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TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

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Clarion

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620 REV. WYNIA RETIRES

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what's inside

Meditation on God and his Word is good for the soul, and we have several fine articles to help us do that. Richard Aasman writes on the biblical command to “choose life,” while Wes Bredenhof describes how our Saviour guides us through life in “The Greatest Guide Overcame.” Hendrik Alkema presents a delightful reflection on godly friendship while Jeff Morris helps us see the wonder and beauty in the simplicity of God. “Simple,” it turns out, is not a simple concept! Another meditation comes in the form of the song “Burning Bush” by William Helder.

November has been a traditional time to spotlight and pray for persecuted Christians and Andrew Douma’s latest column on that topic helps us do that. While such suffering continues in many places, we may also receive from the Lord’s hand many good gifts and joyful occasions and give thanks for them. One such gift is the person of Rev. Dick Wynia who has served the Lord as minister of the Word for some thirty-seven years and has now retired. May this next chapter of your life provide opportunity for both refreshment and service of a different kind! Another gift is the graduation of more than 100 students from Guido de Brès Christian High School this past June. And still another is the blessing of growth that has come from splitting one small Christian school into two and see both flourish—how lavish our Father’s grace! Read the reports on these events and may it provide grist for the mill of your thanksgiving.

Elsewhere you’ll find our usual slate of book reviews, another instalment of *Clarion Kids*, *Classis Clippings*, and an IRTC newsletter. Leading off the issue is Eric Kampen’s thoughtful reminder to do our homework prior to jumping into a conversation on issues of substance in church life. It’s a matter of respect and good order in church life. May your reading be a blessing to you!

Peter Holtvliuwer

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Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

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JOINING A CONVERSATION

COMMON LIFE EXPERIENCE

Many will have experienced coming late to a meeting, arriving in the middle of a discussion. If it is about a topic that has great personal interest, it will be even more regrettable if the meeting is missed altogether, the matter was not finished, and the topic will be dealt with again at the next meeting. Joining the conversation late, be it late in the meeting or after having missed a meeting, puts one at a great disadvantage, because one does not know what has already been said. One may end up looking rather foolish, coming up with an idea or suggestion that one considered brilliant, but which has been discussed already, analyzed, and rejected, with all the weaknesses pointed out in the process. Therefore, if you are late or new to a conversation, you do well to determine what ground has been covered and even what decisions may have been made. It will be a bit challenging if one is late to the meeting, as one has to gauge where the discussion is at. If the discussion carries over to the next meeting, there is the benefit of minutes or a record of the meeting to give a sense of what was discussed.

LOCAL CHURCH LIFE EXPERIENCE

This joining of a conversation is inherent in Article 33 of the Church Order. It states that “Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds.” This shows that there is continuity in the governing of the church. Each time there are new office bearers, there is not a clean slate to discuss things anew. Rather, there is a joining the conversation. We can call it a generational conversation. To be sure, matters can be reconsidered, but before doing that, one should catch up on the conversation. If good meeting minutes are kept, a clerk will be able to extract the necessary information quickly. Then it can be determined if there is something new to say, or whether it is just rehashing of what has been said before. Article 33 is a good rule in that it keeps a church from frenetic zigzagging with each changeover of office bearers. Such zigzagging politicizes the governing of the church in the way of the world. In any conversation in the governing of the church, we should not ignore those who have participated in the discussion before. They sat at the table long before the current generation.

BROADER CHURCH LIFE EXPERIENCE

We can extend this also to the broader life experience of the church. It is naïve and irresponsible for today’s generation to act as if it were the first to read Scripture. Believers have been busy reading it for thousands of years. The key topics arising from the reading of Scripture and the conclusions of discussions about these topics are reflected in the creeds and confessions of the church. It is the responsibility of each generation to catch up on the faith conversations of previous generations. The conversations are not infallible. They should be measured by the standard of Scripture. However, if one wants to take issue with conclusions of faith conversations of the past, one should show that one has done his or her homework and offers a fresh interaction with conclusions, rather than rehashing arguments already refuted.

This also applies to the various practices that have developed within the particular faith communities in which one finds oneself due to God’s providential guidance. Christians are not little islands floating in the ocean, but have historic ethnic backgrounds where circumstances shaped how believers worked with God’s Word to apply it in their concrete situations. The applications were shaped by the confessed understanding of God’s Word. Every generation must know the broader history of the church, as well as the more specific history in which they have been placed. Circumstances change, but before changes are implemented, it is important to keep in mind that the current generation is the newcomer to a long-running conversation. This means you can’t just ignore the voices of the forefathers or dismiss them out of hand.

Each generation is joining a faith conversation that has been going on for a long time. Listening to voices from the past in the present honours the previous generations and shows wisdom by listening to their voices. So, for the wellbeing of the church, before joining the conversation, catch up on what has been said. It will keep the church from wild zigzagging in doctrine and practice. 



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CHOOSE LIFE

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days – DEUTERONOMY 30:19-20

Just before Israel entered the Promised Land, the LORD, through his servant Moses, issued this challenging command: “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.” This is a matter of *eternal* life and death. Why did God speak in this way? Look at what had happened in the wilderness during the past forty years. God had delivered Israel from Egypt, organized them as his special people, and was leading them to the Promised Land. But Israel rebelled again and again. In fact, the older generation who had wanted to return to Egypt all died, and they were buried in the desert. For their rebellion they would not make it to the Promised Land. The LORD knew what was in the heart of man and was warning Israel before they entered a land flowing with milk and honey to choose life, “loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ issued a similar charge at the end of his Sermon on the Mount: “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt 7:13-14). Everyone is called by God to make choices that will either bring a person closer to God or drive them further away. Thankfully the right choices are not hard to discern. Earlier in the chapter the point is clearly made: “But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (v. 14). In the Book of Deuteronomy alone the LORD has outlined in clear detail how his people are to love him and love their neighbour. Right choices are clearly described in God’s Word.

Today we are also called to choose life. God sets before us “life and death, blessing and curse.” Choices have to be made about the kind of entertainment we engage in: does it bring us closer to God, or does it waste enormous time, or does it even draw us into sinful lusts? Choices have to be made about how we are going to deal with conflict situations: are we patient, kind, and forgiving with others who may have hurt us in some way? Choices have to be made about worship: do we have time for reading our Bible, meditating on it, followed by prayer? Is the Sunday a special day where we gather with our brothers and sisters to hear the Word of God and to praise God?

All of us realize how far we fall short in loving God with all our heart and soul. How can we make right choices? Notice that after God tells us to choose life, we read, “For he is your life and length of days.” What we learn here is that God is the source or foundation of our life. Ultimately that is realized in the gift of his Son Jesus Christ who took all our bad choices, all our sins, and paid for that on the cross. It is when we come to Jesus Christ with empty hands and with full confession of our sins that two amazing things happen. First, his blood washes away our sins so that we are right with God. Second, his Holy Spirit renews us so that we die to sin and rise up to a new life where we can begin to love God and our neighbour.

In Jesus Christ who is our “life and length of days,” we can choose life, and walk that narrow road that leads to life. This is a blessing for us personally and also for our families, for our children who witness the joy and purpose of parents who keep in step with the Holy Spirit, who walk with God. 📖

FURTHER READING:

Deuteronomy 8; Matthew 5:17-30; Galatians 5:16-26

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

1. Reflecting on the Lord Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 5:17-30, what choices have you made that either bring you closer to God or further away?
2. How does the internet and social media present temptations in your life that can lead to bad choices and behaviour?
3. How can we experience transformation in our lives so that we are on the path to life and blessing?
4. What are some things in your life that you realize need to change?
5. Why is it so important for children to see that their parents love God and his Word, and put God’s Word into practice in their lives?



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Delightful FRIENDSHIP

HENDRIK ALKEMA

I would imagine that most people want good friends. Some may claim a preference for being alone, but that's often a way of covering up a deep and painful loneliness or wound. It's not fun being a lone wolf. God has made us to be people who need community and find enjoyment, pleasure, and satisfaction in relationships with others. Among these relationships, we need friends, and we need them from a young age. Parents understand this, and thoughtful parents will cultivate healthy relationships between their children and others. We know how painful a lack of friends can be, or how destructive an influence bad friends can be on our children. As we get older, responsibilities increase and time for friendships often decreases to the point where children may ask their parents, "Why don't you have any friends?" As adults, we may ask ourselves: "Who has time for friends?" Despite these challenges, friendships remain an important part of life.

Friendship in the world is often based primarily on shared interests. If people have similar tastes in music, art, sport, literature, or recreation, friendships make sense. No doubt there are many abiding friendships that stand the test of time in this way. But what happens when the foundation of that sort of friendship (shared activities or interests) changes, or fades away?



IN THE CHURCH

How healthy and common are good friendships in the church? It's a question worth asking. God does not expect us to be great friends with everyone in our congregation; that's simply not possible. But is your church a community where true friendships thrive in abundance? What is the character of our friendships? Do they basically resemble the secular model, or something else?

I have been struck numerous times over the years by the reason many people leave church. In the end it's often not a question of theological differences, but a matter of isolation and a lack of friendship. People feel like they don't belong and that no one really cares about them. They have no meaningful connections. I distinctly remember saying to one woman: "I think that if you had even just one good friend in the church, you would not be leaving." Her response? "I think you're right." I also deplore the bullying that can happen in our Christian schools, for it often bears bitter spiritual fruit: people leave the faith, or at the very least leave their church family, asking: "Why would I stay with people who show no love to me?" Ignoring the importance of friendship in the church is a spiritual killer.

*Is your church
a community
where true
friendships
thrive
in abundance?*

WHAT IS FRIENDSHIP?

When it comes to the various relationships we have in life, we often put friendship into a separate category. Yet it's amazing how friendship blossoms and thrives in other relationships as well. We may be both surprised and delighted to discover over time that our parents are also our friends. The same can be said about siblings or cousins (growing up, they were among my best friends and still are). Friendship is a great foundation for marriage, and a healthy characteristic of a thriving marriage. We read in Song of Solomon: "This is my beloved and this is my friend" (5:16). Clearly, friendship includes love and care for others, and a delight in their company. Friendships can prove most precious, even stronger bonds than those we're born into. "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov 18:24).

FRIENDSHIP IN SCRIPTURE

We may have our own thoughts on friendship, but what does the Bible have to say? Friendship is a surprisingly persistent and powerful theme in Scripture. Numerous friendships are referred to in the Bible, both good and bad. We are told that a friend loves at all times (Prov 17:17), a friend can help in times of need (Eccl

4:10), and that even wounds from a friend can be trusted (Prov 27:6, NIV). The dangers of bad friends are also highlighted: leading people into sin (2 Sam 13:3), causing harm (Ps 41:9; 55:13), and failing to provide comfort (Job's three friends). We read of the forces of evil finding friendship in sin (e.g., Herod and Pilate in Luke 23:12). The Lord warned his people not to tolerate destructive friendships and called for the most severe treatment of those who enticed them to sin (Deut 13:6–11).

Reading of friendships in Scripture serves to humanize and fill out the characters we encounter. We are told of Judah's friend, the Adullumite (Gen 38:12), King David's friend Hushai the Archite (1 Chron 27:33), and the friends of Daniel. One of the greatest friendships we come across in the Bible is the friendship of Jonathan and David. This was something truly special. Jonathan might have been expected to bear resentment to the one who would supplant him as heir to the throne of his father, but Jonathan loved David with all his heart. David's love for his friend is described in 2 Samuel 1:26 after the death of Jonathan: "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women." It's an amazing statement, and we may wonder: what made this bond so close? Unlocking the truth behind this friendship is also the key to understanding true godly friendship for us today.

THE KEY TO FRIENDSHIP

To find the key to friendship we begin in the Old Testament with a focus not on friendship between people, but something else: God's friendship with people. In the perfection of Paradise, the Lord used to enjoy communion with man, walking with him in delightful companionship in the garden. After the Fall, God reached out in love, working to restore the bond of friendship. Already in Exodus 33 we read of the closeness between the LORD and the most prominent mediator of the Old Testament: Moses. We read there that God used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exod 33:11). While Moses experienced a characteristic of friendship, the patriarch Abraham is actually called "the friend of God" (Isa 41:8; James 2:3). Different words are used in the Old Testament to indicate friendship, but the word used by the LORD to describe his relationship with Abraham has the sense of deep and abiding love. What a miracle of grace!

What is foreshadowed in the Old Testament comes to its fullest expression in the New Testament with the coming of the Lord Jesus. In Christ, God demonstrates what friendship is all about: sacrifice, love, and abiding faithfulness. Jesus himself had friends; think of the special bond between the Lord Jesus and Lazarus

and his sisters (John 11:11). Yet the acts of the Lord Jesus emphasized so powerfully the force of divine friendship in reaching out to others. People stood amazed at how he reached out in love to those who were neglected and looked down upon. He was even criticized for it: "Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Matt 11:19).

But it is in his act of sacrifice on the cross that Jesus fulfilled his mission of restoring the bond between God and his people, and remarkably he describes his relationship as one of friendship: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends" (John 15:13–15).

Jesus is the key to friendship. When bonds are built on God's love through Christ, then they have a firm foundation.

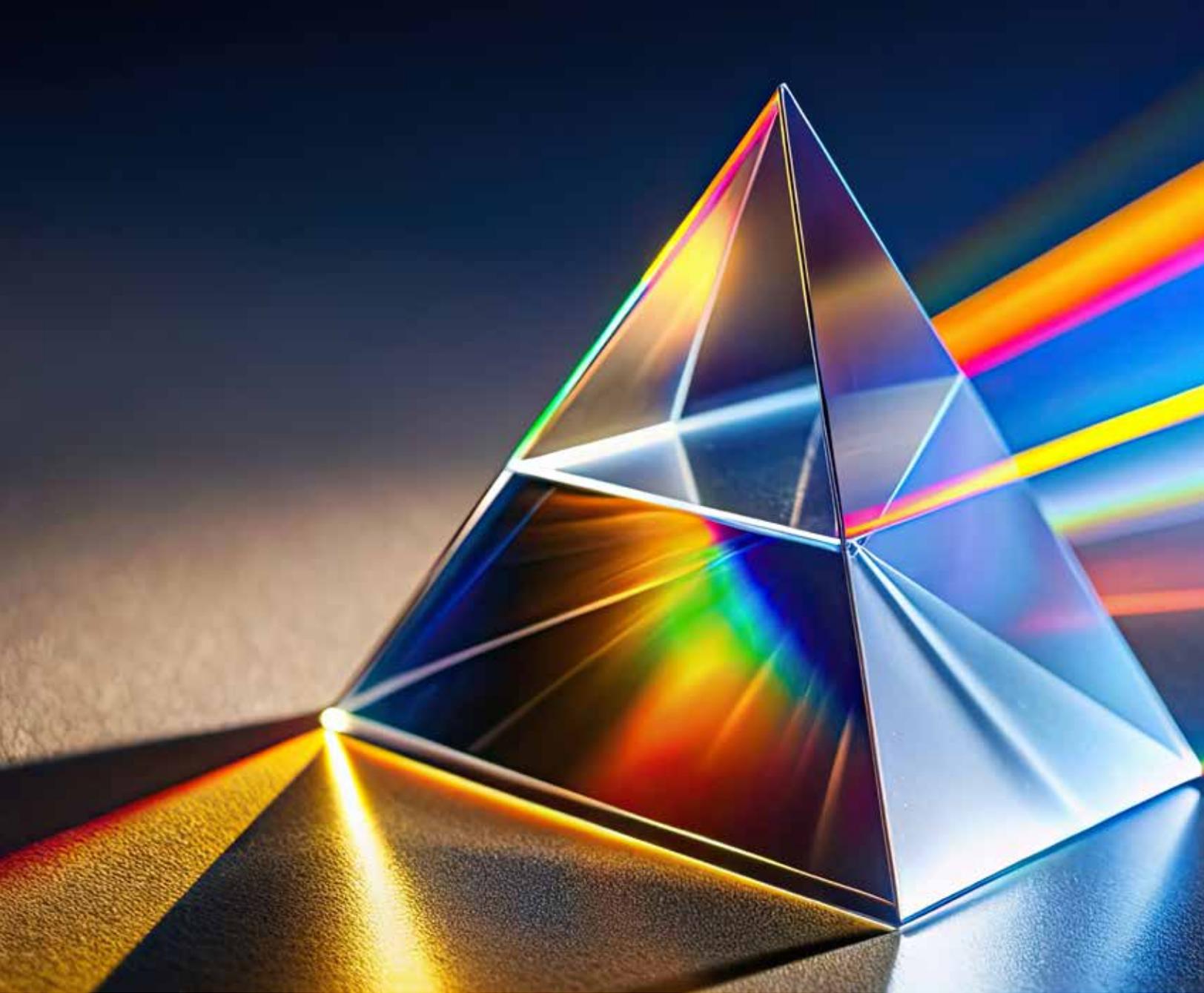
THE CALL FOR FRIENDSHIP

All too often our friendships are rather shallow. We are content to laugh and have fun, but reluctant to go further. We are hesitant to speak of deep spiritual matters, especially when they call for vulnerability and costly honesty. How many friendships have an element of mutual accountability? Why is this? What would change this?

When we focus on the bond we share together in our Saviour, friendship is deepened and strengthened. In him there can be an *intentionality* to our friendship. We may enjoy each other's company as we walk together in faith. That's why Jonathan and David had such a special friendship; they strengthened one another *in the Lord* (1 Sam 23:16). The love of Jesus allows us to be open to one another, for he has covered our sin and shame. The love of Jesus motivates us to reach out to others who are neglected or ignored, for he has brought us in from the darkness into his wonderful light. The love of Jesus brings true bonds of loving friendship, for what we have in him we can enjoy with others. The saints in the New Testament experienced this friendship, calling each other *dear friends* (Rom 16:5, 9, 12; Col 4:14; Phile 1:1; 3 John 1). That is our privilege today as well, for together we share in the greatest Friend of all. 🕊



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THE MAJESTY *of God's Simplicity*

JEFF MORRIS



WHOLE AND PARTS

For Augustine, the doctrine of divine simplicity is motivated by God's ultimate perfection. Since God is ultimate perfection, God does not depend on anything to be all who he is. Now from Augustine's perspective, if a being has any parts, that being depends on those parts in order to be all that it is. For example, the universe is composed of the heavens and the earth, which means the universe depends on the parts of the heavens and the earth to be what it is. Similarly, the earth is composed of innumerable parts, including rocks, oceans, trees and so on. Individual bodies are also made of parts, for individual bodies are composed of size, shape, and colour. Thus, composite things, such as the universe, the earth, bodies, and in fact all created things, depend on their parts to be what they are. Since, for Augustine, dependence is an imperfection, and God is ultimate perfection, God cannot depend on anything. Therefore, God is simple, not depending on any parts.

Now, since we know that God is a spirit, it might seem obvious that God does not have parts. For when we think of "parts" we normally think of the physical components that might be used to build something. For example, we might think that a car is a whole made up of parts, including wheels, a frame, an engine and so on. Likewise, since humans are physical, humans are composed of parts, such as arms, legs, cells, molecules, atoms, and even quarks. Still, when theologians like Augustine say that God is simple, they not only contend that God lacks physical parts, but that he also lacks meta-physical parts. To understand what it means that God lacks *all* parts, including both physical and meta-physical parts, we do no better than to consider Thomas Aquinas's account of divine simplicity.

ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

Thomas Aquinas was a thirteenth century theologian who wrote a highly influential and instructive systematic theology. Famously, Aquinas introduces the doctrine of divine simplicity in Article 3, following his explanation of the need for systematic theology and his arguments for the existence of God. Once the existence of God is established, the doctrine of simplicity plays a central role in Aquinas's presentation of the doctrine of God. To help us understand the importance of the idea that God lacks all parts, including both physical and meta-physical parts, Aquinas distinguishes a being's essence from its existence. The idea is that every created being, whether it is a physical being such as a horse, or a spiritual being such as an angel, is composed of at least two meta-physical parts. That is, every being is composed of, minimally, the meta-physical part "essence," and the meta-physical part

Article 1 of the Belgic Confession states that we believe that God is a simple and spiritual being before offering a partial list of God's divine attributes. That God is simple is a traditional doctrine of God that was articulated by Catholic theologians such as Augustine (fifth century), Anselm (eleventh century), and Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century), and defended by Reformed theologians such as Francis Turretin (seventeenth century) and Herman Bavinck (nineteenth century). It's unfortunate that the writer of the Belgic Confession did not extrapolate on the doctrine that God is simple in any detail, for the doctrine of divine simplicity offers a rich understanding of God which can instigate a sense of awe and worship for his majesty. In this short article, we will explore the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity. First, we will explain what motivates theologians to think that God is simple, and then we will explain what it means that God is simple.

“existence.” Essence is what makes a thing what it is. For example, the essence of humanity is what makes a human a human, and the essence of a horse is what makes a horse a horse. A human is not a horse, because a human has a human essence, not a horse essence. Existence, on the other hand, is what brings essences into reality.

So why does Aquinas think that every being is composed of both an essence and existence? Why shouldn't we simply conclude that it is part of the essence of a thing to exist, so that each being is only comprised of an essence? Because, says Aquinas, we can imagine beings that do not exist. For example, we can imagine the essence of a sphinx, but in reality, there is no such thing as a sphinx. That's because, in order for the *essence* of a sphinx to exist, it must be coupled with *existence*. So, while we can imagine sphinxes, because no sphinx essence is coupled with existence, no such creature exists. Thus, for something to exist, it must have at least two parts, including both an essence and existence. Of course, as we already noted, it's an imperfection for God to depend on parts, which means that God cannot be composed of the meta-physical parts, essence and existence. So, Aquinas concludes, God's essence just is existence.

GOD'S SIMPLE NATURE

That God's essence *is* existence is a startling and awe-inspiring claim. Every created being has existence because God shares existence by creating, while God is existence itself. Of course, God is not only existence. For we know from Scripture that God is also loving, kind, good, and just. Thus, even if we accept that God's essence is existence so that he is not composed of *those* parts, isn't he composed of other meta-physical parts such as love, kindness, goodness, justice, and so on? In other words, aren't all of God's attributes meta-physical parts that together compose God? Defenders of divine simplicity say no!

According to the doctrine of divine simplicity, God does not have goodness, but God *is* goodness itself. Likewise, God does not have justice, God *is* justice. Further, God's goodness is not distinct from God's justice, it only seems that way from our human perspective, while in reality God's attributes are identical with each other. In other words, all of God's attributes are identical with God, and identical with each other. So, when we say that God is existence, God is just, God is good, we are not referring to a handful of meta-physical parts, but God's one simple majestic

divine nature, understood as various attributes by our finite limited minds. As Herman Bavinck writes,

God is not the One “than whom nothing better can be thought.” Instead, God is uniquely his own, having nothing above him. Accordingly, he is completely identical with the attributes of wisdom, grace, and love, and so on. He is absolutely perfect, the One “than whom nothing higher can be thought” (*Reformed Dogmatics, Vol 2*).

For many theologians, the doctrine of divine simplicity is a way to explain how God is different from every created being. As Bavinck notes, God is not a *better* being among beings. Rather, God is *the highest possible* being, so that while every created being is composite, receiving existence by God's creative will, God is uniquely simple, who is existence itself. The doctrine also implies that there is something incomprehensible about God.

In fact, God's incomprehensibility is one of the first attributes listed in Article 1 of the Belgic Confession. That God is incomprehensible does not mean we do not know anything about God, for God gave us a mind to know about him and he reveals himself specially in many ways. Still, there is something incomprehensible about the idea that God is identical to existence, goodness, love, justice, mercy, and so on. That God is simple is not something we can fully comprehend, which, for many, is a fitting implication of the One who calls himself I AM WHO I AM.

STAND IN AWE OF GOD

For various reasons not all theologians, including some Reformed theologians, accept a traditional account of the doctrine of divine simplicity. Some argue it has its roots in Greek philosophy, and others point out that it's not explicitly taught in Scripture. It also presents some challenges around how to understand the Trinity and the incarnation. While we do not have the space to explore these complexities here, many theologians have attempted to work out solutions to these and other puzzles and will likely do so until Christ's return. In the meantime, by reflecting on the merits of the doctrine of divine simplicity we exercise our minds, acknowledge the tradition of the church, and most importantly, we stand in awe of God, worshipping him for his incomprehensibly majestic nature. 🕯



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The Greatest Guide

OVERCAME

WES BREDEHOF

I'm blessed to live in a mountainous part of the world. Tasmania's mountains don't compare in elevation to Canada's Rocky Mountains, but they're impressive in their own way. They often feature a considerable amount of relief from the surrounding terrain and they can be quite steep. I enjoy getting out into our local mountains in the summer months to gain some altitude. So last summer I went with a friend to Mount Pelion East. At 1461 meters (4793 feet), it's one of Tasmania's higher peaks.

The first part of the adventure involves a strenuous climb up into the high country on the Arm River Track. It's some eight-een kilometers to the New Pelion Hut and there we overnighted along with half of the state's visitors. The New Pelion Hut is on the famous Overland Track, you see. So, in the summer months, the hut is almost always bustling.

The next day we set out south down the Overland Track for Pelion East. Again there's a bit of climbing to get up to the Pelion Gap (1126 meters/3694 feet). From there, the track turns left and heads steeply up. Most of it is relatively easy, but eventually you get to the last 100 meters or so and this part is scrambling up the nearly vertical north side.

When you're climbing a steep mountain like this, they say you should always have three points of contact between your body and the mountain. That means you need to always have at least one hand holding on to something. On this section of the Pelion East track, you need to traverse a ledge to get to the next vertical climb. The ledge is narrow, and it's slanted at an angle downward. Below is a whole lot of air—the ledge is on a cliff. If you fall, you die. However, you've got to get across this ledge to continue to the



top. But there's no place to put your hands; there are no handholds for you while you go across this ledge. I saw this situation and hummed and hawed over it. In the end fear won out and I headed back down. My friend did it with no issues, but I think he has some mountain goat ancestry in his bloodline. Me, I'm clumsy and afraid of heights, so it was a no-go for me.

SOMETHING TO HOLD ON TO

Things might have been different if I'd been climbing with an experienced guide equipped for this situation. I can imagine him being above me in a safe spot. He yells down to me, "Hey, you got this. You can do it. I did it and you can too." But he has more than words. He secures a rope to some rock and he throws it down to me. Now I've got something to hold on to while I move across the ledge and while I climb the next section. Having that guide and his equipment and experience would have made all the difference. With him, I could have summited Mount Pelion East that day.

Jesus is that guide for believers as they make their way up the mountain of life. In John 16:33, he's revealed as the one who has overcome the world. He has victory over everything that threatens to undo us. He overcame it all to give us encouragement as we

navigate this life and all its challenges. He's gone ahead of us and because he has overcome; so shall we. Since he's made it to the top, so certainly will we. There's tribulation in this world and from this world, but Christ's work has dealt with it decisively. That's a huge encouragement for believers as we face our own uphill climbs where we might be tempted to give up and head back down.

Our Saviour has experienced the tribulation of the world firsthand. If we compare it to climbing a mountain, it's not like he took a helicopter to the top to encourage you. He has climbed it himself and he knows the way is hard. He said in Matthew 7:14 that "the way is hard that leads to life." But now he's above us calling down, "Take heart, friend, I have done it. I have overcome. With me, you will overcome too." He gives us something and someone to help us—he gives us his Word and his Holy Spirit. With the Bible and with the Holy Spirit, we have exactly what we need to make our way to where our Saviour is. By his grace, everyone who believes in him will surely make it there. 📍



Wes Bredenhof

Minister

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Burning Bush

1. "How is it that the bush with rag - ing flames can burn
and, fierce - ly blaz - ing forth, does not to ash - es turn?"
"Mo - ses, why stand a - mazed and baf - fled at this sight?
The Lord is in the bush. He saves it by his might."

The musical score is written on four staves in a single system. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody consists of quarter and half notes, with some dotted rhythms. The lyrics are printed below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across notes.

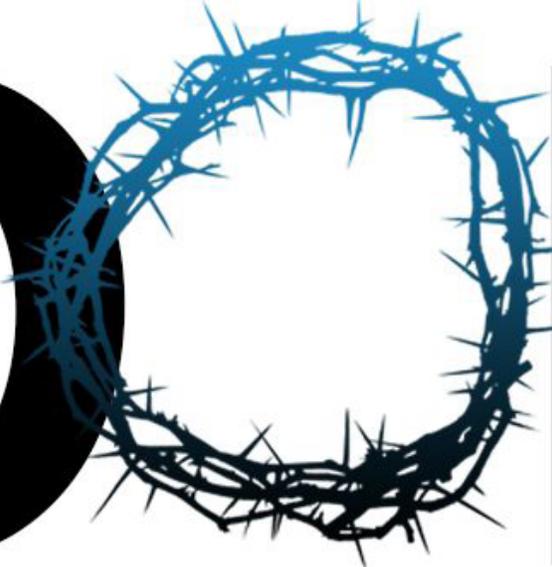
2. "How is it that the Church, not by fierce flames consumed,
can in oppression's furnace richly thrive and bloom?"
"Christian, why stand amazed? For as you ought to know,
the Lord is in his Church. He'll never let her go!"

Text: William Helder, 2023

Based on Jacobus Revius, "Brandende bos," *Over-Ysselsche sangen en dichten*, 1630

Tune: Charles J. Dale, Denby, 1904

IDOP



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER *for the* PERSECUTED CHURCH

For the last couple of decades many religious groups around the world have recognized the first Sunday in November to be an International Day of Prayer (IDOP) for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. To that end, let us consider a couple of scriptural examples of communal prayer, followed by specific examples of situations that you can remember in prayer.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNAL PRAYER

2 Chronicles 20 has a fascinating story of the community coming together to pray. At this time Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, was notified that “a vast army” was approaching Judah during what had been a time of peace. King Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast and

summoned all of Judah to come together. It was a day of prayer, if you will, and everyone participated.

God’s response to their prayer surpassed what the men of Judah could have imagined. Not only did the victory come without a single casualty, but the soldiers didn’t even have to break a sweat. After watching their enemies destroy themselves, they spent three days gathering the spoils of war. You might say that God “over-delivered” on their prayer request.

In Acts 12, Luke records the arrest and imprisonment of Peter, which was followed by the church offering earnest prayer to God (v. 5). At night, while Peter was bound with chains and heavily guarded by soldiers behind locked doors, an angel of the Lord

woke him up. The chains fell off and together the two walked out of prison. The power of God was so great that even the city gate opened “of its own accord” to allow Peter and the angel to walk through. Imagine the surprise of Peter’s friends who were gathered to communally pray for him, only to be interrupted by Peter’s knock at the door. God answered their prayers in a way they likely had not imagined.

EXAMPLES OF ITEMS TO PRAY FOR

1. The continent of Africa is ground-zero for the war against Christians. Globally, nine out of ten martyred Christians lost their life in Africa. Islamic militants organize themselves into raiding parties that storm villages and churches, killing, torturing and maiming as many as possible. Those who flee frequently end up in the many Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. By the end of 2023, a staggering 16.2 million Christians across sub-Saharan Africa had been forcibly displaced from their homes and off their land by persecution.
2. In China, brothers and sisters who wish to remain faithful to the Word of God meet in secret house churches. The Chinese government considers all gatherings which are not state-sanctioned to be cults and accordingly convicts and sentences pastors and their families to lengthy prison sentences. Since China considers itself fair and just, it tortures those arrested until they confess to the crimes of which the state has accused them. The resulting trials appear to show accused persons who have confessed to their crimes.
3. In Pakistan, many Christians are enslaved to the owners of brick kilns for debt that was incurred by their parents or grandparents. Since their wages don’t cover the daily cost of their “accommodations,” the family debt is increased each day in perpetuity. Generations of families have been trapped in Pakistan’s brick kilns, with no chance of freedom.
4. One of the products of traumatic persecution is a wounded and troubled heart. Time and again I read stories from brothers and sisters who ask for prayers that their hearts are guarded from resentment towards those who hurt them, and discontent with God who allowed this to happen. May they be steadfast in their faith and hope that Jesus will bring to justice those who have done such evil.

WRESTLING IN PRAYER

When considering the brutality and apparent hopelessness of those who are persecuted, it can be hard to pray with words that don’t seem trite. Does praying that God would alleviate their suffering actually help? Is relief what we should pray for, or would it be better to accept this persecution as fact, and then pray for steadfastness of faith in the face of trial? When meditating on the reality of persecution in the world, what insights do we gain about our own hearts? I wonder why persecution is so concentrated in the continent of Africa and the Middle East. If persecution must occur (2 Tim 3:12) in this world, would it not be fairer if North America took some of the persecution burden away from those born in hot zones?

The remedy to finding oneself at a loss for what to pray is Scripture. Psalms 44, 60, and 80 are among the psalms that are corporate laments. May each of us take time to pray for the persecuted church. May Christ’s return come quickly so that sin may once and for all be extinguished with an assured finality that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived. Come Lord Jesus, Maranatha! 



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Rev. Wynia

RETIREES

ELORA DEVRIES

The weather on the last Sunday of June seemed to mirror the feelings of the congregation at Vineyard Canadian Reformed Church of Lincoln. The air in Beamsville was warm, then cool; it was sunny, then it was cloudy. If you asked practically anyone in attendance at the retirement evening for Rev. D. Wynia that day, you would likely get a similar spread of indecisive responses: it's hard to see him go, but it's good he can rest from his hard work. It is true that saying goodbye to something—or someone—you love is no easy thing, so the retirement of Rev. Wynia, our pastor of sixteen years, was a cause for both celebration and sorrow. These years were not all shining and perfect (what is?), but the Vineyard congregation has long felt God's blessings through Rev. Wynia's pastoral work. There was no way we were going to see the Wynias leave without at least a little fanfare.

RETIREMENT EVENING

The celebration began on the lawn of the manse with a potluck dinner of brisket and pulled pork, salads, and other options generously provided and prepared by members of the congregation. Later in the evening, we were called back inside the church



to begin the program. Jonathan Reinink, the MC for the night, opened with words of welcome to everyone in attendance. Rev. Holtvlüwer (a longtime friend of the Wynias) of Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church led us in devotions, reading from Matthew 13 (Parable of the Kingdom of God), followed by prayer. After the singing of “Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me” by the attendees, a letter from Rev. Jopie van der Linden from the Reformatinal Study Centre was read.

Vineyard’s most prolific poet, Connie VanAmerongen of Anchor Home, read her poem “Wonderful Gift” dedicated to the Wynias, which was followed by the Anchor Inspiration Band’s musical performance (which nearly didn’t happen because Jerry Bontekoe’s drumsticks were hiding!). A video of the congregation’s youngest members reciting Psalm 104 was shown. The Lincoln Cadets club sang their theme song, “Living for Jesus,” followed by a short speech from one of the counsellors on how the pastoral work in Lincoln has truly aligned with the Cadets’ values of serving others with love and humility. After their performance, we were treated to a violin solo from one of our young congregants followed by the reading of a letter from Bethel URC in Woodstock. Although Rev. Wynia never served at this church in particular, the congregation is populated with many members from his first congregation at Aylmer CRC from 1987 to 1991.





Next on the program was a video presentation of the Wynia grandchildren reciting Psalm 92. This psalm, we were told, was traditionally read Sunday mornings in the Wynia household. This was followed by a speech which took listeners through the Wynia's family story, peppered in anecdotes from their childhoods that painted a beautiful picture of both the struggles and the joys of being a part of the family of a pastor in God's service. It was funny, revealing, and heartfelt, accompanied by pictures both old and new. After a lovely performance of *Hungarian Dance* by two of the congregation's violinists, the MC read a letter from Bethel URC in Calgary, Rev. Wynia's second congregation. Some insight was then shared on "The Perks and Detriments of Pastoring," before James Kooremaker, a representative of Covenant Christian Church in

Wyoming (his third congregation), congratulated Rev. Wynia on his retirement on behalf of the congregation there.

To break up all the listening we had been doing, everyone was invited to play a Wynia-themed Kahoot. Eighty-nine attendees participated, but only three came out on top; Rev. Wynia appropriately won first. The prize was a framed print of three separate sketches depicting the Sermon on the Mount, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and the Parable of the Mustard Seed. A second game, called "Behind Closed Doors, Surrounded by Glass Walls," featured the members of council. The host read off several quotes, and Rev. Wynia was tasked with assigning the quote to the council member most likely to say it. Afterwards, Council presented him with another gift of a painting of the church and manse. Additionally, they were gifted a fireplace, barbecue, and gift certificate to go towards their new residence in Vineland— gifts that were mostly centred on summer activities more than winter because, as the Vice Chairman noted, Rev. Wynia and his wife will be in Australia for the winter.

WORDS OF THANKS

The end of the evening began when the Voices of Vineyard Choir sang "He is Your Servant, O Lord," "Beauty of the Cross," and "Go Now in Peace." The audience then joined them in singing Psalm 143. Finally, Rev. Wynia and his wife, Charlene, took to the stage to say their words of thanks. They expressed gratitude to the congregation for their support over the years and to those in attendance for celebrating with them. Most importantly, they thanked God for the many, many gifts he has blessed them with. Full of emotion, we sent them off with a standing ovation. The evening was then officially closed with prayer and the singing of Psalm 43.

The congregation at Vineyard has been blessed through the Wynias' work in our church, as have the many surrounding churches in the area. Whether it be through the preaching, catechism classes, or simple conversations at coffee socials, every member felt Rev. Wynia's care for God's flock. We thank God for the numerous blessings he has given us through him and wish Rev. Wynia and his family all the best and God's blessings in the future as they rest from thirty-seven years of active service in the ministry. 

Elora DeVries

GUIDO

Graduation

2024



MIKAH FEUNEKES

Award Recipients

GUIDO DE BRÈS AWARDS

Kara Bosch	Ethan Koning
Kyra Bredenhof	Mattea Mans
Arie DeVries	Zoë Smith
Niya Hulleman	Abigail Van Raalte

ACADEMIC ATHLETICS AWARD

Emily DeJager

BLUE AND GOLD GRADUATION AWARDS

Robert Blokker	Ashton Strating
Emily DeJager	Ben VanDasselaar
Noah Wildeboer	Jonah Harsevoort
Courtney Kuizenga	

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S ACADEMIC MEDAL

Abigail van Raalte

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR'S COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AWARD FOR STUDENTS

Kaelyn Lof

DR. F. G. OOSTERHOFF STUDENT-OF-THE-YEAR AWARD

Rachel Hoogstad

Over the past year, the Guido de Brès Christian High School community in Hamilton experienced the endings and beginnings of many different seasons. December heralded the end of an era in the building at Crerar Drive and a new beginning at Albright Road. In early June, 2024, the school board and staff noted with sadness the departure of several staff while also taking time to celebrate the beginning of their new life stages. Finally, on June 26, the school community came together to commemorate the end of high school and the beginning of the next step for this year's Guido graduates.

CEREMONY

The theme of God's steadfastness in changing seasons was a constant refrain throughout the evening. Board Chairman Bert Knol opened with a reading from Ecclesiastes 2:24–3:12 and encouraged the graduates to find enjoyment in their daily work. He acknowledged that this class, which started Grade 9 in the midst of the pandemic, had a four year experience unlike any before them, and exhorted them to "consider the time you spent at Guido in the framework of God's grand design."

Principal Jason Heemskerk continued the connection to God's design by reflecting on the truth that each of us are "masterpieces of work . . . the Master's pieces of work." He took listeners through portions of Psalm 139



and demonstrated that our value (like the value of art) is found in both the intricacy of the work and what someone is willing to pay for that work. In our case, Christ paid the ultimate price. He concluded with a call to action for the graduates: “Live your life in thankfulness.”

Graduates Kyra and Sasha Bredenhof echoed the refrain as they sang “Center of All History,” which includes the following lines: “My life now yielded to my king . . . Your presence is the treasure / It’s you alone I treasure.”

Dr. Art Witten gave the main address to the graduates. He continued the reflection on Ecclesiastes 2–3 by stating that the directive for life in this passage is to “work hard, work smart, [and] enjoy life.” Dr. Witten highlighted the changing values in society, challenging the graduating class to consider what brings ultimate satisfaction and fulfillment. He cautioned all to engage in self-reflection and learn to be content, concluding with the directive to look forward in hope for the final fulfillment of God’s coming kingdom.

AWARDS AND VALDEDICTORIAN

A number of awards were given to exceptional students in the graduating class, and Susanna Holtvlüwer, this year’s valedictorian, took to the podium with dramatic flair. She referred to her class as a school of diverse fish and praised their many talents. She thanked the teachers, EAs, parents, board, and administration for their support, giving a special shout out to Mr. George Alkema, one of this year’s retirees, for his many years of service. Susanna then encouraged her classmates to acknowledge “how foolish and powerless we are” and recognize that “nothing we do is on our own strength,” but only through God.

The praise of God’s strength and steadfastness culminated in the song “Goodness of God,” sung by graduates Mattea Mans, Jazmin Post, Kierstin Smouter, and Abby Tel. The evening concluded with prayer and the singing of “O Canada,” and the graduates departed the room, one step further on their paths in life.

Graduates of 2024, may you always rely on God’s steadfastness through the changing seasons of life. Walk with him as he walks with you! 

Mikah Feunekes

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMAS

Darryl Melle Aalbers
Taya Christina Aantjes
Abigail Jayne Alkema
Jude David Alkema
Dani Natalya Bartels
Samuel Liam Bartels
William Kazimerz Bartels
Robert Jackson Blokker
Dylan Simon Boersema
Alliyah Danielle Bos
Joely Patrice Bos
Kara Breanne Bosch
Jewel Sedona Bouwman
Marie Joel Bouwman
Kyra Miriam Bredenhof
Sasha Naomi Bredenhof
Stephen Bradley Brouwer
Anjelica Lee Buikema
Jamee Joette Buitenhuis
Chloe Anne Creelman
Jordan Amber de Jonge
Caleb John DeBoer
Keira Jamie DeBoer
Melissa Patti DeBoer
Kyle Timothy DeHaan
Emily Triana DeJager
Tavian John-Marc deJager
Isabella Marie DenHollander

Arie Willem DeVries
Alayna Gabrielle Dinga
Kyara Jordan Donker
Shannon Joelle Dykstra
Carter Shawn Evers
Jonah Herman Harsevoort
Levi Bernie Harsevoort
Anna Rose Hart
Chelsea Tina Heyink
Morgan Joanna Heyink
Myles Daniel Hofsink
Susanna Catherine Holtvlüwer
Micah Levi Hoogstad
Rachel Yvonne Hoogstad
Niya Reanne Hulleman
Colin Kenneth Hymering
Trevor Jacob Jagt
Elle Jewel Jans
Kate Ava Faith Jans
Slater Gerrit Marshall Jans
Elijah Johannes Jonker
Karlee Danielle Jonker
Seth Andrew Kampen
Lilia Catharina Kingma
Tess Alexandra Kingma
Emily Elizabeth Kirk
Ethan James Koning
Courtney Faith Kuizenga

Sophia Elizabeth Lanting
Kaelyn Michelle Lof
Takara Beatrix Lof
Victoria Jane Lof
Liselle Alina Louwerse
Abigail Emily Ludwig
Jordan Daniel Ludwig
Geykeprusoe Lweh
Mattea Andrea Mans
Kylie Christine McNeil
Annika Eva Muis
Deziree Rose Muis
Adam Peter Olij
Josie Anna Oostdyk
Riley Dustyn Petter
Justin Willem Pierotti
Jazmin Tirzah Post
Julia Elise Ravensbergen
Leah Ellemiek Ravensbergen
Layla Faith Roukema
Rebecca Johanna Schenkel
Reed Preston Scholtens
Natania Lynn Schutten
Tysen Riley Schutten
Niobe Roshean Sikkema
Grace Emily Smid
Garret Peter Smink
Zoë Angelea Smith

Kierstin Helena Smouter
Avery Anne Grace Spoelstra
Ashton Richard Strating
Abigail Raiah Tel
Gavin Cole Ton
Tederic Mark Van Iperen
Abigail Christine Van Raalte
Benjamin Klaas VanDasselaar
Anna Jacoba Vandenbeukel
Levi Derek Vandenoever
Selena Nicole Vandenoever
Braedyn Matteus Vanderhoeven
Jordan Ralph VanderLaan
Izaak Nolan VanderVelde
Dana Grace Vanderwoude
Juliana Christine vanPopta
Lincoln George vanPopta
Samuel Timothy VanPykeren
Nolan Bryce Versteeg
Rylee Danae Vis
Tristan Fredrik Wielink
Karlyn Grace Wildeboer
William Nicholas Wildeboer
Noah Timothy Wildeboer
Ava Siebrig Witten
Mya Ebelina Witten

Page opposite, clockwise, from top left: Guido de Brès Award winners (for academic excellence); Valedictorian Susanna Holtvlüwer; Blue and Gold Graduation Award winners (for extracurricular involvement), presented by two Grade 11 members of the Student Leadership Team; Graduates Kierstin Smouter, Mattea Mans, Abby Tel, Jazmin Post sing “Goodness of God; Chairman Bert Knol; Matt vanPopta presents the Lieutenant Governor’s Community Volunteer Award for Students to recipient Kaelyn Lof.

One Small School **BECOMES** *Two*

ILSE VANDERMEULEN

In the Toronto area, Reformed education is thriving due to a somewhat counterintuitive decision. Facing dwindling membership, the school society of Credo Christian School had to make the hard decision of closing its doors or opting for another scenario: splitting the society into *two* organizations to serve the area better. Under God's blessing, Credo Christian School moved to Brampton and a new school was opened in Richmond Hill. Both schools are growing and flourishing.

Credo Christian School was started in 1979 by the church communities of Richmond Hill and Brampton. The school building was located in Woodbridge, about a half-hour country drive for most people from both directions. As the city of Toronto expanded, the area became busier and housing became expensive. Some families moved out of the area to the more affordable Niagara region, while others stayed in the GTA but moved further away from the city. For many students, this meant a long commute and a long day away from home.

Student numbers started to dwindle, and the school society had to grapple with the question of how to sustain the school. "Change was needed," says Fraser Slaa, the new vice-principal of Credo Christian School. "In 2020 the society decided to sell the school building and property and split the funds to start a school in Richmond Hill and one in Brampton in order to cut the commute

for students." Brampton kept the name Credo and continued the school society. They use rooms at Grace Canadian Reformed Church for classes. Richmond Hill decided to start a new society and take on a new name: Beacon Hill Christian Academy. They have purchased a school building and are working hard to prepare it for the new school year.

PRINCIPAL

Fraser follows the footsteps of his father Edward Slaa, who is now the principal of both schools, in education. Some years ago, the Slaa family moved from Winnipeg to Attercliffe. After finishing high school at Guido, Fraser started a degree in Kinesiology at Sheridan College. During his studies, he had a number of co-ops working with youth and young athletes. "I was running a pilot program for hyperactive kids. Their learning was very active with lots of exercise. That's where I discovered my love for teaching."

At the time Fraser lived close to Credo and was asked to coach the sports teams. "When I finished my degree, they scooped me up for a teacher opening. That was interesting, as all the kids called me 'coach'!" But Fraser soon became "Mr. Slaa" and is working on his Master of Education in school leadership through an online program offered by Dordt University in Iowa. Fraser is married to Hannah, and they have two children. After alternating days as



vice-principal between both schools last school year, he is now a full-time teacher and vice-principal at Credo in Brampton. Both schools are blessed to be fully staffed this school year.

GROWTH

With the distance between home and school reduced significantly, more families are sending their children to one of the schools again. “In our first year of operations, we were up to thirty-four students in Beacon Hill from fifteen from that area. At Credo, we were down to five students from Brampton, and we started the year with twelve students at our new location. For next year there is more interest,” says Fraser. “Through our mission project in Brampton, several young families have attended church. These parents are often very interested in the school and look for synonymous learning between home, church, and school.”

Many new families to the church are not used to the financial sacrifice Christian education requires. “People live in a city where it is already tough to afford housing and then are asked to pay for education for their children.” Fraser explains that new ways are





church, has to adhere to a Statement of Faith and will be non-voting members,” Fraser explains. There is no cap on the number of non-members compared to members. “There can be differences in doctrine. We explain that we teach the students what we believe in our Reformed churches. Non-members have to acknowledge that they understand and accept that their children are taught what we believe.”

The principal has noticed that interest in the Reformed faith and church attendance at Grace Church has increased through the contacts established at the school. “We are not a mission school. We are a school that has a mission and that is to educate students as Christ-like stewards in his Kingdom. Like the church, we are not turning people away because they are new. Each child deserves an equal chance at learning and knowing the gospel.”

According to Fraser, all children can use a healthy dose of mission, and he sees his job as a teacher as discipling children. “Our identity is in Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, and we live thankful lives as a result of that. That is the gospel. That’s what we teach new believers and that is also what we teach each and every student. You don’t need to find your identity and happiness anywhere else. You may identify as an athlete or an artist, but first and foremost you are a Christ-follower and therefore you serve God in athletics or your art.” Both schools generally follow the curriculum used in other Canadian Reformed Schools. “We have multigrade classes. That changes how we teach as well,” adds Fraser. “I taught grade 3 to grade 8 and have the same lesson for all. I have to adapt to that situation and be mindful that some students are new to the Reformed church.”

The principal is excited about the new school year at Brampton. “The future looks bright. The goal from our strategic planning sessions was to have a hundred students ten years after starting. Brampton is not a dying church; it’s vibrant, it’s like family, and there is so much life. We see the same in Toronto where Rev. Park is doing outreach. To see God bringing in people when the gospel is preached is amazing! To witness how excited these people are to have their children taught in a school based on God’s Word and our confessions is very encouraging. We may have all these fears, about the finances and staffing, but you marvel when you see what God can do.”

being introduced to finance education: “A lot of new members are able to make use of assistance through Harvest Foundation, which is a wonderful resource to take off some of the financial burden. We are also looking for sponsors willing to join up with a family and pay for a percentage of the tuition fees. This will be a separate fund managed by the deacons of our church.”

NAPARC

Before the school split, the society had agreed on by-laws allowing members in good standing from all NAPARC churches (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council) to be members of the society. Both new schools kept these by-laws. “There is some misconception that our doors are wide open. That is not the case. The school maintains the standard that all members and teachers are professing members of a NAPARC church. Any family that would like to send their children, but do not attend a NAPARC



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IRTC

INTERNATIONAL REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

Contextualization in Cross-cultural Theological Education

*I have become all things to all people,
that by all means I might save some.
I do it all for the sake of the gospel,
that I may share with them in its blessings.*
(1 Corinthians 9:22-23 ESV)

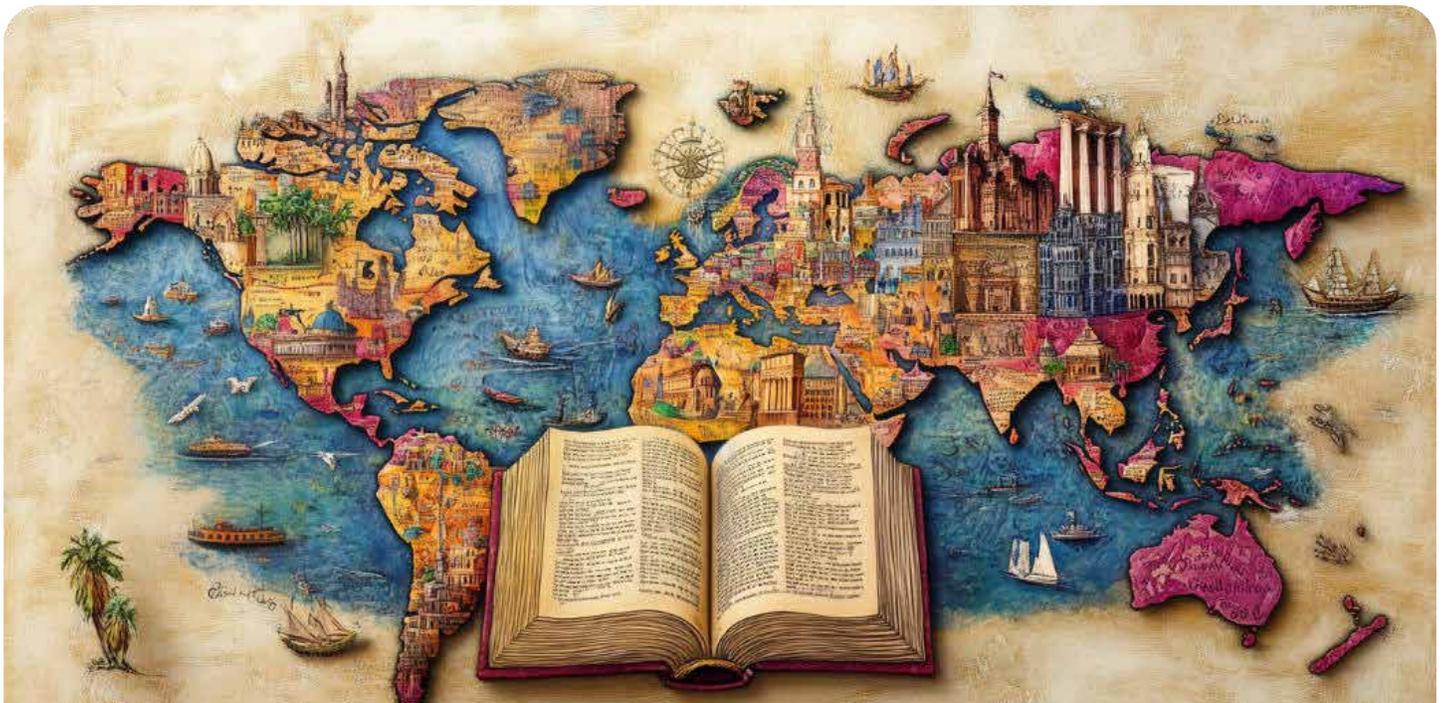
One of the courses the IRTC is offering this term, as part of our Master of Missiology (MMs) degree, is *AM 601 - Missionary Anthropology*. As a discipline that looks deeply into the study of humans across cultural and societal lines, anthropology can be a valuable tool in the mission field. It allows missionaries to engage with cultures in a manner that is both respectful and effective, bridging the gap between the timeless truths of the Gospel and the diverse cultural contexts in which they are communicated.

This process, known as *contextualization*, involves adapting the *delivery* of the Gospel to maximize its comprehension within the cultural frameworks and social practices of different communities, *without altering*

its message. Anthropological methods enhance the mission worker's ability to understand and appreciate these cultural frameworks, allowing them to present the Gospel in ways that resonate with local communities.

At the IRTC, where we train students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, this principle is not only taught but also practically applied in our educational approach. Just as cross-cultural missionaries must navigate diverse cultural landscapes, so too must our instructors, as they teach students spread across multiple countries and continents, each with its own unique cultural nuances. Our students come from various continents, including Africa, Europe and South America, and parts of the Brazilian diaspora in Asia, the Middle East and North America. This diversity presents both challenges and opportunities.

Teaching across such varied cultural landscapes can be challenging because it requires our instructors to be highly attuned to the different ways students might interpret and



apply the material. For example, students from Brazil may come from urban environments with a strong Western influence, yet they bring with them a variety of subcultural experiences that affect how they perceive theology and its applications. In contrast, students from African nations such as Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique might navigate a blend of traditional and modern cultural and educational practices, which can influence their approach to learning and ministry. Cross-cultural missionary students and those from the Brazilian diaspora often face the added complexity of learning in Portuguese while having to apply their knowledge in entirely different cultural and linguistic settings.

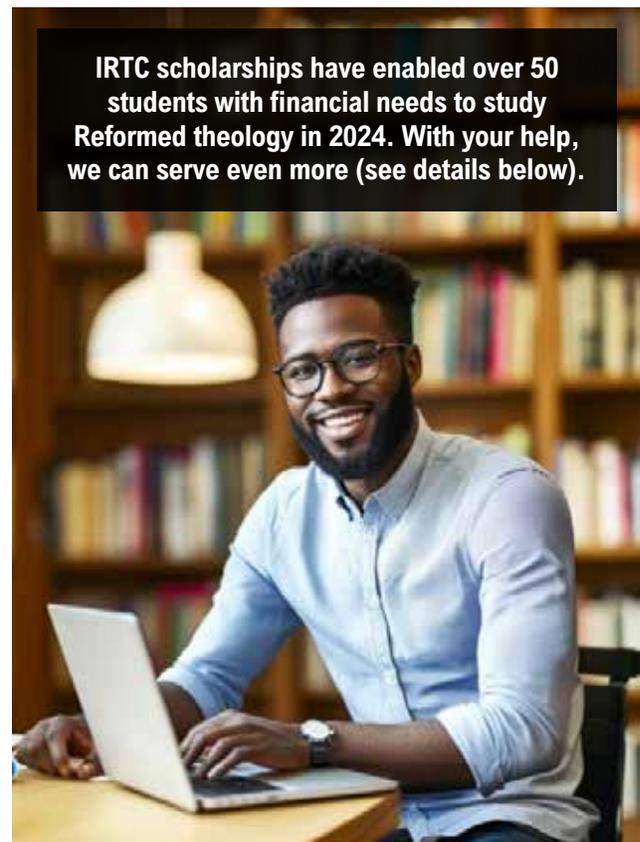
This cultural diversity also opens up unique opportunities. The different perspectives brought by our students enrich the learning environment, offering a broader, more nuanced understanding of how the Gospel can be communicated and lived out in different contexts. This diversity allows for a rich exchange of ideas in the classroom, where students can learn not only from the instructors but also from each other's experiences in cross-cultural ministry. It encourages the development of a more global perspective among students, helping them to see the universal relevance of the Gospel while appreciating the distinct ways it can be expressed in different cultural settings. Ultimately, this diversity strengthens our mission, as it pushes both students and instructors to think creatively and compassionately about how to bring the message of the Gospel to all nations.

To address these varied needs, the IRTC employs several strategies. First and foremost, our curriculum development is carefully crafted to be *supracultural*. While most of our instructors are Brazilian, we strive to teach in a way that remains faithful to the Reformed Confessions, avoiding the particularities of any specific Reformed denomination. This approach ensures that our teaching is as broadly applicable as possible, avoiding the imposition of any one cultural perspective over another.

In addition, we create space for meaningful interaction between students and instructors. Through forum posts and live Q&A sessions, students are encouraged to share the unique challenges they face in their local

contexts. This not only enriches the learning experience by exposing students to a wide range of perspectives but also allows instructors to provide tailored feedback that considers the cultural and contextual diversity of our student body. Different educational backgrounds and linguistic dialects can lead to miscommunication or misunderstanding, and anthropological insights help us to navigate these challenges with greater sensitivity and effectiveness.

As our students go forth to minister in their respective contexts, they carry with them both their training in the Reformed faith and the tools to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with the varied cultures they encounter. Please keep our instructors and our students in your prayers, as they call the lost from many nations into His Kingdom.



IRTC scholarships have enabled over 50 students with financial needs to study Reformed theology in 2024. With your help, we can serve even more (see details below).

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70%

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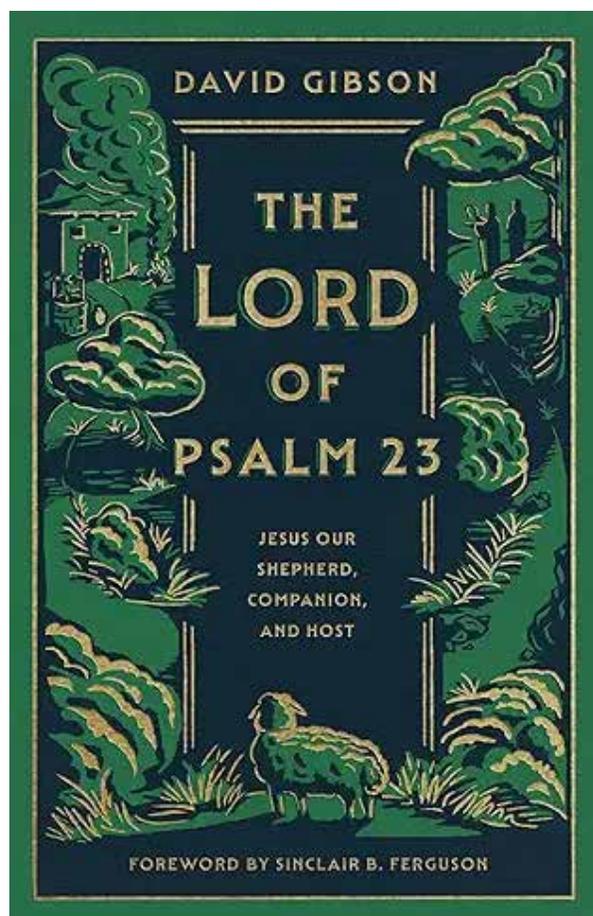
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FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE

The Lord of Psalm 23: Jesus Our Shepherd, Companion and Host, by David Gibson. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023). Hardcover. 137 pages. \$25.95 CDN



It was spiritual arrogance for me to think that I had plumbed the depth of a particular scriptural passage. However, you can hardly fault a funeral director of thirty years for thinking he had Psalm 23 fully tapped! What a delightful surprise, upon receiving this beautiful little book for my birthday from my wife, to discover there was so much more to learn and love about our Lord Jesus in this psalm that Luther called “a little Bible” all on its own. I am excited to share a sample with you as I eagerly recommend this book.

David Gibson, PhD and minister of Trinity Church in Aberdeen, Scotland is both warm and insightful as he weaves three sermons together with three different renditions of this psalm to explore the Lord as shepherd, companion, and host. He is careful to not force his personal impressions of the imagery of the psalm on the reader as he respects that those may speak differently to each person based on their own circumstances. Rather, he is more interested in drawing out the intimacy of knowing Jesus Christ as the shepherd of the psalm. At the middle of the psalm are the words, “You are with me,” which, Gibson preaches, is the gospel in a nutshell. We are personally united with Christ and restored to our Father with and through him. Knowing Jesus so intimately changes everything and sets the illustrations of him as shepherd, companion, and host on vivid display.

Gibson does not settle on exploring the shepherd and sheep imagery that is in the fore of the psalm, but instead he pushes further back to the historical context of David calling YHWH his shepherd, the covenant name of God given to Moses at the burning bush. In doing this he hears

the exodus echoes in the text as it layers the imagery to illustrate what it means that the faithful and unchanging God is the one who supplies all that we are in need of for this life and into the next. The God who told Moses that he would be with him when he confronted Pharaoh is the same God who sojourns with us throughout our life's journey. It is actually "for his name's sake" that he does this. Psalm 23 is an expression of God's covenant faithfulness to his people, and it is his personal testimony of it. Gibson does a wonderful job of bringing this home.

The reader may also be pleased with how Gibson connects the well-known confession of Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism with the psalm. Rich Reformed theology is on display throughout the book, expressed in fresh and moving ways. Along the way he carefully cites the writings of other scholars to support and enhance his findings. Of particular interest to me was his

exploration of some of the translation decisions made over the years and his willingness to engage with the foot-noted alternatives. To consider that "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" may more specifically mean that the loving kindness (*hesed*) of God pursues me all the days of my life adds a lustrous veneer of covenant theology to the text and helps warm the hearts of all who puts their trust in this wonderful shepherd, host, and companion.

This book is well-worth the money and will make a treasured gift for any adult who desires to know the Lord better and longs to dwell in his house forever. 📖



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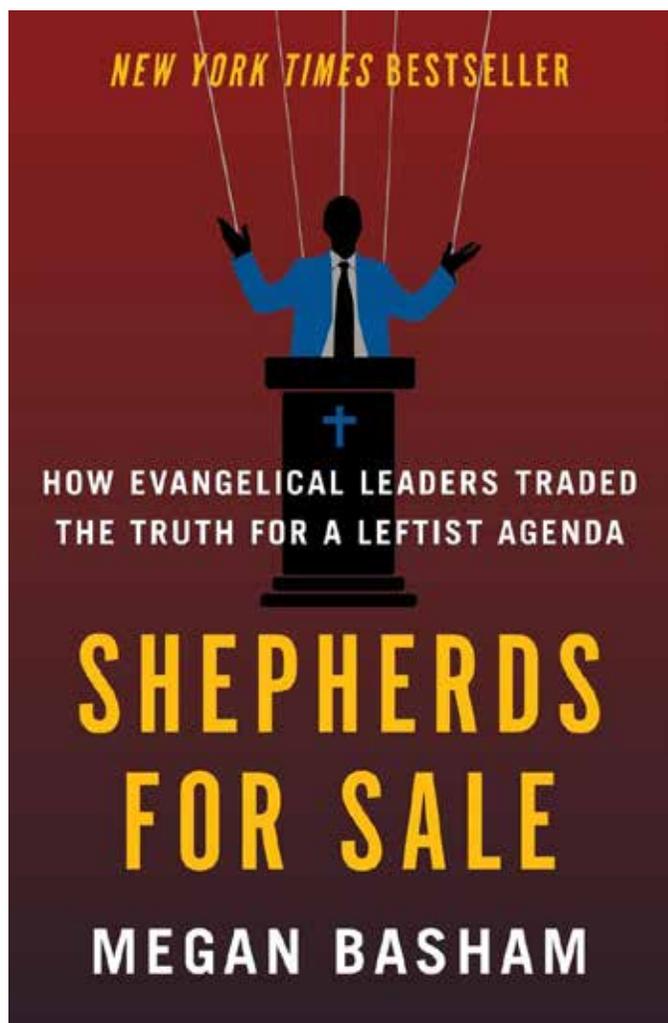
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»	MY FRIEND
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»	MY NEIGHBOUR



LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR?

Shepherds For Sale, by Megan Basham. (HarperCollins, 2024). Hardcover. 319 pages. \$35.89 CDN.



There are some intersections that lend themselves to high impact collisions. The crossroads of faith and politics tends to be such a place. On one route, many Christians are busy trying to align their beliefs with their votes in a highly partisan political landscape with murky policies and larger-than-life personalities dominating the platform. On the other street, political pundits and influencers are working hard to gauge the decision-making trends of voter blocks along lines of gender, race, and beliefs—looking for ways to manipulate each group. If you introduce a third avenue into the intersection, a politicized church pulpit, Megan Basham claims that you not only have chaos both in the church and the country; you also have a pastoral sell-out on biblical truth. *Shepherds For Sale* is a harsh condemnation of the evangelical church in America for its alleged capitulation to a leftist agenda. In this tell-all journalistic report, some of the main culprits are also brazenly accused.

Basham is a journalist, an author, and member of a Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) church. As such, she feels compelled to tell the stories of faithful Christians in America being instructed and swayed by pastors who have been co-opted to support a left wing (Marxist!) agenda in their pursuit of both power and social acceptance. She weaves a complex web of corrupting influence by the world's wealthiest people and their foundations, mixed with critique of their appropriated messages in the spirit of loving your neighbour, all in the service of a diabolical political movement to capture the critical mass of the evangelical vote in America. Combining the quotes and public appearances of recognizable

pastors in the United States, Basham draws lines of relationships to individuals and lobby groups, and fills in the gaps with anecdotal stories, conjectures about alliances, and her critique of the things not said or not done. Her exposé runs the gamut of hot-button topics including climate change, immigration, abortion, mass media, the COVID-19 pandemic response, critical race theory, #MeToo, and LGBTQ and the church. Invoking a recollection of the McCarthy communism crisis of the 1950s, she outs a Democrat behind every door. With her fellow pew members in mind, she has come to the point where she is compelled to take a stand. The cancel culture is being kicked to the curb for the sake of the truth of God's Word. Less talk about being woke and more urgency about waking up!

If you enjoy a robust conspiracy theory, you will get good bang for your buck here. Although Basham claims no political motivation for writing the book, it reads as a covert defense of evangelical support of the Trump administration in the face of the President's dubious personal reputation. Intermixed are a questionable simplification of increasing victimization versus personal accountability and a full rejection of any nuanced approach in speaking about morality in the public square or any seeker sensitivity in the entranceway of the church. In its place she offers a bootstrap approach to the Christian faith and the church's witness to the world. While it is easy to agree with her that the church as an institution should not be busy with the politics of the nation, it seems that she would offer less criticism if the political approach

and message were just different than the prevailing one. Lip service is paid to Christ's claim that his kingdom is not of this world. For Basham, the national flag still seems to be within arms-length of the pulpit, just flapping in a different direction.

What is most egregious about this book is that Basham adopts the current political approach of "enrage to engage" and creates a new wokeism in cancelling pastors left and right in her corrective effort. There is no sensitivity to the reputation of church leaders in their office, to the proper biblical process for holding leaders to account in the church, or to the collateral damage to the cause of the church in her writing style that mimics the harsh lopsidedness of mainstream media. Although the back of the book is rich with footnotes, there is no sense that the shepherds accused of selling out were thoughtfully engaged or that there was any concern for promoting their reputation in line with the ninth commandment. Passion for truth is laudable, but the best intentions still require a godly framework. In the end, loving your neighbour remains a fundamental Christian principle for all of life, right next to loving God. Basham's efforts to correct a wrong ironically fall short of the rubric of her own criticisms. 



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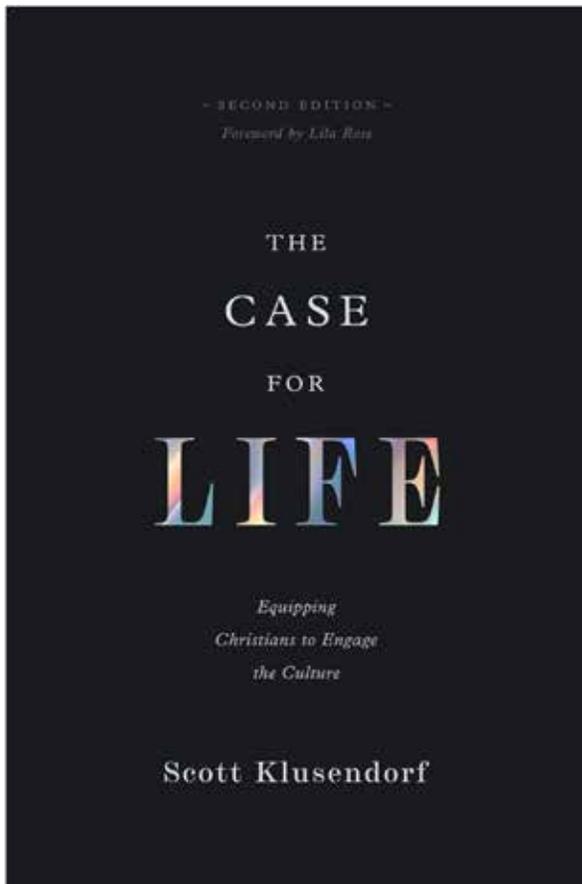
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ADDRESSING THE GREATEST HUMAN RIGHTS ATROCITY OF OUR AGE

The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture (Second Edition), Scott Klusendorf.
(Wheaton: Crossway, 2023). Paperback. 390 pages. \$22.76 CDN.



What do you call an annual death-toll of tens of thousands that has been happening for decades in our country? It's an atrocity. That's what abortion is. It is the greatest human rights atrocity of our era. Nothing surpasses it. Because it happens behind closed doors, though, we can safely keep it out of our minds and not be too bothered by it.

However, can we really do that if we're Christians who believe God's Word? Scripture says in Proverbs 31:8-9, "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." King Lemuel's mother taught him those words. If we share Christ's royal office through his Holy Spirit, then surely we ought to follow that same instruction.

This book is intended to help Christians do that. Scott Klusendorf is an experienced pro-life advocate based in the United States. His thesis in *The Case for Life* is two-fold. He first intends to argue that "a biblically informed pro-life view explains human equality, human rights, and moral obligations better than its secular rivals." Then he wants to convince us that "rank and file pro-life Christians can make an immediate impact provided they're equipped to engage the culture with a robust but graciously communicated case for life" (p. 3).

The Case for Life breaks down into five parts:

- Part 1—Pro-Life Christians Clarify the Debate
- Part 2—Pro-Life Christians Address Worldview Questions
- Part 3—Pro-Life Christians Survey the Major Thinkers
- Part 4—Pro-Life Christians Answer Objections Persuasively
- Part 5—Pro-Life Christians Teach and Equip

The book includes numerous references to other helpful pro-life resources.

Klusendorf is particularly strong in two areas. One is responding to pro-abortion rhetoric. For example, perhaps you've heard of the "Burning Fertility Clinic Illustration." A hypothetical fertility clinic is burning down, and you have to choose between saving a screaming five-year-old child and a container with 1000 human embryos. Klusendorf has a powerful retort to this thought experiment in chapter 4.

Another area of strength is with regard to exposing the inconsistencies in the worldviews undergirding pro-abortion ideology. In chapter 6, for instance, he turns the tables on abortion rights by asking whether such "rights" are natural (prepolitical and transcendent) or legal (granted by government). If the latter, then the government which grants rights is also within its realm to take them away. If the former, however, "then the abortion-choice advocate had that right from the moment she came to be, that is, from conception! Thus, according to the logic of many abortion-choice advocates, unborn women don't have a right to life, but they do have a right to an abortion!" (p. 98).

I can recommend this book, but only with some caveats. There is a strong apologetics component (especially in Part 2), but it's not Reformed apologetics the author uses. Two names appear repeatedly in the footnotes: J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig. Both of them are explicitly Arminian classical apologists. Under their influence, Klusendorf refers on a couple of occasions to Christianity as *possibly* the best explanation. At one point, he says Christian theism cannot claim certitude (p. 190). We can't? Doesn't the Bible give us warrant to do exactly that in passages like John 17:17? Worse, he says on page 176 that "it's possible that Christian theism is mistaken in part or in whole (though that's

highly unlikely). . . ." Because Christian theism is found in God's Word and it's impossible for God to lie or be mistaken, it's impossible for Christian theism to be mistaken. Klusendorf concedes far too much ground to unbelievers—when he shouldn't be conceding any whatsoever.

Regrettably, the author also compromises on the clarity of God's Word when it comes to creation. For beginners, he states that "big bang cosmology challenges the materialist claim that the universe has always existed" (p. 179). However, big bang cosmology is contrary to the creation account given in Genesis. As an example of just one incongruity, Genesis teaches us that creation took place in six ordinary days; big bang cosmology requires deep time involving billions of years. Further, Klusendorf quotes theistic evolutionist J. P. Moreland who asserted that "God rigged the dice ahead of time so life could appear" (p. 180). Rather than simply creating the conditions in which life could begin, the Bible tells us that God created every living creature by the word of his mouth.

Until someone else comes along with something better, Klusendorf's book will be my go-to resource for refuting pro-abortion arguments. *The Case for Life* has some weaknesses, but I trust that readers will be able to "chew the meat and spit out the bones." It is a must-read for pro-life advocates, in other words for all Christians. Abortion is murder. Let's do what we can to "rescue those who are being taken away to death" (Prov 24:11). 📖



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CLASSIS CLIPPINGS

What follows are clippings from the press releases of recent classes across the federation. They have been culled by the editor for the interest of our readers. Each press release can be found in full at canrc.org.

CLASSIS PACIFIC WEST SEPT 26, 2024

Peremptory examination

After ensuring that the proper documentation had been submitted, classis proceeded to the peremptory examination of candidate Taylor Bredenhof. Candidate Bredenhof presented his sermon on Luke 15:1-7, after which classis deemed his two sermon proposals sufficient to continue with the examination. Br. Bredenhof was asked by the chairman to share his motives for seeking the ministry and was then examined in the categories of Old and New Testament Exegesis, Knowledge of Scripture, Doctrine and Creeds, Church History, Ethics, Church Polity, and Pastoral Ministry. Classis judged with thankfulness that candidate Taylor Bredenhof had sustained his peremptory examination and received his verbal promise not to teach anything that is not in accordance with the Reformed confessions.

Proposals (Article 33 C.O.)

An overture from Willoughby Heights was received concerning the ecclesiastical route and a proposed change to Article 30 of the Church Order. After discussion, this overture was adopted and will be sent to the next Regional Synod West (November 19,

2024) with the request that it be adopted and sent on to General Synod Aldergrove 2025.

An overture from Langley was received concerning the method of assigning delegates and number of delegates to general synod and a proposed change to Article 49 of the Church Order. After discussion, this overture was adopted and will be sent to the next Regional Synod West (November 19, 2024) with the request that it be adopted and sent on to General Synod Aldergrove 2025.

An overture from Langley was received concerning the approval of metrical psalms and hymns and a proposed change to Article 55 of the Church Order. After discussion, this overture was adopted and will be sent to the next Regional Synod West with the request that it be adopted and sent on to General Synod Aldergrove 2025.

CLASSIS PACIFIC EAST SEPT 5, 2024

The church of Aldergrove submitted an overture for a proposed revision to the Form for the Solemnization of Marriage. The proposal was discussed and amendments were suggested. The emended proposal was adopted. The overture will be submitted to Regional Synod West.

CLASSIS ALBERTA SEPT 19, 2024

After ensuring all the proper documentation was in order, classis proceeded to the preparatory examination of student Josh Peters. Student Peters presented a sermon on Acts 8:26–40 and then, after the students from Coaldale Christian school were welcomed, he was examined in Old Testament Exegesis (Haggai 2), New Testament Exegesis (Luke 4:1–30), and in Doctrine and Creeds (via an audio-visual link). Classis judged that Josh Peters had sustained his exam, heard his verbal promise not to teach anything that is not in accordance with the Reformed confessions, and declared him eligible for call in the churches.

CLASSIS MANITOBA SEPT 27, 2024

Fraternal greetings

- Pastor Kevin Pulliam brought greetings from the Northern Plains Classis of the RCUS. He shared that in their classis there is renewed interest and desire to reach the lost and that one pastor has been designated for that work. As a federation they are looking forward to celebrating their 300th year anniversary on June 12, 2025 at Mount Rushmore.
- Rev. Todd De Rooy brought greetings from the URCNA Classis Central US. He gave an update on the activities in this classis, including various church plant initiatives. Dr. Cornelis Venema, professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, has retired.
- Rev. Rich Anjema brought greetings from the Providence United Reformed Church in Winnipeg. The president responded with warm words of Christian fellowship and then led in thanksgiving prayer.
- A letter of greeting was received with thankfulness from the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC.

CLASSIS ONTARIO WEST SEPT 11, 2024

Reports, Proposals, and Overtures

- Report of the Fund for Needy Churches—Ancaster as Administrator of the Fund proposed to assist the church at Grand Rapids for 2025 by assessing the churches at \$20 per communicant member. This was adopted.
- Report on the Appeals' Committee proposal—the report of the ad hoc committee (appointed by the previous classis) on Glanbrook's original proposal to establish an Appeals Committee was received and its recommended amendments adopted. Classis proceeded to discuss and then adopt the original proposal as just amended. The Church for the Archives was asked to update the classis regulations, and all churches were

asked to come to the next classis with nominations of persons who could serve on the Appeals Committee.

- Overture from Glanbrook re: suggested changes in wording to the Forms of Excommunication—after discussion, this overture was not adopted.
- Interchurch Committee proposal—Providence church presented its proposal to establish a standing committee for contact with neighbouring classes and presbyteries of churches with whom the CanRC have ecclesiastical fellowship or contact. This committee would replace Grace CanRC in its role as contact church, a duty Grace had asked to be relieved of. After adopting the three proposed amendments, classis then adopted the proposal as a whole. The churches were asked to come to the next classis with nominations of persons who could serve on the Interchurch Committee and Grace church was asked to continue its role until this committee could be populated. Thanks was expressed to Grace Kerwood for all the years of serving as the Church for Ecumenical Relations.
- Overture from Ancaster re: explanatory footnote—Ancaster church presented its overture to add an explanatory footnote to the Apostles' Creed regarding the clause "he descended into hell" (intended to mitigate misunderstanding). After discussion, classis adopted the overture and the clerk will send it to the next regional synod east (November 13, 2024) with the request that this be considered, adopted, and sent on to General Synod Aldergrove 2025.

CLASSIS NORTHERN ON. JUNE 21, 2024

Proposals

- The proposal from Fergus Maranatha regarding a process to work with churches in our classical area with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship, and churches with whom local CanRCs have contact, was adopted. Fergus North was appointed as the Coordinating Church for Ecumenical Relations. It will be responsible for inviting observers to Classis Northern Ontario, and for appointing observers from classis.
- Two proposals were received from the church of Brampton, one regarding Article 49 and the other Article 55 of the Church Order. These proposals were not adopted.

CLASSIS NORTHERN ON. SEPT 19, 2024

- Classis approved a monetary assessment from the churches for \$4.00 per communicant member for the classis fund.

- An overture from Grace Brampton was received by classis concerning changes to Article 49 of the Church Order. The overture was adopted and will be sent on to regional synod.

CLASSIS CENTRAL ON. SEPT 12, 2024

Memorabilia

Classis noted the ongoing health challenges for some of its retired ministers. Classis also noted with thankfulness the ongoing labours of a number of its retired ministers: In September, Rev. Jan DeGelder travelled to New Zealand on behalf of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations (CER) to attend the general synod of the Reformed Churches in New Zealand as a fraternal delegate. Additionally, in the coming weeks Rev. Gijsbert Nederveen and Rev. William DenHollander will travel to Australia to fill the pulpits of two vacant sister-churches for a number of months. Rev. Henry Versteeg also continues to be actively involved in the foreign mission field of Papua New Guinea. Classis remembered Hamilton-Blessings' ongoing search for a second pastor. The churches encouraged them in their continuing search and for the ministry of the church during the ongoing vacancy. Finally, classis noted that the Burlington/Waterdown-Rehoboth and Burlington-Ebenezer councils are carefully working toward a merger of the two congregations.

Evangelist

On behalf of Hamilton-Blessings Church, Dr. Greg Davidson introduced Rev. David Chen to classis as an observer. Rev. David Chen is an ordained minister in the Korean Presbyterian Church of China (KPC), a former church planter, and currently enrolled as a student at MacMaster Divinity School. He is now a member at Blessings. David has been commissioned by Hamilton-Blessings as an evangelist; he is working in the neighbourhood around Blessings and running classes for newcomers.

Advice, proposals, and correspondence

In closed session, one church requested and received advice in a case of church discipline. After returning to open session, Burlington-Ebenezer Church requested and received advice

concerning the best way to structure and oversee a Portuguese-language mission operating out of Ebenezer church under the direction of retired OPC minister, Rev. George Barros. Hamilton-Mercy Church requested and received advice.

Toronto-Bethel Church requested advice about a date for a colloquium for Rev. Richard Eikelboom as he transitions from Byford Free Reformed Church in Australia to the care of Toronto-Bethel as missionary in Papua New Guinea. A date of October 18, 2024 is set for the colloquium.

Redemption Church submitted a proposal to change Article 49 of the Church Order in order to increase the number of delegates to general synod, and to move the body that delegates brothers to general synod from regional synods to each classis. Additionally, Redemption proposed ways that general synod can shorten its duration in an effort to encourage more elders to attend. These include increasing the frequency of general synod, implementing a hybrid model of online and in-person meetings, and getting clerical assistance for the recording clerk of general synod. Classis adopted the proposal.

Burlington-Ebenezer Church submitted a proposal with guidelines for the handling of the Classis Central Ontario archives. Classis adopted the proposal.

Burlington-Fellowship Church submitted a proposal to allow the churches to sing alternate psalm renditions and additional hymns which faithfully reflect the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by consistory. Classis adopted the proposal.

Classis approbated an adjusted letter of call formulated by the Hamilton-Blessings Church for Dr. Bill DeJong in light of his position as Redeemer's faculty chaplain.

CLASSIS NIAGARA SEPT 11, 2024

Upon the request of Dunnville East the date for the next classis was set for October 23, 2024 for the purpose of conducting the preemptory examination for br. Zachary Vanderploeg, with the convening church being Attercliffe. The next regular classis was set for December 11, 2024, with alternate date being March 19, 2025. 

