

Clarion

93 MISSION ORGANIZATION OF THE CANRC *97* GOD'S BATTLE LINES

107 WITNESS AT WORK: BEING A FUNERAL DIRECTOR

what's inside

In Issue 3 you will find plenty of news and stimulating discussions surrounding mission work. Arjan de Visser wraps up his series on how mission work is organized in our federation with a pointed suggestion or two for our churches. We learn from Matthew VanLuik via reporter John Siebenga about some key principles for reaching out to our neighbours without needing to overhaul our worship services. On the news side of things, we have a report on expanding Reformed mission work in the French language as well as a newsletter about Reformed theological training in the Portuguese language—fascinating and encouraging to see how the Lord is sending out his Word to so many corners of the globe! Closer to home Ilse Vandermeulen begins a series of occasional pieces on everyday Reformed Christians witnessing to Christ as their Lord in the workplace. Mission and outreach are everybody's business, one way or another—and that's a blessed thing!

Karlo Janssen finishes his two-part series on the bureaucratic mess that seems to be clogging up our broader assemblies—with a suggested fix to boot. John Smith begins a series of articles on the important but sometimes questioned concept of “the antithesis” and what part it needs to play in our thinking and acting. Jeff Poort takes a less-familiar passage to meditate with us on the preciousness of church unity. This dovetails nicely with Matthew VanLuik's editorial on pursuing reconciliation within the body of Christ, a pursuit that brings Christ glory and us peace and joy. Keith Sikkema presents another story-telling account of God's work through the medieval scholar Alcuin. Two book reviews offer critical evaluations of books that may interest many while *Clarion Kids* walks our younger readers through the 8th Commandment. One classis press release rounds out our issue.

Enjoy your reading and when you're done, consider passing the magazine along so that others can also become informed, edified, encouraged, and feel part of the family of God across our federation. Where else can a person stay in the loop on Canadian Reformed church life? Best!

Peter Holtvluwer

On our cover: Gleason Falls, Hillsborough, United States

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contents

- 091 EDITORIAL
Matthew Van Luik
- 092 TREASURES, NEW & OLD
Jeff Poort
- 093 Mission Organization of the CanRC
Arjan de Visser
- 095 The Ecclesiastical Route (2)
Karlo Janssen
- 097 God's Battle Lines
John Smith
- 100 Mission in Our Communities
John Siebenga
- 102 DISCIPLING THE NATIONS
Louie Medemblik
- 105 IRTC Newsletter
- 107 WITNESS AT WORK
Ilse VanderMeulen
- 110 Alcuin the Scholar and Charles the King (3)
Keith Sikkema
- 113 CLARION KIDS
Amanda DeBoer
- 114 BOOK REVIEW
Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age
Rick Ludwig
- 116 *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*
Wes Bredenhof
- 118 Press Release (Classis ON W, Dec 13)

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Clarion

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

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

Confessionally Reformed
Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

RECONCILIATION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS¹

The church is to be a community of believers who are reconciled with one another and yet the reality is that there are brothers and sisters who live unreconciled. That is not a condition the Lord Jesus tolerates; his command is to be reconciled. What does reconciliation look like?

DEAL WITH SIN

Just as the Lord does not overlook our sins, he does not demand that we overlook the sins of one another. We often encourage one another to just forgive and quote 1 Peter 4:8 that “love covers over a multitude of sins.” In a healthy and loving relationship, we often overlook the sins of another, otherwise life would be impossible. That is not the same as ignoring the actions of people against us in which they have hurt us deeply. For reconciliation to take place, such sins need to be called out.

Reconciliation is the meeting of hearts and minds. We call each other out not to hurt one another, but to restore a broken relationship. When we sin against someone, it impacts the heart of that person for we have hurt them deeply. The goal is not to get someone to confess and move on, but to restore the relationship on a heart-to-heart level. People are estranged from one another because of the bitterness in their heart; as God’s people, we do not want to live with bitterness but with joy and love.

FORGIVENESS & LOVE

Healing in our lives is only possible when we learn to forgive. Understandably, the most difficult lesson for those who have been abused by others is to learn to let go of their anger, bitterness, and shame by learning to forgive those who have abused them. From a human perspective it seems counter intuitive, for we would say that they have a right to be angry and bitter. It is indeed unnatural for one who is abused not to feel anger and bitterness or shame, but the way of healing is not to seek revenge but learning to forgive through the strength of Christ. Bitterness and anger destroy our heart, but seeking the well-being of the soul of the abuser brings healing in one’s heart. Instead of seeking destruction, it seeks

restoration. We do not need to go through life acting like a victim, but in Christ we may act positively for the well-being of others.

Forgiving others is a matter of love. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,” (John 3:16). The world to which God showed love was a world that hated and despised him with its whole heart. In his love God sent his Son because it was his desire to forgive mankind. God did not desire the destruction of the world but in his heart he desired their salvation. This forgiveness came at great expense to the Father. It cost him the life of his Son, Jesus Christ.

This reminds us that showing love to someone involves a sacrifice on our part. It means that we give up the desire for revenge, and we put aside the anger that lives within us because we desire to restore a relationship with those who have hurt us. Because God has revealed his compassion for us in Christ Jesus, it is now possible through the power of the Spirit to show compassion to others. To offer someone forgiveness is a gift made possible through Christ, so that a broken relationship is restored and there is again a meeting of hearts.

EXPECT CONSEQUENCES

To forgive someone does not mean there are no consequences for the sinner. A criminal may sincerely confess his sins, and yet he must still pay for his crime. Someone who is guilty of abuse may be forgiven, having sincerely asked for forgiveness, and yet he must still pay the consequences before the law. A husband who has abused his wife may seek forgiveness, but he may not demand that she now acts as if nothing has happened. A wife may seek the spiritual well-being of her husband, but the scars of the past will not quickly disappear. Even though we are forgiven, in this life we must still bear the consequences of our sinful action. Therefore, we long for the life to come when all relationships will be restored to perfection. 



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¹ Note: This editorial follows up on a previous article, “Be Reconciled” (Vol 72 No 14).

ESTABLISHING UNITY

So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon

1 KINGS 2:46B

Many first-time readers of 1 Kings 2 are shocked by the ruthlessness of the newly minted King Solomon. His father David describes him as a “wise man” (1 Kgs 2:9). However, it does not take long before Solomon seemingly loses his cool and, even before he took the throne, ensures that all the men whom David warned him about are dead. Benaiah is called on to kill Joab, Adonijah, and Shimei—all in the same chapter. Someone once commented that the chapter could be titled, “Solomon Hires a Hitman.” Yet, the conclusion of 1 Kings 2:46 is that through this all, “the kingdom was established.” This means that the kingdom before 1 Kings 2 is not established, but through the actions within the chapter the kingdom comes to be “set” or “made firm.”

The reason for this can be traced back to the old division between the tribe of Judah in the south and the northern tribes of Israel. Some might view that division as something that only came up later between Jeroboam and Rehoboam. However, this division could be seen in the time when David was fleeing from Saul, and shortly after Saul’s death. There was the question of whether Israel would really have David as their king while he was in Hebron. Joab ended up killing Saul’s commander Abner, which had enraged David because this would not bring the tribes of Israel onto his side. It would further divide the ten tribes from the one tribe (Benjamin was generally included with Judah).

This was why Joab was such a threat to unity within Solomon’s reign. Not only had Joab supported Adonijah, but Joab had never been a comfortable fit within a united kingdom. Even in supporting Adonijah, Joab had tried to set him up in Hebron, not in Jerusalem. Hebron was of course a symbol of David’s earlier reign, when he did not have the support of the ten tribes.

If Adonijah—who had been involved in an attempted coup—became king, it would in effect be returning to David’s old guard with a special place for Judah, not the nation of Israel as whole. Shimei is the last on the list of those killed in 1 Kings 2. He had been from the house of Saul and had accused David of not being the rightful king over the northern tribes (2 Sam 16:8).

Simply put, *all* of these men were not just a threat to Solomon, but they were a threat to the unity of God’s people and the future of the nation. This is the underlying reason why Solomon goes to great lengths to get rid of them. Abiathar is banished from his task and the others are eventually killed because of their various rebellious actions. The result is an established, firm, unified kingdom.

This chapter reminds God’s people, especially leaders, to establish unity among God’s people in the New Testament age—unity within the church. This includes the excommunication of divisive people (Titus 3:10, 11) and the striving for peace and oneness among believers. This was the prayer of our Saviour in John 17:21, that no threat would stop him from making sure that believers would become one with him. When establishing unity in Christ is a priority in the church, many of the enemies of our king Jesus Christ, enemies such as the devil, sin, and worldliness, will be removed. 

FURTHER READING:

1 Kings 2 or Ephesians 4:1–16

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. What are some of the threats to the unity of God’s people today?
2. What would it look like if God’s people were more proactive in the limiting of threats to unity?
3. How united were the Israelites under King Solomon? Are any differences still allowed? What kind of differences can still exist in a church that is united today?



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Mission Organization of the CanRC

An Evaluation

ARJAN DE VISSER

In the previous two articles we looked at the way the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) organize their mission projects. We noted that the URCNA has appointed standing committees for mission work (home missions and foreign missions) as well as a mission coordinator for foreign missions. We also noted that the CanRC has always preferred a decentralized approach: the supervision of missionaries is left to individual churches in Canada and there is no standing committee for missions. In this article, I would like to evaluate the organizational model of the CanRC.

The CanRC's approach certainly has some strengths. To begin with, it follows the biblical example of Paul and Barnabas, who were sent out and reported back to the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1–4). It is good that our mission workers are sent out by the churches (not by societies or parachurch organizations) and that the churches maintain supervision over their work.

Second, since every missionary is connected to a sending church in Canada, it allows for the development of a strong connection between the missionary and the home front. It may not always work out like this in practice, but ideally there is strong prayerful support for the missionary from his sending church in Canada. When he is on furlough, he has a “home” for himself and his family where they find rest and encouragement.

Third, this decentralized approach avoids the pitfalls of having a denominational mission agency with an expensive bureaucracy made up of missionary “experts” who are calling the shots, perhaps even steering the denomination’s mission projects in a questionable direction. The history of various North American denominations provides more than enough illustrations of that danger.

WEAKNESSES

But the CanRC's approach has weaknesses as well. To begin with, it does not honour the biblical wisdom that for certain endeavours the churches should seek to cooperate. Theological education is an example: the churches together maintain a seminary for theological training. The same arguably applies to mission work, especially foreign missions: it requires cooperation. The Word of God gives indications of that as well. By way of example, in 2 Corinthians 8:18, 19, the apostle Paul refers to a brother who was “famous for his preaching of the gospel” and who was “appointed by the churches” to travel with Paul (note the plural: *churches*).

Second, the CanRC's approach makes it hard to develop and maintain expertise in mission work. Most members of mission boards are volunteers who have no experience with global mission work. Especially if there is a quick turnover of membership, mission boards are sometimes lacking in expertise. Understandably, they

sometimes struggle to handle the complex issues that pop up in global, cross-cultural mission. As a result, despite all the good intentions, mistakes are easily made and mission workers in the field do not always get the guidance and support that they need.

Third, the CanRC as a federation do not have a body that is able to engage in strategic thinking about global mission in the twenty-first century. The existing sending churches are focused on their own mission projects, understandably so. It would be unrealistic to expect them to develop a broader vision for the missionary calling of the CanRC as a whole. But if they are not able to do it, who can? Since there is no central mission board, the CanRC are not equipped to consider taking new mission projects or to re-evaluate existing ones. As a result, the foreign mission work of the CanRC has been fairly stagnant during recent decades. I believe that our churches could do more in terms of foreign missions, but it is not clear who should be taking the initiative.

Fourth, despite what I said about the good connection between the missionary and his sending church, the same cannot be said about *the other churches* in the federation. There are signals that congregations feel less and less connected to the traditional mission projects. Some churches want to break away and look for a project that is new and fresh, and perhaps closer to home. I know of several churches in the federation who have discontinued their support for foreign missions in order to focus on something more local instead. It also seems to me that church members in general feel more connected to projects supported by organizations like CRWRF and Word & Deed than to their “own” foreign mission projects.

In conclusion, if we look back at the mission history of the CanRC, we can be thankful. The initiative that was taken by the brothers at that first meeting in Carman in 1958 (see previous article) has been richly blessed. The work in Brazil, PNG, and other mission fields has flourished. And yet, I believe that our organizational model needs to be updated because it is causing our foreign mission work to become stagnant. It prevents the churches from building up expertise and from being versatile and flexible enough to be able to respond to missionary challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

SUGGESTIONS

What should be done? If I may make some suggestions, I would start by saying that we should probably make a distinction between home mission and foreign mission. Without suggesting that home mission is easy, a local church plant is easier to manage and supervise than a foreign mission project. With foreign mission there are always the additional challenges posed by geographical distance, language and cultural barriers, missionary team building, relationship with the native church, etc. In other words, the need for

cooperation and bringing in expertise is more urgent in the area of foreign missions than in the area of home missions.

Second, I suggest that it would be helpful if the CanRC synod appointed a standing committee for foreign missions in an effort to promote cooperation and build up missionary expertise. The CanRC Church Order already has an article that suggests that the churches should cooperate in fulfilling their missionary task (Art. 51). In other words, there is an ecclesiastical “place holder” that can be utilized for the purpose. Let’s use it.

Third, the mandate of this committee should be carefully defined in such a way that the role of the sending churches is safeguarded. In this regard, the guidelines as formulated by Abraham Kuyper and as reflected in the decisions of the famous “mission synod” of Middelburg 1896 can still provide guidance today. We stand by the principle that foreign mission is the mandate of the church, not a society, and that missionaries should be sent out and supervised by local churches. At the same time, we recognize that foreign mission work is a complex endeavour that requires the churches to cooperate and assist each other. Synod should appoint mission deputies to help the sending churches with advice and to facilitate consultation and cooperation.

Fourth, in foreign missions there is always the need for building up expertise. It can be a great blessing to have a missionary consultant who is able to visit the mission fields and serve the missionaries with advice and encouragement. Most denominations have appointed someone (sometimes more than one person) for this purpose. As mentioned in a previous article, the URCNA has appointed Rev. Richard Bout as their foreign missions coordinator. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), to mention another example, has two full-time consultants in their foreign mission office. I suspect there will be a need for the CanRC as well to appoint a foreign missions consultant, perhaps starting with a part-time position.

In conclusion, it would be good if the next synod of the CanRC (2025) could receive a proposal from the churches to appoint a committee that is mandated to study organizational models for foreign missions (as used by e.g. URCNA and OPC), with a view to possibly recommending that the following synod (2028) should appoint a standing committee for foreign missions. This should include a suggested mandate for such a committee. 



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The Ecclesiastical Route

(2)

KARLO JANSSEN

The ecclesiastical route is articulated in the last sentence of Church Order Article 30 as follows: “A new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it.”

When this sentence was added to the Church Order in 1983, a church predicted there would be a bureaucratic mess. Last time I explained that this prediction has proven true. This time we’ll see how we got into this mess and how we might get out of it.¹

BACKGROUND

How did we get into this mess?

General Synod (GS) 2010 considered: “It seems that the new sentence added to Article 30 in 1983 is the source of the difficulty.” Indeed. Underlying documentation for the decision of GS 1983 indicates that in adopting this “new sentence,” the Canadian Reformed Churches did as their sister churches, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) (GKv), had done in 1978.

The change was especially motivated by historical considerations. One historical assertion is that what GS 2010 called the “newer view” is actually the “older view,” dating all the way back to 1572. I am not so convinced of this. Anyway, it was thought

that this (presumed) 1572 view is inherent to Dort polity and warranted protection.

It was in response to the proposal to add this new sentence that the Hamilton CanRC warned that a “bureaucratic mess” would ensue (GS 1983 Art. 91). It was right.

A RETHINK IS NEEDED

In 2013, the CanRC prescribed a procedure for the execution of the “new sentence” in its guideline. Ironically, in 2014 the GKv adopted a church order which rescinded the line added to CO Article 30. In my opinion, the CanRC should rethink the 2013 decisions, not only because of the “mess” we are in but also because, in my opinion, it is actually contrary to principles of our polity.

PRINCIPLES

When contemplating regulations, one should always consider principles that underly them. A basic principle of Dort polity, especially of the Doleantie/Liberation sort, is that church assemblies are assemblies of *churches* rather than church members (that would be congregationalism) or minor broader assemblies (that would be conciliarism). Churches, not the minor broader assemblies, set the agenda of major broader assemblies.

¹ For a more detailed account of what follows, see officebearers.com > opinion.

Another basic principle is that churches and assemblies may not lord it over others (CO Art. 74) and broader assemblies have restricted jurisdiction (CO Art. 37). Now, the ecclesiastical route is prescribed as the way to have a broader assembly deal with “matters . . . which belong to its churches in common.” It is ironic that the ecclesiastical route can prevent churches from being involved in a matter that is common to them. This happens when an overture dealing with a topic that is common to all the churches of a major broader assembly is halted in the ecclesiastical route by a minor broader assembly. The ecclesiastical route allows minor broader assemblies to lord it over churches that are not “its churches,” thus having an impact beyond its jurisdiction.

PURPOSE

When contemplating regulations, one should also consider what they seek to achieve.

GS 2010 considered that the ecclesiastical route is a means to create broader support for a proposal (Art. 62). However, the fact that GS 2022 rejected an overture that had been submitted by both regional synods (Art. 105) makes clear it does not work that way in practice. Part of the problem here is that churches do not get involved with overtures the first moment they can and should. That reality exists because the process for overtures is bureaucratically complex.

Another purpose of the ecclesiastical route is to ensure that every church can interact with an overture that is before a major assembly to which it belongs. The concern with GS 2007’s decision was that a church asked a synod to adopt a proposal (and did) which no one else had seen. The importance of this purpose was explicitly acknowledged by GS 2010 (Art. 62), GS 2013 (Art. 99), and GS 2022 (Art. 78).

Finally, it has been said at times that the ecclesiastical route also exists to keep frivolous proposals away from general synod and so not waste time. There are two issues here. The first is, given that a decision not to forward an overture can be appealed, an overture will often still make it, in some form, to a major assembly. Secondly, when I crunched the numbers on this it turns out that if the ecclesiastical route of GS 2013 had not been in place but the route of GS 2010, hundreds of man-hours would have been saved in the run-up to GS 2019 and GS 2022. The ecclesiastical route is actually not that efficient.

A BETTER WAY

There is a better way. GS 2010 took its decision regarding the “older” and “newer” way, considering: “A blending of these two

approaches in a clear direction from synod would serve to benefit the churches and clarify the procedure for churches to address a general synod in the future” (Art. 62).

Now, the issue with the GS 2010 decision was that it adopted a Guideline at odds with the Church Order. This conundrum can be solved by adjusting the Guideline to the Church Order or adjusting the Church Order to the Guideline. GS 2013 decided to do the former (Art. 99). I suggest we try the latter.

That sounds radical but isn’t. For this ecclesiastical route is not original to the Church Order. It exists because of a “new sentence” introduced in 1983 into CO Article 30 based on a disputable understanding of a historical practice. Non-compliance with that new line in CO Article 30 saw GS 2013 prescribe a process.

The solution, thus, is to tweak the Church Order to allow for a guideline similar to that adopted by GS 2010. It means changing the “new sentence” to something like this: *“A new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly and is common to its churches may be put on the agenda by one of its churches.”* And one can then simply reinstate the Guidelines adopted by GS 2010 with a slight tweak: *“For matters common to the churches, individual churches may address proposals or other significant submissions directly to general synod with the requirement that all such submissions are sent also to each church in the federation no later than six months prior to general synod.”*

Regional synods and classes will also have to adopt a guideline like this into their regulations.

IN CONCLUSION

The proposed approach makes for clarity in procedure, for peace in the churches, and upholds the various principles of Doleantie/Liberation Dort polity, namely, that an ecclesiastical assembly is always an assembly of churches and all the churches should be involved in what is common to all the churches.

To get this done, someone will have to write an overture that will have to travel the ecclesiastical route. (If you feel inclined to react, please read the online articles (officebearers.com > opinion), as there you will find my detailed argumentation and the necessary documentation.) 



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God's Battle Lines:

The Antithesis in the Preaching of the Gospel (1)

JOHN SMITH

In a recent letter to the editor, Rick Ludwig wrote, “I wonder if the teaching of the antithesis has inadvertently alienated us from the world around us with clear and sharp lines drawn, so that we have forfeited opportunities to share the love of God in Jesus Christ. . . . Could it be that our awareness of the antithesis makes our missional engagement more urgent? Perhaps, another article?” (*Clarion*, Oct 13, 2023). What follows is a three-part article on this topic, a modified version of a speech that I gave at our CRTS conference this past September.¹ It addresses three questions. 1) What is the antithesis, and where does this idea come from? 2) Is it a theme that can be traced through the Bible, and if so, how? 3) What place should the antithesis have in the preaching of the gospel? In this first instalment we will deal with the first question.

KUYPER & THE ANTITHESIS

What is the antithesis, and where does this idea come from? “Antithesis” is a Greek word that means opposition or contrast.² Thus, during the Reformation, Calvin spoke of the antithesis that separates man as the image of God from the rest of God’s creatures.³ But in the nineteenth century, the word “antithesis” took on a more specialized meaning in theological discussions. It came to refer to the opposition between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light, between Christ and Satan, more specifically between the regenerate and the unregenerate, between the old and the new nature, between principles directed toward God and principles directed away from him.⁴ Thus, people began to speak of “*the* antithesis.” This use of the word was largely due to the influence of Abraham Kuyper.

¹ Footnotes have been kept to a minimum, but a fully-footnoted version is available on request. A video recording of my presentation can also be found on the Seminary website (canadianreformedseminary.ca).

² See also 1 Tim 6:20 (the only place where the Greek word “antithesis” is found in the Bible).

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (LCL 20; ed. J. T. Mc Neill; trans. F. L. Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), §1.15.3; see also §3.11.11.

⁴ C. A. van Peursen, “Antithese,” in *Christelijke Encyclopedie* (ed. F. W. Grosheide, G. P. van Ilterson; Kampen: Kok, 1956), 1:238.



Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

In 1898, Kuyper gave his six famous *Lectures on Calvinism* at Princeton University.⁵ In the first of these lectures he described his time as a time of mortal combat between two life systems. On the one side was post-Enlightenment modernism, with its spirit of revolution, which posed a great danger to the Christian heritage of society. On the other side was Calvinism, the flower of the Reformation and the highest form of Christianity, which had the potential to develop an alternative to modernism in every sphere. In the remaining five lectures Kuyper set forth the contribution that Calvinism would make in the areas of religion, politics, science, art, and the future of human thought and culture. Of these five areas, it was especially in the sphere of politics that Kuyper and his followers developed the idea of the antithesis, presenting his Anti-Revolutionary Party, with its confessional basis, over against the secular principles of the other parties. Kuyper's followers also applied the concept of the antithesis to philosophy, for example,

Herman Dooyeweerd in Europe and Cornelius Van Til in North America. But because our focus is on the preaching of the gospel, we will look especially at Kuyper's second lecture, on "Calvinism and Religion."

THE ANTITHESIS & COMMON GRACE

Here the antithesis runs between the modernist view of religion on the one hand, and the Calvinist view of religion on the other. Modernism has an evolutionary view of religion, developing from animism to polytheism to monotheism. It is a man-centred religion that serves the needs of the weak but can be discarded by those who have been enlightened and delivered by science. Calvinism is opposed to the modernist view of religion: God does not exist for the sake of man, but all creation exists to serve God, and he is the one who has planted the seed of religion in our hearts. Calvinism is the highest form of Christianity, said Kuyper, because unlike the others it does not have priests; it does not allow any human intermediary between God and man, except Christ alone. It recognizes that religion does not simply fill a human need, nor does it simply extend as far as the influence of a human intermediary, but it has a comprehensive scope, exercising its influence over all areas of life. How is religion able to be so comprehensive that its influence extends far beyond the walls of the church? It is here that that Kuyper brings in the doctrine of common grace. He said,

Not only did God *create* all men, not only is he *for* all men, but his grace also extends itself, not only as a special grace, to the elect, but also as a common grace (*gratia communis*) to all mankind. To be sure, there is a concentration of religious life and light in the church, but then in the walls of this church there are wide open windows, and through these spacious windows the light of the Eternal has to radiate over the whole world. Here is a city set upon a hill, which every man can see afar off. Here is a holy salt that penetrates in every direction, checking all corruption.⁶

SCHILDER'S CRITIQUE

In 1937, the centennial of Kuyper's birth, Klaas Schilder wrote a critique of Kuyper's *Lectures*.⁷ He had great admiration for Kuyper's vision for Calvinism, but on the point of common grace, he disagreed with Kuyper. Normally, said Schilder, common grace is mentioned in the context of sin and guilt: although the

⁵ A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism: Six Lectures Delivered at Princeton University, 1898, under the auspices of the L. P. Stone Foundation* (repr. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008).

⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 42–43.

⁷ K. Schilder, "Dr. Kuyper on Calvinism," in *The Klaas Schilder Reader: The Essential Theological Writings* (ed. G. Harinck, M. de Jong, and R. Mouw; Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2022), 159–77.

*“The first task of the church
will always be the proclamation
of that centuries-old antithesis”*

KLAAS SCHILDER



Klaas Schilder (1890-1952)

world is under judgment and curse, God tempers the judgment and restrains the curse, and *that* is common grace. But in his lecture on religion, Kuyper spoke of common grace in a much more positive sense: not to restrain the curse, but to penetrate and permeate religion so that it grows and expands and radiates over the whole world.⁸ That, for Schilder, was much too positive. When Kuyper wrote that there would have been next to no cultural development without common grace,⁹ Schilder responded that the development of the world was already part of God’s counsel and that the antithesis had to be taken into account.¹⁰ What Kuyper called common grace was for Schilder simply a continuation of the cultural mandate in a fallen world, in which there is not only grace, but also judgment. Schilder, therefore, preferred to speak of a common *mandate*.¹¹

In addition to Schilder’s criticism, I would like to add a criticism of my own. It strikes me that in Kuyper’s lecture on religion, about the role of the church in the world, Kuyper says very little about the preaching of the gospel,¹² and nothing at all about mission. Considering his emphasis on the antithesis, this is a significant omission. Schilder, by contrast, stated that “the first task of the church will always be the proclamation of that centuries-old antithesis.”¹³ You see, Schilder had not witnessed the flowering of Calvinism that Kuyper had promised. Instead, in his day, the church was being threatened by the false ecumenism of the World Council of Churches, which ignored the antithesis and compromised the historic confession of the church.

TEMPERED APPROACH

Schilder’s colleague, Benne Holwerda, also emphasized the antithesis in the preaching of the gospel. In the aftermath of two World Wars, Holwerda, too, was much more sober than Kuyper about what the church would achieve in society. In the rise of communism and the ecumenical movement, Holwerda saw the intensification of the antithesis and the rise of the beast and the false prophet in the last days.¹⁴ In short, then, the tendency of the *Vrijgemaakt* (Liberated) churches in the Netherlands, and hence of the Canadian Reformed Churches here, was to retain Kuyper’s language of antithesis, but to avoid his language of common grace.¹⁵

Next time we’ll tackle our second question: Is the antithesis a theme that can be traced through the Bible, and if so, how? 



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⁸ Schilder, “Dr. Kuyper on Calvinism,” 171.

⁹ A. Kuyper, *Common Grace: God’s Gifts for a Fallen World* (trans. N. D. Kloosterman and E. M. van der Maas; Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 1.35.

¹⁰ K. Schilder, “Lecture on the Creed (1935),” in *The Klaas Schilder Reader*, 318.

¹¹ K. Schilder, “Lecture 1. Common Grace,” in *The Klaas Schilder Reader*, 30.

¹² Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 51, 54.

¹³ K. Schilder, “Your Ecumenical Task,” Appendix 3 in Rudolf van Reest, *Schilder’s Struggle for the Unity of the Church* (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1990), 451.

¹⁴ See Koert van Bekkum, “‘Het begin van een eigen weg’: Geschiedenis en antithese in het werk van Benne Holwerda,” in *Holwerda herdacht: Bijdragen over het leven en werk van Benne Holwerda (1909–1952)* (ed. George Harinck; Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2005), 177–215, esp. 198–99.

¹⁵ Douma found Schilder too critical of Kuyper and found room for common grace as understood by John Calvin. See Jochem Douma, *Common Grace in Kuyper, Schilder and Calvin: Exposition, Comparison, and Evaluation* (ed. W. Helder; trans. A. H. Oosterhoff; Hamilton: Lucerna CRTS Publications, 2017).

Mission in Our Communities

God Prepares the Harvest in Dark Times

Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church Home Mission Committee hosted the 2023 Fraser Valley Reformed Evangelism Conference on November 3 and 4, 2023. They had invited Pastor Matthew VanLuik, retired pastor of Grace Canadian Reformed Church in Brampton, Ontario, to speak on the church's role as a light to the world with the theme: "Mission in Our Communities: God Prepares the Harvest in a Dark Time." Rev. VanLuik had been in Brampton for eighteen years and witnessed many changes in the church and the community. It is interesting to note that, in the past, Chilliwack was considered part of the Bible belt in the Fraser Valley. That has changed. The remnants of the past are evident in the many churches that remain. The Brampton community where Grace Canadian Reformed Church exists is very different. There are only three churches in the north-east corner of Brampton—a Roman Catholic Church, a non-denominational community church, and Grace Canadian Reformed Church. This allows for some unique opportunities.

GOD IS AT WORK

Rev. VanLuik's Friday evening speech could be summarized very briefly like this: "God is busy, and he prepares the harvest in your neighbourhoods." You may not be able to see what God is doing, but he is working. If God is indeed working, then we are called to get in on what he is doing. In an increasingly godless world, the Lord of the harvest has ripened the grain. Rev. VanLuik related many stories of members in Grace that had come to the church

first of all because they had been led to search for a safe haven where the gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed truly, fully, and faithfully. In short, they were looking for a spiritual home. The criticism that immediately arises could be that every city/town/village/community is different. What is good for Brampton is not the same in other places. Rev. VanLuik nicely put that criticism to rest when he stated we need to ask the question: what is God doing? What is he doing in our neighbourhood, our community? In the messiness of our woke and ungodly communities, VanLuik expressed the confidence that God works almost counterintuitively by doing his best work in the messes. So, he encouraged us to look for opportunities because God has already ploughed the soil and created a harvest of souls for us. We bring *hope* in a hopeless world. The harvest is ready. All we need to do is bring in the harvest.

Bringing in the harvest requires that we have an attitude of hospitality and love for the communities where God has called us. VanLuik referred to this as bringing the light of God's salvation. This requires that the grace, mercy, and love of God is evident in our lives. It ought to well up in us. That grace needs to shine as a light in our communities, drawing others to the riches of salvation. As much as God is working in the hearts of those who are coming to him, he is working in the hearts of his people. We are blessed with rich doctrines and traditions, but they don't save us. Instead, we need to be looking to share our firm foundation in the Scripture with those who are searching. Pastors need to preach the gospel—the full gospel of salvation. He emphasized that the



word “Reformed” means nothing to those who are searching for the gospel—they only want solid, biblical teaching. The very gospel that is preached each week must be changing our hearts to serve and love our Saviour, as well as those who come to us.

So how do we go about bringing in the harvest that God has prepared? Rev. VanLuik outlined a number of activities that Grace church has been involved in, activities that may not necessarily work in every community. The important thing, he stressed, is to get to know the neighbourhood of the church, the neighbourhoods where the members live, and then design activities that address the needs of the community. This means we need to be ready to open our church buildings to the community and possibly our homes. Which begs the question: Are our church buildings a resource for the communities? Are they safe places? Are they functional? Are they open or closed? How do we make our church buildings welcoming to the community? Good questions, especially to those who are thinking of building a place of worship.

And that was only Friday evening.

CHALLENGES

Saturday morning began with a breakfast that was second to none. (Thank you, Chilliwack Home Mission Committee; that was scrumptious and delicious!) Saturday morning, Rev. VanLuik took us through some of the challenges, inherent to our Canadian Reformed Churches, that need to be addressed. Attitude was the first one. Unless the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ rules and overwhelms our hearts, then we are in dire need of an attitude change. We need salvation. We need the blessing of new believers to remind us of the riches we already possess. This also means that those riches are meant for all, red and yellow, black and white, and those treasures are precious to all. VanLuik stressed that this does not

mean we have to change our liturgy, music accompaniment, or songs to be effective, as is evident in Brampton. The structure of the service does not need to change, but it is important that visitors understand the dynamic relationship between God and his people that is happening during the service. The other challenges for all intents and purposes fell out of the first: prayer, engagement, accountability, and confidence. If our hearts are turned toward the Lord, we will pray—pray for those we talk to, pray that the Lord would open our mouths to speak, pray for others in the congregation, pray, pray, pray. And God will answer. He will give the confidence to speak. When we pray, we will also be happy to see new faces in our congregations. And so it goes.

This segued into what happens in our worship services. Rev. VanLuik stressed that the gospel should never be dumbed down. Bring a message that is clear to the receiver, without clichés or theological terms (unless they are explained), challenge the heart to depend on Jesus Christ alone, stay away from dos and don’ts, as the sinful heart is always looking for ways to “earn” a little bit of God’s salvation. Preaching must come back to the fact that it is all grace.

OPPORTUNITIES

One of the riches we have as Canadian Reformed people is the communion of saints. It is within the communion of saints that newcomers realize that they are among other broken sinners, whose only comfort in life and death is belonging to Jesus. As members on the inside, we need to come with compassion and love, through engaging their heart more than their minds.

Rev. VanLuik passed on a few statistics that were somewhat disconcerting: 86% of those who are invited to church actually come to church; 82% of the unchurched would come to a worship service if invited but only 2% of the church members actually invite people to church. I am not sure where Pastor VanLuik got those numbers, but if true, we stand convicted.¹

God is working in our neighbourhoods. It is up to us to bring in the harvest, with compassion, with passion, with love, and with grace. Can we do it? Never, unless the Holy Spirit goes with us, and through prayer, he will. He is the faithful one and calls us to be faithful. We have a strong foundation; let’s build on it, let’s shout it from the church doors. Sounds like a wedding feast happening. 

John Siebenga

¹ Rev. VanLuik informs me that he got this from Dr. Thom Rainer (President and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources.)

Progress

of Ressources chrétiennes

LOUIE MEDEMBLIK

At the beginning of every new year, it is good to reflect on the year past. We have the privilege of being able to do so with wisdom since we know the Lord God. He gives us the ability to evaluate all that we do with a clarity and depth that cannot be found apart from him. He is to be in focus as we look back on what has been accomplished in the past year.

He is also to be in focus as we look ahead and consider our plans for the year to come. We have our lists, but the Lord holds the outcomes as sovereign over our lives. Therefore, he commands us, “Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established” (Prov.16:3).

THE RESSOURCES CHRÉTIENNES MINISTRY

This project began ten years ago with the cooperation of three groups: the Reformed Church of St. Georges, Quebec, the Owen Sound Canadian Reformed Church, and the Reformational Study Centre (RSC) in South Africa. Its goal is to bring free online Reformed material in the French language to pastors, students of the Bible, and new Christians alike. There is so much need for

this globally. Users from every continent use this website to grow in the knowledge of the Lord.

Rev. Paulin Bédard, former pastor in St. Georges, is the man behind this work. He retired last year from his pastoral duties and now dedicates all his time to *Ressources chrétiennes*. Since this work has flourished over the years, Rev. Bédard now oversees others who labour alongside him. They are translators who are not only required to know both languages fluently but must also be extremely well grounded in biblical doctrine. In addition, he uses the IT experience of others who keep the access to this material available in coordination with the study centre in South Africa. There are three main projects in *Ressources chrétiennes*.

LIBRARY

The first project is the general library of materials located on the main website (ressourceschretiennes.com). There are currently well over 7000 Christian articles archived. They are classified for ease of searching specific material. The topics range from doctrine to Reformed confessions, family devotions to pastoral care, to



Steering Committee of *Ressources chrétiennes*

name a few. There is relevant material for anyone wishing to better understand God's Word, from office bearers to youth.

Each year Rev. Bédard adds somewhere in the order of 700 articles to this site. This comprises a large portion of his work, since it must go through the following stages before it is made available: researching new material, checking content and theology, translating, proof reading, preparing the layout, uploading, and finally making regular users aware that this new material is available to them.

VOX VIVA

Our second project is actually English based with a view to making it available in French. *Vox viva* ("living voice") is an online Bible commentary (*voxviva.app*). It is intended to provide explanatory notes to preachers as they prepare their sermons. The information accompanying each Bible book falls into the following categories: Scripture content, structure and outline, exposition (notes on each verse), key themes, application, Christocentric focus, and sermon suggestions.

This site has been developed by the Reformational Study Centre. Rev. Bédard and his translators take that content and translate it into French. There is so much need for this material as very few

pastors in Africa are well trained in theology. Additionally, they do not have access to Reformed texts and commentaries.

The translation of these notes is progressing well. So far, notes on seven books of the Bible have been translated. They are now being proofread, then they will be posted as soon as the French side of the application is ready. As one can see, *Vox viva* is an ongoing long-term project with conceivably no end.

LAMAD

Our third program is *Lamad* ("learn" and subtitled: grow in grace – *lamad.app*) and is also developed and maintained by the RSC. This too is in the process of being translated into French. *Lamad* provides courses which encourage the Christian to read and study the Bible. These courses are offered on WhatsApp because most Africans have cell phones and are already familiar with this application. Volunteer facilitators are available to mark portions of the course and be contacts for the program users.

What is the current status of this project? Two studies are now ready in French (What is a Christian? /Christian Leadership). Eight others have been translated into French, but still need some adjustments for WhatsApp use. The app is almost ready for use,

and the first two courses are ready to be tested by knowledgeable “students” who will give feedback on the whole process.

The RSC started to offer some of these Bible studies in English in 2023 to African and Asian students. The project is rapidly booming. They now have over 1000 students! Some of them are more fluent in French and are eager to study with the French material when available.

Imagine for a moment that you do not speak the English language and the Lord has awakened the gospel of grace in your life. You have no money to buy biblical material. And even if you did, you would not even begin to know from where to source them. There is so much available, but already you realize that not all such material is true to God’s Word.

IMPACT

It does not take much of an imagination to realize that under these circumstances, to have access to the *Ressources chrétiennes* sites is worth far more than gold. The following are two reactions to the material provided by these programs.

REQUEST FOR SUPPORT

Finally, here are some prayer requests from Rev. Paulin Bédard with a parting note.

- Thank the Lord for the good progress in the preparation of the Lamad Bible studies and the translation of Vox viva notes, including thankfulness for all those who are working hard to prepare these materials and for those who are translating them into French.
- Pray that these Bible studies and these notes may begin to be available soon in French, during the upcoming months, and that we see a positive response from future students and users.
- Pray that we may find volunteers that we will need for correcting the lessons of the Bible studies and for the follow-up work with the students.
- Pray that we continue to receive the financial support needed for the development of these projects.

We urgently need your support and prayers for these wonderful challenges the Lord has given us. In all of this, we are but mere servants with opportunities that are far beyond our strength and manpower. We look up to our God who is faithful and will provide. To this glorious God alone be all blessing, and honour, and glory, now and forever!



From a pastor in Zimbabwe studying the topic of church: “This lesson taught me what actually should be done in church worship meetings in that believers should stick to important guidelines which are: teaching the Word of God, fellowshiping and prayers, breaking of bread and also placing Jesus Christ as our worship leader.”

From a student in Kenya: “I shared *Lamad* with a lot of people. I’m so much enriched and transformed through this study. Especially my understanding of some topics has changed tremendously like heaven, hell, rewards, and resurrection. I wish to continue learning without stopping because I love growing, learning, and improving daily in my spiritual life. Thank you for the vision and development these courses. God bless *Lamad* forever with resources and more knowledge.”

There is so much hunger for God’s Word. Please help us, the Mission Board of the Owen Sound Canadian Reformed Church, to support Rev. Bédard and his work to fill this need. 🇨🇦

Louie Medemblik

Donations may be sent to:

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IRTC

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But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. – Acts 1:8 ESV

Lucas Salviano, a student at the IRTC, has a story that extends beyond his hometown of Blumenau, where he serves as an assistant pastor. He also extends his ministry to the quilombola community of Barra de Oitís, in Diamante-Paraíba, led by Pastor Nézinho. (A quilombola is a Brazilian hinterland settlement founded by people of African origin, many of whom were escaped slaves.) This church lacks certain basic elements of infrastructure, such as bathrooms, but it has about 50 members who gather weekly for worship. The simplicity of life is evident—from the pigs roaming freely in the yard to the old buildings and unpaved roads. According to Lucas, the online nature of the IRTC was essential in allowing him to continue developing missionary work. Next, Lucas shares what drew him to the IRTC and considers his experience with the College.

In Brazil, there is a lack of theological institutions with an orthodox and learned faculty. In this context, the IRTC presented itself to me as the best of all options. Since I am located far from a major city, this institution allowed me to be trained by reformed pastors who are highly respected in their respective fields of study; great theologians who have applied all their knowledge to the life of the church.

Although it requires greater discipline, the distance learning offered by the IRTC has the advantage of not being limited to just one time and place. As a missionary pastor, I often needed to visit other fields and church plants in remote regions in Brazil. Through virtual study at the IRTC, I was able to continue studying with my teachers even during my travels.

One of my dearest instructors, and without exaggeration, one of the greatest, was Dr. Frans Leonard Schalkwijk. In my first year, while studying Early Church History, he called me to heed the exhortation of 1 Corinthians 4:2, to be found as a faithful steward of the Word. He emphasized that redeeming how we spend our time is part of this required faithfulness. I then understood that my readings,



Lucas, shown above with his Associate's degree, recently completed the requirements for a Bachelor's in Biblical Studies

assignments, exams, and my entire academic journey, as well as everything in my life, was being done *coram Deo* (in the presence of God). Consequently, I developed the habit of studying every day, beginning in the early morning, and reading at least 20 pages required by my program. This discipline is not natural to me, but God has blessed this consistency, greatly enriching my learning.

Another transformative experience in my ministry occurred during a live class on the Pentateuch with Dr. Daniel Charles Gomes. We were studying the book of Leviticus, and he made a remark along the lines of, 'It's not enough to chew the cud, the animal must also have split hooves. It's not enough to have split hooves; it must also chew the cud.' In the context of the lesson, he meant that we cannot fragment Truth and select only one aspect of it to hold dear. This impacted my life and from then on, it gave me the strength to resist this tendency. I have kept these words in my heart, and they often resonate, reminding me of the need to fully cherish the revealed Truth.

I grew significantly through my interaction with these and other instructors, as I learned that my mentors had endured the same pains as I have in ministry. I understood that undergoing certain afflictions is part of the process, and that suffering is not always an indicator of my own mistakes. From their example, I learned to endure and overcome such difficulties, recognizing that Christ is not only the Lord of my salvation but also Lord over the mission. Looking to Him, believing that all power has been given to Him in heaven and on earth, and that He will be with His people and stewards until the end of the ages, brought me peace and relief from the external and internal pressures I often faced.

The guidance of my mentor, brother, and friend, Pastor Saulo de Melo, was essential in my journey. He was God's instrument in providing me with security and calming my heart. Ernest Hemingway reminds us that in the trenches, it's more important who is by your side, and I agree: having a fellow prayer warrior and devotee with me was crucial.

I plan to use the knowledge I've gained to teach and care for missionaries, areas in which I'm already active and where God has blessed me. The wonder is that, as God is eternal, theology can never be exhaustive. I love studying this field and hope to be found by my Lord, still mining precious truths about His Person and works in my old age.

To new students, I offer this suggestion: let the dust settle. Our feelings and wills, since the Fall, are unstable. There will be days when the only thing God uses to inspire us to fulfill our commitment will be a sense of responsibility. There will be obstacles, sleepless nights, and problems to solve. On such days, quitting may seem like a perfect solution. Wait a few more days before giving up, and you'll see that the nights will again be restful, solutions will be found, and the Lord will be glorified through your perseverance. Until Christ is formed in us, all things are working together to form that image. Keep striving and let the Holy Spirit apply all these adversities in a way that glorifies God and edifies us.

To the dear brothers and sisters who financially support the IRTC, I want to say that over the years, I have had the privilege of meeting other students from various backgrounds, some studying in conditions of extreme scarcity. Without the IRTC and the support it has received, these brothers and sisters would never have been able to study theology with the depth and excellence that exists at the IRTC. I pray that God continues to be pleased in using these men and women, who have generously invested in the training and equipping of new workers for the harvest, even in the most remote fields of the planet.



Above: church plant (in blue) in Barra de Oitís, Diamante, Paraíba.

Below: caring for missionaries in the field through a Zoom video conference.



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Being a Christian **FUNERAL DIRECTOR**

Clarion is interviewing various professionals in our Reformed community to highlight how they are serving the Lord in their particular industry or calling. First up is Rick Ludwig (age 55) who owns and operates a full-service funeral home in Waterdown, Ontario.

BACKGROUND

After graduating from Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton, Rick went on to earn a BA at McMaster University followed by a diploma in Funeral Service Education from Humber College. Rick has been active in several business organizations and regulatory bodies in the funeral sector. He writes and speaks regularly on the topic of bereavement, including at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton. He co-hosts an annual Christmas and Grief community event with Blessings Christian Church. He is married to Denise (nee Sieders) and has three married children.

Tell us about the work you do.

There are two main parts to my work. First, there is the grief-assistance side, or the pastoral side, where you come alongside a family in their loss to be a support and make sure they are looked after. Then there is also the main leading role of the funeral director: the family wants you to direct all the details of the funeral with all involved parties. And you also take care of the deceased and share in those duties.

In the profession at large the idea of “full circle of care” has evolved: from pre-need, including the financial and planning perspective, to palliative care support when a family realizes death



“Funeral directors become the new ministers in a secular society.”

is approaching, to follow-up after the funeral, including the services of a grief counselor.

My interest in funeral service started with my interest in the local funeral director’s daughter! As we dated, her father slowly introduced me to his work and I began part-time work in his funeral home. Our first home was above the funeral home. While living there, I attended university, taught elementary school part-time, started a family, and did the night phone shift at the funeral home. Through all that I pivoted and decided to pursue a career in funeral service. In 2004, my wife Denise and I were given the opportunity to purchase Kitching-Steepe Funeral Home and continue operating it as a family-owned funeral home, now Kitching, Steepe & Ludwig. In 2023 the funeral home commemorates 100 years of being at this location on Mill Street in Waterdown.

What are some of the joys of doing this work?

A good day is when you have walked with a family and reached the culmination of all the preparations, and all the details fall into place. When the family shakes your hand or gives you a hug and thanks you for all you have done, that is what keeps all of us going in funeral services. We make connections with people that we may otherwise not have. For a very intense time, you are invited into a sacred space. That is an honour and a privilege. Like love, grief does not exist on its own. Grief is God-given, but it is meant to be shared, especially in the Christian community.

People would often say: “I couldn’t do your job, so much sadness!” And yes, if we were amongst the mourners every day burying a loved one, that would be difficult, but we are more on

the edges: walking alongside people during a very difficult time. Most people are very appreciative, and you form lifelong bonds, sometimes even through generations. We say: the funeral home is quietly at the centre of the community, a real gathering place. We have an important role in bringing the community together in a safe and comforting way during difficult days.

Another joy for me are the children at funerals: they are so natural. People worry about their kids at funerals, but we say that children are way better at this than adults. They come with no big apprehensions unless we’ve laid them on them, and they ask open questions, like “Oh, where are Oma’s legs?” (when they see the open casket). They just observe and we should give them honest answers at a level they can understand, don’t try to deceive them about what’s going on. Often, minutes after seeing their loved one, they are busy showing a friend around or finding where the candies are.

What are some of the challenges of your job?

I have been a funeral director now for almost thirty years, and as you get older, the accumulative grief of the community weighs heavier. There are more and more people you cross paths with whom I have walked a hard road.

In our local community, I sometimes need to give people space, when I am in the grocery store or post office. You don’t want to bypass people, but I have to be sensitive to where they are right now after losing a loved one. Is it appropriate right now to say hi or will it add a burden of memory?

When I started with funeral services, I thought people would become more open to talking about bereavement over time, but

I found that the opposite has been true. Another change is that when I started there was more burial than cremation and more connection to faith communities than there is now. People have lost touch with why we do a burial because they have lost footing with their faith community. There is also lots of advertising that suggests cremation might be easier and cheaper; a way of speedily removing the body from the scene so that you can celebrate life. We can understand why people do that, but I do believe people may be doing themselves a disservice. The point of the gathering is to recognize someone has died and that loss has an impact. It also challenges us to examine our worldview, what is this life all about? If we try to dismiss that, we miss an opportunity to do some soul-searching and come to grips with the loss as a community.

There is a grey area creeping in around Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD). I know some funeral homes in the province that have set up a suite on-site where you can facilitate medically assisted death at the funeral home. I question the ethics around that from the funeral service sector's perspective because that is a conflict of interest. If someone would suggest that should be part of the services we offer, obviously I would be very concerned about that. I am much more in favour of supporting and enhancing palliative care in our area.

We now have families calling us to schedule a death. MAiD comes up in preplanning too, and we do talk about it. It's complex: often in a faith-based way, people have no concern about it, but I don't think they have worked through what it will be to stand there and see a loved one decisively say: my time is done. We have dealt with people in aftercare for whom this was not a good experience. They had a lot of regrets. I'm concerned about the way the country has gone with this, that not enough cautions have been put place to make people understand the gravity of their decisions and what it will look like for their loved ones.

What are some rewards as a Reformed believer?

As a funeral director, I can contribute to the conversation around death in the broader Reformed community. Over the years, the concept of "we belong to Christ, body and soul in life and death" in Lord's Day 1 has been something I revisited many times with people.

With 70% of the population in urban North America choosing cremation, this is now also a topic of discussion among Christians. My observation is that many have not really thought that through biblically. Often people separate the physical from the spiritual. But that is not theologically sound. Our funerals are for the living. We believe Christ lays claim to our bodies in life and in death and a burial is a statement that says: we believe in resurrection. In our

work, we have an opportunity to talk to people about this: what are we doing when we bury a loved one, what statement are you making? And how does that tie in with what we believe?

We have to be careful not to condemn cremation, as it is not forbidden, but the pressure from our culture is to minimize death and eliminate it with direct cremation. As Christians, the burial—as part of a funeral—is the climax: we stand at the grave, and we make profession of our faith in hope. Can we still do that in the community, or is that a private thing? I do believe community is part of this, first of all the family of faith, but also the broader community of neighbours and friends. They may not believe, but what a benefit to be invited to an event where faith is affirmed, where people support each other and a statement of the victory of Christ is shared. A lot of people don't get the opportunity to hear this anymore. That is a powerful gospel witness for us as Christians to give.

What do you bring to this role as a Reformed believer that might not otherwise be there?

As a Christian, I think I have another level of compassion: how can I reflect Christ to my clients and show the gospel in a way that the Spirit may use in their lives, even in an age where you feel so much pressure to think you can't say anything as it can be taken as a judgment. The door is open so many times in our occupation because we stand at death's portal.

The community has become so distanced from the church that it is uncomfortable asking clergy to officiate at a funeral. It does happen that they ask us to officiate. People state they don't want anything religious, but then they say: it's nice to recite the Lord's Prayer or the 23rd Psalm. We can explore those Christian connections. The context of church has gone away, but there is still some hope and belief and we can bring a message of Jesus and the significance of living in a relationship with him. Other funeral directors I talk to have similar experiences; in a sense the funeral directors become the new ministers in a secular society.

As funeral directors, we are standing on life's precipice weekly and that keeps a lot of things on the forefront of your mind when it comes to your personal life: your relationship with the Lord, your family, and loved ones. . . . That doesn't mean I do all that perfectly, but I get lots of opportunity to reflect on that. That is a blessing. It's a regular reminder to reprioritize and put things in life in a proper perspective. 



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Alcuin the Scholar and Charles the King

Part 3: Parma

KEITH SIKKEMA

MARCH, AD 781

It is March 781. Some Anglo-Saxon horsemen trot north on the *Via Francigena* pilgrim road through Lombardy as it winds through forests, fields, and vineyards. They are on their way home from Rome. Their greying and balding leader wears an elegant scholar's cloak over a linen tunic and black shoes. He is about fifty. They wave to travellers going the other way but hurry on to find lodging in Parma before sunset.

A peasant comes into view, and the city. The city! There are tents and campfires at the gate. Guards stop all traffic . . . what might that mean? They ask the peasant, "Is it peace?"

He chuckles, "Absolutely! King Charles of the Lombards and his family are lodging with Bishop Wibodus!¹ I think they'll like our Lambrusco wine with Parmesan cheese!"

"Are there still inns available?"

"For pilgrims, always! Got to go now . . . goodbye!"

That sounds good, and Alcuin thinks, "Hmm, might Wibodus have manuscripts to copy? Might they meet the king?"

They trot on, and Alcuin dismounts for the guards. He explains and shows his credentials, "Alcuin of York. On our way home from a mission to Rome for King Ælfwald of Northumbria. We seek

lodging in Parma," and boldly adds, "and seek audience with the bishop and the king!"

"Alcuin of York, you say? The book-loving scholar? We'll rush a messenger to check; hold your horses!"

NOT BY CHANCE

In the grand hall, Charles has a wonderful dinner with Bishop Wibodus, his family, and their aides. As always, he enjoys the roast, and just as he rubs his prominent belly in satisfaction, the messenger rushes in, bows, nods to the bishop, spots the king, and tells him of Alcuin's request.

Charles's blue eyes bulge and he shouts, "Alcuin of York, you say? Providence! Invite them in, escort and all!"

"Y-y-yes, Your Grace," the messenger stammers, and leaves in an even greater rush.

Charles orders, "Food, Lambrusco wine, and Parmesan cheese! Royal care, lodging!"

When fruit is served for dessert, and a table is set for the new guests, Charles sips some more wine and stands up to speak. "Father Wibodus, thank you for being so accommodating for us. To promote peace and pursue the City of God also among the

¹ Parma's first bishop-ruler under Charles after 774. Charles invited Alcuin "at" Parma. The narrative is fictional.

Like David and Josiah, I promote the fear of God.

Lombards! As Augustine says, is not our heart restless and without peace within us, until it rests in God? . . . Ah! Here are our guests. Welcome guests, welcome! May God's peace be with you!"

Alcuin nods, curtsies, and replies, "Indeed and thank you! May the peace of God keep all your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!"²

Charles points to their table, "Be seated my friends! God ordained your presence today, Alcuin. We'll talk tonight!"

Bishop Wibodus nods and remarks, "All is for good; not even guests come by chance!"

As the Anglo-Saxons eat their meal, Hildegard's aides bring the children to bed. Afterwards, Charles and Hildegard, Wibodus, and Alcuin withdraw to an upstairs room.

INVITATION

Charles frames the conversation, "We all serve in the City of God—I as king; you, Father Wibodus, as bishop; and you, Alcuin, as scholar. I serve the people God gave me, from Frisia to Aquitaine and Lombardy. They lack learning and need unity in the Christian faith. Like David and Josiah, I promote the fear of God. What of you, Father Wibodus?"

"I was ordained to administer God's grace in Word and Sacraments, ordain priests, manage finances, and settle disputes. Since 774, I rule Parma County on behalf of you, King Charles. I seek to serve God in humility and truth. What about you, Master Alcuin?"

"Through learning, I seek peace, unity, and moderation among God's people. I serve my king and desire to expand our library beyond today's one hundred books. This would help my students to better serve others. I also search for ancient manuscripts to copy in our scriptorium—might you have any, perhaps, Father Wibodus?"

"You sure did well!" Charles exclaims. "Your school and scriptorium, accomplishments, knowledge, and affections are renowned, Alcuin! By God's providence, I invite you today to lead my Palace School in Aachen and revive classical learning, as a model for Francia and Frisia and Lombardy, to serve Catholic unity and Christian uniformity!"

Alcuin raises his eyebrows and shakes his head in disbelief. "I would have never thought of such honour, Your Grace! I seek to

serve, and I admire your interest in spreading the holy faith and classical learning, but I'm aging. I should rather retire in York!"

"Dear Master Alcuin," Charles interrupts, "if you can ride a horse from York to Rome and back, you can also work for another decade! Isn't Aachen more central than York?"

Alcuin objects, "In Northumbria we also need to restore learning and Christian commitment!"

"My realm is large and needy, Alcuin! Schools hardly exist, monasteries are in decline, and 10 or 15 million people cannot tell their right hand from their left. In Northumbria . . . a million, perhaps? You could reach far more people from Aachen! In fact, I need twelve scholars like Augustine and Jerome and you!"

"My dear King, the Creator had but a few of them, and you want a dozen?"

"Think of Josiah's reforms, Alcuin.³ To be saved, people must be baptized and learn God's law, and priests must know Canon Law and Church Fathers. You can train priests, missionaries, and scholars, but my plan is much bigger. I also invite and fund other well-known scholars, like Abbot Fulrad of St. Denis, Paul the Deacon of Pavia, Peter the Grammarian of Pisa, Abbot Rado of St. Vedast, and Theodulph the Visigoth of Saragossa!"⁴

Alcuin just nods, but Bishop Wibodus speaks up, "Your Grace, serving the Triune God must come from the heart, not by force or funds, but by the Spirit. After the Israelites abandoned faith and truth in their hearts, they were soon exiled."

"Sure," Charles agrees, "but I am *Dei Gratia Rex*, King by the Grace of God. My whole realm must be Christian! We need books and schools to train leaders! We need students who study the stars, reading, writing, mathematics, music, Hebrew, and Greek!"

"I admire your passion," Alcuin replies. "Some of my former students could help you."

Now Hildegard chimes in, "Brother Alcuin, would you not enjoy constant companionship with seasoned scholarly friends from all Francia and beyond? You certainly would cherish joining the king for a good swim in Aachen's hot sulphur springs!"

Bishop Wibodus adds, "Think about it, Alcuin. You are the right person to set this up. Your library would be magnificent! You could teach and write books, commentaries, and letters.⁵ Remember also that nothing happens by chance; don't you think the Lord

² Phil 4:7

³ 2 Kings 22, 23; 2 Chr 34, 35

⁴ They all, and others, taught at Charles's schools. Theodulph later became bishop of Orléans and wrote what is now (via translation) Hymn 29 (*All Glory, Laud, and Honour*) in the *Book of Praise* (Winnipeg: SCBP, 2014).

⁵ Over 300 of his letters were preserved.

arranged this meeting? And yes, of course, you should see my book collection!”

Rubbing his forehead, Alcuin responds, “I’d like that, Brother Wibodus. Yet, I must first complete my mission. Let me also speak to my king and friends and pray about it. Perhaps God does call me to Aachen.”

“May the peace of God keep your heart and mind focused on the City of God,” Charles wraps up the conversation.

CONSEQUENCES

The next day, Alcuin explores Wibodus’s library and moves on. King Charles and his entourage set out for Rome.

In Rome, at Easter, Charles has Pope Hadrian rebaptize his second son Carloman (8 years old), renaming him Pepin the Younger. At the same time the pope anoints Pepin as King of Italy, and his brother Louis (3) as King of Aquitaine. Byzantine envoys come and help restore relations between their Empress Irene, King Charles, and Pope Hadrian, and even arrange the engagement of Irene’s son Constantine (10) with Charles’s daughter Rotrude (6).⁶ On the way home, Pepin and Louis are crowned as kings. When Widukind and the Saxons revolt, again, Charles strikes back and sets harsh new expectations for them in 782.

Alcuin reports, thinks, prays, and wavers. Should he stay in York? He would miss his hometown, library, his students, his St. Andrew monastery and scriptorium, and his quiet retirement. However, Northumbrians always have bloody fights about kingship-succession, and King Offa of Mercia still wants to forcefully subject all Anglo-Saxons. Also, Charles’s desire for Christian learning is sincere, both for training church leaders and others, and Aachen actually might be a good place to get old, in peace and tranquility. He could still learn and teach, collect books, give written advice, and have scholarly contacts. In York, there are men who can maintain the cathedral school and the scriptorium.

Surprisingly, King Elfwald and Archbishop Eanbald encourage him to go: Perhaps pleasing Charles might help them against Offa. But does the Lord really want him to go? 



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⁶ Annulled by 788.

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>>	MY FRIEND
>>	MY BROTHER
>>	MY CHILD
>>	MY GRANDCHILD
>>	MY NEIGHBOUR



CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 42

Let's pretend that Grandma has a tray of chocolate chip cookies. You and your cousins rush to Grandma and crowd around her. "I'm going to get that one!" you think. You see your little cousin reach for a cookie . . . but that's the one you wanted! Quickly, you push her hand away and grab that cookie. Does something like this sound familiar to you? Well, this may not be nice to hear, but you would be being greedy! Greed is really wanting something and doing anything to get it. It could be pushing your cousin's hand away to get the biggest cookie. But it could also be stealing to get what you want. The Lord does not want us to be greedy. So, he made the commandment "You shall not steal." Instead, he wants us to be generous people! We are to share what we have. We are to give with open hearts to those who are poor. That is one way to show our thankfulness to God.

READ QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS 105 AND 106. FIND ALL THE ACTIONS THAT GOD SEES AS MURDER. WRITE EACH OF THEM SOMEWHERE INSIDE THE WORD "MURDER" BELOW.

I must:

promote my neighbour's _____,

_____ with him as I would like others to deal with me, and

work faithfully to give to those in _____.

The catechism lists different ways that we can steal. Draw a line from the words to their proper definition.

False weights and measures

Selling a fake gold ring and telling the person it is real gold.

Deceptive merchandising

Lending money to someone but making them pay you a lot of extra money when they pay you back.

Counterfeit money

Saying that the items you have are 100 pounds, when they are really 150 pounds. Then you do not have to pay for 50 pounds of items.

Usury

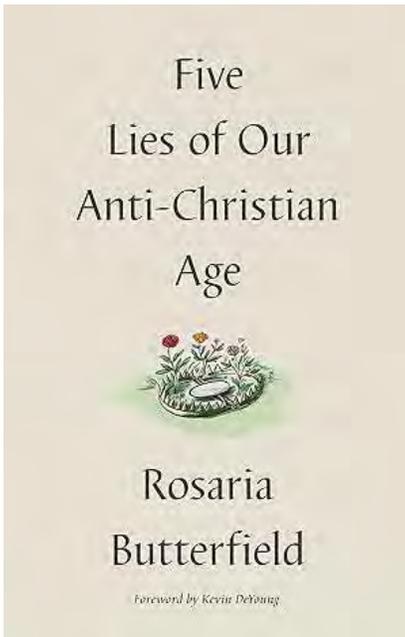
Fake money.



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



FIVE LIES AND THE GOSPEL

Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age, by Rosaria Butterfield.
(Wheaton: Crossway, 2023). Hardcover.
344 pages. \$38.92 CDN

In 2018 I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Rosaria Butterfield speak at the annual Ligonier Ministries Conference following the release of her book *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*. At that time, I was deeply moved not only by what she said but also the way she spoke with humility and compassion. I remember whispering to my wife, “I think this is what it is to be Christ-like!” With that impression still in mind, I was eager to see how Dr. Butterfield would traverse the culturally choppy waters of gender and sexuality and the church’s response to it in her latest book.

Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age is squarely aimed at Christians, the evangelical church in North America, and in some parts particularly at Christian women. It is not written for the LGBTQ+ community. Butterfield has presented it as a course reset for the church and her own recanting of positions she once held accommodating, or at least being empathetic to, Christians who struggle with or assert gay or transgender identity. It is biblically bold and practically punchy. I have to admit that I had to read it twice in order to process my understanding of it and reaction to it. It didn’t seem like the same Rosaria I met in Florida a few years ago.

MURKY WATERS

The premise of the book is that the evangelical church has augmented God’s Word or ignored it in places to come alongside

the secular culture in recognizing the LGBTQ+ community as a victimized group, also in the church. In doing this they have also absorbed the cultural edict that sexuality is an identity, gender is not necessarily binary, and biological sex is irrelevant to the expression of gender or sexuality. Our individual experiences will articulate our reality. In a new and murky understanding of Genesis 1–3, what was considered naturally ordered by God’s decree and design has been set aside for the possibility of many new normals (72 and counting), cradled in Christian love and acceptance. This new understanding seeks to support homosexual relationships to varying degrees and is even sensitive to gender change or fluidity. Emancipation from this sexual confusion has been encoded in an unorthodox rewriting of the biblical sexual ethic. Butterfield argues that this has not brought freedom but reinforced a slavery to sin.

Rosaria Butterfield, a self-declared former feminist, lesbian, University professor—turned—Christian, wife of a pastor, and homemaker, weaves the story of her *progressive sanctification* into her exposé of what has influenced the shift in the evangelical church. In doing so, her earlier compassion and understanding for Christians with sexual disorientation or dysphoria is replaced by a firm rebuke of the church’s empathy and an accompanying sympathetic correction to the individual’s sinful behaviour. She

identifies five lies of the anti-Christian culture that have been appropriated by the church in its effort to bring healing and hope for a marginalized community. They include in her words:

- 1) Homosexuality is normal.
- 2) Being a spiritual person is kinder than being a biblical Christian.
- 3) Feminism is good for the world and the church.
- 4) Transgenderism is normal.
- 5) Modesty is an outdated burden that serves male dominance and holds women back.

UNNECESSARY DILEMMAS

There is a lot to digest here, so a sampling will have to do to get the flavour. Butterfield makes a convincing case about the traditional understanding of the creation of man and woman, the distinction of their roles, and the complementary nature of their relationship. This is the plain reading of Scripture that is echoed and reinforced in subsequent texts throughout the Bible. She chastens those who do not hold to the inerrancy of Scripture and are open to new interpretations. In addition to this, she explains that heterosexual sin is a sin of *practice*, whereas homosexual sin is a sin of both *pattern* and *practice*. It denies the created order and as a result it always corrupts sexual relationships. In this way, it is a more base sin and needs further rooting out. The way it reads is that heterosexual sinful desire can be resisted and even redeemed but homosexual desire is always sinful and there is no redemption for it, not even celibacy. It requires a deeper change.

While there seems to be some logic to her point, it is not convincingly scriptural, and it ignores the common deeper problem for all fallen mankind. All our sinful affections are at war with the pattern of God's good creation and are a temptation to sinful practice. Heterosexual sin flies in the face of the pattern of the marriage covenant, ordained by God. Theft or coveting of our neighbour's goods undermines the pattern of God's providence. Murder breaches the pattern of God's sovereignty over life. And so on. Butterfield leaves little room here for the reality of the overall disruption of the pattern of creation because of the damaging effects of original sin. Many of our related disabilities and disorientations never get resolved in this broken life. Compassion and understanding are still desperately needed in the face of our brokenness and vulnerability. Everyone needs a Saviour equally.

In connection to this perception of sin, she eschews the role of empathy in the church (mutual understanding of where people find themselves) for a more appropriate sympathy (recognizing

that someone is suffering in sin and that they need help and healing). Pitting sympathy versus empathy alongside proposed tiers of sinfulness is not helpful. In my mind, these two unnecessary dilemmas together have not served the church well in the past in ministering to members who are sexually disoriented or sinful. It has quickly made them feel like a pariah. Empathy sets us all in same humble place before the throne of God, all requiring repentance from our besetting sin and the need for repentance and daily renewal. This does not alter God's Word, but always corrects our disposition towards each other and opens the door to pastoral relationship and spiritual help in the church as we seek God's holy will together.

ONE GOSPEL

There is much more in this book about being made male and female that is thought provoking and biblically supported, and for that it is worth the effort to read; her writing requires serious contemplation. It is also engaging, although at times it feels harsh, a little sarcastic, and even overly personal in its critique. Butterfield challenges the writings of others in evangelical Christendom on these topics but does not leave it at that. In some cases, she also questions their integrity and their faith. This comes across as unnecessarily judgemental and unloving and doesn't square with her critical comment in other places in the book, that written barbs across media do not solve issues, but personal face to face discussion is the godly way. These instances distract from her main point and diminish the necessary sensitivity for the discussion around a complex physical and spiritual problem.

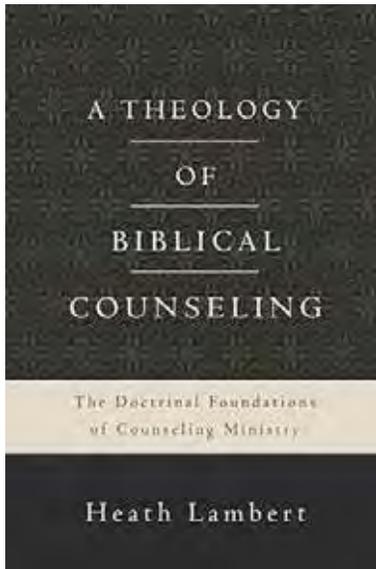
In my second reading I noticed that the book opens with a quotation from Revelation 1:11-16 about the white horse and its rider and a postmillennialist assertion that we have shared marching orders as the church militant. This helped me understand why the content of the book feels less compassionate and more provocative than I expected. The white horse and rider will come in triumphant glory *upon Jesus's return*. And he is ushering in a kingdom *not of this world*. But for now, in God's gracious patience, the hope of the ages still comes to all servant-like, on the foal of a donkey, and on the cross of Calvary. We should be careful to not bring his gospel on a high horse. It always falls heavy that way! 🐎



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VILE, WRETCHED, MISERABLE, BLIND?

A Theology of Biblical Counseling, by Heath Lambert.
(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016). Hardcover.
352 pages. \$29.99 CDN.

Heath Lambert's *A Theology of Biblical Counseling* is a rewritten, updated, and improved version of Jay Adams's *A Theology of Christian Counseling*. I read Adams's book back in 1997, mostly when I was on breaks at my summer job. I found it helpful—I remember especially being impressed with his insight that what we gain in Christ is far more than what we lost in Adam.

Both of these books are exemplars of what used to be called nouthetic counselling. That name never really caught on—so it's now known as biblical counselling. To make matters even more confusing, what's now known as Christian counselling takes a far different and more eclectic approach. Christian counselling is open to augmenting biblical teaching with secular counselling practices.

STRENGTHS

One of Lambert's strengths is his critique of some of those contemporary secular practices. For example, he provides biblical assessments of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Reparative Therapy. Like Adams and others, he distinguishes between scientific observations we can use from psychology and the interpretation of those observations, and the subsequent incorporation of those interpretations into counselling methodology.

Overall, I have a lot of appreciation for Lambert's *A Theology of Biblical Counselling*. I'd say it's recommended reading especially for pastors, elders, and anyone else involved in having what David Powlison described as "intentionally helpful conversations" (a.k.a. "counselling"). However, I do have one minor quibble and one major point of disagreement.

Chapter 4 is about "Biblical Counseling and a Theology of God." He explores God's attributes and how they relate to counselling. He numbers God's wrath among those attributes: "This is an attribute of God that often makes people feel uncomfortable" (p. 131). For something to be an attribute of God, it has to be true of him eternally. God did not have wrath in eternity past because there was nothing to have wrath towards. There was no sin. This is why it's more accurate to say that the wrath of God is the expression of his attribute of justice towards sin. The attribute is justice or righteousness—wrath is an expression of that attribute with respect to the presence of sin.

A WRONG TURN

My major disagreement has to do with something Lambert writes about regeneration in chapter 10, "Biblical Counseling and a Theology of Salvation." He lays the doctrine out correctly as the change of heart the Holy Spirit gives before someone can have faith. Then he identifies an area of misunderstanding on this doctrine. This is where he goes off-roading into the muck for a spell.

Lambert claims that the Puritans were often guilty of undervaluing "the magnitude of the heart change that has taken place in believers." As an example, he quotes a prayer from the Puritan devotional *The Valley of Vision*: "Eternal Father, Thou art good beyond all thought, but I am vile, wretched, miserable, blind. . . ." According to Lambert, "Words like these improperly confess the nature of a regenerate person" (p. 282). He says that prayers like that "constitute an unintentional denial of the doctrine of regeneration. Christians are not vile, wretched, miserable, and blind. . . ."

It is harmful and confusing to believe doctrines, pray prayers, or live lives that minimize that truth” (p. 283).

COURSE CORRECTION

Lambert’s view is not uncommon, but it is surprising to read it in a book purporting to present *biblical* counselling. I say that because, in this instance, the Puritans are more biblical than Heath Lambert. Most famously, in Romans 7:24 the apostle Paul called himself a “wretched man.” But the actual language of that Puritan prayer is likely drawn from Christ’s words to the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:17, “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” Remember: those are words addressed to a church. Are we to suppose all the people in that church weren’t born again?

The language of Scripture is reflected in our Reformed confessions. In Lord’s Day 51 of the Heidelberg Catechism, we find these words explaining the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “For the sake of Christ, do not impute to us, wretched sinners, any of our transgressions, nor the evil which still clings to us. . . .” This language was by no means unusual during the time of the Reformation. John Calvin’s prayer of confession in Geneva reads as follows:

O LORD God, eternal and almighty Father, we acknowledge and sincerely confess before thy Holy Majesty that we are miserable sinners, conceived and born in guilt and sin, prone to iniquity, and incapable of any good work, and that in depravity we make no end of transgressing thy commandments. We thus call down destruction upon ourselves from thy just judgment.

Calvin wasn’t original—he based that prayer on Martin Bucer’s confession of sin in Strasbourg.

DON’T UNDERESTIMATE SIN

Rather than too low a view of the extent of our regeneration, I would contend that today we often have *too low a view of sin*. After all, as Lambert says too, Scripture teaches that sin dwells even in the regenerated. But now consider that the heinousness of any sin rests in the infinite majesty sinned against. The least sin in my life is therefore horrifically vile, wretched and miserable—and I am such for committing it. Scripture teaches me to humbly own it and confess it—to confess who I am for having done it. It’s not like someone else did it. I did. Next to God’s infinite holiness, I am in myself vile, wretched, miserable, and blind. I must cry out with Isaiah, “Woe is me! For I am lost . . .” (Isa 6:5). It’s when I take that humble posture that God also comes to me with his gospel word of pardon: “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for” (Isa 6:7). The gospel of Jesus Christ is for honest, humble, repentant sinners.

It’s ironic that, back in the day, nouthetic counselling was sometimes panned for allegedly having an overemphasis on sin. Now nouthetic counselling is gone and biblical counselling is in. And with it, at least with Heath Lambert’s version in that one section, the sin of believers doesn’t seem as heinous as it once was. Thankfully, you can read chapter 8 and find Lambert speaking about sin more along the lines of Scripture—a blessed inconsistency in this book. 



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CLASSIS ONTARIO WEST

December 13, 2023

On behalf of the convening church, the American Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Rev. Ken Kok welcomed the delegates and opened the meeting by reading from Isaiah 9:1-7. He remembered the following matters in prayer: the acceptance of the call extended to Rev. Steve van Leeuwen by Grace-Kerwood, and the acceptance of the call extended to Rev. John Louwerse by Covenant-Grassie.

The credentials were examined and found to be in good order. Classis was declared constituted. The following brothers took their places as executive: chairman—Rev. Jeff Temple; vice-chairman—Rev. Timothy vanBeek; clerk—Rev. John VanWoudenberg. The agenda was adopted with minor revisions.

ADVICE & CORRESPONDENCE

Question Period ad Article 44 CO was held. All the churches indicated that they are continuing the ministry of the office-bearers, as well as honouring the decisions of the broader assemblies. Two churches requested advice on any matters related to the government of their congregations. Both London-Pilgrim and Trinity Glanbrook requested and received advice in matters of church discipline. Together, the delegates prayed for wisdom and diligence in the matters brought forward.

Classis received a letter from the CER communicating the desire of Bethel URC in Woodstock to honour the “Golden Rule”

Comity Agreement (1984) and inform Classis Ontario West that they have established an URCNA church plant in the Mitchell area. It was agreed that a response be sent to the CER.

PREPARATIONS & CONCLUSION

The church of Hamilton-Cornerstone was appointed as the convening church for the next classis on March 6, 2024, with May 22, 2024 / June 5, 2024 as an alternate date [*editor’s note: the spring classis is normally split over two dates due to the volume of student examinations*]. Suggested officers for the next classis are Rev. Timothy VanBeek (chair); Rev. John VanWoudenberg (vice-chair); Rev. Arjen Vreugdenhil (clerk). The Revs. Ken Kok, Peter Holtvlüwer, and John VanWoudenberg were appointed as the Committee for Examiners. Personal question period was held.

With thankfulness, the chairman concluded that the meeting had been conducted in a spirit of harmony and that there was no need for Christian censure (Art. 34 CO). After question period, the acts were adopted, the press release was approved, and the chairman led in thanksgiving prayer. Classis Ontario West, December 13, 2023, was declared closed. 

*For Classis Ontario West,
Rev. Timothy vanBeek (vice-chairman at that time)*

