VOLUME 75 ISSUE 12 SEPTEMBER 18, 2026

Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE | TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

Why Children Need Godly Teaching
Naeem Zafar

The Incomprehensibility of God
Jeff Morris

Tamar: When God Breaks Through the Darkness
Georǵe van Popta

What's Inside

While our editor-in-chief enjoys his summer break, the undersigned is filling in for this issue. We start off with an editorial by Calvin Vanderlinde which makes us think about projecting Bible readings on screens. While this may be convenient and user friendly, are there unintended negative consequences? Arjen Vreugdenhil's contribution in *Treasures, New and Old*, causes us to reflect on our readiness for the coming visit of our King, Jesus Christ.

As this issue of *Clarion* will arrive shortly after a new school year has begun, there is a helpful article by Rob Schouten on how to guide our children in dealing with success and failures, followed by an article by Naeem Zafar on the importance of educating our children in the way of the Lord.

An article by Jeff Morris on the incomprehensibility of God will delight those who like something theological to chew on. It sets the stage for an article by George van Popta on Tamar, an example of God's gracious, incomprehensible ways.

The readers of *Clarion* may remember hearing the name of Robin Martens, a former Baptist pastor who has been drawn to the Reformed faith. An article by Ilse Vandermeulen gives insight into his spiritual journey. It is followed by an article by Robin Martens himself on the Sermon on the Mount.

Calvin Vanderlinde also highlights the American branch of our spiritual family tree, and you will find the final installment of the *Churches Outside the PARC* series, dealing with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. Jan DeGelder has another instructive article relating to Church Government, this time dealing with the question of equality among office bearers.

While the rays of summer are getting less each day, you will find a double dose of *Rays of Sunshine* featuring brothers and sisters with special needs. Finally, there is a book review by Rick Ludwig about the art of disagreeing, a fitting conclusion to the variety of articles which inevitably will lead to a variety of responses and so a lively discussion of opinions.

All in all, a varied reading menu to satisfy various tastes and interests! While we might right away head for our favourites, why not try something different as well? All the items on this menu are included in the price!

Eric Kampen

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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 Holtvlüwer
E: *editorinchief@clarionmagazine.ca*
Managing Editor: Anna Nienhuis
Contributing Editors: Eric Kampen, Jason Van Vliet, Matthew VanLuik, Calvin Vanderlinde

CONTENT INQUIRIES

E: *editor@clarionmagazine.ca*

ADMINISTRATIVE INQUIRIES

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

ARCHIVE

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Canada	$ 59	$ 104
USA (USD)	$ 74	$ 134
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Disappearing Bibles

The title of this editorial could suggest a variety of things. Rather innocuously, it could refer to lost or misplaced Bibles. To be sure, that would be a low-scale crisis. Less innocently, it could allude to the intrusive attempts of governing authorities to ban and confiscate Bibles or remove references to the Bible in the public sphere or deem the Bible, or portions thereof, as hate literature. On another level, and no less alarming, is the quiet disappearance of the Bible in Christian homes where the Bible is neglected or read only sporadically and briefly, representing a fading religious devotion. Even more subtle, however, is the regrettable trend among *churches* to make the Bible disappear.

Of course, there has been no decree to this effect, and no malevolent plot has been hatched by church leaders. It happens almost imperceptibly and with little scrutiny that a church decides, for the sake of convenience and being visitor-friendly, to project the Bible reading on a screen or wall. It seems wholesome and accessible, saves time and perhaps cost, and alleviates the desperate search for those pesky shorter, lesser-known Bible books. And if technology fails, physical Bibles can remain on hand in the pews as back up.

SCREENING THE SCREENS

But some questions must be asked and meditated upon by any church contemplating such a switch to screen-based Bible reading. Are there any practices or disciplines that this use of technology will inadvertently displace? Will such a switch automate or outsource responsibilities that congregants should be expected to learn and cultivate? What might we lose or tacitly encourage others to lose, forget, or marginalize, if we move away from physical Bibles in the direction of digital forms? When we consider these questions, we discern a few unforeseen and unintended consequences.

TRANSIENCE

When a Bible reading is projected on a screen or wall, it is presented only for a moment. With a longer passage of Scripture, the latter part will even "erase" earlier parts as the screen needs to be renewed. Once the designated passage is read, it disappears, perhaps being replaced by the sermon points or the next song in the liturgy. The message that is conveyed subliminally is that the Word of God is transient and temporary and for quick consumption, when it is, in fact, the opposite: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isa 40:6). "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Screens send a very contradictory message.

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

Personal responsibility and a sense of ownership also suffer. When a Bible passage is projected, people become passive observers rather than active participants in the worship service. There is less interaction when there is no turning of pages, underlining phrases, or notes written in margins which can be revisited during the week.

Biblical literacy also suffers as screens shortchange the development of the mental map of the Bible needed to locate passages and understand them in their context. A screen simply cannot present the Bible in the context of a canon—a library of books—but instead presents it as isolated, disparate fragments. The Bible is seen just as "the verses on the screen" instead of something that invites personal engagement. With all this comes a loss of familiarity, trust, and strong connection to God's Word. One will no longer use possessive pronouns to speak of "my Bible" or "your Bible."

A physical Bible, on the other hand, invites reflection and allows for more thoughtful and prolonged meditation on a passage without distraction. It also sets a good pattern for making disciples as children see the adults around them engaging with the text. They will learn from them what matters, not just from what is said but from what is done. Some things are easier caught than taught.

PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

In the second petition of the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Your kingdom come." The Catechism explains this means, in part, that we ask God to "destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against you, and every conspiracy against your holy Word." Does that not include any effort to sideline or undermine God's Word, intentionally or unintentionally?

Thankfully, the trend is reversible. The move from disappearing Bibles to reappearing Bibles involves more than just a simple switch of prefixes, but where there is a will there is a way to a healthier church practice.

Calvin Vanderlinde
Minister
Nooksack Valley American Reformed Church
calvinvanderlinde@gmail.com

Visited by the King

"God has visited his people!" — Luke 7:16

What an excitement there is in town when the king comes for a visit! Just for him to show up is an honour. It makes you feel that he cares about you. In ancient times, a king would not just come for a parade, but he would also take care of things. He would hold court. He could see for himself the suffering of the poor and the corruption of the rich and do something about it. The visit of a good king meant hope for justice and betterment of life.

That is the picture to keep in mind when the Bible speaks about God "visiting" his people. The Hebrew word used here implies justice, punishment for the wicked, relief for the innocent. It is why old Zechariah was so joyful in his song: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has *visited* his people and brought them redemption!" (Luke 1:68). That was the hope of sincere believers.

In Luke 7, we see Jesus hard at work, proclaiming the gospel, healing the sick, and even raising from the dead the son of the widow in Nain. The crowds of onlookers finally understand, finally draw the necessary conclusion: this man is a very special prophet. In fact, God has *visited* his people!

They spoke the truth. The coming of Jesus Christ was so profound that, long after he had ascended into heaven, the church needed decades to put it all together. He was so much more than a miracle worker. He was the great Son of David. He was the promised Son of Man. He was the Messiah. He was the Son of God, in a more literal sense than anyone could have imagined. He himself was God, and still is God, who assumed our human flesh.

God has visited his people. The King has come! This is the best news for everyone, except those who are wicked and refuse to submit to him. The miracles of healing and raising from the dead were but a small beginning. With the Lord Jesus walking around and showing all these signs, could anyone still doubt that the Kingdom of God had finally arrived and that justice would finally be administered?

Sadly, the crowd in Jesus's time did not keep their excitement. Perhaps they believed it was too good to be true. Maybe they thought that the coming of God's Kingdom should look different; we read in Luke 7 that even John the Baptist struggled with this. While the crowds enjoyed watching Jesus's wonderful signs, they did not really care for his teachings about the Kingdom of God. God was indeed visiting his people, but most people did not listen. His message offended them.

What is your expectation? Even today, the Lord is visiting his people. He comes with the same message. His Word and his Holy Spirit tell us the same things he did in person 2000 years ago—that the way of salvation is only through Jesus Christ. That faith takes the shape of humility, self-denial, meekness, and love to all people. That the Kingdom of God grows, not by any of our social or cultural accomplishments, but by people repenting and confessing Jesus Christ.

Our confession of faith is not that different from what the crowds in Luke 7 whispered so excitedly. "God has come to visit his people!" How does this take shape in your life? Pray that the Holy Spirit may give us the faith to submit to him and to celebrate the King in all humility and submission. Then you may also receive the Lord's blessing in verse 23: "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

FURTHER READING:

Luke 7

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Study the word "visit" in the Old Testament, especially in the prophetic books. A few verses to start with: Gen 50:25; Ex 20:5; Ruth 1:6; Ps 8:4, 80:14; Is 26:21; Jer 5:9; 27:22; Zec 10:3.
2. In Luke 7:1–10, we read about the healing of the servant of a Roman centurion. It concludes with Jesus saying: "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." What did the centurion understand that the crowd of Israelites didn't?
3. In Luke 7:36–50, Jesus has dinner with a Pharisee called Simon, perhaps because this man was intrigued by the rumors about him. What elements in this event illustrate why people ended up taking offence at our Lord?
4. Can you identify ways in which your expectation of God "visiting" his people was/is different from the way his Kingdom actually works?
5. 1 Peter 2:12 mentions a "day of visitation". What is that day? How is it similar, and how is it dissimilar from the time the Son of God "visited" his people 2000 years ago?

Rev. Arjen Vreugdenhil

Minister
Eben-Ezer Canadian Reformed Church, Chatham
pastorarjen@gmail.com

The Weight of Our Children's Successes & Failures

ROB SCHOUTEN

One of the more striking features of contemporary culture is how openly it celebrates success. Achievements are shared, compared, and amplified on social media. Accomplishments travel quickly and gain recognition. Against that backdrop, it is hardly surprising that parents today speak and share readily about their children's successes—their grades, athletic talents, or future promise.

What is surprising is how easily this habit has taken root in church communities. Christians confess their dependence on God and prize humility. Yet we often mirror the broader culture, sharing our children's accomplishments with the same ease and enthusiasm.

FROM GIFTS RECEIVED TO RESULTS DISPLAYED

When parents regularly highlight accomplishments, a subtle shift can occur. Conversation moves from gratitude for the child God has made and the gifts he has given, to showcasing what that child has done. The emphasis drifts from gift to performance, from what is received to what is achieved.

Over time, children can become barometers of parental self-worth. When a child excels, parents feel buoyed. When a child struggles, parents may feel unsettled or diminished. A child's performance begins to shape a parent's sense of success or failure.

One of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is freedom from the need to be exceptional.

Youth sports are one area that makes this pattern visible. Sports can be deeply positive, fostering health, discipline, and teamwork. However, when the emotional tone of the home rises and falls with wins and losses, children learn what matters. A victory lifts everyone. A loss casts a shadow over the drive home.

Academics can function in similar ways. Grades and honours deserve acknowledgment. Yet, when report cards determine the emotional climate of the home, children learn that outcomes matter more than effort, and that approval is most readily available when results are impressive.

Even the life of faith is not immune. Parents may draw attention to a child's insight, seriousness, or moral clarity. These are genuine gifts of grace. But when a child's spiritual maturity becomes a point of comparison—when stories are told to emphasize how thoughtful or devoted one child is relative to others—faith itself becomes another arena of performance. Children notice which stories are repeated and which traits draw adult attention.

WHEN PRAISE BECOMES PRESSURE

Praise and encouragement are necessary. Children need to know their efforts are seen and that faithfulness matters. The problem is not praise itself, but praise that is tied to outcomes or is conditional on success.

When praise focuses on results or fixed traits—being "smart," "gifted," or "naturally talented"—children begin to associate approval with performance. Success brings affirmation; failure threatens it. Worth starts to feel earned rather than received from God. The child learns that having impressive achievements matters more than being faithful.

Research in child development has shown how this kind of praise shapes the way children approach challenge and failure. Children praised primarily for innate ability tend to become more cautious. They are more likely to avoid difficult tasks and respond poorly when they struggle. By contrast, children praised for effort, persistence, and wise choices are more willing to face challenges and recover from setbacks. Difficulty becomes part of growth rather than a verdict on their worth.[1]

None of this requires parents to withhold joy when their children do well. When a child masters difficult material, wins a hard-fought competition, or produces excellent work, joy is the right response. The question is what we celebrate and how.

[1] Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2006), esp. chapters 3–4; see also Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, *NurtureShock* (New York: Twelve, 2009), chapter 1.

Consider a student for whom math comes easily. The ability is real, and the delight in understanding is good. Parents rightly share that joy. The risk comes when celebration settles on "you're so smart" or "you're a natural." Then the child learns that their value lies in being exceptional and that struggle or setback would mean something has gone wrong.

Gifts should be acknowledged without being allowed to define a child. A parent might say, "This material comes easily to you—that's wonderful. Let's find some problems that will really make you think." Or, instead of magnifying outcomes, they might point toward growth: "I wonder what other math challenges you'll be able to tackle someday." In both cases, the gift is recognized, but the child is invited into perseverance rather than performance.

The same is true in athletics. A win can be celebrated not only for the outcome, but for the discipline, teamwork, and character it required. Doing so teaches children that who they are and how they grow matters more than the scoreboard.

PREPARING CHILDREN FOR ORDINARY FAITHFULNESS

One of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is freedom from the need to be exceptional. That freedom grows when effort is praised without becoming an identity, when losses are met with steadiness rather than anxiety, and when children are reminded—by word and tone—that their place in the family, and before God, rests on grace, not results.

Freedom also grows when achievement is noted but character, kindness, and perseverance are celebrated just as much. It grows when a child who excels easily is guided toward challenges worthy of struggle, and when children see their parents respond to their own failures with honesty and grace.

In a culture that measures worth by success, refusing to measure children this way may seem strange. Yet, it is one way that Christian homes can bear witness to another kingdom—one where faithfulness matters more than applause, and where children are cherished not for what they achieve, but for who they are in Christ.

Rob Schouten
Minister
Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church
robert.a.schouten@proton.me

Signs of misplaced praise

1. **The mood of the home tracks results.**
   Joy follows wins or high grades; tension or silence follows setbacks. Children learn what matters by what changes the emotional temperature.

2. **Talent is praised more than effort.**
   "You're a natural" is heard more often than "You worked hard at that." Worth becomes tied to gifts beyond the child's control.

3. **Setbacks are met with excuses rather than reflection.**
   Poor results prompt complaints about fairness instead of questions about growth.

4. **Comparisons creep in.**
   Children are measured against siblings or peers, making it harder to appreciate their own gifts or celebrate others.

5. **Quiet faithfulness goes unseen.**
   Steady effort, ordinary responsibilities, and perseverance receive little notice.

6. **Achievement dominates conversation.**
   Scores, rankings, and outcomes crowd out a child's inner life—their struggles, questions, and everyday joys.

WHY CHILDREN NEED GODLY TEACHING

NAEEM ZAFAR

Understanding why we teach and guide our children in God's Word is essential. As Christian parents, pastors, teachers, and church leaders, God has entrusted us with the responsibility of raising children who know him, love him, and walk in his truth. Our calling is not simply to educate children but to disciple them.

The Bible tells us that Jesus "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). This verse provides God's pattern for the spiritual, moral, and personal development of every child.

DESIRING GOD

The Bible records very little about Jesus's childhood. Apart from his birth and early years, Scripture highlights one important event when Jesus was twelve years old. When his parents had taken him to Jerusalem to worship, they noticed

on the way home that he was no longer with them. After his parents searched for three days, "they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46).

This moment is significant. Around this age, children begin to understand responsibility, right and wrong, and the seriousness of obedience. Jesus was not truly lost as his family thought. He was exactly where he desired to be, in his Father's house. His heart was already directed toward God's purposes.

This teaches us the importance of guiding children early in life so that their hearts begin to desire God's truth, God's presence, and God's ways.

Children enter the world without the knowledge of God's Word. Without biblical instruction, they can easily become influenced, confused, and misled by the values of the world. God warns through the prophet Hosea that "my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6). A child who lacks biblical knowledge is at risk of becoming spiritually lost among the voices and influences of society. Teaching Scripture to our children is not optional; it is essential. God's Word establishes a child's identity, shapes wise decisions, and provides the direction needed to walk faithfully throughout life.

JESUS'S OBEDIENCE

When Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple, no doubt incredibly relieved after three days of searching, he asks them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). Jesus was not being disrespectful or rebellious. Rather, he revealed that the calling of God rested upon his life even from childhood.

Yet, despite his divine mission, Jesus continued to honour his earthly parents. "Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them" (Luke 2:51). Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's commandment to honour his father and mother while remaining completely devoted to his heavenly Father. His life demonstrates the perfect balance: honoring earthly parents while loving and obeying God above all.

RAISING CHILDREN IN GOD'S WORD

The aim of Christian parents, pastors, and teachers should be to raise a righteous generation, a generation that knows the Lord, obeys his Word, and walks faithfully in his truth. God has shown us through Jesus Christ how to live a life of holiness, humility, love, and obedience. While the cross stands at the center of our salvation, the entire life of Jesus reveals how believers are to live.

Every event recorded in Scripture is intentional. Everything God has written serves his purpose of teaching us his will and guiding his people into truth. Therefore, parents and church leaders must faithfully teach God's Word to the next generation. As Scripture says: "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6).

WHAT EVERY CHILD TRULY NEEDS

A child does not primarily need worldly wealth, success, or fame. A child needs a life shaped by the will and ways of God. Jesus himself declared: "For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38).

Through Adam, sin entered the world. Through Jesus Christ, salvation came to all who believe. Because human nature has been corrupted by sin, every person must be born again through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us a new heart, a heart that loves God, delights in his Word, and desires to obey him. It is this rebirth we pray for in our children because we know from Jesus that "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Children are not only the future of the Church, they are souls entrusted to us by God. Their greatest need is not education, financial success, or opportunity, but a heart transformed by Jesus Christ and grounded in the truth of God's Word. Jesus himself demonstrated the pattern every child should follow, growing in wisdom, living in obedience, honouring his parents, seeking his Father's will, and increasing in favour with God and with people.

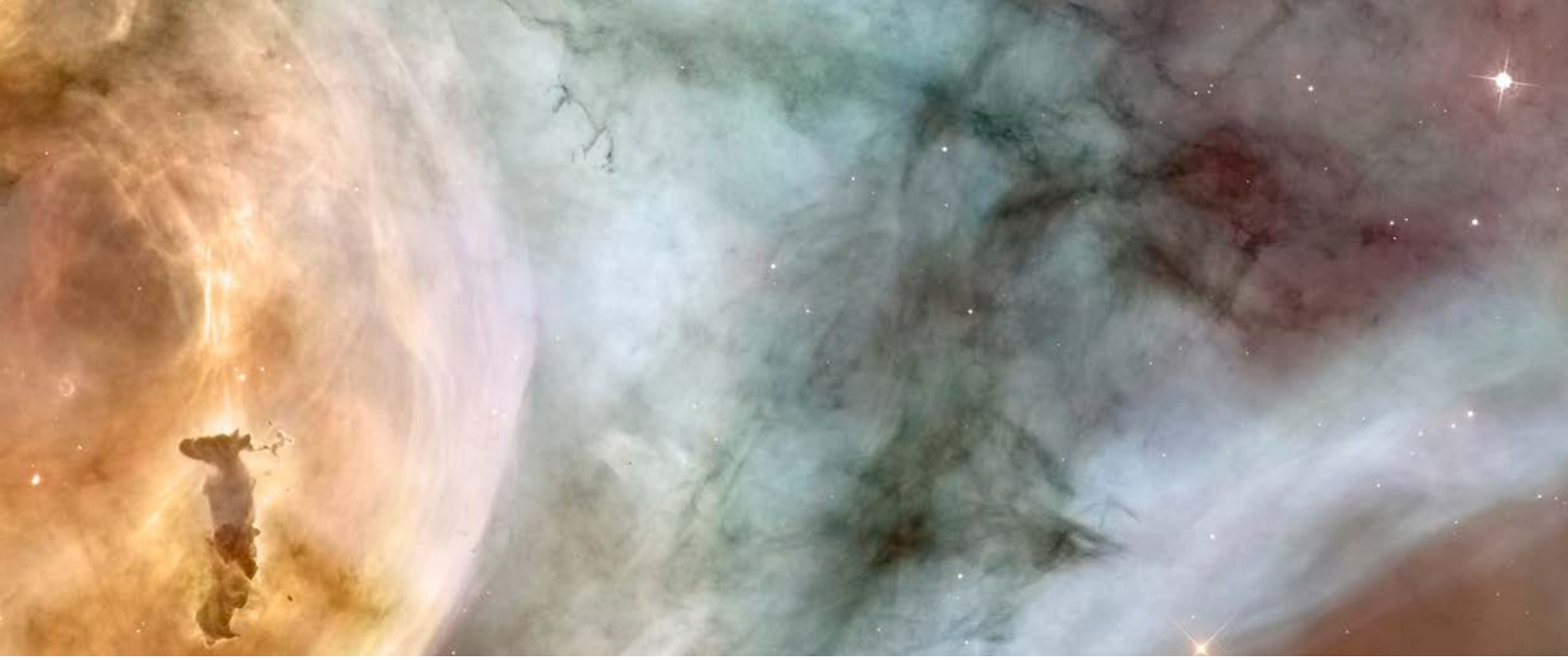
CALLING AND VISION

The responsibility of Christian parents, pastors, teachers, and leaders is therefore clear. We are called to teach children the Scriptures from an early age so that they come to know the Lord, understand the good news that is the gospel, recognize their need for salvation through Jesus Christ, and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. As they are rooted in God's truth, they will be prepared to stand firm in a world filled with confusion and deception.

The vision is to build a generation firmly established upon the Word of God, a generation that reflects the character of Christ, lives according to his commands, proclaims the gospel, and glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ through their lives. By faithfully teaching God's Word today, we invest in the kingdom of God for generations to come. The question is: are we faithfully investing in the next generation according to God's Word, so they can see what truly matters? C

Naeem Zafar

Founder & Chairman, Christ for all Ministry Canada
Langley Canadian Reformed Church



The Incomprehensibility of God

A systematic way to grow in our knowledge of God is to reflect on his attributes. God's attributes include his necessity, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence and many others. In this brief article we will reflect on God's attribute of incomprehensibility. First, with the help of Scripture, we will see that there is an inscrutable difference between God and created reality. Second, we will uncover the problem this raises for our knowledge of God, and review two possible solutions. Third, we will learn how God himself solves this problem.

CREATOR/CREATURE DISTINCTION

It is not difficult to recognize that there is an unfathomable difference between God and human beings. By his will, God creates matter out of nothing. He determines the laws of physics that govern the universe. He is beyond space and yet he is omnipresent. He is beyond time and yet knows everything about how our time-bound reality will unfold.

Humans, on the other hand, are made from matter. We are totally constrained by the laws of physics, and we are confined to space and time. We exist in one tiny location for a momentary flash and our knowledge is often feeble, mistaken, and weak.

Scripture refers to the gap between God and humans on many occasions. The psalmist writes, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable" (Ps 145:3). Through Isaiah, God declares "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is 55:8–9; see also 1 Tim 6:15–16; Is 40:18–28; Rom 11:33–36).

Since the early church, theologians have recognized the inscrutable distance between God and humans, concluding that God is incomprehensible. That God is incomprehensible means that his essence is beyond the comprehension of created things, including even rational beings such as humans and angels. As such, the only one who truly knows God is God himself.

Herman Bavinck summarizes this view when he writes, "Between him and us there seems to be no such kinship or communion as would enable us to name him truthfully. The distance between God and us is the gulf between the Infinite and the finite, between eternity and time, between being and becoming, between the All and the nothing."

PROBLEM AND SOLUTIONS

Of course, if God is incomprehensible this immediately implies a serious problem for our knowledge of God. As Christians, we say that God is our Father, that God loves us, that he disciplines us, that he sent his Son to die for us. But if, as Bavinck suggests, God is infinitely beyond the powers of the human mind, how can we ever grasp God enough to confidently say anything truthful about him?

For centuries, theologians have wrestled over this problem and developed several possible solutions. Dionysius argued that, while God is beyond all human knowledge, we can at least say negative things about him. That is, we can say what God is *not*. For example, we can say that God is not material, God is not in time, and God is not finite.

Importantly, by saying what God is not, we implicitly learn something about who God *is*. If God is not material, he is immaterial. If he is not in time, he is timeless. If he is not finite, he is infinite. This is called apophatic theology, from the Greek term ἀποφασις which means "deny," or "negation."

Others, such as Thomas Aquinas, argued that we can speak positively about God, but in an analogical, or comparative, way. Aquinas argues that all our knowledge is derived from this created reality. Of course, God transcends this reality which seems to imply that we cannot say anything true about God. Still, argues Aquinas, that God transcends this reality does not stop us from saying true things about God in an analogical way.

For example, Scripture teaches that God is wise. While it is impossible for us to grasp God's infinite wisdom, we know what it means for a human to be wise. Since wisdom is a perfection and God is perfect, there must be some resemblance between human wisdom and God's wisdom. We can say the same about God being loving, kind, just, righteous, and so on. Still, we cannot say that God is wise in the same way that Solomon was wise because, for all of Solomon's wisdom, God is infinitely wiser.

So, for Aquinas, while we have an idea of what it means for God to be wise because we know what it is for created things to be wise, we must add that God is wise according to the proportion of his being. Since God's being is infinite, God is wise to an infinite degree. Of course, it is not possible for us to grasp what it means for a being to be infinitely wise, so while analogical knowledge of God is possible, actual knowledge is out of reach and God remains incomprehensible.

GOD'S SOLUTION

While we cannot deny the unfathomable gap between God and his creation, other theologians, such as T.F. Torrance, exhort us to recognize that God gave us a solution to this problem in Jesus Christ. The immaterial, timeless, infinite God who is beyond all created reality planned for eternity to share the abundance of his love by creating humans after his image. And he knew that because of his transcendent nature, we would never quite grasp him.

However, God created us so that we would only be satisfied by coming to know him. So he also planned to bridge the chasm between the awesome glory of his infinite being with our mutable finite reality by becoming incarnate as Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ does not just tell us what God is like, but he is God. As the apostle Paul writes "he is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). Likewise, the Author of Hebrews states that Jesus "is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3).

It is important to understand that when Scripture says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God and the exact imprint of his nature, it does not teach that Jesus resembles God, or is a picture of God, as though Jesus is like a landscape painting that is separate from the landscape it represents. Rather, Jesus *is* God among us: God seen with human eyes and touched by human hands (1 Jn 1:1).

The apostle John helps us understand the dramatic immediacy of our knowledge of God through Christ. John refers to the preincarnate Christ as "the Word who was God." Words have to do with intelligibility, so there is an intelligibly to God which is known by God. This is "the Word". And this Word who is God, the intelligibility of God, is the one who became incarnate as Jesus Christ.

In other words, Jesus Christ is not a picture that represents God, nor does he reveal a word about God, but he is the very Word who is God in the flesh. The intelligibility of God entered our created reality and dwelt among us as Jesus Christ, making God known to the created order.

While we do not have direct access to God's essence, God is not incomprehensible to us insofar as we fix our eyes on the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

SIGNIFICANCE

What is the significance of God's Word, the intelligibility of God, crossing the chasm of the infinite into the finite for our knowledge of God? It means that God is no longer incomprehensible to us, for as far as we observe Jesus's actions and listen to his teaching, we observe and listen to God.

Jesus himself teaches us this when he says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves" (Jn 14:9–11). And in John 10:30, Jesus declares, "I and the Father are one."

Jesus is the intelligibility of God on public display for all to see and hear. And what does Jesus teach us about God? Jesus heals the sick, raises the dead, and calms the sea, showing us that God has direct mastery over creation. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for failing to grasp the spirit of the law and promoting religious legalism, so we know that God despises religious hypocrisy. Jesus teaches that the weeds will be separated from the wheat, teaching us that God is actively aware of injustice and will eventually judge the nations. Jesus also washed his disciples' feet, demonstrating God's selfless love. He visited the prostitute and tax collector, teaching us that God is kind, humble, and selfless. And when he allowed weak, foolish, wicked humans to crucify him on the cross, he forgives those same people, displaying God's overflowing love, mercy, and faithfulness toward the fallen humans he made.

So, while we do not have direct access to God's essence, God is not incomprehensible to us insofar as we fix our eyes on the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Jeff Morris

Theologian for the Reformation Study Centre, & Adjunct Professor in Philosophy at Redeemer University

Streetlight Christian Church, Hamilton

jeffbmorris@hotmail.com

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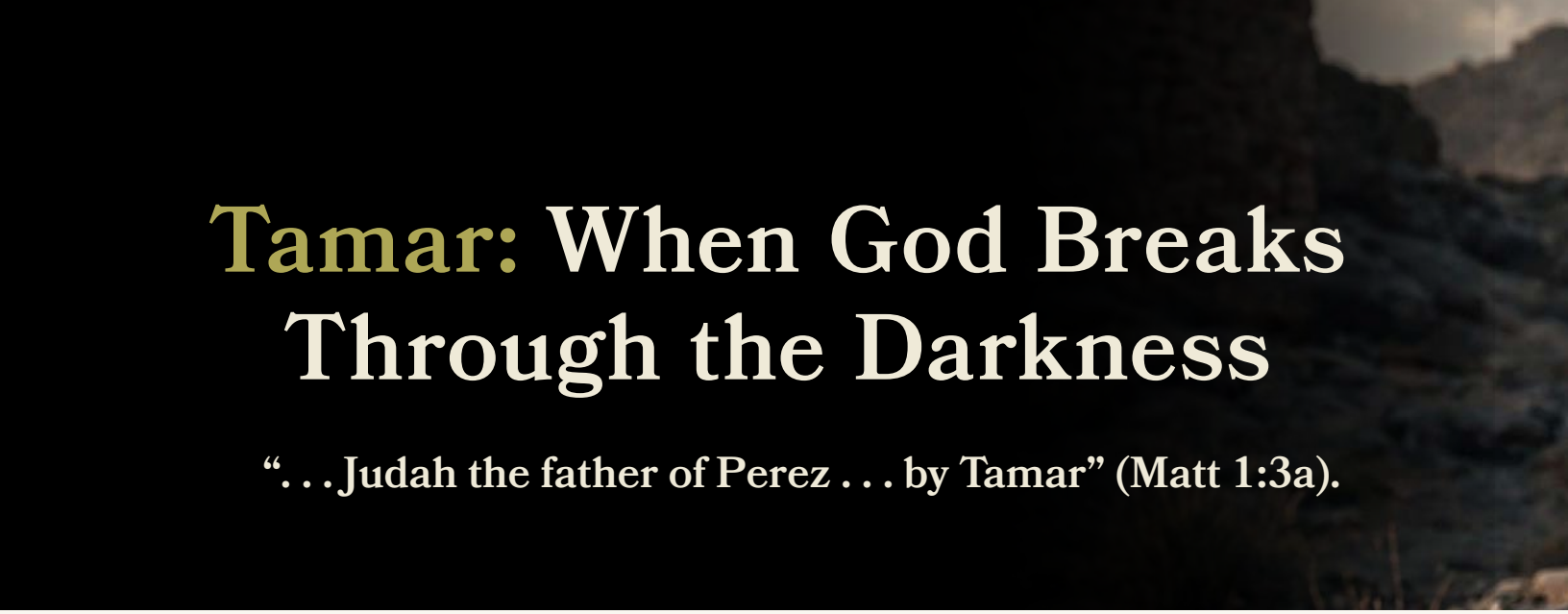


Tamar: When God Breaks Through the Darkness

"...Judah the father of Perez . . . by Tamar" (Matt 1:3a).

Editor's note: This is the first in a five-part series looking at the women in the genealogy of Jesus.

Matthew opens his gospel not with angels or shepherds but with a genealogy—a long, deliberate chain of names stretching from Abraham to Jesus Christ. While it may not capture the attention like a story, it is not a sterile list. It is a doorway into the drama of redemption. Every name carries a story, a wound, a promise. And among the list of fathers, Matthew includes five mothers.

The first mother listed by Matthew is Tamar. Her story is anything but tidy. It is tangled with grief, injustice, sin, and a shocking twist of providence. Yet it is precisely through this darkness that God presses his promise forward. Genesis 38 records the story.

JUDAH'S DESCENT

Tamar's story begins with Judah, the man whose name means "I will praise the LORD." Yet the first thing we see him do is walk away from the place where the LORD was praised. He leaves Hebron, the home of the patriarchs, the heart of the covenant family. He steps out of the circle of promise and into the world of Canaan. The move looks harmless. But spiritually, it is catastrophic.

Judah settles among the Canaanites. He befriends a man named Hirah, marries a Canaanite woman, and raises three sons in a culture steeped in idolatry. Outwardly, everything he does prospers—flocks, household, and reputation—but beneath the surface, rot spreads.

Judah finds a wife for his firstborn, Er—a Canaanite woman named Tamar. Soon after the marriage, Er is struck down by the LORD for deep wickedness. Tamar becomes a widow.

According to ancient custom, later codified in Mosaic law, the next brother in the family was to marry the widow to raise up offspring for the deceased. Judah instructs Onan to fulfil this duty. Onan takes Tamar as his wife but refuses to give her a child. He uses her body while denying her justice. The LORD judges him for this, and he too dies.

Only Shelah remains, but he is young. Judah promises Tamar that Shelah will be hers when he grows up, but fear grips him. He blames Tamar for the deaths of his sons. He sends her back to her father's house. This is a humiliating exile, a life in limbo. Because she belongs to Judah's household, she cannot marry anyone else. Her future is locked behind Judah's broken promise.

Years pass. Shelah grows up. Judah's wife dies. Judah's line—the line through which God promised a King—shrivels. The royal tribe is collapsing. The branch looks dead. But God is not finished.

TAMAR'S RESOLVE

Tamar eventually sees the truth: Judah will never give her to Shelah. She has been wronged, abandoned, forgotten. Yet she knows her covenant rights. She had been chosen to bear the heir of Judah's firstborn. The continuation of Judah's line rests on her.

Then she hears the news: Judah is going to Timnah for sheep-shearing,a season known for feasting, drinking, and ritualized sexual indulgence. Tamar knows Judah. She knows his weaknesses. She knows this is the moment.

Tamar removes her widow's garments. She veils herself as a cult prostitute and waits alongside the road. This is not rebellion. It is not lust. It is a desperate act of justice, a fierce determination, however dimly she understood it, to preserve the line through which God promised a King.

Judah sees her. Lust blinds him. He does not recognize her. They agree on a price for her services: a young goat. Tamar asks for a pledge until payment arrives: his seal, the cord from which it hangs, and his staff. This is his identity, his authority, his power.

Judah hands them over. In doing so, he symbolically hands over the very markers of who he is. He sinks fully into the Canaanite world he has embraced.

Tamar returns home from the encounter, resumes her widow's garments, and soon knows she is pregnant. When Judah later sends Hirah with the goat as payment for the prostitute, the woman cannot be found. Embarrassed, Judah lets the matter drop and counts his pledge as lost. He thinks the incident is buried, but God is about to expose everything.

MOMENT OF RECKONING

Three months later, Judah receives the report: "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution. She is pregnant."

The hypocrisy Judah immediately displays is staggering. The man who slept with a prostitute now burns with self-righteous fury. "Bring her out," he commands, "and burn her."

Tamar is dragged out to die. But she carries evidence: Judah's seal, cord, and staff. She sends them to him with a single message: "I am pregnant by the man who owns these."

Silence.

Judah's face drains of colour.

His sin, his hypocrisy, his injustice are all exposed.

"She is more righteous than I," he confesses, "since I would not give her to my son Shelah."

The Canaanite woman has shown more covenant faithfulness than the covenant man. And in that moment, something remarkable happens: Tamar becomes the instrument through which God pulls Judah back from the darkness he embraced. She reaches down to where he has fallen, and through her courageous act, the Lord restores Judah to the place he was meant to stand. Judah's house, collapsing under sin, is rebuilt by grace. Tamar, foreshadowing what Christ would do!

Later, in Egypt, when Joseph's brothers stand before the prime minister of the land, it is Judah who steps forward as the leader he was always meant to be. The man who once descended into Canaanite darkness now offers himself as a substitute for Benjamin. Grace has done its work. Judah, foreshadowing what Christ would do!

THE BREAKTHROUGH OF GOD

Tamar gives birth to twins. During the delivery, one child thrusts out a hand, and the midwife ties a scarlet thread around his wrist. But he draws back, and his brother bursts out first.

"So this is how you have broken out!" she cries. He is named Perez, "the one who breaks through."

What a name. What a moment. What a God.

Through Perez, God breaks through Judah's wickedness. He breaks through Tamar's suffering. He breaks through Satan's schemes. He breaks through human sin, human failure, human darkness. He breaks through to carry forward the promise of a Saviour. Perez becomes the ancestor of David. David becomes the ancestor of Christ. Christ becomes the Saviour of the world.

Judah's line should have died. Tamar should have been forgotten. The promise should have collapsed. But God is faithful. He keeps his word. He moves history forward even when his people stumble. He breaks through the darkness with sovereign grace and he does it through Tamar, a wronged woman, a courageous seeker of justice, an unexpected instrument of redemption, the mother of the Messiah.

George van Popta

Minister Emeritus
Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church, Ottawa
gvanpopta@gmail.com

A REFORMATION JOURNEY:

Pastor Robin Martens

Robin Martens's (55) story reflects a journey of steady reformation of heart, doctrine, and practice. From Baptist ministry to confessional Reformed convictions, Martens now seeks to serve Christ as a minister within the United Reformed Churches of North America or the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

Robin Martens grew up on his grandfather's ranch and dairy farm in Vanderhoof, British Columbia. "While it was a great blessing," he shares, "my family was far from the Lord. Yet, by God's grace, I was converted to Christ in 1991 at age 21. I was baptized and became a member of a church in the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada, where I remained for more than 30 years as a member and about 27 years as a pastor." Robin also met his wife, Leanne, in the Baptist church, and together they have five adult children who are walking with the Lord.

ENTERING THE MINISTRY

In preparation for ministry, Martens completed a Bachelor's degree in pastoral theology through Northwest Baptist Theological College, including classical languages, followed by a Master's degree in theological studies with an apologetics track through what is now called the Northwest Baptist College and Seminary.

Since 1997, Martens has served in a variety of roles: assistant pastor, associate pastor, lead pastor, and church planter. However, he gradually became uneasy with the direction of the churches he

was serving. "The Baptist church where I became a member was traditional Calvinistic," he says. "However, I found myself in a spiritual quandary, earnestly searching for firmer biblical and theological footing as my previous denomination was slowly shifting in perspective and practice."

A SHIFTING FEDERATION

What had seemed like a good idea—to engage the culture and become more missional—gradually resulted in a subtle erosion of truth, leaving Pastor Martens increasingly unsettled.

"Books from the business world were brought in to reshape the church," he explains. "The gospel was still preached, but pragmatism became so prevalent. You need to be able to explain who God is to new believers, but the theology became very thin."

His effort to bring expositional preaching back to the center of church life were met with pushback. He also feared that the next generation of ministers and leaders, particularly in Western Canada, would continue this trajectory even further.

It was a difficult season for Pastor Martens and his family. "The Baptist church was all I knew. My wife, her family, and all of our friends were part of it."

Pastor Martens began searching for faithful resources to teach new believers the gospel in a theologically rich and biblical way. By God's grace, he was led back to the Reformed roots that his previous church had once reflected. He struggled to find resources that presented the whole counsel of God until he discovered the Westminster Standards and later the Three Forms of Unity—the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort.

"These documents are so clear, concise, and well written," Martens says. "The Heidelberg Catechism especially, beginning with Question & Answer 1, deeply impacted me. They are remarkably accurate biblical summaries of what Scripture teaches. I call it a systematic theology from Genesis to Revelation. It's all there for a new believer. It was a breath of fresh air."

NEW RELATIONSHIPS

In his previous denomination, Pastor Martens was often advised to leave the Reformers in the past. "I was told that the Reformers made valuable improvements to the church, but they belonged to a particular era. Many said the catechism was overly detailed and rigid and was better left alone. But what I began to realize was that when people come into the church and we preach a me-focused message rather than a Christ-focused one, centered on what feels good, we fail to teach them the full scope of the Christian faith in a comprehensive, systematic way."

From there, Pastor Martens developed a deep desire not only to study Reformed theology but also to meet Reformed ministers who could guide him. "I found Pastor Iwan Borst of the Vernon Canadian Reformed Church. He also introduced me to Pastor James Roosma from the United Reformed Church in Kelowna, and we spent well over a year discussing Reformed doctrine and working through the Belgic Confession."

The two younger ministers, both serving their first congregations while mentoring a fifty-year-old pastor, found themselves in a unique situation. ""It was clear from the very beginning that Robin was sincerely interested in Reformed theology and in using the Heidelberg Catechism for discipleship," says Pastor Iwan Borst. "You don't get to discuss theology at that level very often. Robin was getting to the heart of things, and that was a delight. We felt very connected to him because, in a sense, all three of us were on a new journey."

INTERNSHIP

When it became clear that Pastor Martens wanted to join a Reformed church, the two ministers proposed a year-long combined internship in Kelowna and Vernon. The internship included preaching, teaching catechism classes, and preparing for a possible entry examination into either church federation.

Robin and his wife joined the United Reformed Church in Kelowna, and he was examined for a license to exhort, opening the way for him to preach in both congregations.

"There is much that connects us with Baptist theology," says Pastor Borst, "but there were also areas that Pastor Martens had to rethink and reframe—baptism, of course, and subjects such as dispensational views on Israel. Our style of expositional preaching was also very different. Our sermons generally follow a clearly defined structure with a theme and points, whereas Robin had been trained in a more conversational style that moved more freely between ideas."

On infant baptism, Pastor Martens reflects, "Infant baptism was not a huge difficulty for me. I had been reading Reformed theologians and scholars and came to appreciate the beautiful theology of the covenant and the place of households within it. Infant baptism demonstrates the continuity of God's covenant from Genesis 17 through Matthew, Acts 2, and Revelation. I saw how children belonged to the covenant under the Old Testament through their believing parents. To stop baptizing them under the new covenant would actually represent a step backward. I now realize that the passages I used to defend believer-only baptism had been taken out of context. I did not have the full picture."

LEARNING AND GROWING

Pastor Martens admits that learning to prepare sermons from a Reformed perspective was the most challenging part of the internship. "It was very humbling to relearn so many things at my age, including how to preach a historical-redemptive, Christ-centered sermon."

He compares sermon preparation to changing a golf swing. "It takes about 2,000 repetitions to change your golf swing. I realized I had to rethink everything from the ground up in order to preach through a Reformed lens. Even my vocabulary still sounded "evangelical" to listeners in the Reformed churches. At times I really hit a wall before I could move forward again."

Members of the consistories carefully reviewed his sermons and provided constructive feedback. Pastor Martens is deeply grateful to both congregations. "I am so thankful these two pastors were willing to travel and meet with me regularly. They have wisdom beyond their years. Their consistories received me graciously and have been incredibly welcoming and encouraging."

Adjusting to Reformed church life was also challenging for his wife and children. "At first it felt like stepping into Narnia," he explains. "Everything—from the liturgy to the singing—was so unfamiliar, but over time we came to appreciate the depth and richness of the liturgy, the psalms, and the hymns."

He also greatly appreciates the way the Reformed church federation functions. "At regional Baptist conventions, there was plenty of enthusiasm and good food, but I did not always leave feeling spiritually strengthened. Since attending classes, I have been impressed by the level of dedication, discipline, and focus. The mutual support among the ministers and elders is remarkable. These men are not afraid to walk through the storms of life together. The work is harder and the standards are higher, but that is exactly the environment in which I want to serve."

MOVING FORWARD IN HOPE

For Pastor Borst, mentoring Martens together with Pastor Roosma has been deeply rewarding. "I've appreciated the opportunity to do this together and to explore ways to open doors for men like Robin to receive a call and use their gifts, while also carefully evaluating them throughout the process." He notes that while it is encouraging when someone desires to join the Reformed churches, it is essential to exercise discernment without becoming discouraging. "There is a fine line between the two, and I am very thankful we had this internship to carefully work through the process."

Pastor Martens appreciates that careful approach. "The Canadian Reformed churches are protective of what they have, and I admire that. They tested me with care and caution. Some people have told me, 'Our denomination is so isolated.' But that is one reason why your churches have been able to preserve what you have. You have to be careful when making changes. Something may seem helpful in the moment, but it can lead to consequences you never anticipated. I have witnessed that firsthand in my previous church federation."

The Martens family now looks forward to getting to know more Reformed congregations. "I want to thank the churches in Kelowna and Vernon for the way they welcomed and supported me," Pastor Martens says. "It was clear they genuinely wanted me to succeed. That was deeply encouraging because this journey involved a great deal of wrestling with the Lord. My wife and children had many questions about where I was leading them. We left a place that was comfortable, where we had invested many years of ministry. But today I have a deeper understanding of Christ and a fuller grasp of God's Word. Those gains have made every step of the journey worthwhile." C

Ilse VanderMeulen

Elora, Ontario

ilsevandermeulen@hotmail.com

Robin Martens is eligible for call. If he receives a call from a United Reformed Church, he will have to do an exam, called a colloquium, to enter the URC ministry. If he is called by a Canadian Reformed Church, he will have to be examined by classis in the same way as a graduating student from the CRTS, according to the Church Order (Article 4). An article by Martens can also be found elsewhere in this issue.

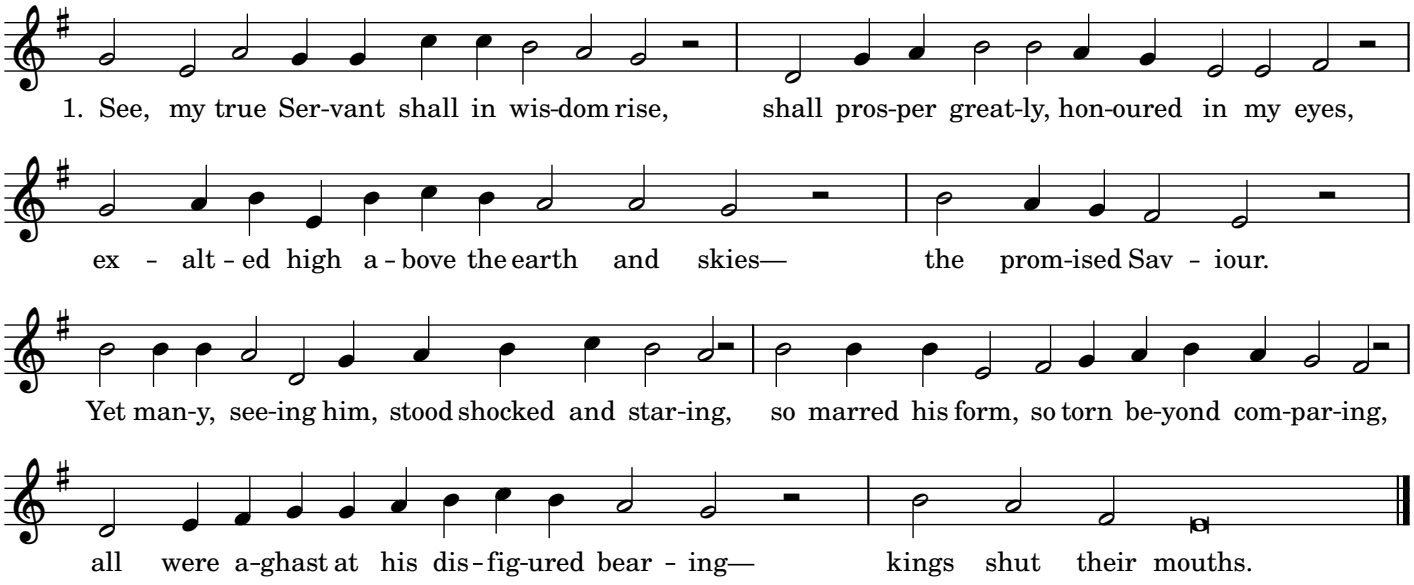
To reach Pastor Martens, email
robin.7martens@gmail.com

See, my true Servant Shall in Wisdom Rise

Isaiah 52:13-15

George van Popta, 2026

Geneva 1542/1543



2. Far distant nations tremble at his name,
   their rulers stunned, unable to proclaim
   the myst'ries shown through him who bore our shame—
   God's revelation.
   For what had not been told will be discovered,
   and what had not been seen will be uncovered,
   the secrets of the Servant, why he suffered,
   will be made plain.

Hymn 25 in the *Book of Praise*, "Who Has Believed our Message," is a versification of Isaiah 53, the fourth and final of the Servant Songs of Isaiah. It should be noted that this final servant song begins in Isaiah 52:13. Here are two additional stanzas versifying Isaiah 52:13-15.

George van Popta

Minister Emeritus
Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church, Ottawa
gvanpopta@gmail.com

Approaching Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount

Has there ever been a time when you felt the need to turn over a new leaf, to resolve, with real determination, to become a better version of yourself? Most of us know how poorly such resolutions fare. Enslaved as we are to a do-it-yourself spirituality, human effort is often all we bring to the table, and it is never enough.

It should not surprise us, then, that many raised in the modern West bring this same mentality to the Sermon on the Mount. We sense our shortcomings, observe Christ's character across the gospels, and feel a stirring of inspiration to imitate him. Almost without noticing, we begin to treat the Sermon as a reference guide for self-improvement, a set of proverbial gems to be mined at our discretion.

But is self-improvement our Lord's goal?

If we approach the greatest sermon ever preached as an inspirational checklist, we have missed its point entirely and reduced Christ to a great moral teacher ranked alongside other religious figures of history. Left unchallenged, even believers can absorb this diminished view and miss both the truth about Christ and the true goal of life.

The truth is this: if we take Christ and his words seriously, we discover that we fall hopelessly short at every point—but also that Christ fulfilled every point flawlessly on our behalf, and then died for our shortcomings. This is the only foundation for a fresh reorientation to Christ and to what the Sermon on the Mount truly is: a countercultural, all-encompassing call to a new life of faith in him.

The Sermon on the Mount is indeed the way to "the better life." But that better life is only found *in Christ*. To see how, we turn to Matthew 5:1–2, which teaches us how rightly to approach Jesus and his Sermon.

AT THE FEET OF CHRIST

Matthew places us among the crowds gathering to listen to Jesus at a mountain (Matt 5:1). Some are true disciples, seated at Jesus's feet. Others listen from a distance, still others hover in between, and some ignore him altogether. Where do we place ourselves? Detached, merely occupying a pew? Following at a safe distance, absorbing only what suits us? Or are we truly at his feet, hanging on his every word?

It is worth asking, too, why the crowds followed him. Israel had long expected the promised Messiah, and the crowds were plainly drawn by Christ's miracles (Matt 4:23–25) and his authority in teaching (7:28–29), though their motives surely ranged from the self-serving to the God-glorifying.

What of our own motives? Do we come as spiritual thrill-seekers, chasing something new, for a pep talk, or for what we imagine Jesus can do for us, rather than on his terms? Because of the constant pull of our sinful nature, these are questions we must return to often if we hope rightly to hear his Sermon.

AN APPROACHABLE TEACHER

Matthew records that Jesus went up on the mountain and sat down (5:1), deliberately shifting from serving the pressing crowds to teaching them. Having seen the multitudes flooding in from every district (4:23–25), he takes his seat and "opened his mouth and taught them" (5:2), intent on giving them a right understanding of the kingdom of heaven now drawn near in him.

This shift carries deep significance. First, consider the role Jesus assumes. As teacher, he presents himself as the great Prophet of whom Moses spoke, whom Israel must heed (Deut 18:15–19; Matt 17:5), and as the eternal King promised to David (2 Sam 7), now gathering his subjects—a decisive step forward in redemptive history.

Second, consider the place he chooses. In Scripture, mountains are frequently the site of God's manifest presence, from Sinai, where Israel's encounter with God became the standard by which later encounters were measured (Ex 3:5; 19–24), to Zion, and onward to Isaiah's vision of the nations streaming to "the mountain of the LORD's house" at history's end (Isa 2:2; Mic 4:7).

Matthew 5:1–2 deliberately echoes Sinai, where Moses ascended to receive the law (Ex 19:2–24), so that we might behold the exalted authority of Jesus. Though the Son of God walked among us as a man, we are meant to look up to him who holds all authority in heaven and earth (Matt 7:29; 28:18) and to trust him as Israel was called to trust Moses at Sinai (Ex 19:9).

More than this: the one now seated on the mountain is Yahweh incarnate. The LORD, who called and spoke through Moses, has himself come down to shepherd his people directly (Ezek 34; John 10; Matt 15:29–31). Christ is a Mediator like Moses, yet infinitely more. He speaks *as* God (Heb 3:5–6), Mediator and LORD in one person, fulfilling what Moses dimly foreshadowed. Prefigured in the exodus as the Passover Lamb, Jesus now prepares to fulfil that office at the cross, delivering his people from bondage to sin and the devil. The true and greater exodus is underway.

A third, and perhaps most striking, feature of this scene is how near and approachable God is in Christ. Under the old covenant, the people kept their distance from God. At Mount Sinai and then in the tabernacle and temple there were barriers whose breach meant death. Those barriers, which once protected sinners from judgment while teaching them the gospel through ceremony and sacrifice, are now removed, fulfilled in Christ, who himself replaces the temple (Rev 21:22). We may freely approach God in him, without fear of judgment, provided we come in true faith and humility (Isa 66:2; Heb 10:19–22; 12:18–24). The crowds could come to Jesus, touch him, and be embraced by him. The only thing that keeps anyone back now is unbelief.

Here, as in Eden before the fall, God's sovereign rule is extended again to a humanity long alienated and exiled from him. In the person and work of Christ, son of David, son of Abraham, the greater Moses, God is with us. This nearness has not ceased with Christ's ascension; by his Spirit he remains with his church until his return, still calling his lost sheep to himself, still as near as ever (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 47).

The first priority of the Sermon on the Mount, then, is to call us to Christ himself—to his feet, that we might become his disciples, bowing to him as our Teacher and Prophet, our High Priest and Passover Lamb, our eternal King who loves, governs, and keeps us in the deliverance he has won.

This is no light matter. Deuteronomy warns that whoever does not listen to the words of this promised prophet will be called to account by God (Deut 18:18–19). Let none of us be found ignoring Christ or treating him lightly (Heb 2:1–4).

THE BETTER LIFE IN CHRIST

We have come full circle. The Sermon on the Mount is indeed what it means to turn over a new leaf, but only as we heed Christ's call, through his church and by his Spirit, to come and freely receive from him (Isa 55:1; Rev 22:17). Everything depends on where we locate ourselves among the crowds: spiritually elsewhere, forging our own path, intrigued but hanging back—or ascending, pressing in close, to sit at his feet.

Christ himself makes the stakes plain at the close of his sermon (Matt 7:24–27): the one who hears his words in faith and obeys is wise, building on solid rock; the one who hears and does not obey is a fool, building on sand that will be swept away in judgment, now and forever.

We are called to come freely. There is no condemnation for those who trust in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). His kingdom is a gift received by faith (Rom 6:23). We are not meant to remain spectators, but disciples—those who come, sit, and receive.

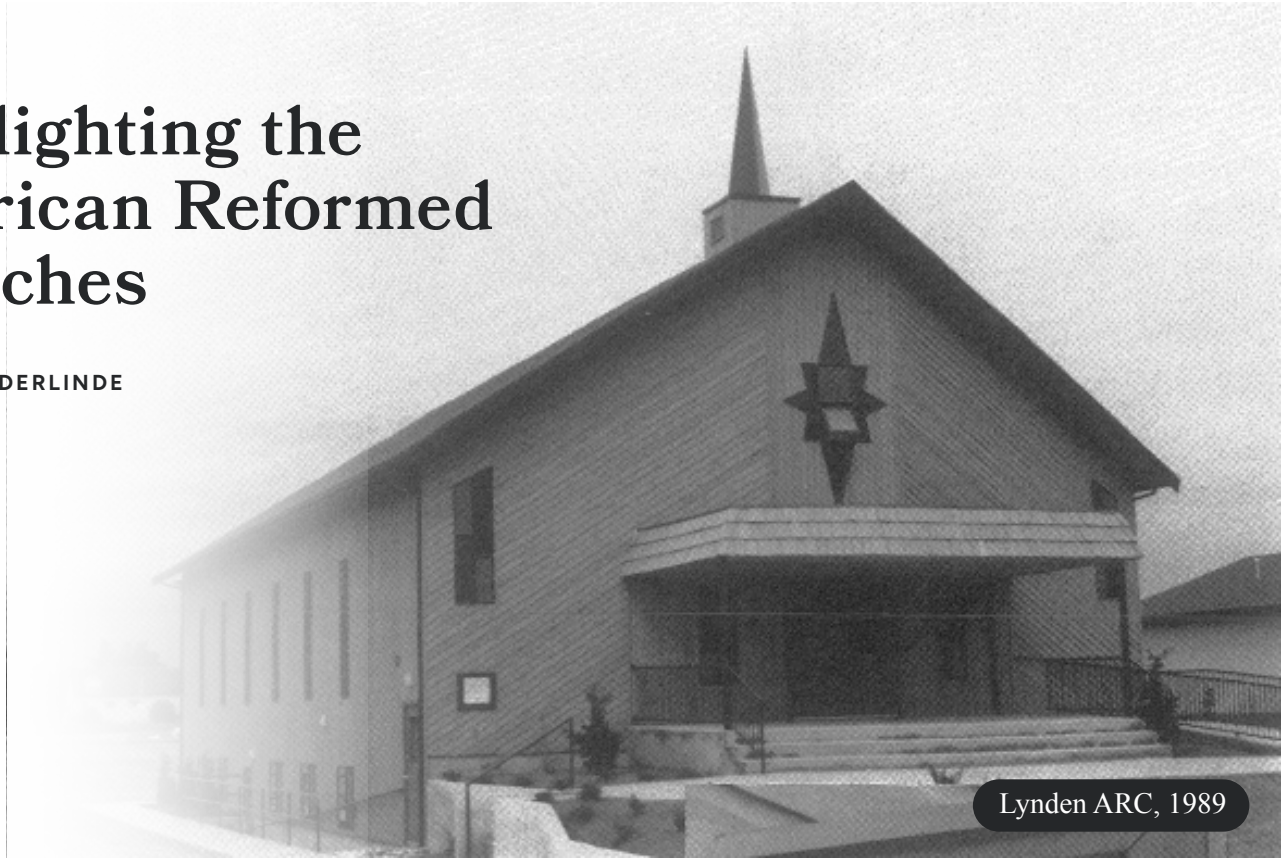
As the Sermon on the Mount makes clear, this better life is no bed of roses. The Beatitudes describe a life marked, in this present age, by poverty, mourning, and persecution. Yet it is the better life, for it glorifies God and rests under his blessing. And Christ himself will lead his disciples, keeping their heads above the stormy waters of this passing world, until he ushers them into the unending riches of the world to come (Matt 19:27–30). The journey begins with beholding Christ (Matt 3:17) and heeding him (Matt 17:5)—Yahweh in the flesh, exalted on the mountain, yet fully near and accessible.

Robin Martens

robin.7martens@gmail.com

Spotlighting the American Reformed Churches

CALVIN VANDERLINDE



Lynden ARC, 1989

In the year of our Lord 2025, the Canadian and American Reformed churches celebrated seventy-five years of existence under God's blessing. In various places, commemorative events were held and thanksgiving was offered to honour this milestone of God's faithfulness. *Clarion* magazine also published a feature issue commemorating this special occasion (Vol 74, Issue 12).

One angle that went without much attention but is nevertheless worth highlighting is the American Reformed wing of the federation. This wing presently consists of only three churches, forming less than five percent of the total number of churches, and yet it features prominently in the federation's official name. As it stands today, American Reformed churches are found only in Grand Rapids, Michigan and two side-by-side in northwestern Washington State.

So, what is the story behind the American Reformed churches? This article will briefly chronicle their history and draw a few additional observations and considerations, before making some concluding remarks.

HISTORY

The American Reformed churches are intrinsically part and parcel of the more numerous Canadian Reformed churches but are composed of members who find themselves living in a different country, with all that that entails. These churches are, it is fair to say, simply an extension, or offshoot, of the larger entity of Canadian Reformed churches. Their locations in the northernmost regions of the country, within no more than a couple hours driving distance from Canada, also supports this connection. It may be helpful to think of the American Reformed churches as the little toes of the CanRC, which dip just below the border into the United States of America.

There is little that distinguishes the American Reformed churches from the Canadian Reformed churches in terms of character or roots. Their place in the federation is longstanding, with a shared history of seventy-five years. That was when the first American Reformed church was established in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Beginning as a house church consisting of a small handful of families of Dutch descent, upon the advice of Rev. L. Selles, minister in Chatham, Ontario, the church at Grand Rapids was instituted on September 25, 1955. In 1957, she received her first minister in Rev. S.S. Cnossen, who came from the Netherlands, and she has been supplied with seven ministers in the time since.

For nearly thirty years, the Grand Rapids American Reformed church held claim to being the only American Reformed church, and that in a sea of other Reformed churches. The church grew not only internally but also through an influx of Dutch immigrants from the Liberated tradition who had first settled in Paterson, New Jersey but were unable to institute a church there.

A golden age of sorts dawned in the 1980s when three more American Reformed churches emerged on the scene. The first of these arose on the west coast in Washington state, when the Lynden church was instituted on March 10, 1985. The church in Lynden was a daughter church of the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed church

and upon her inception she drew members from other Canadian Reformed churches as well.

Shortly thereafter, Reformation Church in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, which had seceded from the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches, was received into the federation on Sept 11, 1985. Reformation Church called Rev. Ken Kok, and he was ordained to serve as her minister in 1987.

The third church to join the federation was the Tri-County Reformed Church in Laurel, Maryland which seceded from the Burtonsville Orthodox Presbyterian Church and joined the federation on March 26, 1987, under Rev. Barry Hofford.

Fast-forwarding to the 1990s, the first and only American Reformed church to appear in this decade, and the first and only to emerge in the midwestern part of the country, was the church in Denver, Colorado. This congregation seceded from the PCA under Rev. M. Pollock and initially seemed on a trajectory to join the OPC. However, a connection was established with the Canadian and American Reformed churches which set them on a new direction. The path to being admitted into the federation for this small church near the Rockies was, shall we say, a rocky one. Upon her request for affiliation with the Canadian and American Reformed churches, one classis redirected the matter to another classis in a different region for geographical reasons, and that latter classis denied the request. After appeals were adjudicated at both regional and general synods, Classis Alberta/Manitoba admitted the American Reformed Church at Denver into the federation in March 1994.

SHIFTING TRENDS

What no one could have known at that time was the fact that the number of American Reformed churches had hereby reached her peak at five churches. From this point forward, the number of churches would begin to dwindle. First, a short time after Rev. Hofford took up the call to serve the church in Grand Rapids, the church in Laurel disbanded in 1994, with members migrating to other ARCs. After suffering a sharp and irreversible decline in membership over the years, the remnant of Blue Bell believers eventually disaffiliated and joined the Reformed Churches of the United States in 2014. A similar course was followed by the church at Denver in 2023 when it was no longer sustainable to continue as an American Reformed church.

However, in the midst of these developments, the burgeoning church in Lynden propagated a daughter-church of her own, composed of her easternmost members who lived in Everson, Nooksack, and Sumas. In this way, the Nooksack Valley American Reformed Church came into existence and was instituted on July 8, 2018.

SIDENOTE

There is an interesting sidenote to this history. *Clarion* readers of older vintage and more extensive historical awareness may recall one particular prospect which never reached the point of institution as an American Reformed church. The American Reformed Fellowship in Palmetto, Florida was regularly featured in the pages of *Clarion* in the 1990s and early 2000s via articles and advertisements. This fellowship was made up predominantly of Canadian snowbirds who spent November to April in Florida's warmer climate and hoped their regular services would lead to the institution of an American Reformed Church. This hope, however, was not realized as no Canadian or American Reformed church was found willing to organize worship services in Florida, and she also faced objections concerning her nature as a "winter church" or "church of convenience," leading one writer to describe it in terms of "the Florida problem." At some point in the new millennium, the group affiliated with the Heritage Reformed Churches and was renamed the Bradenton Reformed Fellowship, which remains in existence today.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

Due to the vast geographical distance that separates the American Reformed churches, as well as their spread across different classical regions, it is understandable that the level of contact, awareness, and interconnectedness is minimal. The churches mostly operate in their own spheres unless a Christian school or other local factors bring them together. Aside from their common faith and Reformed identity, and familial relations for some, there is little that unites American Reformed churches across the vast divide.

Yet at times, there has been significant internal migration within the churches, often coinciding with the dissolution of a church. This migration has happened in a generally westward direction as American Reformed believers have moved around and resettled. This dynamic has undeniably had a significant impact on the churches that exist and those which no longer do.

Besides these internal factors, one of the most significant external factors which has slowed the spread of American Reformed churches (while simultaneously expanding her network) is the proliferation of sister-church relationships established by the Canadian and American Reformed churches with churches in the United States. Since the dawn of the millennium, four sister-church relationships have been established with churches with a presence in the United States (URCNA, OPC, RCUS, ARP), when previously there were none.

Though the six instituted American Reformed churches provide only a small sample size from which to draw any big conclusions, it

can be observed that the intrinsically American Reformed churches (who originated from within the federation—Grand Rapids, Lynden, and Nooksack Valley) have outlasted the extrinsically American Reformed churches (who came from outside the federation—Laurel, Blue Bell, and Denver). Judging only from these cases, being born into the federation seemed to establish a stronger connection than being adopted into the federation. That said, it is not as though the extrinsically American Reformed churches never truly integrated or adapted to the ways of the federation. That would be a false narrative. Their reasons for dissolution or disaffiliation were never such that they did not feel a sense of belonging.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Contemplating seventy-five years of American Reformed existence prompts the question: what will the next seventy-five years bring? Of course, who can really know? Who can tell which way the wind is blowing or what twists and turns lie ahead? But similar questions could certainly have been asked by those who lived in Grand Rapids in 1955. Who could have foreseen the way in which the history of American Reformed churches would unfold according to the Lord's sovereign plan and providential leading?

Yet, what we do know for certain is that the Lord Jesus Christ continues to gather his church and will not be hindered even by the gates of hell. He reveals himself to the church at Philadelphia (Asia Minor, not Pennsylvania) in Revelation 3:7 as the One who holds the keys, "who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens." He is the One who decides to open the doors of newly planted churches and he is the One who, in his wisdom, also decides when it is time to close them.

As the writer of Ecclesiastes once wrote: "For everything there is a season, and a time for ever matter under heaven . . . a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted." The history of the American Reformed churches simply retells this ancient story in one part of the Lord's harvest field. C

Calvin Vanderlinde

Minister
Nooksack Valley American Reformed Church
calvinvanderlinde@gmail.com

Current American Reformed Churches:

Grand Rapids American Reformed Church
Instituted: September 25, 1955

Lynden American Reformed Church
Instituted: March 10, 1985

Nooksack Valley American Reformed Church
Instituted: July 8, 2018

ERIC KAMPEN

In the article dealing with the Mennonite Brethren churches, it was acknowledged we were wandering quite far from the PARC. Nevertheless, it was worthwhile learning about these churches because we might meet members of Mennonite Brethren churches in our local parks and neighbourhoods. Knowing something about them could lead to more meaningful interaction.

The same can be said with respect to the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC). This group of churches consists of some 1100 congregations spread across all of Canada, with about 235,000 people attending services weekly. It is the largest evangelical church in Canada. The PAOC are not the only Pentecostal Church group. There is a wide diversity of groups. However, as the PAOC are the most numerous and one is most likely to encounter people belonging to this group of churches, they will be the focus of this article.

LOS ANGELES ROOTS

The Pentecostal Assemblies trace their history back to the beginning of the 20th century. In reaction to what was seen as a growing worldliness in the main Protestant churches in the United States, some had begun preaching about the work of the Holy Spirit in connection with a call to more holy living. This included talk about baptism with the Holy Spirit, which would be confirmed by speaking in tongues.

In April 1906, a man named William Seymour, a son of former slaves, began preaching this message in Los Angeles. This led to what has become known as the Azusa Street Revival, named after the street on which the building where they met was located. It drew people from many ethnic backgrounds, especially people of lower social standing. In these meetings, people reportedly would respond to Seymour's preaching by running around the room, dancing, jumping, shouting, and singing spontaneously.

While there were disputes involving doctrine and leadership, the movement grew rapidly, expanding also into Canada where, in 1919, a group of twenty-seven churches organized themselves into a Fellowship. By 1939, there were over 300 affiliated assemblies. By 2013, there were over 1100 churches, a number that appears to have held steady since that time.

This brief history of the Pentecostal Assemblies shows that they did not separate from a particular church body. From the beginning, they drew people from different backgrounds who fell under the influence of charismatic leadership and the appeal of claims of direct spiritual contact with God and experiences of the Holy Spirit.

BELIEFS ABOUT TRINITY, BIBLE, AND CREATION

The PAOC has a Statement of Essential Beliefs. In the Preamble, it states that it "represents the result of an extensive collaborative

process to rephrase and refresh what is most essential to us." This Statement is amended from time to time, with the most recent amendment dating from May 2022. They recognize that "there is some diversity of theological thought among us, but we remain committed as Pentecostal community to the historic creeds of the church, to evangelical conviction of faith, and to the Full Gospel that Christ is Saviour, Healer, Spirit-Baptizer, and Soon Coming King."

The preamble is encouraging in the way it affirms commitment to the historical creeds, which, it is assumed, refers to the ecumenical creeds. While within the worldwide Pentecostal community there are churches known as "Oneness Pentecostals," which deny the Trinity, the PAOC, thankfully, is not among those and explicitly affirms the doctrine of the Trinity in the first Article of its Statement of Essential Beliefs.

One can also appreciate the way the second article speaks of the Bible. It is accepted as true and trustworthy, inspired by the Spirit, and the final and absolute authority for belief and conduct.

ARMINIAN THEOLOGY

The third article deals with the creation of the heavens and the earth and man's rebellion. It mentions "humankind is entrusted with the care of God's creation as faithful stewards," which is a good reminder of our calling to exercise dominion over creation to God's glory. The article, however, weakens the effect of the fall into sin by speaking of how it merely distorted the image of God. As the image of God has to do with being righteous and holy, man's rebellion destroyed the image of God. Talk of distortion brings out the underlying Arminianism in Pentecostal theology.

This Arminian theology is reinforced in the article about salvation. The article says many things about God's work of salvation through faith in Christ that will echo favourably in our hearts, but the Arminian flavour will be detected in the way it states that "salvation is *available* (italics added) to all people by the loving, redemptive act of the triune God." There is ambiguity in the way it refers to the grace of God at work in those who repent. We see this in the way the article states that "the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ provide the way of salvation for those who, *by God's grace*, (italics added) repent from their sin and confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord."

While referring to God's grace, Arminian theology ultimately makes salvation a joint project of God and man, not doing justice to the fact that those dead in sin are not able to make any contribution to salvation. Even the faith by which we embrace Christ is a gift. It is noteworthy that in this article, faith is not mentioned as one of the gifts of salvation. It states that "salvation means to receive the Spirit, to be forgiven, reconciled with God and others, born again, and liberated from sin and darkness, transferring the believer into God's kingdom."

HEALTH AND WEALTH GOSPEL?

One final aspect to highlight is the description of liberation. The Statement of Essential Beliefs states, "our experience of liberation includes healing—whether spiritual, physical, emotional, or mental—as a foretaste of our future, complete restoration."

While it is unclear how much this is currently at play in the Pentecostal Assemblies in Canada, the mention of "physical, emotional, or mental" healing is a big factor in the worldwide Pentecostal movement. Health and wealth preachers, faith healing ministries, and "name it and claim it" teachings tend to be Pentecostal in their theology.

SPIRIT BAPTISM

The fifth article is about Spirit Baptism. The event of the Day of Pentecost is seen as an ongoing activity. It states that this baptism "empowers [believers] to continue his work of proclaiming with speech and action the good news of the arrival and coming of the kingdom of God." It then states that "this experience is available for everyone, male and female, of every age, status, and ethnicity. The sign of speaking in tongues indicates that believers have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and signifies the nature of Spirit baptism as empowering our communication, to be his witnesses with speech and action as we continue to pray in the Spirit."

Here we touch on what may well be the defining feature of Pentecostal belief, which also explains their name. Their focus is on the work of the Spirit. This does not see the events on the day of Pentecost as a unique event in the history of salvation, but as a continuing event. This is also true for speaking in tongues. On the day of Pentecost, however, the disciples appeared to have the ability to speak other languages, but the understanding among Pentecostals is more in the sense of the tongues experienced in Corinth, that is, speaking in languages unintelligible to others. It overlooks the fact that what happened in Corinth was something unique and more a subject of rebuke than commendation.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

In the article about the Church, it states that the role of the church is "to participate in the mission of God to restore all things." In the early years of the Pentecostal movement there was a strong sense that this was the last generation before Christ would return, which served as a strong impetus for mission. This is indicative of an optimism in Pentecostal theology in bringing about Christ's return. While the church is called to spread the gospel, it does seem to overstate the

case by speaking of participating in the mission of God to restore all things. That is the work of God, which he will accomplish when the Lord Jesus returns.

The article on the church also mentions baptism by immersion and the Lord's supper. Both are described as actions of believers to express their faith, rather than as God's means of grace to signify and seal the promises of the gospel.

RESTORATION

Historically, the PAOC held a premillennial view of the return of the Lord Jesus. The conviction that Christ's coming was imminent served as a strong impetus for mission. This emphasis is not found in the current Statement of Essential Beliefs as it speaks about Christ's second coming, but can be found in the Statement in use as recently as 2014. This does not mean that this view is not held by many, but simply that it is not seen as an essential belief that must be held by all.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

While the Statement of Essential Beliefs gives some insight into Pentecostal distinctives, it does come across as minimalist. When compared to previous versions, it is shrinking. Earlier versions included statements about believers and demons, were more detailed about the end of time, and included positions and practices on marriage and family, as well as tithing. It appears that, by revising the Statement of Essential Beliefs, there is a desire to give room for more diversity of opinion.

Overall, the emphasis falls on the work of the Spirit. One author stated that "it is characteristic of both the Pentecostal as well as charismatic movements to concentrate on spiritual power at the expense of God's grace, even though this is not expressly denied . . . This fascination has led to a division of the Christ of grace and the Spirit of power . . . The strict conditions which a person must fulfill to experience that power makes the *sola gratia* of the Reformation powerless, as if the grace of God would not be sufficient for the spiritual power which is necessary in the Christian life" (translation from *Nader Bekeken*, Feb. 2026, p. 67).

This review of the Statement of Beliefs brings out, therefore, significant departures from the Reformed understanding of Scripture. Having said this, however, we repeat what has been said in previous articles, that where the Word is, the Spirit is working.

THE END OF A SERIES

This article is the twelfth in a series on *Churches Outside the PARC*. We have looked at churches that once belonged to NAPARC or have been visiting NAPARC as observers. We moved a bit further afield, looking at churches that have Reformed or Presbyterian roots, but have drifted away from those roots. We then moved even further afield by looking at a church that had roots in the age of the Reformation.

In the last few articles, we looked at churches that fall under the general umbrella of being Protestant, but unlikely to join churches in the PARC. Just the same, it was worthwhile because we might meet members of these churches in our local parks and neighbourhoods. We may know some by name and have had good conversations with them. Perhaps, having learned something of their history and beliefs, we can have better conversations.

This series has brought to the fore the bewildering number of divisions that have taken place among churches rooted in the Reformation of the 16th century. The main divisions may have been due to geography and national developments but over the following centuries, there has been endless splintering within these main divisions. At times, the reasons for division were clear to see in terms of remaining true to Scripture. At other times, divisions were more about people than principle.

It is easy and comfortable to smugly judge events in the past. The hard and difficult work is to remain faithful in faith and life and to do what we can to preserve and promote unity among believers and work on restoring unity.

As we draw this series to a close, we think once again of that prayer for the Church Universal found in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer.* You may recall that the Anglican Church was even invited to send delegates to the Synod of Dort. This prayer reflects the awareness of the mess that man makes of the Church of God and therefore lays it before God in prayer. So, here it is once more, along with my hope and prayer that this would also be reflected in our words and works.

> *Most gracious God, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth; in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where any thing is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen and confirm it; where it is in want, furnish it; where it is divided and rent asunder, make it whole again; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Eric Kampen

Minister Emeritus
Canadian Reformed Church of Orangeville
rev.e.kampen@gmail.com

Equal or Identical

The Reformed churches that were established after the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century came through that process with a healthy aversion toward hierarchy. The first article in the acts of the first synod of the Dutch Reformed churches, held in 1571, states what we have today as Article 74 in our Church Order: "No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no office-bearer over other office bearers."

The brothers in Emden were determined to avoid what they had experienced from powerful popes and bishops in the Roman Catholic structure. This caution against hierarchy comes out in different ways, but it shows up in particular in Articles 17 and 25 of the Church Order. What we have in our Church Order in these two articles was originally one (Article 17). As far as I could find in other Church Orders, based on Dordt 1618/19, only the Canadian Reformed churches have decided (in 1983) to split it up in two articles. It's not clear why this was done, but the point is clear that here the churches stipulate that ministers are each other's equals and that the same is true for elders and deacons.

The rule was adopted by Synod Middelburg (1581). This was the same synod that rejected overtures to appoint some ministers as superintendents to supervise the local churches. Synod's judgment that such a move would be "unnecessary and dangerous" shows their awareness that inequality can easily trigger competition for power or even abuse of power.

ALL SERVANTS

This is not just a minor issue. Jesus rebuked his disciples for arguing about the question of who would be the greatest among them (Mk 9:34; Lk 22:24). He also says, "You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. . . . The greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt 23:8–11). The same is true for all office bearers. Even the apostle Peter, addressing the elders of the churches, refers to himself as their "fellow elder" (1 Pet 5:1).

This equality is also reflected in our Belgic Confession: "Ministers of the Word, in whatever place they are, have equal power and authority, for they are all servants of Jesus Christ, the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the church" (Article 31). All of this is behind the statements that "among the ministers of the Word (as well as among the elders and deacons) equality shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their office and in other matters."

The Church Order does include the qualifier "as far as possible," which suggests that there might be some flexibility here. However, that judgment is not up to individual office bearers. The consistory is the final judge in this matter. As a federation of churches, we have decided what "the duties of the respective offices" are in Articles 16 (minister), 22 (elder), and 23 (deacon). Up to this point, and on the face of it, the stipulations in Articles 17 and 25 then seem straightforward.

GIFTS DIFFER

Nevertheless, the reality is that we do not all have the same gifts. In the church of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit has distributed a variety of gifts so that we are all able to serve each other (Rom 12:4–8; 1 Cor 12:7–11). The gifts we have can be similar but are not identical and are often meant to be complementary. This is also the case with the men who are called to serve as ministers, elders, or deacons. The question is: How should that impact the work of office bearers as they carry out their specific responsibilities? And what does that mean for applying Articles 17 and 25 of the Church Order? Would such diversity in gifts and opportunities be a challenge for the required equality? To put it differently: is "equal" the same as "identical"?

SERVING ELDERS

In our Reformed churches, we are used to having multiple elders in one congregation. It is common practice that each one of them will be assigned one ward, or section of the congregation, with about the same number of addresses as the other wards. As such, that's a

good way to maintain equality among the elders with respect to the duties of their office.

At the same time, it can be practical and beneficial to bring some level of diversity into the distribution of tasks. Perhaps consistories weigh those things already. For instance, an elder who has retired from his daily job will have more time and opportunity to visit senior members during the daytime. Another elder may be known for the gift of relating well to teenagers. Would it be wrong to utilize these, and other gifts, intentionally in the way the work is being distributed among the elders?

Sometimes elders have other responsibilities added to their duties, like acting as clerk of the consistory, which can take up a fair amount of time. Not every individual elder's work must look exactly the same. That's the built-in flexibility in Article 25 with the words "as far as possible." There will be equality among the shepherds as long as everyone is pulling his weight in faithfully fulfilling whichever part of the duties he is responsible for.

SERVING MINISTERS

The idea of having more than one minister serving a congregation is not new, but it can be organized in different ways. My own experience is with the Dutch model. When a large church is served by two (or sometimes three) ministers, the congregation is divided into two or three wards of roughly the same size. The ministers share the preaching responsibilities, but for the rest of their duties each one does all the work in his own ward. In this way "being equal" comes very close to "being identical."

The North American model is different. It is quite common for a sizeable church to have a pastoral staff with several ministers. There is usually one "lead pastor" or "senior pastor", with an executive pastor under him, and a number of assistant or junior pastors under his supervision. The latter often have specific tasks assigned to them, such as youth pastor, discipleship pastor, outreach or missions pastor, worship pastor, etc.

While the specifics vary by church, two things stand out in this kind of structure. First, in the end there is one man who is responsible for making the decisions. And second, it is striking that in this set-up elders as we know them are usually absent. If there are elders, they may function as a board of administration or management but are not involved as spiritual leaders or fellow shepherds. Such lack of equality is contrary to our provisions in Articles 17 and 25 of the Church Order and, even with the best of intentions,may leave congregations vulnerable to abuse of power.

CO-PASTORS

For a long time, calling a second pastor did not occur in the Canadian Reformed churches. In 1990, Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene could still write: "Fortunately we do not see this too often among us…. And if it happens, it is usually the first step towards division into two autonomous churches." But this is changing. More and more, we see churches with a minister call a second minister, often referred to as co-pastor. This can be triggered by the growing size of a congregation, but there is also increasing interest in what is called the "two pastor model." There is nothing inherently wrong or unequal about this. It can be attractive to have two men share the workload of the task described in Article 16 of the Church Order. And here again it does not mean that there cannot be any diversification between the distribution of tasks between the two. Depending on someone's strong points, special abilities, or interests, slightly different roles for co-pastors with complementary gifts can be beneficial for the church they serve.

However, there are some potential pitfalls here. It's good to avoid terminology that suggests inequality, like "senior" or "lead" pastor versus "assistant" pastor. It is probably unavoidable that one of the pastors will often emerge as the "leader," but it's important to watch out for competing egos that can eventually become a problem, especially if it would turn into a "popularity contest" that involves the congregation.

NO RANKS

It is for good reasons that, throughout the New Testament, the Lord Jesus emphasizes a plurality of leadership in his church. Not all ministers, elders, and deacons have the same gifts, or the same age, health, circumstances, and opportunities. More experience in years or life circumstances might come with more wisdom and insight, but that should not translate into higher and lower ranks with more or less authority in the church.

Throughout the New Testament, elders are referred to and addressed as a group (Acts 13:1; 14:23; 15:2,4; 20:17,28; 21:18; Phil 1:1; Jas 5:14). All ministers and elders are equally shepherds and pastors for the flock (1 Pet 5:1–2). There can be significant variety in how office bearers divide and carry out their work without jeopardizing the anti-hierarchical principle outlined in Articles 17 and 25 of the Church Order.

Jan DeGelder

Minister Emeritus
Redemption Canadian Reformed Church, Flamborough
jdegelder8@gmail.com

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

6 Katie Deboer will be 26
3558 Thurston Pl
Abbotsford BC
V2T 6Y2

8 Marsha Moesker will be 49
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line RR 3
Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4

14 Jerry Bontekoe will be 62
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road
Grimsby, ON
L3M 0L1

15 Cindy Blokker will be 35
c/o Harbour Home
Spadara Drive,
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3

18 Easton Shulenberg will be 8
3476 Cherry Ave
Vineland ON
L0R 2C0

22 Nick Prinzen will be 52
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street, West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

29 Paul Dieleman will be 55
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

Happy birthday to all of you celebrating a birthday in September! Wishing you all a great day with family and friends. May you all feel the love of Christ each day.

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen." (2 Pet 3:18)

OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

3 Janell DeBoer will be 36
6311 Silver Street RR #2
St. Ann's, ON
LOR 1YO
Email: janell.db90@gmail.com

3 Jeanette Wieringa will be 32
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR 3
Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4

6 Henry Vander Vliet will be 59
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road
Grimsby, ON
L3M 0L1

8 Lindsay Kottelenberg will be 36
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR 3
Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4

13 Nancy Schipper will be 70
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A IT8

17 Alan Breukelman will be 60
2225, 19th Street
Coaldale, AB
T1M 1G4

21 Cameron Dantuma will be 35
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR 3
Fergus, ON
N1M 2W4

22 Nelena Hofsink will be 66
Bethesda Clearbrook Home
32553 Willingdon Cr.
Clearbrook, BC
V2T 1S2

28 Mary Ann De Wit will be 70
#4 6560 Vedder Road
Chilliwack, BC
V2T 5K4

Happy birthday to all of you celebrating a birthday coming up in October! I would like to give a special mention to Nancy, Alan, and Mary Ann who are all celebrating a milestone birthday this year! Wishing you the Lord's blessing and a wonderful day celebrating with family and friends.

Rachel Vis | tom.rachelvis@gmail.com

EASTON: WONDERFULLY MADE

Easton is eight years old and lives at home with his Mom, Dad, three brothers, Eli, Jackson, and Zeke, and a whole bunch of farm animals.

Easton absolutely loves letters. He loves the sounds they make, the way they look, and that he can put them together to make words and communicate. Communication has always been a little different for Easton. Because of his autism, he communicates in unique ways. He is a gestalt language processor (if you don't know what that is, look it up. It's fascinating!). Basically, it means that he takes scripts he has memorized from videos, whether online or home videos, and applies them to everyday life. Sometimes it's like putting together a puzzle to understand what he means when he says a certain sentence. But for those who know him well, we simply think about the memory or video connected to those words, and we can usually figure out what he's trying to communicate.

Life for Easton started out with some significant challenges. He was diagnosed early on with optic nerve hypoplasia with endocrine deficiency. This means the midline of his brain didn't fully develop, affecting both his vision and the way his pituitary gland produces hormones. Once we found the right hormone replacement medication and surrounded him with lots of therapy, he grew into such a cool kid with so much joy to offer everyone around him. Doctors told us he would likely be completely blind, but God had other plans. Today, his one eye has remarkably usable vision.

Psalm 139 reminds us that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." God doesn't make mistakes. Easton's life is a beautiful daily testimony of God's perfect design, faithfulness, and goodness. Easton brings so much joy to our family and our community, and we are so thankful that God created him exactly the way he did.

MEET NANCY SCHIPPER

Hi, my name is Nancy Schipper. I have lived at the Beacon Home in Dunnville since it opened many years ago. God willing, I will be 70 years old on October 13! We are planning an Open House on **Monday, October 12 from 2–4pm** if you want to join in the celebration. One of my favorite things is to enjoy a good cup of coffee, especially if it's from Timmies!

I am a member of Grace Reformed Church in Dunnville and Sunday is my favourite day of the week! I do not like to be late for church—I love singing in church and going to coffee social. My favourite song to sing is "Hallelujah Praise Jehovah," #301 from the blue Psalter Hymnal.

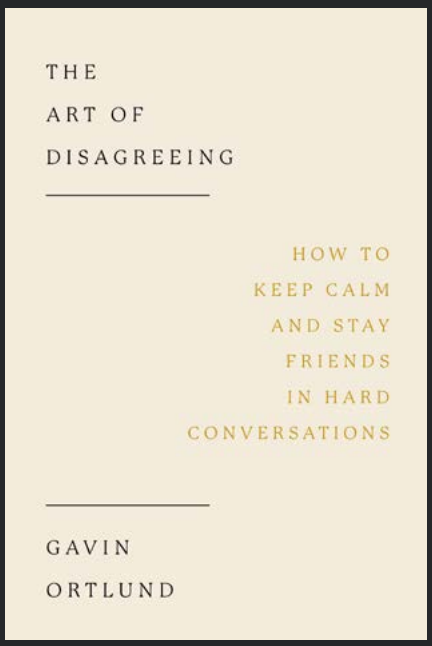
I also really enjoy going to Beacon baseball in the summer and cheerleading for all the participants. We have many people from our church community who join us on Monday nights. My favorite color is pink, just like my new Beacon baseball hat that you see me wearing!!

I spend my days sorting beads or playing memory. I also enjoy watching the Toronto Maple Leafs. On Fridays, I go to Shalom Gardens to visit my mother. I have two brothers and three sisters and many nephews and nieces and great-nephews and great-nieces.

I get around in a wheelchair and love to go for drives but not in the rain and snow. I don't like being wet or cold.

We at the Beacon Home LOVE getting birthday cards and I look forward to receiving many cards for my 70th birthday!!

Thank you for taking time to learn a bit more about me.



Rhinos and Hedgehogs

The Art of Disagreeing: How to Keep Calm and Stay Friends in Hard Conversations. Gavin Ortlund (The Good Book Company, 2025). Paperback, 95 pages, $18.99 CDN.

Who would have guessed that disagreeing could rise up to an actual art form? Growing up in a family with five siblings, I always assumed that disagreement was inherent and not a cultivated practice. Good news from Gavin Ortlund in this pocket-sized book—God can also redeem disagreement! In fact, the fruit of disagreement can be fresh ideas, revitalization of activities, refined orthodoxy, mental stimulation, and even growth in self-awareness.

It turns out that disagreeing can have many positives when done well. But there's the rub: often our disagreements become disputes as we handle ourselves, our body language, our words, our tone, and our own personal baggage rather clumsily and carelessly. Who cannot say they don't know of relationships still smarting from the effects of pandemic disagreements about science, politics, public policy, personal liberty, religious freedom, world powers, cosmic forces, etc.? Perhaps we can all *agree* that Ortlund's book is better late than never.

Once the battleground is set, Ortlund identifies five key areas to grow in understanding and to work on for honing the craft of productive disagreements. These include kindness, courage, listening, persuasion, and love.

Intermixed with these, he encourages the readers to analyze themselves along the lines of *rhinos* and *hedgehogs* to understand how their own nature, character, and past influences all gather at the table when entering a disagreement. The images are not subtle. A rhino tends to charge when challenged and a hedgehog curls up in a ball when under duress. Knowing our characters and tendencies, and observing that of others in the room, can help us balance the dynamics, so that a profitable sharing of contrasting ideas can exist together in the same space.

We all have a role we play around the table. Rhinos and hedgehogs can come together when they learn how to respect each other and make space for their differences, not just in ideas but also in how they express themselves. Additionally, imagining ourselves sitting around the table as rhinos and hedgehogs should put a smile on our faces and convince us to relax a little and not take ourselves so seriously!

Ortlund ably references both Scripture as well as the commentary of others throughout the text. This booklet has been prepared as a reflective exercise for an individual or group to improve discussion and dialogue. It is an easy read and raises practical questions at the conclusion of each chapter. What a nice primer for a family who love to share opinions around the dinner table, for a leadership group in a church, school, or business, or a small group who tends to get into issues. It could even be fun to work through with a group of friends who enjoy sharing hot takes on all kinds of topics, but often don't land them well. Who knows, maybe improving how we disagree will even lead to less disagreements? C

Rick Ludwig
Streetlight Christian Church
rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com