickedly condemned an innocent man.

Yet Jesus went to his crucifixion without complaint in order to “redeem us, and be gracious to us” (v. 11). Since he obeyed God perfectly in our place, and kept himself clean of all sin, he is able to suffer as our sacrificial lamb without blemish or spot. His blood, more precious than silver or gold, washes us completely clean from all our sins.

And so, in Christ, this psalm also becomes true of us! God sees us as those who walk in our integrity and trust the Lord without

wavering. That’s because Christ has done this, and his perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness are fully given to us as our own.

At times as Christians we feel a little bit like a graffiti-laden wall that has simply been painted over. We do our best to act Christian and maybe we can fool other people. But we are thinking: if only you knew me well enough and could look below the surface. A different picture! So many sins! We feel like hypocrites. Especially when singing Psalm 26.

But Psalm 26 is in the Bible to teach us what we are in Christ. We’re *not* white-washed walls. We’re saints who have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Christ once and for all washes our sins completely away.

In Christ we can call on God to “prove us and test our heart and mind” without nervousness and fear. Our heart *is* pure and our mind *is* free of guilt. That’s because Christ has cleansed them completely. And that is the greatest reason for thanksgiving we could have! **C**

FOR FURTHER READING:

Isaiah 53

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Does singing Psalm 26 make you nervous? Is it because you have unconfessed sins? If so, be reconciled to God. Repent!
2. Or does Psalm 26 make you nervous because you need to more fully grasp the riches of God’s redemption and grace in Christ? If so, make this a regular part of your prayers.
3. Do you thank God enough for Christ’s redemption and righteousness given to you?



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Can We Trust *Non-Christians?*

ERIC KAMPEN

Can we trust our non-Christians neighbours, the businesses we deal with on a regular basis, our civil leaders? In the last few years, suspicion, especially of the trustworthiness of our civil leaders, has become very evident. Judging by posts on Facebook, the suspicion of civil leaders has not abated but is intensifying as the actions of our government are at times compared to the actions of the Nazis in pre-war Germany. The question of trustworthiness, though, is not to be limited to our civil leaders, but to all non-Christians.

Thankfully, we can answer in the positive. To be sure, it must be a nuanced positive. This should not surprise us as, even among fellow Christians, trust can be an issue. Nevertheless, there can be a high level of trust for a number of reasons.

THE LIGHT OF NATURE

First, there is what the Canons of Dort refer to as “The Light of Nature” (III/IV 4). After some articles about the fall into sin and its effect, it states, “To be sure, there is left in man after the fall,

The fall into sin affected every aspect of man's nature, giving reason to speak of total depravity, but God prevented a descent into absolute depravity, where every human being acted in the worst possible way.

some light of nature, whereby he retains some notions about God, about natural things, and about the difference between what is honourable and shameful, and shows some regard for virtue and outward order.”

This is immediately nuanced when it is added,

But so far is he from arriving at the saving knowledge of God and true conversion through this light of nature that he does not even use it properly in natural and civil matters. Rather, whatever this light may be, man wholly pollutes it in various ways and suppresses it by his wickedness. In doing so, he renders himself without excuse before God.

So, while the article recognizes the light of nature is not sufficient for salvation, it acknowledges that it is sufficient for knowing what is honourable and shameful and regard for virtue and outward order.

If one studies the history of Reformed theology, one will see how these truths were expanded on in what was called the doctrine of common grace. In the introduction to the translation of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, it states that:

The doctrine of common grace is based on the conviction that prior to, and in a certain extent independent of, the particular sovereignty of divine grace in redemption, there is a universal divine sovereignty in creation and providence, restraining the effects of sin and bestowing general gifts on all people, thus making human society and culture possible even among the unredeemed. Cultural life is rooted in creation and common grace and thus has a life of its own apart from the church (Vol. 2, pp. 16–17).

Bavinck himself writes, contrasting the good works done by believers to the virtues of the pagans,

The Reformed have always fully acknowledged the existence and moral value of such virtues. Since after the fall people have remained human and continue to share in the blessings of God's common grace, they can inwardly possess many virtues and outwardly do many good deeds that, viewed through human eyes and measured by human standards, are greatly to be appreciated and of great value for human life (Vol. 4, pp. 256–257).

There has been much discussion in the past over the use of the term “common grace.”

The main concern was the use of the word “grace” with respect to God's interaction with the unregenerate world. While one may discuss the use of the word “grace,” one cannot deny God's ongoing goodness to all of humanity after the fall (cf. Psalm 145:9).

GOD'S RESTRAINING INFLUENCE

The fall into sin affected every aspect of man's nature, giving reason to speak of *total* depravity, but God prevented a descent into *absolute* depravity, where every human being acted in the worst possible way. If God had not put restraints on man, human life on earth would soon have ended by humanity destroying itself. Whenever evil increased, God put on the brakes. We see that in the flood in the days of Noah. We see it in the confusion of languages and the dispersion of mankind at Babel. We see it in the way the LORD has used one nation to destroy other nations that became too big for their own good.

Furthermore, God did not allow all memory of him to be lost. Paul and Barnabas told the people at Lystra that God “did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:7). In his letter to the Romans, he mentioned that the “Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness . . .” (2:14–16).

We can also think of Paul writing in Romans 13:1–7 that the governing authorities have been instituted by God to be a terror to bad conduct. He said this about governing authorities who did not believe in God. As we confess in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession,

We believe that, because of the depravity of mankind, our gracious God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers. He wants the world to be governed by laws and statutes, in order that the lawlessness of men be restrained and that everything be conducted among them in good order.

While we may be grieved by the way the governing authorities do not stand up for the rights of the unborn or sexual morality, we can appreciate the numerous laws and regulations to ensure peace and stability, fairness in the workplace and marketplace, as well as protection of the environment. Many laws restrain man from

taking advantage of others and abusing the earth's resources in a selfish, careless way.

While it is true that the history of man is filled with murder and mayhem and there have been times where it seems that the total depravity of man's nature was manifest in absolutely depraved conduct and in reigns of terror, in time some stability was restored for life to be reestablished and flourish. Even the pagans were able to achieve remarkable things in terms of culture and a sense of justice and fairness. As Bavinck wrote, "they can inwardly possess many virtues and outwardly do many good deeds that, viewed through human eyes and measured by human standards, are greatly to be appreciated and are of great value for human life."

As we reflect on this, we will have to agree that we know many people who may not confess Christ, but they are good, decent, trustworthy people. We see this in our neighbours, our fellow workers, businesses we patronize, the many people who are involved in activities in our community, and yes, also our civil leaders working hard for the good of the community. On a human level, we must admit they are good, nice, helpful people, and we can be thankful for that.

We can see then that the light of nature, or, if you wish, the "common grace" of God, the law written in the hearts of unbelievers, his restraining of evil, indicates why there can be a level of trust. It will not be blind trust, a gullible trust, but God has made it possible even for fallen man to coexist and for life to develop and flourish.

There is more. There is also the matter of motivation.

SELF-SERVING MOTIVATION

When it comes to motivation, helpful are the words of Article 24 of the Belgic Confession, which explains our sanctification and good works. It defends the teaching of justification by faith by interacting with the accusation that "justifying faith makes man indifferent to living a good and holy life" by saying that without such faith "no one would ever do anything out of love for God, but only out self-love or fear of being condemned." What it comes down to is that people do good because it benefits them. It is a case of doing good unto others as the best way to get them to do good to you. This also applies to fear of being condemned. People keep laws and adhere to social conventions to avoid getting into trouble with the authorities or being a social outcast. The threat of jail or a fine is a subtle incentive to comply. You find acceptance by adhering to the standards and expectations of your community. If you act oddly you will be the odd man out.


While these motivators may not be recognized or acknowledged, they work in the background. If you want to be treated nicely by

your spouse, treat him/her nicely. If you want your business to flourish, produce a good product, have good customer service, and set a good price. When we think of the frequent customer satisfaction surveys, it may seem like a company is concerned about your best interest, but it is really their own interest. Poor ratings can lead to lost business. People vote for those who offer things that serve their own wellbeing. Those elected to office may be keen to serve, but they are also keen to maintain high approval ratings from their constituents in the hope of re-election, so that their desire to serve easily turns into self-service.

Even as believers, we may have to admit that at times we do things out of self-love and fear of being condemned. Sanctification involves growing in obedience, not because we must but because we want to; that is, we obey simply out of love. Out of love for God and our neighbour, we will do what is right even if there is no personal gain. We do it even if it will lead to being hurt.

We are, however, looking at the perspective of unbelievers. Even if they do not have the ultimate motivation of faith, they will be motivated to do much good. Their motivation, however, makes them vulnerable. When there is no personal benefit anymore, they can easily change. As a result, marriages break up, political parties are voted out of office, allegiance to sports teams that don't deliver happiness changes. In times of war, people can turn on their neighbours to preserve their own lives.

CONCLUSION

We started with the question as to whether we can trust non-Christians. Considering the light of nature, as well as the motivation of self-love or fear of being condemned, we can conclude that we can. God has made it possible for life to continue. The total depravity of our nature does not mean absolute depravity in all conduct at all times. To give one more quote from Bavinck, "God providentially permits the word to continue because of his higher purpose for his elect" (Vol. 3, p. 420). So, while we should not be naïve to the spiritual dangers we face, as well as to times of great upheaval and threat, thankfully we can live with a degree of confidence as God's children in this world that we can trust others. 



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Complacency Can Kill

Tasmania's North Esk River is hit and miss for trout. Below the agriculture, it's almost always a miss, at least for me. But once you get into the headwaters, above the farms and into the forest amidst the mountains, it's magic. When a friend told me about a stretch of the headwaters I hadn't tried yet, I decided it was definitely worth an afternoon with the fly rod.

I thought I had a reasonably good grasp on the lay of the land. There was a road running parallel to the river for a few kilometres. I found the spot where I thought my friend had gone in. My thinking was that it wouldn't be far to fish up to a bridge where I could easily pop out and then walk back to my vehicle.

It took about twenty minutes for me to get from the road down to the river—much more than I expected. But once I got down there, I was enchanted. I found the most stunning stretch of river. It was all shallow enough to wade, with plenty of riffles and glades. There were beautiful banks under which trout could shelter. Where there were small rocky or sandy shores, I saw no evidence of any other recent fishermen. It was pristine, like I was the first person ever to fish these waters.

Now, as the saying goes, there's a difference between fishing and catching. But on this sunny afternoon they converged. I started off with a scruffy old Royal Wulff fly and, after three misses, I finally got on the board with a small brown. I soon switched to a Hi-vis Klinkquill Para and then the action *really* heated up.

My largest conquest was caught behind a fallen log running across the river. I often tell people that I catch fish despite myself. Though I'm trying, I'm still very much an amateur. When I waded through the river, I do so with all the grace and stealth of an elephant. But on this occasion, that fallen log over which the water was running masked my approach. It also gave me a lower profile as I came up to the pool where this bigger brown was hiding. I made a little overhead cast along the side where I thought a fish might be. Within a second, it was game on. He put up a good fight, trying to run for cover, as browns are wont to do. But in the end, he wound up in my net.

If he'd been towards the end of the day, he might have ended up in the frying pan at home. But it was still early, so I spent a moment with him, took a picture, and then released him to fight another

day. You might be tempted to think that complacency almost killed this fish. But this is a *trout*. They don't think like you and I do. They're strictly operating on instinct—they just want to survive. So, when a fly lands above them and it looks something like food, and there are no danger signs around, the survival instinct demands they go for it. If the trout doesn't spot me, that's not because he's complacent, but because I'm either providentially blessed (some might say "lucky," but I don't buy that) or exceptionally stealthy. In this case, I'd say it was the former.

Through the course of the afternoon, six more small browns came to hand. As I worked my way upstream, the whole scene just became ethereal. The late afternoon sun turned everything golden. My mind got lost in the beauty.

A SPOT OF TROUBLE

Around 4:00, I started to notice the sun was declining to a point where I'd have to be getting out soon. It was autumn in Tasmania and the days were getting shorter. I thought I'd only have another bit to go before I got to the spot where I was planning to exit the river. Another bit turned into another bit and on it went. I stopped fishing and started wading through the river with more determination and speed.


At 5:00 I started thinking I might be in a spot of trouble. What if I didn't get to the bridge before dark? Should I set out through the thick bush towards the road? What if I get turned around in the bush and end up lost? If I'm honest, I'd been complacent about the risk factors in that afternoon's adventure. I hadn't told my wife where I was going. I didn't have a full survival kit with me. I didn't have a map, compass, or GPS—and I hadn't consulted the map before leaving home either. I didn't have any food. There was no mobile service out there. On the other hand, I had plenty of water—in the headwaters you can safely just drink straight out of the river. It wasn't that cold and, in my chest waders, I wasn't wet. I had a fire-starter, a knife, and plenty of fly line with which I could have built a shelter if I had to. I had survival training. I told myself not to panic—if I had to, I could likely survive a night in the bush with what I had and then carry on in the morning. I decided I would keep walking in the river until 5:15 and then reassess if I hadn't reached the bridge yet.

The time came and I had to make a call: keep going in the river or start bush-bashing in an effort to get to the road. The river was

meandering quite a bit at this point, so I thought I'd just be better off by trying my best to head for the road. I could hear vehicles, so I knew it wasn't too far away. I disassembled my fly rod, drank some extra water from the river, and then set off into the ferns and trees. Well, about 100 meters up from the river I came to a cutline. As I looked up, I saw a powerline and I knew immediately where I was because I'd been in this cutline before looking for access to the river. With a prayer of thanks, I headed up the cutline to the road and within forty-five minutes I was back at my vehicle. It was a lot longer walk than I thought it would be.

That could have turned out quite differently. My complacency may not have killed me, but what about my dear wife at home? If it was 9 or 10 o'clock and I still wasn't home, she wouldn't have been in a good place. I've resolved that next time I'm going to be much more careful and much more prepared. The wilderness is beautiful, but it can also be unforgiving.

SPIRITUAL COMPLACENCY

Complacency can endanger your earthly life when fly fishing, but spiritual complacency is even more threatening to your eternal welfare. Unlike the trout, we can't operate on instinct. We have to be intentional; we have to plan and prepare when it comes to the health of our souls. Become complacent about church attendance, Bible reading, prayer, and you may soon find yourself in grave spiritual danger and not even know it. The Puritan Thomas Watson wrote, "Satan loves to fish in the troubled waters of a discontented heart." It's equally true that he loves to fish in the calm waters of a complacent heart. It's why Paul tells Timothy to keep a close watch on himself (1 Tim 4:16). It's why Christ tells his disciples to "watch and pray" that they may not enter into temptation (Matt 26:41). It's why the Holy Spirit says in Proverbs 1:32 that "the complacency of fools destroys them." Spiritual complacency can truly be deadly. Dear reader, pray that God would help you to be conscientious and attentive in your spiritual walk. 



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IN MEMORIAM: DR. NICOLAAS HENDRIK GOOTJES

(July 16, 1948–August 20, 2023)

Early in the morning on the Lord's Day, August 20, the Lord called home to himself Dr. Nicolaas (Niek) Gootjes at the age of 75. After a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease, the Lord relieved his servant from his earthly struggles in a fallen creation to take him to his heavenly and glorious dwelling place. The message of the memorial service on August 25 was based on the comforting words of our Saviour: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25–26). The focus was on Christ and the glad tidings of life in Christ, as our colleague would have wanted. After the service, his body was sown for the day of the resurrection.

The departure of our dear colleague from this life is a pivotal moment for his wife, Dinie, and the children. After years of sorrow and trial with Alzheimer's of which more than a decade was in institutional care, he is no more with them and now the family truly has no more father on this earth. It is a time of reflection and sorrow because of the power of sin and the brokenness of the present life, but it is also a time of relief and gratitude that he is now home, safe in the presence of the One he loved and served to the utmost of his considerable abilities.

This is therefore also a good time for the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) and the churches that support it to pause and to thank the Lord for the many blessings that we and many others have received through his work.

BEGINNINGS IN LEIDEN AND PUSAN

Dr. Gootjes was born in Leeuwarden, Friesland. Already at an early age he wanted to be a minister of the gospel. He studied theology in Kampen and in 1974 graduated from the Theological University of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in that city. He then commenced with his doctoral studies in dogmatics, receiving the doctorandus degree in 1976. In that same year he accepted a



call to be the minister of the congregation of the Reformed Church (Liberated) in Leiden. He was ordained on September 26, 1976.

As a pastor he continued his studies part-time, making use of the many academic resources in the university city where he now lived. In God's providence, his pastoral ministry in Leiden was to be his first and last. And it was to be rather short.

After only three years, he received a call to teach as a professor of dogmatics on behalf of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) at the Korea Theological Seminary in Pusan, the official seminary of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Koshin). (This seminary is now located in Cheonan.) He accepted this challenge and was ordained for this task in 1980. And a challenge this task was for a westerner, especially to master the Korean language! Dr. Gootjes was given the ability to do this, and so he eventually taught in that language. Besides teaching dogmatics, he also gave instruction in New Testament Greek.

In 1985, while in Korea, he received his doctorate in theology from his alma mater in Kampen on a dissertation entitled *De geestelijkheid van God (The Spirituality of God)*. Not one to waste any time, Dr. Gootjes researched, taught, and wrote books in Korean as well as in Dutch, and later in English. His most important publications in these different languages are listed in the bibliography at the end of his book, *Teaching and Preaching the Word* (2010).

While in the Far East, the Gootjes family enjoyed fellowship with Rev. Kim Batteau and his family. Rev. Batteau was also teaching in Pusan on behalf of the Dutch churches and the two families

formed a lifelong friendship. Dr. Gootjes's service in Korea ended as planned in 1989.

HIS SERVICE IN HAMILTON

The end of Dr. Gootjes's term in Korea providentially coincided approximately with the retirement of Dr. J. Faber as Professor of Dogmatology at CRTS. Synod Winnipeg of the Canadian Reformed Churches (1989) directed the Board of Governors of the Theological College to appoint Dr. Gootjes as Professor of Dogmatology. He gladdened the churches by accepting this appointment.

To be a professor at CRTS one had to be ordained into the ministry in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Dr. Gootjes's ordination took place on October 1, 1989. Appropriately, his inaugural sermon was on Matthew 9:36–38. "When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Students are academically trained with the goal of becoming caring shepherds who have compassion on the sheep entrusted to them. The human shepherds pass on the Word of the Good Shepherd so that the sheep hear his voice.

Dr. Gootjes officially began his teaching work in Hamilton in January 1990. He laboured with great devotion. On more than one occasion, he would say: if we do nothing but faithfully pass on the treasures of Scripture for the next generation of ministers to preach, we have done our task. The core responsibility of professors is to train faithful preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Tim 2:1–2). We praise the Lord for the faithfulness with which Dr. Gootjes could do this work. He knew himself a steward of the riches of the gospel. As such he heeded the apostolic instruction: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet 4:10).

His love for the Reformed confessions was obvious both within and outside the classroom. He taught with studious care and academic precision. He also treasured and collected antiquarian copies of important sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theological works, of which he owned not a few. An important product of his interests and gifts was the publication in 2007 of his meticulous and well-researched study, *The Belgian Confession: Its History and Sources* (2007).

Our dear colleague was not an ivory tower scholar. The well-being of the church was a constant preoccupation. When called upon to help the federation of the Canadian Reformed Churches by participating in synodically-appointed committees, he did so with diligence, dedication, and great pleasure. It was very difficult for

him when it was realized that his health was declining so that he was no longer able to continue his many tasks, chief of which was teaching. According to human reckoning, this milestone came far too soon. The need to step aside from the work he loved was very hard on our brother. His work was his passion for he was very conscious of the fact that he was doing it for the Lord and his church. He was also fully cognizant that he could only do it in the strength of the Lord.


Since 2008, temporary lecturers took over his teaching responsibilities and eventually Dr. Jason Van Vliet was appointed as Professor of Dogmatology in 2010.

RETROSPECT & PROSPECT

Dr. Gootjes is no more with us. We are comforted with the knowledge that "blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them'" (Rev 14:13).

As churches we praise the Lord for the many blessings we have received through the labours of Dr. Gootjes. He did his professorial task quietly and in all humility. He saw himself as a servant, a mere steward of a priceless treasure entrusted to him by his Sender, the Lord Jesus Christ. As can be expected from a good steward, he guarded the treasures committed to him meticulously. As a teacher of the doctrine of Scripture he also sought to pass on the riches and fullness of the gospel to his students with painstaking accuracy and care. He felt the burden of being a trustworthy steward (cf. 1 Cor 4:1). His example is a lasting inspiration for all of Christ's servants and indeed for all children of God as they seek to be faithful stewards of what has been entrusted to them.

As churches we can also be thankful for the tremendous support that his faithful wife, Dinie, gave him through all his years of service and the enormous love and care she displayed during that long journey through an Alzheimer's valley of tears and sorrow as she and her husband struggled on their earthly pilgrimage. May the comfort of knowing that he is safe with his Redeemer be a source of lasting solace and give "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding" (Phil 4:7).

May the Lord continue to surround Dinie and her children and grandchildren with his grace and may the gospel of the resurrected Christ continue to uphold and comfort them. He promised: "Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." The prospect of faith is glorious, and the best is yet to come! 



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Mission Field *Seeks Sending Church*

Did the title of this article strike you as odd? From what we know about missionary activities, it's usually the other way round, isn't it?

There is a church that feels called to be more actively involved in mission. Jesus's words in Matthew 28:18–20 really speak to them, they have prayed about it, discussed it, and are eager to move forward with it. They also have the funds available, and perhaps even a man who has the desire to take up a missionary task somewhere.

The next question is then: where do we go? The world is a big place with many people who need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ, the message of salvation by grace. They may live in places and countries that have never been reached by the gospel.¹ But with the migration patterns in our days they may also live close by, or in other modern western countries.

The point is, this potential sending church must find a location for their mission work, and—despite the many needs out there—that’s not always so easy and takes time.

Is this not how you would expect the process to develop? “Church seeks Mission Field.”

A MISSION FIELD’S SEARCH

However—the title is correct. This is exactly what we want to bring to the attention of our readers (and churches): There is a place with a “fledgling church,” a community of believers, but so far without elders and deacons, and without the oversight of an established church. And they are looking forward to meeting a man, committed to the Reformed confessions, to disciple them, and help them grow and mature in their faith. And all of that under the supervision and with the encouragement of a Reformed church. Indeed: mission field seeks sending church.

Let us explain. Many of you might be familiar with the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF). MERF’s newsletters appear regularly in *Clarion* to keep you informed about its various ministries in the Arabic world and other Muslim lands. The head office of MERF is the John Calvin Centre (JCC) in Larnaca, on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus. Larnaca is also the residence of MERF’s general director, Pastor Victor Atallah and his wife Lisa.

What most of you may not be familiar with is the fact that, as the result of MERF’s presence in Larnaca, a group of believers meets every Sunday for worship in the chapel of the JCC, under the name “International Evangelical Church.”

Over the years this group was led by Rev. Victor Atallah as pastor and preacher, although for him it was a job “on-the-side,” so to speak, since his main responsibility was his role as general director of MERF. For many years the care for this group was


therefore basically a “one-man effort,” with the help of others once in a while who came and went, especially when pastor Atallah was travelling for MERF.

At this point in time this community of believers is at a crossroads. Pastor Atallah and Lisa are getting older, and as an ordained minister in Rehoboth CanRC, he is primarily looking to the Canadian Reformed Churches for a younger man/couple to take on the responsibility for this work in Larnaca. We are convinced that this is also the crucial moment to eliminate the lack of ecclesiastical oversight. What is needed in Larnaca is a missionary couple that is willing:

- (a) to work with what is available and with practices that have developed over many years,
- (b) to strengthen the fellowship and spiritual growth of the current believers, and
- (c) to focus on developing qualified local leadership.

To be sure, all of the above is to be set within the framework of preaching, teaching, and reaching out with the gospel of salvation for lost sinners in Jesus Christ, under the spiritual supervision and with the guidance and encouragement of the consistory of a Reformed church in Canada.

A CALLING FOR YOU?

We have been in Larnaca many times. We believe that the Lord gives good potential with a good place to start. We would love to see God’s people there mature in faith and his church flourish. Indeed: here is a mission field searching for a Reformed church willing to take it under its wings. Could this be your congregation? For more information or to ask questions, please reach out to either of the undersigned. 

Rev. Jan DeGelder jdegelder@cogeco.ca
Lammert Jagt lammertjagt8@gmail.com
Directors on the Board of MERF Canada

¹ It’s hard to believe, but after 2000 years, this is still true for about 40% of the world population.

Change *and Stability*

RICK LUDWIG

Bright and early on Sunday morning, July 16, 2023, the Streetlight congregation welcomed Rev. Winston Bosch to their pulpit to greet him for the first time as their minister and to hear him preach his inaugural sermon. Having arrived a few weeks earlier following a number of months of anticipation, Winston and his wife Berber along with their son Justus moved into their new home in downtown Hamilton, blocks away from the newly built Streetlight Church Ministry Centre. Their two other children, Isaac and Myka, remained with their former congregation in Ottawa for the time being to complete their studies. While the hope was that the arrival of a new pastor would be coupled with the opening of the new building, construction delays made that impossible.

CHANGING TIMES

The worship service was held in the intimate confines of St. Peter by the Park church building, which has served more than adequately as the temporary home for Streetlight for over a year. The worship auditorium was chock-full with regulars and some guests, all eager to welcome the Bosches. Pastor Winston did not waste any time in breaking out in one of his fabled musical flourishes as he crooned the words to Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A-Changin'." He then tabulated some of the changes that could be experienced by him and his family over the next months, as well as the changes for the congregation. These include new voices at the table, a new preacher, the coming retirement of our beloved







Pastor Paul, and a new building with many possibilities, including plenty of room for others to join the growing congregation. He noted that change can bring both excitement as well as anxiety, hope as well as fear, enthusiasm as well as resistance, optimism as well as cynicism. The challenge for the Streetlight congregation along with their new pastor would be to navigate the change well. To foster unity even in the midst of change. It was clear we would need help to do this.

STEADY FOOTING

Resting on Hebrews 13:8 as his foundation, Pastor Winston explained that during changing times (one more round of Bob Dylan!) having stable footing and something immovable to hang onto would be important. That bedrock is Jesus Christ. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” He explained that although Jesus changed in his humanity (his incarnation, resurrection, and ascension) he has never changed in his divine character. He is immutable. That means he is consistent in who he is, in his purpose, and in his promises. He always loves his Father, and he forever loves his Father’s children, his brothers and sisters. He is fully dependable. Unwavering. Unstoppable. He will finish what he has started. This revelation of Jesus Christ gives great hope for the church that is always facing changing times in the world. We are not standing on shifting sands but on the Rock! As we link arms as

a congregation, even in our diversity, our strength and stability will be in sharing our faith in Jesus Christ and holding on to it together.

The preaching was bookended with a lively singing of “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” and the age-old doxology “Glory be to the Father.” On behalf of the congregation, Pastor Paul presented a “prayer calendar” to Pastor Winston in the form of a framed map of the Beasley neighbourhood and also one of the adjoining neighbourhood where they purchased their home. We are delighted that the Bosch family will add their prayers for these neighbours to ours before the throne of God. Following the service everyone was welcomed to Gage Park, a beautiful green space in the eastern core, where a lunch was shared, along with some time to get to know each other better, pass the babies around, and let the younger ones run around and play some games. It felt like some things were changing and some things were remaining the same. And we were thankful to God for both. **C**



Rick Ludwig
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Guido de Brès Christian High School

Commencement 2023

MATT VANAMERONGEN



With the return of warm weather and sunny skies, another class has finished their four years of study at Guido and were able to celebrate their graduation on June 27. Family and friends of the graduates, along with teachers, board members, and other well-wishers, gathered at Redeemer University to congratulate the outgoing class and share in their celebration. Like other graduating classes in recent years, the class of 2023 has had their high school experience affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, so it was with great thankfulness that such a large group of people could come together to celebrate, to sing God's praise, and to reflect on the blessings that he continues to provide in our community.

In his welcome address, board chairman Bert Knol read from Ephesians 1, reflecting on the blessings that we have in our Saviour, and pointing to Christ as the source of our spiritual growth. Principal Jason Heemskerk built on this theme in his welcoming remarks, taking the opportunity to reflect on the interesting way in which students have a natural impulse to "pose" or act a certain way, especially when online. Principal Heemskerk called on attendees of the graduation to instead "be real" before God regardless of their individual circumstances.

The main address to the graduating class was given by Mr. Mark Wanders. In his remarks, Mark focused on Philippians 1:27, highlighting the need and the opportunity that students have to position themselves and conduct themselves in a worthy way as they leave Guido's halls and go out into the world. Students were

reminded that they, as children of God, have an incredible opportunity to find their identity in Christ, and to represent the gospel in everything that they do and everywhere that they go. We recognize of course that the spiritual training and preparation that took place for these graduating students over their time in Guido does not end when they graduate, but rather that this important work continues for a lifetime. As they go into the world, graduating students will need to continue to stand faithfully for Christ against the antipathy of the world, setting their minds on things above. Mr. Wanders concluded his remarks by offering his hope that the good work started by the Spirit in these students would come to completion, and that in their whole lives these students would remain faithful to Christ.

The evening concluded with various awards being given to some of the exceptional students in the graduating class, and with a humorous and thoughtful valedictory address by Timothy Beijes. Throughout the evening, the messages presented by the various speakers were reinforced by the singing of praise to God, both by the audience and by some talented student performers. Many of the speakers and attendees took the opportunity to congratulate and thank Ronn Van Aniel for his contributions to the Guido community over the last four decades, as he has decided to retire from teaching.

Congratulations to the class of 2023, and may God continue to bless you and walk with you in the years ahead! 🎓





Hear, Israel! The LORD Is One

Geneva, 1551



1. Hear, Is - ra - el! The LORD is one.



He is our God, and he a - lone.



Love him with all your heart and mind;



this is the first and great com - mand.



Serve him with all your strength and might,



with all your be - ing, day and night.

2. Commit these words to memory.

Let them your guide and compass be
in all you say, in all you do.
Impress them on your children too.
Indoors and out of doors teach them
to love the LORD and honour him.

3. Bind to your forehead and your hand

the holy words of God's command.
On all your doorposts write them down,
and on the gates of all your towns.
Do not forget! The LORD is one.
He is our God, and he alone.

Text: William Helder, 2023

Tune: Genevan 117 / 127

Based on the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-9



RAY OF SUNSHINE

Rachel Vis

OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

Happy Birthday to the many of you celebrating a birthday in October!
We wish you all the Lord's blessing in the year to come.

- 3** Janell DeBoer will be 33
6311 Silver Street RR #2
St. Ann's, ON
LOR 1Y0
Email: janell.db90@gmail.com
- 3** Jeanette Wieringa will be 29
6674 Wellington Rd 7
Elora, ON
NOB 1S0t
- 6** Henry Vander Vliet will be 56
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road RR 2
Beamsville, ON
LOR 1B2
- 8** Lindsay Kottelenberg will be 33
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line RR 3
Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4
- 13** Nancy Schipper will be 67
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8
- 17** Alan Breukelman will be 57
2225 19th Street
Coaldale, AB
T1M 1G4
- 21** Cameron Dantuma will be 31
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line RR 3
Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4
- 22** Nelena Hofsink will be 63
Bethesda Clearbrook Home
32553 Willingdon Cr.
Clearbrook, BC
V2T 1S2
- 28** Mary Ann De Wit will be 67
#4 6560 Vedder Road
Chilliwack, BC
V2T 5K4

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
(1 Thess 5:16-18)

THANKSGIVING

I'm thankful to God
because he died for me!
Now he lives again,
never more to die;
he is my Saviour on high!

I'm thankful that God
is there when I fall.
Through grace alone,
because of his love,
he is there when I call!

I'm thankful to God
for all of his gifts to me!
He knows my daily needs;
freely he will give!
Friends and family very dear;
capable hands he sends for my care.

I'm thankful to God
for the promises he gives!
Though undeserving;
if I obey him,
if I seek to do his will;
forever with my Saviour I'll live!

Poem by Connie Vanamerongen

CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 35

Lord's Day 35 The Second Commandment

God takes it very seriously if we do not obey him when we worship. God taught us that using King Saul. One day God told him to fight against the Amalekites. Saul had to kill all the people and animals. Saul fought the Amalekites, but he did not listen to God all the way. The king of the Amalekites was not killed. Neither were the healthiest animals. The next day Saul told Samuel, "We are going to use those animals to sacrifice to God!" In other words, Saul wanted to use those animals to worship God. That sounds like a good thing to do, right? Well, it wasn't. God did not want Saul to keep those animals alive in the first place! So, God did not want Saul to worship him with those animals! And Saul's punishment was that his son would not be king after him. God is holy. We must worship him the way he tells us to.

The Second Commandment also talks about making an image of God. Decode the words to learn more about this.

God _____ and _____ be visibly portrayed in any way.
 3 1 14 14 15 20 13 1 25 14 15 20

Creatures may be portrayed but God _____
 us to make or have any images of 6 15 18 2 9 4 19 them in order to
 _____ them or to serve God through them.
 23 15 18 19 8 9 16

1=A 2=B 3=C 4=D 5=E 6=F 7=G 8=H 9=I 10=J 11=K 12=L 13=M
 14=N 15=O 16=P 17=Q 18=R 19=S 20=T 21=U 22=V 23=W 24=X 25=Y 26=Z

Fill in the following words on the correct blanks below to complete the Bible text. This text reminds us how to listen to the Lord: add, careful, take Deuteronomy 12:32 "Everything that I command you, you shall be _____ to do. You shall not _____ to it or _____ from it."



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!

AMANDA DEBOER

A RESPONSE TO “TEN BEST PRACTICES FOR HOW CHURCHES SHOULD RESPOND TO SEXUAL ABUSE”

Dear Editor,

I would like to respond to the article by Rev. Wes Bredenhof about how churches should respond to sexual abuse. I appreciate him raising the topic and summarizing what he has learned from his experience as a pastor and the literature, as the church still has to learn and improve. As he states himself, this list does not cover every situation. The *Clarion* article gives some good pointers; consistories would do well to work with professionals to assess each case and their involvement. But mostly, consistories should portray Christ to both those who experience sexual abuse and those who offend.

A situation not covered in this article is sexual abuse by minors (age 12–17). Unfortunately, many people don't understand the differences between young offenders and adults; juvenile sexualized behaviour is in most cases caused by a lack of social development. Traditionally, these young people were treated the same way as

adult sexual offenders, but this has changed, and the church needs to respond likewise. “Adult driven” approaches may not be the most appropriate as they may ignore significant differences between adult and juvenile sexual offenders. Treatment and supervision practices of juvenile sexual offenders need to be attentive to the developmental changes occurring during adolescence, including, but not limited to, sexual and social maturation. Sexually abusive juveniles are different from their adult counterparts in that deviant sexual interests in youth are relatively infrequent.¹

Young offenders rarely continue to re-offend when they mature and receive appropriate counselling and help. Therefore, it is important to follow the privacy protection that these young people receive under the law and allow them to make changes without their reputations in tatters. None of that was known to us until one of our children displayed sexualized behaviour towards

¹ <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsracs/pblctns/sxlbsv-jvnls/index-en.aspx>


other children and deeply hurt and damaged others. Nothing can describe our deep shock of being confronted with these events, the horror of realizing that other children have not been safe in our home despite our vigilance, and the deep pain that our child fell into these sins despite open conversations about sexuality and rules for the use of the internet.

As parents, we did not have the “luxury” of distancing ourselves from our child; we needed to love and support him. We could not point fingers but had to point him to Christ. We informed authorities, walked through the mandatory counselling sessions, and implemented mandatory boundaries to allow victims space to heal. It taught us that as a faith community, we need to be aware that our young people, especially those struggling socially, are prone to sin sexually and need our love and compassion, not our judgment and gossip.

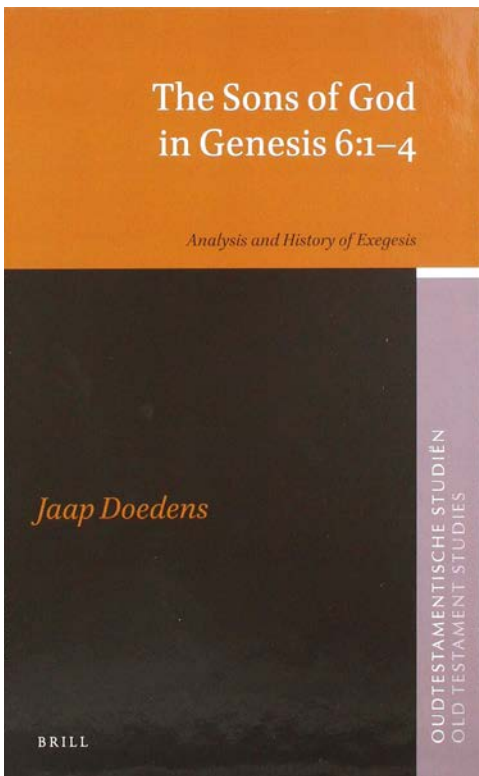
I found the tone of the article quite harsh towards brothers and sisters who deal with this sin in their lives. Matthew 18 might not apply in the sense that a victim does not have to confront the offender in person, but we still need to work towards healing and restoration (and “gain our brother,” v. 15), even if this takes a long time. The apostle Peter encourages the church in the end times to “love each other deeply because love covers a multitude of sin” (1 Pet 4: 8) That is not “soft-pedaling matters,” but our only hope for both for victim and offender, juvenile or mature.

It’s unfortunate that Rev. Bredenhof uses language like “predators;” not everyone who falls into the sin of sexual abuse is one. And consistories need to be careful with sharing information, amongst themselves and with the congregation. We need to support not only those who have experienced abuse, but also those who offend and their families long term (unfortunately a paragraph on this is missing in the article). Accused offenders too often leave the church for a lack of love and care shown to them.

As the church, we should portray Christ to one another with justice and mercy. Not follow the #metoo movement and the cancel culture of our time and elevate one sin over another. The #church-too movement should do better. *Both* victims and offenders are not identified by what happened but by their identity in Christ and may expect his healing and restoration if they truly desire it. Joni Eareckson Tada, who has many reasons to feel a victim as a quadriplegic, says it like this in an Instagram post:

We live in a day many people feel victimized. People don’t survive anymore. And words are important. Look, Christians are never victims. Please don’t be shaped by your pain and struggles. If you allow yourself to be that way, you see yourself as a victim. But if you recognize that Christ is shaping your life, you see yourself as a victor. Hardship is the tool that God is using to perfect his work in you. And when the Lord is done, you too can say with Christ: it is finished! And that makes you an overcomer, and that is your victory. 

Editor’s Note: Due to the necessity for privacy in the above situation, the writer’s name is being withheld upon request.



SONS OF GOD AND DAUGHTERS OF MAN

Jaap Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: Analysis and History of Exegesis*. Oudtestamentische Studiën, 76. (Leiden: Brill, 2018). xxiv + 369 pages.

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown (Gen 6:1–4).

time? Are the “mighty men of old” the same as the Nephilim, or are they a different group again?

NEW STUDY, ANCIENT ISSUE

A Reformed scholar by the name of Jaap Doedens wrote a doctoral dissertation on this passage under the supervision of Prof. Gert Kwakkel at the Theological University in Kampen. Doedens now teaches at a small Reformed seminary in the town of Pápa, Hungary. His book focuses especially on the first question in the list above, namely, the meaning of the sons of God. Much has been written on this question. Some of the main interpretations that have come to the fore over the years are the following: 1. The sons of God were angelic beings who intermarried with human women and produced a race of giants. 2. The sons of God were descendants of Seth who became ungodly and intermarried with women of Cain’s line. 3. The sons of God were oppressive human rulers or judges. Some readers may recall the lively and informative articles of Prof. Ohmann, who held that the sons of God were tyrants, likely from the line of Cain, who took multiple wives.²

What in the world does this passage mean? One author wrote that there is “more disagreement here per square inch than almost anywhere in the Bible.”¹ Some of the main questions are: Who are the sons of God? And who are the daughters of man? What did the Lord mean when he declared that man’s days would be 120 years: was this a restriction of the normal human lifespan, or was it the number of years left for people to repent before the flood would come? What exactly were the Nephilim? Were they the children of the marriages between the sons of God and the daughters of men, or were they simply a group that lived at that

¹ Robert L. Deffinbaugh, as quoted by Doedens, *Sons of God*, 1.

² H. M. Ohmann, “Zonen Gods en dochteren der mensen in Gen. 6:1-4: Een oude kwestie,” *De Reformatie* 67 (1992): 969–73; 68 (1992): 1–6; 21–26; 45–50; later republished in H. M. Ohmann, *Een Levendige Voorstelling: Verzamelde Opstellen* (Kampen: van den Berg, 1993), 94–129.

Many variations and minority positions have also been proposed, so the interpretive landscape is rather bewildering.

I enjoy reading dissertations. The people who write them spend years developing the skills needed to do academic research; they read just about everything that has been written on their chosen topic in multiple languages; they are carefully coached in developing a sound method of interpretation; they leave no stone unturned so that their arguments will meet the highest standards of critical scrutiny; and they set forth modest solutions and propose new directions for research. Sometimes dissertations can be quite technical and difficult to read, but the published version is often edited in such a way that it becomes more readable and useful for a wider audience. After all, publishers want to sell books, and authors want to get their ideas out there! As such, I was thrilled to come across Doedens's book, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, and I enjoyed reading it. A thorough and patiently argued dissertation is "just what the doctor ordered" for a passage otherwise liable to wild imagination and fanciful speculation. I cannot hope to do justice to the amount of information the book presents, but I'll try to summarize the main aspects and perhaps whet your appetite to read the book for yourself.

FOUR INTERPRETATIONS

"Back in the days when the earth was young, hearts grew very cold," to quote a Jamie Soles song. Genesis 6 brings us back to the dawn of human civilization, the days before the flood, when humans began to multiply and their apostasy took a turn for the worse. That is the setting for our passage. In chapter 1, Doedens notes that the history of interpretation of this passage began already in the Second Temple period and continues to the present day. Broadly speaking, there have been two mainstream solutions: the human and the non-human solution. Each of these has two main branches. Among those who consider the sons of God to be humans, some identify them as Sethites, and others as rulers, judges, or "mighty ones." Among those who consider them to be non-human, some identify them as angels, while others regard them as divine beings or deities. In total, then, there are four main lines of interpretation, and all four are still defended today. The newest research favours the view that the sons of God are divine beings, members of the so-called "divine council." Doedens notes that conservative exegetes still tend to favour the Sethites-interpretation but have done very little to evaluate the newest research, and thus a fresh study is warranted.

In chapter 2, Doedens studies the grammar of Genesis 6:1-4 to determine which of the four interpretations have the most support from the Hebrew text. He notes that the word "man" in verse 1 refers to the human race, just as it does in chapter 5:1-2. The fact

that only their daughters are mentioned is not to say that they had no sons but to set the stage for verse 2, where the sons of God take notice of them. Indeed, the daughters of man in verse 2 are the same as those in verse 1, and the Hebrew does not specify that they belong to a particular line of the human race. Thus, "daughters of man" can only refer to women of the line of *Cain* if it can be demonstrated that the "sons of God" are men of the line of *Seth*.

"SONS OF GOD"

What could "sons of God" mean? Several meanings are possible. In Hebrew, the phrase "sons of" can mean "(male) children of" or "those belonging to the category of." Sometimes God-fearing men are called sons of God in the Bible, so it is possible that the phrase could refer to the Sethites, but it more often refers to heavenly beings, not only in the Old Testament, but also in Ugaritic literature. As for the Nephilim, the meaning of the word is uncertain. It resembles a verb that means "to fall," but whether this implies that they were "fallen beings" is unclear. Numbers 13:33 indicates that they were tall, and indeed, the oldest translation, the Septuagint, calls them "giants." (I've jokingly suggested to my students that they could translate the word Nephilim as "big fellers!") Verse 4 seems to say that the mighty men of old *are* the Nephilim and are thus the offspring of the sons of God and daughters of man. Yet Doedens is suitably cautious when he notes that the passage remains enigmatic for the modern reader; it is impossible to be dogmatic about what it means. It is clear from God's reaction that humanity had crossed a line. Perhaps the marriage of the sons of God with the daughters of man was an attempt to achieve a longer life, or even immortality, and therefore God stepped in and restricted the human lifespan to 120 years.

Chapter 3 outlines the entire history of interpretation of the expression "sons of God," from the Second Temple period to the present. Doedens surveys a tremendous amount of material, including the Septuagint and its revisions, the Jewish Targums, Philo, Josephus, apocryphal and pseudepigraphal works, the Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbinic writings, the New Testament, the church fathers, the Reformers, and more recent authors from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—fascinating reading, but far too much to summarize here. At the end of the chapter, he offers some conclusions. The angels-interpretation is the oldest and was common from the second century BC to the second century AD. New Testament passages referring to the angels who sinned (1 Pet 3:18-20; 2 Pet 2:4-7; Jude 5-7) seem to allude to the angels-interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4, as explained in the Book of Enoch. The angels-interpretation was quite common among the early church fathers until the end of the fourth century AD. The view

that the sons of God were “mighty ones” appeared occasionally, but not as often as the angels- and the Sethites-interpretations.

Doedens found that the Sethites-interpretation did not come to the fore until the third century AD, and it was increasingly accepted in the fourth century. At the same time, the angels-interpretation was increasingly viewed as heretical. A combination of factors led to this shift. First, the Book of Enoch, which most strongly promoted and embellished the angels-interpretation, disappeared from use. Second, a new perspective on sexuality arose, one which idealized monastic chastity and therefore regarded the sons of God as fallen Sethites who had left behind their previous “angelic life.” Third, Western Christianity more and more came to see angels as having no corporeal substance and thus as being incapable of sexual intercourse. Fourth, adherents of the Sethites-interpretation often appealed to a misinterpretation of Genesis 4:26. This verse says, “To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time *people began* to call upon the name of the LORD.” In the Greek Septuagint translation, this verse became: “And to Seth a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. *He hoped* to call upon the name of the Lord God.” The church fathers then understood the Greek translation in a different way: “And to Seth a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. He hoped to *be called* the name of the Lord God.” Thus, if Enosh could hope to be called “God,” logically his sons could be called “sons of God.” *Ergo*, the sons of God were Sethites. The original Hebrew, however, says no such thing. Even though the Reformers returned to the Hebrew text, they held onto the Sethites-interpretation. In the nineteenth century, however, there was a return to the older angels-interpretation, and in the twentieth century, a new view began to take hold, namely, that the sons of God were divine beings.

ASSESSING ARGUMENTS

With this history of interpretation in hand, Doedens returns to the passage to weigh the solutions. Since every solution has its pros and cons, it is important to have a method for determining which factors weigh more heavily and which are less decisive. Hence Doedens proposes a hierarchy of arguments. Most weighty are the arguments that are based on the meanings of words: if a solution is based on something that the Hebrew cannot mean, then that solution is ruled out. Arguments based on context come second: the meaning of the phrase, “sons of God,” has to fit the passage and its context in Genesis 1–11. In the third place come arguments based on the use of similar expressions in ancient Near Eastern

texts: after all, the book of Genesis was first written in the ancient Near Eastern world, and thanks to archaeological discoveries we now have access to ancient religious texts from Mesopotamia, Ugarit, Egypt, etc., to help us understand the language of the Old Testament better.³ Fourth come arguments based on the way concepts are used within the Old Testament as a whole. In the fifth place come considerations that have to do with the way an expression developed in later literature. Finally, reasoning that is based on theological reflection comes sixth. Perhaps an example will make it more clear: to argue that the word “man” in the phrase “daughters of man” means “mankind” is quite weighty because it belongs to level two about the immediate context, while to argue that angels could not have impregnated women, because angels are non-corporeal spirits, belongs to level six in the hierarchy of arguments—not unimportant, but less important. Such an approach helps Doedens to arrange the arguments in the proper order and to come to a balanced solution.

HUMAN OR NON-HUMAN?

In chapter 4, then, Doedens considers each of the four main solutions afresh and weighs their arguments in the balance. To begin with the two “human” interpretations, some have argued that the sons of God were Sethites, and others that they were rulers, judges, or “mighty ones.” The latter is based on the argument that the Hebrew word for “God” (*el hîm*) can sometimes mean “judges.” Doedens studies the passages where this meaning has been proposed (Exod 21:6; 22:7, 27), but he is not convinced, nor does it fit the use of the phrase “sons of God” in Genesis 6. Others have argued that the sons of God were kings who were regarded as divine, but Doedens finds little basis for this view. Even if the Ancient Near East knew of divine kings, there is no evidence that they could have worked as a group. Doedens also finds the Sethites-interpretation wanting: in its context, the phrase “daughters of man” points generally to human women rather than specifically to women of a particular line of descent. Nor can a marriage of Sethite men with Cainite women account for children of unusual size and strength. Further, it is hard to find other Old Testament passages where the phrase “sons of God” refers to pious men, which is necessary in order to link it to the line of Seth. On the other hand, it is much easier to find passages where “sons of God” refers to non-humans, that is, to heavenly beings.

In the “non-human” camp, some have argued that “sons of God” refers to angels, while others argue that they are divine beings. The

³ So too Ohmann remarked that “the Bible is a thoroughly eastern book, which we like to read through western eyes, whether consciously or unconsciously.” And further, “However heathen this material may have been, the ancient Sumerians and Babylonians stood close to the source of revelation” (“Zonen Gods,” 114, 120).

angels-interpretation is the oldest view and has a number of points in its favour. Firstly, if “daughters of man” are human females, then it stands to reason that “sons of God” are non-human males. Secondly, the Hebrew phrase, “sons of God” in Genesis 6 has an exact match in Job 1:6 and 2:1 (“the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD”), and a near-exact match in Job 38:7 (“when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy”). Many have quickly responded that angels are incapable of sexual relations, pointing to the words of Jesus in the New Testament: “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matt 22:30; cf. Mark 12:25; Luke 20:36). Doedens points out, however, that Jesus there is not teaching about the sexuality of angels but about the resurrection. To be sure, Jesus implies that angels in heaven do not marry, but he does not say that they *cannot* marry, nor that fallen angels could never have had sexual relations. In fact, the Old Testament tells of angels appearing on earth, who are “dressed as men, eat, drink, walk, and are subject to being molested (Gen 18:1, 2, 8; 19:1, 5).”⁴

DIVINE BEINGS

If the sons of God were angels, why does Scripture not simply call them angels? Here Doedens offers a worthwhile insight: we typically use the word “angels” as a catchall term for the heavenly beings, but this usage came later. Originally, the word for “angel” in Hebrew (and in Greek) meant “messenger,” and it was used for heavenly beings who brought people messages from God, which is not the case in Genesis 6. Other words are also found in the Old Testament, which shows the variety of heavenly creatures (e.g., cherubim, seraphim, watchers, holy ones). “Sons of God” made sense to the people of the time. It is partly for this reason that Doedens prefers the divine beings-interpretation. This view, too, has a number of advantages. First of all, the Hebrew phrase, “sons of” can mean “those who belong to the category of.” Thus, “sons of God” can mean “those who belong to the divine category,” or more simply, “divine beings.” Secondly, ancient Near Eastern documents have been found which speak of the sons of the gods and the assembly of the gods. To be sure, these came from polytheistic cultures, but the Old Testament, too, speaks of a heavenly council, and Doedens offers a detailed study of all such passages.

Does the divine beings-interpretation conflict with the monotheism of the Old Testament? No, says Doedens. The Old Testament always emphasizes the uniqueness and incomparability of Yahweh. Other gods were worthless and unable to save, and

Israel was forbidden to worship them, since they were not worthy of such honour. Furthermore, while the Old Testament does speak of a heavenly council, it never does so in a polytheistic way: “There is always a significant difference between YHWH and other divine beings.”⁵ Yet to call them “divine” was open to objection, and it is probably for this reason that they came to be called “angels” in later interpretation.

SUPER HUMANS

In short, Genesis 6:1–4 tells a strange story of heavenly beings who saw the beauty of human women, selected wives from among them, and produced super-human children who were revered as heroes in their time. But the Lord responded by declaring that these offspring were mere mortals and by imposing a limit of 120 years on human life. “The function of the passage, then, could be to provide an additional example of how mankind overstepped humanity’s boundaries with this resulting in a type of superhuman race, or how mankind tried to gain immortality by an alternative route, seeing that access to the tree of life was rendered impossible (Gen 3:24).”⁶ God therefore responded by cutting off this alternative route, and in the New Testament he provided his only begotten Son as the only way to life everlasting. In that vein, it is fascinating to read how Christ, “made alive in the spirit, went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah” (1 Pet 3:19–20).

That is the gist of Doedens’s book. To be sure, I have only summarized the main arguments: his own discussions are much more detailed and nuanced. It will surely not be the last word on the subject, but then again, dissertations aren’t meant to be. They’re meant to open new avenues for research, and as such, it’s a good place to start. The reader will notice that Doedens’s work is more exegetical than dogmatic, more interested in the literature of the ancient Near East than in the confessions of the church. That is because his intended readership is academic rather than ecclesiastical. At the same time, his work shows that a Reformed scholar can participate in Old Testament discussions with integrity and come to defensible conclusions that are also of service to the church. **C**



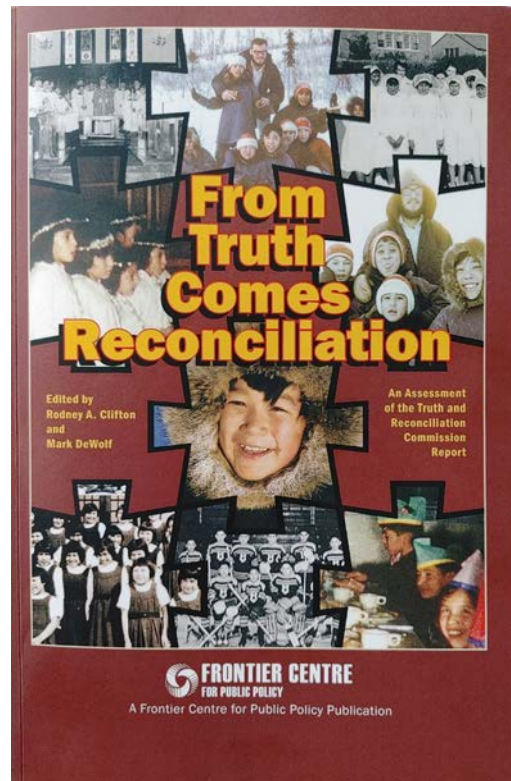
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⁴ Doedens, *Sons of God*, 186, quoting an article by Willem VanGemerem.

⁵ Doedens, *Sons of God*, 248.

⁶ Doedens, *Sons of God*, 283.



FROM TRUTH COMES RECONCILIATION

From Truth Comes Reconciliation: An Assessment of the Truth and Reconciliation Report, eds. Rodney A. Clifton and Mark DeWolf (Winnipeg, MB: Frontier Centre for Public Policy, 2021). Paperback. 323 pages. \$24.99 CDN.

The federal government of Canada appointed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2009 to examine the history and the ramifications of the Indian Residential School (IRS) system, in the hope of gaining a full understanding of the responsibility borne by the federal government and the churches who were involved. The IRS system was in operation in one way or another from 1883 until 1996, and included residential schools (i.e. where students lived in residence), day schools on reserves, and hostels where students lived while they attended public day schools. Over that time, an estimated 150,000 Indigenous youth were involved in the IRS.

SEEKING NUANCE

The purpose of the TRC was ultimately to help bring about reconciliation with the Indigenous people of Canada. The net effect of its report (published in 2015), especially as it has been presented in the Canadian media, is that “most Canadians now believe that attending a residential school was a seriously traumatic experience for most Indigenous children . . . (which) caused significant damage to their communities and affected the lives of their children and grandchildren” (p. xvii). The editors and authors of *From Truth Comes Reconciliation* want to provide additional context to the report, in order to give Canadians a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the IRS and its impact on Indigenous people in Canada.

Editor Rodney Clifton has taught in several Canadian universities and has had a special interest in the education of Indigenous children and residential schools. Fellow editor Mark DeWolf lived on a reserve and attended a residential school at which his father served as principal. Included among the other authors are educators, lawyers, and Indigenous people who have been involved in issues directly related to residential schools in Canada.

The various authors and editors of *From Truth Comes Reconciliation* contend that the TRC report makes “contentious” and even “incendiary claims” (p. xviii, xix) that require closer scrutiny, to see whether these claims are in fact supported by the evidence. They are in full agreement with the TRC’s statement that “Without truth, justice and healing, there can be no genuine reconciliation,” but they believe that the TRC “has fallen short in its attempt to reach the first of these vital goals” (i.e. the truth about the IRS), and thus cannot succeed in bringing about the desired reconciliation.


CONTENTS OVERVIEW

Part I of the book is made up of two chapters. The first shows that throughout Canadian history, “two distinct ideas have shaped the way Indigenous people were treated and the way their children were educated.” Until the mid-1960s, the focus was on integrating Indigenous people into a Western culture. In the mid-1960s, the focus shifted to “granting them special rights, called “citizens plus,” recognizing and interacting with them as unique “First Nations” (p. 3). In the second chapter, the editors provide statistical and historical data that gives an accurate picture of the IRS and their impact on Indigenous people of Canada. They provide, for example, an accurate definition of what constituted a “residential school,” precise information about the number of Indigenous children who attended the schools, about the students’ separation from their families, the average length of students’ stay at the schools, alleged mistreatment (including e.g. being forbidden to speak their native languages, and numbers of students who suffered abuse) suffered, and the numbers of students who died at the schools. The chapter also speaks about benefits that students received from their education at IRS, and about the legacy of the IRS.

Part II, which is entitled, *Critical Analyses of the (TRC) Report*, includes the following chapters: The Political Economy of Truth and Reconciliation; Capturing “Rents” with the Creation of a Victim/Perpetrator Dichotomy; Is the Final Report of the TRC Good History?; Indigenous Exceptionalism and the TRC; A Legal Perspective on the TRC Report; A Narrative that Satisfies; and Negative Attributions on the TRC Report.

In Part III, four authors provide *Personal Reflections on the Schools*, under the following titles: Abandoning Binary Thinking; Why I Speak Out; My Experience in Residential Schools; and A Retired Hudson Bay Store Manager Speaks Out.

ASSESSMENT

Judging by the information they provide, as well as their own backgrounds and interest in the IRS, it seems that the editors and authors of *From Truth Comes Reconciliation* have made a good faith effort to provide accurate and relevant information about the IRS, and a fair assessment of the TRC Report from a variety of perspectives. They are critical of the TRC, and dispute various claims that it makes, but they do not ignore or deny that wrong was done to Indigenous children and their families in a number of ways and recognize that these wrongs must be addressed. Real reconciliation depends on both non-Indigenous and Indigenous Canadians knowing and acknowledging the truth about the Indian Residential Schools, the responsibility of the federal government and the churches for the IRS, and the impact that government policies and students’ experiences at these kinds of schools have had on those individuals and their families. While not written from a Christian perspective, this book is well worth reading and considering. 

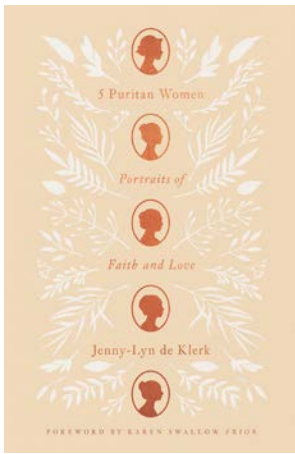


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THE PURITAN GLASS CEILING DEBUNKED

5 Puritan Women: Portraits of Faith and Love,
Jenny-Lyn de Klerk. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023).
Paperback. 155 pages. \$22.99 CDN.

When most people hear about the Puritans, their thoughts turn to old, dead white guys. Besides being stereotyped as legalistic killjoys, they're often regarded as chauvinistic and perhaps even patriarchal by today's standards. Women were supposedly marginalized; they were without a voice. There was a solid glass (or perhaps brass) ceiling facing any women who might have wanted to write or speak about the Christian faith. Well, Dr. Jenny-Lyn de Klerk shows how this ceiling is a myth.


De Klerk aims to counter two prevailing approaches to Puritan women. One is ignorance—which is what most of us have when it comes to them. For example, I'm fairly well read in matters Puritan, but I was really only acquainted with one of the women included in this book. The other prevailing approach pays ample attention to these women (and others) but misconstrues them in the service of feminist scholarship. De Klerk writes, "I cannot count how many times I have read articles that literally argue these women said the exact opposite of what they actually said" (p. 20). In contrast, she wants to present them on their own terms and spark a revival of reading their works.

This book features the stories of five fascinating Puritan women. Each of them is presented under the rubric of their roles and the way they exemplified a particular spiritual discipline:

- Agnes Beaumont: Daughter as Evangelist, Using Memorization
- Lucy Hutchinson: Mother as Theologian, Using Fellowship
- Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick: Wife as Philanthropist, Using Meditation
- Anne Bradstreet: Grandmother as Homemaker, Using Prayer
- Lady Brilliana Harley: Matriarch as Physician, Using Spiritual Conversation

With this approach, not only do you learn facts about their lives, you also benefit from their "great insight into the Christian life and good instincts regarding matters of human relationships" (p. 21).

Anne Bradstreet was the woman I'd heard about previously—she is well-known for her poetry. I first read about her in the first edition of *Meet the Puritans* by Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson—it was hard to miss the only woman included in this survey of dozens of Puritans. But in de Klerk's book, it's Lucy Hutchinson who really stands out to me. According to de Klerk, Hutchinson was the only woman known to write a piece of systematic theology in the seventeenth century. She wrote *Principles of the Christian Religion* for her daughter Barbara. Reading about it made me want to read it for myself—and it's easy to find online. Once you get used to the archaic spellings, you'll find it both doctrinally and practically encouraging.

Puritan Women makes me curious whether there are more Puritan women out there waiting to be discovered. De Klerk has a breezy style of writing drawing you in and producing that effect. While her main audience seems to be other women, it'll be enjoyed by men too—particularly if you have an interest in church history. 



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