

Clarion



What's Inside

Perhaps you have had trouble in the past explaining the name "Canadian Reformed Church." In our editorial, Rev. Eric Kampen asks us: what does our name communicate? While it was an intentional and meaningful choice - a church in Canada that teaches and lives what was taught by the Great Reformation of the sixteenth century - it may not always be understood that way by our neighbours or our members today. Our Reformation Day issue also brings readers an article by Jeff Morris: "A Zealous Monk and a Magnificent Message."

Issue 21 contains the Treasure, New & Old and You Asked columns, MERF News, a report from Owen Sound saying farewell to the Pols, a book review, and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

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Clarion

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; **Copy Manager:** Laura Veenendaal

Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliwer, E. Kampen, J. Van Vliet, M. VanLuik

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

CLARION

8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert AB T8N 5J5

Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Canada 

LEAD ARTICLE



Eric Kampen *Minister*
 Canadian Reformed Church
 Orangeville, Ontario
rev.e.kampen@gmail.com

Rebranding

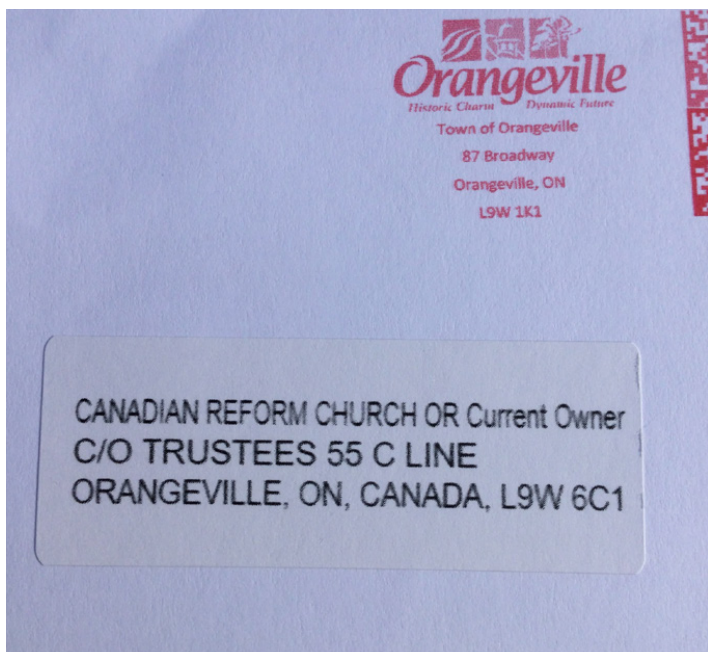
In the world of business, it is common for companies to rebrand themselves. Logos that may have once captured what the company stands for may now look stodgy and dull, and slogans may become stale. The product and service being offered may be the same, but it is time for a refreshed look so that customers will know what they stand for and serve as incentive to seek their services. I have a daughter and a son-in-law in the graphic design field, and I understand that rebranding keeps them very busy.

Now, the church is not a business, but what about the way we present ourselves to our communities? We don't have a common logo, like the Christian Reformed Church, for example, but we do have a common name, "Canadian Reformed Church." That name was chosen with care, to communicate the desire to be a Christian church in Canada, faithful to the riches rediscovered in the great Reformation that took place in the sixteenth century. After some seventy years since being established in

Canada, this continues to remain the desire. The question is whether the name communicates what we hope it does, namely, of being a church rooted in Scripture, proclaiming the gospel of being saved by grace, through faith in Christ, seeking the glory of God in all we do.

What does our name communicate?

I ask whether it communicates this now, but the question is whether it ever did what was hoped for. I will illustrate with two events in my life, one that took place in the seventies and one that took place just this past year. Back in the seventies, I was dating the young lady who by now has been my wife for forty years. She was not of Dutch background, so I bravely explained to her father that I was a member of the Canadian Reformed Church. Without really skipping a beat, he said, "Oh, the Dutch church." I suspect that others from that time will have had similar experiences when they talked to someone about belonging



Even after more than seventy years in Orangeville, the town can't get the name right.

to a Canadian Reformed Church. It would have been true for Christian Reformed people, too. If the name "Reformed" was connected with the word "church," it was understood as "Dutch."

Fast forward more than forty years, to 2021. In the spring, we were on a walk with my daughter and three little grandsons, when we ended up talking with a man about his well-cared for gardens. Before long, we learned he was of Mennonite background, and he learned we were of Reformed background. Without skipping a beat he said, "Oh, the Dutch church," even though I had used the word "Canadian." The word "Reformed" gave it away, as he had known people who belonged to various Reformed churches. Other adjectives like "Free" or "United" or "Christian" didn't really make any difference. It appears, then, that the name "Canadian Reformed" may be very meaningful to us, but for those who know anything about churches, you might as well call it "Dutch Reformed," along with other denominations that have the word "Reformed" in their name.

"Reformed"


As for those who know next to nothing about churches, my experience is that you are bound to be confronted with a confused stare as the name tells them nothing about the church, except that it is a church. The word "Reformed" is easily misunderstood as "Reform." For some time, that gave the impression of being associated with a political party (the Reform

Party of Canada). As the word "reform" is also applied to efforts to rehabilitate prisoners, it does not bring up a positive image. If someone is willing to listen for a few minutes, I might try to put it in historical context, but you usually lose them when you talk about the Reformation of the sixteenth century and try to sketch what happened. All that accomplishes is that they know you are not Roman Catholic. If they listen long enough, they will discover you are Protestant, with a Dutch connection. So, we are back again to the Dutch church. In the spirit of multiculturalism, others will see us as the Dutch part of the Canadian mosaic, even though by now we have fifth generation descendants of immigrants and many members of different ethnic backgrounds.

As we reflect on the name "Canadian Reformed Church," then we realize it was meaningful internally. It gave an indication of how the first generation of immigrants saw itself and what it wanted to be in Canada. We can only commend them for not wanting to come across as an ethnic church. As the years have gone by, though, it is evident that it did not really accomplish what it was meant to do. The word "Reformed" does not evoke in the minds of others what it does in our own.

What name?

Is it then, perhaps, time to think about rebranding? It is not that the message has changed; at least, let's hope not. Of course, that begs the question, "What name?" Perhaps in an ideal situation, we should just call ourselves "Church," since that word is associated with the Christian faith. We actually did that for our website. If you type in Orangevillechurch.ca, you will see our webpage. Regrettably, the word "church" is too generic, as it is used by a wide variety of groups with a diversity of interpretations of the gospel. It would be like a car dealer advertising they sell cars. People want to know what brand. There is a need for some adjective.

I don't have a name to suggest. That wouldn't be helpful anyway, for any suggestion would have to come from one of the churches and receive widespread exposure and input from the churches by going via classis and regional synod. My point is to make us think about how transparent we want our name to be. Is it important, or are we content to feel good about the name internally, with our only concern to distinguish ourselves from other Reformed churches? If that is so, well, that is the end of the conversation. If there is a desire to let the name by which we call ourselves be meaningful in our society, how then can we, collectively, rebrand, so the first thing others think of when they hear the name is the gospel? 

Salvation by God's Design

"After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel" (JUDGES 3:31)

This passage, right on the heels of the narrative about the left-handed judge Ehud, is an earthy tale; it's one of the raw parts of Scripture.


Who is this mysterious Shamgar, whose judgeship is recounted in just this one verse in the book? He is the first of the minor judges. His name is not a Hebrew name, which means he was most likely not an Israelite. And his identification as the son of Anath, "ben-Anath," suggests he was devoted to the service of Anath, the Canaanite goddess of war. "Ben-Anath" was a widely used name in extrabiblical sources, applied to a troop of Egyptian mercenaries in Pharaoh's army. So while Shamgar's success against the Philistines, killing 600 of them with an oxgoad, benefitted the Israelites, he may not have been intentionally serving Israelite interests. It may have been a one-time benefit on an otherwise Egyptian campaign.

But the LORD who raised up Ehud as a deliverer accomplished the same with Shamgar, to save Israel. So what if Shamgar wasn't an Israelite? The LORD can make use of foreigners only looking out for their own purposes to save his people, just as much as he can use left-handed Benjaminites like Ehud.

Shamgar's weapon was not a sword or spear; it was an oxgoad, a tool for training stubborn oxen to be obedient. It was about eight feet long, up to six inches thick at one end, and pointed at the other. This is a most unlikely tool with which to kill 600 Philistines and save Israel. We do not know whether he did it all at once or killed only a few at a time. But again, that is not the point. Should we not see here the very glory of the LORD? Can't he deliver his people as he sees fit, whether by a follower or a pagan? Is there not something so mysterious about a God like this?

God finds a way in seemingly hopeless situations to save his people. Who would have thought that God would continue the line of promise through Tamar, a Canaanite who was more faithful to her culture's standards than Judah was to his? Who would have thought that God would deliver Moses from infanticide by having Pharaoh's daughter rescue him? Who would have thought that God would've saved Israel through a lefty assassin like Ehud, or a pagan like Shamgar?

How much more salvation through Jesus Christ? Who would have thought that God Almighty would take to himself human flesh in the person of Jesus, be born of a virgin, for the purpose of saving us from our sins? He grew up with no form or majesty that should attract anyone to him (Isa 53:2-3). The LORD used him to accomplish the greatest salvation of all, through the humiliation and weakness of the cross. The gospel is all about the LORD choosing what is foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong. Christ's crucifixion was unexpected for so many, and the ultimate act of foolishness to a pagan. But it was necessary; he needed to make a mockery of Satan and the evil powers. And he did! Not with an oxgoad, nor with a dagger. But with the shedding of his own blood. He was slaughtered for the salvation of his people.

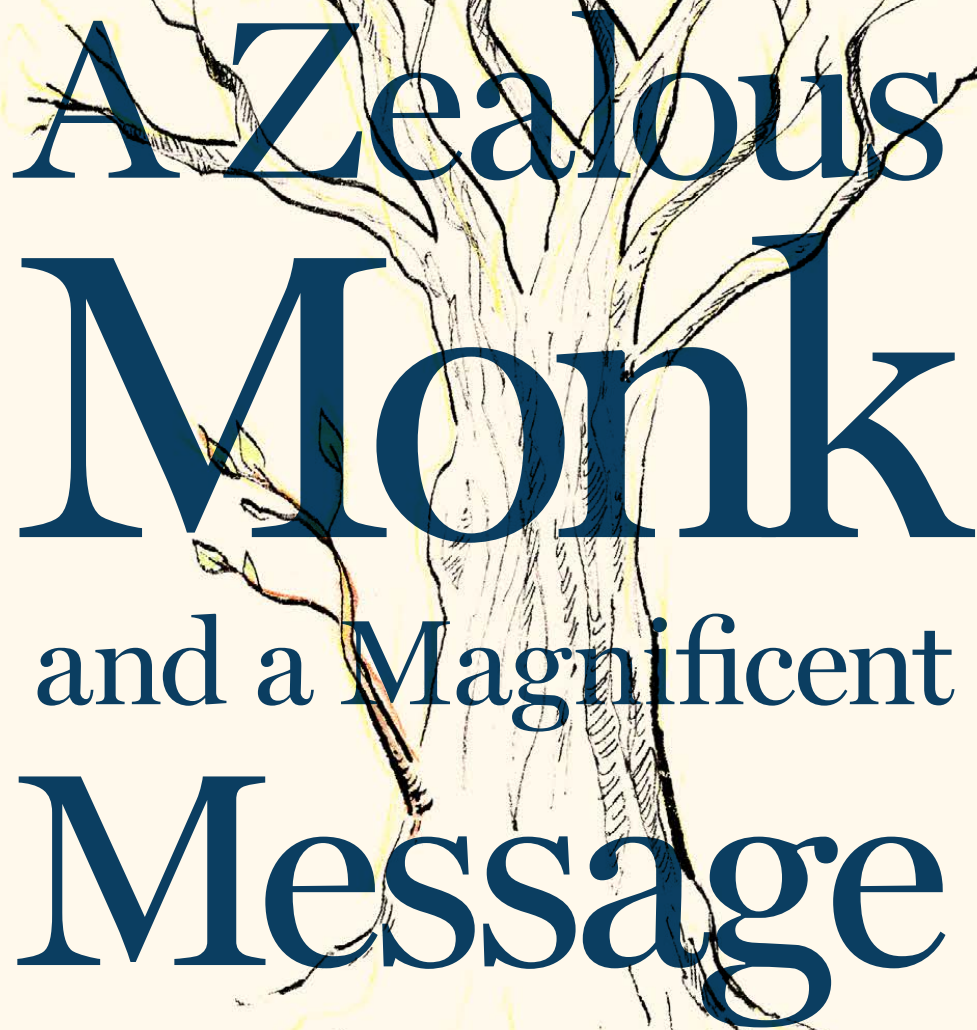
The Bible is not all neat and tidy. Neither is the history of the church. God intervenes in surprising ways to deliver his people. Because salvation belongs to the Lord, who gave an oxgoad to Shamgar, a dagger to Ehud, horns and torches to Gideon, and a donkey's jawbone to Samson. It's God's joy and delight to use the weak and foolish things of the world to shame the strong and wise. And therefore, it is our call to cling by faith to this God, to find rest in him, and to receive the strength to serve in his kingdom. 

For Further Study

1. Perhaps with the aid of a concordance, find out from elsewhere in the book the confirmation that Shamgar was known in Israel.
2. How have you experienced the Lord's use of unlikely instruments in your own life?



Ryan Kampen Minister and missionary
Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church
Reformational Study Centre
South Africa
rjkampen@gmail.com



A Zealous Monk and a Magnificent Message

The gospel of salvation cuts to the heart of the human soul because it speaks to life's most pressing questions

In the early 1500s the glorious riches of the gospel of Christ exploded onto the Western world with a renewed understanding, marking the end of the Middle Ages while ushering in a new Reformation era.

In 380 AD, Christianity had become the official religion of the state of Rome, a status which both benefitted and hindered the proclamation of the gospel. Eventually (1054 AD), the Church split into two groups, resulting in the Eastern and Western traditions, and after further centuries of political wrangling, the Western Church unwittingly found herself in a spiritual crisis. While calls for reform had come from figures such as John Wycliffe (d. 1384) and John Huss (d. 1415), things came to a head when the formidable Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, read the book of Romans. Luther's desire to comprehend the truth of the gospel, along with his ability to pinpoint and articulate its core, altered the Western Church permanently. God used the zealous monk in a remarkable way and the Church continues to benefit from his rekindled insights to this day.

As we reflect on the anniversary of the Reformation, we will consider the damaging theology that Luther would eventually oppose. Next, we will explore Luther's crucial insights, which remain with us today.

Historical background

As we already noted, by the 1500s the Christian faith was no longer a new religion; in fact, in many circles it had become old news. We know from the New Testament that the faith had gone out through the preaching of the apostles, so that even in their lifetimes the gospel of Christ had reached "all of the Jews and Greek in Asia" (Acts 19). These efforts led to many thousands of conversions (Acts 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19), and as each converted person embodied the Holy Spirit, they became another means by which God could render even more conversions. The gospel of salvation cuts to the heart of the human soul because, when understood correctly, it speaks to life's most pressing questions. Who am I? How did I get here?

We are called to lean on God's grace, deny ourselves, and allow our sinful natures to be buried with Christ so we can be raised with him by the power of God's Spirit in newness of life

What is the meaning of life in the face of death? Why do I carry guilt, and how do I deal with it?

The early Christians faced insurmountable challenges, especially in the form of physical persecution, but by the fourth century the message of salvation had spread throughout the Roman empire until it was finally inaugurated as the official state religion. From this point in history until sometime around the eighteenth century, Christianity's prominence on the world stage would grow exponentially. Over time fortune, fame, and politics took its toll on the leadership of the Church, and her doctrines, not to mention her members, paid a heavy price. This is the church Martin Luther knew, a church with a distinctly human hierarchy, a vast legacy of tradition and rules, and an unspoken way of understanding theology.

Doctrinal background

Martin Luther became a monk in 1505. By 1507, he was ordained and began teaching in the University of Wittenberg. Some ten years later, he was nailing his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Church door, an event which sparked one of the most influential social movements in history. To understand the depth of Luther's insight, it's important to contrast it with the most prominent theology at the time.

Gabriel Biel was an influential theologian whose work on God's justification was well known at the University of Wittenberg, where Luther taught during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Simply put, Biel thought that God's justice had to do with the

fact that God never goes back on his word. On the surface this is true, but, as Martin Luther would eventually point out, the way Biel applied God's faithfulness to his work of salvation falls way short of Scripture.

Grace and justice misunderstood

Biel well understood that humans are sinful, and that God must be gracious toward humans for their salvation. So far so good. What Biel and others failed to perceive is the consequence of sin. Instead, theologians like Biel taught that humans, although they are sinful and do not deserve salvation, sometimes do morally right acts. For example, one might notice that one's neighbours' chickens have escaped, and take time out of their day to help retrieve them. Biel might categorize this as a generally good act. Now, Biel was not so scripturally illiterate that he thought such an act earned the human any merit toward salvation. How could it, since humans are inherently sinful. Rather, Biel thought that God was pleased with such acts so that by his grace, he utilized his enormous power to decree such morally good acts meritorious for salvation. In other words, by God's gracious decree some of the things you do are enough to earn your salvation.ⁱ

Further, Biel explained that because God is just, he will never take back his decree. Since God is perfectly faithful, never backing out of his promises, Biel thought that if God decrees that one of your deeds gets you a little closer to heaven, then that decree is permanent – regardless of what you do tomorrow. At the same time, if your actions are not good, then God will not

ⁱ Shepherd, Victor A. 2015. *Interpreting Martin Luther: an introduction to his life and thought*: 91-93.

decree that your actions have earned you anything, and by his same justice, will bring unspeakable punishment on you. Luther was taught that God's righteousness was revealed in the act of his divine justice punishing sinners.ⁱⁱ

Anti-gospel: Justification by works

Biel's presentation of the gospel is dark and startling for numerous reasons. For one, it leaves one desperately wondering whether it's God's salvation or wrath that awaits one on the day of judgement; but, far worse, it says nothing about Christ's death on the cross.

The fact that the Church encounters harmful theology is not surprising. The apostle Peter writes that the devil is like a roaring lion, looking to devour those who love Christ (1 Pet 5:8). And Timothy warns his readers to watch their doctrine closely. Even stating that the outcome of such perseverance will result in people's salvation (1 Tim 4:16).

As human beings we are prideful, and often conceal the truth. We are inclined to allow our sinful flesh to dominate our thoughts and our actions. Sometimes this means supplementing the gospel with a list of man-made rules which carry the appearance of godliness. At other times it means allowing our doctrine to erode to suit the latest trend. That's why we are called to lean on God's grace, deny ourselves, and allow our sinful natures to be buried with Christ so we can be raised with him by the power of God's Spirit in newness of life. That's also why it's imperative for Christians not just to read Scripture, but to study it. By doing so, Martin Luther perceived the flaws of the theology of his day and brought the truth of the gospel back into the light.

Gospel: Justification by faith

Martin Luther took seriously the idea that one might be able to perform works which would merit God's grace, to the point of wretched desperation. In a famous passage in the preface to his Latin writings, Luther recalls the inadequacy of his spiritual state from decades earlier.

For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically of the formal or active justice, as they called it, by which God is righteous and

*punishes sinners and the unrighteous. Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt I was a sinner before God with a most disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Luther remembers that as a monk he lived "without reproach." He studied Scripture, prayed continually, and followed the rules of his teachers. Yet, his conscience remained disturbed because of the inevitable sins which flow from the mind of fleshy human-kind. Luther had been taught to do good works so that God's righteous judgment might pass over him, but he was honest with himself and knew he stood condemned. For this reason, Luther feared God, and even hated him.

Of course, the story does not end there. Luther was diligent in his study and wrestled with Scripture. He understood that God is the greatest conceivable being and therefore worthy of all worship and praise, so he persevered, toiling in his studies. Finally, when he considered the text of Romans he had been struggling over in context, Luther noticed something glorious.

Finally by the mercy of God, as I meditated day and night, I paid attention to the context of the words, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" Then I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith.^{iv}

The righteous shall live by faith!

It is true that God is righteous, and that his wrath is poured out on sin. God is perfectly just and by nature requires satisfaction for the injustices we perform. Influential theologians across the centuries including Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and even Biel understood that humans are by nature sinful. On this the Bible is clear. In Genesis 6:5 it says that the Lord saw "that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." The wickedness of the human heart is the reason Adam and Eve were removed from the garden, why God destroyed humankind with a flood, and ultimately why God chose Abraham and not the other way around.

Centuries after God promised to bless Abraham's descendants, God met them at Mt. Sinai. This time, instead of destroying them, he declared his holiness by inviting them into a relationship. He did this by explaining what he requires for people to

ⁱⁱ Ibid: 94.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luther, Martin, Timothy F. Lull, and William R. Russell. "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings" *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2005: 8-9.

^{iv} Ibid.

be in a relationship with him, in the giving of the ten commandments and the rest of the law.

The Law anticipates the gospel

Luther explains that already at Mt. Sinai the promise of “justification by faith” has been proclaimed. The law was not given simply because people might be able to follow through with its requirements, but to reveal our blindness and hardness of heart toward God. By reflecting on the chasm between our unbelief and the God of Creation, we might be compelled to throw ourselves upon God’s grace.^v Still, God is just, and his wrath must be appeased. So how is God’s justice satisfied if not through the law? By the only work that counts for our salvation, that is, the work of Jesus Christ.

In Colossians 2:13-14, Paul reveals the foundation on which “justification by faith” stands, writing,

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

By his death on the cross, Christ drank the cup of God’s wrath because he knew that if the punishment were to fall on us, we could not bear it. And he did this “while we were dead in our sins.” Justification by faith does not mean doing the right thing, or following the right tradition, or obeying God’s law. It means looking into our hearts and throwing ourselves at the mercy of God in faith “while we are dead in our sins.” God is not waiting for us to be good before we are justified, as Biel thought – not because he does not want us to be good, but because without Christ, there’s simply nothing good that we can do!

Two kinds of righteousness

At the same time, Christ not only carries the burden of our sin by forgiving us, but he also offers us a new life through the power of his Spirit. Luther writes on the forgiveness of Christ and the

recreation of our spirits in his tract, “Two Kinds of Righteousness.” There Luther explains justification by faith in terms of “alien” and “proper” righteousness. He says that we are justified simply by putting our faith in Christ, because when we put our faith in Christ we share in Christ’s own righteousness. This is “alien” righteousness because it is not our own but comes from someone else. For those who put their faith in Christ, God justifies them because Jesus Christ is righteous. At the same time, when we put our faith in Christ, he makes his home with us, and transforms our spirits. This is our “proper” righteousness, because our own desires and attitudes are eventually converted by the power of his Spirit.^{vi} According to Luther, “justification by faith” has to do with both. We are justified by putting our faith in Christ’s righteousness, and when we put our faith in Christ’s righteousness, he lives in us, so we are recreated.

Conclusion

By the fifteenth century the essence of the gospel had slowly been eroded by time and tradition, but once it was recovered by the monk Martin Luther, it could not be contained. Luther spent the rest of his career articulating the primary theme of the gospel again and again – “the righteous shall live by faith.” The truth of the gospel is so profound and Luther’s work to promote it so effective that hardly a Protestant exists who does not know the Reformation slogan “justification by faith.” It’s a beautiful doctrine. It’s the culmination of God’s faithfulness to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the people of Israel. It’s the solution to the problem of the debt of sin, and the only way to change our hearts. God displayed his promises in circumcision, his law at Sinai, and his grace on the cross. We are justified before God, even while we are sinners, if only we would believe it. **C**



Jeff Morris is an elder in Streetlight Church in Hamilton. He has a Masters in Theological Studies from Tyndale University and is currently finishing his MA in Philosophy at Lincoln Seminary in Illinois

jeffbmorris@hotmail.com

^v Luther, Martin, Timothy F. Lull, and William R. Russell. “Preface to the Old Testament” *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2005: 119.

^{vi} Luther, Martin, Timothy F. Lull, and William R. Russell. “Two Kinds of Righteousness” *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2005: 135-137.

YOU ASKED


How Will We See God?

In heaven, will we see God face to face? How do we expect to see Christ on the new earth; as his disciples did after his resurrection in human form with crucifixion wounds, or as John sees him in Revelation depicted in fearful glory?

What the Bible says about eternal life far exceeds our imagination. It hasn't been revealed yet what we will be (1 John 3:2), so John cannot and may not go further than that. We may think of a knowing of God that's much richer than we would have now. It is a big question, though, *how* man can see God, who is the "invisible" (1 Tim 1:17). Throughout Scripture we read no one can see the face of God and live. Moses was permitted to see his back, but not his face (Exod 33:20, 23). No one has ever seen God (John 1:18; 6:46; 1 John 4:12). In Revelation 22:4, however, John does write that the glorified saints will see "his face." That is, they will be standing before the throne of God and of the Lamb and gaze at his glory (just as the angels are, rejoicing constantly in his glorious presence; cf. Isa 6:1f.). The apostle Paul also writes about a *seeing* "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12), but in a parallel sentence denotes this to be a matter of *knowing*, which is a knowing according to what God has revealed and manifested of himself! Then we will know him and see him *in* everything and everywhere *in which* he will appear to us!

We won't know what it will be like, this "seeing" of God "face to face." Yet, the expression does convey that we will be in his presence, that we will have a more intimate impression of his glory, his majesty, his goodness, and his grace. Our walking with God from Genesis 2 will be exceeded unto a full and perfect communion, a total enjoyment of God's gracious nearness, an intimate interaction. We will know him in a pure and perfect experience of all his goodness. In other words, this impression will be a fulness of salvation that's unimaginable today! We will know him in his love in all that God is, in all that God does. That's the kind of intimate knowledge Christ prayed for (John

17:24), "Father I desire that they also whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world."

The apostle John, also, has seen some of this glory and majesty in the ascended Lord Jesus (Rev 1:16). Again, what he will look like in heaven or on the new earth we cannot know. John's description does show that this is the same Jesus – John recognizes him – yet he is totally different too. Jesus appears to John in a heavenly glory and majesty, yet John speaks about someone like a son of man. John's description of Jesus's appearance, however, must be taken symbolically and not literally. John sees him in his glory as priest and king and judge, which makes on him an overwhelming impression: Jesus shines as bright as the sun in full strength. In other words, it was humanly impossible to look Jesus in the face. This is more than what John has seen on the mount of transfiguration, more than Jesus's appearance after the resurrection and at his ascension. Such great glory and majesty! Yet, as I already mentioned, this is not necessarily his appearance on the new earth, neither is this his appearance as God (John looked upon him and *lived*), but an appearance in which Jesus revealed himself as the Christ, the Holy One, who came to purge the churches and to punish those who were persecuting his elect! 



William den Hollander, Minister emeritus
Bethel Canadian Reformed Church
Toronto, Ontario
denhollanderw@gmail.com

Ask a Question Is there something you've been wanting to know, an answer you've been looking for? Send us your most thought provoking questions to explore in our You Asked column.

Please send questions to **William den Hollander**, Minister emeritus
Bethel Canadian Reformed Church, 23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0
denhollanderw@gmail.com

David & Erika Pol

Serving New Terrain

Bringing hope & hospitality in a season of “firsts”

By Darren Bosch

December 18, 2016 wasn't only an inaugural church service for a young couple discovering a new congregation and beautiful Grey County. It was the beginning of a season of “firsts” ... the start of a new adventure on new terrain. Heading into the unknown in the LORD's service.

In the congregation of Owen Sound, this heart-warming couple came as David Pol and Erika Langendoen. A “first” for many of us. The first time having a young, unmarried pastor straight out of college ... with his exuberant fiancé eagerly ready to serve in Young People's. Married six months later, Pastor David and Erika Pol set out on an adventure of “firsts.” And, likewise, the congregation of Owen Sound.

For the congregation, some “firsts” were:

- A young pastor just learning the ropes
- A pastor's wife hosting and discipling teenage students
- A pastor who plays guitar with the youth
- Starting up Small Groups with a broader mission
- Having a pastor preach and teach online
- Having a pastor with a headful of hair!


For David and Erika, some new territory was:

- First congregation
- First time in Church Council leadership
- First time doing holy supper, baptisms, and profession of faiths
- Having babies
- Serving as a registered nurse
- Coming alongside your own sheep experiencing deep brokenness
- Leading through COVID's change and conflict
- Winning the Pastors' Gun Shooting contest!

It was new terrain every step of the way. Unknowns around each corner. Dependence on God's faithfulness with every step. Whether it was navigating rich conversations hiking Harrison Park, praying for strength under Sauble's sunsets, or standing in awe atop Wiarton's cliffs, the terrain was both shaping, challenging, and gratitude-giving. Like life itself.

God continued to be faithful in the four-plus years the Pols served. Bringing them Isaiah in June 2018 and then Silas in May 2020, their family grew, as our congregation did, maybe not even aware of it. Despite sin, we grew together as a congregation through new adventures, twists and turns, and up hard climbs. God at work ... always stretching us out of love. Pruning and shaping. Even when the trek wasn't smooth or as we mapped out.

Two things that describe David and Erika and their ministry are hospitality and gospel-sharing. May the seeds planted in Owen Sound bear fruit: in loving the lost, warmly welcoming the hurting, being salt and light (Matt 5), bringing Good News to the poor, comforting the broken-hearted, and freeing captives (Isa 61).

In your new adventure you will meet new challenges and uncharted “firsts.” Leaning on him, may you continue to bring warm joy, hope, and hospitality to those on your path as you share the gospel. God is with you every step of the way (Isa 43)! 





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MERF News

Middle East Reformed Fellowship—"Declaring the Whole Counsel of God"

September 2021



Beyond Taliban

by Pastor Victor Atallah



After 20 years, it has been suddenly announced that Western troops left Afghanistan. This has become the overriding subject of news and discussions on TV and the internet. We will leave the diverse political aspects and speculations to others. As biblically thinking Christians, however, we need to be reminded of our Lord's firm

our heavenly Father's name, the coming of His kingdom and the application of His will. Should not that shape our own thinking, questioning, analysis, concerns and conclusions, rather than geopolitical, military and/or economic concerns? The agenda of Western nations has never been a truly "Christian" agenda.

exhortation to "first seek God's kingdom and righteousness" and His perfect design for our daily prayers – the sanctity of

This must be the conviction of all Christians.

Who are the Taliban?

The "Taliban" are extremely religious people with a very specific world and life view. The name, "Taliban," has its root in the Arabic verb "talaba," which means "asked for." The Arabic noun, "talabat," generally means "school students." The Urdu/Farsi name, "Taliban," was adopted to refer to a movement which seeks to return to the study and strict application of

the Quran and Islamic "sharia" law, as supposedly instituted and practiced by Mohammed.

Western governments heavily endorsed and promoted the massive efforts of this movement that was organized for training and equipping Afghani and Pakistani Sunni Muslim men, predominantly from the Pashtun ethnic group, to fight the Soviets and the communist Afghani government. Saudi and other Arab oil money financed most of the effort, including the arming and support

of huge numbers of trained and energized Islamic zealots. Most other Afghani ethnic groups did not join the effort. Even at the peak of the Taliban's success in governing Afghanistan, they met significant resistance and opposition by other Afghanis.

Whose Agenda?

Sadly, from the beginning of the 20th century, short-sighted geopolitical agendas encouraged and supported the establishment and expansion of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. It gave birth to more violent modern Islamic movements such as Taliban (Afghanistan and Pakistan), al-Qaeda/ISIS (Arab and Muslim lands), al-Nusra (Syria), Boko Haram (Nigeria) and other Jihadist groups. Related major wars claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands and caused immense sufferings even devastation for millions of families, throughout the Middle East, North Africa, West-Asia and beyond.

Before and after the



Western military presence in Afghanistan, the Lord has gathered His own people among the Afghanis. Even during the Soviet-controlled communist regime there, at least three churches existed in the capital, Kabul. This included a sizeable multi-ethnic congregation. Radio broadcasting responses have indicated not only growing interest in the gospel and some conversions in different parts of the country, but also significant movements of disenchantment with Islam, especially in urban areas. The number of converts to Christ has continued to increase. Disenchantment with Islam and public repudiation of much of its teachings and practices by thinking Muslims continues to mount. The Internet has made this far more open. Significant numbers of Muslims are frightened by the Islamic agenda and practices of Taliban and similar groups. Their

numbers are constantly growing.

Yet, the fact that Western countries continue to be falsely identified as "Christian" has not helped the cause of the gospel. Sadly, some Christians are still seriously distracted by the political and military aspects of recent developments. Thankfully, this has not been as prevalent as with past regional events, such as the Iraq war. Key Islamic teachers identify Western promoted war efforts as "Judeo-Christian" campaigns against Islam. They also point to ungodly socio-cultural developments in the West as the natural consequences of "Christianity."

Faithful Stand

Thankfully, the strong public stance of Christians against the promotion of ungodly, immoral and anti-family movements is helping correct that misrepresentation. More than ever before, Western Christians

are willing to publicly refuse to identify their nations and societies as truly Christian. Also, the testimony of mature Christian converts from Muslim backgrounds is playing a major role in correcting the misunderstandings of Muslims.

Clearly our Gospel agenda must be that of Christ himself, the "Prince of Peace." It is focused on "discipling all nations" to love and trust the Savior of the World. This was the conclusion of the Samaritan converts (John 4:42) and is the conviction of Muslim converts today. The Gospel builds a "new creation," a people of God, a holy nation, a royal priesthood. They are in the world but not of the world. This includes Afghani and Pakistani Pashtun people.

Our priority is to be in prayer for the Lord's people and the gathering and building up of more of them worldwide including in Afghanistan. Please pray that MERF's online Farsi ministries bring gospel comfort and peace to many Afghanis.

MERF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support! Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

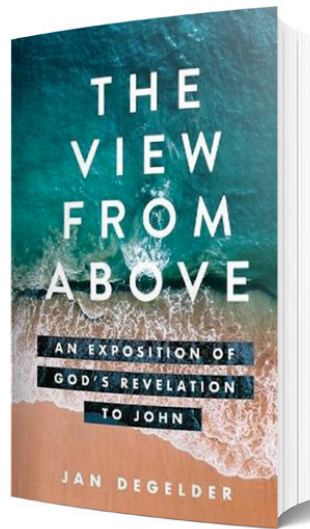
Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through www.merf.org/support

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And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

— Matthew 28:18

BOOK REVIEW

**The View from Above:**

An Exposition of God's Revelation to John by Jan DeGelder
Fergus, Ontario: The Study, 2021
Paperback, 435 pages

The View from Above:

An Exposition of God's Revelation to John

Is there a part of Scripture timelier to read than Revelation? Our newsfeed is full of alarming reports and troubling scenarios. Over the last two years, a global pandemic has rattled the world. Deep and painful divisions in society are evident. Trust in elected officials might be at an all-time low in the West, while poverty and violence grind down the populations in many other countries. As for the church, we are growing concerned about the infringements on our freedom to speak biblical truth, about the spread of godless ideologies, and about perversions of the gospel. There is outright persecution of Christians in numerous places. One might be tempted to say that the future doesn't look bright.

But what we see and read online is often only the view from here, the view from below. The eyes of our hearts are being trained to take the earthly view of things – which tends to be pessimistic. This is what makes Revelation so refreshing. As it sketches world history, past and present, it gives us “the view from above.” This book unveils God's perspective on all these events, and it affirms God's good purpose for the church. Revelation shows the progressive unfolding and fulfillment of God's promises toward that glorious day when the resurrected and ascended Jesus Christ will come again in victory.

The final book of the Bible is something akin to a “running commentary” on what is happening in our world right now. Revelation is a timely read, but it is a difficult read. Chapter by chapter, we can be overwhelmed by the other-worldly imagery of this book, by its strange events and perplexing numbers.


This makes the publishing of *The View from Above* very welcome. In his book, Rev. Jan DeGelder unfolds the meaning of Revelation's cosmic drama in a clear and faithful way. It is a drama marked by hostility, apostasy, judgment, and violence – yet God's Revelation to John is also dominated by the reality of the hope which is available through the Lamb who was slain.

In *The View from Above*, DeGelder guides us through all the stunning scenes and deafening noise of Revelation. His writing is marked by keen attention to textual detail and the warmth of a pastor's heart, seeking to encourage Christ's people with biblical truth. Where a passage has a range of interpretations – and few biblical books have seen as many wildly divergent interpretations as Revelation! – DeGelder acknowledges the various options. Yet, he doesn't get unduly distracted or speculate on things that are less than clear. Instead, he presses on to emphasize Revelation's crystal-clear message for the church.

One of the many remarkable aspects of Revelation is how it is so saturated with the Old Testament. It includes no explicitly signalled quotations, but every chapter, and sometimes almost every verse in a given chapter, echoes the Old Testament Scriptures. If I may be permitted one critique of *The View from Above*, it is that the Old Testament's centrality to Revelation is understated. DeGelder doesn't ignore the obvious allusions, but he could have further explored this feature of Revelation with much profit. Why does it matter? This background in the Old Testament is much more than a theoretical point of interest. Instead, this confirms how God's plan of judgment and salvation for these end times is actually rooted in his unchanging purpose since the beginning. It's a plan that he has been revealing for millennia, through Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and many more.

This book can be used in a variety of ways. First, it would be a useful resource for anyone who is studying the book of Revelation. While it is not a verse-by-verse commentary, DeGelder's treatment of each passage is thorough and is generally inclusive of all the key details. I think *The View from Above* might also be beneficial for use in personal devotions. It is written in an uplifting tone, and each chapter has a number of

sub-sections which could be read separately as part of a (longer) time of devotion. Finally, DeGelder's book lends itself to group Bible study, for he has included a short set of discussion questions for each of his chapters. If a group can commit to considering its thirty-four chapters over a couple years, it would be well worth the effort.

Like the book of Revelation itself, DeGelder's volume inspires hope and confidence. If anything, Revelation shows that persecution, pestilence, and peril are not unique to our time and place. We are not the first Christians to be distressed and troubled, and unless Christ returns soon, we will not be the last. But as God's plan for this world and his church continues to unfold, we may be cheered with the certainty of Christ's triumph. When we take "the view from above" on our life, and this world, and the church, Revelation encourages us to long for and live for the great day of the Lord. 



Reuben Bredenhof Minister
Free Reformed Church
Mt. Nasura, Western Australia
rm.bredenhof@gmail.com

PRESS RELEASE

Classis Central Ontario, September 17, 2021

Rev. Anthony Roukema, on behalf of the convening church, welcomed all the delegates and opened the meeting with the Scripture reading from Psalm 131 and prayer.

Burlington-Fellowship reported that the primi delegates are in attendance. Additional instructions were read into the meeting.

Classis was constituted. Rev. Winston Bosch was appointed as Chair, Mr. Ivan Tiggelaar as Vice Chair, and Rev. Hilmer Jagersma as Clerk.

The agenda is adopted with the addition of one item.

Memorabilia: The chair noted Rev. DeGelder's work on publishing a book on Revelation. Also mentioned was Rev. Dick De Jong recently being called to the Lord, the health concerns of Rev. John van Popta and Rev. Chris Bosch.

Classis remembered Blessings Christian Church search for a second pastor. The churches encouraged them in their continuing search for a pastor and for the ministry of the church during the ongoing vacancy.

Reports:

The churches in turn reported on their foreign and local mission activities and following each report their efforts were prayed over by a delegate from a neighbouring church. We then sang Hymn 8. Burlington-Fellowship church reported that the Classis archives have been inspected and were found to be in good order except for a short list of items. The missing document list was reviewed in respect to the classis guidelines. A proposal was made for Rev. John van Popta be appointed to correct these noted deficiencies, including preparing a guideline document for future clerks. Proposal was accepted.

The Treasurer's report was received and reviewed. The assessment proposal of \$2 per communicant member was approved.

Rehoboth church reports that the financial records have been reviewed and are in good order. Mr. Jack Spithoff was thanked for his work.

The Committee for Needy Churches reported on its activities for the past year. There has been no activity for the fund in the past year. Mr. Kent Baartman's retirement from the committee and the appointment of Mrs. Aafke Spithoff as his replacement was missed. Burlington-Rehoboth reported that the financial records were reviewed and found in good order. Mr. Kent Baartman was thanked for his work.

Question period according to Article 44 C.O. was held. Blessings Christian Church requests the advice of Classis regarding calling a pastor from a non-sister church.

1. Classis advises that Blessings is able to present the candidate to the next classis, according to Article 4 CO, and that they include corresponding testimonies of his life, conduct, and doctrine (i.e., Church Order, Article 4.B.2).
2. After considering previous precedents, Classis unanimously advises that the brother be examined in accordance with the candidacy and ordination exams. This will include sermon evaluation, Old and New Testament exegesis, Knowledge of Scripture, Ethics, Ecclesiology (Church history and church polity), Doctrine, Personal Life, and Public Ministry. Specific attention will be paid to areas of denominational differences between the church where the brother previously served and the Canadian Reformed federation. This examination shall take place with the cooperation and concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod.

Correspondence received:

A letter was received from the Canadian Reformed Church at Orangeville. Classis appoints a committee to formulate a response to the letter and submit to the next classis.

Appointments were made for the following:

Committee of Examiners: Rev. Clarence VanderVelde, Rev. Bill DeJong; Alternates: Rev. Tony Roukema and Rev. Winston Bosch

Church Visitors: Rev. Clarence VanderVelde (Convenor), Rev. Bill DeJong, Rev. Tony Roukema, Rev. Gerrit Bruintjes (alternate)

Church Archives: Burlington - Ebenezer

Church to inspect Archives: Burlington-Fellowship

Treasurer: Mr. Jack Spithoff

Church for inspecting Treasurer's books: Burlington-Rehoboth

Committee for Needy Churches: Mr. Ed Jans (Chair), Mr. Fred Lodder, Mrs. Aafke Spithoff

Church for inspecting books of Fund for Needy Churches: Burlington-Rehoboth

Committee for Appeals: Rev. Jan DeGelder (Convenor), Mr. Rick Ludwig, Mr. Andre Schutten; Alternates: Rev. Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Rev. John van Popta, Mr. Leo Kampen (in that order)


Delegates for Regional Synod East: (Ministers) Rev. Winston Bosch, Rev. Bill DeJong; (Alternates) Rev. Jake Torenvliet, Rev. Ian Wildeboer (in that order); (Elders) Mr. Barry Hordyk, Mr. Walter Smeding; (Alternates) Mr. Andy Baartman, Mr. Chris van Popta (in that order)

Convening church for next classis: Burlington - Fellowship

Suggested Officers for next classis: Rev. Hilmer Jagersma (Chair), Burlington - Fellowship Elder (Vice Chair), Rev. Tony Roukema (Clerk)

Date of next classis is set D.V. for Friday, December 10, 2021 at 9 a.m. at Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church (alternate date March 11, 2022)

Classis Contracta for Rev. Victor Attalah has been requested by Burlington Rehoboth for October 4. Classis appoints Rev. Ian Wildeboer to represent Classis at the installation service of Rev. Attalah on October 3

Question period was held. Censure according to Article 34 C.O. was deemed unnecessary. The Acts were reviewed and approved. The Press Release was read and approved. Rev. Winston Bosch led in closing prayer. The meeting was adjourned. 

Ivan Tiggelaar - Vice Chair

Clarion

To equip God's people for his glory,
in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized
in the Reformed confessions, Clarion
adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed
Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
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Nurturing Christian living

