



# Clarion

*493* A DISTRESSING HERESY *496* REFORMATION WEDDING BELLS

*500* TWO ERRORS IN 10 SECONDS

# WHAT'S INSIDE

**H**appy Reformation Day! October 31 is coming up fast and we have a meditation plus a historical piece which help us remember aspects of what the Lord did for his church at that time. "Reformation" means returning again and again to the norms of Scripture and correcting ourselves wherever we may have strayed. In that spirit, Rolf den Hollander in "A Distressing Heresy" encourages all of us to examine our attitudes toward our local church and whether we are not inadvertently moving away from the attitude and commitment Christ calls us to. Wes Bredenhof points out two common yet impactful theological errors that we ought to studiously avoid.

A large focus in this issue is the happenings at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, which is naturally dear to our hearts. September is always a big month for our Seminary, and we are thankful to see the Lord's blessings recounted in the graduation of six students, the beginning of a new year of instruction in a newly renovated building, and the financial gifts received from willing donors through the agency of the Women's Saving Action. This year also marks the retirement of Dr. Arjan de Visser, whose keynote speech is found in this issue as well. Also from this place, Dr. de Visser, we commend you for your faithful labours at CRTS these nineteen years and thank our heavenly Father for all we as churches have received in you. May God bless your retirement with a refreshing change of pace.

Otto Bouwman describes in some detail what he terms a "minor point of doctrine" in "Confessions on Church State Relations," an issue that will no doubt be discussed again in the churches leading up to General Synod 2025. It's good for all to pay attention to and evaluate this idea. MERF provides a summary of its burgeoning mission work. This issue rounds off with an installment of Clarion Kids, a letter to the editor, and two book reviews. May your reading build you up in faith.

*Peter Holtvliuwer*

## contents

- 491** EDITORIAL  
*Jason Van Vliet*
- 492** TREASURES, NEW & OLD  
*Randall Visscher*
- 493** A Distressing Heresy  
*Rolf den Hollander*
- 496** Reformation Wedding Bells  
*Theo Wierenga*
- 500** Two Errors in 10 Seconds  
*Wes Bredenhof*
- 502** 2023 Anniversary Meeting and Convocation of CRTS  
*John Louwse*
- 505** Update From CRTS  
*Jason Van Vliet*
- 507** Enlarge the Place of Your Tent  
*Arjan de Visser*
- 512** Collecting in Faith: Presentation of the Women's Savings Action
- 513** Confessions on Church/State Relations  
*Otto Bouwman*
- 518** MERF Newsletter
- 520** Clarion Kids  
*Amanda DeBoer*
- 521** LETTER TO THE EDITOR
- BOOK REVIEW
- 522** The Sabbath, the Covenant, and the House of God  
*Wes Bredenhof*
- 523** Do Not Be True to Yourself  
*Wes Bredenhof*

## Clarion

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

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

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

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

### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

**Editor in Chief:** Peter Holtvliuwer  
E: [pholtvliuwer@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:pholtvliuwer@clarionmagazine.ca)

**Managing Editor:** Laura Veenendaal  
**Contributing Editors:** Eric Kampen, Jason Van Vliet, Matthew VanLuik, Jim Witteveen

### CONTENT INQUIRIES

E: [editor@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:editor@clarionmagazine.ca)

### ADMINISTRATIVE INQUIRIES

W: [clarionmagazine.ca](http://clarionmagazine.ca)  
E: [publisher@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:publisher@clarionmagazine.ca)  
T: 204-663-9000

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

E: [letters@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:letters@clarionmagazine.ca)  
Letters to the Editor must not exceed 300 words and are to be written in a Christian manner. See [clarionmagazine.ca](http://clarionmagazine.ca) for guidelines.

### SUBMIT AN ARTICLE

E: [submissions@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:submissions@clarionmagazine.ca)  
Only articles which agree with Clarion's guidelines will be considered for publication. See [clarionmagazine.ca](http://clarionmagazine.ca) for guidelines.

### SUBMIT A BOOK REVIEW

E: [bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca)  
Reviews should be 600-700 words and concern books which fit with Clarion's purpose. See [clarionmagazine.ca](http://clarionmagazine.ca) for more.

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

[clarionmagazine.ca/subscriptions](http://clarionmagazine.ca/subscriptions)

#### 2023 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

Digital can be added to print subscription at no cost.

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

### ADVERTISEMENTS

[clarionmagazine.ca/advertisements](http://clarionmagazine.ca/advertisements)  
[ads@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:ads@clarionmagazine.ca)  
Full page \$434 | ½ \$234 | ¼ \$119 | ⅛ \$64  
We reserve the right to refuse ads.

# MAKE SINGING DISCIPLES

About ten years ago I gave some lectures in Brazil. The room held about twenty-five local pastors, elders, theological students, two Canadian missionaries, and one prof. At one point we sang Psalm 2—all stanzas, in Portuguese, Genevan melody, with only the lyrics projected on a wall, no accompaniment. Never in my life have I heard that psalm sung with so much gusto from so few people!

How did that group of men learn to sing that psalm so well? Nearly all of them did *not* grow up singing psalms, either to Genevan or any other melodies. They were born and raised in unbelief, in religious sects, or in churches that read, but did not sing, psalms. However, someone took the time to teach them, intentionally and enthusiastically. They became *singing* disciples.

## SUNG THEOLOGY

Singing the full range of scriptural truth is of paramount importance. Augustine once described how singing contributed to his own discipleship as a new convert: “I was powerfully moved at the sweet sound of your Church singing. These sounds flowed into my ears, and *the truth streamed into my heart*” (*Confessions*, IX, 6). This aligns well with Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” Singing is both doxological and *pedagogical*. Our congregations are welcoming new members from diverse backgrounds: converts from our neighbourhoods, immigrants and refugees from other countries, and people who are leaving churches that drift away from Scripture. How do we lead them into the rich pastures of God’s entire revelation?

We are certainly intentional about discipling them in the *written* theology of the biblical, Reformed faith. Learning opportunities include one-on-one catechism, new members’ classes, Christianity Explored, as well as Bible studies, small groups, and mentorship relationships. There is always room for improvement, but much time and energy are devoted to this kind of instruction.

What about *sung* theology? Over time, in worship services, newcomers will learn to sing the psalms and hymns. For the sake of argument, we could also say that, over time, especially with catechetical preaching in the afternoon, newcomers will learn everything they need to know. Theoretically, that may be true. But in practice, beyond our worship services, we eagerly offer classes and other opportunities to disciple people in *written* theology. Can we do something similar for *sung* theology?

## SOME SUGGESTIONS


Teaching, or discipling, effectively includes at least four things: a curriculum, some instructional resources, a passionate teacher, and community support. How could this work out for helping newcomers learn the psalms and hymns that we have?

Thankfully, a key piece of *curriculum* is already in place. Reformed elementary schools have carefully curated memory work lists that begin with shorter, simpler songs and progress into longer, more involved songs. Perfect! So, what if our new members’ classes included some time devoted to teaching and practicing the song-of-the-week from that list, possibly in sync with the local primary grades, and culminating with that same song in the worship service the following Sunday? It could be a powerful pedagogical and doxological moment!

Of course, singing in a small group, when most people do not know the melody, is hard and may sound hollow. Yes, but that is where good *instructional resources* come into play. What if we had an easy-to-use website that provided the lyrics and the melody line of each song in our Book of Praise, *plus a crisp, clear recording of that melody by itself and a recording of that song sung by a congregation*. The Dutch-speaking world already enjoys such a website: [www.psalmbboek.nl](http://www.psalmbboek.nl). Can we make an English version? As one newcomer recently said to me, “That would be gold! I would love to practice at home, too!”

Next, we need *capable and passionate teachers*. They don’t need a music degree. They simply need to be able to sing well and enjoy doing it. If the person teaching the new members’ class is not such a confident singer, can someone else from the congregation help, before or after the class? Or before or after a worship service, if that is more convenient?

Finally, hospitality is a huge part of integrating newcomers into our congregations. Imagine this: what if every (or almost every) visit in *the supporting community*, the congregation, included singing a few of our psalms and hymns after a meal? Much learning would happen, and our holy Father’s name would be “enthroned on the praises” of his people (Ps 22:3).

Undoubtedly, local circumstances will require variations on the themes suggested above. Yet, under the Lord’s blessing, that uplifting experience in Brazil could be duplicated across Canada. 



**Jason Van Vliet**  
Principal and Professor of Dogmatics  
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary  
[jvanvliet@crtcs.ca](mailto:jvanvliet@crtcs.ca)

# RELYING ON CHRIST'S MERITS

*“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”*

EPHESIANS 2:6-7

Growing up, I always thought it rather strange that Reformation Day fell on the same day as Halloween. As a child, I suspected some form of conspiracy must be involved. Had Christian parents encouraged the celebration of Reformation Day on October 31<sup>st</sup> only to keep their kids away from a night which made light of death, devils, and all manner of ghoulish things? Or were Roman Catholics and non-Christians promoting October 31<sup>st</sup> as the night for frights and free candy in order to distract society from the historical and spiritual significance of the Protestant Reformation? It felt like someone was up to something.

What I did not suspect was that the someone in question was actually Martin Luther. What I did not consider in my younger years is that Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses or *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* on October 31, 1517 precisely *because* that was the day of the year when the church celebrated the Eve of All Saints' Day (also called All Hallows' Day). Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on All Hallows' Eve (which has come to be called Halloween) because that was a day when the church focused on “special” saints who had died as martyrs and confessors.

The Roman Catholic Church was teaching that they had the ability to sell indulgences by drawing upon a *treasury of merit*—a collection of good works done by Christ, Mary, and these “special” saints. An indulgence effectively allowed you or a loved one to benefit from the good works done by one of these figures. An indulgence was said to reduce the punishment of sin experienced by Christians in purgatory.

By posting his Ninety-Five Theses on October 31<sup>st</sup>, Luther was seeking to start a debate around the sale of indulgences on the very date when people were thinking about the saints and the saintly good works which were being used to justify the very practice of indulgences. He could not have picked a more appropriate date to post his Ninety-Five Theses, given the nature of what was being discussed.

Luther was beginning to see the truth of the matter. The church has no need to apply the work of one believer to another, even if it could do such a thing. We are all saved, from first to last, through Jesus Christ. Christ's works benefit all believers through faith

and are completely sufficient to secure our salvation. It is with Christ that God raises us up. It is in Christ Jesus that we can be seated in the presence of God. It is in Christ that God's riches are poured out upon us.

As we see in Ephesians 2:6-7, our good works do not ease our passage into God's presence. We do not need to seek the favour of godly men and women who have gone before us into the throne room of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, in order to escape the purifying flames of an imagined purgatory. In Christ, we already enjoy the favour and incomparable grace of our God, because Christ's one sacrifice has brought about the complete forgiveness of all our sins. The kindness of God in Christ has brought about cleansing from the guilt, the punishment, and the stain of our sin. In Christ, “he does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps 103:10). In the blood of the lamb, we are washed from all sin and stain (Rev 7:14).

May Reformation Day remind us that we have nothing to fear in death. No painful punishment or purification of purgatory awaits us before we enter his presence and stand before his throne. **C**

## FOR FURTHER READING/STUDY:

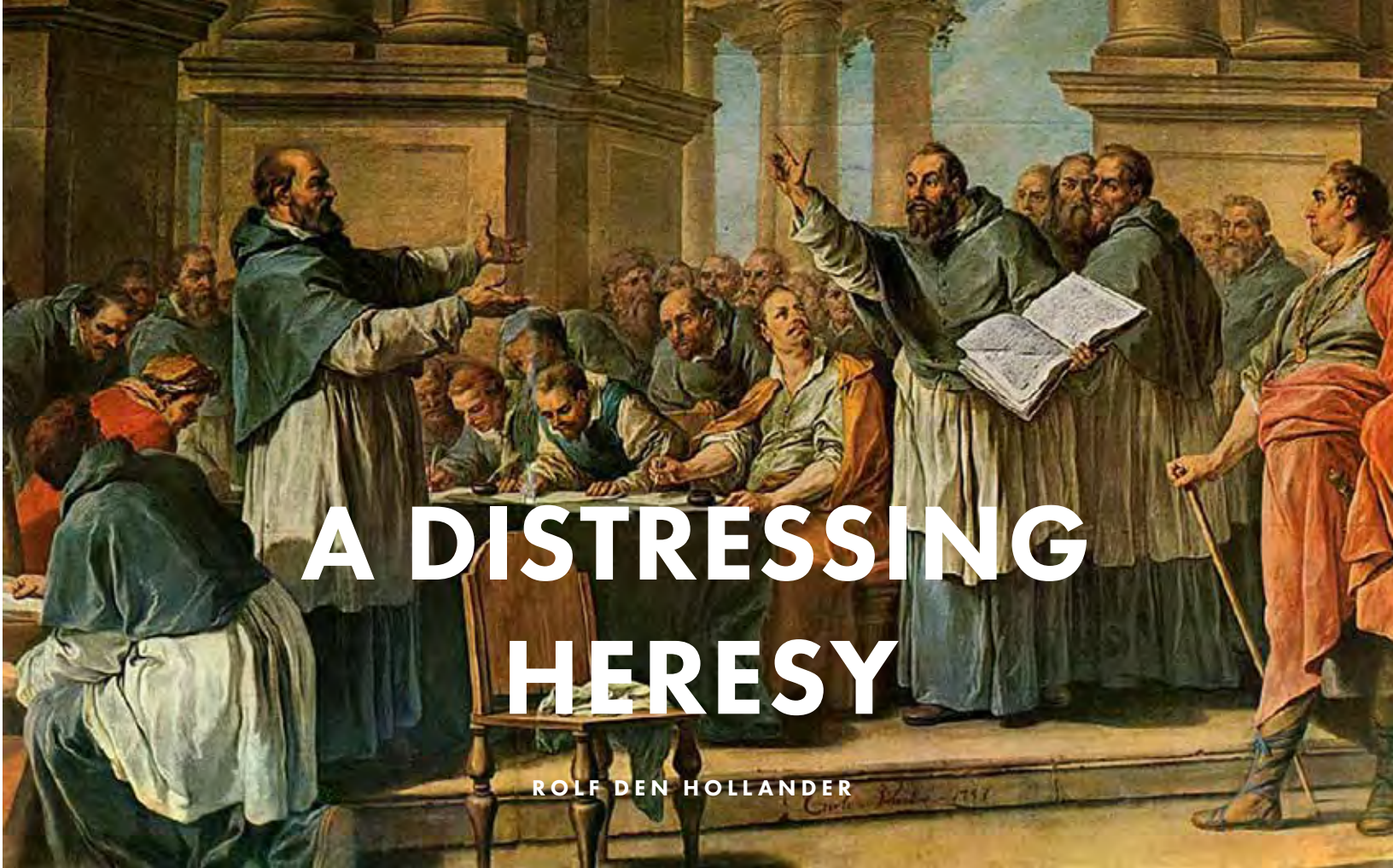
Philippians 3:1-11

## FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Why do we struggle to accept that we have complete forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ alone?
2. Does the Roman Catholic Church still issue indulgences? What has or has not changed since the days of Martin Luther?
3. Does knowing about the origins of Reformation Day impact your perspective on Halloween?



**Randall Visscher**  
Minister  
Refuge Canadian Reformed Church  
[randallvisscher@gmail.com](mailto:randallvisscher@gmail.com)



# A DISTRESSING HERESY

ROLF DEN HOLLANDER

Who doesn't love the old hymn, "The Church's One Foundation"? Comforting, yet real! "Though with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed, by schisms rent asunder, *by heresies distressed* . . ." (stanza 3; emphasis mine). How would you respond to someone who said, "The most prevalent heresy distressing the church today is Donatism"? Maybe some of us would say, "Dona-what? Never heard of it." Whether you've heard or not, hopefully it gets you thinking.

So, what's Donatism? It's named after a bishop, Donatus (or Donatus Magnus) in Carthage, North Africa, in the fourth century A.D. He died in 355. But to understand Donatism, take a few steps back in time. Without intending to be simplistic, it's best to stop at the persecution of Emperor Diocletian (who abdicated in 305). The story of how Diocletian came to viciously persecute the Christians only towards the end of his reign is a story all itself. It's enough to say though that his was maybe the most intense persecution of them all. He enacted some new laws: Christian books and churches had to be destroyed and Christians themselves outlawed. Eventually he added another law, that everyone be made to sacrifice to the Roman gods.

## TRAITORS!

And what did the Christians do? Many of them, by God's grace, stood strong. They died martyrs. But not all stood strong. Some buckled under the pressure; they lapsed. They were called *traditores*. The *traditores* "handed over" their books (think "tradition"—things handed down) and even sometimes fellow Christians. (Hence our word "traitor!") There's a somewhat famous example of what Mensurius (Bishop of Carthage) did. When he heard that all his Christian books were to be confiscated or face punishment, he quickly hid them, exchanging them with heretical books. He figured the soldiers wouldn't know the difference anyway. When they came to collect his books, he happily handed them over and watched them burn. Problem solved! Not everyone admired this cleverness.

We jump to Emperor Constantine, Diocletian's successor. Maybe he's more familiar as the emperor of the Edict of Milan (February 313 A.D.), putting an end to the persecution and treating Christians kindly. It meant that many who once buckled under the pressure returned, including priests and bishops. This is where things get messy. What to do with these once-lapsed priests and bishops? Should they still be allowed to serve? Were they tarnished for life?

---

## *The church will only be a bride without spot or wrinkle after the Lord's return*

---

When this Mensurius died, his elected successor was Bishop Caecilian. He was also not particularly courageous. He had little respect in Carthage. Things became worse when they discovered one of the men who'd participated in Caecilian's ordination, at the laying on of hands, was a *traditor*. (He'd handed over his books.) Then, they said, the ordination of Caecilian was invalid, and he wasn't a bishop at all!

### A "PURE" CHURCH

Enter Donatus. He was the leader of a group that founded a new church, presumed to be "pure" because it was headed by "pure" bishops. After all, isn't that what Christ bought his church to be? "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25). Having bishops stained by such sin did not leave the church without blemish!

For the Donatists, it meant the Roman Catholic Church was a false church and any baptisms administered couldn't be recognized as legitimate. Rebaptism was needed. (They would say, of course, that they were only "baptizing" them. The other baptism just didn't count.)

The Donatists appealed to Emperor Constantine to recognize them as the legitimate church. Constantine tried to solve the issue, organizing a council in 314, in Arles (France). The Donatist claims were rejected. For one, the Council concluded they had the facts of Caecilian's ordination wrong. And the Donatist idea that a bishop who'd once fallen into sin cannot perform valid functions in church was denied.

Still, for multiple reasons, in the following decades Donatism grew strong in North Africa. But the Donatists had struggles amongst themselves. Some of them were more radical than others, like the Circumcellians. (Google the name and find some fascinating, if sad, stories!) All in all, despite multiple attempts by Constantine and others to quell this heresy, it remained strong.

### AUGUSTINE

Enter Augustine. Augustine's life is a study in the faithful providence of God. Here God raised up a man perfectly suited, we might say, to lead the church beyond this heresy. It's not possible to lay all that out here. There are some great biographies that tell the story of his life. We can simply say that by God's grace the church has been blessed by the life and teaching of Augustine. For now, we focus on his contribution to the Donatist issue. Augustine judged

that they did not have the love that characterizes true Christianity. Instead, they were proud and militant.

Key is his response to their use of Ephesians 5:25. It's true that Jesus is to present the church to himself without spot or wrinkle or any such blemish. But the Donatists, he said, were looking for the church "as it will be" after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and not "as it is now." The church will only be a bride without spot or wrinkle after the Lord's return. Before then it's impossible that the church, or its office bearers, would be perfect.

Augustine only had to point at the Donatists themselves. They weren't exactly fair in their evaluations. They were quick to point the finger at the Roman Catholic Church, but they were blind to the "spots and wrinkles" in their own church.

And as far as the sacraments go, Augustine said it didn't depend on the holiness of the bishop, or the minister for that matter. It was all God's grace in Christ! If a minister who has committed a serious sin administers the sacrament, that doesn't nix the sacrament.

Not everything Augustine said and did in this controversy was good. He went too far when he condoned the use of government force to convert the Donatists. He supported that with the words of Luke 14:23, "Go out to the highways and hedges and *compel* people to come in, that my house may be filled." That sadly led to the later Inquisition.

### SO WHAT?

The whole story leaves us with a lot to think about, doesn't it? Questions sometimes come up about why we accept the baptism of those who convert from Roman Catholicism, for example. I've had the privilege of catechizing a few former Roman Catholics. They were not rebaptized when they became members of the Reformed church. Why not? Because the sacrament isn't about who performs it but about the God of grace who speaks in it!


That's a source of comfort to others who are left deeply touched by the fall of a (prominent) pastor. You've maybe heard of or read about some of these sad falls. Then people are left questioning themselves, and their faith. "But he taught me!" "I came to faith under his guidance!" "I've benefited so greatly from his writing!" Yes, by God's grace, he can work salvation even through the moral imperfections of church leaders. How humbling for church leaders. God uses sinful instruments, jars of clay, to do his wonderful work! The "lamentable fall of Peter" (CD, V 4) is an example of that. Jesus graciously confirms Peter in his gospel calling, despite his rather public fall.

---

## *Are we tempted to look for the perfect church?*

---

That's not the only application though. And maybe it's here that the claim is the most thought-provoking—Donatism is the most prevalent heresy in the church today. What of this “perfect church” idea? We confess in the Belgic Confession the marks of the true church. That's not the perfect church. Are we tempted to look for the perfect church? What lies behind the increasing practice of “church shopping”? And why do we see more moves from church to church without physically relocating? Is it because we find something lacking in the church where we are? Lacking not in the sense of questioning its trueness or falseness but just lacking? An “impurity”? So that we just don't feel as “comfortable” there anymore? Is it possible that we're looking for something that won't be there until Christ returns? Do we have enough grace for the “impurities” in the church, those spots and wrinkles that still exist? Yes, even amongst the leadership of the church, men who have their weaknesses and shortcomings and their own need for abundant grace—do we have grace for them? Grace that comes from the comfort that this is Christ's church, and he will purify it once and for all when he returns on the clouds?

It requires much wisdom. Our own church history is filled with secessions, for one reason or another. When is it right to leave a church? How far is too far when a church begins to turn from the truth? And I too, with local consistories, have had to wrestle with requests for attestations and the extensive related conversations. These can be thorny issues. But the history of Donatism should at least get us thinking. How Donatist are we in our thinking, when it comes to our expectations of the church and her leadership today? What “impurities” might we bear today as we look forward to perfect purity when the Groom finally appears? I leave it with you as questions. What do you think? Is Donatism the most prevalent heresy in the church today? It's a distressing thought. 



**Rolf den Hollander**  
Minister  
Living Light Canadian Reformed Church  
[rolfdh@gmail.com](mailto:rolfdh@gmail.com)

## **GIVE THE GIFT OF CLARION**

Subscribers get **25%<sup>OFF</sup>** the first year of a gift subscription!

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

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



# Reformation

## *Wedding Bells*

THEO WIERENGA

**M**artin Luther stands large in the history of the church. Mightily used by God, Luther was a man who shook the church and society. The impact of his teaching on the authority of Scripture and the means of grace is still felt today. Less well known is the impact of his marriage and home life.

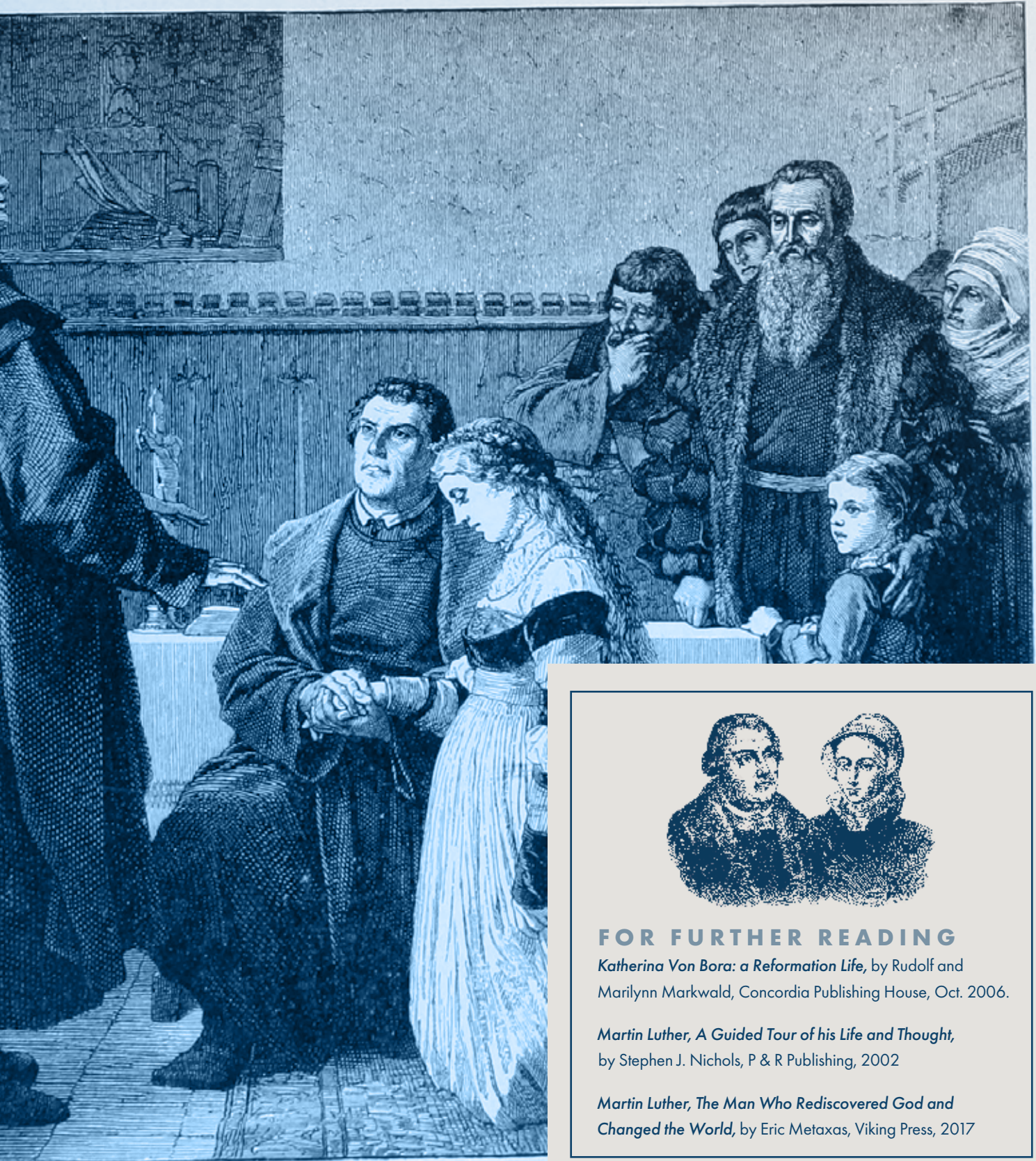
Luther (a former monk) married a former nun, Katherine Von Bora. The news of this “scandalous” marriage went viral in sixteenth century Europe, and the impact was significant. Fifteen years her senior, Martin didn’t meet Katherine until he was forty-one. She was twenty-five and had lived in a convent from the age of five. Martin was a confirmed bachelor, not willing to subject a wife to the risks of losing a husband to martyrdom. Yet the Lord brought them together in a most unique manner.

### THE GREAT ESCAPE

According to Luther, the first commandment supersedes any monastic vow, and therefore such vows could be broken. He also said there are very few people who have the will power and grace to live a celibate life, and no one has the right to force celibacy on another (1 Cor 7:9). He actively backed up his view by helping nuns escaped from convents.







### FOR FURTHER READING

*Katherina Von Bora: a Reformation Life*, by Rudolf and Marilyn Markwald, Concordia Publishing House, Oct. 2006.

*Martin Luther, A Guided Tour of his Life and Thought*, by Stephen J. Nichols, P & R Publishing, 2002

*Martin Luther, The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World*, by Eric Metaxas, Viking Press, 2017

---

## *He spoke enthusiastically about the “sweet union” of marriage and the gift of marital friendship and intimacy*

---

Luther’s writings and ideas penetrated even the walls of cloisters and convents. Many nuns and monks, after discovering the truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, longed to be free. But leaving a convent was illegal and hazardous in those days. What to do?

Katherine, along with her good friend Magdalene, wrote to family and friends asking for help. They all received various forms of the same answer: “No!” This was somewhat understandable, as it was a capital crime to help a nun escape. The solution? Ask Dr. Luther in Wittenberg.

He was willing and enlisted the help of a friend, Leonard Kopp, a fish merchant. One day he pulled up to the convent with a wagon loaded with barrels of fish and left with barrels full of nuns. The great escape caused a stir and sensation, as nothing like this had ever happened before. And Luther, instead of trying to keep it a secret, actually published a story about the “Great Escape.” He enjoyed rubbing this news in the faces of the Roman Catholic clergy, but also wanted to encourage other nuns to do the same.

A number of these nuns arrived in Wittenberg, and Luther was able to find a home or a husband for all but one, who proved to be more than a little difficult. Her first marriage proposals did not meet with her approval. Eventually she indicated a willingness to marry Dr. Luther. However, he was quite hesitant. He lived under a papal ban, and he did not want to subject a wife and potential family to harm. Besides, he considered himself too old. Neither did he have a good impression of Katherine, who had the reputation of being strong-minded, perhaps even somewhat bossy.

When he was finally persuaded, he stated that his marriage would be a good thing, since it would give his father grandchildren, it was just one more way to rile the pope, it would cause the angels to laugh and all the devils to weep, and it would be a good example to other monks.

So, he proposed to her, and they were married the same day, June 13, 1525. He was forty-one. Katie (as he preferred to call her) was twenty-six. Luther didn’t want a long engagement, since he knew what the reaction would be. The opposition to his marriage was great, and it would have made a long engagement extremely difficult and uncomfortable to say the least. Instead, he presented the world with an accomplished deed.

### **MARTIN AND KATIE**

Neither Luther nor Katie married for love, but they entered marriage in faith, trusting God to guide them. By all accounts, Katie considered her marriage an assignment from God, and this was evident right from the start of their union.

They made their home in the Augustinian Monastery, a wedding gift from Frederick of Saxony. A huge home, with many rooms, it came with gardens, a fishpond, and a small brewery. Katie managed the estate and turned it into a self-sustaining boarding house.

She was a hard worker and an early riser. Martin called her the “morning star of Wittenberg.” She was also a nurse to Luther and their children. Luther was often plagued by illnesses, and she had all kinds of remedies. People marvelled at the fact that Luther’s health improved after his marriage.

They soon developed a mutual respect. They gave each other a lot of space. Their marriage was a model for everyone who knew them. They prayed together, they read the Bible together as a couple and as a family, and they sang a lot. By all accounts they had a happy home, doted on their children, and disciplined them in love. Together they had six children, besides taking in a number of orphaned relatives.

As time went on Martin increasingly appreciated his wife’s abilities and intellect. She reportedly had a keen theological mind. At the end of the day when the table was cleared, guests would often just sit back and relax, listening to Martin and Katie exchange ideas.

Their love for each other continued to grow, even though they were both strong-minded individuals. Apparently Katie had a temper, but she was also a true “helper” for her husband. She found creative and provocative ways to keep her husband from burying himself in his studies. Once, when Martin locked himself in his study for three days, Katie (with the help of some of students) took the door off the hinges and demanded his return.

Luther also suffered from depression. Often Katie would pray with him, read the Bible to him, but at other times she was at her wits end. One morning (so the story goes) Katie came to breakfast in a funeral dress. Martin asked, “Who died?” Katie replied, “God died.” Martin proceeded to rebuke her for such an outrageous reply. She waited till he was done and said, “Well, Martin, the

---

## *The marriage of this ex-monk and ex-nun was not merely a revolution; it was the reformation of marriage*

---

way you were acting, I thought he was dead.” She knew how to help her husband.

Their love for one another also sustained them when their second child (daughter Elizabeth) passed away before the age of eight months. A year later the Lord gave them another daughter, Magdalene. She was the apple of Luther’s eye, and by all accounts a dear and sweet girl. But in her thirteenth year she became ill and died within a few days. The Luthers were heartbroken but, through this all, the bond between Martin and Katie only grew stronger.

Before he was married, Luther’s teaching on marriage essentially portrayed marriage as a sort of necessary evil to stave off sexual temptation. But, as his loving marital friendship with Katherine grew, his perspective changed. He considered a pious and God-fearing wife one of the greatest gifts a man could receive. He spoke enthusiastically about the “sweet union” of marriage and the gift of marital friendship and intimacy.

### IMPACT OF LUTHER’S MARRIAGE

You might ask, what’s the big deal about this marriage?

Martin and Katie taught future generations that marriage involves mutual love and respect, genuine companionship, joyful physical intimacy, and all this with the approval of God. Just try to imagine how this came across to people who lived in a time when the prevailing thought was that the holiest people were celibate monks, priests, and nuns. The marriage of this ex-monk and ex-nun was not merely a revolution; it was the reformation of marriage.

Luther’s marriage and his very candid talk about marriage, his openness about the joys of physical intimacy, his exuberance about the companionship of marriage, did much to affect the reformation of marriage. He never wrote a book on marriage. Instead, he and his wife lived it. Martin and Katie displayed in their marriage what the gospel means to everyday life. They displayed grace and the love of God to one another.


Luther’s re-discovery of the gospel of grace transformed the church, and his marriage to Katie helped to transform the everyday life of a Christian. He cleared away the false doctrine of celibacy. He changed the cultural ideal. Luther showed that all Christians have a high and holy calling both outside and inside the home, as fathers, mothers, children and husbands and wives—living out of faith for the glory of God.

Martin and Katie didn’t get married for love. But they entered marriage in faith. They didn’t put their hope in marriage but in God, and even though they did not marry for love, they grew to love each other.

They also viewed marriage as a place for growing in holiness. They were willing to learn from each other and willing to correct one another. Martin and Katie’s marriage demonstrated that the home is the greatest school for sanctification; that family life and marriage is the place where Christ and his church is to be served; that the family home (not the monastery) is the place where we grow in holiness.

Scripture teaches that “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim 4:4–5). This is exactly how Martin and Katie lived. Together they enjoyed the God-given gifts of life and family and marriage to the glory of God. This revolutionized the way people thought about life and marriage.

Luther showed people that instead of being intensely worried about whether or not your actions were going to make you spend more time in purgatory, a believer is allowed to enjoy all the good things that God gives us in this life, including marriage and children.

When Luther published his Ninety-Five Theses against indulgences, little did he know the impact and the consequences his action would have. Similarly, when Luther married his Katie, little did he know the impact and the consequences his action would have. Together they showed everyone what Christian marriage and family life should look like. Together they demonstrated that marriage truly can be a picture of the gospel. Praise the Lord Martin married his beloved Katie. 



**Theo Wierenga**

Minister

Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church

[wierenga.theo@gmail.com](mailto:wierenga.theo@gmail.com)

# TWO ERRORS IN 10 SECONDS

A few months ago, my wife and I were visiting back where we started. When we first got married, we were living in Edmonton, Alberta. Around the same time we got married, the city's first Christian radio station came on the air: 930 CJCA. As we were about to set off to drive somewhere on our most recent visit, on a whim I changed the vehicle's radio to 930. I was curious: was it still a Christian radio station? Sadly, what I heard made me quickly change the station again.

I heard two grievous theological errors in ten seconds. I don't know who it was on the radio, but he said something like: "After you believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will come to you. It will change your life. It will not leave you the same." Being in a car, I didn't write down the exact words, but it was something like that.

So, what were the two serious errors?

## FAITH & REGENERATION

The first one has to do with being born again or regeneration. Arminian theology teaches that the new birth follows faith. So first you believe and then the Holy Spirit comes to you and you're born again. You can see this order in many statements of faith. For example, this is from Samaritan's Purse: "We believe that all

men everywhere are lost and face the judgment of God, that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, and that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ results in regeneration by the Holy Spirit." Regeneration follows faith—that's the Arminian order. Billy Graham reflected that order, famously teaching that one becomes born again through repentance and faith.

However, the Bible teaches that the unregenerate are dead in sins and trespasses (Eph 2:1). As a result, Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). And Paul says, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). But Christians have received "the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God" (1 Cor 2:12). The Holy Spirit brings dead hearts to life—he causes us to be born again. Then our living hearts are empowered to take hold of Jesus Christ for salvation. Faith follows regeneration—that's the biblical order of things. You can't believe (and repent) unless you've been born again.




## THE PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The second serious error has to do with the personality of the Holy Spirit. The guy on the radio used the impersonal pronoun “it” for the Holy Spirit. This makes it sound as if the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force, rather than the third Person of the Trinity. Sadly, this sloppy way of speaking is quite common. I’ve seen it slip into Reformed theology books and I’ve heard it from Reformed pulpits. It’s a major problem because it’s not only false, but it’s also dishonouring to the Holy Spirit.

Scripture (inspired by the Spirit!) says the Holy Spirit is a person. By that we mean he is a *someone*, a subject. He acts and he is acted upon. Persons communicate—the Holy Spirit says things (Heb 3:7). Individuals may try to deceive persons—Ananias and Sapphira attempted to deceive the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). You can grieve a person—we’re warned in Ephesians 4:30 not to “grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” Impersonal forces like electricity or gravity cannot be grieved, cannot be deceived, and cannot communicate. The Holy Spirit is a person and therefore it’s vitally important we use the right pronouns for him: he, him, his. This is indeed the practice of Scripture. In John 16:7, Jesus says, “But if I go, I will

send *him* to you.” The third person masculine pronoun is used in English, just as in the Greek.

### IMPORTANT POINTS

Is this just nit-picking? No, these are really important things to get right. It’s important to get the order of faith and regeneration correct, lest we ascribe too much to man and too little to God. It’s a matter of making sure he gets *all* the credit for our salvation. It’s important to use the right pronouns for the Holy Spirit, because it’s a matter of honour and worship. If we’re not careful to refer to him in the right way, we’ll not be thinking about him in the right way. Not only will that affect our theology, but also what’s downstream: Christian living. After all, why would you pray to an impersonal force to strengthen your faith and help you with holy living? You see friends, correct theology really does matter. 



**Wes Bredenhof**

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston

[wes.bredenhof@gmail.com](mailto:wes.bredenhof@gmail.com)

# 2023 Anniversary Meeting and Convocation of CRTS



In gratitude to God, many gathered in the auditorium at Redeemer University in Ancaster for the 54<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meeting and 49<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary on September 8, 2023. Those who could not join in person at this location were able to join in online from around the world.

The festive evening began with a processional and opening song of praise to God after which the chairman of the board, Rev. John Louwerse, welcomed everyone. In prayer he gave thanks to God the Father for the many blessings which come from his Son Jesus Christ. One of those blessings is CRTS and its support of the cause of the gospel of God's grace. Gratitude was expressed for the completion of the work of Dr. Arjan de Visser and his entry into retirement and the arrival of Dr. Reuben Bredenhof and his installation as Professor of Ministry and Mission. The professors emeriti and their spouses and families were also remembered in prayer. In particular, gratitude was expressed for the service of Dr. N. H. Gootjes, whom the Lord God had recently taken home to glory, after many years of illness. His wife Dinie and their children

and grandchildren were commended into our Father's care for the time ahead.

After the opening prayer, excerpts from letters of encouragement and congratulations from a church in Canada and from a church in Australia were read and were received with thankfulness. Rev. Dirk Poppe, one of the deputies for the training for the ministry from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, was given an opportunity to speak. He expressed appreciation for the work of CRTS and the close relationship between the seminary and the churches in Australia.

## OUTGOING & INCOMING PROFS

The chairman read from Isaiah 54:1-5, a focal passage in the address of Dr. Arjan de Visser, the featured speaker of the evening. After the chairman officially declared the anniversary and convocation evening opened, the principal of the seminary, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, presented his annual report. You can read the contents of his address elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. He expressed



much gratitude for the completion of the renovations at CRTS. He noted the arrival of the new students for first year and was hoping that the new academic year which lay ahead would be a normal year. Following this encouraging report, all praise was given to our Father in heaven with the singing of Psalm 145:3, 4, 5.

The chairman of the board read the Form for the Installation for Faculty of CRTS. Dr. Reuben Bredenhof, who had been appointed by General Synod Guelph 2022, responded in the affirmative to the three questions posed in this form and was installed as Professor of Ministry and Mission at CRTS. Upon the reading of the Form of Subscription by the chairman, Dr. Bredenhof indicated his agreement by signing this form. Praise to our Lord for this joyous milestone was expressed with the words of Hymn 6:1.

Following the installation of the new Professor of Ministry and Mission, the retiring Professor of Ministry and Mission gave his address, which was entitled “Enlarge the place of your tent, do not hold back: Reflections on the missional calling of the Canadian

Reformed Churches.” You will find the full text of this speech elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. Dr. de Visser focused on the encouraging words of Isaiah 54:1–5. He concluded that these words did have missional significance and gave three suggestions on how the Canadian Reformed Churches could improve on “enlarging the place of our tent: and letting the curtains of our habitation be stretched out.”


## GRADUATION & FINANCIAL GIFTS

After singing from Psalm 87:1, 3, 5, the degree of Master of Divinity was conferred on Faustin Emadjeu, Caleb Kos, Matthias Schat, Timothy Slaa, Mark VanderLinde, and Adam Werkman. Mark VanderLinde spoke on behalf of the graduates. He expressed thankfulness first and foremost to God and then to others for receiving these years of instruction and seeing their work crowned with the granting of this degree.



The Woman's Saving Action gave a brief presentation of the work of collecting funds for the CRTS library. Thanks was expressed for the contributions which came in from congregations far and wide. Sister Janet Van Vliet presented the amount of fifty thousand dollars to the seminary library. Dr. Van Vliet expressed the seminary's gratitude for this valuable contribution by the sisters of the WSA.

The collection this evening was again for the Foreign Student Bursary—a fund that provides the necessary financial assistance to qualified foreign students who seek a Reformed theological education, but do not have sufficient financial resources themselves and their home church is not able to provide enough support either.

During this collection, a musical group of singers and those playing various instruments played and sang excerpts from Cantata 93 by J. S. Bach. Rev. James Slaa led in closing prayer, focusing on the future of the graduates and the work of the seminary in the upcoming year. As is customary, the assembly concluded with the robust singing of the national anthem "O Canada." After the program, everyone had an opportunity to congratulate six graduates and their wives and the new Professor of Ministry and Mission and his wife Rebecca. You are welcome to view a video version of the Seminary evening at [canadianreformedseminary.ca](http://canadianreformedseminary.ca). 



**John Louwerse**  
Minister and Chairman of CRTS  
Board of Governors  
Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church  
[pastor@cornerstonecanrc.org](mailto:pastor@cornerstonecanrc.org)





# Update from CRTS

JASON VAN VLIET

“Wow! So spacious! So bright and light! So well-laid out! What a change!” We have been hearing a lot of comments like that recently. The other day one person even said, “Trendy!”

Yes, you probably guessed it. These people are referring to our newly renovated facilities at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. It required patience, but in the end our heavenly Father has blessed it all. The lower level, with our classrooms and student lounge, is now more spacious, brighter, and functional than ever. We will have a very easy time settling into this new space. Thank-you to everyone for your support!

On Saturday, September 30, the church community was invited to an open house to have a look at the renovations for themselves. Over the years many people have said, “You know, I’ve never actually set foot inside our seminary.” Well, to begin with, if you are ever in the area, you are welcome to stop by any time. For most of the year, we are open from 8:30 to 4:30, and if

you stop by on Monday morning at 8:50 or Friday around 12:20, you can join us for chapel. We always welcome guests. And for those who are not in the area, please check out our website. We have a photo gallery under the “About” menu. By the time you read this, hopefully, it will be updated with new pictures and also a short virtual tour of our renovation project. If it’s not posted yet, please just check back in a few weeks.

## STUDENTS

We welcome four new students this year; three of them are in the Master of Divinity program and one will be in the Bachelor of Theology program. That puts our student body at twenty-nine full-time students. We are thankful for each of these students, and we pray that the Lord of the church will continue to send more men to CRTS to be trained for gospel ministry. Brothers have already been reaching out to us about beginning their studies

in the years to come. That is wonderful! But the need remains and grows. Please continue to discuss this in your families and congregations and above all, bring this need before the King of the church in prayer.

As a new year begins, we are also eager to hear about all the experiences that our students have had in their summer internships. Just to give you a little taste, our students went to preaching and pastoral internships in congregations located in towns and cities such as Smithers, Hamilton, Carman, Fergus, Grimsby, Elora, Lincoln, Guelph, and Baldivis. Other students went off on mission internships to places like Papua New Guinea, South Korea, and New York City. We are so grateful to all the ministers and missionaries who served as internship mentors and helped our students gain such valuable practical experience.

## FACULTY & STAFF


The Lord continues to give faculty and staff health and strength to fulfill their daily tasks and we are grateful for this. By all accounts, the transition in the department of Ministry and Mission is going well. After almost twenty years behind the lectern, Dr. Arjan de Visser has stepped aside and Dr. Reuben Bredenhof is stepping into his area of teaching. We wish both brothers the Lord's blessing.

Our thoughts and our prayers are also very much with the Gootjes family. On August 20, 2023, the Lord took Professor Nicolaas H. Gootjes into eternal glory. On the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ, he entered the heavenly house, not made by human hands. We remain deeply appreciative of the many years of faithful instruction that he gave at CRTS and, prior to that, in South Korea.

## A BRIEF PEEK AHEAD

Here at CRTS everyone is looking for a “normal” year without too many extras. After approximately two years of COVID restrictions and one year of renovations, it is time for some *regular* at CRTS. At the same time, we do not want to sit on our own laurels, so we have various initiatives and improvements in mind for the coming year(s):

- In addition to the regular courses, we are in the process of organizing a January Interim Semester in 2024 which will focus on preaching. We have recently adopted more specific and clear guidelines for a four-year cycle of January Interims, which will focus on preaching, cross-cultural missions, pastoral care, and church planting.
- We plan to improve and refresh our website, especially developing new webpages that we hope will be informative and inspirational for prospective students. Our physical facilities are fresh and renewed. Now it's time for our digital space to receive some TLC.
- We are making further improvements to our Spiritual Formation Program, which has been in place for a number of years already. Ministers and missionaries need to be able to understand, explain, and proclaim God's Holy Word, but they also need to be godly men who are growing in the spiritual virtues that are fitting for a servant of the Lord: humility, steadfastness, wisdom, and purity in speech and conduct, among others. Through prayer, mentorship, and discussing good books, faculty and students at CRTS seek to encourage and challenge each other to “adorn the doctrine of God with a godly life” (Form for Ordination of Ministers of the Word).

Finally, from everyone at CRTS, our sincere gratitude to our entire supporting community in the churches, not only here in Canada, but also in Australia, South Africa, Korea, and other countries as well. It is such a blessing to have a seminary of the churches for the churches. Under the Lord's blessing may CRTS prosper in serving our Lord and our churches for years to come. 



**Jason Van Vliet**

Principal and Professor of Dogmatics  
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary  
[jvanvliet@crtcs.ca](mailto:jvanvliet@crtcs.ca)

# Enlarge the Place of Your Tent Do Not Hold Back

*Reflections on the missional calling of the Canadian Reformed Churches*

ARJAN DE VISSER

The year was 1792, the occasion was a meeting of Baptist ministers in England, the venue was the Baptist chapel in Nottingham, the speaker was William Carey. Six months earlier, Carey had published a pamphlet entitled “An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens.” It was a missionary manifesto, culminating in a call to action. Specifically, Carey had called for the establishment of a missionary society that would send out missionaries to other parts of the world.

Half a year had passed, and nothing happened. But now William Carey was invited to deliver a sermon at the ministerial conference, and he used the opportunity to preach a missionary sermon. His text was an unusual one: Isaiah 54:2-3: “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine

habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left.”

Based on this text, Carey preached a powerful message, summarized in the famous exhortation: *Expect great things from God! Attempt great things for God!* Once again, Carey exhorted his colleagues to do something and establish a missionary society. The brothers were impressed. The prospect of starting a missionary society seemed daunting, but Carey’s sermon and leadership led to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society. Not long after, Carey himself was sent out as a missionary to India where he spent the rest of his life spreading the gospel, translating the Bible, planting churches, and indeed, attempting great things for God.

The manuscript of Carey’s sermon has been lost. It would have been interesting to see how he explained Isaiah 54. Be that as it

may, we do have the words of Isaiah. Let's explore these words and see if indeed it has something to say about mission work today.

## ISAIAH 54

Let's listen to the text again: "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities."

Enlarging the tent: it is an image that we can relate to. Many of us go camping, and we know that a tent can become too small. As a young couple, you can manage with a small tent. But as the family grows, you need more space. So, you upgrade from a two-person to a six-person tent. And perhaps, after some more years and more blessings, you need a large family tent. There are twelve-person and even twenty-person tents on the market.

Our text contains a call and a promise. The call: enlarge the place of your tent, do not hold back. The promise: you will spread abroad to the right and to the left. What did it mean back then and what does it mean today? Let me point out three things.

First, this is a message of forgiveness and reconciliation for God's people, the people of Israel. It is important to keep in mind that this message comes right after Isaiah 53, the well-known prophecy about the Servant of the LORD. God's people had been punished by God because of their unfaithfulness. But God remains faithful to his covenant. He still loves his people, and he promises to have compassion on them. Verse 8: "In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer." This compassion will work itself out in such a way what the LORD will settle his people in the promised land. They will prosper and flourish there. Their towns and villages will be full of people, so much so, that they will have to build new extensions. You will need to enlarge your tent, the LORD tells his people.

Second, this prophecy does not just relate to the people of Israel. It also says something about the nations: "Your offspring will possess the nations" (v. 3). Now, this might sound like a promise that they will drive out the nations and take possession of their towns and their lands. That is indeed part of it, but there is more to be said. Consider what it says in the next chapter, Isaiah 55: "Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you" (v. 5). In other words, when Isaiah is telling God's people that they should enlarge their tents because there will be more and more people that need a place to live, he is not just thinking about the people of Israel, but he is





---

## *Expect great things from God! Attempt great things for God!*

---

also thinking about the Gentiles who will be coming from the east and from the west to join themselves to God's people.

Third, this interpretation is confirmed in the New Testament. In Galatians 4, the apostle Paul quotes from Isaiah 54 and claims the prophecy has been fulfilled in the reality that both Jews and Gentiles are included among God's people. In that chapter he speaks about two Jerusalems: one on earth and one in heaven. The Jerusalem on earth is for Jews only, and Paul says she is in slavery with her children. The Jerusalem above, however, is free. She is for Jews and Gentiles, all those who believe in Jesus Christ.

We can draw conclusions now. Isaiah 54:2–3 is indeed a prophecy that can be used for a missionary sermon. Considering the context of Isaiah, and in light of all the Scriptures, we understand that the Servant of the LORD (our Lord Jesus Christ) was going to be Saviour not just for the Jewish people but for the Gentiles as well. The tent needed to be enlarged because the nations were going to be included among God's people.

For the New Testament church this meant that they needed to make room for the inclusion of believers from the Gentiles. Think of the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading Isaiah 53, came to faith, and was baptized by the evangelist Philip. Think of the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem, meeting to discuss the question whether believers from the Gentiles needed to be circumcised or not (Acts 15). Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they decided that no such burden should be laid on believers from the Gentiles. And so, the tent was enlarged. The church of Christ spread abroad to the right and to the left, thus fulfilling the promises given to the patriarchs and the prophecies spoken by the prophets. If we consider the history of mission work, how the church spread around the globe, and how the church is still spreading east and west, north and south, we understand that Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled and is still being fulfilled in ways that the original hearers could not have imagined.

William Carey got it right: Isaiah 54:2–3 can indeed profitably be used for a missionary sermon. But now we need to move on and ask the question: Does this prophecy still have implications for us today? Is there still a sense in which the tent should be enlarged, even today? William Carey made the application that a missionary society needed to be established in order that missionaries could be sent out to the nations. What kind of application should we make today? Is there still for us a call to "enlarge the tent" or is the tent big enough?

In the remainder of my speech, I am going to focus on the Canadian Reformed Churches, since these are the churches that I have come to know and to love during the nineteen years that I have served here in Canada. I'm going to argue that there is indeed a need to enlarge the tent. I have three practical suggestions.

### SUGGESTIONS

My first suggestion has to do with foreign mission. I suggest that we should expand our organizational model for doing foreign mission. Let me explain. Our churches are working with a model that is very decentralized. While most other denominations have a layered structure with a federational mission board as well as local boards, the foreign mission projects of the Canadian Reformed Churches are managed by a handful of individual churches (Toronto, Hamilton, Aldergrove, etc.). We can be thankful for the efforts of these churches and their mission boards, and we recognize that the Lord has blessed the work in places like Brazil, PNG, and China. However, I would suggest that there are two main problems with our current model. First, it makes it hard to build up expertise. Our mission boards are made up of volunteers and it is hard to develop expertise in coaching missionaries in the field. Second, our system makes it hard to start new initiatives or respond to current needs and opportunities around the globe. Our foreign mission efforts have become stagnant. We have been doing the same thing for the last thirty years. There has been very little movement or new initiative. I would argue that the time has come that we should enlarge the tent. A good way to do that would be for a general synod to appoint a standing committee for foreign mission work, and let this committee be given the mandate to employ someone—perhaps part-time—as a foreign mission consultant. This is a model that is used by the URCNA and the OPC and others, and it has been a blessing for their mission projects. More could be said, but I will do that in articles that I plan to submit for publication in *Clarion*.

My second suggestion is that we should consider using the position of "exhorter" in mission situations, both on the foreign mission field and here at home. What is an exhorter? It is a brother who is licensed to preach and lead worship even though he did not come through the M.Div. program at seminary. The position of exhorter is not mentioned in the Church Order, but it is well-known from the history of Reformed churches (the Dutch name was *oefenaar*). Some Reformed federations still have the position today, for example the Free Reformed Churches in North America.

It seems to me that we are already using this position for the work in Mexico where br. Scott Bredenhof has received permission to preach and lead worship. I think we can also consider using the position here in Canada for brothers from other countries who have gifts to edify their own immigrant communities here in Canada, but for whom it is not possible to come to the seminary here in Hamilton and do a full-fledged M.Div. program. In other words, let's consider using the position of exhorter as a way to enlarge the tent and create room for the spreading of the gospel.

My third suggestion has to do with the reality that Canada has become a country that receives immigrants and refugees from other parts of the world: people from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Africa, etc. According to Statistics Canada, we received more than 430,000 new people in 2022. In addition to this, the number of international students has tripled during the last decade and is expected to reach 900,000 this year. If you have been following the news, you know that this influx of new people puts quite a strain on the housing market. Politicians are looking for solutions. Premier Doug Ford, to mention just one example, is looking to "enlarge the tent" by using parts of the greenbelt.


Our churches are affected by this influx of new people as well. I'm seeing it in my own church, Cornerstone here in Hamilton. I'm hearing the same thing from other congregations in urban areas across the country. Everywhere there are stories of people from Africa, the Middle East, India, Pakistan, Southeast Asia, showing up in our worship services, eager to hear the gospel. The Lord is sending these people to us. We need to welcome them and develop strategies that, by God's grace, they can find a home among us.

To summarize, then, I have three suggestions for enlarging the tent: 1) Let a general synod appoint a standing committee for foreign missions, 2) let's make use of the position of exhorter in mission situations, 3) let's make room for immigrants, refugees, and students coming in from other countries. May the Lord grant us the wisdom and the love that is needed to make this happen, and may he bless our efforts.

## PERSONAL

Allow me to end on a personal note. Nineteen years ago, I experienced my first Convocation evening. I remember having to sign a form under the watchful eye of Rev. Jack Moesker, who was chairman of the board at the time. With me on stage were the four graduates of that year: Reuben Bredenhof, Albert Gootjes, Pila Njuka, and Ian Wildeboer. I consider it a blessing to share the stage with Reuben again this evening, myself as outgoing professor, and Reuben as incoming professor. I am thankful for the Lord's guidance in this. I'm very happy to pass on the baton to Reuben and I wish him the Lord's blessing as he takes up his task as Professor of Ministry and Mission.

During my first year as a professor, we had about ten students. During my last year, we had thirty-five. The Lord has been pleased to use this institute. He made us go through some serious challenges, but we have always experienced his kindness. At the personal level as well, I'm thankful for the blessings of the Lord which I have experienced through the years. I have experienced his love and faithfulness in many ways: the collegiality of my colleagues, the support of the staff, the patience of the students, the support of the church community in general, and especially the loving support of my wife.

It has been a great blessing to see dozens of young men come through the seminary program and seeing them grow and develop into men who are able and willing to serve the Lord and his church in the world. From this place, I salute them all. It is my prayer that they will be instrumental in enlarging the place of the tent and the stretching out of the habitations of the Lord's people. 



**Arjan de Visser**

Professor Emeritus of Ministry and Mission  
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary  
[arjan.devisser@gmail.com](mailto:arjan.devisser@gmail.com)

# Collecting in Faith

## *Presentation of the Women's Savings Action*

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Board and Faculty, Graduates, and Guests,

Imagine for a moment someone who does *not* know about our seminary, does *not* know about our churches, but *does* know a lot about budgets and business models. And imagine that this person took a peek at the budget of our seminary library and discovered that the funds for the library relied almost entirely on freewill donations to meet their budget . . . *every year again*. What would this financial expert think of that? Well, to be honest, he probably would not think much of it! According to any sound business model, that approach is unreliable and doesn't actually make sense.

Then again, how often do campaigns done in faith make sense? Therein lies the beauty.

Despite the trends, the world's financial instabilities, the me-culture, and the numerous causes God's people are called to support, the WSA continues to be amazed by the fact that the annual budget for the library is always met through the freewill donations of congregations across this country and beyond. The library continues to be blessed through faithful representatives and our donors; those that hold the seminary dear to their hearts. Ministers of the Word continue to be educated and have access to a well-equipped library with resources that are even utilized by other students in other universities. (We are reaching more than just our own!)

Once again, we give thanks to our Heavenly Father for answering our prayers. He has blessed the work of the Women's Savings Action, enabling our sixty-seven WSA representatives to go about their work unhindered. He gives individual members of each church that value the blessing of our seminary library. Under his blessing, \$46,948.43 was collected in 2023.

Thank you to our energetic and faithful representatives who work heartily for the Lord, pouring out their love for him in this work. Many thanks to our supporting congregations, for your generosity shown towards the seminary.

We are so thankful for the miracle that God continues to work out in our simple, unreliable financial business model. To him be the praise alone, as the Women's Savings Action pledges \$50,000 this year in support of the seminary library! **C**



# Confessions

## on Church/State Relations

OTTO BOUWMAN

As I made preparations to attend the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) in Edinburgh earlier this year, included in the materials was a Report of the Committee on the Establishment Principle in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Undoubtedly, the matter of church/state relations has been one of particular interest to many Christians around the world in the past few years. The report and discussions at the Assembly raised numerous questions. As this article will make clear, though understandings related to church/state relations have been changing over the years, we have not yet arrived at a place where unanimity of opinion is evident.

### SCOTLAND WCF 23.3

The Establishment Principle, which has long been one of the key doctrines of the FCS, is that the state must recognize the authority of Christ, and consequently also recognize Christianity as the national religion, and protect and promote the Christian (Protestant) faith. It is articulated in the FCS's confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), in Article 23.3:

The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in wor-

ship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.

Note that it is the responsibility of the state to defend “the truth of God” and to ensure that heresies are suppressed. The WCF was put together by the divines (i.e. ministers and theologians) in 1647 and subsequently ratified by the English Parliament in 1649 and 1690. Leaders from both the church and state were agreed that the Protestant Reformation was to continue to shape their world. In line with historical precedent, during the 2023 Assembly, an emissary of King Charles III, the Lord High Commissioner, arrived and brought greetings to the commissioners from His Majesty.

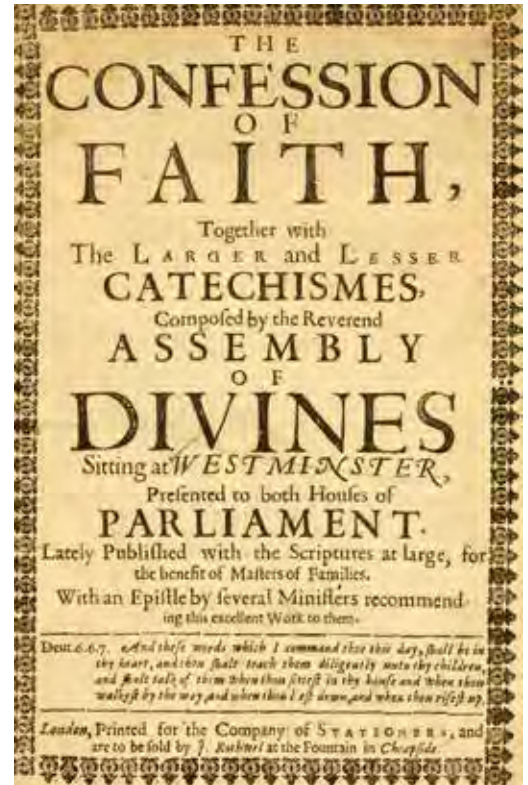
Why was the Establishment Principle on the 2023 General Assembly's docket? A few years ago, a committee was struck to have another look at this key denominational doctrine. Members had observed that Scotland was becoming less and less Christian and increasingly secular. In a twenty-first century context, how should the Establishment Principle be understood? How should it be put into practice?

In the committee's report, the observation was shared that:

The first duty of His Majesty the King on his Accession was to take and subscribe to the Oath relating to the



The Covenanters Memorial, Grassmarket, Edinburgh.



security of the Church of Scotland, which guarantees the “Settlement of the true Protestant Religion as established by the Laws made in Scotland.” The oath, which has been taken by every Monarch going back to 1689, guarantees the position of the Protestant faith as a form of national expression. It is the ceremonial law giving voice to the Establishment Principle.

Just a few weeks before the Assembly, coronation ceremonies had taken place for King Charles III in London’s Westminster Abbey. The new king had publicly identified as a true Protestant and pledged to uphold the Protestant faith.

The committee’s report to the Assembly was brief. They requested a year’s extension to fulfill their mandate. They realized that the topic of church/state relations was a multi-faceted one and more research had to be conducted and more discussions needed to take place. There was no hint that the Establishment Principle should no longer be upheld; it is one of the distinctives of the FCS. Though during discussion a few commissioners expressed skepticism that the committee would be able to untangle the Gordian knot and provide clarity in a 2024 report, the committee’s request was granted; they are to report back next year.

### UNITED STATES WCF 23.3

One might wonder what an American church like the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) would have to say on the topic. The OPC rendition of the WCF contains a very different looking Article 23.3:

Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be



Abraham Kuyper.

suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance.

The almost complete rewrite of this article was the work of the Presbyterian Church in the USA in 1789. During the heady days following the American War of Independence, many American Presbyterians had little stomach for the understanding that the civil magistrates had responsibility vis-à-vis a particular denomination of churches. One of the reasons emigrants from Europe had fled to the colonies was to practice freedom of religion; it follows that colonists wanted to articulate a confessional understanding that it was the responsibility of the civil magistrate to allow freedom of religion. Jews, Roman Catholics, Quakers, Presbyterians, Reformed, and others should all be allowed to freely practice their faith. The civil magistrates were to “stay in their lane” and not “interfere in matters of faith.” The OPC inherited this revision, along with several other ones, since it descended from the Presbyterian Church USA.

The contrast between the FCS and OPC versions of the WCF is substantial. The former says the civil magistrate is to ensure that the Protestant faith is defended and promoted; the latter compares

the civil magistrate to a “nursing father” who gives no preferential treatment to anyone, but who creates an environment in which all are free to practice their religion.

## REFORMED CHURCHES AND THE BELGIC CONFESSION

Many readers of this magazine will recall that Article 36 of our Belgic Confession contains echoes of this confessional non-alignment. In 1900, Article 36 included the following paragraph:

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. For that purpose he has placed the sword in the hand of the government to punish wrongdoers and to protect those who do what is good (Rom 13:4). Their task of restraining and sustaining is not limited to the public order but includes the protection of the church and its ministry in order that *all idolatry and false worship may be removed and prevented, the kingdom of antichrist may be destroyed, the kingdom of Christ may come, the Word of the gospel may be preached everywhere, and God may be honoured and served by everyone, as he requires in his Word* (italics added).

In 1905, the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands removed the words in italics from the confession and relegated them to a footnote below the confession. The Canadian Reformed Churches inherited this revision, since we descended from those Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands, one of the leading proponents of making the change was Abraham Kuyper, who in 1905 was completing his first (and only) term as Prime Minister of the country. Kuyper had an extraordinary level of influence in his country and in the churches at the time and promoted a freedom-of-religion understanding. When he advocated for public funding of Christian schools, for example, he insisted that funding should be granted to all different kinds of Christian schools; he did not want the power of the state used to favour a particular type of education on Dutch citizens.

In the Christian Reformed Churches in North America during the early decades of the twentieth century, significant reservations about the words in italics were also expressed. Unhappiness was evident about the “Constantinian language” of the original



Assertion of Liberty of Conscience by the Independents of the Westminster Assembly of Divines 1644.

article. Finally, in 1958, Synod adopted a substantial revision of the article, in which Constantinian language references were removed. The United Reformed Churches inherited this revision. Not surprisingly, differences of wording and understandings of Article 36 continue to exist amongst Reformed churches in North America today.

### RPCNA

It may be of interest to note how the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) has dealt with this matter. Discussions about the relationship church-state have been divisive in North American Presbyterianism; various Presbyterian traditions are distinguished by their understanding of this matter. The RPCNA does not adhere to the Establishment Principle. As their website states:

Reformed Presbyterians have also been referred to historically as Covenanters because of their identification with public covenanting in Scotland, beginning in the 16th

century. This act was a protest for Christ's crown rights over the state and the recognition of Christ as King over the Church without interference from the government.

Nonetheless, the RPCNA has not changed the text of the WCF as it was articulated by the Westminster divines in 1647. So, they are left in a curious position in which they have a confessional document, but they do not embrace a particular component of it.

Instead, the RPCNA has adopted a parallel document, known as the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony. This document stands alongside the church's confession. It gives explanations, a few rejections, and addresses minor points of doctrine and topics that were not part of the landscape when the document was originally formulated. In connection with Article 23.3 (using the same version as the FCS has), the Testimony states:

We reject the portion of paragraph 3 after the colon. [The RPCNA rendition has a colon instead of a semi-colon after the phrase "or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven."—OJB] Both the government of the nation and

the government of the visible church are established by God. Though distinct and independent of each other, they both owe supreme allegiance to Jesus Christ. The governments of church and state differ in sphere of authority in that due submission to the government of the visible church is the obligation of members thereof, while due submission to civil government is the obligation of all men. The governments of church and state also have different functions and prerogatives in the advancement of the Kingdom of God. The means of enforcement of the civil government are physical, while those of church government are not. Neither government has the right to invade or assume the authority of the other. They should cooperate to the honor and glory of God, while maintaining their separate jurisdictions.

To say in the Testimony: “We reject the portion of the paragraph after the colon” is quite something! The bulk of the paragraph has thereby been discarded! Though questions have been asked about the precise status of the Testimony in the RPCNA, I can appreciate the intent. There is clarity of what the church regards as truth. Though they are reluctant to amend a historical document like the WCF, they also want to keep things real and relevant.

As the RPCNA example makes clear, some churches have found it appropriate to provide more clarity than their confession literally states. Already in 1846 the General Assembly of Scotland’s Free Church had something to say about a perceived intolerance that was thought to come from the Establishment Principle as articulated in WCF 23.3. It also distanced itself from any principles “inconsistent with liberty of conscience and the right of private judgement” (Act XII, 1846).

### “MINOR POINTS OF DOCTRINE”

As our General Synod Guelph 2022 considered a proposal to amend Article 50 of the Church Order, it noted input from the churches about a proposed new wording. Previously (and currently) Article 50 included the sentence: “On minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice churches abroad shall not be rejected.” The new suggested sentence read as follows: “Minor differences on points of doctrine, worship and governance should not be an obstacle to entering into ecumenical relationships with these churches.” The proposal for General Synod’s consideration was to expand the concept of minor points from Church Order and ecclesiastical practice to also include minor points of doctrine.


Some churches expressed significant reservations about the phrase “minor points of doctrine.”

As this article makes clear, it is possible to have significant differences about a “minor point” of doctrine. Churches on either side of the Atlantic have considerable differences in their adopted confessions about church/state relations. Though the topic has long been a tremendously important one, and disagreements about it have cost people their lives, yet in the end, this should be understood as a “minor point of doctrine.” Different articulations about church/state relations should not get in the way of practicing Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

Even for our own churches, there is an intriguing question that could still be asked about our own Belgic Confession in this regard: What is the precise status of the words which were removed in 1905? What is the relevance of the footnote? Are those words part of the church’s doctrine?

### THE LAST WORD

Guido de Brès wrote the Belgic Confession as a defense of the Reformed faith in the face of intense persecution. After writing the document, he threw it over the castle wall with the request that it be read by King Philip II. The king would not have agreed with much of the content of the document, including the matter of church/state relations.

Notice how de Brès ends his confession. He reminds the civil magistrate of a profound truth: in the end, God will judge. The cause of the faithful and elect “at present condemned as heretical and evil by many judges and civil authorities—will be recognized as the cause of the Son of God.” The author has one last reference to the civil magistrates in the closing words of the document, reminding them, and all readers, that whatever tensions, disagreements, and even conflicts that emerge from warped understandings related to church/state relations will be perfectly and ultimately addressed by the supreme Judge in the end. Jesus Christ will have the last word. 



**Otto Bouwman**  
*Member of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations*  
Principal  
Credo Christian Elementary School  
[ottojbouwman@gmail.com](mailto:ottojbouwman@gmail.com)



www.merf.org

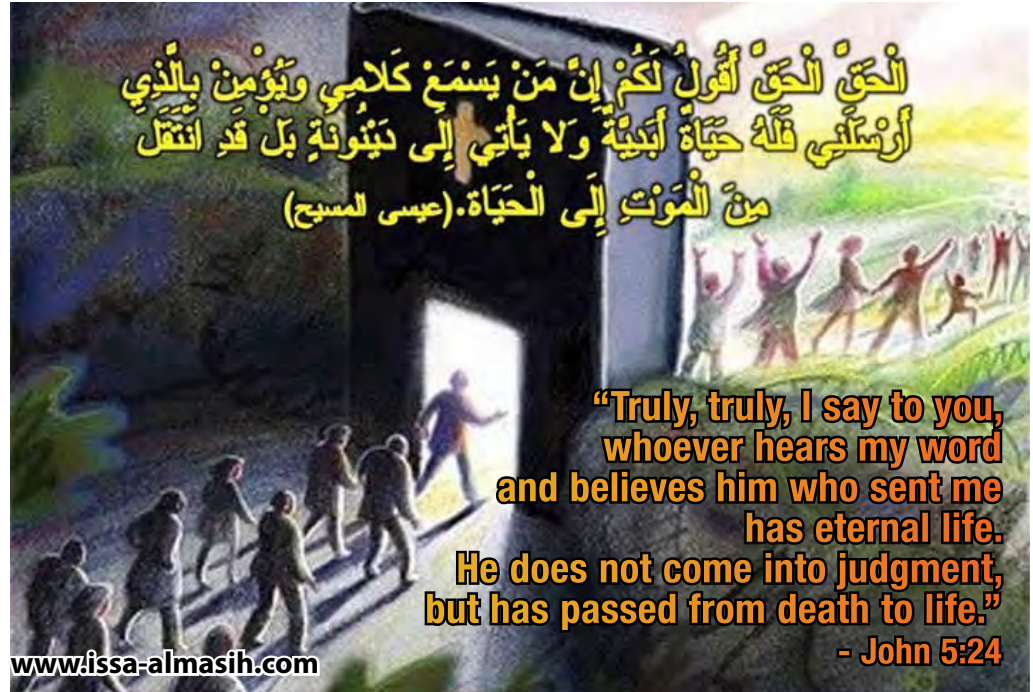


## Arab Youth -- Looking for Answers

By Pastor Victor Atallah

**M**ERF's Arabic Media Ministries focus on reaching Arab youth. The objective is clear - attract them to Christ. The strategy is to provoke serious thinking and so, carefully challenge the deeply held Islamic world and life view. However, a major complication faces the team. It is the fact that to the Muslim mind, generally, the West represents “Christianity.” Recent social, ethical and religious developments in Western nations, especially about gender, raise serious questions about what “Christianity” truly stands for.

Some influential Islamic writers happily point to modern Western culture to claim that “Christianity” corrupts the morals of individuals and even whole societies, contributing to the destruction of family life. They point to statements adopted by Western



www.issa-almasih.com

church bodies and religious leaders endorsing things such as gay marriage and sex-change surgeries.

### Church Leaders Rebuked

In this vein, recently, an English bishop claimed that there is a serious problem with Jesus' teaching in the Lord's prayer, because Jesus calls God “Father.” Interestingly, prominent UK Muslim clergymen convincingly responded. In an online interview, one said that the bishop was not a true follower of Christ! He added: “It is my

moral duty to tell the truth that Jesus the Christ's teaching is both heavenly and infallible.”

### Christ's Heavenly Teaching

So, there is an intersection with Islamic thinking which provides an excellent starting point to share the gospel. This is exactly the emphasis of MERF's Arabic media team. All are deeply committed to God's Word and to reaching their neighbors with the gospel. So, every opportunity is used to make clear that today's Western cultures and norms have betrayed

their Christian roots. They are ready to “... destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” (2 Cor 10:5)

The Arabic team bears witness via three websites and related social media: *Dardasha7.com*, *Issa-almasih.com* and *MERF-Arabiclibrary.com*.



Pastor Victor Atallah

**MERF-Canada**

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

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

[www.merf.org/support](http://www.merf.org/support)  
e-transfers:  
[merfcanada@gmail.com](mailto:merfcanada@gmail.com)



Dardasha7.com - Did you know?

**Dardasha7** presents the gospel in a somewhat indirect fashion. In Arabic, “dardasha” means informal chatting, a conversation. The *Dardasha7* website has audio radio programs, articles and other materials on various topics. It interactively deals with different aspects of life that concern people as a means to introduce the gospel. Subjects include: faith, doubt, marriage, divorce, family life, education, health, medical care,

employment, crime, addiction and more. Visitors are encouraged to express their views, make suggestions or ask questions.

**I s s a - almasih** is more direct.

It openly focuses on the life, teaching and redemptive work of Christ. The website includes audio recordings of gospel messages prepared specifically for Muslims. It also has audio recordings of Scriptural passages which focus on sinful man’s desperate need for God’s saving initiative in Christ. It too invites website visitors to interact.

**MERF-arabiclibrary** provides sound Christian literature free-

ly in digital form. It meets the needs of pastors, evangelists, Sunday school teachers and others who look for biblical, theological and other Christian

resources.

**Responses:**

S.E.Z. is a professor of political science in a private university. He says that he became increasingly disenchanted “with all forms of religion.” He especially resents mixing religion with politics. He became attracted to study the life and teaching of Christ in the four gospels. He came to a very firm conclusion about Christ. He wrote: “Christ alone uniquely presents a life-changing alternative to all religion... In fact, Christ challenges and does away with all religions. I am at peace surrendering my life to his leading and I now know that he secures my way to heaven...”

A.A.R. practices law in a major Arab city. He says: “My wife and I were having marriage problems. She took our baby daughter and went to live with the family of her older sister. Some friends and relatives were encouraging me to divorce her or at least marry a second wife as allowed by my religion. By coincidence I came across an online radio program. I was surprised by what it said about God’s plan for marriage in the Christian Scriptures. I had never heard this before. As I learned more from the ‘Injeel’ (New Testament) not just my views, but my



Arabiclibrary.com - Redemption Accomplished and Applied by John Murray

whole attitude changed. I decided to meet with my wife to share this with her... Now she too says that she wants to follow Jesus...”

Iman (Arabic for “Faith”) is a university student, of nominal Christian background. She says: “I love the Bible teaching you present. It has taught me what being Christian is all about.”

A **9-minute video presentation** on MERF’s Arabic Media Ministries is available online:

<https://merf.org/amm>



Issa-alMasih.com - Fundamentals of Faith

# CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 36

## THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Do you watch TV sometimes? Do you ever feel a little funny when you hear someone take God's name in vain? That is good! Don't ever get comfortable with people swearing! The Lord does not like it when people swear. In fact, the third commandment is all about being very careful and respectful with God's name. You see, God is very holy. We may use his name when we pray or sing to him. We may use God's name when we speak about him too. But we may never, ever use God's name to swear. We should not even let someone around us swear! And that also includes people talking on TV. So, we should ask for the Holy Spirit to give us strength to turn the TV off when we hear people swearing.

Another word for taking God's name in vain is blaspheming. (Maybe ask Dad or Mom how to say that word.) The first sentence of Answer 99 in the BOOK OF PRAISE talks about other actions that God sees as swearing. To remind ourselves of how serious these sins are, put those actions somewhere along the word blaspheme.

B  
L  
A  
S  
P  
H  
E  
M  
E

### UNSCRAMBLE THE WORDS FOR THIS TEXT THAT TELLS US HOW WE SHOULD USE OUR WORDS.

And whatever you do, in [dorw] \_\_\_\_\_ or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving [ahknst] \_\_\_\_\_ to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)



### 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](mailto:deboerca@gmail.com) and find your question and an answer in Clarion!

AMANDA DEBOER




## THE URGENCY OF THE ANTITHESIS

*Dear Editor,*

With interest, I read the September 1, 2023 *Clarion* articles on the antithesis (“No Napping Now!” and “The Great Divide.”) I took note that in both articles the urgency was to remain alert and to be prepared for battle; to remain uneasy in the world. That made me think about the antithesis, with its close connection to the doctrine of election and reprobation, and how its teaching impacts the mission of the church.

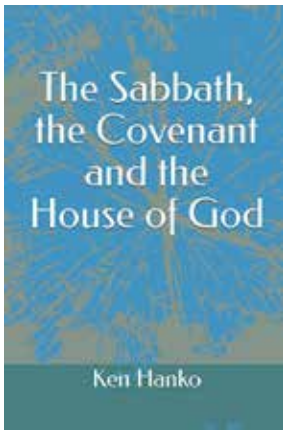
The Canons of Dort teach us that election and reprobation is a doctrine of assurance for the believer, and not one of anxiety or defense (I 14). The omniscient view of the unfolding of human history provides both clarity and comfort in trying times. At the same time, it still allows us to sift out the benefits of efforts that are not rooted in Christ, whether in our local communities or on a global scale. For example: the United Nations providing a forum for leaders of the world to work together in crisis, a World Health Organization monitoring and sharing valuable information and guidance during a pandemic, or a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation working hard to eradicate polio from the world. Even locally, we may work with our neighbours in fostering well-being in the community, even when they cannot maintain a neutral position towards God. We find our peace in the world knowing that God rules over it all in his good pleasure.

I wonder if the teaching of the antithesis has inadvertently alienated us from the world around us with clear and sharp lines drawn so that we have forfeited opportunities to share the love of God in Jesus Christ. After all, our distinction as children of God by grace is not intended to separate us from our neighbours, but through our godly walk, to win them for Christ (LD 32). Could it be that our awareness of the antithesis makes our missional engagement more urgent? Perhaps, another article? 

*With kind regards,*

*Rick Ludwig*

*Streetlight Christian Church*



## THE SABBATH STILL MATTERS

*The Sabbath, the Covenant and the House of God*, Ken Hanko. (Self-published, 2022). Softcover. 45 pages. \$6.51 CDN.

It was Sunday August 3, 1924 in Jamestown, Michigan. Pastor Henry Wierenga hadn't even been the minister of the Jamestown Christian Reformed Church for four years. Back in those days, every Christian Reformed Church had a morning and an evening service. In the second service, it was the custom to listen to a sermon based on the Heidelberg Catechism. On that Sunday Wierenga was at Lord's Day 38.

In his sermon, he said the Sabbath commandment wasn't applicable in the New Testament era. Wierenga maintained that Sunday had no special status in the New Testament and it wasn't to be seen as a replacement of the Jewish Sabbath from the Old Testament. Christ had fulfilled the Sabbath, which was entirely ceremonial. The Fourth Commandment has no moral requirement for Christians today. Therefore, he said, Christians are under no obligation to regard the day as special. They might still *choose* to worship on this day, but every day was equally holy. If one desired, one could certainly work on Sunday or do anything that one might do any other day of the week.

Wierenga's consistory didn't like what they were hearing. The elders completely disagreed with their minister. The matter was brought to a classis. Eventually he was suspended and deposed.

Here we are nearly one hundred years later, and observance of the Lord's Day is under even greater pressure from all sides. After governments capitulated to the pressure to allow full and free Sunday commerce, many Christians conveniently discovered that there are only nine commandments that apply to us today. To keep the fourth commandment today isn't only counter-cultural vis-à-vis the world, but often with those who profess to be Christians too.

With all this pressure, more than ever we need sound biblical studies like this one by Ken Hanko. The author served as an elder in the now-defunct American Reformed Church in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. Prior to that he had also served as a pastor with the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. He is an experienced teacher, a knowledgeable Bible scholar, and an eminently clear writer.

Hanko's short treatise punches well above its weight. It's an example of what's called biblical theology. Biblical theology takes a theme and explores how it unfolds in Scripture. Hanko's theme is obviously the Sabbath, and he explores how it was revealed, how it relates to covenant theology, and to the tabernacle. In addition, he explains how the Sabbath functioned as a sign of the covenant. The book concludes with a chapter on "The Blessings of Sabbath Observance," focusing on two passages from Isaiah.

I commend Hanko's approach for its success in not falling to one extreme or the other. On the one hand, there are legalistic approaches to the Fourth Commandment which disconnect it from God's redemptive work. But on the other hand, there are the lax and indifferent approaches which don't take it seriously as God's will. Hanko emphasizes that the main purpose of the Sabbath is worship. God prohibits work, but that rest isn't the main purpose. He also stresses that we have to avoid another error: deciding that as little worship as possible is best. He writes, "We emphasize physical rest and downplay spiritual rest. So, we diligently attend church for an hour or two and do not work, but then we use the rest of the day for our own pleasure" (p. 44).

This isn't an academic book, and the writing should be accessible to everybody. It will be especially helpful for pastors, elders, and Bible teachers. However, even though it doesn't come with study questions, I think it could also be profitably used by Bible study groups. If you need something to study over the course of about four weeks, I highly recommend Ken Hanko's *The Sabbath, the Covenant and the House of God*.



**Wes Bredenhof**

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston

[bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca)



## COUNTERCULTURAL ADVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

*Do Not Be True to Yourself: Countercultural Advice for the Rest of Your Life*,  
by Kevin DeYoung. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023).  
Softcover. 66 pages. \$10.99 CDN.

This is one of those books to keep in mind when it comes to gifts for graduation or profession of faith. It's biblical wisdom directly addressed to young people. The author's clear and engaging writing style will keep their attention—along with the fact that it's on the shorter side.

Dr. Kevin DeYoung is the senior pastor of a PCA congregation in North Carolina. He also teaches systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte. He's written many books, articles, and blog posts. I have a simple rule for DeYoung's books: if I see one, I buy it. With this book, the rule has again been proven correct.

*Do Not Be True to Yourself* is a collection of sermons and commencement speeches directed to young men and women. In the introduction, DeYoung writes, "If there is a theme that holds the chapters together it is the simple exhortation to serve God faithfully and counterculturally in the next season of your life" (p. xii). While the intended audience is mainly younger folks, the advice in this little book can really benefit anyone of any age.

Chapter 3 addresses the trend of young people going off to university or college and then becoming lax about church attendance. This chapter especially stood out to me because it's addressing a problem that's multi-generational. DeYoung convincingly demonstrates from Scripture that the church can't be optional for a Christian. He quotes John Stott: "An unchurched Christian is a grotesque anomaly. The New Testament knows nothing of such a person. For the church lies at the very center of the

eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought" (p. 23). Quite right! At the end of the chapter DeYoung writes: "If you want to be much less of a follower of Jesus Christ five years from now, make church marginal in your life. If you make church an afterthought, you won't be thinking about centering your life on Jesus five years from now" (pp. 27–28). That's the kind of approach elders could bring to home visits to both old and young: "Do you want to be more or less of a follower of Jesus Christ five years from now? If more, how is that going to happen? What are *you* going to do to make it happen?"

One last thing I appreciate about the book is the appendix entitled, Twelve Old(ish) Books to Read When You're Young. DeYoung writes, "Talk to almost any mature, vibrant Christians, and they will tell you about Christian books that have been instrumental in their lives. In fact, one of the best indications I've seen of the Spirit's work in someone's life is that he (or she) develops a newfound love of reading" (p. 57). The list includes books by (among others) John Calvin, Herman Bavinck, and R. C. Sproul. I'd be happy to second that list—and add DeYoung's book. 📖



**Wes Bredenhof**

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston

[bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca)

