



Clarion

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**CHRIST IS GATHERING
HIS CHURCH IN CHINA**



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Church Signs

***Do these signs truly give the information
that will draw you into the building
or the congregation?***

When you travel down the highway of life you come across stately church buildings and some less venerable edifices that have amazing signage. I mean those locked signs that have interchangeable letters. What, really, is the value of these signs? Do these signs truly give the information that will draw you into the building or the congregation?

I know of what I speak. For a number of years I was responsible as local pastor to take care of the official church sign and see to it that the sign would have meaningful and attractive weekly messages. That's an almost impossible mandate, but local pastors are not easily daunted. I went on an investigative journey and took along some young people who are more capable than I am to read and interpret present-day signs.

Anyway, first a practical note. The sign I tended to is very large with huge Plexiglas panels that had to be held up by my back while I tried to shuffle the letters into something legible. I started to walk around as a question mark, but that was not the hardest part. Do not tackle such signs in the cold Ontario winter. My hair took on the texture of permafrost peat moss. If only my dad had immigrated to Hawaii.

Open-minded

My youthful companions informed me that I had to be open-minded and be tolerant of things that come from outside our "tradition." I almost started a discussion on the value of tradition, but happily the first sign we encountered read, "Don't be so open-minded; your brains will fall out."

I suggested in self-defence that perhaps I was too old for this kind of adventure. Then I read a sign, "Don't regret growing older; it's a privilege denied to many." I am getting on in years, you know, and with the years some wisdom does come. One of my compatriots said, "You

were a bit of a radical when you were young. . ." and as I was pondering the meaning of this, I read on one sign, "A radical is someone who has both feet planted in the air." I am grateful for the peat moss.

A B C

Some church signs do not go very deep and are based simply on the alphabet. One sign had only the three letters A B C and found a way to have a message, "Always Believe Christ." Do you know your ABCs?

One sign read, "A.S.A.P: Always Say A Prayer." I found this not to be as genuine as the words in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." A prayer is quickly said, but a *life* of joy, prayer, and thankfulness means a constant, daily process of focusing on Christ our Lord. I had a little sign text of my own, "It takes a lifetime to raise a Christian" but that was rejected by my companions because it sounded too much like, "It takes a village to raise a child." Don't plagiarize on your church sign. Okay.

There was also this one, "A.T.M. Inside." Do you know what an ATM is? The church sign said, "A.T.M. Inside: Atonement, Truth, and Mercy." Cute, but a machine is automatic, while God is personal. There was also U.P.S., which is a good alternative to Canada Post, but the rendering "God is the Universal Power Supply" is rather flat. God is not a power supply, but a living and caring Father.

More theological

Almost everyone agreed that we need messages with more theological substance, or as someone said, "More *oomph*." Did you know that theological substance is like "oomph"? I learned something that day: we need a deeper appreciation for the oomphatic element.

Well, here are some church signs that have more oomph. “The Rapture: separation of church and state.” That one cuts deeply. Or this one, “Puppy love has sent many a good man to the dogs.” I was not sure about the oomph in this one, “Thank you for our pastor John Doe.” Some more oomph? “To be almost saved is to be totally lost.” That is a truly Reformed statement, although not everyone recognizes it as such.

I liked this Thanksgiving message, although I am not sure if it has any oomph. “An optimist is a person who starts a new diet on

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 11 begins with Rev. Klaas Stam’s editorial, “Church Signs.” We have all seen those message boards in front of church buildings – what’s the best message to write to the world as they pass by our place of Sunday worship?

We continue our three-part series by Prof. Bruce P. Baugus, “An Orientation to China’s Reforming Churches.” It is a long section, but provides an important and fascinating history of Christianity in China. This series is reprinted with permission from the blog *Reformation 21*.

In an ongoing series on Christians and finance, Mr. Bill Dehaas addresses investment. Is investing biblical? How should we approach investing as Christians?

This issue contains regular columns Treasures New and Old, Education Matters, and Ray of Sunshine. Readers will also find a letter to the editor, a press release, and a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

- 270 EDITORIAL**
Church Signs
- 273 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
Two Sons
- 274 An Orientation of China’s Reforming Churches (2)**
- 280 Investing: A Biblical Principle?**
- 282 EDUCATION MATTERS**
Is Reformed Education Enough?
- 285 LETTER TO THE EDITOR**
- 286 RAY OF SUNSHINE**
- 288 Press Release**

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Thanksgiving Day.” There was this advent or pre-Christmas message, “Come in and pray today – and beat the Christmas rush.” Some hack had written, “A Turkey never voted for an early Christmas.”

The idea seems to be that we must hook into modern trends, and be “culturally” relevant

Some signs are indeed really geared to the season. New Year’s Day: God can make all things new, *even you!*” Ouch. Valentine: Jesus asks, “Be mine” (tacky. . .). Easter: “3 nails, 1 cross. 4given” (silly and irreverent. . .). Reminded me of algebra. Summer: “Our church is prayer-conditioned” (rather lame. . .). Pentecost: “This church is SOULer-powered” (environmentally correct, but biblically unsound. It should really be: empowered by the Holy Spirit).

The gospel on a postage stamp?

Actually I was not convinced on my exciting journey that these signs are really useful. Many of the messages do not display biblical truth. The idea seems to be that we must hook into modern trends, and be “culturally” relevant. Try this one: “Church Shopping? We’re open on Sundays.” Church shopping is not a benevolent pastime: it’s wrong. “I pod? I pad? I pray.” Yuck.

CALLED

Called by the Canadian Reformed Church at Fergus, North, Ontario:

Rev. J. Poppe

of Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church of Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHURCH NEWS

Sometimes we try to be too smart. But you cannot print the gospel on a postage stamp or reduce it to a quaint saying. This was the striving of some in the 1960s. Everything had to be simplified. I remember this from the time that I was a young student. Previous century stuff, already. Sometimes simplicity is taken to its extreme and becomes cumbersome. We are left pondering what certain signs really mean, and we keep scratching our peat moss.

If we do have a sign or want to install one, take a little hint from a veteran signer. Signs are not bad in themselves. The best thing to do is put *a text from Scripture* on the sign. Then it is God’s Word made public. I don’t think that such a sign really brings or keeps visitors in, for commitment flows from faith which is worked by the Holy Spirit through the (regular) preaching of God’s Word (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 7, Romans 10:17). But in this way the sign shows respect for the Word of God and may enhance the reputation of the church.

I saved the best sign for last. On the way home, close to our house, we found a church that had this message boldly on its sign, “Sign broken. *Come inside for message.*” Superb.





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Two Sons

“There was a man who had two sons.”

(Luke 15:11)

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Then the Lord Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons.” As the parable unfolds there is a surprising twist as the younger son is found but the older becomes lost. The Lord addresses the relationship between the Pharisees and teachers of the law and the sinners in Israel.

One day the younger son asks his father for his share of the estate. He takes it and leaves for a distant country. This young man didn’t like the restrictions in his father’s home and felt that life would be more interesting somewhere else. When he got there he used his wealth to buy anything he desired, indulging in sin and living irresponsibly. He quickly squandered everything in a wild and immoral life.

No doubt the tax collectors and “sinners” could identify with the younger brother. The tax collectors were despised for defrauding the people. The “sinners” were prostitutes and adulterers who lived sexually immoral lives; they were thieves and murderers. “Sinners” ignored God’s law and followed the evil desires of their heart.

Among God’s people, many covenant children have acted like the younger son. Families grieve because of children who’ve left home and forsaken the family of God. Many “younger brothers” (and sisters) have left to pursue selfish interests. Some left to enjoy a relationship outside of God’s family. Others left when they

became ensnared in alcohol, drugs, or sex. Others just don’t want to make a commitment to Christ and his family, and desire to go their own way. They leave because there’s no place in God’s family for those who insist on living as the world does. They are lost, for they live without hope, as the younger brother did in a distant land.

But the Lord also speaks about the other son. When the father took back the younger son, his older brother became angry. How could his father receive one who’d squandered his inheritance in wild living? He says to his father, “You’re not treating me fairly. I’ve always obeyed you. I was the good son who fulfilled all my responsibilities. When my brother comes back, you kill the fattened calf, but you never even gave me a goat to celebrate with my friends.”

His attitude is, “I’ve earned certain rights and I’m entitled to the family inheritance because I’ve worked so hard for it.” He reveals what really lives in his heart. The reason he slaved for his father all these years isn’t because he loved him, but because he expected that he’d receive the inheritance when his father was gone. His brother’s return threatens his inheritance, so he becomes angry.

The Lord tells this parable because of the attitude of the Pharisees. They’re like the older brother, thinking they’ve earned something. Their attitude is, “Those ‘sinners’ have forfeited their spiritual inheritance, but we’ve earned God’s favour. We live good moral lives, and we’re faith-

ful members of the church.” Yet both “brothers” actually stand condemned. The tax collectors and “sinners” deserve to be rejected by the heavenly Father for squandering their inheritance by their wicked life. But the Pharisees shouldn’t think they’re superior, for Jesus exposes what lives in their hearts. They didn’t serve the Father out of love, but for selfish gain. Therefore they too, aren’t worthy of the Father’s inheritance.

Today, when covenant children rebel and leave the church to pursue their own desires, they place themselves outside of God’s family. But Jesus warns us not to have the morally superior attitude of the older brother. How easy it is to feel that since we obey the Lord and lead a good life, we deserve our inheritance in God’s kingdom. But if we have that self-righteous attitude in which we feel that God owes us something, we’re just as lost as the younger brother. With a humble heart we confess, “Father, I deserve nothing from you, but because of your love for me, I desire with my whole heart to serve you with my whole life.”

That humble attitude is also necessary when receiving our younger brothers and sisters who desire to return to the Father’s family. We make it so difficult for the lost members to return when we take a morally superior attitude. But Jesus Christ is the true brother who reaches out to sinners in order to reveal the Father’s love and mercy. Likewise, a true brother or sister reaches out to those who are lost so that they may be found.



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An Orientation to China's Reforming Churches The Chinese Context (Part 2 of 3)

This three-part series is reprinted with permission from the blog Reformation 21. Reformation Heritage Books plans to release a lengthier publication of this topic, set for Spring 2014.

From the Christian point of view, the true centre of world history is not money or political power but Jesus Christ, and the totalizing narrative of world history is the glory of God through the salvation of his people. In other words, under Christ the church has the lead role in this drama, with city, state, and market playing supporting parts. As Scripture insists throughout, and Augustine reminds us in *The City of God*, the rise and fall of nations, global empires, and economic regimes serve, above all else, this singular redemptive and theological end realized in and through Jesus Christ, for whom the whole creation exists. So, from the biblical point of view, the most important news coming out of China is not the transformation of China's political economy or the shifting balance of global power – it's not even how Christianity is impacting these developments – but rather how Christ is building his church in China in our generation. And this, above all else, is the truly remarkable change occurring in China today and, given the scale of this change, the world order.

Among the most striking examples of how Christianity is sweeping across the global South and East, tens of millions of China's citizens now profess faith in Jesus Christ. The staggering growth rate of Christianity in China over the last three decades has stretched Western imaginations.¹ Yet the impression sometimes cast in reports on this growth, that Christianity is new to the Chinese scene, is not true.

Early Nestorian and Catholic missions

It is possible, as legend holds, that the Apostle Thomas brought the gospel to China by AD 64; it is certain, how-

ever, that some version of Christian teaching has been present in China at least since the Nestorian missionary Alopen arrived in Chang'an (modern Xi'an) in AD 635, during the prosperous Tang Dynasty.² Nestorianism survived into the thirteenth century and was widespread, although much degraded, throughout the Mongol Empire (especially among the Öngüd) and Yuan Dynasty established by Kublai Khan.

Due largely to the conquests of the Mongols and the grave threat this posed to the West, beginning in 1243 numerous evangelistic/diplomatic envoys were sent to the Khan from Catholic Europe. First, Franciscans came to the imperial court and were mostly rejected; later, Marco Polo received a request from Kublai Khan for Rome to send one hundred wise and learned missionaries to convince the Khan and his people that Christianity was the true religion. (Meanwhile, Nestorian monk, scholar, and diplomat Rabban Bar Sauma, born in Beijing, was off to Europe, meeting with Byzantine Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, Kings Philip the Fair of France and Edward I of England, and Pope Nicholas IV.) Rome failed to meet Kublai Khan's request, but did dispatch the very capable Franciscan, John of Montecorvino, who arrived in Beijing shortly after Kublai Khan's death. John was received well, experienced notable success (again, especially among the now largely Nestorian Öngüd), and translated the New Testament and Psalms. The Catholic faith began to take root in China and John was eventually joined by other Catholic missionaries and consecrated the first Archbishop of Peking in 1308.

The Han revolt against Mongol rule and establishment of the Ming Dynasty, however, brought an apparent end to the budding Catholic faith in China. Although Islam continued to make significant inroads, Christianity languished under systematic restrictions. These Ming restrictions, in one form or another, hindered the mission to China into the late sixteenth century.

The Jesuit mission and Rites Controversy

Prevented from entering China legally, the famous Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier passed away on the offshore island of Shangchuan in 1552 while waiting to be smuggled into the mainland. Eventually, the Jesuit mission to China was established at the new Portuguese trading post of Macau where Matteo Ricci landed in 1582. Ricci was a brilliant man who, along with a few companions, devoted himself to learning the Chinese language and culture. His object was to extend the Jesuit mission into the mainland, communicating Roman Catholicism in terms Chinese intellectuals would readily embrace.

Realizing that Christianity and European culture were distinct even if thoroughly entangled, Ricci and his fellow Jesuits attempted to engineer an indigenous Chinese Roman Catholicism. Also aware of just how much Chinese intellectuals – Ricci’s primary target – were steeped in Confucianism, Ricci tried to show that Confucianism and Roman Catholicism were compatible. He argued, for example, that basic Catholic doctrines were latent in the principles of Confucianism and other traditional Chinese religious beliefs and practices. Rome, he argued, could accommodate traditional ceremonies like ancestor veneration and offerings to the emperor and Confucius as mere social or civil practices and not actual pagan rites or idolatry. This stance, however, resulted in a syncretistic version of Roman Catholicism that scandalized Dominicans, and later Franciscans, who eventually had some of Ricci’s compromises condemned by Pope Clement XI.³

Ricci’s influence over Roman Catholicism in China, however, is felt to this day in notable ways. The most striking of these is the crisp distinction Chinese make between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Protestantism is commonly called *Jidūjiào*, which means the religion (*jīao*) of Christ (*Jidǔ*) or simply Christianity; Roman Catholicism, however, is called *Tianzhǔ jīao*, which means the religion of the Lord of Heaven (*Tianzhǔ*). Ricci argued that the long-established, complex traditional Chinese term

¹ In addition to numerous articles in the popular press, book length treatments documenting this development are plentiful, including David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2006); Daniel Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Nanlai Cao, *Constructing China’s Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010); Liao Yiwu, *God is Red: The Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished in Communist China* (New York: HarperOne, 2011); and Mikka Ruokanen and Paulos Huang, eds., *Christianity and Chinese Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). It is also a major theme in more general works on religion in China such as Fenggang Yang, *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2011) and Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

² For an enlarged account of the history of Christianity in China see Bays, *A New History*. On whether Thomas made it to China, Bays notes that it “has never been questioned by the Mar Thoma church in India” whose “books and church traditions clearly have Thomas in the 60s CE coming to India, then to China, and back to India, where he died,” p. 5. Though other hints exist, the matter remains uncertain, unlike the seventh-century Nestorian mission.

³ The Rites Controversy, as this episode is known, is a notable and instructive moment in Roman Catholic missiology. In response to Dominican complaints about Jesuit practices, Pope Clement XI forbid Roman Catholic participation in traditional Chinese rites in 1705 and followed up with *Ex Illa Die*, a papal bull condemning certain rites as inherently “heathen” and forbidding the use of traditional Chinese terms for deity. This stance was largely reversed by Pius XII in 1939, and in 1958 Pope John XXIII upheld Ricci as an example for Roman Catholic missionaries to follow.

⁴ The decision of Pope Clement XI in the Rites Controversy, and the incompetent and callous manner in which it was communicated, infuriated the Qing dynasty emperor, Kangxi, who until then had been very supportive of the Jesuit mission. Bays, *A New History*, writes that “the emperor grew increasingly irritated, then angry, at the message from the Vatican. In fact, as far as can be determined he was quite outraged by what he saw as gratuitous interference in his state and culture, with foreigners who spoke no Chinese presuming to dictate to him the meaning for his subjects of Chinese rituals and cultural practices” (pp. 29–30). The fall out resulted in a significant setback for the Roman Catholic mission in China that was ongoing as Protestant missionaries began arriving in the opening decades of the nineteenth century.

⁵ A series of “unequal treaties” followed China’s defeat in the First Opium War in 1842. For more on that see below. For comparisons between the earlier Roman Catholic mission and Protestant mission see Bays, *A New History*, who argues that, despite obvious differences, early Protestant missionaries grappled with many of the same problems and had similar experiences as Roman Catholics in earlier generations. He also suggests that Protestants could have learned from the history of the Roman Catholic mission if not for anti-Catholic prejudice, p. 50.

Tianzhǔ referred to the Christian God in his catechetical dialogue, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (1603). Although every available term for deity in the language of any un-Christianized culture will be freighted with unhelpful connotations, Ricci's use of this term, together with his accommodation of Confucian philosophy and devotional practices, was controversial and has sharply distinguished post-Jesuit (and post-Reformation) Roman Catholicism from Protestantism in China till today.

The Protestant mission: 1807-1949

Protestant missionaries began arriving in China with the landing of Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society in 1807.⁴ At first, they too were confined to certain coastal districts, but with Hudson Taylor's famous push inland and the altered relations with the West epitomized by the opium wars and unequal treaties, Protestant missionaries were working quite openly throughout eastern China and penetrating the country's interior by the end of the century.⁵

There is a truly remarkable change occurring in China today

Morrison was a studious man. Steeped in Scottish Presbyterianism, he trained diligently, as best he could while still in England, for his life's work as a pioneering missionary. Raised in a working class family, Morrison was not highly educated and already accomplished as were John of Montecorvino or Matteo Ricci when they set out for China. Nevertheless, ordained as a Presbyterian minister in a London congregation of the Church of Scotland just before departing, Morrison more than rose to the occasion. In the twenty-seven year span of his ministry – the rest of his life spent mostly in the vicinity of Guangzhou and Macau – he translated and published the Bible in Chinese, wrote a catechism, produced a Chinese grammar and massive Chinese-English dictionary, started a newspaper, helped found a college, served as the official translator for the British government and the otherwise anti-missionary British East India Company, and along the way “became a major, if not the foremost, Sinologist of his day, and the leading interpreter of China to Western nations.”⁶ And yet he only knew of ten Chinese converts to Christianity through his labours. Still, he laid the foundation upon which other successful Protestant missionaries would build.

The Protestant mission to China was at times deeply entangled in European mercantile interests, including the opium trade,⁷ and suffered from association with the heretical and revolutionary Taiping Kingdom. The Taiping Kingdom was founded by Hong Xiuquan in the midst of the Jintian Uprising – itself the opening episode in the Taiping Rebellion. Influenced by Protestant missionaries who struggled with how to react to his rise, Hong claimed, on the basis of a revelatory vision, to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ and Chinese Son of God. Despite these associations, the Protestant mission made slow but steady progress and was joined by more and more denominations and missionary-sending organizations from an increasing number of nations. The accumulated effect amounted to a major push by Protestants, including many Presbyterian and Reformed missionaries, from about 1870 through 1940 to evangelize what was already recognized as the world's most strategic mission field.⁸

Though not defined by the kind of spectacular growth of more recent decades, this phase of the Protestant mission to China was a great success, even when judged by the often narrow and at times misguided desiderata we tend to use in such matters. The mission to China transformed Protestant cross-cultural missions, too. The story of Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission is well-known, but only one example of just one aspect of the transformation hammered out in the world's largest cross-cultural mission experiment. Also, despite at times widespread and fierce opposition,⁹ it was during these decades that an indigenous Protestant Chinese church was born. This church, as tenuous as its existence sometimes seemed, would survive the turmoil of the communist revolution and coming collapse of the mission.

The Protestant mission to China collapsed with Mao's ascent

The collapse of the Protestant mission to China in the 1940s seemed unthinkable just a few years before. The number of foreign Protestant missionaries in China hit the “high-water mark of more than 8000 in the 1920s,” while “Chinese Protestants. . . [were] reaching about 500,000 before the storms of mass nationalism hit.”¹⁰ After the Xinhai Revolution of 1911-12, through which over two millennia of dynastic rule gave way to the Republic of China, Chinese Christians found themselves enjoying American-style liberties like the freedom of religion, separation of church and state, and the ability to participate

fully in public life as citizens. Some even held top-level positions in the government.¹¹ The future looked promising, also. Nearly 250,000 Chinese students were enrolled in Protestant mission schools, blazing a trail toward China's much desired modernization. Some American observers of the time openly discussed the prospect of China becoming a Christian nation.¹²

Yet, not all was well. By the turn of the twentieth century, theological liberalism was sweeping mainline Protestant denominations in the West and the mission to China suffered the effects. Bays notes that "the world-wide 'Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy' began in China in the summer of 1920, with acrimonious disputes over biblical authority, higher criticism, evolution, and the like breaking out" between missionaries in various places.¹³ By the 1930s, the situation had so deteriorated that "all but the most firm fundamentalists among American Christians. . . [had] second thoughts about the legitimacy of foreign missions."¹⁴ Meanwhile, Pentecostals began flooding in and several deviant indigenous movements emerged from within.¹⁵

Discouragement from without was plentiful too. As Rodney Stark notes, smug secular scholars dismissed Chinese converts:

Through much of the twentieth century, it was widely believed among Western intellectuals that the Chinese were immune to religion—an immunity that long preceded the communist rise to power. When, in 1934, Edgar Snow quipped that "in China, opium is the religion of the people," many academic and media experts smiled in agreement and dismissed the million Chinese claimed as converts by Christian missionaries as nothing but "rice Christians" – cynical souls who had frequented the missions for the benefits they provided. Then, in 1949, Mao Zedong came to power. Religion was outlawed, and it was widely agreed among social scientists that China soon would be a model of the fully secularized, post-religious society.¹⁶

The Protestant mission to China collapsed with Mao's ascent. The few institutions that survived were re-organized under the bureaucratic umbrella of the TSPM.¹⁷

⁶ Bays, *A New History*, p. 44. His catechism, based loosely on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, has been recently translated into English.

⁷ As David Aikman notes, "a monstrous albatross for Protestant Christianity in China for more than a century, was the association of Western missionaries with Western traders who came. . . to make money trading opium," *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2006), p. 51. Already engaged, the opium trade increased steadily under the Canton System, beginning in 1756 and culminating in the First Opium War (1839-42) and Treaty of Nanking (1842). The terms of this Treaty were reworked to China's even greater disadvantage in the Treaty of Tientsin (1860), and other "unequal treaties," after the Second Opium War (1856-60). This began the so-called "century of humiliation" when China was subjected to the mercantile interests of certain Western powers including the United Kingdom and United States. This was the backdrop of the Protestant mission to China prior to 1949 and no doubt haunts the mission to this day.

⁸ In a lengthy discussion on the years 1860-1950, Bays, *A New History*, pp. 66-149, helpfully subdivides this era into three parts: "Expansion and Institution-Building in a Declining Dynasty, 1860-1902"; "The 'Golden Age' of Missions and the 'Sino-Foreign Protestant Establishment,' 1902-1927"; and "The Multiple Crises of Chinese Christianity, 1927-1950." There are numerous studies on the efforts of particular missionaries or mission-sending bodies, or of the Protestant mission in particular locations or among particular groups of people in China, or in relation to certain other factors or historical developments dating from this era – too many to list here. One example worth noting, however, is Selles, *A New Way of Belonging*, which documents the involvement of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Though entering the mission to China relatively late, China was the first foreign nation this small Reformed denomination engaged. Selles's narrative of this decision is very insightful and illustrates the kinds of motives often at work in this era across denominational lines.

⁹ Several notable episodes of violence against Christians, missionaries and converts, erupted in this era. The most famous is the Boxer Rebellion or Uprising (1898-1902). The uprising involved the siege of the Legation Quarter in Beijing and murder of "all foreigners and Chinese Christians in north China within their reach" outside the capital city. Roughly 250 foreigners perished, nearly all missionaries, and 30,000 Chinese converts, before the uprising was put down by the intervention of a foreign military alliance who occupied Beijing into 1902, and the nearby city of Tianjin until 1906. Bays, *A New History*, pp. 85-86.

¹⁰ Bays, *A New History*, p. 94.

¹¹ Sun Yat-sen, celebrated father of the Republic of China by both Mainlanders and Taiwanese, was baptized by an American Congregational missionary and deeply influenced by the Protestant mission. Bays, *A New History*, also reports that several members of the first National Assembly were Christian, p. 95.

¹² Bays, *A New History*, pp. 92-94.

¹³ Bays, *A New History*, p. 106.

¹⁴ Bays, *A New History*, p. 122. Bays highlights Pearl Buck's tirade against foreign missions and William Ernest Hocking's *Laymen's Report* as "the two biggest flashpoints" in the debate that eroded confi-

The Protestant mission: 1949 – present

In 1966 a brutal campaign against all perceived challenges to Maoist orthodoxy was unleashed on the nation. Young radical zealots, the Red Guards of Mao's Cultural Revolution, were especially vicious and Chinese believers were frequent victims of their fanatical rage. "In countless places, Christians were put through such abuse that many did not survive the ordeal."¹⁸

During this decade-long crusade it seemed that Christianity (and other religions) might be wiped out in China, leading Richard C. Bush to pronounce Communism the victor in 1970.¹⁹ A religion unto itself, he argued, Communism had vanquished Christianity and all other religious competitors, even Confucianism, and ushered in the most thoroughly secular society the world had yet seen. The future of China had been forged in the Cultural Revolution, which Bush viewed not so much as a program orchestrated from above as an organic, fanatical religious outbreak – a kind of popular Maoist jihad.

The church continues to grow and make inroads in every level of Chinese society

Although Bush also noted that Christianity continued to persist at some level in the personal devotions of private individuals or tiny gatherings scattered across the countryside – wherever the priests of Maoism were a bit lax – the foreseeable future for China appeared utterly secular.

But it wasn't to be. Instead, belief in a coming post-religious China turned out to be the opium of Western intellectuals. The Chinese Christians of 1949 – those ridiculed in the West as rice Christians—were so "insincere" that they endured decades of bloody repression during which their numbers grew. And as official repression has weakened, Christianity has been growing at an astonishing rate in China.²⁰

What appeared to Bush and many others to be flickering flames ready to burn out were, it turns out, glowing embers ready to be fanned into a fire that academics and authorities did not and perhaps could never have predicted.

Admitting "Christian history in China" during the Cultural Revolution is "still a black hole," Bays estimates "that Protestants increased their numbers by a factor of five or six. . . from 1966 to 1978." This "very rapid growth

rate" translates into roughly "five to six million Protestants" by the end of a decade when many were actually predicting the end of religion in China.²¹

Mao died on September 9, 1976; less than a month later the notorious Gang of Four were arrested and the era of the Cultural Revolution was brought to a close. After what turned out to be the brief, transitional premiership of Hua Guofeng from 1976 to 1978, a new era of reform began in earnest with the ascent of Deng Xiaoping. TSPM churches were allowed to reopen around Christmastime 1978 and in 1982 "Document No. 19" was issued, expounding the party's new official policy on religion and establishing a framework that remains in place till now.²² Although a significant advance over the pre-Deng era, the framework erected by "Document No. 19" remains unnecessarily restrictive and a great hindrance to healthy church development in China today, a point we shall return to below.

As we have seen, by 1978 Bays estimates there may have been as many as six million Protestants scattered around China, and almost no Western missionaries in the country. But the rapid rate of growth he proposes in the late 1970s continued through the 1980s.²³ Almost all of this growth occurred in China's thickly-settled countryside. Then, during the 1990s, an even more remarkable and unexpected turn occurred: as the rate of growth in rural China moderated, the church began to thrive in urban areas, among the well-educated and culturally influential classes. By 2000, the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) reported 89,056,000 Christians in China. In 2008, *The Economist* cited "Zhou Xiao, a former Communist Party official and convert to Christianity," claiming "there are up to 130m Christians in China."²⁴ This number, the article reports, was supposedly confirmed to ChinaAid, also in 2008, by the director of the government bureaucracy responsible for overseeing religion. Others have offered somewhat lower numbers, but even CSGC's conservative estimate projects there will likely be 135,190,000 professing Christians in China by 2025.²⁵

China's millions of Christians

For what it is worth, let us adopt an estimate of roughly 105 million professing Christians in China today. If this figure is anywhere close to accurate, then about eight percent of the Chinese population now professes faith in Jesus Christ, meaning there are more Christians in China today than there are atheists (the officially endorsed and publicly taught religious pos-

ition) or Buddhists (the best known traditional religious alternative). Even the low estimate of seventy million preferred by Stark, Johnson, and Mencken, means the Christian population is as large as the Communist Party despite the clear political and economic advantages of belonging to the latter, and disadvantages sometimes attending the former.²⁶

Whatever the number comes to, this much is clear: “More people go to church on Sunday in China than in the whole of Europe.”²⁷ China appears to be home to more evangelical believers than any other nation, and the church continues to grow and make inroads in every level of Chinese society, from the peasant farmers and factory workers to party officials and the cultured elite. While still labouring under persecution and official harassment, tested by many temptations, and occasionally upset by heresy, the church in China has courageously continued to worship and obey the triune God. Although none of us knows how history might turn as God works out his redemptive purpose, the church in China is already emerging not just as a place of vibrant Christian faith but a significant missionary force in the world. And yet, as Chinese ministry leaders and informed visitors clearly and consistently report, the need for church development is both profound and urgent – both for the health of the church in China and the future of Christianity in the world. **C**



dence in cross-cultural missions, especially to China. See also Daniel H. Bays and Grant Wacker, eds., *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2003); Lian Xi, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions to China, 1907-1932* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1997); and Kevin Xiyi Yao, *The Fundamentalist Movement among Protestant Missionaries in China, 1920-1937* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003).

¹⁵ Among these, The True Jesus Movement, The Jesus Family, and Watchman Nee’s The Little Flock.

¹⁶ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s Largest Religion*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), p. 405. See also Stark, Byron Johnson, and Carson Mencken, “Counting China’s Christians,” *First Things* (May, 2011).

¹⁷ The TSPM was established in 1954 as the only legally permitted Protestant form of Christianity in China. Congregations had but three choices: join, fold, or go underground. Though functionally an arm of the party, even the TSPM was suspended from 1966 to 1978 during the Cultural Revolution. In 1980 a sister organization, the China Christian Council (CCC), was founded. The “two organizations” (*lianghui*) are largely redundant.

¹⁸ Bays, *A New History*, p. 185.

¹⁹ Richard C. Bush, Jr., *Religion in Communist China* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970).

²⁰ Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity*, p. 405. See also Stark, Johnson, and Mencken, “Counting China’s Christians,” *First Things* (May, 2011).

²¹ Bays, *A New History*, pp. 185-86.

²² Bays, *A New History*, p. 190.

²³ Fenggang Yang, “The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 47 (2006), p. 105, offers these estimates culled from the cited sources: “In the early 1990s, a very careful study suggested that the total number of Protestants in both TSPM and house churches was likely to be 20 million or more (Hunter and Chan 1993:66-71).” Later, by “the end of the 1990s,” a count using a careful methodology “concluded that there might be a total of 50 million Protestants (Lambert 1999).”

²⁴ No author, “Sons of Heaven: Inside China’s Fastest-growing Non-governmental Organization,” *The Economist*, October 2, 2008.

²⁵ See their report, “Global Top Ten Lists on 145 Major Missiometric Categories” at <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/documents/listings.pdf>, accessed March 13, 2012. Rodney Stark, Byron Johnson, and Carson Mencken have published results of a survey conducted by Horizons, Ltd. in China, corrected by them in cooperation with Peking University, and conclude that it “seems entirely credible to estimate that there are about 70 million Chinese Christians in 2011.”

²⁶ Stark, Johnson, and Mencken, “Counting China’s Christians,” *First Things* (May, 2011).

²⁷ Tim Gardam, “Christians in China: Is the Country in Spiritual Crisis?,” *BBC News Magazine*, Sept 11, 2011: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-14838749> (accessed on May 26, 2012).

Investing: A Biblical Principle?

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So you and/or your wife had a pretty good year; you've landed some jobs which you didn't think you'd get, or maybe you got a nice bonus from your boss as his company did well. You've made some extra money this year. You've made regular church contributions, you've paid a little extra against your mortgage, paid all the monthly bills, even made some extra gift giving to causes that you might not have in a normal year. So now you have \$10,000.00 extra to invest. You know a "friend" who is an expert on investing in the stock market; you call him just at the right time! He just heard about this hot stock which is going to take off and you can get in on the ground floor. Great, you think, I'm gonna make some quick cash here! So you put your \$10,000.00 in at \$10.00 per share. The stock starts to climb. In six months the share price goes from \$10.00 to \$20.00 to \$30.00. You're grinning big time. Twelve months in it zooms up to \$50.00 per share. You're now strutting a bit. You the man, you know what you're doing; you're the ultimate expert on the stock market! Then, for some unknown reason, the company is in litigation, the stock drops like a rock, before you have a chance to be informed what's going on and do anything (or your buddy has skipped town), the stock drops to \$1.00 per share. Your investment has gone from \$10,000.00 to \$1,000.00 and you've now lost \$9,000.00. Cash – your hard earned money – poof! Does this sound familiar? There is a saying in financial investment circles about extra money you have kicking around, besides the safe, sound mutual funds and term deposits you may have as part of your portfolio; "If you can afford to lose it, you can invest in high risk stocks!"

Is this in accordance to what is written in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25? This is probably the clearest example in Christ's ministry about how we should be stewards of what he has given to us. The Lord has provided for all our needs, he has given us the responsibility of increasing our "talents" to help further

his kingdom work by way of being able to give more financially for this work. And we're going to gamble this away in a "hot stock"? This chapter details that we must be good stewards of what resources he has given us. Christ uses money in this parable because the subject of money seems to resonate easily with most people's minds; it's a simple, tangible, touchable thing we can all associate with. To be clear, this passage goes way beyond money and points to whatever talents and spiritual gifts we have besides financial. The point is that God expects us to use what he gives us properly, and it is therefore a sin to bury them in the ground and fail to use them. Because of our economic system, money is the thing that we use in order to sustain us. In times of surplus, we are to give abundantly *and* invest and save for the future, so that in times of lack, we will have provision stored up for us!

We must be good stewards of what resources he has given us

I see nothing wrong with investing in different areas of mutual funds, government bonds, or term deposits. I do have difficulty with investing in individual stocks with the premise that you know it is high risk and that you can lose money. I believe this goes in the face of Matthew 25. The point here is that you are knowingly investing into something high risk – with God's money. "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty" (Prov 21:5).

Another area of investment is real estate. Many people have done very well, some not so much. In my previous article on credit cards I talked about making purchases on credit which can be very dangerous if you are not able to pay the amount you are putting on your

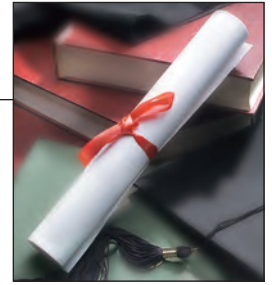


card off every month. Mortgages are similar in that you are making a purchase on credit. With real estate, the most important thing to be careful of is over-extending your debt. If the mortgage, taxes, and expenses of a rental property aren't covered by the amount of rent you're charging. . . not so good. You should not have to contribute from your normal daily living expenses. And this would be no different than your personal residence; if you are not meeting all your monthly expenses because your mortgage is too high? Maybe its time to look at selling and getting into something that can meet your financial obligations. But for this topic I'm talking about investment property. A good rule of thumb is that the total expenses including taxes and mortgage for that particular home should be no more than seventy percent of the rental income; this allows you to put money aside for the times in between renters or any unforeseen repair should that occur. But please keep in mind I am being conservative here for someone just getting into this area;

there are more savvy investors who will have a different formula. And one side note here about rentals; whether it is the one bedroom suite downstairs in your own home, or the full home around the corner, please declare this as income and pay Revenue Canada what they are due; this is income and you must declare it. "Then Christ said to them, 'So give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what is God's'" (Matt 22:21).

God gives us everything, spiritually and financially. He has asked us as his children to be good stewards of all that we receive in Matthew 25; let us all keep this in mind when we do make investments.

Consider also looking out for a good, sound financial advisor; we have many throughout our church communities. If you are new in the investment area, start with your accountant (if you have one) or ask around. The topic of money, investing, sound financial management is prevalent in our circles more than ever before and there are many good resources to draw from. **C**



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Is Reformed Education Enough?

The CARDUS Group has come out with a Canadian version of their Educational Survey. It's a wonderfully fascinating survey which measures the impact Christian schools have had on their former students, compared with the impact non-religious schools – both public and private – have had on the students which attend them. The reason for the survey stems from the stated conviction that “If Christian education is worth doing, it is worth measuring” (*CARDUS Education Survey 2012*). While many, including the undersigned, whole heartedly agree with this statement, it does have implications when applied to education in both the general and the Reformed Christian school. It implies that there are those who question whether sending their kids to a Christian school is worth their time and money. It implies that there are other alternatives out there which may be better. It implies that there are options for parents that will produce the desired “product” in an equal or even better way than is possible in a Christian school. This demonstrates a shift in how we see Christian education in general, and it is a shift that those who support Reformed Christian education should pay attention to.

Successful schools

Some people reading this column will remember distinctly what it was like to move to a new country. They wondered what school would provide their children with a good education and would be glorifying to God, though not in that order. After many prayers, arguments about financial feasibility, and meetings about how it was all going to work, some of those reading these words remember deciding that the school they would send their children to would need to be a school of their own making under the Lord's blessing.

Thus we have the tradition in the Canadian Reformed Churches of setting up what we call “covenantal” schools for children born to members of our churches and of

those churches with which we have some form of ecclesiastical fellowship. For the last fifty years or so, these schools have been established; so far, according to most accounts, they have been very successful. Yet, some may ask, successful in what?

A judgement on priorities

We have been successful in maintaining a school system which promotes, at its core, the desire to help parents instruct covenant children in the fear of the Lord. Schools pride themselves in being able to show that instructing children in the fear of Lord is not just something that is relegated to Bible class or to religious studies, but is infused into every aspect of the curriculum. Keeping it “Reformed” has been the most sought-after aspect of everything that happens in our schools, even to the detriment of other important areas. How does one know this is true? Let's make a judgement on priorities.

Ghandi once said, “Action expresses priorities.” While Ghandi might not be right all the time, he does unintentionally echo Proverbs 21:11 which states, “Even a child is know by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.” If we are allowed to make inferences about priorities based on people's actions, perhaps it would be interesting to think about what action you would take in the following scenario while holding on to what would be *best* for your child.

Here is the scenario: Your school is in need of a Grade 6 teacher by the end of the week to fill the vacancy of a teacher suffering from a stress related illness. You know that, in part, the stress the teacher felt comes from the (mis)behaviour of a group of covenant children found in your Grade 6 classroom who struggle more than some others to curb their sinful nature. You have only two candidates apply. One, we'll call him Marinus, comes to the table with his Bachelor's Degree in Education, having taken elective in the maths, sciences, and, for good

measure, behavioural sciences. The other candidate, we'll dub him Wilhelm, has been attending university for three years, majoring in English, and is just one semester shy of his Bachelor of Arts degree. Which one do you hire?

A no brainer, right?

One thing the Personnel Committee forgot to mention: Marinus belongs to the local Baptist Church and Wilhelm is a member in good standing in the local Canadian Reformed church.

Whom do you hire?

Did your answer change?

The truth be told, for most schools in the Canadian Reformed system there is only one candidate they *could* hire. It would be a shock if any of the schools in our federation were to allow the hiring of teachers who did not belong to a Canadian Reformed or sister church. The hiring of such a person would mean that there has been a seismic shift in the foundation our schools have been built on and, in the opinion of this author, this would not be a good thing. The question remains though, whom do we want to teach our children as we move forward?

Marinus and Wilhelm

Think about the scenario above and ask yourself a different question. Don't ask whom *you will hire* – your school's constitution binds your hands in that regard. Ask yourself whom do you *want* to hire. You will find the decision more difficult. Marinus has the qualifications you need. He has teacher training, a full degree, some university wrought insight into the behaviour of man and, let's be honest, a Christian background. Wilhelm is smart and willing, but in the end he is just a warm body you will put in front of a difficult class because he has the right Reformed pedigree.

More than likely, the members of our schools who have fought and sacrificed to have Reformed education start in their church communities would hold out for Wilhelm, no questions asked. Others, perhaps younger, who have been taught by untrained, though Reformed teachers, who were not the best (because they are out there too) might think differently. It could be argued that parents of the up-and-coming generation of students value a different type of education than their parents did.

Two Christian schools

Do you want to test the shift in your local area? Ask your parent community to make a hypothetical choice. Let's say that they had the choice of schools where most things were equal. Both schools had the same facilities,

the same amount of students, were equally distant and possessed an equally dedicated, qualified staff. One of the schools, let's call it *A Christian School*, was known for its academic excellence, providing many rich and varied opportunities for learning, including a strong music and art program. However, the dedication in *A Christian School* for promoting a Reformed Christian outlook on the world is lack-lustre. A Christian perspective is present but more in the sense of a general Christian School. *R Christian School*, just down the street in the opposite direction, was known for its rich and vibrant Reformed outlook on education. The students are steeped in the Reformed tradition and they look at everything they learn in a clear, historical-redemptive fashion. However, *R Christian School* is only able to provide the basics in terms of academic programs. There is no special music or art program. The students are able to read, write, and work arithmetic, but the graduates will not have had the same academic leg up on their public school counterparts that the graduates of *A Christian School* would have. Where do you want to send you children?

They scrimped, they saved, they hired mostly qualified people

Fifty years ago the answer was obvious. *R Christian School* won the day. How can we tell? The majority of Canadian Reformed communities evaluated the local Christian schools and found them lacking – not in academic rigour, but in Reformed worldview. There were arguments to be sure, but in the end, having a school with what the founders believed to be a rich and vibrant Reformed tradition was more important than having a school with a strong academic program. We know this is true because we judge the priorities of the founding members by their actions. They scrimped, they saved, they hired mostly qualified people, but if they were not to be had, almost qualified was good enough – as long as they were members in good standing. The schools were up and running sometimes before they had enough books for the students to use. This is the general history of how the first schools in our federation were founded. Many of these schools are now reaching their fiftieth year of operation and with the Lord's blessing coupled with the hard work and dedication of the parents, teachers (both with and without official papers), and students, these schools have worked exceptionally well.

Would today's parent community accept the same limitations for their children for the sake of Reformed education? Some would, but not as many as in years past. A parent once told me that the school should be viewed primarily as an academic institution. If children were not getting a better academic education in a Reformed Christian school than in the general Christian school down the street, she was prepared to jump ship. In her view she could and would teach her children about the Reformed tradition at home, but only the best school could provide her children with the academic advantage they needed to compete in the academic world.

There is an increasing urgency for those running our schools – meaning the parents of the children attending – to make sure that they have the best of both worlds

This same sentiment is also alive in other areas. Both our elementary and secondary schools are under pressure to increase programming to keep up with the perceived advances made by public, private, and Catholic schools. Think about the pressure for adding JK and/or five day Kindergarten some of our schools are experiencing. Think about the increasingly complex competition our high school graduates are facing as they prepare for post secondary education. Isn't the bar being set higher all the time?

Parents want the best for their children. They are willing to go to great lengths to get it, and never before have so many been in a position to pay for it (meaning, even private secular institutions are becoming appealing to some.) That means that there is an increasing urgency for those running our schools – meaning the parents of the children attending – to make sure that they have the best of both worlds.

Striving for excellence

There is no reason why parents should have to choose between *A Christian School* and *R Christian School*. In fact, when they prepare to send their children to school, their only option should be *A Reformed Christian School*, which is a school that values excellence in the use of all

of our talents in the service to the Lord through a strong Reformed tradition. As educational leaders, (meaning parents, Board and Education Committee members, as well as educators) we need to strive to provide just that. The Lord has blessed our communities with the means to make it happen and we have the expertise to back it up. We are beyond the days when we can assume parents will always automatically keep sending their children to a Canadian Reformed school simply because it is there. People more and more feel they have options. We are also beyond the days when our schools need to settle for second best with the excuse, "At least it is Reformed." We need to use data like that provided by the CARDUS group to have an honest look at where we excel and where we fall short. Then we need to work as a community to hold fast to our Reformed identity even while we kick against ever settling for second best because of it.

People more and more feel they have options

We are well on our way to getting there. We have an excellent Reformed teachers college in Ontario, and elementary schools which provide a solid background for secondary education. High schools across the country have produced graduates who are sought after by universities, and other graduates who enter the trades with a skill set and a work ethic second to none. We must maintain what we have, and we should promote what we have. Parents need to make sure that our schools are the best option for their children because they hold to the Reformed tradition and set high standards for academics and for the trades. We cannot settle for one or the other. This is not an easy task; neither was beginning a school fifty years ago. With vision, imagination, faith, and constant prayer a model where the best of both worlds is possible will emerge. The question is, do we have the will to pursue it?

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@ech.ca



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

In his excellent article entitled “Tithing,” Bill Dehaas mentions that he prefers to use the terms “tithing” and “giving” as synonymous. I understand that he wisely does not want the question of “tithing” versus “giving” to deter from his message on Christian giving; however, I do think it is worthwhile that we explore this further, for, as Bill said, “There is a much debate regarding the tithe.” The question is if the tithe is part of God’s command also for us today or in other words is it part of the moral law. If it is then we need to understand and know more about it.

Tithing is strongly promoted today in the “health and wealth” gospel by prosperity preachers. They are not exactly known for their careful exegesis of the Bible and have a habit of picking certain teachings in Scripture and ignoring others. One cannot help but question if they preach tithing to their own benefit to entice people to give to their “church.” They also benefit by tithing in that they need only to give ten percent of what they have received and no more. Not a bad deal when you are “making” millions. We also believe that we will be blessed when we give generously, but not with the same understanding as these “give to get” preachers. It is important that we properly understand tithing and Christian giving, for we too are prone to idolatry.

When we turn to the Bible, it reveals that tithing existed long before the law was given at Sinai. We learn that Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God, and that Jacob, when he had a revelation from the Lord on his way out to Padan-Aram, promised to give a tenth unto God. We see that Israel was commanded to tithe but they largely neglected it until the days of Malachi, where we read God expressly telling his people that they had robbed him. In the New Testament, we read that the tithe still existed but Jesus did not explicitly forbid or promote the tithe. He taught that giving is so much more than a matter of tithing. He often mentions and strongly warns against the love of money and material possessions. In the old covenant or testament it seems that God often rewarded with material blessings but in the new there seems to be an emphasis on weaning us of earthly treasures and encouraging us to store up heavenly treasures so as to prepare us for eternal life with him. Consider the following texts: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves

break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:19–21). We read about treasures in heaven again in 1 Timothy 6:18, 19: “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous



and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” In Luke 12:32–34 we read, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Are we to take this literally: “Sell your possessions and give to the poor”? What exactly are we to make from these words of Jesus?

Calvin has a wonderful chapter in his Institutes that may help. It is titled: “How to use the present life and the comforts of it.” If you do not have a copy, it is available online at no cost. Type in [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#), John Calvin and click on “Institutes of the Christian Religion.” Click table of contents on the left and then again for Book 3, Chapter 10 and take twenty minutes to read some of the finest material on this subject from a man who not only preached it but also lived it!

Reading all this material and knowing that God has blessed us abundantly, why is it that so often our schools and churches struggle to collect sufficient funds? We know that it is a major challenge for some to make their financial commitments but collectively is there not more than enough wealth in our circles that this struggling should not be necessary? Maybe we should have more articles such as the one from Bill Dehaas on Christian giving and on how we are to use our material blessings. I would also like to see an article on tithing, explaining whether or not it is part of the moral law and how we should think about it.

Andrew Jans, Dunnville

Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.
(Psalm 19:1-4)*

Have you ever seen a sunset? Perhaps you have gone for a walk near the end of the day and you observed how bright reds, soft pinks, and vibrant yellows light up the sky as the sun sank below the horizon. Or perhaps when you are camping you have witnessed sparkly stars light up the night sky. These are glorious sights to see and experience, aren't they? The heavens are telling us the glory of the Lord. With every sunrise and sunset, with every star that shines in the night sky, the Lord is preaching a sermon without words. We can see and feel and experience the wonder of creation and know that God is real and mighty.

We have another way to know God don't we? Yes, we can know God through reading the Bible. God has given us a great gift in the Bible. We could even say that the Bible is a present from heaven. The Bible speaks about the good news of Jesus Christ. With our ears we listen to this good news. When we read the Bible in our homes or hear the Bible preached in church then we learn even more about our wonderful God. We learn that he is the creator of the heavens and the earth and we also learn that he is our Father through Jesus Christ. We learn that he has called us to be his children. The more we read the Bible, the more we know about God; the more we read or listen to the Word, the more we know God in our hearts.

God gave us two more things to help us understand his Word even better. With these two things we use not only our ears but also our eyes, our hands, and our mouths. We see and experience these two holy things when we are at church. They are the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. These sacraments serve to strengthen our faith. God is gracious to us and gives us these gifts to witness and experience so that we can remember and believe what Jesus Christ did for us.

We can see God through his creation and this can give us knowledge in our heads that God is glorious and his

deeds are mighty. We also hear about God when we read or listen to the Bible and the Holy Spirit works faith into our hearts. While we are in church our faith is strengthened when we witness and experience the sacraments.

Psalm 19:1, 3

The spacious heavens declare
God's glory everywhere;
the skies proclaim his might.
The knowledge they display
day echoes forth to day
and night makes known to night.
They use no speech or word,
yet everywhere is heard
the voice of all creation.
The truth that it expounds
throughout the world resounds
and reaches every nation.

God's law is sounds and whole;
it will revive the soul,
for it new strength supplies.
His testimony sure,
trustworthy evermore,
will make the simple wise.
His precepts plainly show
how right they are, and so
the heart they cheer and brighten.
The Lord's commandments pure
shine forth with radiance clear
and so the eyes enlighten.

Birthdays in June:

17 Joan Koerselman will be 56

2113-16 Avenue, Coaldale, AB T1M 1J8

20 Lars Huijgen will be 22

85950 Canborough Road,
RR 1, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W1

26 Devon Niezen will be 13

454 St George Street East, Fergus, ON N1M 1K8

30 Beverly Breukelman will be 51

2225 - 19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

We wish Joan, Lars, Devon, and Beverly a happy birthday. We are thankful that our heavenly Father has given you another year to celebrate. We hope you have a wonderful day rejoicing with family and friends.

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”
(Num 6:24-26)

Till next time,
Corinne Gelms and
Patricia Gelms

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

*If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of, please let us know as soon as possible.
You can contact us by the following means:*

Mail: Corinne Gelms

8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0

Phone: 905-957-0380, email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



PRESS RELEASE

ILPB Inter League Publication Board

April 23, 2013, Fergus, ON

Present for the board, Dick Nijenhuis (chair), Michelle Helder and Dianne Westrik, representatives of the Women's League. Present for the Administration Committee, Paul DeBoer (Coordinator), Debbie Swaving (Sales), Henrietta Lodder (Treasurer), and Cathy Jonker (Administrator).

ILPB Chairman, Dick Nijenhuis opened our spring meeting with Scripture reading and prayer, and a welcome to all.

Progress report shows that we have published no new books; five more books in editing stages.

Marketing reviewed. Four advertisements have been placed in *Clarion*.

Finances are in good order. Budget, balance sheet, and income statement reviewed.

Sales report shows sales were strong within the past year. It was noted that regular online orders are being received and filled.

Board updated the Administration Committee on books being sourced. Policy manual has been reviewed and is being updated. General discussion period was held. Future plan discussed. Board is looking for an additional Board member. Administration Committee is in need of more members. For more information, persons are encouraged to contact sales@ilpb.ca. Positions on the Committee of Administration are shuffling. Next combined meeting planned for November 7, 2013. Press release was read and approved. Paul Deboer closed in prayer.

