



Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE :: YEAR END 2023

TO ALL OUR READERS,

Best Wishes

AND THE

Lord's Blessings

IN THE YEAR

2024

Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer
Editor-in-Chief

Mrs. Laura Veenendaal
Managing Editor

Rev. Eric Kampen
Co-Editor

Rev. Matthew VanLuik
Co-Editor

Dr. Jason Van Vliet
Co-Editor

Rev. Jim Witteveen
Co-Editor

The
ADVENT
of the
PRINCE of PEACE

JIM WITTEVEEN

PEACE ON EARTH?

As we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, we do so in a time in which the situation is anything but peaceful in many parts of the world. War continues in the Ukraine, old wounds have been re-opened in the Middle East, and the threat of escalation linked to these conflicts is ever present. Nations pick sides and debate rages. While the “hawks” push for war and the “doves” promote their version of peace, it is those on the ground who often suffer the most. And in both of the major conflicts that are currently raging, as well as in the minor conflicts that continue in other parts of the world, many of those who are suffering are people who profess faith in the Prince of Peace.

ADVENT

According to the traditional liturgical year, the season of Christmas, when we remember the coming of Christ in human flesh, is known as the season of Advent. The name “advent” comes from the Latin word “*adventus*,” which means “coming,” or “arrival.” When the Lord Jesus was born, a multitude of angels heralded his first “advent,” singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased” (Luke 2:14). These angelic messengers did not proclaim that Jesus’s coming would mark the arrival of universal, unqualified peace on earth. The Lord Jesus himself even proclaimed, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt 10:34).

Yet he remains the Prince of Peace. The peace that he effects is far more profound than mere political peace between nation-states. His peace begins with the reconciliation between God and men. That relationship of peace leads to reconciliation among human beings themselves, as dividing walls are torn down between those who follow Christ. But ultimately the peace that Christ has won will lead to universal peace, when the time is fulfilled and the Lord Jesus returns to make all things right. As we look forward to the future, we know that for those who are in Christ, real, lasting peace will be a reality—an eternal reality!


But as things now stand in our fallen world, war and strife and suffering are a constant, living reality for many, including for many of God’s people. Sin has not been eradicated from this world, and greed and hatred and envy and the lust for power continue to lead

nations to war. And it is often those who are not at fault for these conflicts who suffer the most.

FIRST AND FINAL COMING

That means that when we think of Advent, we should also remember another aspect of this season that we may not usually consider—his final coming. Traditionally, Advent season has focused on both events, and in a season that is often overtaken by sentimentalism, Christ’s final advent should also be the subject of our meditation. We confess in the Nicene Creed that he will come again in glory, to judge the living and the dead. While his kingdom is already present in this world, it is not present in all of its fullness or glory, in all of its peace. But the promise of his second advent assures us that it will be!

Everything will be made right. The wicked will be defeated, once and for all. Those who oppress and kill God’s people and do not turn away from their rebellion will face the ultimate wrath of the Lamb. And as we also confess, “His kingdom shall have no end.” This is good news for God’s people, good news that should be remembered and recounted even as we focus our attention on his humble coming into this world to inaugurate his Kingdom-building work. He came as a helpless baby, born in lowly circumstances, far from the world’s power centres. He “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil2:7). But he has been highly exalted, and God has “bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (2:9). His return will be glorious because he will return as King.

So, as we celebrate Christmas, let us do so by also celebrating our sure knowledge that the King will come again. And when he comes again, he will come not in humility, but in all of his glory. Let the Advent season serve as a reminder that the suffering that God’s people face in the present is temporary, and that the future holds eternal, perfect peace. So, when Christmas comes, may the Christmas story lead us to pray fervently: “Come, Lord Jesus!” 



Jim Witteveen

Missionary to Brazil

Sent by Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church

jim.witteveen@protonmail.com

WHAT'S INSIDE

If all is well, you are reading this issue thick in the season of Advent which, as our editorialist reminds us, is a time to recall Christ's first coming and to anticipate his return. We're a waiting people. Not idly waiting, mind you, as Arjen Vreugdenhil's meditation reminds us, but a people living "in faith and hope" until the "horn of our salvation" (as Steve Vanleeuwen explains) is revealed on the clouds. As wars and rumours of wars swirl around us we might wonder whether the Saviour's birth really has brought "peace on earth," a question tackled by Jeff Poort. And our Christmas accent in this issue ends on the high note of a hymn based on the gospel of Isaiah 11 as penned by William Helder, "*Sprung from the Stump of Jesse*." Try it out—it's enriching!

As the New Year approaches, we invariably do some reflecting and some looking ahead, and Calvin Vanderlinde's article helps us decide which paths the Lord would have us take. Rick Vanderhorst, looking again at Psalm 25, expands on this same theme in his own way. *Governing the Church* makes another appearance and in it Jan DeGelder discusses what the churches have agreed upon concerning the "Days of Commemoration" and a "Day of Prayer," two perennial topics of interest. Otto Bouwman regales us with an account of a trip to Scotland to visit the ecclesiastical assemblies of our sister churches. Another of our pastors has retired from active service, Pastor Paul Aasman of Streetlight Christian Church, and that story is told inside as well.

And still there is more! A report on the CRTS conference 2023 (and if you missed it, the videos of the talks are posted on the seminary website under "Resources"), an update on mission work in Mexico, two book reviews, two press releases, and our other regular columns can be found in the back half of the magazine. Lots to read while you put your feet up by the fire! Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year!

Peter Holtvliuwer

contents

- 615 EDITORIAL
- 618 TREASURES, NEW & OLD
Arjen Vreugdenhil
- 619 FROM THE PUBLISHER
- 620 The Horn of Salvation
Steve van Leeuwen
- 623 Peace on Earth?
Jeff Poort
- 626 Sprung From the Stump of Jesse
William Helder
- 627 Ancient Paths for a New Year
Calvin Vanderlinde
- 630 How to Live in Covenant With God (part 2)
Rick Vanderhorst
- 632 Governing the Church
Jan DeGelder
- 634 Visit to Scotland
Otto Bouwman
- 637 Pastor Paul Aasman's Retirement
Jeff Morris and Rick Ludwig
- 640 CRTS Conference 2023
Clarence Bouwman
- 644 DISCIPLING THE NATIONS
Scott Bredenhof
- 647 RAY OF SUNSHINE
Rachel Vis
- 648 CLARION KIDS
Amanda DeBoer
- BOOK REVIEW
- 649 Biblical Critical Theory
Wes Bredenhof
- 651 Impossible Christianity
Rick Ludwig
- 653 Press Release (Classis AB, Oct 24)
- 654 Press Release (Classis Niagara, Nov 1)

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

CONTENT INQUIRIES

E: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADMINISTRATIVE INQUIRIES

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

SUBMIT AN ARTICLE

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

SUBMIT A BOOK REVIEW

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS

clarionmagazine.ca/subscriptions

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

Bethel, Bethlehem, and Beyond

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”


JOHN 1:51

Jacob has stolen the great blessing of the God of his father Isaac. But what does he have to show for it? Exiled from his family, walking up north, he does not know if he will survive the journey, or if he will be welcomed by his uncle. In Genesis 28 we find a desperate, exhausted man lying down with a stone for a pillow. Suddenly, this man sees a great light in the darkness! In his dream vision the sky opens up and a stream of messengers goes up and down a stairway to heaven. And God himself, “standing there beside him” (v. 13 CSB), speaks words of grace that change everything. Yes, Jacob, the blessing is real. Not just the blessing of the God of your father, but the blessing of the LORD, your God. You will be protected, and you will return. Your life has great purpose. And the insignificant village of Luz is transformed into Bethel, “House of God.” Here the LORD is present; here is life and purpose. Bethel becomes the anchor of Jacob’s life, worship, and hope.

Two thousand years later a group of shepherds sits around a small fire in the fields of Ephrath, barely twenty-five kilometres south of Bethel. They are descendants of Jacob, heirs of the promise of Bethel. Perhaps they are believers, still hoping for the promised deliverance; or perhaps they are cynical men, living from day to day without hope for anything greater. Suddenly, the people who sit in darkness see a great light! The glory that had shone during the Exodus, the glory that used to fill the ancient temple, now fills the sky. Angels proclaim not just the blessing of Jacob, but its fulfillment. Down the road, in little Bethlehem, the ultimate salvation of God’s people has come. There is Jesus, the great offspring of Jacob. There is Immanuel, “God with us.” His arrival changes everything. The promised deliverance of God’s people is now reality. The simple shepherds become the first of many witnesses who see the very Presence of God embodied here on earth, God among men.

We are now another two thousand years later. Where do you find yourself? So many people wander in darkness, barely daring to hope for a light. Even many of us, who have heard the gospel of light, are uncertain, desperate, perhaps angry at God, perhaps

cynical about the Christian faith. I would remind you that for us, too, there is the Bethel promise, the Bethlehem declaration, breaking through the darkness. Jesus’s riddle in John 1:51 is being fulfilled. Jesus Christ has bridged the gap between heaven and earth; he himself is the stairway to heaven. Even today he sends out his angels to minister to his people. He is present, very close to us, by his Holy Spirit. He changes everything. He anchors our lives and gives us purpose and direction.

One day, the sky will open up fully and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, will personally come once more with his holy angels. Until then, we live in faith and hope. Our homes and churches become Bethels and Bethlehems, whenever we proclaim the promises of our Lord, whenever we join our voices with the angels’ choir: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14.) 

FURTHER READING

Genesis 28:10–22.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. The Lord’s saying in John 1:51 stands in a broader context (1:43–50). How does the context help you understand this saying better?
2. In John 1:51, Jesus clearly substitutes himself for the stairway of Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28. How does this highlight his work as the Mediator?
3. In what ways do you see “heaven opened,” and/or “angels ascending and descending” in your Christian life?
4. How did Jacob respond to his vision of God’s presence? How did the shepherds respond? What is our proper response to the glorious promises revealed to us and fulfilled in us?



Arjen Vreugdenhil

Minister

Eben-Ezer Canadian Reformed Church

pastorarjen@gmail.com

The Things that Make for Peace

Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

LUKE 19:42

This lament of Jesus during his triumphal entry was directed specifically at Jerusalem at that time. But does it not apply more generally to us and our day? In Canada and the United States, we have for years sown the wind of rejecting the norms of God's law and embracing a godless secularism; we are now reaping the whirlwind of a breakdown of families, mental health, and general morality. There's a growing shortage of peace in these aspects of life. As it was for the Jews of Jesus's time, the hearts of so many of our neighbours are hardened to the Word of God; the things that make for peace are hidden from so many eyes.


It's in the midst of this blindness that we have been placed as Christ's church. And against the growing darkness the light of the gospel of Christ's incarnation shines brighter – "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace..." "... we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Let us be treasurers, bearers, and sharers of this gospel!

We hope *Clarion* has served to continually remind you of the peace we have in Christ. We continue on our mission of encouraging, educating, engaging, and uniting church members, and we hope that in doing so we may in a small way contribute to peace in our hearts, families, and churches as we seek the furthering of the Kingdom.


This year we moved from publishing every two weeks to every three weeks. We hope the new tri-weekly schedule has been as beneficial for you as it has been for both our editorial and our production teams. It has proven to be more manageable to publish a larger magazine less frequently. We're still ironing out how to put together a larger magazine without pushing our copy deadline further back from our publication date. Thank you for your positive feedback and your patience!

So many are involved in making this magazine happen, including our editorial committee, who also contribute regularly; our column coordinators; and our regular contributors. I will single out four people who handle the lion's share of the work. Rev. Peter Holtvliwer and Mrs. Laura Veenendaal do a tremendous job preparing and finalizing the content for each issue. Mr. Matt McClay puts it all together with a designer's eye. Mrs. Janette Dewit handles planning, proofreading, and other administrative tasks. Thank you all!

And none of this would be possible without you, our faithful advertisers, and our dear subscribers. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

The gospel of Christmas is that God fulfilled his promises to send the Prince of Peace, who would reconcile all things to God, making peace by the blood of his cross. Let us never lose sight of what makes for true peace! And let us joyfully praise and serve our gracious King in this coming year. Greetings and best wishes to you and yours in this Christmas season and for the New Year. 

W. Gortemaker



The HORN *of* SALVATION


A Forgotten Symbol of Christmas

*“(He) has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David.”*

LUKE 1:69

STEVE VAN LEEUWEN

When you think of Christmas, what is the first thing that comes to mind? Hopefully as believers our initial thoughts go to the magnificent birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. But for many who do not live by faith in the Scriptures, Christmas revolves around Christmas trees, elves, and a jolly old man with a big beard riding a magic sleigh and bringing gifts from the North Pole. Perhaps some have a basic idea that for Christians Christmas is associated with the birth of Christ. They might even set up a model of a manger scene or adorn the top of their Christmas tree with the star of David, but their understanding of these well-known symbols is limited. And it is doubtful whether most people have any idea about the significance of the horn of salvation that Zechariah was speaking about in Luke 1:68–69. It is a symbol of Christmas that



is often not considered even by believers. Yet, this symbol conveys something very important about the coming of Christ.

Zechariah was the father of John the Baptist. Scripture records that he had gone into the temple to burn incense when an angel appeared in order to inform him that he would have a son in his old age. Given his age and that of his wife, he did not immediately believe God's messenger, and therefore the angel declared that he would be unable to speak until his son was born. Immediately following the birth of his son, Zechariah prophesied about the coming Christ, declaring that God had "raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David." It seems rather strange to make such a declaration at the very moment he regained his voice. What do we make of these events that took place following the birth of John, the one who would precede the coming of our Saviour? What did Zechariah mean by his reference to the horn of salvation?

WHAT KIND OF HORN?

For many the answer to that question is elusive, given that the horn of salvation is a rather obscure and little understood symbol of Christmas. We certainly do not see people decorating their homes for the Christmas season with a ram's horn or hanging little horns as ornaments on their Christmas trees. Perhaps you might find some who decorate their houses with the yuletide horn that is often shown along with angels and mistletoe. But the yuletide horn that is similar in appearance to a French horn has little to do with the real meaning of Christmas. Its roots are not in our text. The yuletide horn was part of the pagan celebrations that existed long before the birth of Christ. The yuletide celebrations of the ancient pagan world among the Norse and Germanic tribes of Europe were traditionally a season of hunting. This season ended around the time of the winter solstice, at which time there would be feasting. The yuletide horn was a drinking instrument made for celebration. As these pagan tribes were Christianized, the horn was incorporated into the Christmas tradition and the yuletide celebration gave way to our modern Christian traditions. At best, the yuletide horn is a symbol of celebration but is not at all connected to the horn of salvation that Zechariah was speaking about. No, we need to look elsewhere for the answer.

The horn that really holds true significance for believers during the Christmas season is the horn of salvation that Zechariah prophesies about in Luke 1. If we do a little digging into Scripture about the use of the horn in the Old Testament, an answer begins to emerge, and we get some insight about Zechariah's words. For instance, in 1 Samuel 2:1, Hannah prays to the Lord, "My heart exults in the LORD; my *horn* is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation." Hannah deeply desired to have a child. The

LORD heard her prayer and, when she dedicated Samuel to the LORD at the tabernacle, she prayed those words and declared that my “horn is exalted.” From the context, we can see that the horn was a sign of strength. Hannah saw God providing her with strength by giving her a son.

A HORN FOR ISRAEL

Much like Hannah, Zechariah also had a deep desire for a child. Zechariah and Elizabeth were old and had never been blessed

to as the “horn of my salvation.” In other words, David declared that it was not by his own strength that he was saved from the hand of his enemy, but that God was the source of strength that brought about his deliverance.

CHRIST THE HORN OF SALVATION

All this provides the background to what Zechariah prophesied at the birth of his son John. With the birth of John, who was to be the forerunner of the Christ, Zechariah prophesied about the

God had raised up a source of power with a very specific purpose

with children. When God did provide him with a son, what is interesting is that at the birth he did not prophesy about his own son and the strength that would provide for his own household. Rather, Zechariah spoke prophetically of the strength of God for all the people of Israel. He did not speak about a horn being raised in his own house but about the promised Messiah. Luke records Zechariah affirming the blessing of God for all of Israel, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people” (1:68). That is why he did not just speak of a horn in general but added the important word “salvation.” God had raised up a source of power with a very specific purpose. And the purpose was to bring salvation to the people of God.

So why was that declaration about the horn of salvation by Zechariah so significant? Again, we can turn to the Old Testament. There are two other references in Scripture that use the specific term “horn of salvation.” They are found in Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22, which are virtually identical in their content. When we examine the content of 2 Samuel, we find King David rejoicing in the LORD because the LORD had saved him from the hand of Saul who was trying to kill him. It was on the very day that the LORD delivered him from Saul that David writes a song that we find recorded in 2 Samuel 22. He wrote, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the *horn of my salvation*, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies” (vv. 2–4). David used this term to describe how the LORD God fought on his behalf and powerfully delivered him from his enemies. We see how the strength of God was the source of his deliverance, which he refers

certainty of God’s deliverance. He rejoiced in the knowledge that now that John had come, the Christ was soon to follow. The horn of salvation was being raised up. The Son of God was coming into the world, and he would be a source of power in which all the believers could take refuge. He would come and fight on behalf of his people, the covenant people of God, as their champion. He would defend them and preserve them against all enemies. Sin and Satan would go down to defeat because the horn of salvation would be raised up for the people of God.

With the Christmas season upon us, we are reminded of the significance of the horn of salvation and what it represents for believers. The horn of salvation represents the strength and power of God to deliver his people from their enemies. It is a reminder that we cannot save ourselves, but it is only through God’s power that we can be saved. And during the Christmas season, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the horn of salvation takes on even greater significance because it is a reminder that Christ came to save us from our sins and to be our champion. It is a symbol of the coming Christ, who would be the ultimate source of strength and salvation for all believers.

So, as we celebrate this Christmas season, let us remember the significance of the horn of salvation and rejoice in the knowledge that our Saviour has come. 🇨🇦



Steve van Leeuwen

Minister

Calgary Canadian Reformed Church

pastorvanleeuwen@gmail.com

Peace *on Earth?*

JEFF POORT

A LONGING FOR PEACE

Everyone wants world peace. That seems to be the wish on everybody's list. Ask a contestant at a beauty pageant what they would do if they could do anything, and of course they want to bring the world peace. Ask a celebrity what they still want despite their riches and fame and, of course, they want world peace. And really, who can disagree with that? Who would actually want continual conflict in the world?

Looking back on the year 2023, this desire burns ever stronger. A major war in Ukraine continues. Terrible pictures of destruction in Gaza and elsewhere in the Middle East flash across our screens, not to mention the many ongoing revolutions and coups in various struggling African countries.

At one point humanity had been optimistic that wars and conflicts would end. After World War I, countries formed the League of Nations to prevent this. Then, when World War II ended, there were fresh attempts, albeit with much more realism. Several decades later, having gone through the Cold War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, and a war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are no further along. Tensions between countries continue to broil, whether they show themselves in religious conflicts, economic sanctions, or political sparring.

The sad reality is that we seem no closer to what everyone apparently desires: a world at peace.

PAX ROMANA

Peace was what Augustus Caesar tried to sell to his widespread empire throughout much of his time in power. This propaganda later became known as “*Pax Romana*” or “Roman peace,” the idea that Rome’s way of ruling under Caesar would lead to peace for the world. Augustus even had the Ara Pacis built, “The Altar of Peace,” in the middle of his reign, as a symbol of what his reign had accomplished in areas of Spain and Gaul. This too was a way of emphasizing to the empire that the Romans could accomplish peace in a world that had previously seen war after war and empire after empire fall.

(Luke 2:14) The announcement is that there is peace coming into the world through the birth of this Saviour, the Messiah.

WHAT KIND OF PEACE?

When it comes to Jesus being born, we will often rightly talk about how he is bringing a different kind of peace than what we typically think of as “world peace.” Jesus as Saviour came to take away the sins of the world, and so bring about a peace in the conflict not between warring countries but between God and humanity. The fall of Adam and Eve at the beginning of Genesis started this conflict: humanity rebelling against God and his commands

He is bringing a different kind of peace

Scholars have since argued that as much as “peace” was part of the Roman vocabulary when describing their empire, this was probably more a façade than anything else. There were still many wars to be fought throughout the empire and other lands to be conquered. More familiar to Christians are the revolts in the land of Judea that were crushed by Roman soldiers. But there were many others conflicts as well. World peace sounded nice, but humanity was still grasping at an illusion rather than actually accomplishing it.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF PEACE

In the Gospel of Luke, we are brought into this ancient Roman world when we are told, “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered” (2:1). Here was the whole world under the great ruler Caesar Augustus. But in the midst of it was coming a different kind of ruler, bringing about a different kind of kingdom.

Near the end of his reign, Caesar had fancied himself a “son of the gods.” But when an angel comes announcing to shepherds in a field that a Saviour has been born—the Messiah, in Bethlehem—that speaks to someone who is *truly* the son of God. Heaven is announcing his birth. And it’s not just one angel. A whole host of angels follows him, breaking out in song: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

followed by God bringing just punishments and curses on humanity. When Jesus Christ comes as Saviour, he pays for those sins and creates the opportunity for peace in that relationship. Those who receive God’s grace, “with whom he is pleased,” have lasting peace with God.

But to say that this has nothing to do with “world peace” would go a step too far. The Scriptures teach that the conflicts that are here in this world are a result of the spread of sin. Whether God is directly punishing sin with war, as he threatens in Deuteronomy 28, or whether conflicts happen simply as a result of people sinning against each other or countries sinning against each other, sin is the common root. The obstacle getting in the way of world peace is sin.

So, when the angels are singing that glorious Christmas song, the peace that is coming to the earth is the peace that all humanity is longing for. It is spiritual peace with God that will eventually lead to the restoration of relationships worldwide.

PEACE? REALLY?

But still, questions remain. How much peace did Jesus actually bring? You could argue that Jesus did not come to bring peace but division (Luke 12:51). Even at Jesus’s circumcision, Simeon prophesied that this child was “appointed for the fall and rising of many

in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed.” Jesus’s ministry caused a mob in Jerusalem that Pontius Pilate could hardly calm down.

Perhaps you could look to the time after Jesus was crucified and rose again, defeating death and sin. But when you look at the history of the church, do you really see peace? Could you not point to the crusades or to the times where within the church there were scandals, conflicts, and families broken to pieces? Even today, would we really say that the church is the place where people find peace? How many times have conflicts not caused immense stress, torn up peoples’ lives, and left people with greater anxiety rather than lasting peace?

Or, even to get at the heart of the peace that Jesus brings, what about our peace with God? Did Jesus really bring peace when we continue to sin against God, when we daily do what our new nature does not want to do, and show rebellion against our gracious God and his good commands?

PEACE THROUGH THE SPIRIT

It is actually that last question which points us in the right direction. Despite our struggles, the Christian is justified before God through the blood of Christ. There is a final peace with God that is already guaranteed to his people.

We also confess in the Heidelberg Catechism that the Christian, “with earnest purpose [does] begin to live not only according to some but to all the commandments of God.” (LD 44). In other words, not only has Jesus given us final peace with God, but he has also sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts to awaken in us a new nature which is at peace with God.

When you look at the New Testament church, especially in the book of Acts, it is not that there is no conflict whatsoever. There are situations like that of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), or the neglect of the Greek widows (Acts 6), or perhaps even the separation of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15). But when the Spirit is active among the people, there *is* peace in their hearts and peace in their relationships. Everyone’s needs are met, and the people have deep fellowship with each other and with God (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–37).

Where the Spirit is at work with the gospel of Jesus Christ, there the Lord is making peace, both between him and others and between fellow human beings. This is a peace based on the self-giving of Jesus Christ, his willingness to provide forgiveness and stand firm on the truths of the Scriptures. It leads to those


who are not of the Spirit bringing opposition, but they are not able to disturb the deep-rooted peace that only the Spirit can bring.

When Christians see the Spirit working in their hearts, they will see evidence of this peace on earth. Not only will they have a peace that “surpasses all understanding” (Phil 4:7), they will begin, as much as it is possible, to “live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:18).

It is worth examining your own life to see whether you see evidence of this peace-making Spirit-fuelled work in your heart and in your relationships with others. The church was made to be a beacon of peace in a conflict-torn world. That is the Christian’s calling.

THE GREATEST PEACE-BRINGER

In doing that, they are representing the great peace-bringer, Jesus Christ. To return to the topic of Caesar Augustus and the *Pax Romana*, Augustus was someone who at the time was regarded as the greatest ruler, bringing the world the greatest peace it had yet experienced. But in calling the census of Luke 2, Caesar was unknowingly setting up the birth in Bethlehem of an even greater ruler who was bringing an even greater peace. Caesar’s peace was a peace by force. The peace that Jesus Christ was bringing was a peace by sacrifice.

We now know how long the *Pax Romana* lasted, if you could say that it truly began in the first place. Most scholars tend to date the golden age of the Roman Empire around the end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 170. But the peace of Christ celebrated by angels at his birth is a peace that is still growing in the hearts of Spirit-filled Christians around the world. That peace will not just continue to grow, it will last forever. It has real power to reconcile relationships because it is founded on a true peace with God. It attacks the source of all conflict, sin, which leads to a more all-encompassing peace. It is this peace that we will experience fully in eternity. 



Jeff Poort

Minister

Living Word Canadian Reformed Church


jeffpoort@gmail.com

Sprung from the Stump of Jesse

1. Sprung from the stump of Jes - se as new - ly sprout - ed shoot,
a Branch will bud and blos - som and bear a - bun - dant fruit,
and o - ver him will hov - er the Spir - it of the LORD,
the Spir - it from whose boun - ty rich gifts will be out - poured.

2. The Spirit him with wisdom and insight will provide
and will with might and counsel be ever at his side.
In him the Spirit also true knowledge will instill,
that he may fear the LORD and revere God's holy will.
3. The fear of God Almighty will be his heart's delight.
He will not base his verdicts on hearing or on sight;
appearances and rumours he wisely will ignore.
He will defend the needy and justly judge the poor.
4. The wicked he will punish, for he will strike the land
and wipe out evildoers by voicing his command.
Great are his might and mercy. All wrongs he will redress,
wearing the belt of justice, the sash of faithfulness.
5. All creatures then together will live in harmony.
Then lambs will in green pastures with wolves keep company.
Goats lying down with leopards their friendship will enjoy,
and calves will graze with lions, led by a little boy.
6. Then bears will feed with cattle, their cubs with calves will stay,
and lions will like oxen be eating straw and hay.
Infants that are still nursing will play near cobras' dens,
and into nests of vipers will toddlers put their hands.
7. On Zion's holy mountain there will be peace and joy,
for none will there do evil or injure and destroy.
So widespread will the knowledge of God the LORD then be
that it will fill the earth as the waters fill the sea.

Text: William Helder, 2023
Tune: Genevan 128
Based on Isaiah 11:1-9



Ancient Paths *for a New* Year

CALVIN VANDERLINDE

God gave Jeremiah the unenviable task to bring a strong challenge to a dull and desensitized people. So unreceptive were they that in Jeremiah 6:10 they are described as treating the Word of the LORD as “an object of scorn.” Such people are in dangerous territory and in great need of reorientation and redirection.

For this reason, the LORD figuratively situates them at the crossroads and directs them to pick a path, the right path.

*Thus says the LORD:
“Stand by the roads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way is; and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls.
But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”
(Jer 6:16)*

THE CROSSROADS

Some translations render “ancient paths” as “old” paths. In any case, these were paths that were not recently made but existed for a very long time. In fact, the Hebrew word here is translated elsewhere as “eternal.” These were not just old paths with regard to time; they were eternal paths, stemming back to before time. They were well-established paths which God etched out himself. They are truly his paths—paths that align with his character, truth, and goodness. They are beaten paths because many have travelled them throughout the history of the world. And even if many have deserted these paths, having chosen instead to follow other paths

To be more specific, God has revealed the ancient paths and the good way in the Ten Commandments. He said, “You shall love me with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In the first four commandments he had set the path for how to worship him, and in the following six commandments he marked out the path for how to treat our neighbours with due honour, love, and respect. God gave paths in his Word for his people to follow in every area of life.

God has also given us paths today. In his Word he shows us his ancient paths and in the Gospels we may track Christ’s footprints to observe and learn from his pattern of life and teaching. He

These paths align with his character, truth, and goodness

of their own devising so that these paths have become overgrown, the paths are still there and are so well-worn that they may still be found.

So, locating these ancient paths is not a hopeless search or futile exercise. They do not require an archeological dig to discover them. God has not hidden them or made them impossible to trace out.

What are these ancient paths? They are the paths that God has ordained for all people to walk in. They are the paths that he has laid out and clearly defined in his Word from the very beginning when he gave his commands to Adam and Eve in the garden. This is why the LORD speaks of “paths” (plural) because there are paths in every area of life. To “walk” these paths then simply refers to our way of life in the world, encompassing church, home, school, work, and leisure, and involves all of our thoughts, desires, and actions. We follow paths in the way we worship God, in the way we treat our neighbour, in the way we work, in the way we use our money, in the way we commit a new year to God in everything we do.

GOOD PATHS

Now, it is important here that we do not take this text out of context and make it say what we might want it to say. A traditionalist cannot use this verse to justify their nostalgia or their belief in the idea that the old is always better than the new and think that “the former days were better than these” (Eccl 7:10). This is why Jeremiah qualifies “the ancient paths” with “the good way.” They are called such because they are always ethically good and bear good results. The one who walks in these paths enjoys fellowship with God and nearness with God while the one who refuses to do the same forfeits these good things.

deepened the ancient paths when he taught that it was not the practice of outward obedience that God desires but obedience from the heart. In the New Testament we also have God’s commands to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. These are not merely good traditions to follow. These are the paths God has ordained from of old for us to walk in. He has given ancient paths for how to speak, act, and think in all areas of life, how to treat our neighbour, how to live in marriage, how to raise children, and how to live in the knowledge and fear of the Lord.

Now by grace in Jesus Christ, God’s people have followed and continue to follow these ancient paths today, but there is always the temptation to give up. We know we live in an age that prizes novelty and innovation and prides itself on progress. This is why even good traditions and religious practices held to by former generations are judged as primitive and jettisoned as that which must be thrown off. But God’s people are always led from the past, from the words of Scripture and from the faithful example and instruction of those who lived by those words long ago. We are encouraged by those who trusted God long ago and were not disappointed (cf. Hebrews 11), because they knew that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that the grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of the Lord endures forever.

CROOKED PATHS

But the church in Jeremiah’s day had moved beyond the old paths and found herself enamoured with novelties devised and embraced by creatures here below. These are the new paths which stand in stark contrast to the ancient paths. The new paths are the paths of living that are contrary to God’s Word. Those who walk on new

paths lay the Word aside for what they desire to do, for what pleases them. They neglect the Word and discard good practices established over time. In doing so they blaze new trails. In Jeremiah's time that is what the church was doing. The people of God had forsaken old paths and made new ones—especially in regard to worship and treatment of the neighbour. Instead of following the old paths and the words of God, they ignored the commandments of God for how to worship him and desired something else. Instead of loving their neighbour as God commanded, they had a greater interest in serving themselves and took advantage of their neighbours. In these ways they were blazing new trails.

But we can observe here that the new paths really are not *new* at all. They are in one form or another the age-old rebellion, the old human search for salvation in another way than that which God himself promised to provide. That is why the new ways will never work. While novel ideas and practices may generate excitement and interest and satisfy for a time, in the end they do not have sustaining power. They will fail and disappoint, and those who walk in them only wind up empty and miserable.

SORT OUT THE PATHS

The call Jeremiah brings on behalf of the LORD is expressed by a series of commands which form a string of imperatives: stand, look, ask, walk.

First, the people are exhorted to stand. This requires one to stop and consider where they are and take account of their spiritual health. The end of one year and beginning of a new year is as good a time as any for this. As we take inventory of ourselves and our situation and compare ourselves with others who lived in earlier times in church history and faithfully travelled the ancient paths, we may prevent ourselves from simply going with the flow in the wrong direction.

Second, the LORD called the people to look—to examine the paths laying before them. They were not to plunge blindly or rashly forward in whichever direction they fancied but were to give careful and critical thought and reflection to the commands and principles of God's Word and give due consideration to the detriment of the new paths and their destination.

Third, they were to ask for the ancient paths, for the good way. Why did they have to ask about the good paths? Did they not

already know them? To a certain degree they did know them, but things had so deteriorated that they no longer had a clear idea about God's commands regarding right worship and right treatment of the neighbour. It was not that they had to learn about these old paths as much as they had to relearn what they already knew.

The same is true for us. We know the ancient paths. We have the Word of God. Through the preaching of the Word, we hear what the ancient paths are. We also have the faithful summaries of the gospel and Christian teaching in the creeds and confessions and the legacy of the Reformation and following generations who have gone before us and kept the faith and passed it down to us. Today we have incredible amounts of good literature available to us in books and magazines and websites which are able to build us up in our Christian faith. We have the example of faithful Christian parents and grandparents, catechism instruction, and Bible societies where we may explore God's ancient paths and gain knowledge and insight and understanding into them and learn how to put them into practice in our lives. When we apply ourselves to these things, we are asking the LORD to show us the ancient paths, the good way.

WALK THE GOOD PATHS

Then fourth and finally comes the key command, which is to walk in these good and ancient paths. This means we must not only talk about the ancient paths but take action in obedience to his commands. Taking his Word in hand and head and heart, we want not only to hear and understand it but also to do it consistently.

The people who heard the LORD's appeal through Jeremiah refused it. May we not make the same mistake. In the coming year may it be our aim and our prayer to keep to the ancient paths. We cannot do this in our own strength but only in Christ who walked the ancient paths perfectly every step of the way and gives us the power and the help we need. 🇨



Calvin Vanderlinde

Minister

Nooksack Valley American Reformed Church

calvinvanderlinde@gmail.com

How To Live in Covenant with God

(Part 2): Asking God to Lead You in His Ways

In the previous article we introduced the theme of living in covenant with God. God's covenant is a relationship of fellowship and love between the LORD and his people. At the heart of that relationship is the promise, "I will be your God and you will be my people." More specifically, we asked the question, "How do we live in covenant with God? What does a covenant relationship with God look like, anyways?"

To answer these questions, this series of articles digs into Psalm 25 to teach us what a covenant relationship with God should look like. When we study Psalm 25, we see three themes emerging. The theme we looked at in the first article was this: *In order to properly live in a covenant relationship with God we must rely on God's covenant grace.* In Psalm 25, David asks God to forgive his sins no less than three times. He does this because he knows the holiness of the LORD, he knows his own sinfulness, and so he knows the relationship with holy God can only happen through God's grace.

But there is another theme found in this psalm, which we will cover in this second article. To properly live in relationship with God *we must also ask God to lead us in his ways.* As one example, you can see this theme in verses 4 and 5 where David prays, "Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation."

WHY MAKE THIS REQUEST?

Why do we ask God to lead us in his ways, that is, to lead us in a life of obedience and holiness? We could think of many reasons, but I'll mention three. First of all, God himself calls us to walk in his ways. We can see this in God's dealings with Abraham. Abraham

was graciously declared righteous by God in Genesis 15—he too relied on God's covenant grace and mercy. Then, in Genesis 17, God said to Abraham, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless." This was an obligation in the covenant. Abraham had to respond to God in faith *and* in obedience. The same is still true today for us. God says to us, "Be holy as I am holy" (see 1 Peter 1:16). The God who saved us by his grace now commands us to walk in obedience.

The second reason we ask God to lead us in his ways is this: Those who rely on God's grace are not content with sin in their lives. Yes, God establishes his covenant with us while we are sinners. Yes, God graciously adopts us to be his children when we are sinners. But that does not mean God's children want to remain sinning against God. Actually, God's grace leads us on a different path. The grace of God trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live upright and godly lives in the present age (Titus 2:11–12). In fact, those who refuse to turn from sin and those who refuse to walk in God's ways receive the curse of the covenant. They are showing that their hearts have not been changed by God's grace and so have not truly believed.

Yes, we must confess that our service to God remains imperfect in this life. It is true that much sin and weakness still cling to us in this life and there is a war of desires going on in our hearts. But those who are being transformed by God and by his Spirit still want to serve the LORD. God's children are careful to walk (imperfect though it may be) on the narrow path God calls them to walk. They watch and pray that they might stay off the broad and easy road that leads to destruction.

The third reason why we ask God to lead us in his ways is so that our relationship with God will flourish. Sin necessarily hinders fellowship with God. David himself experienced this as he expresses elsewhere. He says in Psalm 32 that when he kept silent about his sin his bones wasted away through his groaning all day long. God's hand was even heavy upon him because of his deceit. Obviously, David was at a point where his relationship with the LORD was floundering because of his sin, and David could feel it! On the flip side, walking in God's ways will cause our relationship with him to grow and flourish. God's covenant is not a business

he did it perfectly. Where we so often fail, Christ did not. Hebrews 10:5 says about Christ, "When Christ came into the world, he said . . . 'behold, I have come to do your will, O God.'" The Lord Jesus did the will of God perfectly. The good news for us is found further in the chapter when it says, "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (v. 10). Christ perfectly walked in God's ways and so he's the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Christ's sacrifice on our behalf ensures that God also hears our prayers. When you ask God to lead you in his ways and help you

We need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ

contract. It's meant to be a relationship of love and fellowship where both parties enjoy being in the relationship. This goal will not be reached if we walk on the path of sin. Consider only verse 14, which says, "The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant."

HOW TO GROW IN HOLINESS

Now, living a new life of obedience is part of the obligation of the covenant. But that does not mean that walking before God and living a blameless life is all up to us, or that it's done by our own strength. Not at all! At every point in the covenant, we rely upon the LORD. If God calls us to be holy as he is holy, then we can also trust that he will give us what we need to grow in holiness. We then seek these things from God in prayer.

Look at how this is worked out in Psalm 25. David acknowledges again and again that God himself must lead him in the ways of the LORD. Consider the following verses: "Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths" (v. 4); "Lead me in your truth and teach me" (v. 5); "Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way" (v. 8); "He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his ways" (v. 9); "Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose" (v. 12). David knows that if it's all up to him, he's going to fail. If he doesn't receive the help of God's Spirit, he's going to fail. But through God's Spirit both David and we can grow in this.


FOCUSING ON CHRIST

In order to grow as obedience children, we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ. Think about the Lord Jesus for a moment. He was true man. As true man he was born under the law and obligated to walk blamelessly before God. This is what he did, and

to walk on his paths, you can be sure that God will hear your prayers through Christ. As we struggle against sin in our weakness, maybe we think, "There's no hope of changing me. I'm stuck in the same cycle of sin, and I just can't get out of it." But we need to challenge these thoughts based on God's own covenant promises. Yes, we never become perfect in this life, but we can make progress. Change comes through the power and the grace of God in Jesus Christ!

PRAYING FOR CHANGE

This truth can lead us to pray in the following manner: "Father, you call me to cut lustful desires and sexual immorality out of my life, and so I pray that you will empower me to cut them out. I pray this trusting that you will make me grow in this." It can also sound like this: "Father, you call me to avoid lying and to speak the truth, and so I pray that you will empower me to always speak the truth in love. I pray this trusting that you will make me grow in this."

We ask God to lead us in his ways while trusting that Christ will give us new life to actually walk in them. We know and believe that Christ lives in us and that he will change us to be like himself. God will do this by the power of the Spirit who lives both in Christ and in us. 



Rick Vanderhorst
Minister
Grace Canadian Reformed Church
rick_vanderhorst@hotmail.com

Celebrations and Intercessions

In our quest to learn what the Canadian Reformed Churches have agreed upon in the Church Order about worship, we have found so far that it is the consistory's responsibility to call the congregation together twice on the Lord's Day, and to ensure regular catechism preaching. That's in Article 52.

Article 53 comes under the heading "Days of Commemoration." It's about commemorating the "birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ," events we customarily mark at Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost. But, despite the heading, Article 53 does not refer to particular days and what should be done on those days. The consistory is not obligated to call the congregation together for special worship services.

This is different, for instance, in the Church Order of our Australian sister churches. Article 65 of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia Church Order says that on the feast days listed "the consistory shall call the congregation together for church services." To be sure—traditionally the CanRC have always done the same. Special worship services were (and usually still are) held on December 25 to commemorate Jesus's birth, on Good Friday to commemorate his death, and sometimes on Ascension Day to commemorate his ascension into heaven. Easter (celebrating Jesus's resurrection) and Pentecost (the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) are always on a Sunday anyway. And, although it is not required anywhere in Scripture, there is as such nothing wrong with this tradition. However, it is not stipulated in our CanRC Church Order.

DAYS OR EVENTS

As churches we agree that it is valuable to commemorate those key events. But we do so "in the manner decided upon by the consistory." In other words, the "when" and the "how" of such celebration is left wide open and is entirely in the freedom of every local consistory.

This stipulation in Article 53 is actually the closest to the original position of the churches of the Reformation. In reaction to the many ecclesiastical feast days of the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformers had a strong aversion to such days. Subsequently the Protestant churches wanted to discontinue those special days, as human inventions, not ordained by God, and emphasized the Lord's Day (Sunday) as the only day to be observed.

However, the civil authorities did not go for it. They maintained those days as public holidays as the people were used to and felt entitled to. Instead, the government of the day put pressure on the churches to call people to worship on those days. Gradually the churches gave in to this, albeit grudgingly. Eventually they decided that ministers should preach on those days to keep the people off the street. After all, it is better to go to church than spend your free time in idleness, drunkenness, bar-brawls, and other trouble.

The result was that by the time of the Synod of Dort (1618/19) it was agreed that "the churches shall observe the special feast days" mentioned earlier. This is how it became the Reformed practice for the next centuries. And it is good to make clear that the Lord does not forbid his people from coming together for worship at occasions other than the weekly Lord's Day.

Nevertheless—the wording of Article 53 does underline that the observation of those feast days, or even the commemoration of these events, is *not* prescribed in God's Word. We can and

Readers are invited to send questions regarding church polity and the Church Order to Jan DeGelder (jdegelder@cogeco.ca).

may celebrate the great facts of Christ's redeeming work with joy and thankfulness in whichever manner our local consistory decides. But there is no command from God. The same can be said about traditions like advent and lent. In connection with this we see ourselves confronted with what is known as the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW). This is the conviction that "to worship God truly, is to worship him only in the manner which he himself has prescribed in his Word."¹ It is interesting to compare this RPW with what we confess in Question & Answer 96 of the Heidelberg Catechism. But this would take us beyond the Church Order.

CALLING A DAY OF PRAYER

And then there is Article 54, with the heading "Days of Prayer." However, in contrast with the days in the previous article, this is not about annual events. It talks about a day of prayer for all the churches in the federation in time of war, general calamities, and other great afflictions—difficult circumstances that affect all the churches. Who is going to determine that there is a need for such a day of prayer? The churches appointed for that purpose by the last general synod.

In the old Church Order of Dort the rule was for the churches to "request the government to appoint and set aside public days of fasting and prayer." The reason was that on such a day public life was put to rest as much as possible, so that people could participate. They would come together on a regular weekday and sometimes they stayed in church all day, refraining from eating any food. Aside from times of prayer, two sermons were delivered and in between sermons Scripture passages were read.

During the nineteenth century the relationship between church and state changed, and the government was no longer involved in calling days of prayer.² General Synod 1905 appointed a classis for this purpose, and General Synod 1914 instructed the appointed classis that such a day should be held on a Sunday.

Immigration to North America saw Reformed churches established between the Atlantic and the Pacific, an area much larger than the Netherlands. In 1914 the synod of the Christian Reformed Churches acknowledged that in such a large country, calamities in one part may not be experienced in another part, and authorized all the classes to proclaim a special day of prayer as the need arose in a particular region.

General Synod 1958 of the CanRC made the rule to assign the task to proclaim a special day of prayer to two churches: one in the east and one in the west. This has continued until today. General Synod 2022 re-appointed Providence CanRC in Edmonton and

Rehoboth CanRC in Burlington-Waterdown. But the purpose is still to involve the whole federation.

CRITERIA FOR A DAY OF PRAYER

To make that work, the two churches consult with each other, and when they agree they set a date and inform the churches. That sounds pretty straightforward, but in practice that may not always be the case. What if a number of churches feel the need and request the two churches to proclaim a day of prayer, but these churches don't agree, or the request is denied? And does it necessarily have to be nationwide? Would it be possible for Rehoboth to call for a day of prayer in the east because an affliction is not so much felt in the west? Or the other way around? We can take this a step further. Would Article 54 as we have it prevent a classis from proclaiming such a day of prayer for the churches in that particular region? I don't think so.

In the late 1980s the two churches agreed to call a day of prayer, as per Article 54, regarding the issue of abortion. That proved controversial; not because anyone supported abortion, but it triggered the question: Is a gradual moral decline in our society the same as "general calamities and other great afflictions," so that it justifies a special day of prayer? Our ministers will bring this and similar matters before the Lord in the congregational prayers on the weekly Lord's Day. The wording of Article 54 indicates a severe and immediate crisis for the churches and/or the nation. Those are pretty narrow parameters for proclaiming a day of prayer.³

This is connected with the purpose of calling for a day of prayer. The goal is not to "pray away," so to speak, the disaster or affliction, but to show humility and genuine repentance, and pray for mercy and forgiveness. The attitude must reflect what is called "solidarity in guilt," the awareness that as God's people we cannot act as if we have nothing to do with the sin of the world.

This is also why the original article speaks about "a day of fasting and prayer." General Synod 1905 took "fasting" out, not because there is anything wrong with it, but simply because fasting was never done anymore in Reformed churches. But biblical fasting is a spiritual exercise in which one concentrates before God on humble repentance and prayer. **C**



Jan DeGelder

Minister Emeritus

Flamborough Canadian Reformed Church

jdegelder@cogeco.ca

¹ This is the definition given by the late Rev. G. I. Williamson, for many decades minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. For those interested, Williamson presented a paper on this topic at the ICRC, held in Philadelphia in 2001, published in *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, June 20–27, 2001, Philadelphia, USA, Neerlandia, AB, 2001*, p. 213–234.

² This does not mean that political leaders could never play a role. At the outbreak of the first World War, President Wilson called for a special day of prayer in the U.S.

³ Rev. J. D. Wielenga, Letter to the Editor, *Clarion*, Nov. 10, 1989, (Vol. 38, No. 23), p. 502–503.





Visit to Scotland

FCC and FCS General Assemblies 2023

OTTO BOUWMAN

The General Assemblies (GA) of the Free Church Continuing (FCC) and the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) were held during the third week of this past May. The venue for the FCC GA was in Glasgow, and the FCS GA was a stone's throw from Edinburgh Castle. At both GAs it was clear that they seek to be faithful to Scriptures, that the denominations have their cherished distinctives as a result of their Scottish heritage, and that their Scottish connections are of primary importance to them.

Harry de Boer and I had been delegated by the Committee on Ecumenical Relations to attend the GAs. The Sunday before the gatherings began, we participated in worship at two different FCS churches in Edinburgh. While it may be that FCS worship services in Edinburgh have a slightly different feel than in rural small-town Scotland, most of the singing was of hymns with piano accompaniment. The preaching was solid. In one of the services there was translation into Spanish. The church is reaching many Spanish-speaking people who have migrated to Edinburgh from South and Central America as well as from Spain; the building was packed.

FCS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

At the FCS GA, there were about sixty Commissioners. Ministers and elders were approximately equally represented, and professors of the denominational seminary were also in attendance. The first item of business on Monday evening was to select a Moderator, which was confirmed by the stomping of feet (their manner of indicating affirmation). All singing at the GA was done from the Scottish Psalters with the leadership of a Precentor. As could be expected in a Presbyterian setting, there was considerable formality. Nonetheless, the atmosphere at the GA was warm and affirming, and there was a strong desire to build a consensus wherever possible.

There were many references made to the mission of the FCS: “A healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland.” The FCS is very deliberate in their efforts to share the gospel throughout their country. The mission is promoted by denominational headquarters in many ways.

A peculiar event at the GA was the arrival of the Lord High Commissioner, who brought greetings from King Charles III. The Lord High Commissioner made it clear that it is the earnest desire of the King that Scotland should not have a secular culture but a Presbyterian one.

There was considerable discussion about the need for the denomination to be more intentional with regards to the instruction of the youth. Almost all children go to state schools, since home schooling is not part of Scottish culture and “private” schools are considered something only for the elite. The GA appointed a committee to explore Christian schooling, as it considered that the church’s youth are no longer in a safe place when they are in the state school. Since most churches are small and isolated from each other, setting up schools in that context is expected to take a herculean commitment.

FCC GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Interestingly, the incoming moderator came from North Carolina, US. The first order of business was to decide where to hold the following GAs and who should make that decision. It proved challenging to achieve a consensus about how to move forward.

A report from the Ecumenical Relationships Committee resulted in quite lengthy discussions. The report highlighted the lack of progress in unity discussions with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, summarized what had happened at the ICRC meeting in Namibia, and described some ongoing challenges with regards to the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland.

In the report on youth and education, serious concern was expressed for the youth and the need for Christian education in

an ever increasingly secular world. The struggle for the FCC is similar to the FCS, with many very small congregations; the largest congregation might have 100 members.


The report on the training of ministers didn’t garner much discussion, as there are only two students. There is already a shortage of ministers in the FCC. The training is done mostly via the internet, with the lecturers all being active ministers.

Since exclusive psalmody and non-accompaniment are vital parts of their identity, along with the use of the Authorized (King James) version of the Bible, the report from the Psalmody committee received close attention. These denominational distinctives effectively serve as barriers to unity with other denominations in Scotland and abroad.

Delegates from denominations with whom the FCC have relationships were invited and in attendance at the FCC GA. The close ties with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales, the Free Reformed Church, and Reformed Presbyterian Churches from Scotland and Ireland was evidenced in the especially warm greetings given to their delegates.

OUR RELATIONSHIPS

We very much enjoyed the trip and found it encouraging to be with fellow saints in Scotland. We observed that both denominations have a strong desire to maintain their unique distinctives. There was limited evidence of these denominations looking for assistance or direction from the CanRC.

FCS commissioners indicated that they are unlikely to come to our synods, since their GA happens at the same time as our general synod. They felt that it is challenging for them to maintain a meaningful relationship with us; perhaps it might be possible to have meaningful interaction at the seminary level. I was given a tour of their seminary, and Scottish history comes alive during a walk-through of the facilities. Although the FCC commissioners cherish relationships with other faithful churches, including the CanRC, they also do not see their relationship with CanRC going deeper. Commissioners from both denominations indicated that not attending future GAs on a regular basis, but instead putting the emphasis for dialogue on bilateral meetings at ICRC, would be a responsible use of resources. 



Otto Bouwman

Member of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations
ottojbouwman@gmail.com



Pastor Paul Aasman's *Retirement*

JEFF MORRIS & RICK LUDWIG

After a career of faithful service as minister of the Word at Grand Valley Canadian Reformed Church and Streetlight Christian Church in Hamilton, Pastor Paul Aasman retired from his post at the end of August 2023, and is the first emeritus minister of Streetlight. He will be supported in his retirement by both the church that called him originally (Ancaster) and the church currently overseeing the ministry (Hamilton-Blessings).

RETIREMENT CELEBRATION

On Sunday, August 27, 2023 Pastor Winston Bosch presented a sermon in the morning service entitled "A Sermon in Honour of Pastor Paul," where he used the text of 1 Peter 5:1-7 and emphasized the importance of leaders setting an example for the flock. Peter encouraged the leaders to be clothed in humility and it is clearly evident that Pastor Paul took this seriously in his time at Streetlight. Words of appreciation for his work as a Christ-like servant were shared with the congregation and offered as an example worthy to be remembered and followed.



This worship service was the first in the new Streetlight building and it was obvious by the number of guests and visitors that the word was out that the building was open and that it was a special day for Pastor Paul and the congregation. A pot-luck lunch served the large crowd and added to the joyful celebration.

In the evening the new auditorium was filled again, including relatives and friends of Paul and his wife Evelyn as well as ministerial colleagues from the area. Pastor Paul encouraged the congregation with 1 Timothy 4:4, 5 to preserve their inheritance in Jesus Christ by not letting anything or anyone obscure it or tarnish it with additions or subtractions. All things created by God are good when received in thankfulness and consecrated by the Word of God and prayer! His greatest hope in retiring as pastor at Streetlight is that he will continue to hear reports going forward that the Streetlight Christian Church remains faithful in studying God's Word and praying together. A number of colleagues and delegates from neighbouring churches shared best wishes and appreciation for all his work, and for God's leading in fruitful retirement years ahead.



SERVING STREETLIGHT

Pastor Paul took on this role as the first minister in a small church plant in downtown Hamilton where he served faithfully and persistently, often through challenging circumstances. He was a kind, gentle, and unassuming servant leader who embodied the gospel through humbleness and caring. He was always quick to offer pastoral support to any person, at any stage of their spiritual journal, for any reason. And he offered that care with dignity and compassion, always deeply rooted in Scripture and Jesus Christ. Pastor Paul provided this care through countless phone calls, texts, hospital visits, coffee visits, drives through the city, walks through the woods, on city buses, the Streetlight bus, in food courts, and on park benches. After seventeen years of service at Streetlight, it is hard to imagine the number of times that he planted or cultivated the gospel of Jesus Christ in people's hearts in Hamilton. And in a small congregation like ours, he did much of his work anonymously and alone, at least from a human perspective. But God knows his faithful service, as do those who were personally impacted by his ministry.

ETERNAL RETIREMENT GIFT

Other than a couple of gifts and many kind words, what reward will Pastor Paul receive for his years of humble faithful service? Like all those who pursue and support the mission of God by placing their faith in Jesus Christ, Pastor Paul will be rewarded with an eternal inheritance, in the most blessed and diverse neighbourhood imaginable. For when Jesus returns on the clouds, he will gather all the believers into his heavenly kingdom, where God will live eternally with his people.

The Streetlight community loves Pastor Paul, and we publicly thank him for his years of faithful spiritual service. Please join our congregation in praying for him and Evelyn, as they reflect on this important milestone in the coming weeks and months. Pray also for our new pastor, Winston Bosch, and his wife, Berber, who with much enthusiasm, have taken on the mantle of serving Streetlight. 🙏

By Jeff Morris & Rick Ludwig



Photo credit: Sara Kingma

CRTS CONFERENCE

2023

As has become its habit, the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary hosted an annual conference on September 8 & 9, 2023. The theme chosen for this year’s conference was: *Christ Lives in us: Witness & Worship*. The conference doubled as a fitting tribute to Dr. Arjan de Visser upon his retirement after nineteen years of service at the Seminary. He himself offered the keynote address under the catchy title: “Enlarge the place of your tent, do not hold back:’ Reflections on the missional calling of the Canadian Reformed Churches.” As he had initially been missionary in South Africa before his appointment to be professor of Ministry and Missions at CRTS, it was fitting that his farewell address at the 49th CRTS Convocation should zero-in on this topic so close to his heart.

ENLARGE THE PLACE OF YOUR TENT

Dr. de Visser related that the title of his address was lifted from a sermon the English preacher William Carey delivered in 1792 on Isaiah 54:2, 3, a sermon that led to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society—which in turn eventually sent Carey to India where he spent the rest of his life proclaiming the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the people of that land. The necessary question, though, was this: did Carey do justice to the Word of the Lord in Isaiah 54 when he used this text as a plea to his hearers for greater enthusiasm and effort in mission work? By implication: does the Lord in this text instruct us—and Dr. de Visser was intentionally speaking to a CanRC audience—to “enlarge the place of your [ecclesiastical] tent” with more intentional mission work? With arguments drawn from exegesis and context alike,

our speaker argued that Carey was quite correct in using this text as he did. Based on that conclusion, Dr. de Visser posited three suggestions he thought would assist the CanRC in progressing their mission efforts:

1. Have general synod appoint mission deputies (including a full-timer) who would be responsible for assisting churches in their mission projects. Dr. de Visser thought that such centralization would allow for greater expertise and hence better support for mission workers on the field. It would also allow for greater flexibility when an obvious field opens up;
2. Allow persons with less than a full CRTS training to be “exhorters” on the field. This would make more manpower available for mission work;
3. Be consciously more welcoming as churches to the great influx of immigrants in our communities—understanding that the mission field has come to us.

Clearly Dr. de Visser’s suggestions will spawn discussion among any who have a heart for the spread of the gospel. Looking for better ways to “enlarge the place of [our] tent” is invariably a positive thing.

Many attendees at the coffee social following the Convocation (or “College Evening” as its popularly known) lingered late over numerous conversations. So, I suspect I was not the only one for whom the night was shorter than optimum. Nevertheless, by 8:45 the following morning Burlington’s Ebenezer church was abuzz with eager men and women getting their coffee fix before the three speeches planned for the day.



THE RISE AND FALL OF EMPIRES

The first paper of the morning presented Dr Erik van Aalten's research on "The Rise and Fall of Empires, and the progress of the Kingdom of Christ—and what this means for the witness of the church." It was fitting that Dr. van Aalten deliver a paper to this conference, since he was a fellow South African who had worked alongside Dr. de Visser during his years in South Africa. He's currently minister in the Free Reformed Church of Pretoria. Enlarging the place of our tent must invariably occur in the world in which we live. History in this world, Dr. van Aalten drew out, is cyclical so that every empire is short-lived—including the first Rome (which fell in 410), the second Rome (Constantinople, which fell in 1453), and the third Rome (as Moscow is known in some circles); and the same is true of the British Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and inevitably what may be called the American Empire, etc. In contrast to such cities of man, the city of God is eternal because history under the dominion of Jesus Christ is linear, extending from creation through the fall and onward to the victory on Calvary all the way to Christ's imminent return on heaven's clouds and the renewal of all things. The church witnesses to both the futility of the human cycle and the hope that characterizes Christ's dominion. The linear perspective that comes with proclaiming Christ's sovereignty provides a much more meaningful message to our world than, for example, Moscow's insistence on being the third Rome. So, Christ's preachers today can proclaim the gospel with the confidence that Christ's kingdom will never fail. Enlarging the tent, then, is ultimately never a futile task.

GOD'S BATTLE LINES


The second speech of the morning came from Dr. de Visser's colleague at CRTS, Dr. Jannes Smith. His chosen topic was: "God's Battle Lines: the Antithesis in the Preaching of the Gospel." Again, if the tent is to be enlarged, is it helpful in the preaching to emphasize the antithesis between the world and the church, between the city of man and the city of God? In a missional setting, ought the idea of antithesis not be downplayed??

Dr. Smith took us through some history relating to the term, specifically in relation to its place in our CanRC heritage (i.e., emphases in Kuyper, Schilder, and Holwerda). He then turned to the Bible to draw out that the Lord himself drew a battle line between himself and Satan (Gen 3:15), a battle whose contours are never abstract or theoretical but always real, dynamic, and progressive. The pages of Scripture resound with the noise of this battle; though Jesus obtained the victory over the serpent on the

cross of Calvary, the people of God repeatedly find themselves in the ongoing skirmishes of this battle—be it as it comes at us from the world, the devil, or our own flesh. Dr. Smith's insistence was that the living preaching of the Word absolutely needs to speak of this battle, including that God's people avoid any synthesis with sin. As the church seeks to enlarge her tent (and so be deliberately missional), she may not minimize or ignore the reality of the antithesis; the Word of God itself draws battle lines the preaching must draw out. In fact, drawing out these battle lines is the ecumenical task of the church; one is either for God or against God. So, the preaching (and the conversations and lives of believers) needs simply to follow the battle lines God has described in his Word.

FEED MY LAMBS

Dr. Christine van Halen-Faber provided the third speech of the day, under the title "Feed My Lambs: Catechetical instruction within the unity of home, church, and school." As an adjunct lecturer at CRTS assisting in the department where Dr. de Visser had laboured (particularly in Catechetics), Dr. van Halen-Faber had a unique relationship with Dr. de Visser (and of course with sr. Inge deVisser in their joint careers as teachers). The youth of God's flock need not only to be taught at home and at school, but also deliberately catechized in the doctrines of the Word of God in such a way that head, heart, and hand are molded for ready service in God's world.

Altogether the 2023 Conference provided participants with considerable stimulating food for thought. The initial chewing on the diet received occurred during the coffee and lunch breaks available at the conference, but further rumination will invariably happen in the days and weeks that follow. As usual, CRTS is to be commended for putting this conference together. Particularly, we share gratitude for the work which Dr. (& sr.) deVisser could do in the Seminary and in the churches over the years past. May the Lord bless them richly in the retirement phase of their earthly sojourn. 



Clarence Bouwman

Minister Emeritus

Smithville Canadian Reformed Church

clarence.bouwman@gmail.com

MISSION IN MEXICO

Sowing the Seed

SCOTT BREDENHOF



INTO THE FIELD

Mission in Mexico is a relatively new endeavour. My family and I have been on the field for a mere four years and our current ministry in the Santa Barbara neighbourhood was started less than two years ago. Much of our work is focused on sowing the seed—outreach and evangelism. If a metaphor is useful, we’ve just stepped into a field of dry, crumbly dirt, dotted by weeds and rocks (kind of like the actual fields we see around here). Taking a handful of seed, we scatter it about, not knowing what will happen to it.

As you know, plants typically don’t grow overnight, and fruit doesn’t burst forth instantaneously. That is true on the mission field as well. So, we’ve had to learn patience as we look out over the dusty field, praying the few dots of green might be the beginning of a harvest. We’ve had to learn firsthand what the true definition of “success” looks like.



THE EXCITING PART

It's exciting work, thinking five, ten, fifty years ahead and not knowing what God will do. It is exciting to see how God has allowed us to start a ministry from the ground up. *Ministerios La Fuente* (The Fount Ministries), as we have called it, has an outreach centre in town where we hold Sunday services, a kids' Bible club, English classes, and other events. We also run a sports club every Thursday, host a Bible study in our home, and organize a Vacation Bible School twice a year.

It is exciting to stand before a group of young boys and tell them things about God they never knew. It is exciting to study the Word of God with women who have only a thin sliver of Bible knowledge. It is exciting when someone new steps into the Sunday service and hears the gospel for the first time.

THE HARD PART

Sowing seeds can be a sweaty, tiresome job. Dust blows in the eyes, seeds get carried away by the wind, and the sun scorches from above. In the same way, our work of sowing gospel seeds has had its challenges.

Every time we start a new outreach we wonder if anyone will show up, and then when only a few do we have to trust that God knows what he is doing. The Sunday service we started has not grown much and we have not had a consistent group each Sunday. Young people we want to disciple are not as eager as we are.

These are the hard things—the dust, the wind, and the sun. But our confidence is in the seed we are spreading. We are spreading good news of Christ, and we have his faithful presence every step of the way.

SEEDLINGS

Since starting *Ministerios La Fuente* in the community of Santa Barbara, we have seen the “fruit” of investing in a place and its people. Our number of contacts has grown, and more people know who we are or at least a bit of what we are doing. A few people

have come to us seeking help or counsel, evidence that we are gaining their trust.

Last Easter we ran a week-long kids club and many of the moms came and stayed throughout, including the gospel message at the end. From that group of moms, three have started attending a Bible study in our home. Their Bible knowledge is minimal and what they do know is skewed by the teaching of the Roman Catholic church.

WATERING

There are also several Christian ladies who attend the Sunday service, coming from Baptist and Pentecostal backgrounds. This means we have the opportunity to minister to them and introduce them to a theology that is perhaps a bit more robust and exhaustive than that which they have been taught.

We've discussed the topics of prayer and healing, demons, the Trinity, and whether Adam was a historical man. In the preaching, we are able to demonstrate how to interpret the Bible and introduce themes such as covenant and election.

PAN DE VIDA

I mentioned earlier that Mission in Mexico is a new endeavour and while that is true, it is also true that in a way it stands on the shoulders of work being done by Children of Hope and the various children's homes they support in our area.

We continue to stay involved in Pan de Vida especially, located just ten minutes from our house, and benefit from being part of the Christian community there. We help with the Sunday School program and Scott has been teaching English classes to the high school students for several years now.

Our hope is that over time we would be able to foster relationships with the kids and have the opportunity to disciple some of them when they age-out of the children's home.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:7

An apt way to close out this article is to quote the wise, inspired words of the apostle Paul: “So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” Amen indeed. May God bless all our planting and watering with abundant gospel growth, whether in Mexico or Canada or elsewhere.



Scott Bredenhof
 Missionary-evangelist
 Mission in Mexico
 Joint project between Abbotsford
 Vernon, and Willoughby Heights CanRCs
sabredenhof@gmail.com



RAY OF SUNSHINE

Rachel Vis

Katherine Nijenhuis

Hi! My name is Katherine Nijenhuis. I live at the Lighthouse in Fergus, Ontario. I am very blessed by God to be living here. I help staff with chores, which include dishes, preparing meals (especially salads), and cleaning bathrooms. I also take care of dusting and vacuuming my room. I love to make cards and to scrapbook! I thank so many of you for sending cards, especially on my birthday. I love to visit in the communion of saints. I attend Bible Study. We ladies are studying the book of Philippians. I enjoy that. I also enjoy being picked up every Sunday and visiting with members of Fergus Maranatha congregation. I take care of my planters outside and my begonia inside. With a lot of sun and water they have done well. Sometimes I pulled weeds in the flower beds too. Besides all I do at the Lighthouse I also work three days per week at McDonalds as guest experience leader. I clean tables as well as greet the customers. A highlight this year was travelling with my brother to Leamington (near Point Pelee) for a holiday!



JANUARY

6 Jason Herrewynen will be **50**

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

7 Christine Breukelman will be **52**

2225-19th Street
Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

13 Ben DeJong will be **33**

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

14 Stephen Dykstra will be **41**

Box 3573
Smithers, BC VOJ 2N0

17 Henry Driegen will be **68**

PO Box 2532 Station A
Abbotsford, BC V2T 6R3

19 Edwin Schutte will be **40**

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

19 Janine Smid will be **54**

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

26 Katherine Nijenhuis will be **58**

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

30 Tyler Hoeksema will be **35**

6755 Lorne Dr
Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

Happy birthday to the many of you celebrating a birthday in January! May the Lord bless you and keep you in the year to come. May you all continue to shine your light to all of those around you.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Do you love your parents? Do you honour your parents? Well, that is what we are commanded to do by God. So, do you know what "honour" means? That means you always show respect to your parents. But sometimes they make a decision that you don't think is fair! You may talk to them very respectfully about it. But then, if your parents do not change their minds, you must honour their decision. Or sometimes they can be impatient. God calls you to honour your parents by showing patience with them. And, yes, when you get into trouble, your parents have to discipline you. God wants you to take your punishment and listen when they teach you why you needed that punishment. God decided that it is good for children to have parents to teach them. And when you honour your parents, you are obeying God.

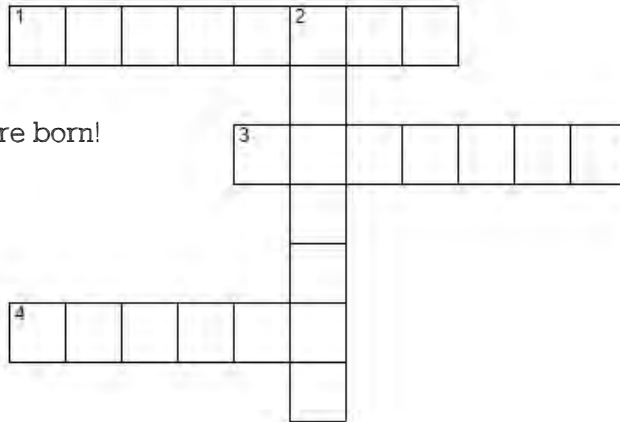
COMPLETE THE CROSSWORD PUZZLE ABOUT OTHERS WE MUST HONOUR.

ACROSS:

- Another word for this is preacher.
- These people have cared for you since you were born!
- They stop you if you speed when driving.

DOWN:

- This person is in charge of you at school.



LOOK UP THE TEXT BELOW TO FILL IN THE BLANKS.

_____, obey your _____

in the Lord, for this is _____ (Ephesians 6:1).

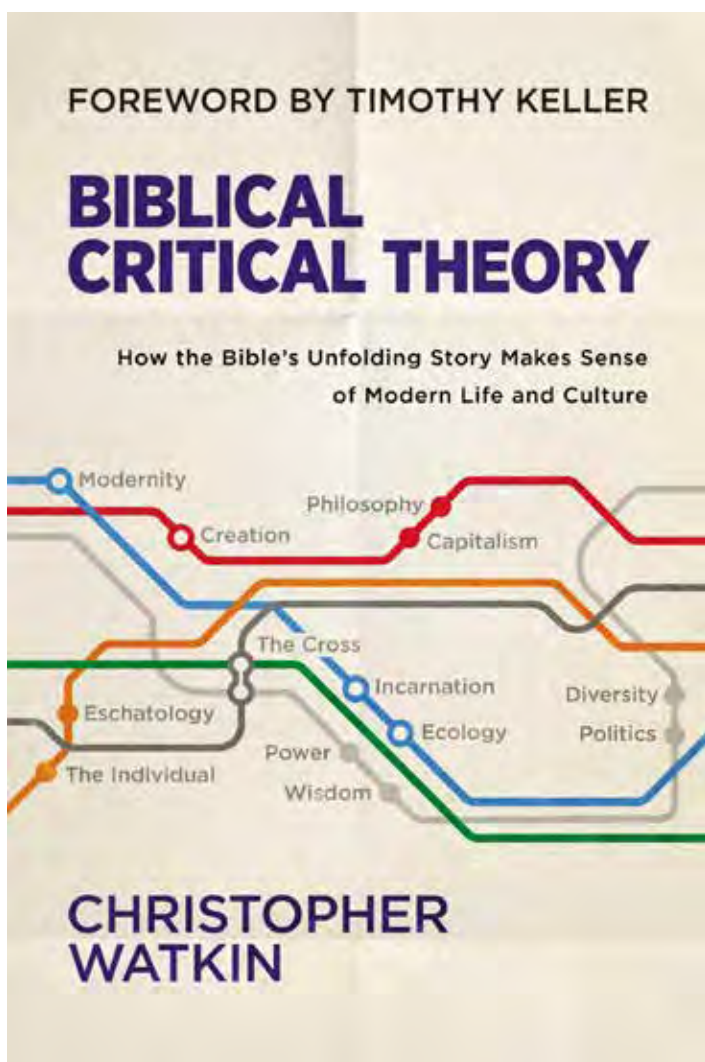


HEY KIDS!

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

AMANDA DEBOER

A CRITICAL THEORY FOR CHRISTIANS



There's a creative new movement afoot in apologetics. It's seen with recent books by the likes of John Dickson (*Bullies and Saints*) and Glen Scrivener (*The Air We Breathe*) and, going back a few years, Vishal Mangalwadi (*The Book that Made Your World*). I don't know if this movement has a name yet, but it involves applying biblical analysis and critique to Western culture, demonstrating how the values Westerners hold dear are, at root, biblical values. Christopher Watkin's massive brick of a book belongs with this movement.

Watkin is associate professor in French studies at Monash University in Melbourne. His range of academic interests, however, extend far beyond French Studies. He has written extensively on philosophical and theological topics, especially on French post-structuralist philosophy.

Biblical Critical Theory isn't a light read, but it's also not impenetrably technical or academic. Of recent books I've read, it's on a similar level to Carl Trueman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. Watkin explains many of his key terms in the Introduction and if a reader had paid attention there, the rest should fall into place.

What does this book set out to do? According to Watkin, it could have been called "Know What Follows from What You Believe" (p. 2). To that end, he introduces us to the idea of diagonalization. This

Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture, Christopher Watkin. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022). Hardcover. 648 pages. \$61.99 CDN.

is the key tool in his biblical critical theory. Unbelieving culture often presents us with competing views. Watkin mentions the example found in 1 Corinthians 1. Greeks love wisdom, but Jews desire powerful signs. But the cross cuts across both of these with its “foolishness” and “weakness.” The cross diagonalizes the Greeks’ wisdom and the Jews’ signs. Diagonalization “presents a biblical picture in which the best aspirations of both options are fulfilled, but not in a way that the proponents of these options would see coming” (p. 17). Watkin notes that this critical tool isn’t his invention, although the term is. Diagonalization, in its essence, can be found in other Christian thinkers, including Augustine, Martin Luther, Herman Bavinck, C. S. Lewis, and Cornelius VanTil.


What’s particularly new here is the scope with which Watkin applies this critical tool. He travels through the whole narrative of the Bible and illustrates how various biblical teachings diagonalize cultural polarities. As an example, chapter 11 is on Moses, the Exodus, and the Torah. He has a section in this chapter on “God’s Name and Criminal Justice.” He observes,

The political right is customarily characterized as holding a view that focuses on justice: locking offenders up and, in the case of serious crimes, throwing away the key. The left is usually framed as favouring compassion, considering the social and structural causes of crime and seeking rehabilitation and reform rather than punishment. Exodus 3 and 33, by contrast, present a God who is neither left nor right or, rather, who takes the compassion that adherents to the left value in their position and the justice that partisans of the right prize in theirs and marries them perfectly, thereby revealing both political approaches to criminal justice as reductive and partial simplifications of a more complex biblical position (pp. 261–262).

In other words, God as “merciful and gracious . . . who will by no means clear the guilty” diagonalizes the right and the left on

criminal justice. This is just one example of dozens in the book. In fact, after the Table of Contents, there is a table of the abundance of figures (114) in the book, many of which illustrate diagonalization.

The majority of these diagonalizations are credible. However, there were a couple where I felt my eyes beginning to roll upwards. One example is the mention of Brexit on page 363. On the one hand, you have the Brexiteers with their emphasis on local identity, and on the other hand, the Remainers with their attachment to the universal. The incarnation diagonalizes these two opposites, according to Watkin (following Graham Tomlin). The incarnation apparently means that these opposites are actually united. But that still leaves the existential question: stay or leave? The other example was in his discussion of wisdom literature where he asserts an “irreducible tension” between Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. However, when the irony of Ecclesiastes is appreciated, how it describes life “under the sun” (i.e., apart from God), I fail to see how one could conclude that there is any such tension between them. But Watkin does and then he uses Job to diagonalize this tension. He believes that Job brings the two radically different perspectives together. Yet what if they were never apart in the first place?

I found *Biblical Critical Theory* to be a highly stimulating and enjoyable read. Watkin’s writing reflects the best of a Reformed approach to life and culture. At the end of every year, I pick out my top reads and publish them on my blog. I have a feeling that *Biblical Critical Theory* is going to be my top pick for 2023. Certainly I haven’t read anything better yet this year. 



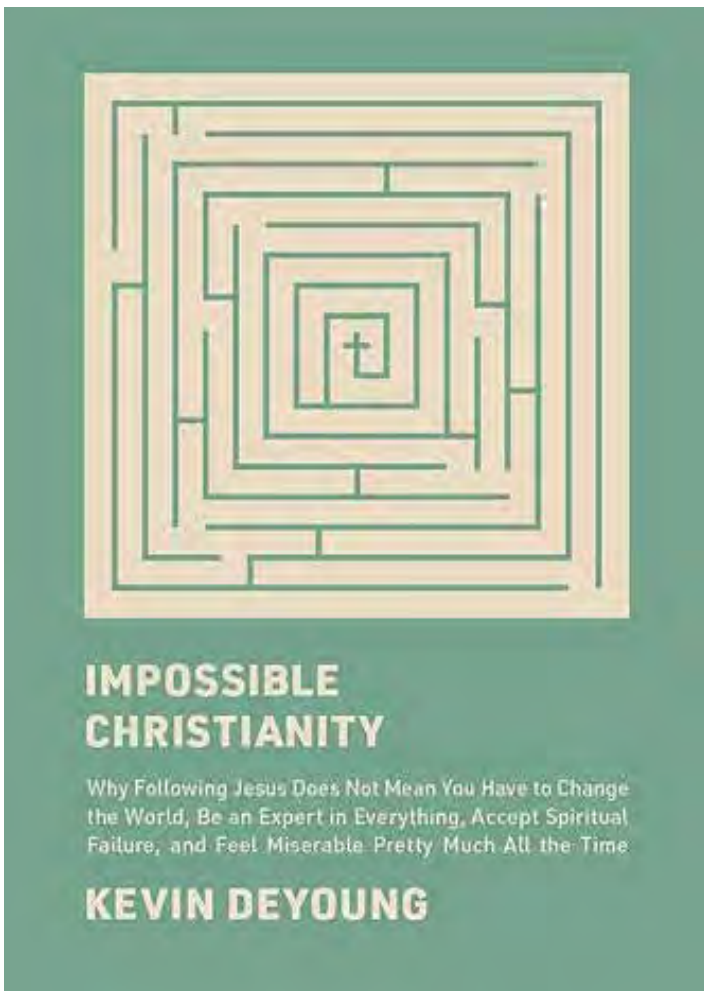
Wes Bredenhof

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston

bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca

A GOOD DAY'S WORK



Impossible Christianity, by Kevin DeYoung. (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2023). Hardcover. 140 pages. \$24.99 CND.

There is a sticky wicket in Reformed theology underlying the full-throated teaching of salvation by grace alone through faith and the scriptural assertion that true faith will always bear discernible fruit in the believer. Not only some fruit, but possibly an increasing yield over time. And to further complicate the matter, the evidence of that fruit affords the believer and those around them some assurance of this living faith that saves by grace alone! Kevin DeYoung's latest contribution explains that an anxiety can develop around this potentially convoluted teaching of justification and sanctification often resembling an *Impossible Christianity*. The subtitle of his book reads: *Why Following Jesus Does Not Mean You Have to Change the World, Be an Expert in Everything, Accept Scriptural Failure, and Feel Miserable Pretty Much All the Time*.

Finding his starting point in his own experience as a struggling but semi-successful runner, combined with a movie reference to *Babe*, the story of a pig who excels as a sheep dog, DeYoung lands in the gospel of Matthew where Jesus teaches the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14–30). Here the traveling master gives money to three of his servants to use productively to increase his enterprise while he is away. The first two respectfully work with the funds they are given and reap the benefits to present to their master upon return. The third servant squirrels it away so he can return it in full measure without losing or gaining anything. The first two do their work expecting their master to be fair and benevolent. The third is fearful of his master, certain that he will be easily disappointed and angry. The first two, with varied gains for the master, both receive the same commendation, “Well done good and faithful servant,” while the third is rebuked as “a wicked and slothful servant.” The parable speaks about life in the kingdom, life as a child of God. It

shows us that God is looking to commend his children for living a Christian life and that we should not live in fear but in joyful expectation. On the other hand, living in fear or expectation of failure could not only be paralyzing, but also possibly expose us as lazy and indifferent towards our Master!

DeYoung realizes he is treading on a theological tightrope here and is quick to introduce seven guardrails to make clear to the reader what he is *not* saying in this book, lest anyone be left feeling uncertain about their salvation in Christ alone or confused about the very real struggle with sin for all Christians. What he is looking to confirm is that “following Christ is never easy, but it does not have to be impenetrably mysterious, exceedingly complex, and relentlessly guilt-producing” (p. 7). Following the introduction, the book explores this theme over eight varied chapters, often engaging the topic by teaching a scriptural truth and then facing up to objections he has heard along his journey as a pastor, seminary teacher, and blogger for The Gospel Coalition. In typical DeYoung style he is insightful, concise, and humorously self-deprecating. A generous amount of scriptural and confessional support texts is provided along with some referenced commentary. Included in the discussion are Christian lifestyle topics such as the use of money, evangelism, self disciplines, corporate responsibilities, global concerns, and dealing with guilt. The book covers these diverse topics to ensure that it is not taken as a detailed manual

for daily Christian living, but as an overall encouragement for God’s children to approach their duties under the smiling face of a God and Saviour who looks graciously upon his children and offers a communal blessing of peace for them from week to week (Num 6:24–26). Thankful living is not the burden of faith but the blessing!

One more thought: the book is curiously published in a size that is barely larger than a 5x7 photo and in hardcover. My first impression was that it could have been printed in a slightly larger and thinner paperback for economy’s sake, similar to some of DeYoung’s other books. But on second thought, although a bit pricey, this is a book that should be read and then readily gifted to another who may be wrestling with daily frustrations and gloom in their Christian living, and not finding the simple joy of a good day’s work in the kingdom. The handy pocket size and hardcover will allow it to travel well! 📖



Rick Ludwig
Streetlight Christian Church
rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com

GIVE THE GIFT OF CLARION

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

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

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



Classis Alberta

October 24, 2023

Classis is opened in a Christian manner. The delegates are welcomed, especially the deputies for Regional Synod West, with a view to a retirement and peremptory examination. In prayer the memorabilia of the vacancies and calls are remembered.

The credentials are found to be in good order. Classis is constituted. Rev. J. Van Spronsen, chairman; Rev. J. Huijgen, vice-chair; Rev. S. Van Leeuwen, clerk. Classis agrees that it suffices that one of the RSW deputies will be connected via video link, due to his inability to travel due to weather related delays.

Classis proceeds to the approbation of the call of br. Caleb Kos by Devon CanRC. After the sermon proposal is deemed sufficient, Classis explores the various disciplines. Br. Kos sustains his examination and Classis approbates the call and deputies RSW concur. Congratulations are offered to the candidate and his wife and we pray in thanksgiving to the LORD.

The church at Coaldale requests Classis to give concurring advice in the case of the upcoming retirement of the Rev. J. Huijgen. Classis gives concurring advice and Deputies RSW concur with that. Rev. Huijgen's retirement will officially commence April 15, 2024.

One church seeks advice in a matter of discipline. Advice is given. Prayer, beseeching God's grace and power, is offered up.

Suggested date for next classis: January 11, 2024 (alt. date: March 14, 2024). Suggested positions: chairman, Rev. M. ten Haaf; vice chairman, Rev. J. Van Spronsen; clerk, Rev. J. Huijgen. Convening church: Neerlandia.

Immanuel church will represent Classis at the ordination of br. Caleb Kos.

Personal Question Period is held. Brotherly censure (Art 34, CO) is not needed. The Acts are adopted, and the Press Release approved. Classis is concluded with prayer.

Rev. J. Huijgen, vice-chair e.t.

Classis Niagara (Contracta)

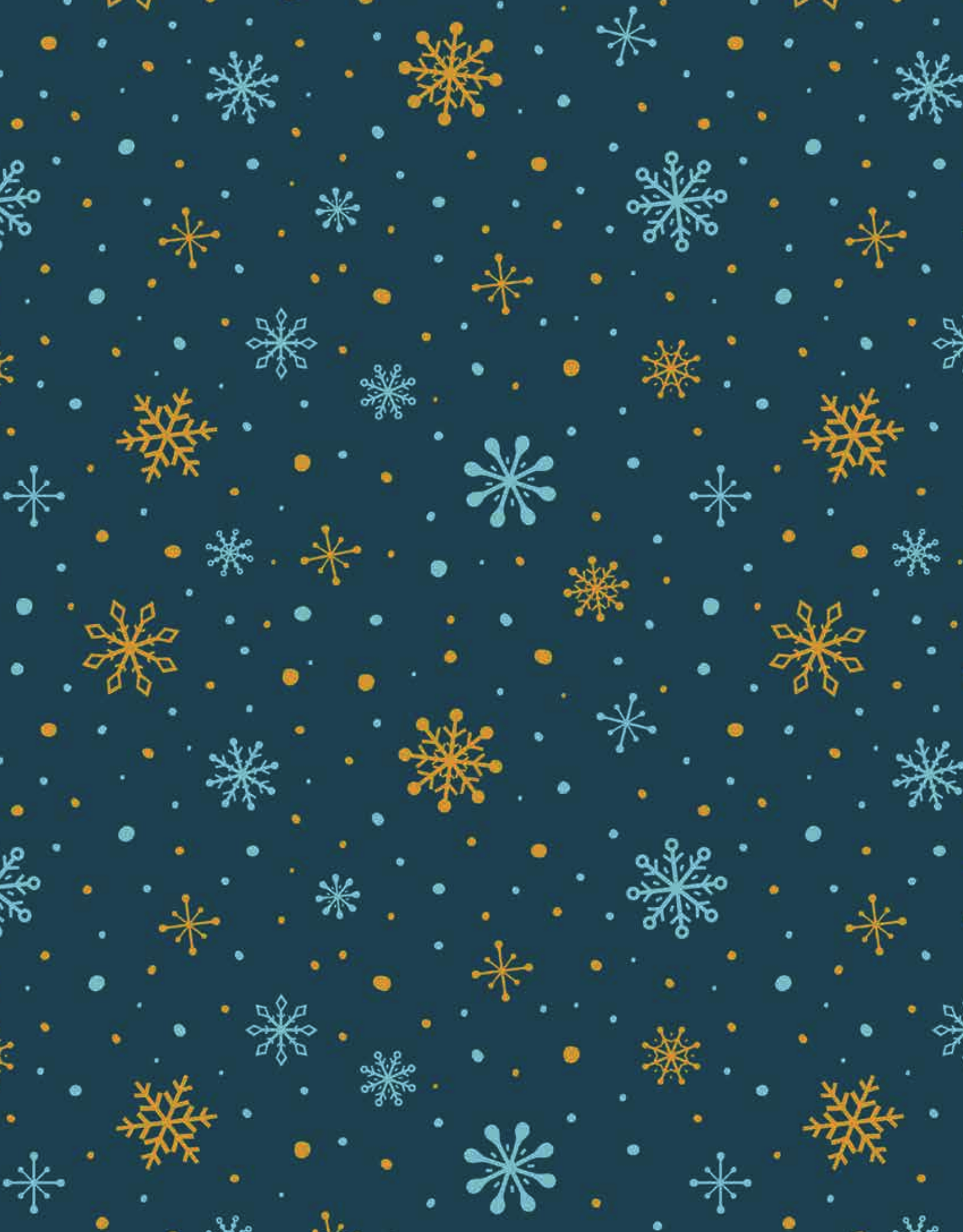
November 1, 2023

Br. Ben Helder, on behalf of Covenant Canadian Reformed Church of Grassie, convened the meeting of the delegates and led in opening devotions. He read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 and led in prayer. He then invited those present to sing Hymn 65:1-4. The credentials were found to be in good order and Classis was constituted. The following officers were appointed: Chairman—Rev. Rolf den Hollander; Vice Chairman—Br. Ben Helder; Clerk—Rev. Rodney Vermeulen.

The purpose of the meeting was to seek classis approval (as per CO Art. 4) to extending a second call to Rev. John Louwse of Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church to serve at Covenant Canadian Reformed Church of Grassie. The Council of Grassie had provided delegates with a written rationale for extending the second call. After a brief discussion approval was given.

Personal question period was made use of and no censure as per Article 34 was necessary. The Acts and Press Release were adopted. The chairman invited the delegates to sing Psalm 134 and led in closing prayer.





Seasons Greetings

FROM ALL OF US AT PREMIER PRINTING