



Clarion

145 THE OTHER THREE-LEGGED STOOL | 148 THE FRAGRANCE OF SWEET PERFUME

152 THE CRMA: THAT QUIET FRIEND | 164 DUKE WILLIAM, ABBOT BERNOT, AND CLUNY ABBEY (PT 2)

what's inside

What's a "prayer warrior"? Should we aspire to be one? Jason Van Vliet's editorial helps unpack that question. Prayer certainly is needed throughout the Christian life and collectively as church, something that our "quiet friend" the Canadian Reformed Missions Association is keenly aware of. Don't know what the CRMA is all about? Check out Julius VanSpronsen's article for an introduction and an update. Prayer is also a key part of discipleship or learning to walk more and more in the footsteps of our Saviour, a topic that Jeremy Segstro encourages us to undertake in his "The Other Three-Legged Stool." Prayer is very much needed too for our persecuted brethren in Syria these days, as Andrew Douma's *Persecution of Christians* informs us. And prayer is necessary for all church leaders in order to continue in humble reliance on the Lord Jesus for the vital work of shepherding God's people, a lesson brought home in the meditation of Gerrit Bruintjes. Lots to ponder in these pieces!

For your further edification we present an article by Han Lee reflecting on the "sweet perfume" of the gospel and how we can spread that fragrance further in this world. You'll find a newsletter updating us on the gospel work in Pakistan and another on the ongoing collection of funds to supply the library at CRTS with needed, up-to-date research materials. If you enjoy history, Keith Sikkema's second part on the origins of a certain Abbey and the various errors that arose with it (despite good intentions) will make for a good reading. Why not try reading both articles to the kids in your life?

Toward the back of Issue 4 you'll find several interesting book reviews, *Ray of Sunshine*, and a new column called *Clarion Kids Ask*. Maybe your child or grandchild would like to have a question answered in *Clarion*? Email us at editor@clarionmagazine.ca. Last but not least we present two thoughtful letters engaging with recent articles—thank you for writing in!

Happy reading!
Peter Holtvliwer

CONTENTS

142	WHAT'S INSIDE
143	EDITORIAL <i>Jason Van Vliet</i>
144	TREASURES, NEW & OLD <i>Gerrit Bruintjes</i>
145	THE OTHER THREE-LEGGED STOOL <i>Jeremy Segstro</i>
148	THE FRAGRANCE OF SWEET PERFUME <i>Han Gil Lee</i>
152	THE CANADIAN REFORMED MISSIONS ASSOCIATION: THAT QUIET FRIEND <i>Julius Van Spronsen</i>
156	PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS <i>Andrew Douma</i>
159	RAY OF SUNSHINE <i>Rachel Vis</i>
160	CFAM NEWSLETTER
162	WSA ANNUAL NEWSLETTER
164	DUKE WILLIAM, ABBOT BERNO, AND CLUNEY ABBEY (PART 2) <i>Keith Sikkema</i>
168	CLARION KIDS ASK
169	BOOK REVIEW <i>Rick Ludwig</i>
170	BOOK REVIEWS <i>Wes Bredenhof</i>
172	LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor in Chief: Peter Holtvliwer
E: pholtvliwer@clarionmagazine.ca
Managing Editor: Laura Veenendaal
Contributing Editors: Eric Kampen, Jason Van Vliet, Matthew VanLuik, Jim Witteveen

CONTENT INQUIRIES

E: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADMINISTRATIVE INQUIRIES

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

ARCHIVE

Search and read past volumes online at clarionmagazine.ca/archive

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

SUBMIT AN ARTICLE

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

SUBMIT A BOOK REVIEW

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS

clarionmagazine.ca/subscriptions

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

Digital can be added to print subscription at no cost.

Taxes extra for Canadian subscribers.

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

ADVERTISEMENTS

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

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

PRAYER WARRIORS

Are you a prayer warrior? Do you know one? Have you been encouraged to become one?

Popular phrases come and go, also in the church. “Prayer warrior” has arrived. Will it stay around? Or fade away? That is hard to predict, but words have power. We do well to consider carefully the terms we use.

WHAT IS A PRAYER WARRIOR?

For many a prayer warrior is someone who prays frequently, faithfully, and fervently. Prayer warriors bathe their lives with supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings, not only for themselves but also for others (1 Tim 2:1). Without a doubt, our God calls us to a prayer-filled life. The apostle Paul urges us to “pray without ceasing” (5:17). After all, prayer is the most important part of our thankfulness (LD 45). We can all agree that praying often is part of healthy living in Christ.

But what about the *warrior* part? Warriors fight. So, at least in some circles, prayer warriors not only call upon the Lord frequently but also engage in spiritual warfare against the forces of evil using prayer as their weapon.

The thinking runs like this. During a war soldiers take on various roles. Some enlist in the air force, others sign up as military engineers, while still others serve in the medic corps. In a similar way, in the battle against evil, some saints engage like a Dorcas, sewing clothes for the needy, while others wage war as an Elijah, face between his knees and pleading earnestly at the top of Carmel. Some prayer warriors even have a special place in their home called “the war room.”

Here we think of Ephesians 6. The Holy Spirit exhorts us to put on the armour of God. In our struggle against “this present darkness” the Lord instructs us to be “praying at all times in the Spirit” and “keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (v. 18). The point of this passage is that the pieces of our armour—from the belt of truth to the sword of the Spirit—protect and attack effectively if, and only if, we use them with the Lord’s blessing. In other words, our foe is not defeated because of, or on the basis of, our prayers. Rather, we pray fervently for *our almighty Lord* to fight through us against those who fight against us (Ps 35:1–3). Indeed, in Christ we are already more than conquerors (Rom 8:37).

INTERCESSORS?

We should also be aware of a broader movement, led by influential authors such as C. Peter Wagner, who wrote the *Prayer Warrior* series, and Elizabeth Alves, who started up Intercessors International. Even if you have never heard these names, some of their ideas float around in Christian blogs and podcasts.

These writers teach that certain Christians are gifted to pray so fervently and for such a length of time that they may become intercessors. For example, in her book *Becoming a Prayer Warrior*, Alves indicates that God “is able to do things through us that He could not do otherwise” and “God seeks for a person, an intercessor, to plead for His perfect will to be done on earth as it is in heaven” (28–29). In fact, “many times the fate of the world is not in the hands of governors or kings, but in the hands of mighty intercessors” (30).

Here we do well to remember our Saviour’s words. It is the Gentiles who “think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them” (Matt 6:7). Added to that, we already have two *divine* intercessors. First, we have Christ Jesus, who died and rose for us, sitting at the right hand of God, “who indeed is interceding for us” (Rom 8:34). As we confess, “Who will be heard more readily than God’s own well-beloved Son” (BC, Art 26)? Second, we have the Holy Spirit who “intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom 8:26). With the Son and Spirit of God bringing our prayers to the Father, we have all the intercessory help we need!

ENCOURAGEMENT

In Christ’s church prayer has always been a vital part of our personal and communal lives. It receives renewed emphasis in our time. This is commendable. As John Calvin once wrote, “Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is, and in how many ways the exercise of prayer is profitable” (*Institutes*, 3.20.3). Let us align our prayers with our Saviour’s teaching. As we call on our Lord, he *will* answer and increase the strength of our souls (Ps 138:3). 



Jason Van Vliet

Principal and Professor of Dogmatics
Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
jvanvliet@crtc.ca

TREACHERY AROUND THE THRONE

On the day of our king, the princes became sick with the heat of wine; he stretched out his hand with mockers. For with hearts like an oven they approach their intrigue; all night their anger smolders; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me – Hosea 7:5-7

Hosea 7 provides a powerful description of a wayward nation, showing how duplicity in leadership is a dangerous sign of impending doom. The people publicly celebrate with their king, becoming “inflamed with wine.” Yet the same hands that lift the glass in revelry eagerly mock and point out the king’s failures. Their contempt for the king soon turns into anger and palace intrigue as they seek his downfall. But when he finally falls, there is no reflection, no repentance, and no return to the Lord their God. Instead, they simply repeat the cycle, raising up another king of their own choosing (8:4). The kingdom would soon unravel, and Assyria’s invasion would bring crushing consequences.

Hosea 7:4–7 paints a tragic picture of a corrupt nation, where leaders take matters into their own hands rather than entrusting themselves to him who judges justly. Israel’s historical account confirms this pattern: 2 Kings 15–17 records that in Israel’s final decades, six kings reigned within thirty years, four of whom were assassins.

Although Hosea’s prophecy originally addressed Israel, its lessons remain relevant. This same pattern of duplicity appeared in Jesus’s day. The scribes and Pharisees outwardly walked with the crowd that adored Jesus yet secretly plotted his downfall. They feared challenging him publicly because of the people, so in their burning anger, they resorted to secret scheming (Matt 21:46). Judas’s duplicitous hand reaching for food at the last supper (Matt 26:23) echoes the mocking hands of Hosea 7:5. Finally, as Jesus, the King of the Jews, is crucified, he is abandoned and mocked. At his downfall, none of them return to God.

Yet unlike Israel’s last kings, who were wicked, Jesus was the righteous King. He did not repay evil with evil but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (1 Pet 2:23). His death was not the end of his kingdom but its establishment. His kingdom is not one of intrigue, deception, and coups, but of truth, righteousness, justice, and peace. We belong to this kingdom through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

As we apply Hosea’s words to our own time, we should not be surprised that the leadership patterns of ancient Israel still characterize many halls of civic power. Jesus himself said this would be so (Matt 20:25). While we should pray for our leaders and work as responsible citizens to oppose corruption where we can, our greatest concern should be the leadership within Christ’s church.

Duplicity, intrigue, and secret scheming should never characterize the shepherds of God’s flock. Yet the temptation to resort

to these tactics remains, especially when things do not go our way. Coalitions, backroom politicking, and deceptive dealings can seem like practical solutions, but they belong to the old way of life.

As we live and lead others in Christ, instead of falling into these patterns, seek the Spirit’s strength to walk in truth, integrity, and openness. As Proverbs 3:6 reminds us, “In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” May we approach the throne room of grace and look to King Jesus to rule us by his Word and Spirit, cleansing us from sinful ways, and leading us on the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. ☑

FURTHER READING:

Psalms 2; Isaiah 32:1–8; Matthew 20:20–28; James 3:13–18

QUESTIONS:

1. Most people hold some form of leadership responsibility, whether in the home, work, school, or church. In which areas of your life do you have such responsibility? How can you intentionally lead with truth, integrity, and transparency, especially when it might be tempting to engage in deceit or behind-the-scenes maneuvering?
2. When things don’t go as we expect or hope, what does a Christlike response look like? How can we guard against resorting to the manipulative tactics of the “old way of life” to achieve our desired outcome?
3. Leadership decisions often come with serious, real-life consequences. Should the weight of these consequences affect how we make decisions? Why or why not? How can we maintain a godly perspective even when faced with difficult choices?
4. How can we pray for leaders who are under pressure to make the right decisions? Do we remember to pray not only for the outcomes of their decisions but also for the wisdom and integrity with which they make them?



Gerrit Brintjes

Minister

Bethel Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto

gbruintjes@gmail.com



THE OTHER THREE-LEGGED STOOL

JEREMY SEGSTRO

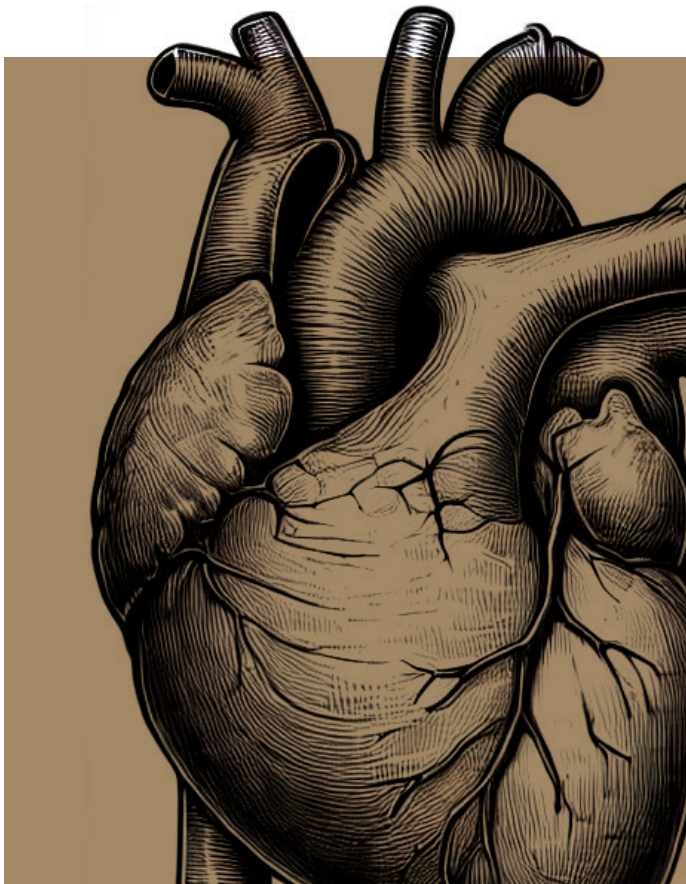
Many of us are aware of the metaphor of the three-legged stool: the stool of Christian education, with legs standing for the church, the home, and the school. But here, in the follow-up to my article a few months ago, “Wanna Trade?”, I propose another three-legged stool—the three-legged stool of discipleship.

In my last article, I explained how discipleship is not, in fact, contrary to covenant theology, but entirely consistent with it. I will not retread this old ground here, but rather, build on the foundation that was laid previously. Assuming discipleship is what our covenant children need, how do we do it? Enter the other three-legged stool.

Please note that this three-legged stool is not meant to supplant the original but rather to work alongside it. Because when it comes to discipleship, what’s the issue with school? What’s the issue with

church? Schools are big. Churches are noisy. They are busy. And, even if they weren’t, the ratio of teachers to students and the ratio of office-bearers to members makes deep and effective one-on-one interactions difficult, if not impossible. And it is *this* that is necessary for discipleship. And what’s the issue with the home? It’s the fact that a father-son or mother-daughter relationship cannot easily change to become a mentor-mentee relationship.

The call of the gospel is to repent and believe and keep repenting and believing. Growing stronger, maturing. And this is accomplished through discipleship. No more should we hear “boys will be boys” and, less frequently, “girls will be girls.” Because, loosely translated, this means “sinners will be sinners.” And that is not the call of the gospel. The stool of discipleship rests on the three legs of the heart, the watch, and the day planner.



THE HEART: CARE

Your desire must not be to become a mentor. Or, more specifically, this cannot be your ultimate desire. But rather, you must desire to mentor a specific person. A specific individual. You see, if it's about the *discipling* rather than the *disciple*, it will fail because such a focus reveals that it's about you. If it's about you rather than the young man or the young woman, then your heart is in the wrong spot. Adding "mentor" to your resume is not a good enough reason to begin a relationship of discipleship.

You must begin this process with love and care for the other person. Your heart needs to be filled with a deep desire to see him succeed, to grow stronger in faith, closer to Jesus Christ, and become more holy.

That is what love truly is—willing the best for the other. This has to be the foundation. For instance, say that God has placed this young man in your life, and your heart goes out to him. Maybe he is struggling. Struggling to fit in, struggling to stay on the "straight and narrow." Or maybe it's the opposite—maybe this young man is thriving, and you can see that he could really be something if all that raw, untamed potential was harnessed. If it was directed. Whatever has drawn you to this person in particular, you are filled with care, with love.

And this love, this care, must be shown. It must be demonstrated to the young person. There isn't one particular way that love must be shown, but as you start talking, as you start meeting together, you can get a better idea of how this individual best receives love. And here, the five love languages can be a useful

tool for you. Or, at least four of the five love languages. Quality time, acts of service, words of encouragement, and gifts—these are good ways to show your care for your disciple. The fifth love language—physical touch—is one that should be used sparingly. A hug, a hand on the shoulder, a handshake (especially between men) is good. But be careful here.

The closer you get to each other, the more accurate you will be at showing your care. The care, the love, is foundational for discipleship.



THE WATCH: TIME

Whether or not quality time is the love language of your disciple, this is something that is key to the process. This is how our Lord taught. He gathered his disciples to him, and they lived and travelled together for a period of about three years. He would teach them through sermons, like the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. He would teach them through parables—saving many of the explanations for just his core group. In addition to this, imagine how much the disciples learned through seeing Jesus's life.

Morality, a proper lifestyle, is so often *caught* rather than *taught*. To see your mentor put the principles he teaches into practice is quite valuable, as sometimes specific lessons can seem rather pie-in-the-sky, rather than down to earth, rubber-meets-the-road. And to see your mentor live out the high ideals in a sinful world is invaluable.

And so, discipleship requires very intentional time, ideally time spent one-on-one. While time in groups is valuable too, the sense of



trust and confidentiality is what leads to vulnerability and radical honesty—two things needed for discipleship to truly happen.

The mentor must lead in this as well. In how he mentors, he must reveal his own woundedness. Because, apart from the ultimate mentor—Jesus Christ—we all should lead from our woundedness, from our failures, from our pains. After all, this is what strengthens us and equips us. And we have to be honest about this.

Then the disciple must mirror this honesty that he has received. The difficulty of this cannot be overstated. There is a relationship of respect, and a desire to please the mentor which acts as an encouragement, a motivation to work hard and to stay on the straight-and-narrow, which is wonderful. But on the other hand, when there is difficulty, when the disciple has “fallen off the wagon,” then there is the temptation to tell half-truths, to downplay the difficulty. Because there is the fear, the dread, even the terror, of having someone you respect say the following four words: “I’m disappointed in you.”

How do you work with this as a mentor? Well, you make up your mind to never use this phrase. It’s that simple. Instead, when radical and even risky honesty is shown, as a mentor, you must thank your disciple for his bravery. Honesty must be valued above everything. While you may feel disappointed that there has been backtracking, to voice this disappointment would not help. It would only hinder the process and make honesty less likely the next time. Instead, you praise the honesty and you make a plan for next time. You do not need to worry that your disciple doesn’t recognize the seriousness of the backtracking—he clearly understands if he is coming to you almost shaking with anxiety. If he knows it, you don’t have to say it.

Instead, take a page from Jesus’s book and say: “Neither do I condemn you, now go and sin no more.” Say to him: “You’ve punished yourself enough with your anxiety and your guilt. All our sins and shortcomings are forgiven in Christ. Let’s go to him and come up with the solution together.” And that takes us to the third and final leg of the stool.

THE DAY PLANNER: INTENTIONALITY

So much of our work, so much of our lives, is spent day to day or maybe week to week—if we’re lucky. The idea of a five- or ten-year plan has been foreign to us traditionally. But it’s started to become more familiar in recent years.

At first this kind of plan might seem very daunting and difficult to your disciple. This isn’t something that needs to be obvious and out in the open right from the start. But as the mentor, you should have a long-term plan in mind. What is your goal, your hope for the outcome of this discipleship? Is it to strengthen the young man or the young woman to be independent? To “work yourself out of a job”? Or is it to see him become a mentor himself? Or become a deacon, an elder, a pastor? You should have a picture in your mind that becomes clearer and clearer as you spend more time together. And at some point, when there is that foundation of love, when there is that foundation of trust, when radical honesty is the norm, then you can work on a five-year plan with your disciple. Introduce the concept to him and see what’s on his list. Don’t impose your list on him but keep it in the back of your mind. Ask leading questions if he is stuck on certain things.

You must be intentional with your discipleship. And the specific intentions will differ from person to person.

Ultimately what matters most is that your disciple is, first and foremost, a disciple of Jesus Christ. Keep the focus on him, above all. It’s fine to take a page from 1 Corinthians 11, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ,” as long as the emphasis is on that last word: *Christ*. You are not to remake your disciple in your image, but rather, you are to encourage him, empower him, and guide him to be remade in the image of his Saviour. 📖



Jeremy Segstro
Minister
Yarrow Canadian Reformed Church
jeremy.segstro@gmail.com

The Fragrance of Sweet Perfume

CLARENCE BOUWMAN



“And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” – John 12:3.

In some churches, when you enter the auditorium, you may see a notice like “no fragrance zone.” It is probably because there are people who cannot handle the strong fragrance of perfume.

What kind of scent should there be in the gathering of God’s people? In this article, we’ll take a look at John chapter 12, especially verse 3 where it says, “the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” What is the significance of this sweet perfume and how does it apply to us today?

MARTHA & LAZARUS

John writes that “six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.” There was a dinner given in Jesus’s honour. This dinner happened right before the Passover. This is the last Passover Jesus celebrated. He instituted the Lord’s supper and that same evening he was arrested. This dinner and the anointing of Mary happened right before Christ was about to die.

And we see the three siblings: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. You probably remember the famous story of Martha from Luke 10. She was busy preparing a meal for people and when she saw her sister Mary not helping her because she was sitting at Jesus’s feet, Martha complained. Martha on that occasion became a classic example of someone who serves but is caught up in herself. However, in John 12, we see an improvement on Martha’s part. After Jesus raised her brother Lazarus, it seems like Martha’s attitude changed. We see her once again serving Jesus and others, yet there is no word about Mary helping her. But here Martha doesn’t complain. Instead, Martha keeps on serving, directing her work as a joyful gift to the Lord.

Lazarus gave his service too. How? By becoming a witness for Christ. Throughout John 11 and John 12, we don’t hear a single word from Lazarus. Perhaps he was a quiet man. But even without a single word spoken, his very presence was a powerful testimony of God’s salvation because Lazarus had died back in chapter 11! His resurrection spoke louder than anything else, so loud and powerful that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Lazarus (John 12:10).

MARY AND HER FLASK

So, Martha was serving and Lazarus was reclining at the table with Christ, enjoying being alive. But where was Mary?

All of sudden she appears and does something totally unexpected: “Mary took a pound of pure nard and anointed the

feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair” (12:3). Pure nard is known as spikenard and was very rare. Some say it grew in the Himalayas, hence it was very expensive. And Mary had a pound of it!

You can picture the scene: everyone having a good time, enjoying their food, laughing, smiling, talking, and then in comes Mary. Before anyone knew what to think, she began to pour that expensive ointment over Christ, a move which shocked everyone.

Mark gives a little bit more detail saying that the ointment was contained in an alabaster jar. Alabaster is a mineral and a soft rock used for carving. It is translucent; if you shone a light

The ointment was rare and its container was very special as well—it would only be broken open on a most special occasion.

at the alabaster flask, it would go right through, giving the flask a glowing, mysterious effect. So the ointment was rare and its container was very special as well—it would only be broken open on a most special occasion.

It’s a little bit like the old-fashioned piggy banks that had no opening to take the coins out. You put coins in the one thin slot at the top of the piggy bank and little by little it would fill up. It was designed to teach little children the discipline of saving money. Money is to be saved up for a very special purpose; once you break open the piggy bank, the money is out and it can’t be put back in. It’s the same with the alabaster flask. You would have to be absolutely sure that the time was right because once you break the jar, the expensive perfume would be spilled out and there would be no getting it back.

And Mary broke the jar without hesitation.

HEAD OR FEET?

But where did she pour out this ointment exactly? Matthew and Mark say that Mary poured it on his head whereas John says she poured it on his feet. More particularly, John says that “she anointed his feet and wiped his feet with her hair.”

Does that mean there is a discrepancy among Matthew, Mark, and John? Not at all. What happened was that she started with

his head. She worked that anointing process all the way to his feet. This was a kind of *burial practice*, applying the ointment from head to toe. It makes sense that Matthew mentions Jesus's head because in his gospel he focuses on the kingdom of God and so Matthew emphasizes Christ's kingship. He is the head of God's kingdom.

John, however, pays attention in our text on the Lord's feet. Interestingly enough, only one chapter later we find John describing Jesus's washing of his disciples' feet. John focuses on the true definition of love which Christ demonstrated in his humility. Christ, who took on the form of a servant, lowered himself to bathe the feet of his disciples in an act of love. But before that, Mary anoints his body for burial right down to his feet. In fact, when we read about Mary, we frequently find her at Jesus's feet, which was the fitting position of a true disciple (see Luke 10:39; John 11:32).

CONTRASTING HEARTS

And Mary poured out everything!

One commentator said: "This is a gift of great value—one that had not been surrendered even in the death of Lazarus." Perhaps this perfume had been reserved for her own burial. We don't know that for sure, but the point is that Mary did not surrender the most cherished item she possessed even in the death of her beloved brother Lazarus, but now she willingly poured it all out on Christ. And she did so in public while everyone was watching. Perhaps this is a good reminder for Reformed churches. We have a good tradition of public profession of faith. How beautiful it is to fill the house of worship with our confession that Jesus is our Saviour!

But not everyone found her action beautiful. The Holy Spirit places Mary and Judas Iscariot side by side in this passage to show us the contrast between the true devotion of Mary and the hypocrisy of Judas. Judas responded with sharp criticism: "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" (v. 5). Judas the thief has no care for the poor but only for his own pocketbook, as he showed later by betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Judas did his damnable deed secretly, but Mary showed her devotion publicly, a worthy practice to copy.

SWEET AROMA

John mentions one other thing not found in the other gospels: "And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (v. 3). Jesus explains Mary's action, saying she kept the ointment "for the day of [his] burial" (v. 7). These two things together remind us of the Old Testament sacrificial system which required the important element of a "sweet aroma." Each sacrifice properly offered in faith would rise up to God and be a "pleasing aroma to the LORD" (see Gen 8:21; Lev 1:9; 2:2, etc.). Those sacrifices were sweet to the LORD's nose (so to speak) because they pointed ahead to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and the full payment for all our sins. Christ's purchase of peace for us with God was like sweet perfume to God!

So, the house in Bethany was filled with the wonderful fragrance of the perfume. Later when Christ ascended to heaven, the holy of holies above was filled with the sweet aroma of Christ's redemptive work. At the same time, each house of worship on earth is to be filled with the sweet aroma of Christ as well.

What does this mean? How are we to fill the house with the fragrance of Christ? The house of worship is filled with the aroma of Christ when we sing his praises, singing psalms which are filled with the perfume of Christ, singing biblical hymns and canticles. God smells this sweet aroma most especially when Christ is faithfully preached, the sacraments faithfully administered, discipline upheld, and also when God's people give alms for their needy neighbours.

So, when we come to worship service, let's think about what it means that the house of worship must be filled with the fragrance of *Christ*, not our own scent. 🕯

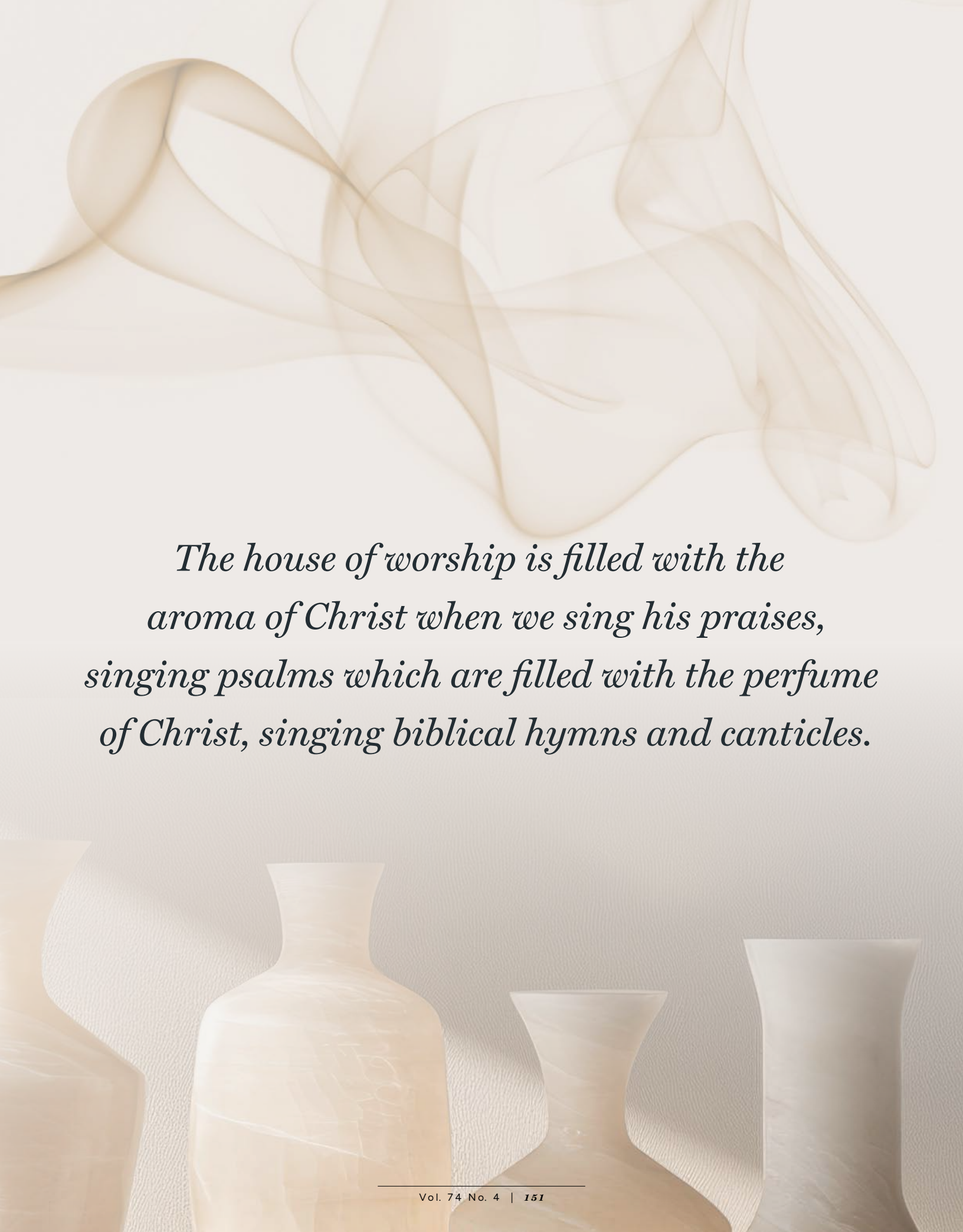


Han Gil Lee

Minister

Houston Canadian Reformed Church

hanleestra@gmail.com



*The house of worship is filled with the
aroma of Christ when we sing his praises,
singing psalms which are filled with the perfume
of Christ, singing biblical hymns and canticles.*

CANADIAN REFORMED MISSIONS ASSOCIATION: THAT QUIET FRIEND

JULIUS VANSPRONSEN

What does it take to send a mission worker into the field? What kinds of challenges do churches and mission workers face along the way? How can churches support one another in the fulfilment of our missionary calling? What can be done to keep the work of mission in the prayers and minds of all the churches that give their support? Are there resources or strategies that could help us in our work that we do not yet know about?

When several different missionary sending churches found that they were asking the same questions, it became clear that a Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA) would be a wonderful blessing for all the churches involved in missions. Although the decades of the magazine *Mission News* and the annual distribution of missions calendars are evidence that the concept of cooperating on some common needs of mission churches was not something new, churches involved in missions believed that it was time to do even more. In this article I would like to remind the readers of the history and purpose of the CRMA, present the many ways it has been a blessing, and give an update on the discussions that are taking place among the member churches and organizations of the CRMA.

HISTORY & PURPOSE

At the inaugural meeting on September 7, 2011, the minister of the hosting church of Langley, Dr. James Visscher, explained

that the purpose of gathering together was to “form an association of Canadian Reformed churches and organizations that are involved in mission work.” All the sending churches and mission boards present (Langley, Toronto, Hamilton, Surrey, Smithville, Abbotsford, and Burlington-Fellowship) then agreed that the purpose of the CRMA would be to “aim to assist the churches in the fulfilment of their missionary calling by facilitating the flow of information between member churches and organizations, by encouraging consultation about matters of mutual concern, by facilitating cooperation where necessary and beneficial, by organizing conferences where relevant mission topics will be discussed, and by having Canadian Reformed mission projects represented at meetings of international bodies such as NAPARC and ICRC.” It was further agreed that the association would have no authority over the affairs of its members and that “while the association is expected to facilitate mutual consultation and cooperation, its power will be no more than advisory.”

Based on feedback from sending churches and mission boards, the CRMA explained that it will assist its members by becoming an address for requests for advice, by functioning as a platform where mission workers can share expertise and maintain contact with mission organizations of other Reformed denominations, and by stimulating further training among members of mission boards and evangelism committees.

HOW THE CRMA ASSISTS

Annual meetings

The CRMA has an annual meeting where all the members are able to report on their ongoing work, highlight developments and discoveries, and share some of the challenges that they have been facing. The annual meetings are a valuable time for learning from one another, networking, identifying common needs that are best done in cooperation with one another, and finding volunteers who are willing to work on some of these projects.

A missions website

From the beginning the members of the CRMA recognized the importance of creating a website that could serve as a hub of information that would be relevant for anyone involved in missions. The idea was that churches and mission organizations who were reviewing their policies and handbooks, planning to start a new project, or getting into a new area of the work could consult the website and have access to the research and work that had already been done by other churches so that they didn't need to "reinvent the wheel." In addition to this, any member of the CanRC can go to the website <https://reformedmissions.net/> to read the latest updates and have them sent directly to their email addresses.

Informing the churches

A major area of focus for the members of the CRMA was their common need to inform the churches of the work they were doing so that the homes of all the CanRC members could be permeated with prayers for missions. The consensus was that since social media had influenced most of the readership to become accustomed to short, in-the-moment updates, with pictures, it was time to move on from the Mission News format of reporting. Rev. G. van Popta worked to prepare a proposal to collect the social media posts and reports that the missionaries were sharing during their work and shares these regular up to date newsletters with all the members of the churches in the federation.

Leadership in prayer

The churches and organizations of the CRMA believe very strongly that their preaching and other projects will only bear fruit if the LORD grants his blessing. After years of encouraging prayer and personal connections with the missionaries and their families on the fields through the use of mission calendars with the mission family birthdays and pictures of the different areas of work, in recent months the members of the CRMA decided to discontinue the mission calendars and to encourage prayer

through the use of prayer maps and weekly prayer requests sent to every church in the federation (thanks again to the work of Rev. G. van Popta).

Annual conferences

Every year the CRMA invites guest speakers to assist the churches in training and development. Topics such as missionary care, CRA compliance, missionary debriefing, and fostering mission zeal among the churches serve to keep the member churches informed and to foster further conversations among the different boards.

Representation at NAPARC & ICRC

The CRMA agreed that instead of having every mission board and/or sending church send someone to the NAPARC and ICRC missions meetings, it would be more cost-effective to cooperate together and send one or two people who could represent all the Canadian Reformed mission projects at the meetings of these international bodies. The members of the CRMA would then be kept informed of a much broader range of Reformed missions in the world and also be kept informed of the impressive amount of resources that are already available.

EVALUATING THE CRMA'S EFFECTIVENESS

Blessings

The CanRC has been blessed by the work of the CRMA. The involvement of the CRMA in promoting mission awareness and the regular prayers of God's people has been a great benefit. Even if you have never heard of the CRMA, you will know about the mission calendars and prayer maps and may have been blessed by the regular updates and encouragements to pray for different missionaries. Most members of the Canadian Reformed churches can know about all the work that the CanRC is doing.

The board members of the mission churches and organizations have also benefited from the opportunity to network with other missionaries and board members and to learn about different facets of the work in the annual meetings and conferences. The more diligent boards may even have ensured that all the past reports and training sessions are in the hands of all the active board members and not just a distant memory of the one or two who happened to go.

Challenges

In September 2023 the members of the CRMA noted that in spite of all the work that had been done to increase cooperation,

POTENTIAL AREAS OF COOPERATION

- 1. Mission Strategies:** missionary training, research and development, church institution models and criteria, catechetical curricula, federation models, church order development, leadership training, Christian schools, and entry of other churches into existing federations (at home and abroad).
- 2. Board governance and development:** board structures, board training, handbooks and self-assessment, succession planning for missionaries, staff and board members, assessment of health and safety of workers involved in different projects, and repatriation strategies.
- 3. Recruitment, training, and placement of professionals in the field:** teachers, medical professionals, and development and aid workers.
- 4. Volunteer opportunities for mission service (short-term and long-term):** leader training, recruitment models, project identification on the field, as well as debriefing and ongoing mentoring after coming home.
- 5. Broadcasting/Narrowcasting:** radio/TV, live streaming, blogs, podcasting, and smart phone and tablet apps.
- 6. Church member (local) education:** promotion of the need for missionaries and support staff on the home front, training in questions related to hunger and poverty, and local curriculum development among the churches.
- 7. Assisting churches with respect to new projects:** developing a global plan to reduce overlap and to ensure the effective use of existing resources.
- 8. Sharing resources that can be used in different settings:** handbooks, best practice policies, constitutions and bylaws, governance structures, finance principles, CRA issues, teaching materials, and discussion forums.
- 9. Providing the churches with a missions newsletter and update centre:** one place to go to get all the information on the different mission work being done by the Canadian Reformed churches (either directly or as major contributors).
- 10. Establishing a link to other Reformed churches cooperating on mission:** keep each other informed about conferences and seminars taking place in broader Reformed circles, maintain contact with mission organizations of other Reformed federations (NAPARC, ICRC churches), and share relevant information from the CanRC missions initiatives with churches in the ICRC and NAPARC.

there is still a need for the various mission initiatives to work together to break down silos. Although the churches are sharing their written resources (on-field course curricula, home front board documents, etc), more can be done to share the wisdom and experiences of mission workers and board members who have been involved in the work for a long time. Although the CRMA has taken good steps toward more cooperation, the present structure does not enable it to serve well as a central point of expertise that the churches can turn to for consultation and advice, especially

in times of set-up, conflict, and evaluation. As the years pass by and some of the early members of the CRMA move on, it would not be hard to “lose” a wealth of the resources that have been built up, simply because there was no one who noticed that this information had ever existed.

A second challenge that the members of the CRMA are facing is that, since missionaries are very busy and boards and church councils are often changing, there are very few qualified people who are available to take the time needed to supervise training,

research and development, or to address any questions and concerns. While there were just a few mission initiatives it worked well for the mission boards to reach out to the seminary professor of missions or a missionary they have had some contact with, but there is concern that the present system of consultation cannot be sustained as the number of mission initiatives grows. In addition to this, the long span between annual meetings and the lack of anyone appointed to respond to requests means that it could be difficult to get timely, informed responses to requests for guidance or material.

Finally, although the CRMA has appointed an executive committee to ensure that there are annual meetings and conferences and that funds are collected and administered with transparency, there is no one responsible for analyzing the incoming information and thinking about existing needs and/or proposals for future strategic steps to meet those needs. Although this is part of the purpose of the CRMA, it is a task that cannot easily be fulfilled without some changes in structure.

A proposed way forward?

As the number of both domestic and foreign mission initiatives grows and an increasing number of people are involved in a host of different ways, many members of the CRMA believe that it would be beneficial to investigate the possibility of appointing a person or a small committee that is familiar with all the CanRC projects and with all the available resources, agencies, and missionaries. The CRMA thus agreed that we would do well to consider the work of the missions coordinators that are employed in the URCNA and the OPC, and to see if we also could benefit from a person or persons dedicated to observing, encouraging, and advising mission workers and their boards, to making proposals concerning future plans, and to assisting the churches by coordinating recruitment, training (long and short term trips), and debriefing.

At their last meeting together on September 7, 2024, all the members of the CRMA agreed to participate in a special consultation from April 10–12, 2025, to hear from mission coordinators from the OPC (Mark Bube) and URCNA (Rev. Richard Bout), to receive advice from Dr. Arjan de Visser (CRTS emeritus professor of missions), and to decide on the best way forward.

1. Are we content with the present CRMA activities and structure or do we believe that there is more that the CRMA can do to assist one another in fulfilling our missionary mandate?
2. Would your church or missions organization be in favour of the concept of having a missions coordinator or a missions committee to serve the Canadian Reformed churches?
3. What would you like to see included in the mandate of such a missions coordinator or missions coordinating committee?
4. If such a coordinator or committee was to be appointed, would your church prefer to see the project supervised by the CRMA, or would you prefer to see it as a task and position(s) under the oversight of all the CanRef churches through a general synod?

May the LORD bless the consultation so that as Canadian and American Reformed churches we may become increasingly effective in assisting one another in fulfilling our missionary calling. 



Julius VanSpronsen

Minister

Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church, Edmonton

julius.vanspronsen@gmail.com

VISIT [HTTPS://REFORMEDMISSIONS.NET/](https://REFORMEDMISSIONS.NET/)

Read the latest updates and have them sent directly to your email addresses!

ALEPPO: SURROUNDED BY DOGS

ANDREW DOUMA



In late 2024 Syria started making the headlines. The Assad dictatorship which spanned two generations fell to a coalition of domestically grown, internationally funded jihadist groups. The toppling of a brutal dictator made for good vibes across western media. But on the ground, Syrian Christians were uneasy, particularly those living in the northeastern city of Aleppo.

TRAPPED IN ALEPPO

Before civil war started in 2011, Aleppo's Christian population was over 200,000. Since then, most Christians have fled due to the presence of a Sunni Islamist group called Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). In early December 2024, Assad fled to Russia, sealing the end of his tyranny of the Syrian people. Of the militant groups involved, HTS became the group in charge of Syria, led by their leader Abu-Muhammad al-Jawlani. Over the first week of December, many Christians and Kurds attempted to flee Aleppo because HTS has consistently persecuted them. At the same time, HTS surrounded and controlled the city Aleppo, even closing off roads going into or out of the city. A Syrian friend of mine grew up in



Aleppo and now resides in Canada. He still has family in Aleppo and they shared pictures of the roads out of Aleppo once HTS had surrounded it. It made me think of Psalm 22:16, “For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me.”

The Political Affairs department of the HTS issued a number of statements that civilians will “remain shielded from any targeting or threats based on sectarian or ethnic affiliation,” yet the jihadist ideology of HTS give those remaining in Aleppo serious reason to doubt these promises.

Imagine, these Christians loading up their families and their belongings and attempting to flee only to become stuck on a road that jihadists have blocked. Oh, the depth of anxiety these Christians must constantly feel! They are stuck on a road and cannot go anywhere. They congregate outside their cars along the road, trying to stay warm with a fire, wondering if they or their family will soon be slaughtered. Or perhaps their children will be kidnapped. Maybe one is spared harm but witnesses atrocities committed to others and so lives on with the consequential trauma. Dark thoughts indeed, but they are reality for the body of Christ and as part of that body they need our prayers.

OUT OF FRYING PAN . . .

Understanding how Syria ended up with a jihadist group ruling the country is complicated. Bashar al-Assad was a brutal dictator just like his father. The Assads are Alawites, a minority sect of Islam that mainstream Muslims consider heretical. For the last fifty years the dictatorial regime stayed afloat only because of support from Iran and Russia who armed and funded militant groups to work as mercenaries for the Assad regime. On the other side, the US and Turkey funded other militant groups who were bent on overturning Assad. This tension-filled landscape was what characterized Syria since 2011; each group having some control of part of the country. When Russia and Iran’s domestic interests became greater than their desire to help a fellow dictator, they pulled military support away from Syria, shifting the balance of power to the jihadist groups that sought to overthrow Assad and make Syria a Sunni Islamic state.

The dangers for many of the remaining Christians in Syria have both an ethnic and a religious component. Religiously, an Islamic state has no place for Christians,





who must convert or die. Ethnically, the north of Syria has a concentration of Kurds. If you happen to be a Kurdish Christian, you are worse off than if you are simply Christian. The history of Islamic jihadists' hatred of Kurds can be found in the book of Ezra.

AN ANCIENT HATRED

The prophecy of Ezra tells us of how the LORD stirred the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple that was destroyed when they were captured and taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar. Not only are they allowed to return to Jerusalem, but Cyrus also gives back the temple treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen. Further, Cyrus proclaimed that Persians who lived near Jews were to give them a farewell gift of their own silver and gold. One minute the Jews were sojourners and exiles, living in subservience to Persia, the next they are free to return to Jerusalem carrying generous going away presents.

Jihadist groups, such as HTS, believe Kurdish people descended from the Persian people who helped the Jews return to Jerusalem in the days of Cyrus and that is why they hate them. Christians are hated because they believe that Jesus Christ is divine. Kurdish Christians endure a double penalty of hate from the dogs who surround the city. May we pray that just as God unimaginably directed the heart of King Cyrus to show favour to the Jews, so may he direct the hearts of the HTS leaders surrounding the city of Aleppo to allow all its residents to live in peace. 🇺🇸



Andrew Douma
Cornerstone Canadian Reformed
Church, Hamilton
agdouma99@gmail.com



Today we thank Trevor Hofsink for introducing himself. He celebrated his 47th birthday this past March. I also would personally like to say thank you to everyone who sends cards to everyone on our *Ray of Sunshine* list. I know everyone appreciates them and loves receiving them!

Happy birthday to Derek, Arlene, and Bryce who are celebrating a birthday in April! May the Lord continue to bless you richly in the coming year. We all hope you have a great day celebrating with family and friends.

TREVOR HOSFINK

Hi, my name is Trevor Hofsink. I live in Edmonton, Alberta within a group home for physically disabled adults. I also have two sisters, one who is married and lives in Mexico with her missionary husband and children, and a sister who lives in Ottawa. I have two brothers, one of whom is married with several children. My other brother lives in Prince George.

At home I enjoy writing, as well as playing games on my iPad. I go to Cornerstone United Reformed Church. I enjoy watching our church service every Sunday and having fellowship with the members there. Thank you for all the birthday cards I get sent every year, from all over, I always look forward to them.

APRIL BIRTHDAYS:

2 Derek Kok will be 55
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, Ontario
N1A 1T8

23 Arlene DeWit will be 64
#4 6560 Vedder Road
Chilliwack, British Columbia
V2R 0Y6

29 Bryce Berends will be 50
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1 st Line, RR #3
Fergus, Ontario
N1M 2W4

*Happy birthday to all of you celebrating a birthday in April!
We wish you the Lord's blessing in the year to come.*

Rachel Vis

Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.



Visiting our Christians brothers and sisters in Pakistan

Message from

Chairman Naeem Zafar

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! I am excited to share an update from my recent mission trip to Pakistan, where God continues to work powerfully through Christ for All Ministry. In Lahore, we are launching another Sunday school, youth group, and Bible study program to nurture the faith of young believers and train future leaders. These programs are vital for equipping the next generation with biblical knowledge and a heart for serving others. Additionally, CFAM is addressing both spiritual and physical needs through:

One of the highlights of this trip was witnessing the impact of the Audio Bible project. These devices reach individuals and families in remote areas, enabling them to hear God's Word in their language. The response has been remarkable, particularly in places where churches or Sunday schools are unavailable.

I am also thrilled to share the work being done by our dedicated team members. They are faithfully reaching out to Hindu families and Christian families living in areas without churches or Sunday schools. These efforts are bringing the light of the Gospel to communities that have long been overlooked.

- Opening a sewing center for young women, providing them with skills to earn a livelihood and build a brighter future.
- Expanding family support programs, including food distribution for struggling families in Pakistan and Thailand.

Your prayers and financial support make this Kingdom work possible. Together, we are spreading the hope and love of Jesus Christ to the most vulnerable.

Thank you for your unwavering partnership in the Gospel. May God bless you abundantly for standing with us. For information about our projects, please contact Naeem at naeem@christforallministry.com.



Mehwish is sharing Christmas clothes with the youth



Neriaah, our young Canadian volunteer, distributing shoes.



Ximon, our young Canadian volunteer, distributing food.





Poverty Relief

Gospel of John booklets were well received



Children reciting memory verses



Christmas gifts distributed



Samantha was very excited to share the clothes with the little girl

My name is Neriah, and I am a member of the Langley Canadian Reformed Church. I am also part of CFAM and recently had the opportunity to visit Pakistan. My experience there was truly incredible. In the first picture on the left, I learned how to make a brick—a task that was much harder than I expected. A little girl, about 7 or 8 years old, patiently taught me how to do it. In the second picture on the right, I was distributing clothes to young girls in one of our Sunday schools. This trip deeply impacted me. It made me realize how blessed I am and how much I should be grateful for each day. I'm already looking forward to the next time God allows me to visit these children again.

Audio Bible Project



Donations are accepted via: Cheque, E-transfer or Secure online donation. Make cheques payable to Christ For All Ministry and mail them to 26929 16 Ave, Aldergrove, BC. V4W 2S3, E-transfer to donate@christforallministry.com Secure online donation via our website: Christforallministry.com



I had the opportunity to share the Gospel of John and engraved coins with the Ten Commandments and a Gospel message with youth in the streets. I also visited different shops to share these with others. If you look closely, you'll notice a gunman present in the area. He is there to protect the street on Sunday service days and checks people before they enter the church in Pakistan. Everyone must pass through a metal scanner to attend church services. It's truly a blessing for many of us to freely and independently attend church services here in Canada.

- *Prayer Request: Pray for persecuted families in Pakistan, asking for God's protection and provision over them. Pray for the safety and well-being of our team serving faithfully in Pakistan.*
- *Pray for our brothers and sisters who have been falsely accused of blasphemy in Pakistan.*
- *Pray for the success and impact of our ongoing Bible project.*

We humbly invite you to prayerfully consider becoming a prayer partner with us. Your prayers make a difference.



WSA

Annual Newsletter

*“The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places,
indeed I have a beautiful inheritance.”*

– Ps 16:6

Indeed, we do have a beautiful inheritance! It is a privilege as The Women's Savings Action to join in keeping our seminary supplied with reading materials, to be part of the heritage of training up young men to serve in the churches of God, and to witness the convocation ceremony this past September.

This year's presentation at the convocation was a slideshow compiled by Deb Alkema, the outgoing secretary, and presented by Janet VanVliet and Karen Schuurman, the outgoing treasurer. The theme was “Change.” It gave a pictorial history of the changes since the inception of the seminary. At the same time, we recognize that the Lord has provided a constant—a “pleasant place”—for the education of aspiring preachers.

To that end, we are so thankful for the support of so many of you for the ongoing needs of the seminary library. This year, the total tally was \$42,492.83! As we considered the annual financial needs of our seminary library, we were able to top up that amount from a reserve that had been put aside to assist with the lean years and gift a cheque of \$50,000 to our cause.

In case you missed the convocation slideshow, just scan the QR code on the right or type in bit.ly/2024Convo into your online search engine and enjoy!



Two board members are ready to move on after giving much of their time and energy to the WSA—in fact, overextending their terms by a few years. You will have enjoyed reading Deb Alkema's newsletters and witnessing her convocation presentations—every year something new and innovative! She will be a hard act to follow. Joyce VanAmerongen will take on her role as secretary. She is a grandmother to two little ones whose daddy attends the seminary as it happens, and a member of Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church at Tintern. Corrine VanWoudenberg will be filling the shoes of Karen Schuurman, who has been an enthusiastic treasurer for a long time! Corrine works as a consulting and assurance manager and is a member of Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton. You may recognize her name as that of the daughter of Rev. John VanWoudenberg. With those qualifications, you can expect her to do a great job as the new treasurer. Janet VanVliet remains as President although she as well deserves a sabbatical after serving for many years. Her dedication and expertise are very much appreciated by all and we hope to benefit from it for another year or two yet!

Currently, we are working on making the writing of cheques to WSA easier. Sometimes the bank refuses cheques written simply to Women's Savings Action and requires that we add “for the

Theological College.” Quite a mouthful, heh? And certainly a bit of a trial to fit on the receiver line. Your local WSA representative will be able to let you know when we get the green light to change it legally and simply to Women’s Savings Action or **WSA**.

Tax receipts will be issued for donations over \$10.00. There are three easy ways to donate:

1. Place your donation, either cash or cheque (written to: *Women’s Savings Action for the Theological College*) inside an envelope and pass it on to your representative.
2. E-transfer to **wsa@crtswsa.ca** (password: crtswsa). Please include your mailing address and specific church name in

the “message” box to ensure the donation is attributed to the right congregation.

3. Online donations via credit card can be made through CanadaHelps.org link (search: CRTS) and Women’s Savings Action should pop up. The link can also be found on the CRTS website. Again, please *include the specific church in the box marked “company info.”*

As we move into the year 2025, we want to wish all of you God’s blessing as you thank him with us for the seminary that year after year provides us with godly men who want to bring the clear message of the gospel to the churches and the world. 📖



PRESIDENT:

Janet Van Vliet

905-923-6271

livingstreams@rogers.com



SECRETARY:

Joyce VanAmerongen

905-563-6281

rjvanam@yahoo.com



TREASURER:

Corrine VanWoudenberg

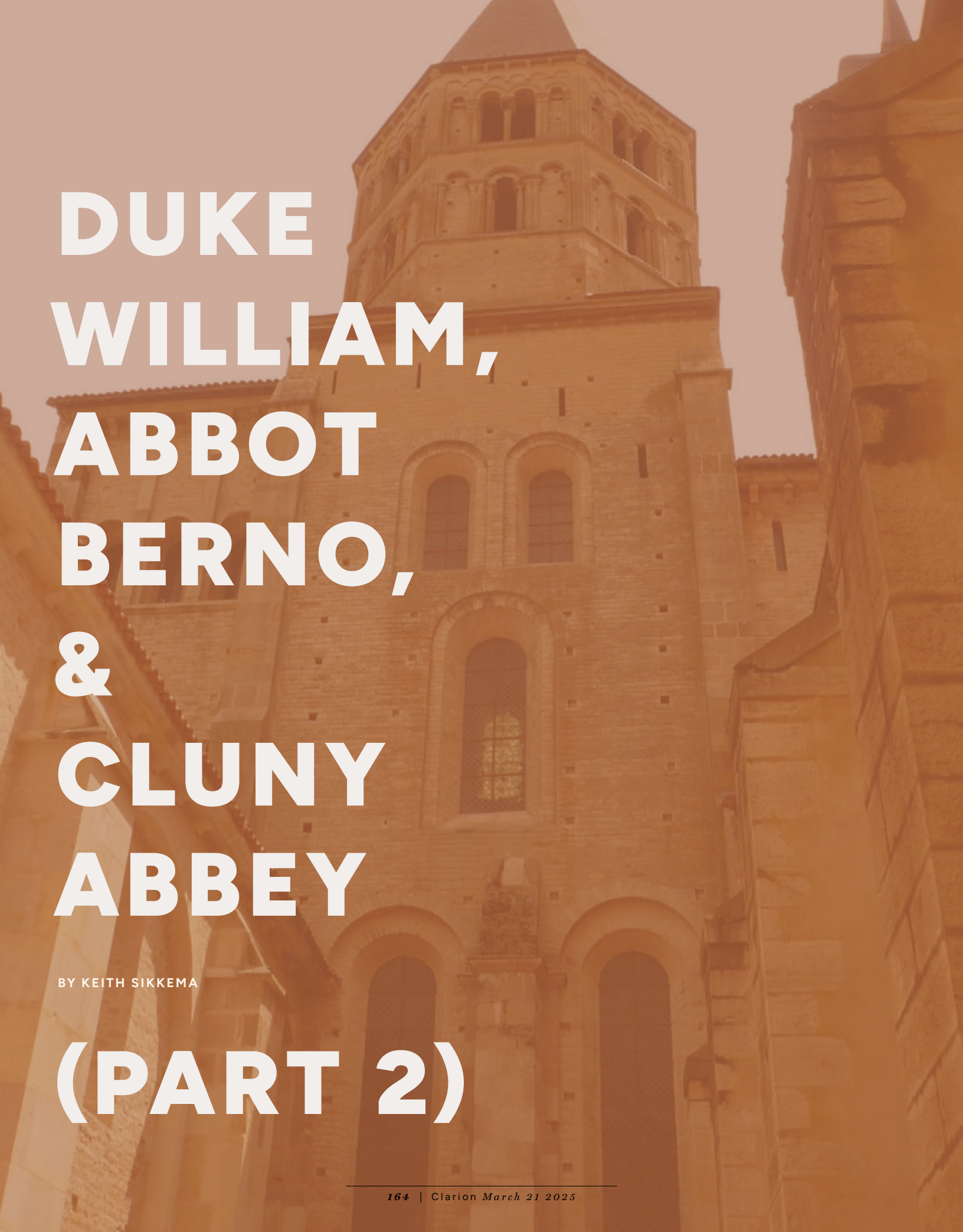
289-682-4772

treasurercrtswsa@gmail.com

READ AND SEARCH OLD VOLUMES

of **Clarion**

clarionmagazine.ca/archive



DUKE WILLIAM, ABBOT BERNO, & CLUNY ABBNEY

BY KEITH SIKKEMA

(PART 2)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

By the early Middle Ages, monasticism was an acceptable and even admired way to express one's devotion to God, but it was not without flaws. In this two-part article, the "Background" section briefly presents the error of Semi-pelagianism. Next, historical fictional sections illustrate and identify (with asterisks) such beliefs at the origin of Cluny's Benedictine Abbey. The final section provides some highlights of what became of it after its well-intended start. The church needed to learn again that salvation is by grace alone and through Christ alone—without meritorious good works (HC, LD 33). Footnotes are meant to clarify, without disrupting the story.*

DECISION & DEED

William asked Berno to linger in Cluny. Despite the good hunt, his sins continued to haunt him, and he did not sleep well the following nights. When he had opportunity to explain his troubles, he started telling Berno, "God's anger with me must be great. He has not given me a male heir, like Jacob's son Reuben."

"Reuben did have sons, William, and he even lost his first-born birthright. But don't agonize over a male heir. Ever since Adam, people often did not receive what they hoped for, but God provided as he saw fit, for his purpose. He disciplines us so that we may not be condemned. God wants you to cry to him concerning your grief and anxiety, like Hannah and David did, and like Paul told the Philippians to do. Like Job, acknowledge God's sovereignty, William."

William nodded, but then added, "My burden is really bigger than that, Father. I am responsible for the death and distress of many, for pursuing power and glory, for not being wholly devoted to God, for breaking his law, for not loving my neighbour and being barbarian like a Viking . . . I have blood on my hands, and I fear to meet my judge when I die; I have no comfort. What must I do to be saved? Must I give you another monastery*?"

Berno understood. He knew of terrorizing Vikings, and as an ordained priest, he could also grant absolution. "Yes, William," he said, "we do break all God's laws even if we fail in just one point. Your sins trouble your heart, mind, and soul. They are scarlet like the stag's blood, but Isaiah tells us to look to God for comfort, for they shall be white as snow. He pardons our iniquity through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and gives power to the faint. Even though the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, Paul assures us that no one can bring a charge against God's elect, and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"As for being saved, the apostle says that you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household. I know you do, for you are sincere and contrite and

would probably gladly offer me yet another monastery. Unlike kites and wolves, who do not need to, you show remorse. You would also never nullify the merit of your gifts*—by demanding them back, installing relatives as abbots, or taxing them to poverty, like others do."

William, pious indeed, agreed, and said, "By God's grace, that's right, father."

"However, your confession alone does not gain absolution. You must make up for your sins* and prove your sincerity by a public and permanent deed. You cannot restore the hurts you caused, but for the gain and peace of your soul, you must show you remain earnest."

William waited for what would come next. What would Berno's pastoral verdict be?

"God has shown his grace to you by enabling you to substitute for your sins, William, and this is how. At your own expense, and from the heart, you shall give your Cluny Domain as a monastery to Peter and Paul and the Holy Church forever, so it will never decline or be repossessed. Then I can assure you of God's mercy and his forgiveness*."

"Berno, the Domain of Cluny?! Nobody ever gave that much for his soul's redemption!"

"Apart from Christ, nobody indeed, William, but many also squandered and nullified the merit of their gift. Think of the gravity of your sins, brother. Remember that Solomon said a rich man can buy his way out of threatened death by paying a ransom. Perhaps God made you rich for this purpose*."

"Dear Berno, Cluny is far from the battlefields and worldly turmoil. It allows me to devote myself to noble and holy tasks. It is here that I find peace. I could give another place..."

"A place in Aquitaine will not give you peace, for it is burdened with your guilt of war and conquest. Cluny is God's valuable gift to you to assure you of salvation. He searched for you and found you in the Cluny Forest. Cluny must be the place. Give it back to God.



It will show how contrite you really are. Remember the master who advised the wasteful manager to make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails, those you favoured may receive and welcome you into the everlasting habitations.¹ God's grace allows you to present this gift, brother, and Peter and Paul will welcome you to paradise*!"

William knew he was reaching for straws, but said it anyway. "Berno, monks have no use for hounds. And what about the people? It is not Christian to just dismiss them."

Berno smiled. "Others will take the hounds, brother, and do you think the Lord cares as much about them as you do? And the people—the monastery needs them as well, to help provide for the sick, strangers, and pilgrims. You and your relatives past, present, and future would also benefit from the merit of the monks who dedicate themselves to God by despising the world*."

"But could they not annul the merit*?"

"The monks must strictly hold the Rule of Benedict, be committed to Peter and Paul and the Pope as God's representatives (not to you or your heirs). They will obey their abbot's discipline

and select the next one. They will confirm their commitment by a substantial gift of ten shillings for light,² every five years, and so, the light of your merit will continue to shine. If you pledge this, William, as you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrifice, your soul will be well, and your sins forgiven*."

"But won't decline happen just the same, Father?" William asked. "You yourself have found a need to reform monasteries, and you did well. To have a good model with good rules and built-in safeguards is great, but it will only be as good (or as bad) as the monks in it."

"You are right, brother," Berno responded, "but good rules help, and we will seek the Lord's blessing for it. Also, those who threaten this gift and its intent will be cursed and tortured in eternity and must pay a 100 pounds of gold to their victims—whichever they may be."

For some time, William was silent now, but then bowed his head and relented, "Father, I will do it, but who would be the abbot of this new monastery? Would you?"

Berno accepted William's invitation. Ingelberga agreed. With a clearly worded legal charter,³ Cluny's Benedictine monastery

¹ Luke 16:9; exegesis is disputed.

² \$1000 or \$2000 today.

³ See <https://media.bloomsbury.com/rep/files/Primary%20Source%203.4%20-%20Cluny.pdf>

was founded on September 11, AD 910. Berno died in AD 927 and was succeeded by great abbots like Odo and Odilo. Before long, the monastery needed to be enlarged and became known as “Cluny II.” Ingelberga died in AD 917, and William the year after, without a male heir. William’s nephew, William the Younger, inherited the title.

CLUNY ABBEY

Initially, twelve men joined Cluny’s monastery, using the existing facilities. For the salvation of themselves and others, they were wholly devoted to God for an ascetic and anti-worldly life according to the Rule of Benedict. They were strict, and punishments could include harsh physical pain or unrestricted silence. Several notable popes⁴ came from Cluny; they sought to restore the church but continued to propagate Semi-pelagian errors.

People liked the Cluny model, and under its successive abbots as many as 2000 daughter monasteries were established under its abbot’s supervision, each with their own prior, and involving all-told perhaps 10,000 monks. They opposed simony and corruption, insisted on celibacy, and promoted piety among people in general. Indeed, despite the built-in error, the Lord still gathered his church. Yet, as Cluny grew in popularity and size, it also became rich with donations and bequests from people who hoped for their merit*. After Abbot Odo and Abbot Odilo, monks took it easier. They liked their wine and wealth, reduced devotion, and gained weight. Some invented elaborate sign-language to “keep silence.” As pride filled their hearts, they replaced coarse black habits with classier ones. In AD 1131, a massive third Cluny Abbey was completed in stone, with artistic carvings, ancillary buildings, and surrounded by a wall.⁵ It was the largest church anywhere for over 400 years. Yet, even as it was being built, in AD 1098, a stricter monastic order started in Cîteaux, 100 km to the north.

Between AD 1790–1810, during the French Revolution, the abbey was looted, confiscated, and sold for demolition. Only a fraction remains. Cluny had deserted its founding principles, and the revolutionaries especially hated it for its close association with royalty. They wanted “Ni Dieu, Ni maître!”—No God and no Master! Cluny’s founder had cursed its foes, but to them, it had become a curse itself. Today in Canada Benedictine monasticism remains.⁶

Cluny’s remaining south transept tower



In a time of spiritual decline, Cluny represented a reform movement but could not bring full restoration. Its theology was flawed, and, despite occasional revivals, un-Benedictine pursuits prevailed. Error and depravity did not prevent decline and departure from the intended Benedictine holiness. As perceived leaders, they failed and were culpable. During the early sixteenth century Luther, an Augustinian monk, discovered that indulgences, works, and wealth earn no merit for salvation. When he died in AD 1546, one scribbled note found on his desk said, “In truth, we are beggars.” Indeed, salvation is by grace alone through Christ alone, and ours by faith in him alone without merit of our own. God is greater than us and has no need of us and yet out of his own heart sets his undeserved love upon us. The Synod of Dort (AD 1618–1619) refuted both Pelagianism and Semi-pelagianism.⁷ 



Keith Sikkema

Retired Teacher

Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College

sikkemak@gmail.com

⁴ Like Gregory VII (Canossa) and Urban II (First Crusade).

⁵ <https://www.cluny-abbaye.fr/en/discover/history-of-the-abbey-of-cluny>

⁶ See <https://westminsterabbey.ca>

⁷ On total depravity, see Canons of Dort III/IV Art 1–3

CLARION KIDS ASK!

Why do the minister and elder shake hands before and after the church service?

- Lydia, age 9

Hello Lydia,

This is a really good question to ask because the Bible doesn't tell us! When elders in your church shake the minister's hand in the service, they are following a *tradition*—something that has been done for a long time.

Handshakes have a few meanings, like saying hello and showing you are happy to see someone. But we see extra meaning in the handshake between a minister and an elder in church.

In our churches that handshake shows us that the elder, who represents the whole consistory, is giving the minister the authority to preach God's Word. A minister has a very special job, but we should not see him as the "boss" or "ruler." Jesus gives authority to the elders, and they give the minister the special work of preaching sermons and doing baptism and Lord's Supper.

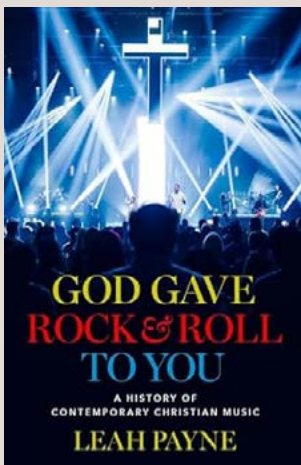
When you see an elder shake the minister's hand in the church service, you can see that he is welcoming the minister to preach that Sunday. Elders make sure the minister is preaching the message of the Bible, not his own opinions. Elders have a big job to do, and one part of their job is to watch over church services to make sure that the church is hearing God's Word.

Thank you for sending in the first question to *Clarion Kids*!

Till next time,

Mrs. Veenendaal

Email your question to editor@clarionmagazine.ca
and watch for the answer here in the *Clarion*!



SOUL MUSIC

God Gave Rock & Roll To You: A History of Contemporary Christian Music, by Leah Payne.
(Oxford University Press, 2024). Hardcover. 241 pages. \$32.95 CDN

I don't imagine Bob Seger was thinking about gospel music in the late 1970s when he sang the refrain, "Still like that old time rock and roll. That kinda music just soothes my soul." However, as Leah Payne details in her most recent book, there was a growing industry of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) at that time which flowered in the late decades of the twentieth century and reached its full bloom in the aughts of the twenty-first century. Payne illustrates how Rock 'n Roll music, which was considered a threat to white evangelical Christianity in the USA, miraculously became embraced as a means to reach the next generation of Americans with scriptural truths, morals, and fuel for faith. The provocative title of the book delicately explores the possibilities of how God could use worldly culture and turn it to his purposes. Perhaps you're raising a *Spockian* eyebrow like me; let me explain further.

EVANGELISM TOOL

If you reared children or grew up in the decades from 1980–2010, you may be familiar with names of music performers like Amy Grant, Michael J. Smith, and possibly if you were a little edgier, Petra and Stryper. These are just some of the names of entertainers who burst onto the scene through the CCM industry that was largely based in the country music capital of Nashville, Tennessee. This growing industry provided a "safe place" for Christian parents and teens to engage the phenomenon of pop music (with music videos) while working within the confines of a Christian ethos. In fact, CCM soon became aligned with church youth group culture as well as right wing political posturing in the US. It found its target market with Christian moms shopping at the loosely networked family Christian bookstores throughout the country which had become giant purveyors of the newly popular compact disc to augment their book sales. While not all of the music was designed for corporate worship, many songs trickled into church liturgies through this enthusiastic next generation. Popular themes of the music had to do with sexual purity, sanctity of life, healthy living (say no to drugs), devotion to the Lord,

and fighting the battle of faith. Contemporary preachers like Billy Graham and Pat Robertson first flinched at this new gospel music with its noisy Fender guitars, but slowly realized that under proper controls, it could be an effective tool for evangelising a generation that was largely adrift as well as provide a potent political influence.

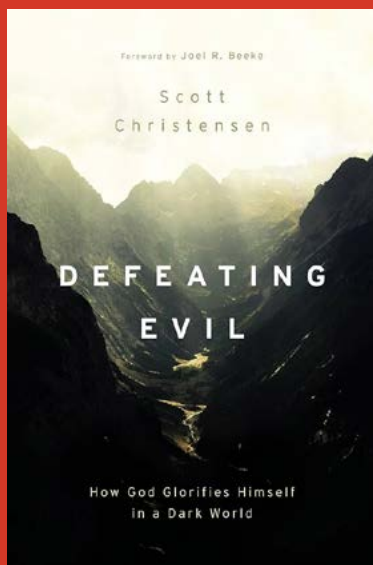
WIDENING STREAM

Payne, who is an Associate Professor of American Religious History at Portland Seminary, does an impressive job of packing this book with details as she traces the history of CCM to the present day. What is fascinating is how this media was managed under the control of CCM as an entity, to effectively cull entertainers who crossed the morality line or opted to venture into the secular mainstream, all the while maintaining their dominant white evangelical bent. This came to a sudden end with the advent of music streaming services which gave the power directly to the purchaser and targeted their tastes through algorithms, cutting out the Christian bookstore middlemen as well as any national borders, and ultimately CCM's content control. This led to the development of a broader multi-national music platform and an increasing charismatic and Pentecostal influence, with a greater emphasis on Zionism, prophetic vision, and end-times theology. This aligned with contemporary writers like Frank Peretti (*This Present Darkness*) and Tim LaHaye (*Left Behind*), as well as with recent American conservative political developments offering an increasingly combative stumping style paired with a religious national fervour.

This is a documentary style book which allows you to draw your own conclusions from the presentation of a wealth of data and analysis. If any of this intrigues you, you will enjoy this book. If not, in the words of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young in their popular ballad, "Carry On." 



Rick Ludwig
Streetlight Christian Church, Hamilton
rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com



WHY DOES GOD ALLOW EVIL TO EXIST?

Defeating Evil: How God Glorifies Himself in a Dark World, by Scott Christensen.
(Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2024). Paperback. 249 pages. \$29.95 CDN.

I love a good book on apologetics (defending the faith) and this one checks almost all the boxes. It deals with one of the biggest challenges to our faith: the problem of evil. Unbelievers will latch on to this as an excuse for rejecting belief in the God of the Bible. They say if God is all-powerful, he should be able to eliminate evil. If he is all-loving, he should want to eliminate evil. But evil exists. So, God, if he does exist, is either not all-powerful or not all-loving. Either way the Christian conception of God loses.

But this problem can also trouble Christians. We believe that God is both all-powerful and all-loving, but there is still evil in the world. So how *can* we make sense of that? As the Creator, could he not have made a world without a fall into sin? Wouldn't that have been better all around? These are tough questions!

If you or someone you love has struggled with these kinds of questions, then this book is a must-read. The author, associate pastor of Kerrville Bible Church in Texas, has adapted and simplified an earlier, more academic work on the same topic. *Defeating Evil* is a book that plumbs the depths but does so in an accessible and readable manner. I commend the author for the way he's been able to chart an easy course through what is really challenging theological terrain.

Christensen compares the different approaches to the problem of evil. He finds the Arminian approach, known as the free-will defence, to be problematic. Instead, he proposes an improvement on what's known as the greater-good defence. The greater-good defence argues that "God brings about greater goods via evil that could not otherwise come about without the evils connected to the emergence of those goods" (p. 218). This is a traditional Reformed answer. But Christensen sharpens it by bringing in the glory of God. Why did the fall into sin happen and evil enter the world? "The panoramic narrative of the Bible tells us that the fall occurred so that the Father would have occasion to put the glory of his grace on full display through the work of the Son's redemption" (p. 105).

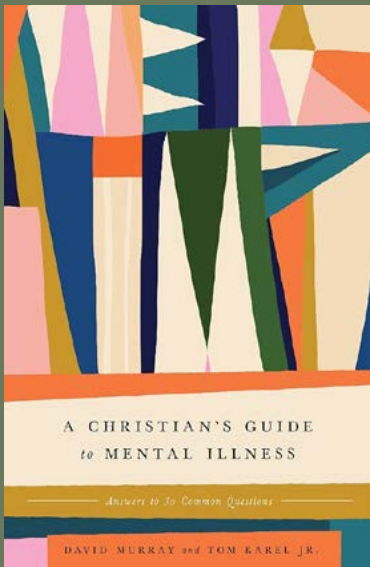
Christensen calls this "the greater-glory theodicy"—a theodicy is an attempt to answer the problem of evil. To learn more details about this, you'll have to get the book and read it for yourself. It's not only fascinating but theologically satisfying.

Earlier I mentioned that *Defeating Evil* checks almost all the boxes. So what's left unchecked? Chapter 8 must be read with discernment. This chapter deals with eschatology, the doctrine of the last things. Sadly, the author contradicts what our Reformed confessions say by promoting a premillennial view. In Christensen's scheme (confirmed by the Doctrinal Statement of his church), Christ returns and establishes his literal millennial kingdom on earth, based in Jerusalem. After the literal 1000 years reign, "the grand conflict of the ages finally unfolds"—Christ battles Satan and wins. This contradicts our confessions (cf. Belgic Confession article 37) where Christ returns, judges the living and the dead, and inaugurates the age to come immediately. I'm rather surprised that P & R Publishing would allow this viewpoint in print, seeing as how their company is committed to only publishing books that align with the Westminster Standards (which premillennialism also contradicts). It also makes me wonder whether Joel Beeke, who wrote the Foreword and called the book "thoroughly Reformed," actually read the entire book.

I can't call it "thoroughly Reformed," but I will call it really helpful in explaining an extremely difficult issue. To enhance its helpfulness, *Defeating Evil* also includes study questions with each chapter. So it could be profitably used for a topical Bible study. However you use it, it will lead you to a better understanding of who God is and what he is doing in this world. 📖



Wes Bredenhof
Minister
Free Reformed Church of Launceston
bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca



A CHRISTIAN'S GUIDE TO MENTAL ILLNESS

A Christian's Guide to Mental Illness: Answers to 30 Common Questions, by David Murray and Tom Karel Jr.. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023). Paperback. 244 pages. \$30.15 CDN.

"Some Christians believe that mental illness is simply a modern idea dreamed up by God-defying psychiatrists, soul-denying psychologists, money-making drug companies, and blame-shifting sinners. Church history says otherwise (as does modern medical research). To give just one example, mental illness was accepted as genuine and treated seriously by some of the greatest Christian experts in soul care that God has ever given to the church—the Puritans. (pp.8–9) "

The above quote from the first chapter of this book really captures its value in addressing ongoing misconceptions about mental illness. When churches and (especially) their leaders don't understand the nature of mental illness, so much harm can be done to those suffering with it.

The authors are uniquely positioned to address the issues. David Murray has written a previous book entitled *Christians Get Depressed Too*. He was previously a professor of practical theology at Puritan Reformed Seminary. He's currently a Christian Reformed pastor in Byron Center, Michigan. His co-author is an elder at a Free Reformed Church in the Grand Rapids area. Tom Karel is also a psychologist at a Christian mental health centre. Together they bring not only pastoral and counseling experience, but also first-hand suffering of mental health struggles. What we get is both compassionate and faithful to the Scriptures.

- What are the thirty questions answered? Here's a selection:
- Is "mental illness" a helpful label?
- How is mental illness different from ordinary sadness, anxiety, and confusion?
- Can a Christian have mental illness?
- What role do mental health professionals have?

- What role does medication have?
- How can we help sufferers in the church?
- How can we help someone who is suicidal?
- What good comes out of mental illness?

At the beginning the authors promise their guide will be "ruthlessly practical." And it is. Every chapter ends with a summary. The summary includes the problem addressed in the chapter, insights offered, and action that can be taken. Every chapter also includes a real-life story of a Christian who has struggled with mental illness.

I appreciated the balanced approach found in *A Christian's Guide to Mental Illness*. The authors acknowledge that spiritual concerns are always in play. Those suffering with mental illness always need spiritual encouragement, and sometimes even admonition. The authors write that "sinful attitudes, desires, and actions can cause or at least contribute to mental illness" (p. 83). However, there are also many cases where the cause of mental illness is related to being human rather than being sinful. Among other things, the authors mention research showing a possible link between autoimmune disorders and psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia.

Even if you've read other books on this topic, I think Murray and Karel have brought a unique perspective in a helpful format. If you know someone with mental illness, I can't recommend it enough. 



Wes Bredenhof
Minister
Free Reformed Church of Launceston
bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca

letter to the EDITOR

Dear Editor,

In the November 2024 issue of *Clarion*, brother Kampen discusses the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC), drawing on information from its official website. However, brother Kampen adds that “the CREC is unlikely to be welcomed at NAPARC because of the view known as Federal Vision, which was promoted by some of the leaders of the CREC.” Notably, the term “Federal Vision” does not appear on the CREC website and is not an officially endorsed belief; many leaders have distanced themselves from it to avoid divisions. We should be careful to dismiss a federation based on this ambiguous association. At the very least, those accused of holding FV views should be allowed to explain their positions.

That said, differing viewpoints on covenant theology and regeneration are not unique to the CREC; I believe the goal behind the FV movement was to clarify covenant membership and foster church unity, albeit imperfectly. I think we can appreciate the desire to bring clarity to this important doctrine.

The CREC is intentionally broad in its confessional unity to allow for paedobaptists, paedocommunionists, credobaptists, and credocommunionists to be united as brothers and sisters in Christ. Brother Kampen finds it striking that the CREC places a high emphasis on clearly defining sex, gender, and marriage, but not paedobaptism; but I would posit that we can and should recognize, for example, Reformed Baptists as faithful Christians; but we absolutely cannot and should not affirm “Christians” who affirm the LGBTQ2+ agenda as brethren in Christ. I think we can also appreciate the CREC’s clear stance on this issue.

Brother Kampen writes, “the CREC is just another example of ecclesiastical entrepreneurship so prevalent in the United States of America.” But I would ask: is it entrepreneurship? Or is it reformation?

Peter Harthoorn
Taber, Alberta

letter to the EDITOR

Dear editor,

Thank you for a great article on children's Bibles, with a solid selection of options including one by Anne de Vries. I still have his *Story Bible for Younger Children* and both volumes of the *Story Bible for Older Children* and they remain some of the best. I wanted to share another excellent one that my mum used when I was a kid. It is *Egermeier's Bible Story Book* by Elsie Egermeier. The subtitle inside is: "A complete narration from Genesis to Revelation for young and old." I can confidently say that I learned from this Bible even as I read it to my own children. This book isn't just a highlight reel; it contains over 300 stories covering the whole Bible in chronological order, with Bible references for each story. I would recommend it for kids 8–14 and even older. Good for family devotions for sure. It's been reprinted and is available from Amazon.

I have one concern with *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. I recently went through the exercise of finding a first children's Bible for my grandson and looked at this one. In the account of creation, which it calls the "song" of creation, God saying "hello" to things to create them comes across as rather casual. I bought *God's Big Promises Bible Storybook* by Carl Laferton instead, which has "God spoke . . . and there was light," etc. The ninety-two stories highlight how God keeps his promises all through the big story of the Bible. Also, as a bonus, the pictures are much less cartoonish (Jesus doesn't look like a bedraggled cat).

Thanks for highlighting the importance of reading Bible stories to our children from a young age. It's the most important habit that our kids can get into, and with God's blessing will lead to a lifetime of Bible-reading.

Marianne van der Ahé
Edmonton

