



Clarion

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what's inside

As we approach Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, *Clarion* brings you a meditative editorial on the hope those events provide us as well as a devotional piece on the true resting place we have in and with Christ. Bill Helder also shares a timely musical rendition of the famous passage in Isaiah 52–53 where our Saviour's suffering is so movingly foretold. Later in this issue the birthday greetings in the *Ray of Sunshine* are wrapped in the gospel of Easter as well.

We welcome the return of *New Voices*, a column dedicated to letting the young adults in our community give voice to their thoughts and ideas in creative or other ways. Professor Smith is back with Part 2 of "God's Battle Lines," tracing the antithesis throughout Scripture. How do ministers and churches go about "exchanging" pulpits? We have an agreement about this in our Church Order as Jan DeGelder writes about in *Governing the Church*. On a completely different topic, Jim Witteveen teaches us to understand the Bible's teaching about the end times in connection with today's state of Israel.

Did you know that Christians in Colombia are a target of the drug cartels? I didn't, but Andrew Douma enlightens us in *Persecution of Christians*. As well, you'll find an update on Christian work in Pakistan undertaken by CFAM. Closer to home we may rejoice with our brothers and sisters in Niagara South in the Lord's provision of a building they can now call their own. Keith Sikkema finishes his story of Alcuin, all of which helps us of northern-European descent to appreciate God's providence in our earlier history. Finish your cup of coffee with a couple of helpful book reviews and a short classis press release. Have a blessed commemoration of Good Friday and celebration of Easter Sunday!

Peter Holtl uwer

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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

HOPE

Anyone taking the time to reflect on what's happening in this world is bound to come away with a sense of hopelessness. The rapid rise of house prices in the last number of years has many losing hope they will ever own their own home. The war between Russia and Ukraine has damaged the hope of a stable, safer world, at least when it comes to the Western world. The fighting between many factions in the Middle East may seem far away, but they are brought closer to home when those supporting the various sides in the Middle East carry on the battle verbally in our own country. There seems to be little hope of ever resolving those conflicts. Hopelessness can also arise when one reflects on the political scene both in our own country and south of the border. Add to this the constant clamour about climate change, which has led to the term "eco-anxiety." We see a growing sense of despair and hopelessness about the homeless and those entrapped in addiction. Hopelessness drives some to suicide.

RESURRECTION HOPE

When we consider all the things that can feed hopelessness, we can be thankful for the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. This is celebrated at Easter and remembered every Sunday when we gather for worship on the day of the week our Lord arose from the dead. The apostle Peter connects our Lord's resurrection to hope. We read in 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The mention of a living hope stands in contrast to the lack of hope for those who do not belong to Christ.

What is that hope? It is not that God will make all things well for us in this life. This life will continue to be filled with sorrows and temptations. The hope he refers to is the inheritance waiting for all those who believe in the risen Jesus. In verse 4, he speaks of an "inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for believers."

We could say that the Christian message is one of hope, based on the atoning death of Christ. The resurrection of Jesus is the proof that his death satisfied God's justice. Because of Christ's resurrection, our hope is not just a wish for a better of future, a

case of "I hope so," but of certainty. It refers to the good things waiting for us in the age to come.

SOFTENING SORROW

This hope is important throughout all of life. Many have experienced that it speaks with particular poignancy when standing at the grave. As Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Christians do not grieve as those who have no hope. He then goes on to describe how those who die in the Lord will receive a glorious resurrection body on the day the Lord Jesus comes from heaven. The hope of that inheritance softens all sorrows.

Hope is also expressed in our songs. We read of a call to hope in Psalm 130:7, "O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption." In the hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness," we have the line, "strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow—blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside." We can also think of Hymn 71 in the *Book of Praise*, "The hope of faith shall not deceive us," and "That hope must soften all our sorrows," that is, the hope of one day being in the Promised Land.

This hope of our inheritance, rooted in the risen Christ, is also to be part of our testimony to the world. A little further in his first letter, Peter calls his readers to always be "prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:14, 15). If that hope truly fills our lives, our lives should exude calmness amidst the hopelessness.

The Easter message is a message of hope. Every Sunday is a reminder of that hope. May that hope continue to fill our heart, and may the Spirit bless the times we make a defense of the hope that lives in us, so that many others may be born again to a living hope. 



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The Christ's Glorious RESTING PLACE

In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples — of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious

ISAIAH 11:10

Where or when do you feel at home? Do you have a place to put up your feet, relax, and feel at home? Or do you spend your life restlessly wandering, from city to city, house to house, room to room, hobby to hobby, distraction to distraction, but never quite find rest?

In the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11, we read that the resting place of the Messiah (whom we know to be Jesus) shall be glorious. What does this passage refer to? In our vernacular, a person's final resting place refers to their burial plot. As we go into Good Friday, it seems natural to connect the resting place of Jesus with the cross or the tomb. However, the biblical context and Isaiah's prophecy encourage us to look beyond the empty tomb.

The term "resting place" in the Old Testament often refers to a settlement or dwelling place. Two clear examples illustrate this link. First, when Israel traveled through the desert to the Promised Land, their camp was where God rested. "So they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey. And the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them" (Num 10:33). Second, David promised to make a permanent home (the temple) for the same ark of God. Israel sang in anticipation, "Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might" (Ps 132:8). Therefore, the resting place in Isaiah refers to the dwelling place of the Messiah.

Isaiah 11:10 guides us in finding Jesus the Messiah's resting place on earth. First, there is a signal, a military banner of sorts, that gathers the people. This banner represents the proclamation of the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). Christ teaches us to stop our silly scavenger hunt for a place to call home. Wherever Christ is preached, a banner is unfurled calling people from every nation to return home to God.

Then remarkably, Jesus gives us a place to rest by telling us where he is at home. Jesus says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (14:23). The dwelling place of God

is with those who believe in Jesus Christ. As we come to Christ, we "like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house" (1 Pet 2:5), a glorious home for God. The resting place of Jesus is the church.

We are travelers through this world, longing for our eternal home. As in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), the devil, the world, and our own flesh constantly tempt us to find a cozy home away from God. They do so by making the "house of God" seem unattractive as a home. Don't be deceived! It's not the people around us that gives us a home, but the cross of Christ under which we shelter. Under the cross, we will be at home with the Lord. He is at home with us! 

FURTHER READING:

Psalms 84; Luke 15:11–32.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Why does the cross make it possible for God to have a home on earth?
2. As you remember the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, how do these events give you a solid place to call home?
3. Does knowing that Jesus Christ views the church as his home change your view of church? If yes, how? If no, why not?
4. Is there a tension between seeing church as home and longing for our eternal home? Why or why not?
5. What is glorious about the church as a resting place of Jesus Christ? Have you ever traveled to a foreign country and found home was there as well?



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THE PLACE OF MODERN ISRAEL

In God's Plan

JIM WITTEVEEN

In recent months, the seemingly perennial tension that characterizes the Middle East has once again boiled over into armed conflict. Alfred, Lord Tennyson wrote in his well-known poem “Locksley Hall” that “in the Spring, a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.” When it comes to Middle Eastern politics, we could aptly modify this turn of phrase and say, “When war starts in the Middle East, the Christian’s fancy turns to thoughts of eschatology and the state of Israel.” Whenever events in the Middle East hit the headlines, you can be sure that evangelical pundits, prophetic “experts,” and authors of highly speculative and sensationalistic

books about the events of the “last days” will once again come out of the woodwork. They will eagerly provide their insights about which chapter in the book of Revelation was written specifically about events that would occur in our generation.

WHAT IS ESCHATOLOGY?

Eschatology (from the Greek word *eschatos*, meaning “last,” or “farthest”) is defined by Merriam-Webster as “a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of humankind,” or “a belief concerning death, the end of the world,

There is one way of salvation

or the ultimate destiny of humankind; specifically, any of various Christian doctrines concerning the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the Last Judgment.”¹

In the world of North American evangelicalism, the dominant eschatological view is that of premillennialist dispensationalism. While Dispensationalism has fallen out of favour in the academic world, its influence endures in popular theology. The word “premillennialist” speaks to the issue of when Christ will return. According to the premillennialists’ understanding of Scripture, the Lord Jesus will return *before* the millennium, Christ’s earthly reign, begins. Historical premillennialism has a long history among Christian theologians; for example, church fathers such as Irenaeus (c. 130–202) and Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) held to this understanding of the doctrine of the last things.

However, in his “Dialogue with Trypho,” Justin Martyr does acknowledge the fact that his understanding was not universal. Justin’s interlocutor, Trypho, asks, “But tell me, do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people to be gathered together, and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs, and the prophets, both the men of our nation, and other proselytes who joined them before your Christ came?” Justin responds: “I admitted to you formerly, that I and many others are of this opinion, and [believe] that such will take place . . . but, on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.”² It is clear that even in the second century there was a distinct lack of unanimity concerning eschatological issues.

MODERN PREMILLENNIALISM

While the popular modern version of premillennialism claims continuity with the premillennialism of the early church, it is radically different from the premillennialism of men like Irenaeus and Justin Martyr. The Dispensationalist scheme was first developed in the nineteenth century by men like John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), and was popularized, particularly in the United States, through the publication of Cyrus Scofield’s “Scofield Reference Bible” in 1909 and associated correspondence courses and prophecy conferences.

According to Scofield’s system, the end of all things will begin with “the Rapture.” Christ’s followers will be “raptured,” taken up from the earth in a sudden, unexpected event, after which the seven-year “Great Tribulation” will begin. The Battle of Armageddon will follow the Great Tribulation, evil will be defeated, and Christ will establish his millennial (i.e. 1000-year) kingdom on earth. For a literal period of 1000 years, Jesus will sit on the throne of David, and the rebuilt temple in the ancient city of Jerusalem will be his headquarters. His kingdom will be distinctly Jewish in nature, and during this period the Jews will be gathered in.

A single article will not suffice to discuss the complex doctrines of premillennialist dispensationalism and its understanding of the end times, so we will focus our attention specifically on the Dispensationalists’ understanding of the continuing place of the nation of Israel in the Lord’s plan of redemption.

PREMILLENNIAL VIEW OF ISRAEL

According to premillennial dispensationalism, the church and Israel are completely distinct from one another, and the Lord has a unique plan for each, as well as two plans of salvation. We are currently in the “church age,” or the “dispensation of grace,” but the nation of Israel remains God’s chosen people, with its own special purpose in the Lord’s plan. As a result, the nation-state of Israel, which was founded in 1948, has a special place in the thinking of many evangelical Christians, especially in the United States. Because this understanding of Israel’s place in God’s plan dominates popular Christian understanding, it also exerts an influence on the thinking of many Reformed Christians.

The Dispensationalist understanding of the continued importance of the nation of Israel to God’s plan in history is one of the driving forces behind the often-unquestioning support of Israel by many evangelical Christians. While geopolitical reasons are frequently offered for the massive support given to Israel by the West (particularly the United States) since Israel’s modern founding, Christian Zionism, based in Dispensationalist thinking, has exerted a profound influence on the West’s relations to Israel. Organizations like Christians United For Israel (CUFI) and associated political, cultural, and religious leaders believe that God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 must govern our attitude toward the modern nation-state of Israel: “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and

¹ “Eschatology.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eschatology>. Accessed 11 Jan. 2024.

² Martyr, Justin. Dialogue With Trypho, Chapter 80. <https://www.logoslibrary.org/justin/trypho/080.html>

him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:2, 3).

To cite just one recent example (of many) of this application of God’s promise to Abraham, Don Bacon, Republican member of Congress from Nebraska, recently explained his support for Israel in this way: “My support comes from the time I was five years old and my dad said ‘Those who bless Israel will be blessed’ which is right out of the Old Testament.”³

In the end, there may or may not be geopolitical reasons to support the modern nation-state of Israel. Unfortunately, much of the support that Israel receives from individuals, organizations, and politicians who hold to some form of premillennial dispensationalism is based on an erroneous interpretation of Scripture, and a failure to recognize how God’s promises to Abraham were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

ISRAEL OF GOD

Christ has established a new Israel, which has nothing to do with the nation-state that came into existence in 1948. This is the “Israel of God” that the apostle Paul mentions in Galatians 6:16. Earlier in his letter to the Galatians, the apostle had written these words: “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (3:7-9).

Christ has also established a New Jerusalem, which has nothing to do with the physical city that is today the subject of so much political and religious turmoil. The present Jerusalem, Paul writes in Galatians 4:25, “is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.” It is not the earthly Jerusalem that is uniquely precious in God’s eyes; it is the “Jerusalem above”!

Christ came to break down the barrier that had previously been erected between Jew and Gentile, and to form one new united people, built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles. This united people, composed of people from every tribe and nation, is the church of Jesus Christ. Paul reminded the Gentile Christians in Ephesus that they had formerly been “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). The good news for these followers of Christ, who had formerly been excluded, was that, in Christ, they had been included in the one, united people of God! “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (2:13, 14).

It cannot be claimed that the state of Israel holds a special place in God’s heart today, any more than it could be said of Canada, Brazil, or Liechtenstein. There are not two peoples of God, each with their own special place in God’s plan for history; there is one way of salvation, and there is one united people of God. That one people of God certainly includes the true believers who live in the modern country of Israel (as well as faithful Christians in Gaza, Syria, the West Bank, and Lebanon), but it is in no way specially tied to one particular nation. To claim otherwise is to misuse Scripture, and that misuse of Scripture can lead to serious negative consequences. 



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³ Perkins, Tom. “Revealed: Congress backers of Gaza war received most from pro-Israel donors.” *The Guardian*. 10 January 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/10/congress-member-pro-israel-donations-military-support?ref=upstract.com>.

God's Battle Lines:

The Antithesis in the Preaching of the Gospel (2)

JOHN SMITH

In the first instalment, we dealt with the question, what is the antithesis? and, where did this idea come from? We saw that it came especially from the writings of Abraham Kuyper, Klaas Schilder, and Benne Holwerda. Now we turn to our second question: Is the antithesis a theme that can be traced through the Bible, and if so, how?

ENMITY INTRODUCED

The classic passage for the antithesis is Genesis 3:15, where the LORD said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall strike your head, and you shall strike his heel.” Let me make some brief remarks on the meaning of this passage.

First of all, this verse is found at the juncture of creation, fall, and redemption: *creation*, in this sense, that God's work of creation is not undone, but providence, the image of God, and the cultural mandate all continue; *fall*, in this sense, that creation is under a

curse, humanity is in bondage to sin and death, and the cultural task will be characterized by toil, pain, and vanity; *redemption*, in this very limited sense, that the woman is placed not *under* but *over against* the serpent who deceived her, and she hears the enigmatic promise that her seed will engage the serpent in a fight to the death.

Second, in this verse the LORD asserts his rights as sovereign Judge and establishes enmity by *speaking*; it is God's Word that produces the antithesis.

Third, the Hebrew word for enmity does not mean “antithesis” in the abstract sense of an opposition of ideas that are at odds with each other, but it speaks more concretely of a hostility between parties at war with each other.

CONTINUING ENMITY

Fourth, when the Lord says, “I will put enmity,” the form of the Hebrew verb does not have the sense, “I hereby put enmity,” but

We should see the antithesis as a dynamic, progressive theme in the history of revelation

rather, “I am putting, will continue to put, enmity.” We should therefore see the antithesis not as a *static* category, a fixed characteristic of the fallen world, but much rather as a *dynamic, progressive* theme in the history of revelation.

Fifth, the Lord speaks to the serpent in “snake-language,” if I may put it that way: a serpent crawling in the dust can kill a man by striking his heel, and a man can kill a snake by striking its head. Indeed, we need to reckon with the fact that the serpent is called a beast of the field (Gen 3:1), that is, an animal over which our first parents had received dominion. It is only later in the history of revelation that we hear of “Satan,” the accuser (Job 1:6; 2:1; Zech 3:1), and much later still that Satan is called “the ancient serpent” (Rev 12:9; 20:2). To be sure, we see hints in Genesis 3 already of a more nefarious power at work, namely, in the serpent’s ability to speak and to deceive. This is the power that is at work in the “sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2), that is, the seed of the serpent.

Sixth, while Eve is called the mother of *all* living (Gen 3:20), her *seed* is more particular than humanity in general (cf. Gen 4:25) and refers in the first place to Israel. This is clear from the setup of the book of Genesis, which takes us from the *toledoth* (generations) of Adam to the *toledoth* of Jacob. It is also hinted at in Genesis 3:15 itself, where the Hebrew word for “heel” (*aqev*) is a word play on the name of Jacob (*ya’aqov*), who grasped his brother’s heel in his mother’s womb (Gen 25:26).

With these remarks in mind, we may conclude, first, that the antithesis, in the Old Testament at least, may be found where the LORD by his Word identifies an enemy that threatens the very life of his people, and second, that the LORD who draws the battle lines also promises the victory.

FROM CAIN TO THE PATRIARCHS

How, then, can we trace the theme of the antithesis through the Bible? I would like to take a redemptive-historical approach, but I can only be very selective.¹ We may begin with Cain. God warned him that the real enemy was not Abel but the sinful desires of his own murderous heart, but he refused to listen and killed his

brother. Yet the LORD granted Adam and Eve “another seed” in place of Abel, so that the line of promise might continue (Gen 4:25). In the time of the patriarchs, the antithesis is interwoven with the covenant. Thus, in Genesis 22, after Abraham obeyed God’s command to offer up his son on Mount Moriah, the LORD said, “Your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” (v. 17, 18). As reward for Abraham’s faith, the LORD gives two promises in tandem, the promise that his seed will defeat his enemies (from Gen 3:15) and the promise that his seed will bless the nations (from Gen 12:3).

We also find this twinning of antithesis and covenant in Genesis 25, when Rebekah’s infant children struggled together in her womb. The LORD told her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger” (v. 23). When Jacob secured not only the birth right but also the blessing, he had to flee for his life, because Esau sought to kill him. Jacob also feared for the life of his family upon his return. He had to learn not to resort to deception but to trust in the LORD.

The two brothers went their separate ways, and the LORD granted Esau his own place outside the Promised Land; yet that “ancient enmity” (Ezek 35:5) flared up throughout Israel’s history. Think, for example, of how Doeg the Edomite slaughtered the priests of the LORD at Nob (1 Sam 21:6–23). In times of strength, Israel annexed the land of Edom (2 Sam 8:14; 1 Kgs 11:16; Ps 60:8), but in times of weakness, the Edomites were a thorn in Israel’s side (2 Chr 21:8), siding with Israel’s enemies and taking perverse pleasure in the conquest of Jerusalem, provoking the Lord to take vengeance on them (Ezek 25:12–14; Ps 137:7). In the New Testament the hostility continues even to the trial of Jesus Christ. I have an old Dutch sermon by Rev. G. van Dooren, about Christ on trial before Herod. The sermon has a grand redemptive-historical theme and points: “Jesus Christ, the great ‘Israel,’ silent before Herod, the son of Esau. This silence is: 1) full of promise for faith; 2) full of threat for unbelief.”²

¹ I owe a debt of gratitude to Rev. Jeff Poort for sharing his notes and reflections on the biblical evidence for the antithesis, compiled during his sabbatical in the winter of 2022.

² G. van Dooren, “De groote ‘Israël,’ zwiigend voor den zoon van Esau: Lucas 23:8, 9, 11,” in *Waarheid en Recht* 3:13 (Enschede: te Sligte, n.d.), 1–12. For a similar approach, see K. Schilder, “Christ before Herod: Israel before Esau,” *Christ on Trial* (trans. H. Zylstra; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939).

ENMITY IN EXODUS

But the antithesis was also found outside the covenant circle. The book of Exodus begins with Pharaoh's decree to set the Israelites to hard labour and to kill all their baby boys, which would surely doom the seed of the woman. But the LORD ensured that baby Moses survived, and when the Israelites groaned under their burdens, he sent Moses to them, with shepherd's staff in hand, to do battle with Pharaoh and with the gods of Egypt, declaring, "Israel is my firstborn son. Let my son go that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son" (Exod 4:22, 23).³ The battle intensified through ten plagues, and it culminated at the Red Sea, a death trap that turned into a way of escape for Israel but a watery grave for her enemies. The people did not even have to fight, but only to "stand firm and see the salvation of the LORD" (14:13).⁴

The next mortal enemy was Amalek, the first nation to attack Israel after the exodus from Egypt (Exod 7:8–16).⁵ This time Israel did fight, while Moses lifted his staff in supplication to heaven. The LORD then declared perpetual war against Amalek, and thus, a few centuries later, Samuel could say to Saul, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (1 Sam 15:2, 3). Saul indeed defeated them, but he spared their king, Agag, and he allowed the people to take the best of the animals. It was a sin that cost him the kingdom—so high were the stakes in this war. Very striking are the words of Samuel, before he hacked Agag to pieces: "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women" (1 Sam 15:33). Whether Haman the Agagite was a descendant of this Agag is a debated point,⁶ but Haman, too, sought to annihilate God's people, this time by way of Persian decree. But a Jewish queen came into the royal court "for such a time as this" (Esth 4:14), Haman's devilish plan was overturned, and the Jews were

permitted to defend themselves and to kill their enemies. Here too is an instance of the antithesis.

ANTITHESIS ACROSS THE JORDAN

Besides the Amalekites, the LORD also placed the ban of destruction on the seven Canaanite nations that the Israelites were to dispossess. As we read in Deuteronomy 7:1–2, "When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them." This passage, and others like it, have become something of a flash point for theologians and apologists in recent years: How can a good God command his people to commit genocide and to dispossess the first nations of Canaan?⁷

But seeing the passage in light of the antithesis helps us to make sense of it: to live alongside the Canaanites would be fatal for Israel's faith and survival as a nation. It was a matter of "destroy or be destroyed," for the LORD added, "You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God." Notice how the LORD declares his sovereignty, both in salvation and in judgment: it is *he* who draws the battle lines, and he who decides the outcome. And note again that antithesis is interwoven with covenant: if the people trusted in the LORD, he would deliver them *from* the hand of their enemies, but if they proved faithless, he would deliver them *into* the hand of their enemies.

³ Bakker comments, "Here it becomes evident that it is a battle between the Lord and Pharaoh, or actually (since Pharaoh is just an instrument) between the Lord and Satan, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The Lord is going to fulfill his promises. Now Satan exerts his power to prevent the fulfillment, because if Israel perishes, the Christ will not be born, and Satan will have defeated God. It is also a battle between the Lord and the gods of Egypt (see Ex 12: 12), since behind the gods stands the power of the devil, who uses them to deceive people and pull them away from God" (F. L. Bakker, *Geschiedenis der Openbaring: Het Oude Testament* [Kampen: Kok, 1955], 171; translation mine).

⁴ Another instance of Egyptian hostility may be found in the earliest extra-biblical reference to Israel, where Pharaoh Merneptah (ca. 1212–1202) claims, "Israel is laid waste; its seed is not." See James K. Hoffmeier, "The (Israel) Stela of Merneptah," in *The Context of Scripture* (ed. W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 2:41.

⁵ Note that Genesis 36:12 identifies Amalek as a grandson of Esau.

⁶ According to Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (rev. ed.; Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 398, an inscription of Sargon mentions Agag as a district in the Persian empire, which offers the possibility that Haman was a native of this district rather than a descendant of an Amalekite king.

⁷ See, e.g., Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Canaanite Conquest: Covenant, Retribution, and the Fate of the Canaanites* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017); Arie Versluis, *The Command to Exterminate the Canaanites: Deuteronomy 7* (OTS 71; Leuven: Brill, 2017).

THE BATTLE AGAINST FALSE WORSHIP

It is this perennial struggle with syncretism that punctuates the entire history of Israel's life in the Promised Land.⁸ Yes, there were times when the land had rest from war: after Joshua finished his conquests; after various judges defeated the enemy of their day; after David defeated all Israel's enemies and left Solomon a kingdom of peace. But these times were short-lived and showed that the victory of Genesis 3:15 was not yet won. Israel's repeated unfaithfulness invited invasions from additional nations such as the Philistines, the Ammonites, and the Arameans, who interrupted the covenantal way of life. Solomon's marriage alliances enabled a syncretism that endangered the very temple service he had inaugurated.

The Bible's refrain for the kings of Judah is that they failed to remove the high places, and the Bible's refrain for the kings of Israel is that they continued in the sin of Jeroboam at the high places of Bethel and Dan. More heinous still was the sin of Ahab and Jezebel, who made Baal worship the official religion of Samaria and who persecuted the faithful prophets of the LORD, culminating in the dramatic contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Though Baal was discredited, and Ahab's dynasty was wiped out, the subsequent kings of Israel did not listen to the warnings of the prophets. The northern kingdom, which bore the name Israel, was taken into exile, never to return, and Judah was soon to follow. Surely the faithful remnant must have wondered how Israel could ever survive.

PROMISED HOPE

Yet, in a historical context in which tiny Judah was merely a pawn of the superpowers of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, the prophetic literature of the Old Testament is nothing short of remarkable. First, Israel's God remains sovereign. It is he who speaks with authority, he who draws the battle lines, he who governs the destiny of his people and uses the world powers as pawns in his plan, he who holds the nations accountable for oppressing his people.

Second, in his covenant love; it is he who foretells the return of his people from exile, the coming of an era when it will again be Israel's task to be a light to the nations. Third, the LORD reveals that the return from exile will usher in a restoration that will far exceed the best times of Israel's history, a restoration of Paradise itself. I think of Isaiah 65: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. . . . I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. . . . They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. . . . The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD" (vv. 17, 19, 23, 25).

Besides the prophets, we have also the book of Daniel, who not only lived to see the end of the exile, but who received visions of future kings who would be used by hostile spiritual forces to make war on God's people, so that Jerusalem would be destroyed once again. And yet, Daniel learned, the archangel Michael and his forces would fight back, and ultimately the righteous would rise from the dust and shine like the sun (see Dan 12:2, 3).

For the fulfilment of all this, we come to the New Testament. It is here that the centuries-old enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent comes to a climax in the life and death of Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. We will look at this climax next time and then conclude this series of articles with some reflections on the importance of the antithesis for preaching, mission, and education. 



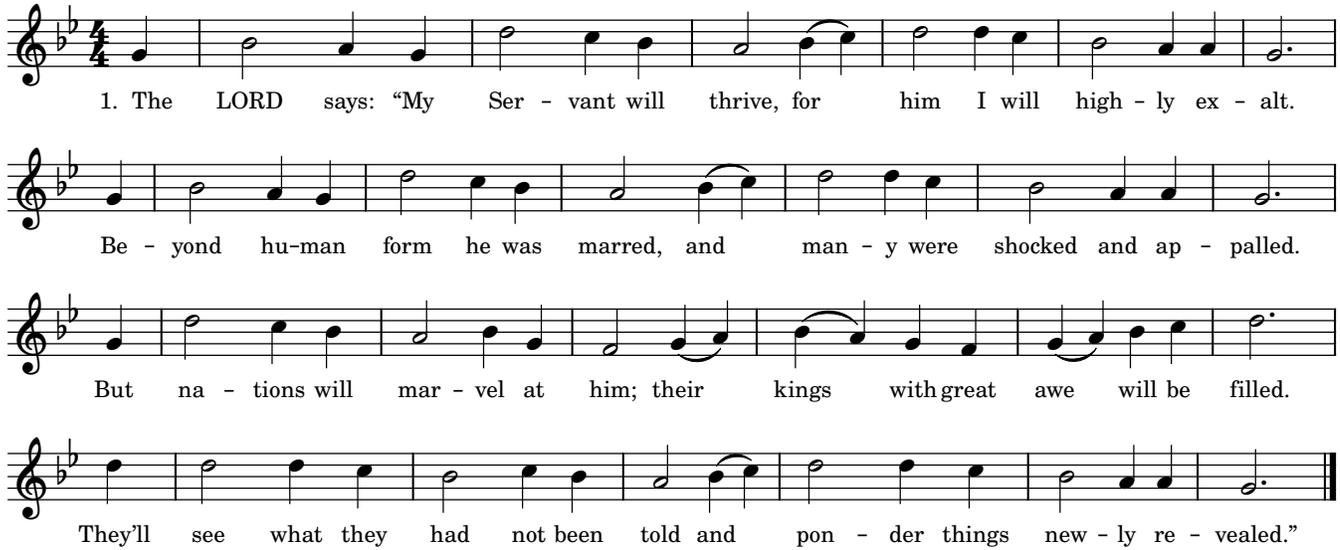
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⁸ Not all of Israel's wars are automatically to be interpreted as a matter of the antithesis. Each passage needs to be considered in its own context. Think of the many civil wars that threatened Israel's unity (Saul vs. David, Abner vs. Joab, David vs. Absalom, Rehoboam vs. Jeroboam, etc.). On the flipside, the military alliances which Israel and Judah secured are often evidence of failure to trust in the Lord for deliverance (2 Chron 16:1–10; 28:16–21). Think also of the words of the Jehu the seer, who rebuked Jehoshaphat for his alliance with Ahab: "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?" (2 Chr 19:2).

The Suffering Servant

Based on Isaiah 52:13–53:12



1. The LORD says: “My Ser - vant will thrive, for him I will high - ly ex - alt.
Be - yond hu - man form he was marred, and man - y were shocked and ap - palled.
But na - tions will mar - vel at him; their kings with great awe will be filled.
They'll see what they had not been told and pon - der things new - ly re - vealed.”

2. By whom was our message believed, received as God's trustworthy word?
And who saw in all this displayed the powerful arm of the LORD?
Before him he like a mere shoot sprang up from a root in dry land
and so had no beauty or grace that we should desire or commend.
3. By mankind rejected and scorned, he sorrows and suffering endured.
From him we averted our gaze and so left him shunned and ignored.
We counted him smitten by God, but he was oppressed and abused
that we might be healed and made whole. For us he was beaten and bruised.
4. All we have like sheep gone astray, have all gone our own willful ways,
but he bore the burden of guilt. For us he the penalty paid.
And he, like a sheep being sheared, or lamb that its slaughter awaits,
did never once open his mouth, though taunted by foes filled with hate.
5. They falsely condemned him to die, but no one took notice or cared,
though he was for them put to death. For them he his lifeblood outpoured.
They gave him a criminal's grave but found him a wealthy man's tomb,
though he had committed no wrongs and there was no falsehood in him.
6. The LORD says: “My Servant I've crushed and made him an offering for sin.
So now he his offspring shall see; his life I will lengthen for him.
His anguish will have as reward the joy I for him have prepared,
for many will he justify; their burden of sin he will bear.
7. “He willingly gave up his life, enduring the bitterest shame,
to set many free from their sin and make intercession for them.
On him I will honour bestow. He'll share with the great and the strong
the spoils that his triumph has won. To him praise and glory belong!”

Text: William Helder, 2023

Tune: Gardd Gethsemane, anonymous Welsh, alt.

PREACH THE WORD!

Anywhere?

JAN DEGELDER

You are most likely used to seeing ministers other than your own minister on the pulpit from time to time. Ministers sometimes have pulpit exchanges or go away on vacation. If your church happens to be vacant, you'll see guest preachers all the time. We are all familiar with these scenarios, and probably take it for granted. Are there any rules for this?

Well, yes. As federated churches we agree in Article 15 of the Church Order that “no one shall be permitted to preach the Word or to administer the sacraments in another church without the consent of the consistory of that church.”

The rule is simple: based on what we have adopted in Articles 6 and 16, your minister has the responsibility to preach the Word and administer the sacraments in the church he is bound to, and under the supervision of the elders of that church. However, the authority of the consistory is restricted to that particular church only. And thus, the minister of church A who leads worship in church B places himself for that service under the authority and supervision of the consistory of church B. Therefore, we have the stipulation that he can only preach the Word and administer the sacraments in church B with the consent of that consistory. After all, only the elders in church B have authority to control access to their pulpit. As a guest preacher I cannot claim such authority, just because I am an ordained minister.

TACIT CONSENT

From a Reformed church polity perspective this is actually so self-evident that you might wonder why we need such a rule. But it is good to recognize that a simple rule like this reflects the same biblical principles as we have seen earlier. The Reformed Church

Order protects the autonomy of the local church and, at the same time, through the local elders, safeguards the faithful submission to God's Word in the proclamation of the gospel.

All of this does not mean that every Canadian Reformed (CanRC) minister who is scheduled to preach in a CanRC congregation other than his “own” is going to be examined by the receiving consistory before the consent of Article 15 is granted. We know how it works. The person appointed by the consistory to take care of pulpit supply invites guest preachers with the assumption that, within the federation, there is tacit consent, so to speak.

That's not a matter of carelessness, but it is because as churches we have also adopted Article 26. And as long as there is the mutual trust among the churches that we all maintain and defend the true doctrine of God's Word, reject false teaching, and act as reliable partners in the federation by wholeheartedly upholding the agreement we have adopted in the Church Order, there is no need to question or double-check this all the time.

It works the same way for ministers from churches we enjoy ecclesiastical fellowship with. One of the rules for this sister-church relationship is that “the churches shall in principle open their pulpits for each other's ministers.”¹ This does not imply that those ministers do not need the consent mentioned in Article 15, but it confirms that we treat them the same way as ministers within our federation. To be sure, if a minister has a free Sunday, he does not need the permission of his own consistory to go and preach elsewhere. That would not make sense. Then church A could determine who church B can invite to preach, which is in conflict with Article 74. Only the consent of the receiving church is required.

¹ See Acts GS Guelph Emmanuel 2022, Appendix 30, p. 201.

CONSENT WITHHELD

Again—this stipulation seems pretty straightforward. But there are still a few questions that can come up in connection with Article 15.

One of the questions is: how far can a consistory go with giving consent to preaching God’s Word from its pulpit? Would a local consistory have the freedom to go beyond the churches in the federation and the sister churches, and give consent to an ordained minister from another denomination, after having ascertained that this man wholeheartedly believes the doctrine of God’s Word and has promised not to teach anything but the pure Word of God?

Article 15 does not address this, simply because its main focus is not the responsibility of the consistory, but the accountability of the minister. Still, the question can come up, for instance within the framework of our connections with churches that are fellow members of NAPARC or the ICRC. What are the boundaries?

The issue here is that the “consent” of the consistory as per Article 15 is not based on its own examination of potential guest preachers, but on examinations done in cooperation with other churches within the federation. We have agreed that access to the pulpit is given after examination(s) by a classis, sometimes with concurring advice of deputies of regional synod (Art 5). And this access is confirmed by subscribing to the Reformed confessions (Art 26), which is also done at classis. A consistory would dismiss the significance of this process and so challenge the mutual trust among the churches they are federated with if it would invite ministers to preach God’s Word from churches other than the ones they are federated with in the unity of faith. Personal feelings and a local interview do not suffice here.

WHICH OTHER CHURCH?

Another question is: can I, as a CanRC minister, accept an invitation to proclaim the gospel in a church outside of our federation, obviously with the consent of the leadership of that church? In his Church Order commentary, Rev. Van Oene is adamant that this is an absolute “no.” Article 15 may not specify the term “another church,” but “our Church Order speaks only of the obligations which we have within the federation towards one another, of the duties we have taken upon ourselves within our bond as churches.” And thus “another church” in Article 15 can only refer to another member of the federation of churches.² This is correct. But does that answer the question?

I assume it won’t happen often, but imagine that a (local) church that is not part of our federation and does not belong to

one of our sister churches requests one of our ministers to come and preach the gospel—does he have to decline right away and categorically? Or does he have other options?

It might be helpful to ask why they want to hear you preach. They may say: “We like to invite all the clergy in town, just to get to know each other.” But for that purpose, a social gathering of all the clergy in town would work too.

But what if they say: “We hear that you are proclaiming the truth of God’s Word, repentance from sin and salvation in Christ alone, by grace alone and through faith alone. The problem we have is that, in our denomination, this message is hard to get. But this is exactly what we are looking for.”

Would that not make a difference? It would be an unusual request, which makes it important for a minister to consider this in consultation with his consistory and seek the approval of the elders. After all, he is bound to the service of the church that called him. It would also be wise to ask for the advice of classis, or at least inform classis about what is happening.

WHAT ABOUT THE SACRAMENTS?

If bringing the message of God’s Word would be possible in such a context, should this then also include the administration of the sacraments? Word and sacraments are often mentioned together,³ and are both listed among the duties of the minister in the Form for Ordination. At the same time, it is good to remember that they are not identical. Celebrating Holy Supper in that situation may suggest a unity of faith that is not there. However, in our Church Order we do have a provision that allows for preaching the Word, without the “right” to administer the sacraments. Article 21 speaks about “speaking an edifying word,” also called “preaching consent” or “licensure.” This is usually granted to seminary students, who are preparing for the ministry. It might be an option to qualify a minister’s preaching in a church outside of the federation as “speaking an edifying word.” For the message it does not make a difference, and it may help to explain to the leadership of the church that invited him that in this case administering the sacraments is not included. ☐



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² W. W. J. Van Oene, *With Common Consent*, Winnipeg 1990, 76.

³ See Lord’s Day 25, Q/A 65 of the Heidelberg Catechism

VISUAL MEDITATIONS

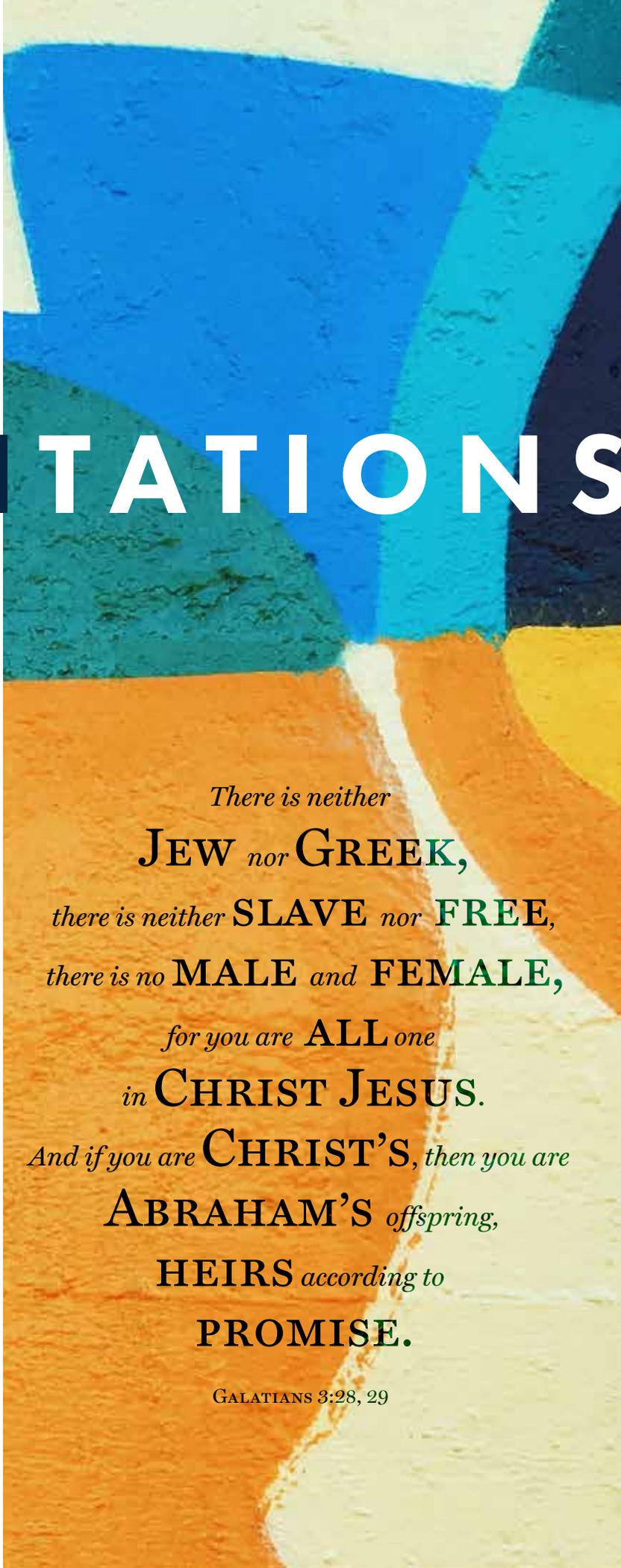
PETER HOLTVLÜWER

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION:

It's been more than a year but we are happy to now present the second installment of *New Voices*, a column that showcases some of the thinking and talents of our young adults. As a church community stretching from generation to generation (all by the grace of God), it is healthy to include voices from across that spectrum in our magazine. In this way younger and older believers can learn to listen to and learn from one another.

I'd like to thank Mrs. Sheila VanDelft, Art teacher at Credo Christian High School in Langley, and also Mrs. Carina Scott, English teacher at Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton, for encouraging and working with their students for the results you see below. I would like to invite all Art and English teachers in each of our CanRC high schools to consider doing the same with their senior students. If you are interested or have questions about what is involved, please get in touch with me (pholtvluwer@gmail.com). We would love to publish a cross-section of submissions from our young adults across the federation.

Our thanks go out to Janelle, Caitlyn, and Isabel for your willingness to share your gifts with the rest of us—so nice to see! The first two have given us visual meditations on Galatians 3:28, 29 along with a brief explanation of their work. Isabel has contributed a short story. Now, let's enjoy their creativity and thoughtfulness!



*There is neither
JEW nor GREEK,
there is neither SLAVE nor FREE,
there is no MALE and FEMALE,
for you are ALL one
in CHRIST JESUS.
And if you are CHRIST'S, then you are
ABRAHAM'S offspring,
HEIRS according to
PROMISE.*

GALATIANS 3:28, 29



One In Christ
Artist: Janelle Vane
*Acrylic and pencil crayon
on poster board*

I made a coloured pencil drawing and painting, overlaid with glass on poster board. I used a hammer to break the glass and then I traced out the pieces and filled them in with painted people. Then I used pencil crayons to make a realistic hand of Jesus. After this was done, I mounted my art project on cardboard. I made this art piece to represent the verse Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

For me to really capture the message in the verse I included people, male and female, of many different ethnicities and cultures. There was sadness and joy, love and brokenness, and many more human emotions. For each picture I painted I wanted to try and represent the opposite besides them, one example of this could be at the top with a dark old man next to an unborn baby. The glass shards represent a broken nation that has shattered. But we are all simplified and small, and I made the focus on Jesus and his hands. His wounded hands symbolize the price he had to pay for us in order to save us. We are such broken people and yet our loving Saviour was nailed to the cross for our sins, and through his sufferings he is willing to bring us into his cross, his kingdom.



Reaching for the Christ

Artist: **Caitlyn Huttema**

Mixed media on paper

I made this artwork to represent this school year's theme text, Galatians 3:28, 29. I made a watercolour painting on top of a pencil drawing on paper. I also used pen and ink to outline the pond.

The pond in the middle represents the living water, that is, Christ. There are also mountains outlined lightly within the pond to illustrate that Christ is our rock and foundation.

The rocks lining the pond show that God is separate from the world, yet still involved in it. And the hands that surround it represent all the different kinds of people in this world. Young and old, rich and poor, dirty and clean, of all colours, "we are all one in Christ" (Gal 3:29).

I chose to draw the hands of people in my life: my grandpa, boyfriend, cousins, friends, and my own hand. I wanted them to feel near to me, as we all reach as one for our Saviour.

I placed the hands purposely to draw your eye to the centre, representing Christ. For he is the centre of everything in heaven and on earth.

A FOREVER BROKEN Heart

This is the heart-wrenching tale of the man who captured my soul, the sweetest person to grace this earth, and the father of my children. It's a journey through the highs and lows, a roller-coaster ride from the best of times to the darkest of days. Life, with its unpredictable twists, never allows a moment for you to catch your breath before it flips your world upside down, a ceaseless dance with an ever-shifting, unpredictable reality.

Let me take you back to that summer when I first laid eyes on John, the man who would become my husband and the anchor of my existence. In those days, we were young, blissfully ignorant, with the weight of the world feeling like a distant concept. Together, we thought everything would align, unaware of fate's twist. The tale unfolded, testing our promises in stormy realities. Our love fought life's trials as the clear path turned into a maze of uncertainties. Life's surprises kept us holding tight, navigating ever-changing tides and waves of circumstance threatening to pull us under.



"I do," John whispered, the words escaping his lips as a promise.

"And do you, Cara Scott, take John Brown to be your lawfully wedded husband?" The weight of those words hung in the air, and at that moment, both John and I, surrounded by our emotional guests, couldn't hold back the tears. It felt like we were on the brink of a lifetime filled with success and happiness.

"I do," I said, my voice steady, my heart pounding with a mix of excitement and nervousness.

"I pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride." The pastor gracefully took a step back, closing the book in his hands. It was our cue, our moment to seal the promises with a kiss. As we leaned in, the world around us blurred, and in that fraction of a second, everything felt surreal.

Our lips met, and it was more than just a kiss; it was the beginning of a journey, a promise etched into that fleeting moment. The warmth of the embrace, the cheers from our loved ones, and the soft notes of joyous music in the background created a memory that time has yet to fade. Even after all these years, that beautiful moment remains vivid in my heart, an indelible mark on the canvas of our shared history.

We signed the papers, and our marriage became official. I was now Cara Brown. I had a new name and was prepared to make the most of my newfound life. Only a year into the marriage and I was already in the hospital pushing out our first-born son. There was screaming and crying but soon all that pain turned into pure joy of the creation of a new life. Caleb was his name, and he could not grow up any faster. We made so many memories together. It was perfect.

Until John decided to join the army. I understand why he did it even though I didn't like it. I knew it was necessary especially with the ongoing lack of soldiers in our country, but it was still scary, every moment he was gone was a reason to worry.



"I'm home!" John's voice rang out as he closed the front door behind him. Without a second thought, I darted over and enveloped him in a tight hug, grateful that he had returned once again, safe and sound.

"I missed you," I murmured, my words muffled against his chest, my heart overflowing with relief and joy. His fingers gently brushed my hair back, tucking loose strands behind my ear.

"I missed you too, but I'm here now and I come bearing gifts." John reached into his bag, pulling out a vibrant bouquet of pink and yellow geraniums. While they weren't my favourite, they reminded me of him. "Some beautiful flowers for my beautiful wife." It was a routine, something he did every time he came back after being away for an extended period of time, a tradition that had become intertwined with the petals of our reunion.

"Thank you," I smiled, the warmth of his gesture adding to the joy of having him back.

"How's the little guy doing?" John inquired, his eyes shifting to my six-month-pregnant belly.

"Same as before, number two is going to make an appearance in a couple of months," I shared, a mix of nerves and excitement fluttering within me at the thought of labour. Despite the apprehension, the prospect of creating more cherished memories with our growing family overshadowed any fear. The expectation of those moments yet to come filled the air with a sweet promise of the future.

"Daddy!" echoed Caleb's excited scream as he thundered down the stairs, racing straight into his father's open arms. He clung to John with a tight grip, as if afraid that letting go would make the moment disappear. For a six-year-old, enduring days without his dad was a constant struggle, but we managed to navigate through it the best we could.

"How long are you staying?" Caleb asked, his eyes sparkling with anticipation.

"Only for the night. I have to leave tomorrow for a training exercise," replied John, and I watched as the joy faded from Caleb's face. Despite the brave attempt to mask it, a deep pain lingered in his eyes, knowing his father would once again miss a few more weekends with the family. John noticed the change in Caleb's expression. "Sorry, buddy. But it should only be a month. It's just a training exercise. Nothing to worry about."

"Okay." Caleb's spirits lifted a bit, and hopefulness returned to his bright blue eyes as he ran off to the dining room where dinner awaited.

Before I could join my son, John pulled me aside. "I'm sorry, but it's not just a training exercise," he confessed. My smile began to fade as he continued, "I'm leaving for deployment, but in a very safe area, I promise. Okay?" My mind raced, grappling with the weight of his words in the context of the uncertain present and daunting memories of the past.

"Deployment?" I asked, fear gripping me. He had been deployed before, but in a war like this, nowhere seemed safe.

"Yes, but I promise it will be okay. I won't be in the action; it's a safe area," he reassured me, pleading as he saw the fear in my eyes.

Our supper became a blur, a mix of laughter and shared moments around the table as a family for what felt like the last time. We stayed up late, watching movies and catching up on each other's lives, but underneath the surface, John's words lingered like a heavy cloud. The next morning, we all got ready, John donning his military uniform, while Caleb and I wore our Sunday best.

Hugging him tightly, Caleb and I bid our goodbyes.

"Goodbye. I love you both very much," said John, giving each of us a kiss before walking down the driveway. He waved before stepping into the waiting taxi.

"See you soon!" I called out, not realising then that it wasn't true.



That marked the final moment I laid eyes on him, watching as he stepped into the car of someone I didn't know. I'd always carried this unnecessary worry about his safety, but on that particular day, strangely, I felt a sense of reassurance. "*It should only be a month,*" I convinced myself. Little did I know that month would stretch into an eternity.

When a month came, John didn't. I stayed awake through the night, an anxious cocktail of hope and prayer coursing through me, yearning for his return. Instead of John, a letter showed up at my doorstep. It was from John's commanding officer, bearing the gut-wrenching news that he was missing in action. I clung to denial for days, but as days melted into weeks and weeks transformed into months, an ominous dread took root within me.

When the war eventually concluded, John was officially declared dead, even though no trace of him was ever unearthed. Those days are a blur in my memory, yet the pain that pierced my heart and clouded my vision back then is still vivid. While the streets of our nation celebrated victory over the enemy, I found myself indoors, silently wishing it wasn't true.

Weeks drifted by, marking the sombre occasion of his memorial service. A heartbreaking funeral unfolded, no body to lay to rest, just an empty casket. The air echoed with the solemn notes of the national anthem, a poignant backdrop to grieving family members, amidst the pink and yellow geraniums. They weren't my favourite, but they reminded me of him.

Isabel Nyenhuis

CAPITALISM PERSECUTES THE *Church*

The last number of articles dealing with persecution covered how the church of Christ is persecuted by either Islam (think Nigeria or Pakistan) or dictatorial paranoia (think China or India). Another evil force that takes aim at our brothers and sisters around the world is capitalism.

Admittedly, this is not an overly common driver of persecution, but it does exist and the oppressive intent is the same. Perhaps one of the earliest instances of this occurring is recorded for us in Acts 19. There, Luke records an uproar that occurred in Ephesus. A silversmith named Demetrius, together with other craftsmen, made wealth by selling shrines of the goddess Artemis. Every visitor to Ephesus who visited the elaborate temple of Artemis was a potential customer to purchase a silver souvenir thereby furthering the wealth of Demetrius and his colleagues. The influence which The Way was having on their “bank balance” could not be accepted and thus they orchestrated a riot to impede the gospel message that Paul brought to the city. As we will see, Colombia is also a nation that is ever on alert to anything that threatens its ill-gotten gains and at times Christianity falls in its crosshairs.

THE COUNTRY OF COLOMBIA

Colombia is a country located in the northwestern tip of South America. It is blessed with thousands of acres of pristine rainforest and wildlife. Colombia is a democracy that has elections every four years, both for the districts (think provinces or states) and for the presidency of the country. On paper their laws appear to promote freedom of religion; however, rebel groups are a major driver of Christian persecution.

Approximately 40% of Colombia has a “limited state presence.” This means that traditional government military and police are fewer in number and much less powerful as compared to the various paramilitary rebel groups (aka drug cartels). These groups are separate from the government and the only authority they bow to is an insatiable pursuit of wealth and power. They reinvest some of their profits into high grade weapons which they use against the legitimate Colombian military when bribes and threats don’t work.

The drug cartels’ wealth is primarily obtained by producing more cocaine than any other country in the world¹ and secondarily by illegally mining gold. It is estimated that in 2022 Colombia

¹ www.reuters.com/world/americas/cocaine



produced 1,738 metric tons of cocaine. Colombia has two native species of coca plants which make farming it in large quantities very favourable. The leaves can be stripped off the plants or bushes up to eight times per year which makes it fairly labour intensive. Anyone owning land which a drug cartel finds attractive will have their land expropriated or risk death. Reading this made me think of the story of Ahab and Jezebel taking Naboth's land (1 Kgs 21).

Communist guerillas, paramilitary groups, criminal gangs, and drug cartels all see the church as an enemy to be eradicated because, thanks to the preaching and courageous action of leaders and pastors, many young people have renounced armed conflict and illegal activities. The persecution primarily targets the pastors—either executing them immediately after a worship service for congregants to see, or otherwise in front of the pastor's family.² On other occasions the cartels announce a full lockdown where residents are not allowed to leave their homes, for fear of being murdered or kidnapped. It is no coincidence that these lockdowns occur on days of worship.³

So, we see in Colombia that the spirit of capitalism is so strong that it drives the persecution of God's children. And since no enterprise exists without regular customers it could be said that the

single largest customer, the United States, is equally culpable. Isn't it regrettable? A country, which at one time believed it wise to declare on its currency, "In God We Trust," has fallen so far that today it may be more apropos if their currency read, "For Pleasure We Live." The god of pleasure works in tandem with the god of money and appears to flourish with every sniff of stimulant.

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them

— PSALM 135:15–18. 



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² <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/02/another-colombian-pastor-killed-leaving-the-church>

³ <https://globalchristianrelief.org/christian-persecution/stories/persecuted-christians-in-colombia-face-drug-cartels/>



**Christ For all Ministry team
Bangkok Thailand**



Message from Founder, Chairman Naeem Zafar

Thrilled to share the success of our Sunday schools with Pakistani Christian refugees residing in Thailand. Last year, we officially launched a new Sunday school in Bangkok, Thailand, and it has been flourishing. Special thanks to Kazu, our dedicated representative, for providing unwavering support, and Kinza, one of our Sunday school teachers, for their ongoing encouragement. Embarking on a mission trip to Bangkok, Thailand, was a remarkable journey within my community. It allowed me to gather numerous memories and embrace the love shared. Pakistani Christian refugees face many ongoing hurdles and dangers around daily living related to the immigration process. In the span of two days, I had the privilege of visiting over 200 Pakistani refugees, conducting home visits, and witnessing their struggles. Special thanks to our representative, Mr. Kazu, who guided me to diverse locations, facilitating meaningful connections with my fellow brothers and sisters. Thank you for your ongoing support and prayers. All glory to God. For additional details, please visit www.christforallministry.com.



**Sunday school Bangkok Thailand
among Christian Refugees**



During my brief visit to Bangkok, Thailand, I had the opportunity to visit my family. I learned about numerous families enduring prolonged hardships in Thailand, hoping to secure a safer haven, such as Canada. These families fled their home countries due to persecution and have been facing challenges in Thailand, particularly concerning their children's education. Many young individuals have grown up without adequate educational opportunities, experiencing setbacks during their high school years. Please keep these families in your thoughts and prayers, hoping for their safety and a brighter future.



Visit to Samrong Church Bangkok Thailand

Prayer Request: Prayer for the persecuted families in Pakistan. Pray for the safety of our team in Pakistan. Prayer for the recent arrest of families in Thailand and Christian refugees who are suffering around the world especially those who are in Prison in Thailand. Prayer for recent brothers who were falsely accused of blasphemy cases. Prayer for our bible project. Please prayerfully consider being a prayer partner



**Bible classes for Christian Refugees
Bangkok Thailand**

"In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."



Christmas gifts and food distribution Pakistan



We are so grateful to be able to serve many different Sunday Schools by the grace of God in Pakistan



Dry fruits given as Christmas gifts Punjab Pakistan



Poverty Relief: Small Business Finance Support
CFAM helps families to open a small business so they can get out of working in the brick kiln. More details please visit our website



Providing shoe's to children who are in need at Christmas



We continue to be able to supply Bibles to Persecuted Churches



We are opening new Sunday schools in 2024 among the Bricklin communities



Donations and information
We accept Cheques
Cheque: Christ for all ministry 26929 16 Ave,
Aldergrove BC V4W 2S3
E-transfers: donate@christforallministry.com
For projects information
Naeem@christforallministry.com
Prayer Partner: www.christforallministry.com

Donate: Paper Bible, and Audio Bible



Niagara South

DEDICATES NEW BUILDING

JOHN HOMAN

On the evening of November 15, 2023, the congregation of Niagara South came together to celebrate and dedicate their recently purchased church building. In March of 2020, the congregation had been instituted by combining portions of the Dunnville and Spring Creek Canadian Reformed churches into one new congregation. It was the strong desire of this new congregation to have a place of worship within the city of Welland, where very few churches of any Reformed persuasion are found. Early in this journey, the congregation was able to locate and rent a church building that met all the congregation's needs. The building was well located and suitably sized. The building belonged to a local congregation of another denomination that was facing declining membership, and this congregation was very open to helping with the needs of Niagara South. In time, it became apparent that a better fit might be that the congregation of Niagara South purchase this building and in turn continue to work with the original congregation, allowing its continued use of the building. Negotiations were conducted, a purchase price agreed upon, a capital drive initiated, and on November 1, 2023, the transaction completed. There was great reason for thankfulness!

DEDICATION EVENING

The celebration and dedication evening was opened by Rev Offringa. Building on Bible passages that described the temples of Solomon and Zerubbabel, he pointed those present to the fact that today Jesus Christ is building a heavenly temple that exceeds that of Solomon. This does not diminish the role of today's place of worship, but rather sharpens the focus, as the church building is the workshop of the Holy Spirit where the congregation is built up.

Considering the fact that the purchase of a building is a significant venture, part of the purchasing process involved a capital drive campaign. Titled "Enduring Hope," this campaign ran from June to October 2023, aiming to raise \$400,000. Brs. R. Ouwersloot and C. Feenstra shared with those present how letters requesting funds had been sent across Canada. Placing trust in the LORD, the committee did not track donations for the duration of the campaign, but waited until the campaign was completed. The final tally indicated a total of \$618,900 had been raised, with a total of \$476,900 coming from outside the congregation, including those outside the Canadian Reformed community! The generosity of the many donors was humbling and cause for great thankfulness.



Clockwise from top left: Rev. Offringa; brothers C. Feenstra, and R. Ouwersloot; key; Niagara South new building.

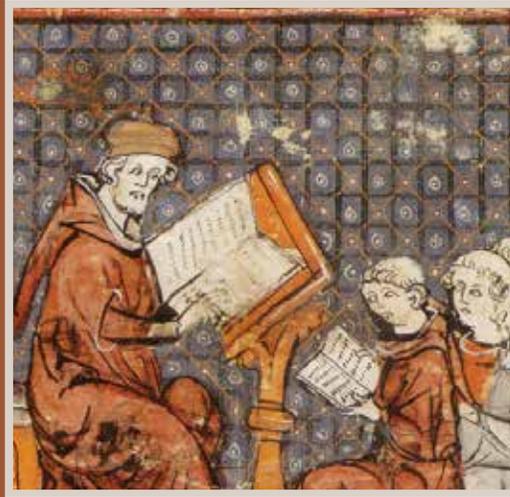
Opportunity was also given to a representative of the committee that was responsible for executing the building purchase to look back and reflect on the path to the building purchase. Br. N. VandenOever reflected how the purchase was, in many ways, seemingly bold for such a young congregation. However, the Bible also contains examples of boldness, and the LORD's blessing. As such, it was with much thankfulness that the congregation has reached its present point where it is now holds the deed of its own building. Br. VandenOever also shared that the building's "old" congregation had recently celebrated seventy-five years of existence. As part of the celebration, the words of dedication spoken when the church building was originally dedicated were shared with those present. These words were a reminder of how a church building is to serve as a focal point of God's Word and work in the community. In addition, these words laid the foundation of the sentiment within the "old" congregation that the building

would continue to be used as a house of worship, and how this also impacted negotiations leading to the purchase and sale. Br. VandenOever ended his talk by presenting to the representatives of council a key engraved with the words of Psalm 122:3, showing the completion of the work of this committee.

As the evening wound to a close, the committees responsible for the building purchase and capital drive were duly thanked and discharged from their mandates. The program was also punctuated with singing, allowing those present to praise the LORD for his blessings.

Looking back, the congregation at Niagara South has a lot to be thankful for. Looking ahead, the congregation can also know that the LORD looks after his church and his church is to always look to him in faith to lead and guide. *Soli deo gloria.* 🇨🇪

John Homan



The School of Master Albinus

Alcuin the Scholar and Charles the King

Part 4: Renewal

KEITH SIKKEMA

INTRODUCTION

Alcuin joins Charles in AD 782, with one assistant. He comes to serve, and later says to Charles, “I was made many things to many people, to instruct them for the profit of God’s Holy Church and for the lustre of your Imperial Reign.” That suits both Charles and the pope, for to them, the church and the kingdom cannot exist apart from each other. Better yet, their labours direct God’s people back to God’s truth and Christian living. Satan may rage, but the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.¹ When Alcuin dies in 804, he is a leading counselor to Charles, head of several Benedictine monasteries, and a wise Christian advisor to many people.

¹ Matt 16:18

AACHEN

Alcuin is quickly at home at the Aachen Palace School, which especially trains future and current courtiers from the nobility. It soon flourishes as the “School of Master Albinus” (Alcuin’s nickname), with he and other scholars as teachers. Students flock to Aachen like they used to do at York. They include Einhard (770–840, Charles’s future biographer), several others who later lead as teachers, abbots, bishops, and courtiers, but also the royal family, young nobles, and even commoners. Occasionally, Charles himself joins the class. He cannot write but takes a wax tablet to bed to practice the alphabet and his signature.

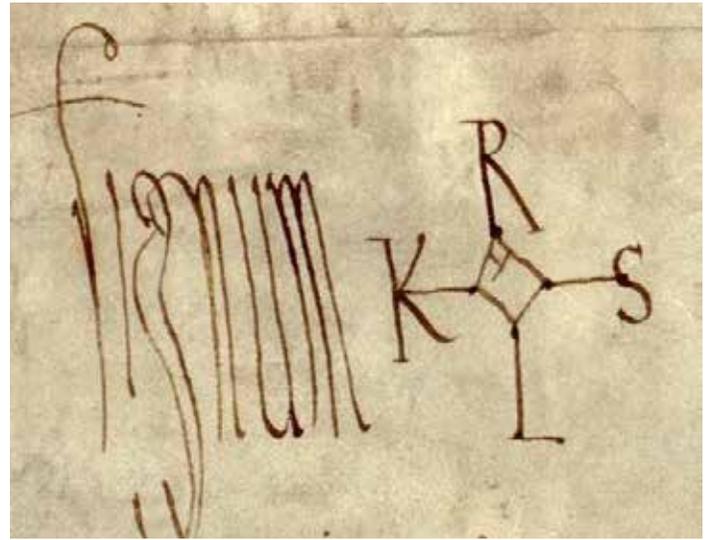
Alcuin’s students *must* do well. When Charles asks him one day what it is that makes Aachen’s Palace School better than ancient Greek schools in Athens, he answers, “The Greeks trusted Plato and the earthly wisdom of the seven liberal arts of Trivium and Quadrivium. Our ‘Athens’ will be enriched by the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit² and surpass all the dignity of earthly wisdom.” Charles likes that—Augustine of Hippo would have said so!

Charles also inspects student progress, and one day he finds that those of nobility do not try very hard. He tells them to stand and wait on his left. The others work hard and must come to his right. He praises them, “You are dedicated. You will do well at any court!” Students of nobility expect to get even better praise, but he says, “You may think that your birth and wealth will bring you praise. But your horse-back riding and hunting, your garb and play, and your resources are not important to me. If you waste your time now, you will be worthless when you grow up.” Ouch! They know that the King has power to take away their nobility and its benefits!

BEYOND AACHEN

Alcuin is very busy—teaching, summarizing the Church Fathers’ commentaries and other scholarly books, writing letters, and advising Charles. Charles wants everyone to be educated, starting with leaders for the church. He also asks Alcuin for advice about education, doctrine, and architecture, and wants him to come along as advisor when he visits his various palaces. He also gives him charge of some abbeys, so he can direct their *scriptoria*. Alcuin enjoys most of this, but it is far from retirement.

Alcuin visits York in 787 and from 790–793 to give personal advice. He observes that “we Anglo-Saxons are a race of evildoers, a people laden with iniquity, a sinful nation whom God will punish unless we repent.” In 793, Lindisfarne monastery on Holy Island,



Charles’ signature

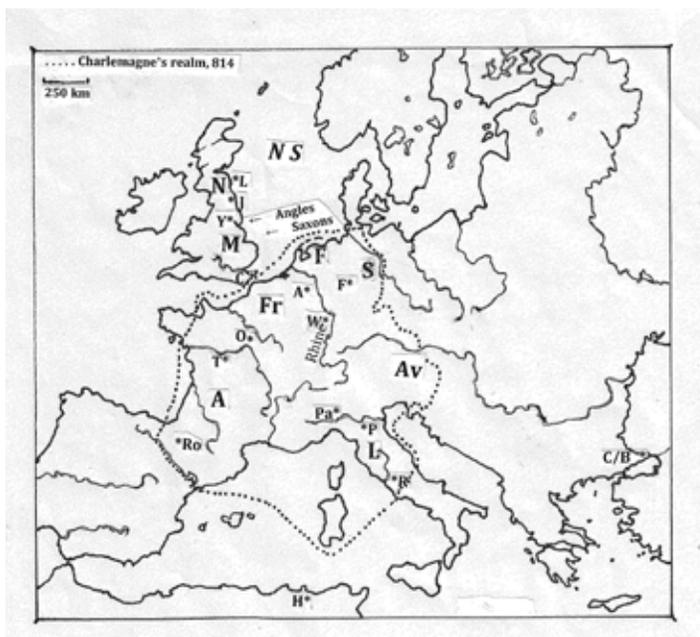
250 km north of York, gets raided, desecrated, and massacred by Vikings. Alcuin tells its bishop, Higbold, that it is God’s wrath and a call to turn from violence, adultery, greed, and vanity—lest worse will happen.

Coming home to Aachen, Alcuin tells Charles that Anglo-Saxon clergy are often drunk or distracted by hunting for foxes and priding themselves in their ranks of nobility. Also, many cannot even write sermons and stumble through reading homilies written by others. That’s bad, but many priests in Charles’s realm are also led by desires of the flesh, and not by the Spirit; some never even wanted to be a priest. Many are guilty of vanity, extravagance, haughtiness, superstition, and immorality, or even extort bribes by threatening excommunication!³ Charles agrees that such clergy are worthless: “They themselves must first know God’s Word to preach it, and take up letters and learning before serving communion, hearing confessions, baptising babies, and burying the dead.” Alcuin notes that nobles and officials tarnish Charles’s reputation by accepting bribes, lacking wisdom, suppressing orphans and widows and being lazy. Common people imitate the vices of the nobles and ignore moral standards, giving themselves to violence, and drunkenness.

By 788, Charles sends his decrees (called “capitularies”) from his headquarters in Aachen by special envoys (called “missi”) everywhere in his realm. Many capitularies focus on the church. They insist on proper worship and connect Sunday rest to Old Testament Sabbath laws and the Lord’s resurrection.

² Isa 11:2; Job 28

³ Gal 5:16–26



Code for map of Relevant places for Charles and Alcuin

A	Aquitaine	C/B*	Constantinople / Byzantium / Istanbul	*P	Parma
Av	Avars	A*	Aachen	*R	Rome
F	Frisia	C*	Canterbury	T*	Tours
L	Lombardy	F*	Fulda	Y*	York
N	Northumbria	H*	Hippo	W*	Worms
S	Saxony	*J	Jarrow	*Ro	Roncesvalles
M	Mercia	*L	Lindisfarne	Pa*	Pavia
Fr	Francia	*O	Orléans	250 km	
NS	North Sea	Rhine		← Angles ←	
				← Saxons ←	
				Charlemagne's realm, 814	

People should go to church, not elsewhere, and priests must preach every Sunday, on feast-days for saints, and also several days leading up to Christmas, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. Additional days must be set aside for prayer and thanksgiving.⁴ The Kyrie Eleison and the Creed⁵ must be sung, and the Lord's Supper celebrated every Sunday. In 789, Charles orders a revision of all church books: All must start using the same "Carolingian Minuscule" script and corrections, with Alcuin's Roman Latin liturgy. Charles also encourages preaching in the vernacular, so people can understand.

HERESIES

Alcuin believes that a bishop must "carry the key of the heavenly kingdom on his lips." The king carries "the sword for vengeance on offenders" and must protect church doctrine and practice. Charles says, "The king's mission is to protect, strengthen, spread, and maintain the faith."⁶ The pope's mission is to support the king in this task by praying for him like Moses with outstretched arms.⁷ It is not surprising that, in 794, Charles calls the Church Council of Frankfurt to oppose heresies.

Empress Irene of Byzantium and her husband, Emperor Leo IV, fight viciously about venerating images. She promotes "loving

revelation" of saints and Christ by burning candles and incense before their images, but he encourages "iconoclasm," destruction of all images. In 787, the Byzantine Council of Nicaea excommunicated her opponents as "heretics." Pope Hadrian agrees with Nicaea's decision, but Alcuin is not excited about this: "It is better to imitate saints in the heart, than to carry their bones in bags." Charles agrees with Alcuin, not with Hadrian, and the Council of Frankfurt accepts images "as teaching tools only."⁷ Yet, Charles weeps when Hadrian dies in December, 795.

At the Ecumenical Councils of Chalcedon (451) and Nicaea (787), the heretic Nestorius had been condemned. However, Archbishop Elipandus of Toledo now says that Christ *adopted* his divinity after birth and was not really God by nature. His idea is called adoptionism.⁸ Charles, Alcuin, and Pope Hadrian oppose Elipandus because of "apostolic authority and the command of the king," and the Council of Frankfurt (794) condemns adoptionism to "eternal anathema."

FRIENDS

In Aachen's splendid palace, warm friendships develop. They tell each other what they think and call each other by nicknames: Charles is David, and Alcuin is Albinus. In 796, white-haired

⁴ See CanRC CO, Art. 52–65.

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDortyp228>

⁶ BC 36

⁷ LD 35

⁸ Athanasian Creed, 29-42; BC Art 10, 18, 19; LD 6.

Alcuin, looking forward to peaceful retirement,⁹ accepts Charles's honourable appointment as abbot of the great St. Martin of Tours Abbey. He later gets Charles's permission "to also have . . . some of our boys bring to Francia the flowers of Britain (books), so that the blossoming of Paradise may be found along the Loire in Tours as well." His excellent *scriptorium* brings fame and endowments to Tours. On another occasion, Charles asks Alcuin to explain the puzzling courses of the planets. Alcuin has more important things to do and refuses.

Alcuin strongly opposes Charles's harsh decrees to "compel the defeated Saxons to come to faith by reason, fear, or the sword" (Luke 14:23), including the death-penalty for refusing baptism,¹⁰ sacrificing people to Satan, cremation, and church raids. He reminds Charles of Zechariah 4:6, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts," and continues, "Rather send pious preachers to win them gently—like children who must be fed milk about the Trinity and especially Christ. You can force people to be baptised, but tithes and other harsh measurers invite rebellion and apostasy, not faith."

In Central Europe, Charles's armies defeat pagan Slavs and Avars. After the Avars' defeat, it takes fifteen wagons, each pulled by four oxen, to bring the gold and silver and other Avar loot back to Aachen. Charles figures they had robbed this wealth from other peoples, and distributes it as he likes to reward noblemen, bishops and abbots in Francia and England, even King Offa, and Pope Hadrian. Avar leaders are baptized in the Aachen Chapel—but, when opportunity arises, they are just as treacherous as the Saxons. They also cannot be converted by force, and Alcuin reminds Charles again that, "It has pleased Christ to reward you, the lover of truth and the salvation of so many, and to subject the terribly savage Avars, causing them to bow their proud necks under the yoke of the holy faith. . . . Now, give them the milk of good morals and gentle commandments first so they will not vomit out what they just took in!"

In 801, when Theodulph of Orléans accuses Alcuin to Charles for shielding a criminal cleric, Alcuin answers that he repented

and sought sanctuary in his church.¹¹ Charles then calls Alcuin a "minister of the devil"—but the friendship remains: When he gets old and nearly blind, Charles lightens his workload before he dies.

On Christmas Day, 800, Pope Leo III (unexpectedly?) crowns Charles emperor of the "Holy Roman Empire." This illustrates the link between church and state, and Charles's commitments as theocratic king and his independence from Byzantium.

RENAISSANCE

Alcuin's leadership was a reforming blessing for God's people from each of the three influential schools at which he taught: York (England), Aachen (Germany), and Tours (France). After his death in 804, the church drifts away from Scripture. 700 years later, God grants Reformation with a return to Scripture—in the vernacular now—and using sources Charles and Alcuin helped preserve. Alcuin's work for preserving ancient manuscripts, Christian culture, and Christian education is still deeply relevant today.

Charles becomes known as Charlemagne, Charles the Great, but his hopes already falter when Pepin dies in 810 and Charles in 811. Louis "the Pious" becomes his heir and successor after a short co-reign as emperor before Charles dies in January, 814, and is buried in the Aachen Chapel. After, by 843, the empire is divided among Louis's sons Charles (largely western France), Louis (the "Holy Roman Empire," largely Germany and Austria), and Lothair (the middle kingdom, from the Netherlands and eastern France and Switzerland to Northern Italy).

By his Word and Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ gathers, defends, and preserves his church—even using flawed people like Charles and Alcuin. Their achievements have become known as the "Carolingian Renaissance." Descendants of Frisians, Saxons, and Franks may reflect on its enduring benefits for church and society, as they, too, praise God, seek his city, and hope in Christ (Rom 5:10; Gal 3:28). 



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⁹ There is no peace in York. In 796, King Æthelred of Northumbria is assassinated, his successor Osbald escapes within a month, and then Aardwolf becomes king. King Offa of Mercia and Archbishop Eanbald also die.

¹⁰ Abandoned by 788.

¹¹ Exod 21:12–14; 1 Kgs 1:50–2:35. Sanctuary allows criminals to seek God, repent, make restitution, and then be exiled.



**RAY OF
SUNSHINE**

Rachel Vis

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

to Derek, Arlene, and Bryce!

We wish you all the Lord's blessing as you celebrate your birthday in April.

*Enjoy your special day of celebration, and may you continue
to feel God's presence and provision in the year to come.*

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

2 Derek Kok will be **54**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

23 Arlene DeWit will be **63**
#4 6560 Vedder Road
Chilliwack, BC
V2R0Y6

29 Bryce Berends will be **49**
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1 St Line, RR #3
Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4

*As we celebrate Easter in this issue I thought
I would share this Bible text with you all:*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls - 1 Peter 1:3-9

Let us all encourage one another with the promise of Christ's resurrection. We can be comforted by the knowledge that Christ rose from the dead for each and every one of us. We all have our trials, but we can all look to Christ and rejoice, knowing we will have eternal glory with him in heaven. ☐

CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 4!

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

We have already come to the ninth commandment! Do you think you know which commandment it is? This commandment is about lying. The ninth commandment is "you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour." So, what is a witness? Well, let's explain that using a little story. Let's say there was a car accident and your dad saw what happened. Because he saw what happened, your dad would be a witness. And he would talk to the police to tell them what happened. Now, the commandment speaks of a false witness. False is the opposite of true. So, false is a lie. A false witness is someone who lies about what they saw. In this commandment, God is saying "do not lie about your neighbour." Instead, we are to speak the truth. Lying is very serious to God. Lying comes from Satan. We are children of God. And so we should love and tell the truth always.

Decode the missing words in the text below to learn the Lord's thoughts about those who lie and those who tell the truth.

____ lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act
12 25 9 14 7

____ are his delight. (Proverbs 12:22)
6 1 9 20 8 6 21 12 12 25

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

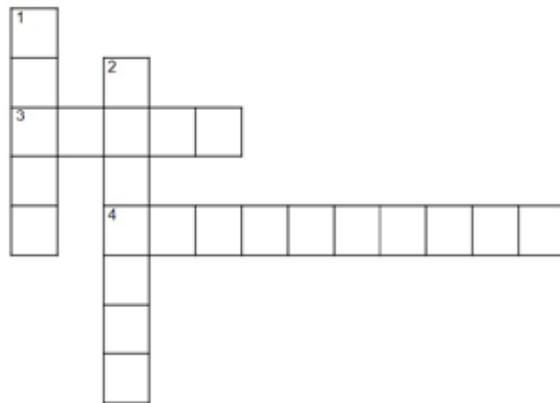
CROSSWORD

Down:

- The opposite of true
- Someone who saw something happen

Across:

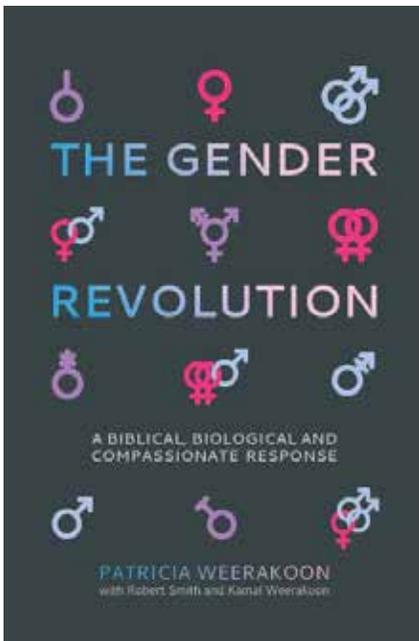
- When you do not tell the truth
- Those around us are our _____



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



CHRISTIAN SEXOLOGIST CLEARS THE GENDER CONFUSION

The Gender Revolution: A Biblical, Biological, and Compassionate Response, by Patricia Weerakoon (with Robert Smith and Kamal Weerakoon). (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2023). Softcover. 199 pages. \$19.99 USD.

I'm quite sure I've never read a book by a sexologist before. I'm glad I made this one my first. This is the clearest and most informative book I've seen on transgenderism. Other books are helpful in understanding the philosophical or worldview aspects of the movement. This one spends little time on that and instead devotes its bulk to the concrete issues likely to confront Christians in their homes, churches, and schools.

Patricia Weerakoon is well-qualified to address this topic—she's a medical doctor, counselor, sex therapist (sexologist), and academic. Two theologians assisted her in writing *The Gender Revolution*: her son Dr. Kamal Weerakoon and Dr. Robert Smith. This expert team has ensured that the book lives up to its subtitle as “a biblical, biological, and compassionate response.”

This paragraph from the first chapter captures the thrust of *The Gender Revolution*:

As we will show, contemporary science is demonstrating the truth of a traditional understanding around the differences between sex, behaviour, orientation, and identity. Much more importantly, we will see how the Christian concept of objective reality—of our created, embodied biology—harmonizes with the rest of our self. We will see how the Christian worldview offers clarity and comfort in the face of

confusion. We will see how the Christian gospel offers light and hope to those who are trapped in darkness (p. 13).

Transgender ideology, according to the author(s), attacks not only Scripture's public objective truth (corresponding to reality), but also the best scientific research. For the latter, Weerakoon provides a good number of footnotes to journal articles, many of them quite recent.

I found this book particularly helpful on five issues. I'll just identify the issues without revealing what the book says about them—I want you to read it for yourself, after all.

First, I've been wondering why there are vocal lesbians protesting the transgender ideology. I did a talk a while back for a largely Christian audience on this issue and there was a prominent lesbian from the community who attended too. Have we become allies of a sort?

Second, what do we make of the phenomenon of “intersex” people as it relates to transgender ideology? What exactly is “intersex”?

Next, Weerakoon provides concrete advice for Christian churches and schools in dealing with scenarios that may arise in relation to the transgender revolution.

Fourth, is it true that transitioning reduces suicidality? What about puberty blockers? Weerakoon provides scientific evidence to answer those questions.

Finally, there's an appendix, "On the Use of Pronouns and New Names." How should Christians respond when confronted with someone who wants us to use their preferred pronouns? Or if we're asked to give our preferred pronouns? I hear from congregation members that these are now real issues in many workplaces.

I will share you with one helpful point with some detail. Transgender ideology holds that, at birth, doctors "assign" sex to a child. But Weerakoon points out how it's actually the other way around:

Transgender ideology says that if a child behaves according to the stereotypes assigned by society to a particular sex, then the child must be that sex, regardless of their biology. If a child dislikes toys stereotypically associated with their sex and prefers toys, games or activities usually preferred by the other sex, or if a child enjoys dressing up and acting in playtime as the other sex, or if a child prefers playing with the other sex, gender revolutionaries insist that the child is the other sex—a "trans child," irrespective of biology. In this

way, they show themselves to be even more enslaved to rigid gender stereotypes than people of previous eras.

Transgender ideologues, then, not medical practitioners, are ones who "assign" a sex to children. Medical practitioners recognize a child's sex at birth; transgender ideologues seek to override this biological reality with a sex assigned on the basis of behaviour (p. 97).

That's one of the most powerful points in the book.

This book is necessary reading for a wide audience, but especially for teachers, office bearers, and everyone involved in Christian education. We need experts to help us navigate these challenging waters—and we need Christian experts. *The Gender Revolution* will not only inform you about the issues, it'll also equip you to be a genuinely loving help to those struggling with their gender identity. 



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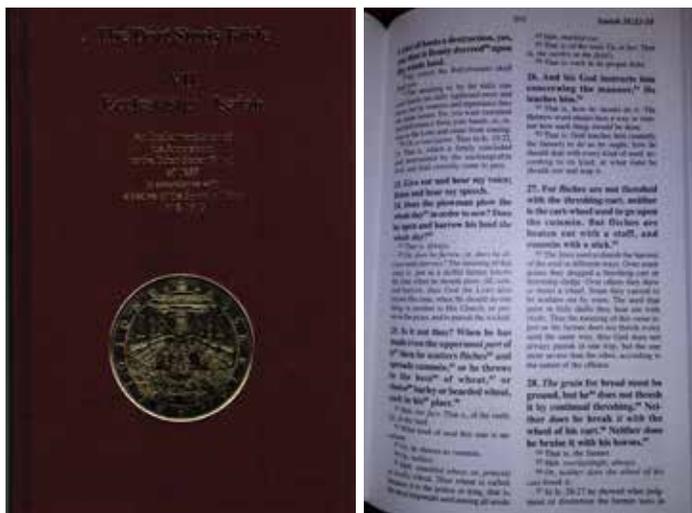
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>>	MY FRIEND
>>	MY BROTHER
>>	MY CHILD
>>	MY GRANDCHILD
>>	MY NEIGHBOUR



THE DORT STUDY BIBLE

An English translation of the Annotations to the Dutch States Bible (Statenbijbel or Statenvertaling) of 1637, by Theodore Haak, edited by Roelof A. Janssen and published by Inheritance Publications, Neerlandia, Alberta / Pella, Iowa. Vol. 6 (Psalms to Proverbs); vol. 7 (Ecclesiastes to Isaiah). \$31.95 CAD / \$27.90 USD.¹



One of the decisions of the great Synod of Dort (1618–19) was the mandate given to a committee of scholars to publish a new translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. This edition was also to contain notes to further explain the text and provide cross-references. It was ordered by the synod and, amazingly for us today, financed by the government of the Protestant Dutch Republic. Released in 1637, it is arguably the first study Bible. I have a first edition of this Dutch “States Bible,” and it contains evidence of some ancestor having used it for their study and devotions.

The English soon saw the value of this new publication, and nine years later, in 1646, the British House of Lords commissioned Theodore Haak (1605–1690), a respected German multi-lingual academic, to begin work on an English translation. This was published in 1657.

You may well ask, how useful could a nearly 400-year-old set of notes be? There are study Bibles galore. Why add one more, especially if it is centuries old?

It’s a good question, but it is also good to realize that the notes are, indisputably, orthodox and trustworthy. One may not agree with every conclusion that the “Fathers of Dort” reached, but they will make you think and dig deeply into the holy Scriptures.

They will also root you in our history. This Dutch Bible and the notes were used by our parents and grandparents for generations, but they were mostly inaccessible to us English-speaking people. I have on my computer a PDF of Haak’s translation, but it is difficult to read. These beautiful and well-bound volumes, which lie flat on one’s desk when open, will be a worthy addition to any home, church, school, or minister’s library.

As the previous volumes did, these provide a brief introduction to each book and a short summary of every chapter. The note to each verse follows the pertinent verse of the English translation, making it very user-friendly. Anyone who has used the original Dutch edition, with the notes in tiny font along three margins (right, left, and bottom), will be pleased with how this English version has the annotations following the verses. Arranged this way one is presented with a running commentary on the text of scripture (see illustration).

These volumes are warmly recommended to you with the confident expectation that they will enlighten your mind and warm your heart. **C**



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¹ Note from the publisher: For book club members (also for those who want to join the book club right now) we will still honour the book club price set in 2003 of \$20.00 per book for those who have or will get all the volumes.—R.A. Janssen

CLASSIS CONTRACTA PACIFIC WEST

January 11, 2024

On behalf of Refuge the convening church, Rev. Randall Visscher welcomed the delegates as well as Rev. Rick Vanderhorst. He then read 1 Peter 5:1–11 and opened in prayer.

Delegates from Refuge, Langley, and Smithers were present via zoom. The credentials were found to be good order and the classis contracta was declared constituted. Rev. Randall Visscher was appointed as chair and Rev. Aidan Plug as vice-chairman and clerk. The agenda was adopted and the only matter on the agenda was the approbation of the call from Smithers Canadian Reformed Church to Rev. Rick Vanderhorst. It was confirmed that all the required documents were in order and the call was approbated.

Houston church was delegated to represent Classis Pacific West at the installation service planned for January 28, 2024 in the morning worship service.

The Acts and the Press Release were adopted via email. Rev. Aidan Plug led in prayer and classis was closed.

Rev. Aidan Plug, vice-chairman

