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TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

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Clarion

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WHAT'S INSIDE

As most of us Canadians are embracing (or enduring?) the thick of winter, we have some spiritual food that will warm the cockles of your hearts ☺! Beginning at the end today, you will find a very endearing letter to the editor that may spur you into action. Pastor Wes Bredenhof introduces us to a book which allows us to gently ease into the deeper waters of theology while Mr. Lucas Holtvliwer points out a podcast about history designed to be enjoyed with our kids (imagine that!). Speaking of kids, Mrs. Amanda DeBoer walks our younger readers through the sacrament of baptism in *Clarion Kids* (and kids, don't forget to write to her with any Bible or church questions you have . . . teachers, there may be a Bible or writing class opportunity here too!).

As Christians and churches we have the task of spreading the gospel one way or another. Pastor George van Popta presents part 1 of his report on a recent CRMA conference to that end while MERF gives us a pictorial representation of some of their missional labours and locales. Indonesia is one such locale which is where Pastors Andrew Pol and Hendrik Verteeg were late last summer to visit two of our (CanRC) sister churches and develop contact with another, all of which is detailed in Dr. Pol's report.

Because of growing time constraints, Mr. Mitchell Bosveld has turned over the column *Persecution of Christians* to Mr. Andrew Douma of Hamilton. Thank you Mitch for your excellent work and thank you Andrew for taking up this worthy effort! Andrew's first column is about Nigeria, where 50% of the population is Christian but yet endure some of the heaviest persecution in the world. It's a sober reminder to be in prayer for the persecuted and do what we can to help.

Pastor Tyler Vandergaag writes on the final fruit of the Holy Spirit: self-control. Pastor Jan DeGelder writes about the important matter of the gateway to the ministry in *Governing the Church* and discusses why the bar is set so high for ministers. Pastor Jim Witteveen touches on a topic not often brought up, the matter of threats in preaching the gospel and asks: do threats have a place? In *Treasures, New & Old* Pastor Winston Bosch gets us thinking about the physically poor, the spiritually poor, and the Lord's Supper—all worthy of meditation. And finally, we have the editorial by yours truly on the topic of "Blessed Anonymity," which I'll let speak for itself.

I hope you will find much in these pages to lift up your hearts, stimulate your minds, and draw you into a closer walk with your God.

Peter Holtvliwer

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Clarion

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BLESSED ANONYMITY

To be anonymous is literally to be without a name. Virtually everyone has a name, of course, but there are times when no one around you knows your name. And that can be just fine. For instance, when you are at a crowded hockey game, a concert hall, or the beach, being anonymous likely doesn't bother you. It might even be a welcome break from a busy life where lots of people call, text, or email your name. On the other hand, you might be worshipping in your own congregation but walk in and out with barely a nod from anyone. You feel like nobody knows your name, which is not good. The church is the family of God and in a family we should all know each other by name and make each other feel welcome.

But there is a kind of church anonymity that is a blessing, one that I'd like to encourage, and it's this: anonymous acts of kindness. This kind of namelessness is not you being ignored or forgotten. Rather, it's you doing something nice for another while keeping your identity secret.

BLESSED TO GIVE


So, why is anonymous giving a blessing? First, as the Lord Jesus said, it is always "more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). While this refers to the giving part, it is worth mentioning: as a Christian, the very act of being generous to another is a blessing for you. How so? Well, your decision to give selflessly is the work of Christ's Spirit in you, shaping you to live as he lived, serving others instead of expecting to be served (Mark 10:45). It's to anyone's benefit to become more and more like Christ, right? Further, doing such kind deeds provides proof that you truly are a child of God, and that strengthens your assurance of salvation.

The blessing only increases for you when you give anonymously because it takes your ego out of the equation. It's very natural for us to look for a pat on the back. We often don't mind doing something nice if it will be noticed and appreciated. But unbelievers do this too, right (Luke 6:35)? To be sure, it's not that giving under your name is wrong or inappropriate, and it's good that we express appreciation to each other. Yet, we must always be careful to give gifts or render kindness so that the Lord receives the glory, not ourselves (Ps 115:1). This is a special benefit of anonymous giving: you ensure that no part of you is glory-seeking. It's a check on your pride and helps deepen your humility.

And your heavenly Father sees what you do in secret—still more blessing for the giver! Our Saviour exhorted us to love even our enemies (from whom we have no expectation of return love; Matt 5:43-48). To avoid hypocrisy and seeking mere human praise, we are encouraged to give anonymously to those in need, so that our left hand does not know what our right hand is doing. And with that Jesus gave this promise, "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matt 6:4). Is that not a wonderful additional motive to do a kind deed without anyone knowing who did it? When Almighty God is handing out rewards, who wouldn't want to be in line?

BLESSED TO RECEIVE

But maybe the above is too self-focused. After all, the act of kindness is meant first of all to bless the *recipient*. As a pastor I have joyfully observed how anonymous giving greatly blesses within the church. A large family making ends meet on a single income finds in their church mailbox several gift cards for the local grocery store—enough to feed the household for a month! An elderly widow opens her front door to find a bouquet of flowers awaiting her. A Christian school teacher comes home to a box of frozen meat recently dropped off. A single mother of three whose vehicle is falling apart wakes up to find a shiny, gently-used van in her driveway—hers to keep!

I myself as a pastor have also received unexpected anonymous gifts, and they are a sweet blessing. You feel thought of. Cared for. Receiving them anonymously takes away any sense of being beholden (no strings attached!) and, especially where there is financial hardship, it preserves the receiver's dignity. Gifts like these sure are a boost—sometimes in a very real financial way but always as a great spiritual encouragement for you know that the Lord's eye is upon you. As a recipient, part of you would certainly like to thank the human giver. But all you can do instead is to turn and thank God. And that might just be the best part of it all! 



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LORD'S SUPPER AND THE POOR

“Jesus said to him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly.’ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, ‘Buy what we need for the feast,’ or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.”

JOHN 13:27–30


When I was a kid growing up in Smithville, Ontario, there was a little tradition the church observed on Lord's Supper Sundays. As people would walk up to the front of the sanctuary, they would pause before they sat down to put money in a bowl that sat in the middle of the table. As a kid I thought they were paying for their food or leaving a tip. In reality, the money in the bowl was an offering for the needy. Giving to the poor at the Lord's Supper table is a very old Christian tradition full of symbolic meaning. Maybe we should bring it back.

Think about the Last Supper. After eating the bread at the Lord's table, Judas creeps out with evil intent. But look closer—he is carrying the collection bag with the money for the poor (John 13:29). Judas was money hungry, and the disciples later found out he was stealing from the poor (John 12:6). The old tradition of a bowl on the Lord's Supper table was a reminder not to be like Judas.

Then think about what was happening in the early church of Corinth. Their Lord's Supper was potluck style, but if you were to peek through the window you would see that the rich were eating their fill and ignoring the poor who were going home hungry (1 Cor 11:21–22). Paul found this out and called them to self-examination. Our form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper picks up on Paul's intent when it admonishes those who *by stealing, greed or extravagance lead a worldly life* to not come to the table. The tradition of a bowl on the Lord's Supper table was an extension of this, a symbolic reminder not to be worldly like the church in Corinth but to care for the poor.

Consider this quote from the early church father John Chrysostom: “If you do not find Christ in the beggar at the church door, neither will you find him in the chalice.” There is an allusion here to the famous teaching of the sheep and the goats, where Christ explains that it is as if he disguises himself in the poor and judges our faith in him by our service to them (Matt 25:42–46). Chrysostom's point is that if you are not serving Christ by helping the poor, you cannot expect to be strengthened by Christ in the sacrament.

That makes sense. Judas came to the table but left without receiving Christ in the sacrament (BC, Art 35). The same was true for the believers in Corinth (1 Cor 11:20). The old tradition of the bowl on the Lord's Supper table was symbolic of this important truth. You gave your offering to the poor as you took the bread and the wine, because if you do not find Christ in the beggar at the church door, neither will you find him in the cup of blessing.

So maybe we should put the bowl back on the Lord's Supper table. That may be a good idea, but that is really not my point. As I write this, I am struck by how spiritually poor I am. If you look closely at my life, if you peek through my window, you'd see I'm way too much like Judas, and not enough like Jesus. I'm way too much like Corinth, and not enough like Christ. Lord have mercy! Put the bowl on the table if it is helpful, or not. But please join me in repentance and renewed faith. O Lord Jesus, feed our poor and desolate souls with your body and blood. We need your grace and your pardon. Comfort us in your love, remind us of your forgiveness, and strengthen us by your Holy Spirit, also at your table, as we dedicate ourselves again to care for the poor, especially for those in the household of faith. 

FURTHER READING

1 Corinthians 11:17–34

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. How would you define the word extravagance? What temptation do you face when defining it?
2. “Faith without works is dead.” What specific works is James talking about in James 2:14–17?



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PREACHING THE THREATS OF GOD'S WORD

"EXHORTATIONS, THREATS, AND PROMISES"

In Article 14 of the Canons of Dort's fifth head of doctrine, we confess that the Lord uses means to preserve his people in the true faith: "Just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the preaching of the gospel, so he maintains, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of his Word, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and by the use of the sacraments."

The means of grace, the tools that God uses to work faith, strengthen faith, and enable his people to persevere in the faith, are the preaching of the gospel and the use of the sacraments. This definition of the means of grace is pretty basic stuff, but in this article we will focus our attention on the Canons' description of

the content of God's Word. Three specific aspects of God's Word are mentioned as means by which God maintains, continues, and perfects his work of grace in us: its exhortations, its threats, and its promises. These are essential elements of God's Word, and they must also be essential elements of the preaching of the gospel.

When we consider two of those aspects, the exhortations and promises of God's Word, there may not be much controversy, if any. As Reformed churches in which the theology of the covenant plays a central role in teaching and preaching, we rightly emphasize the promises that the Lord makes, his faithfulness to his promises, and the necessity of responding in faith to those promises. The exhortations of God's Word flow from those promises; we are exhorted to fulfil our obligations in response to God's gracious work in our lives.

What role should these threats play?

WHAT ABOUT THOSE “THREATS”?

But what about the second word in that group of three: “threats”? What place should threats have in our preaching, both to those who have already professed faith in Christ, and to those who have not yet responded to the call of the gospel? Should the threats of God’s Word in fact have a place in preaching and teaching that is directed toward God’s covenant people? And as we consider our evangelistic calling, to reach our unbelieving neighbours with the good news of Jesus Christ, what role should these threats play?

In the ministry of the Old Testament prophets, threats played an important role in the prophetic message. There are many examples that we could choose from, but one vivid picture that we see in the commissioning of Ezekiel clearly reveals the nature that his ministry would take. The LORD commanded Ezekiel to eat a scroll, filled with words on both front and back. This scroll represented the message that Ezekiel was being called to proclaim to a people that the LORD characterized as being “stubborn and rebellious.”

What was the content of that scroll? “Words of lamentation and mourning and woe” (Ezek 2:10). As Ezekiel’s ministry progressed, he did proclaim many glorious and beautiful promises; but the message of comfort that he preached was preceded by some of the strongest and most disturbing threats in all of Scripture.

Moving on to the New Testament, we encounter a brief summary of John the Baptist’s ministry of preparation for the coming of the Messiah in Matthew 3 and Luke 3. He warned his hearers, “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3:9). He also spoke of the One who was to come, whose “winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (v. 17).

Luke summarizes John’s preaching ministry in the following verse: “So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.” The Greek word translated as “preached good news” is the root of our English word “evangelize.” John the Baptist’s evangelistic ministry, as summarized by the evangelists Matthew and Luke, clearly included many of what the Canons of Dort describe as “threats.”

A number of examples from the book of Acts show us what the preaching of the Apostles was like in the earliest days of the New Testament church. In this new phase of redemptive history, following the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we find exhortation and promise, but also threats, both implicit and explicit. In his Pentecost sermon, the apostle Peter warned the gathered crowds in no uncertain terms to save themselves from “this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40). In subsequent sermons we see that the apostles, even in their evangelistic preaching, did not shrink back from proclaiming the judgment that is to come. Paul’s preaching in Athens exemplifies this approach: “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people

*He had these threats proclaimed,
and inspired his servants to include
them in Scripture, in his love for us*

everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30–31).

FROM HEBREWS TO REVELATION

We encounter several more of these “threats” in the New Testament epistles, two of which are well-known passages in the letter to the Hebrews. In Hebrews 6, the writer describes the two possible responses to the gospel. “Land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God,” he writes. “But,” he continues, “if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned” (v. 8). It is clear that there is at the very least an implicit threat in these words.

An even more powerful threat is found in Hebrews 10:26–31, where we’re told that “if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries” (v. 26, 27). The Lord is

an awesome and just judge, and “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (v. 31).

Finally, the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are replete with their own threats. To the church of Sardis, the Lord Jesus says this: “Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.” And that call to repentance provides a stark warning for anyone who would not heed that call: “If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you” (Rev 2:3).

It is clear, then, that the threats of God’s Word remain an integral part of the whole message of the gospel. They certainly are “threats,” and are therefore by their very nature unpleasant, and not something that we take great delight in contemplating. But even the presence of these threats in God’s Word is evidence of his grace. He had these threats proclaimed, and inspired his servants to include them in Scripture, in his love for us. They are meant to motivate us to bow the knee to King Jesus, to submit ourselves to his gracious kingship, to entrust ourselves to him and depend on him alone. They warn us, in no uncertain terms, about the alternative—the only alternative—to heeding the gracious call of the gospel.

LEAVING OUR COMFORT ZONE

And while that alternative is almost too horrific to contemplate, it must not be ignored, whether we are speaking to committed Christians or evangelizing. Unbelievers need to know that salvation is necessary before they can be led to seek their salvation in Christ. They need to understand that there are only two options: to follow Christ and inherit eternal life, or to go their own way and face the certain reality of eternal punishment.

This is not an easy message to proclaim. It takes us out of our comfort zone, especially in our cultural context. We live in a culture that proclaims that tolerance is the highest of virtues, along with a version of “love” that doesn’t challenge, doesn’t confront, and most certainly doesn’t “threaten.” Sadly, when our goal is to be

winsome in order to attract those who are on the outside to the church, there exists a very real temptation to ignore the threats that we confess are a necessary aspect of the gospel message, or at the very least to push them off to the side and minimize them.

A COUNTER-CULTURAL MESSAGE

But as we seek to bring the ministry of the church, its form and its message, into conformity with God’s Word, we dare not neglect one of the essential aspects of gospel proclamation because it is so very counter-cultural. For two thousand years the church of Jesus Christ has proclaimed this message. Her messengers have been sinful men, often swayed by the ever-shifting currents of the cultures in which they proclaimed the message entrusted to them. Therefore, every generation, ours included, needs to be encouraged to go back to the source, to the Word, in order to receive correction and re-orientation.

We may imagine that visitors to our worship services will be turned off by hearing about the necessity of repentance, about God’s hatred of sin (especially the sins that our society has declared to be virtues), and about the reality of God’s wrath and judgment, and that they may never return should they be confronted with such a message on their first visit to church. But when we truly understand that every response to the proclamation of the full message of the gospel is in God’s hands, and that he has entrusted a message to us that we must proclaim “in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2), and that he will bless that faithful proclamation, we can be greatly encouraged. And in the end, we’ll be able to say, with the apostle Paul, “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). **C**



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JOB SECURITY

In our series on running the church according to the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches, we are going to have a closer look at some of the articles. After the Church Order's introductory article, we encounter the lengthy articles about entering the ministry of the Word. Articles 4 and 5 outline the road between graduating from seminary and being ordained as minister. It may sound a bit like checking off a list of formalities, but it makes clear that the churches are firmly in control of the conditions to be met by those who are going to proclaim and teach God's Word.

TWO GATES

Besides the required documents, these articles also mention two examinations: the *preparatory* exam (Art. 4.B.1) and the *peremptory* exam (Art. 5.A.1.b). These are like two gates on the road mentioned above. Going through the first gate makes a man eligible for call. Then, after he has accepted a call, he has to go through the second gate to be ordained.

These CO articles do not give any specifics as to what these exams should look like or how they should be done. Those things have been stipulated in what are called "General Ecclesiastical Regulations." The second general synod of the CanRC (Carman-Homewood, 1958) formulated those regulations in Article 188 of its *Acts*. These acts are in Dutch, but an English translation of Article 188 is now available in the *Acts of Synod 2022* (Guelph-Emmanuel).¹ Since in both cases the men involved are examined by a classis, classical regulations often contain more detailed arrangements for those exams.

According to GS 1958, the preparatory exam should test a student's ability to preach, to exegete both Old and New Testament, and to recall his knowledge of the doctrine of the church. An interesting detail is GS 1958's note added to its decision: "Synod is of the opinion that the so-called 'inquiry into the motives for seeking

the ministry' should not be treated as a separate matter, but should take place during and through the manner of examining" (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p.180–181).

At my own preparatory exam, way back in 1977 in the Netherlands, a committee of two or three members of Classis interviewed me, in a separate room, about why I wanted to become a

It hinges on the unique character of the relationship between the church and its office bearers

minister. They then reported back to Classis. The suggestion of GS 1958 that this should not take place separately, but during and through the manner of examining, was maintained by GS 2022.² I wonder how effective that is. There are good reasons to give this inquiry more intentional attention during the exam. And then not in a separate room by two or three people, but in the full meeting, with everyone present. What is there to hide when a young man testifies about his motivation and desire to serve God in the ministry of the gospel?

The peremptory exam is quite lengthy, covering almost all the subjects of the theological curriculum which the candidate was faced with during his years in seminary. That makes it extra important for the examiners to keep in mind that an ecclesiastical exam is not just a copy of an academic exam. When the churches undertake to examine a man at classis the focus is more on how the candidate sees all these subjects functioning in the practice of the ministry.

This exam also requires the presence and the concurring advice of the deputies appointed by regional synod (CO Art. 48). These men represent the rest of the federation. Why should the rest of

¹ Appendix 23 of the *Acts of GS 2022*, available online at www.canrc.org

² *Ibid*

the churches have a say in such an exam? Because when a man is admitted to the office of minister, he becomes active in that capacity within the federation of churches. Thus all the churches are (potentially) affected by and have a shared interest in the outcome of the peremptory examination.

WHY SUCH A HIGH BAR?

All together the regulations of Articles 4 and 5 of the Church Order sound pretty rigorous. And sometimes people wonder: why? Why is the bar so high? Why do we make it so difficult to get into the ministry? There are basically two reasons for this.

First, it is difficult to get in because it is difficult to get out. This is different from most other callings. If you apply for a job, you hand in a resumé, sit through a job interview, and if everything goes smoothly you could start next Monday. It's relatively easy to get in. But then, if your boss is not happy with how you perform, he can say: "smarten up, or by next week you're out!" And if you don't like your work, you can say: "by next week I'm out of here!" It's also relatively easy to get out.

But the ministry doesn't work that way. The way out (so to speak) is narrow and difficult, whether such desire comes from the side of the minister or the side of the consistory. If, after a while, a minister would conclude that the pastoral ministry is not for him, he will find the way out outlined in Article 12. And if, after a while, a consistory would conclude that their minister no longer serves fruitfully, they will find the way out outlined in Article 11. In both scenarios it's not impossible to dissolve the relationship between church and minister, but either way it is an elaborate and lengthy process. It can get messy and will often leave the people involved with feelings of frustration and hurt that can last for a long time. It's indeed not easy to get out. The ministry in our federation has a high level of "job security." Therefore, we had better make sure, to the best of our ability, that those who do get in are up to it.

But then, why is it so difficult to get out of the ministry? It hinges on the unique character of the relationship between the church and its office bearers, particularly the ministers. For tax purposes the minister is listed and treated as an employee of the church,

but it is different from any other paid position in the church, like an administrator or a caretaker. We believe that ministers are called by our holy God himself to their office, through the call of the congregation³—and this for life (Art. 12). That's a big deal!

STAND FOR THE TRUTH

The second reason why the churches don't make it easy to enter the ministry has to do with one of the goals of the Church Order, mentioned in a previous article.⁴ It is the church's responsibility, emphasized throughout the New Testament, to protect true doctrine and guard against false teachings. That's why we maintain thorough seminary training and rigorous screening of men who desire to become ministers. And even after they have been ordained, we do not automatically assume that everything will always be fine. Office bearers are called to uphold Article 27 (re: warding off false doctrine and errors), and therefore they are also required to submit to the rule of Article 26 (re: signing the form of subscription).

Many years ago, on a family vacation on Prince Edward Island in the fishing village of North Rustico, we came to talk with an old fisherman about faith and church. He was Baptist, and when he heard that I was a pastor, he said to me: "That's a big responsibility, young man. If you don't go by the truth for yourself or in your family—that's bad enough. But if you don't tell them the truth in your church, there is a whole congregation you are leading in the wrong direction. Think of what you're doing."

He was right! That's why in the Church Order our churches have committed themselves to support each other in making sure that those who are called to be spiritual leaders as preachers and teachers of the truth, are committed to speaking the whole truth and nothing but the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. **C**



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³ Form for Ordination of Ministers, first question, *Book of Praise*, p. 620

⁴ *Clarion*, November 25, 2022, Vol 71, No 24, p. 715

In the Fruit of the Spirit is **Self-control**



TYLER VANDERGAAG

Self-control is the last thing Paul lists in the fruit of the Spirit. Self-control is the ability to control yourself and keep yourself in check. It's the ability to show restraint and moderation, and to avoid extremes. Self-control is the discipline to not do what your sinful heart desires and to do what you know you must do as a child of God. As we've done in the other articles in this series, we'll first look at self-control in the Lord Jesus and then in our own lives.

JESUS'S SELF-CONTROL

Many people who saw the Lord Jesus during his active ministry on earth didn't think of him as a model of self-control, moderation, and restraint. They called him "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners" (Matt 11:19). So, in their minds, he ate and drank too much, and hung out with the wrong crowd. That's a complete lack of self-control. How wrong they were.

If there was ever a man who had total Spirit-filled self-control, it was the Lord Jesus. Filled with the Spirit, he always kept in step

with the Spirit and always exercised self-control and restraint. Recall when he was just twelve years old. He went to Jerusalem for Passover, but instead of going back home to Nazareth, he stayed in the temple, in his heavenly Father's house. That's where he had to be. When his parents finally found and questioned him, the twelve-year-old Jesus didn't roll his eyes. He didn't shout in anger or storm off in a fit of rage, as tweens and teens are so prone to do. Even when his parents didn't understand what he was saying to them, he went back to Nazareth with his earthly parents and "was submissive to them" (Luke 2:51). That is self-control!

His time in the temple also shows us his self-control in another area of his life. At just twelve years old he amazed everyone with "his understanding and his answers" about the ways and things of God (Luke 2:47). We can't just chalk this up to him being the divine Son of God. As a human, he had to increase in "wisdom and in stature" (Luke 2:52). So, his understanding and answers about the Lord is a testimony that he spent time in God's Word



and in prayer. That—as we all know—takes self-control. We can always find other things to do rather than be in God’s Word and in prayer. We can come up with all sorts of excuses for not starting, joining, or attending a Bible Study. The Lord Jesus never found excuses or other things to do. He had the self-control to be in God’s Word and in prayer.

RESTRAINT IN SUFFERING

Our Saviour also exercised great restraint and self-control with those who refused to believe in him. In Luke 9, the Lord Jesus set his heart with determined resolution to go to Jerusalem. He took the quickest route, which was through Samaritan territory. The Samaritans didn’t welcome him. That’s not surprising. Samaritans and Jews had a long history of hostility. Two of his disciples were especially angry. They wanted to do to this town what God did to Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 9:54). Jesus could have easily said, “Go ahead. Let them have it.” He didn’t. Jesus wasn’t impressed with

*His self-control is our
salvation and life!*

his disciples’ reckless zeal; instead, he rebuked the two of them and pressed on to another village (vv. 55–56). Self-control ruled the day and guided his heart. Despite the opposition, he pressed on to his destination, to Jerusalem.

Now, why did Jesus set his heart on going to Jerusalem with determined resolution? What was waiting for him there? A royal reception? Fame and fortune? Recognition and respect? No. None of those things were on the radar. Oh, it looked good at first as he rode in on the donkey and as the hosannas rang from the lips of children, but it was not to be. Rather than a golden crown placed upon his head, a cursed crown of thorns was crushed into his skull.

Rejected as their king, he was falsely accused, spit upon, mocked, beaten, whipped, and nailed to the cross for our sins, for my lack of self-control and yours! And if that's not enough, he was mocked by the crowds who passed by and even by the criminals on his right and left, as he bore God's wrath in our place.

And what was his response to all this? Not at all like mine. There wasn't an ounce of revenge in his heart, not the slightest desire of it either. Instead, what do we find Jesus doing on the cross? Praying the words of Scripture he knew so well. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matt 27:45; Ps 22:1). "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46; Ps 31:5). Yes, if there's ever a picture of self-control it's Christ on the cross! There, on the cross, we see Spirit filled self-control and restraint on full display. And praise the Lord for this. His self-control is our salvation and life!

OUR SELF-CONTROL

The apostle Paul stressed the importance of self-control in the life of God's children in his letter to Titus. Self-control appears five times in Titus 1 and 2. Elders are to be self-controlled (1:8), and so also older men (2:2). The older women are to teach self-control to the younger women (2:4) and Titus is supposed to teach the same to the young men (2:6). Here we see that self-control is for both genders and for all ages. Male, female, young, and old—we all need self-control. We all need to cultivate restraint. There are no exceptions. Self-control is like a muscle that needs to be worked and exercised to grow.

The truth is, without self-control a person's life will easily spiral out of control and into deadly and destructive patterns and lifestyles. "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Prov 25:28). A person who lacks self-control (among other things) "is so nearsighted that he is blind" (2 Pet 1:9). And that's why we must embrace self-control in the fruit of the Spirit from an early age and teach our children to do the same. Without self-control you open yourself up to every snare of the devil, every desire of your sinful heart, and every ungodly passion the world dangles in front of you.

Self-control is what we need if we ever want to defend ourselves against the acts of the sinful nature listed in Galatians 5:19–21. Sexual immorality, sensuality, strife, dissensions, divisions, drunkenness, and all the rest listed there flow from a lack of self-control. Affairs don't happen overnight; neither do addictions. They stem

from a long period of failure to control one's thoughts, one's eyes, one's heart, and the unwillingness to say "no."

Self-control is also what we need if we are ever to have the hope of producing the other eight aspects in the Spirit's fruit. To *love* as deeply as Christ loves us, to root our *joy* in Christ and not our circumstances, and to enjoy the *peace* that passes all understanding requires nothing less than diligent self-control. And you can't have long-nosed *patience*, show true *goodness*, live in all *faithfulness*, or have unusual *kindness* and be as *gentle* as the Lord Jesus without self-control. Self-control is like the peel that keeps the fruit of the Spirit all together!

NO LOST CAUSE

Now maybe you've neglected self-control in one area of your life or another for far too long. You think, "It's too late now. I'm a lost cause." But the beauty of the gospel is that as long as you're alive, it's never too late. Even if you've destroyed your life, and you're drowning in the sinful consequences due to a lifetime of never cultivating self-control, you can always run to Jesus. His Spirit is powerful enough to work this aspect of the Spirit's fruit in our lives. It might be a slow, hard, painful, and long process, but never under-estimate the Spirit's power. Never think in your mind, "It's been too long. I cannot break from this or that sin, not even God can help me!" That's a lie of the highest order. It's a denial of the Spirit's ability to renew the hearts and lives of sinners who have been saved by grace. That's clear in Titus 2:12—the fifth reference to self-control in Titus 1 and 2. There Paul explains how the grace of God teaches us to "renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age."

So, there's hope for the person who's failed to exercise self-control and has fallen deeply into sin. The gospel is powerful. Grace is powerful. The Spirit is powerful. You're not a lost cause. None of us are. As we grow in God's grace, the Spirit will also work in us the ability to pursue this last aspect in the fruit of the Spirit. **C**



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The Persecuted Church IN NIGERIA

ANDREW DOUMA

BODY OF CHRIST

What perspective comes to mind when you consider the “body of Christ”? Perhaps you think of Ephesians 4, which focuses on the diversity of blessings given to different members and how they use those blessings for the good of the whole. Maybe we relate to this term by immediately aligning our thoughts with 1 Corinthians 12, which speaks of how when one member suffers we all suffer. How broad is our scope when we think of the “body of Christ”? Do we mentally fence off a perimeter that includes our congregation, or maybe more broadly the federation we belong to, and further still the nation we call home? How often do we think of the body of Christ on a global scale, such that we consider our brothers and sisters in Christ who, while calling the same earth home, live in conditions so different from ours that it seems like a different world?

ATTACK ON NIGERIAN VILLAGE

Consider for a moment our sister named Harjaratu. She lives in the north of Nigeria, a country which Open Doors has referred to as the most dangerous place on earth for Christians.¹ She is a widow trying to raise her five children in the fear of the Lord. On July 10, 2020, her village was awoken by gun shots; a raid by Fulani militants. She woke up her children, told them to run, grabbed her youngest daughter, strapped her to her back, and ran. Harjaratu made it to the other side of a river, but the strong current swept her daughter away as she crossed. Alive, she sat on the muddy bank, without shoes or possessions, and cried to God for the rest of the night.

The next morning, she went back to her village and found the horror of the previous night to be anything but a bad dream. Buildings burned, livestock stolen, friends and extended family members slaughtered like animals at the hands of Fulani militants. A bus carried what survivors there were to a camp for Internally

¹ The Open Doors Podcast, April 7, 2021; S2 E2

Displaced People (IDPs), as they are known. For three days Harjaratu thought her entire family had been wiped out, but by God's grace on the third day she found her remaining four children, who themselves had made it to the same IDP camp.


POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Overall, the country of Nigeria has approximately 200 million people, with roughly half of them knowing Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and the other half holding to one variation or another of Islam. From that statistic, one might assume a balanced society, as the numbers are roughly equal to each other. The challenge exists in the northern territories, where Christians represent a small fraction of the overall population. Despite national laws which apply equally to all, individual regions have adopted sharia law as the governing authority. This has been made possible in areas where Muslims dominate the local government. President Buhari is himself a Muslim and, since the start of his first term in 2015, he has, without regard for Nigeria's Constitution, favoured appointing Muslims to influential government posts.² Police do not serve and protect with equality but are reported to intentionally delay responding to any calls from Christian villages under attack.

The attack on sr. Harjaratu's village was therefore not an isolated incident, nor was it simply a spat between local herdsmen and farmers—a myth which Nigerian foreign relations officials tell the world. According to a recent report from Revelation Media, "The terrorist groups Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) want to eliminate the presence of Christianity in Nigeria."³ This is something the rest of the world doesn't realize or worse, chooses to ignore.

Within a year of President Biden taking office, his administration took Nigeria off the state department's "Country of Particular Concern" list.⁴ In January 2023, this mistake was renewed for the second year in a row despite petitions urging the United States to recognize Nigerian Christians as the most persecuted group in the world. Nigeria welcomes the foreign investment of the United States to explore and harvest its vast supply of oil and natural gas. In exchange, the US Administration only needs to turn a blind eye.

PRAYERS

Pray that God would end the killings, and kidnappings, the maiming, and the trauma for children that have come face to face with a kind of evil none of us may ever know. And at the same time perhaps we may also pray for our own hearts. When a part of the body of Christ screams in pain, when it suffers poverty and worries about what the next day will bring, do we genuinely ache in our hearts and passionately wrestle with how long, O LORD? Will you forget our brothers and sisters in Nigeria forever? How long will you hide your face from them (Ps 13)? May the prayers of *Clarion's* readers be so heartfelt, so consistent, and with such fervour that the tender mercy of God is turned toward the persecuted church in Nigeria. Come Lord Jesus, Maranatha. 



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² <https://www.icirnigeria.org/buharis-lopsided-appointments-in-six-years-con>

³ <https://email.revelationmedia.org/persecution-in-nigeria-persists>

⁴ <https://www.state.gov/countries-of-particular-concern-special-watch-list-countries-entities-of-particular-concern/>



2022 INDONESIA VISIT

ANDREW J. POL

OVERVIEW

The situation of the Reformed churches in Indonesia and our relations with them as Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) is a complicated one, so let's begin with a sketch of how things developed. There are three main groups of Reformed churches in this vast land that eventually come into the story. Historically our first contacts were with the Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia (GGRI), otherwise known as the Reformed Churches of Indonesia. Later on in the early 1990s, contact developed with another group of churches that are presently called the Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvinis in Indonesia (GGRCI), the Reformed Calvinist Churches. In 2003, the church at Smithville, Ontario, sent out the Rev. Edwer Dethan to Timor as a missionary. His task was to do mission work in cooperation with the GGRCI. The work grew and eventually led to the establishment of a new federation of churches called the Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia-Timor (GGRI-T). Currently the CanRC currently has ecclesiastical fellowship with the GGRI and the GGRCI; we maintain official contact with the GGRI-T.

GGRCI

The Rev. Hendrik Versteeg and I were appointed by the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) to represent the CanRC at general synods of our two sister churches in Indonesia in August and September 2022. We were also tasked to seek interaction with deputies of the GGRI-T.

We arrived in Kupang, Timor on the morning of Saturday, August 27, 2022, and were met by the Rev. Yonson Dethan, who brought us to the Hotel on the Rock, where we stayed for the duration of the general synod of the GGRCI. We were joined there with delegates from the URCNA (Rev. Dr. Dick Moes) and the FRCA (Revs. Abel C. Pol and Anthon Souman).

On Sunday, August 28, 2022, we attended the a.m. service with the Oeba congregation in Kupang. They now have a spacious church building, acquired not long ago after years of diligent fund-raising efforts from their own midst along with help from within the CanRC. We attended the p.m. service in the Eben-Haezer NoelBaki church. It was heartwarming to join the brothers and sisters in worship.



From August 29–31, we attended the GGRCI synod. The proceedings were conducted in an orderly way in good brotherly harmony.

New government regulations are pushing the Reformed churches toward closer cooperation. This was reflected in decisions made by the general synods of the GGRCI and the GGRI. The GGRCI and the GGRI churches have decided to intensify contacts with each other. This includes more pulpit exchanges as well as having students from the GGRI do internships in GGRCI congregations.

The GGRCI do not have their own seminary. Synod decided to encourage young men desiring to study for the ministry either to go to the seminary of the GGRI on the island of Sumba or to study at STAKRI, the theological training centre established by the Rev. Edwer Dethan in Kupang.

In regard to the GGRI-Timor and the frustration of the GGRCI as to how another independent federation of Reformed churches was formed next to them, various fraternal delegates urged the brothers not to push the issue, but to be prayerfully patient and wait for the Lord.

Synod terminated the relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) because of their unfaithfulness to

the Word of God. The brothers at the synod were therefore glad for the supportive presence of delegates from the CanRC, the URCNA, and the FRCA.

After the synod, the CanRC, FRCA, and URCNA delegates met with the GGRCI deputies. The deputies responded to various questions, describing challenges and trials that the GGRCI are facing and requesting prayer support. Church life is going well, but there is a shortage of ministers. They currently have students being trained in Sumba and Kupang. There are also three men receiving special training from the Revs. Yonson Dethan and Yawan Bunda.

Their only sister church relationships are with the CanRC, URCNA, and the GGRI. Contact between the Reformed Churches of Indonesia in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (GGRI-NTT) and the Gereja Bebas (Free Church) on the island of Sumba in that same province is increasing. The Gereja Bebas are sister churches of the Netherlands Reformed Churches because the late Rev. P. P. Goossens, a Dutch minister who worked on the island of Sumba in their midst, belonged to that group of churches. Although the Netherlands Reformed Churches tolerate liberal theology, the churches in Sumba are conservative in character.

GGRI-T

On September 1, the CanRC, FRCA, and URCNA delegates met with the GGRI-T deputies (*pictured page opposite, bottom right*). The church life of the GGRI-T seems to be progressing well and they are financially healthy. There is help from Canada for STAKRI (their institution for theological training) and for Elpida, a local Reformed high school. They have informal relationships with the GGRI-NTT and have attended a regional synod of the GGRI-KalBar as observers. They also attended a synod of the FRCA and were present at a synod of the Gereja Bebas (Sumba) to promote STAKRI, their theological training centre.

GGRI

Following the GGRCI synod (*page opposite, at top*) and a meeting with deputies of the GGRI-T, we travelled to Bengkayang, Kalimantan Barat, to attend the Third National Synod of the GGRI which took place from September 5–7.

Like the GGRCI synod, the proceedings were conducted in an orderly way in good brotherly harmony. The only dissonant remarks were made by delegates from the Dutch churches, who expressed their disappointment at the decision made by the regional synod of the GGRI in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (GGRI-NTT) to terminate the relationship with them. The National Synod of the GGRI could not yet make a final decision in this regard, since the matter had not yet been dealt with at the regional synods of Kalimantan Barat and Papua. A final decision has therefore been deferred to the next national synod.

The decision made at the First National Synod that women are not to be ordained to ecclesiastical offices in the Reformed churches was reaffirmed.

Synod accepted an updated, streamlined version of the Church Order that continues to be essentially parallel to the one in use among the CanRC.

There were decisions on various practical matters, such as how to help the GGRI-Papua deal with their difficulties in their interaction with the government, whether office bearers can have official garments, and the baptism of children in situations where marriages have not been conducted under the auspices of the church. Synod also decided that a minister should resign from being a minister of the Word if he becomes involved in a political party.

Since the GGRI seminaries in Sumba and Kalimantan Barat do not have government-approved accreditation, they cannot issue a B.Th. degree to their graduates. Because of new government

regulations, such graduates will therefore no longer be able to pursue further theological studies at an M.Th. level or later to obtain a Doctorate. This will pose problems for ensuring that those seminaries will be provided with qualified teaching staff in the future, which will eventually also further limit possibilities for obtaining accreditation. The GGRI are currently exploring possible options to deal with this issue, including possible cooperation with the the CanRC seminary in Hamilton. The matter has also been discussed at the recent ICRC.


Since the GGRI-NTT is officially registered with the government, the GGRCI have asked to shelter under their “umbrella” for legal protection. The National Synod approved of this and decided it would be desirable if the GGRI-NTT could also take steps toward establishing a relationship with the GGRI-T. Given the existing contacts between the GGRI-NTT and the URCNA, the National Synod decided to offer the URCNA a sister church relationship.

Synod declined to sponsor the Evangelical Reformed Churches in India for membership in the ICRC, since the GGRI have no relationship with them and do not know them sufficiently.

The GGRI churches in Papua (GGRI-P) will be responsible for convening the Fourth National Synod of the GGRI. It is scheduled to take place in September 2025.

ENCOURAGEMENT

It is encouraging to see eagerness among the churches represented at their respective synods to uphold and promote the Reformed faith in Indonesia, a country that is predominantly Muslim. In this context, it was also remarkable to see how supportive local (Christian) government officials were, even being involved in the opening of the synods and urging the churches to be a channel of blessings not only to their own members but also to society around them.

The churches face challenges, some of which are familiar to us as well. They also deal with issues that are unique to their context. They are thankful for the bonds of shared faith with the CanRC, bonds which serve to remind them that they are not alone in their efforts to serve the Lord in their country. Let us remember them in our personal and congregational prayers. 



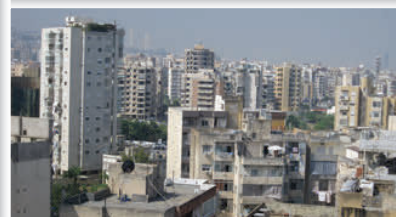
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North Africa



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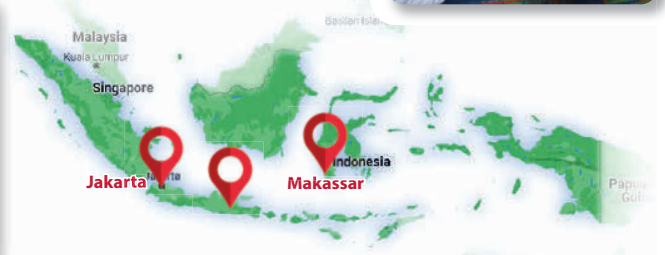


Indonesia

Media Ministries



Children outreach



MISSION TO THE WORLD:

MISSION AGENCY OF THE PCA

Canadian Reformed Missions Association Conference (1)

GEORGE VAN POPTA

Each year the Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA)¹ hosts a conference. In 2022 it was held on September 10th at Cornerstone Canadian Reformed in Hamilton. Delegates from most of the sending churches were in attendance. This is part one of two reports about the event.



The board of the CRMA seeks to secure a speaker on a topic of importance and interest to missionaries and the mission boards/councils of the sending churches. The speaker in 2022 was the Rev. Dr. Lloyd Kim, who gave two presentations about Mission to the World (MTW), the mission agency of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Dr. Kim is the coordinator of MTW.

The PCA is the largest of the denominations that belong to North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), to which the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) also belong. To give a sense of the difference in magnitude between the two families of churches, consider that whereas the CanRC is made up of approximately 20,000 people, the PCA consists of about 379,000 members.

In the first presentation, Dr. Kim gave some background on himself and on MTW. In 2004, Dr. Kim and his wife were sent out to Manila, the Philippines, and in 2007 they went to Cambodia. They planted several churches in these countries. In 2014, the General Assembly (GA) of the PCA appointed Dr. Kim as the coordinator for MTW.

MTW is headquartered in Lawrenceville, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. It has several smaller hub offices throughout the United States: California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Missouri,

¹ For information on the CRMA and to see updates on the various Canadian Reformed mission projects, please see <https://reformedmissions.net>



Aerial picture of the Reformational Study Centre, South Africa (Dunnville mission in South Africa)

and Texas. The PCA ministry buildings in Lawrenceville are the location from which the various ministries of the denomination are coordinated.²

MTW publishes one regular periodical. *Network* magazine comes out twice yearly and includes articles and pictures of MTW's work around the world. In addition, there is a bi-weekly *MTW Online* email that includes recent blog posts.

Dr. Kim spoke about MTW's vision, missions, and values.

VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES

Vision

Your vision is what you want to do and accomplish. MTW asked what it is that they wanted to do. In seeking to answer that question they asked: what does Jesus want to see done? We should want to do what Jesus wants to see done. What was Jesus's vision? The kingdom of God. MTW's vision is to see the kingdom of God advancing throughout the world. Their desire is to see what all the church wants to see: Satan's kingdom destroyed. They want to see people coming to faith in Jesus, to be obedient to him, living out the ethics and truths of the kingdom. We want to see the darkness pushed back and Jesus's reign throughout the world. This is a vision that all Christians share.

Mission

What is someone's mission? It is something you do. It formulates your marching orders. Our marching orders are defined

by the great commission: we are to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded us, trusting that the Lord is with us always, to the end of the age.

Values

1. MTW values the *church*. They love the church because they love Christ, the bridegroom of the church. They love the bride because the bridegroom loves the church. MTW is multi-faceted as it seeks to demonstrate that it loves the church. Many are involved in direct church planting while others work in other vocations supporting the work of planting churches. This work may include teaching or medicine.
2. MTW values *grace*. One might think that ministry is works based. A missionary might fall into the trap of feeling that he needs to prove his worth to people. He might come to apply all manner of metrics: has he learned the language? How many people attend the Sunday services and Bible classes? He may be trying to please his supporting constituency and to prove his worth. But the work should not be based on how well you are doing. The missionary must come to the point where he lives out of grace. Trying to prove that one is worthy by works is a recipe for burn out.
3. MTW is *Reformed and covenantal*. They seek to form churches that are Reformed and covenantal. They are not embarrassed

² These ministries are Mission to the World, Mission to North America, Committee on Discipleship Ministries, Administrative Committee, and Reformed University Fellowship



Commemoration of Reformation Day at the Reformed Church in Village 2 (Hamilton mission in Brazil).

by these values. Often the desire to be ecumenical leads to a least common denominator Christianity. We ought not to be ashamed of being Reformed and covenantal.

4. MTW values *mercy and justice* as reflecting God's love. There have been times when the church only preached grace, and other times when it only did good things. MTW asked: why are we making this divide? MTW seeks to be integrative and wholistic. We should not only say, "Believe in Jesus, go, be warmed and filled," without lifting a finger to help. Of what use would that be? As we seek to help people, we tell them *why* we love. Word and deed are integrated.

BRIEF HISTORY

Dr. Kim then gave a brief history of MTW, where it came from and who they are. The PCA was founded in 1973, having come out of the heterodox Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). They very quickly began sending out American teaching elders (ministers) to plant churches in many major cities of the world.

The focus was mainly on Word ministries. Early on there were those involved in Bible translation and in bringing the gospel to Muslims.

In 1974–1977, cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding were forged with organizations such as Wycliffe, Pioneers, and Frontiers. Men were trained and presbyteries were established. Strategies were developed as to how to turn the work over to national leaders.

In the decade of 1977–1986, stronger ties to nationals and national churches were developed. Greater efforts were made to become partners with national/indigenous churches and leaders.

In the years 1987–1994, MTW missionaries entered the former Soviet Union. Men taught in schools, while the primary focus was on planting churches. Men were also active in Ukraine. Churches were planted, presbyteries were formed, and even as the missionaries have had to pull out because of the current war, there are pastors and churches that can minister to the people and who can direct the relief efforts.



Kids club (Abbotsford and Vernon mission in México).

In the years 1994–2014, mission was conducted in every global area, and men were trained specifically for Muslim ministries. Less emphasis was placed on training North Americans to be church planters and more was put on training them to be facilitators to help nationals plant churches in their own countries.

Presently, MTW is labouring throughout the world. It includes 700 missionaries (600 of which are long term and 100 short term), as well as many interns and trip participants. MTW missionaries serve in the following locations: Africa,³ Asia-Pacific,⁴ Europe,⁵ and the Americas.⁶

MAJOR DIVISIONS IN MTW

There are four major divisions in MTW.

US operations

“Mobilizers” are scattered around the USA. They are involved in marketing the PCA brand. They coordinate events and rigorously interview potential candidates. They also organize volunteer trips.

Field operations

Fields ops works in four areas: Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Muslim countries. The resource team will answer questions about such things as taxation rules. Each missionary has one person whom he can contact for help in navigating the intricacies

of dealing with foreign countries, or one’s own country while living overseas. They will assist a missionary and his family with their practical needs. They will lend support where counselling is required and where there are concerns with mental health. They will also care for the children of missionaries and lend aid to these “Third-Culture Kids,” helping them navigate the college years back home. They will assist a family to repatriate. Repatriation is difficult for the whole family, but especially for the kids. MTW is aware of that.

Administration services

This division helps missionaries deal with finances and information technology and similar issues. This is not very exciting stuff, but necessary. Thankfully, MTW is in good financial shape.

Partner relations

This group addresses issues dealing with child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual assault, and marital discord. It reports directly to Dr. Kim. MTW has good policies, protocols, and best practices in place.

In all of its divisions MTW strives to abide by five norms:

1. It is *prayerful* and communally dependent upon God. MTW realizes that we are largely shaped by our prayer.

³ Ethiopia, Malawi, South Africa, Uganda

⁴ Australia, Cambodia, Guam, Japan, New Zealand and Pacific Islands, Taiwan, Thailand

⁵ Belgium, Bulgaria, England, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Romania, Scotland, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine

⁶ Belize, Bahamas, Canada (First Nations), Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, United States (Native America)

2. It seeks to be *humble*. This has varying importance in different cultures. Behaviour and attitudes that may be considered to be normal in one culture are thought to be an affront in another.
3. It seeks to be *excellent* in all it does.
4. It is *celebratory*, realizing we have every reason for joy.
5. It is *courageous*, willing to take risks in faith.

The divisions of MTW serve four constituencies:

1. The missionaries in the field.
2. The supporting churches.
3. Donors.
4. The international partners.

CHALLENGES

Dr. Kim spoke about some of the challenges MTW faces. One challenge has to do with its relationship to the denomination. MTW is the sending agency of the PCA. It approves the plans that people come up with. MTW is the guardian of the vision, mission, and values of the PCA and is answerable to the annual General Assembly (GA).

The coordinator (Dr. Kim) functions between the board of MTW and the GA. He renders an annual account of his work to the GA and is appointed annually to a one-year term. He is on a “short leash,” but so far has been reappointed seven times.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR QUESTIONS

How do we foster a good connection between the missionary and the sending church(es)?

From time to time, every two, three, or four years, the missionary comes back to the sending church to conduct mission work at home. He will have a home missions assignment and will encourage the home church in matters related to home or foreign mission. He will encourage the congregation to be generous in their giving to overseas mission and urge members to consider whether they are called to the work of mission.

What sort of financial support is there for missions and the missionaries in the PCA?

In the PCA there is generally great financial support for missions. Whereas some churches (denominations) give the missionary 100% of his salary while others require of him to raise all of his own funds, the PCA practices a hybrid model. Missionaries are trained and coached in how to raise funds. All missionaries are given a budget as to what they need. The missionaries are asked to raise some of the funds they need while MTW guarantees a basic salary. In the PCA a missionary receives an income equivalent to what a senior pastor receives, adjusted to the cost of living of where he is.


Is mission work conducted in North America?

Yes, and this is overseen by Mission to North America (MNA).

How do you know when it is time to pull out of a country and to let the mission church transition to a national church?

This is a judgment call. The PCA has an example in the Philippines when at some point the church there became strong enough for MTW to pull out. MTW has had several happy surprises when the missionaries were, for various reasons, forced to pull out, and the church thrived and grew.

Can you speak to the topic of financial support of national partners and pastors?

Great discretion must be exercised as money can be damaging for missions. We cannot just “send money.” We need to have a good relationship with the national partner. It is not possible to have a blanket policy and a “one size fits all” approach to supporting national pastors. If support is given it is best that it be on a sliding scale. Consideration must also be given to whether he is living and working in an urban or in a rural context. 



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REFORMED BOOK SERVICES

CONNOR KEUNING

President

Reformed Book Services (RBS) is a Christian bookstore located in Brantford, Ontario serving the Canadian market. I'm sure you have seen our ads many times in *Clarion*. Its origins go back to the late 1970s. John Schuit and Jack Westerink, both teachers at Rehoboth Christian School in Copetown, felt a need for our people to read (more) Reformed and Puritan books and to make them available at discounted prices. A few years later they were joined by Ryk Naves, in whose basement the books were stored. Books were sold mostly at weekday church gatherings. After running this "store" for some ten years, they sold it to John and Henny Pennings

of the St. Thomas Free Reformed Church (FRC), who continued in a similar fashion for the next twenty years.

Around 2009, several avid readers of the Brantford, Dundas, Hamilton, and St. George FRCs got together to consider taking over the book ministry and make it more accessible to the public. At the outset, and many times since, we have observed the Lord's blessing in this endeavour. Early in 2009 RBS was incorporated as

(Pictured above) How the building should look once it is fully renovated.

*Our hopes and prayers are that the sale of Bibles, good books,
and tracts will be a great blessing to many.*

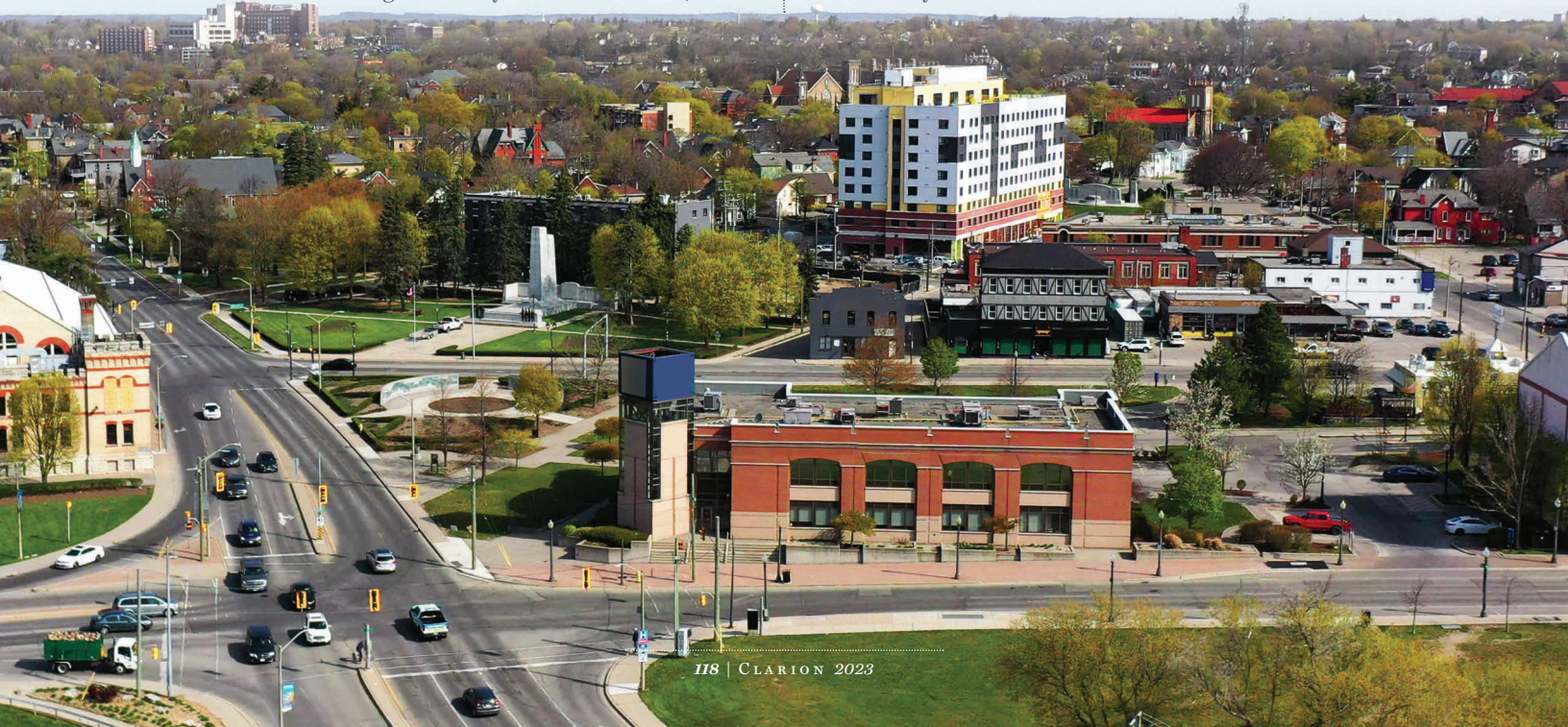
a not-for-profit entity. Soon a store was opened on Lynden Road in Brantford, Ontario in a nicely renovated space rented to us at a significant discount by a member of the Dundas FRC. The store in its initial stage was managed by Wilma Droogendyk. Trudy Schuit took over the helm in 2017. These capable managers were assisted by a board of directors and a team of able volunteers and staff. In 2018, we opened a depot in the Niagara Region. Besides the store operations, many books are sold at various conferences; in one year we attended thirty-two conferences. Throughout our history Reformation Heritage Books in Grand Rapids has assisted us with invaluable counsel, and sizeable discounts. Our board now has a member from the Heritage Reformed Congregations and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as well.

Since COVID came along in 2019, sales have increased rapidly. The main reasons, it seems, are an increased appetite for good books throughout Canada, especially in the West, the shutting down of several nearby Christian bookstores, and the use of better website software. On average each business day at least one new customer is added. As sales are increasing so much, we are running out of space. Our dreams were to get charity status by the end of 2022, and then look for larger premises. In one week during late Spring two wonderful things came together: we received charity status, and our landlord informed us of a 7200 sq. ft. building that was for sale just around the corner. A building committee was formed and the building on 16 Roy Blvd. was visited, and an

estimate for renovations was made (about \$200,000), resulting in the board making an offer to purchase the property for \$1,700,000. Within two weeks sufficient financing was secured, and a large donation received—all from supporters in our Reformed community. We took ownership of the property on October 27. Most of the back part of the building is be rented out to the current tenant. We will start out using about 35% of the building, which is almost three times the space we currently have.

While the purchase could be completed, we need money to renovate and furnish the building, and to increase the inventory to better serve our customers. The board does not view RBS as a business, but rather a ministry. As stated in our logo, we seek to promote godliness, revival, and reformation in individuals, families, churches and in our communities. We could tell you many stories of how new customers come in who have just discovered the Reformed doctrines, of people who hardly know anything about Christianity and are looking for something deeper. During COVID, the puritan paperbacks were our bestsellers. We are starting to receive invitations to large well-known conferences. Our hopes and prayers are that the sale of Bibles, good books, and tracts will be a great blessing to many. As part of our expanded mission as a registered charity we also plan to hold seminars, book presentations, and the like, in the near future.

Please prayerfully consider donating to RBS. You can do so conveniently at our website: ReformedBookServices.ca. 



CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 26

Doesn't it make a church service extra special when a baby is baptized? That is good! That service should be extra special. Did you know that when a baby is baptized, God is saying something to you, too? That's right! God the Father is telling you that he decided you would be his special child. Don't ever forget that! God also uses the drops of water to show you something about Christ's blood. Just like water cleans your body, so Jesus's blood cleans your soul. This means that your sins are forgiven. The Lord Jesus gave you his Spirit. He is working to clean your soul too. The Holy Spirit does this by helping you know your sins. He also changes you so that you do what pleases God more and more. So next time you see a baptism in your church, be comforted! You were baptized once too. Jesus died for you.

USE VOWELS (A,E,I,O,U) TO COMPLETE THE SENTENCE. THE VOWELS MAY BE USED MORE THAN ONCE, OR NOT AT ALL!

B__PT__SM IS A S__CR__M__NT.

THE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY ARE WORKING TOGETHER IN OUR BAPTISM.
FILL IN THE BLANKS WITH THE WORDS FATHER, SON, OR HOLY SPIRIT

Matthew 28:19: "Jesus said 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the _____ and of the _____ and of the _____'."

Find Romans 6:4 and fill in the missing words.

"We were buried therefore with him by _____ into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in _____ of life."



HEY KIDS!

Do you have questions about something you have read in the Bible or heard in a sermon? Maybe you are wondering about something you have read in a Lord's Day. We have a new column coming called KIDS' QUESTIONS. We warmly invite you to ask Mrs. DeBoer your question! With your parent's permission, email deboerca@gmail.com and find your question and an answer in Clarion!

AMANDA DEBOER

REAL COOL HISTORY FOR KIDS

In past reviews, I have focused on podcasts discussing political and cultural issues; content that is usually aimed at an adult audience. However, in this piece, I will focus on a podcast that many parents may find to be educational and entertaining for their children.

The podcast is entitled *Real Cool History for Kids*—a name sure to win the attention of kids everywhere! The host of the podcast is author Angela O'Dell—a self-described “veteran homeschooling parent” who crafts fifteen-to-twenty-minute episodes teaching the history of everything from creation to 9/11. If you are interested in viewing the whole catalogue of her episodes in chronological order, you can find them on the podcast's website, <https://real-cool-history-for-kids.onpodium.com>.

O'Dell does a wonderful job of breaking down complex historical events into palatable and intriguing narratives that children can understand and learn from. While the episode length and audience necessitate simplifying the story and leaving out certain parts, I have not found any of the episodes I have listened to to be misleading. In fact, O'Dell consistently hammers home the love of Christ and the guiding hand of God throughout history.


If you're looking to introduce this podcast to your kids, some of the more interesting episodes (at least in the humble opinion of the author) include *Ep. 67 The Unsatisfied Conqueror—Alexander the Great (Mid to late Ancient Era)*, *Ep. 77 The History of Ninjas (Japanese Feudal Period—Middle Ages)*, and *The Adventures of Lewis and Clark and Sacajawea (early 1800s)*. If you're looking to provide extra motivation, each episode is dedicated to a listener who sent in a request for the topic of the episode. If your child

would like to submit an episode idea, you can have them submit that idea at <https://angelaodell.com/episode-request-form/>.

In addition to providing some educational entertainment for her grandchildren, O'Dell's primary motivation for the podcast stems from her desire “to support parents in their God-given mandate to teach their family: who He is, who they are, and what their purpose is.” Furthermore, O'Dell's website is full of resources for parents, particularly those who homeschool their children,

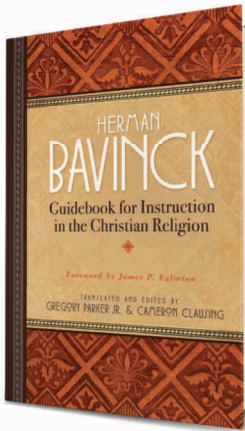
as O'Dell has developed an entire “Biblical Worldview Homeschool Curriculum” with a special focus on “Heart-Focused Education.”

If you are looking to provide your kids with an educational and entertaining podcast that captures the curiosity and wonder of a child while also simultaneously weaving in the story of Christ's redeeming grace throughout the history of the world, I would recommend introducing them to *Real Cool History for Kids*. While it can be a challenge to interest kids in a subject like history, O'Dell does a

great job of bringing the stories to life and igniting the imagination of her listeners, both young and old alike! I hope that the listenership of *Real Cool History for Kids* continues to grow and that many more children are able to learn about the history of our world and the God who created it and sustains it. 



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THE GATEWAY TO THE DEEP END

**Guidebook for Instruction
in the Christian Religion,**
by Herman Bavinck. Translators and editors,
Gregory Parker Jr. and Cameron Clausung.
(Peabody: Hendrickson Academic, 2022).
Hardcover. 224 pages. \$29.95 USD.

Let's say you've read one or two of those modern popular-level theology surveys and you're ready for something more. You've heard about this great Dutch Reformed theologian named Herman Bavinck. Doing a little research, you discover he wrote a massive four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* (RD). That's the deep end of the Reformed theology pool. You're not the type intimidated by challenges—"where there's a will, there's a way" is your motto. But how are you going to eventually find your way to swim confidently and profitably in that deep end? Thankfully, Herman Bavinck answered that question for you already back in 1913 when he published this book.

In 1911, Herman Bavinck was approaching the sunset years of his life (he'd die ten years later). In that year, he completed the definitive second edition of RD, the fruit of years of teaching both at Kampen and the Free University of Amsterdam. With that publication, he almost entirely left dogmatic writing behind. However, in 1913, he published his *Guidebook*, intended as a short summary of RD. His audience, he said, was high school and university students. While I'm not sure it would still be accessible to high school students, certainly anyone who's read some of the more basic theology books will manage it.

The *Guidebook* consists of twenty chapters covering all the essentials of Reformed theology in the conventional order. Most of the chapters are fairly short—they could easily serve as edifying reading between church services. Like RD, there's nothing here in terms of personal anecdotes and little in the way of illustrations. Bavinck is all business. Like RD, there are plenty of Scripture references and much careful thought. Unlike RD, you'll find sparse interaction with other theologians, whether negatively or positively.


The *Guidebook* presents Bavinck as a classically Reformed theologian, faithful to Scripture and the confessions. Some of his

formulations are especially concise and elegant. For example, on sanctification he mentions the image of faith as a hand. In justification, what that hand does is receive Christ's benefits. It's a merely receptive activity. But subsequently, with that hand of faith, "we desire to carry out our own work" in our sanctification (p. 155).

I've yet to read a book like this where I've agreed with the author on everything. Here too, there are some formulations I find infelicitous and others curiously indecisive. To give just one example of the latter, Bavinck appears unsure about whether the days of creation were ordinary days. In his 2020 biography, James Eglinton noted that Bavinck's personal copy of the second edition of the *Dogmatics* contained all manner of handwritten annotations. There were also twenty-three pages of material for further expansion, including material on the creation days. What direction was Bavinck's thought heading? I'd love to know, but Eglinton doesn't say. The *Guidebook* only suggests limbo.

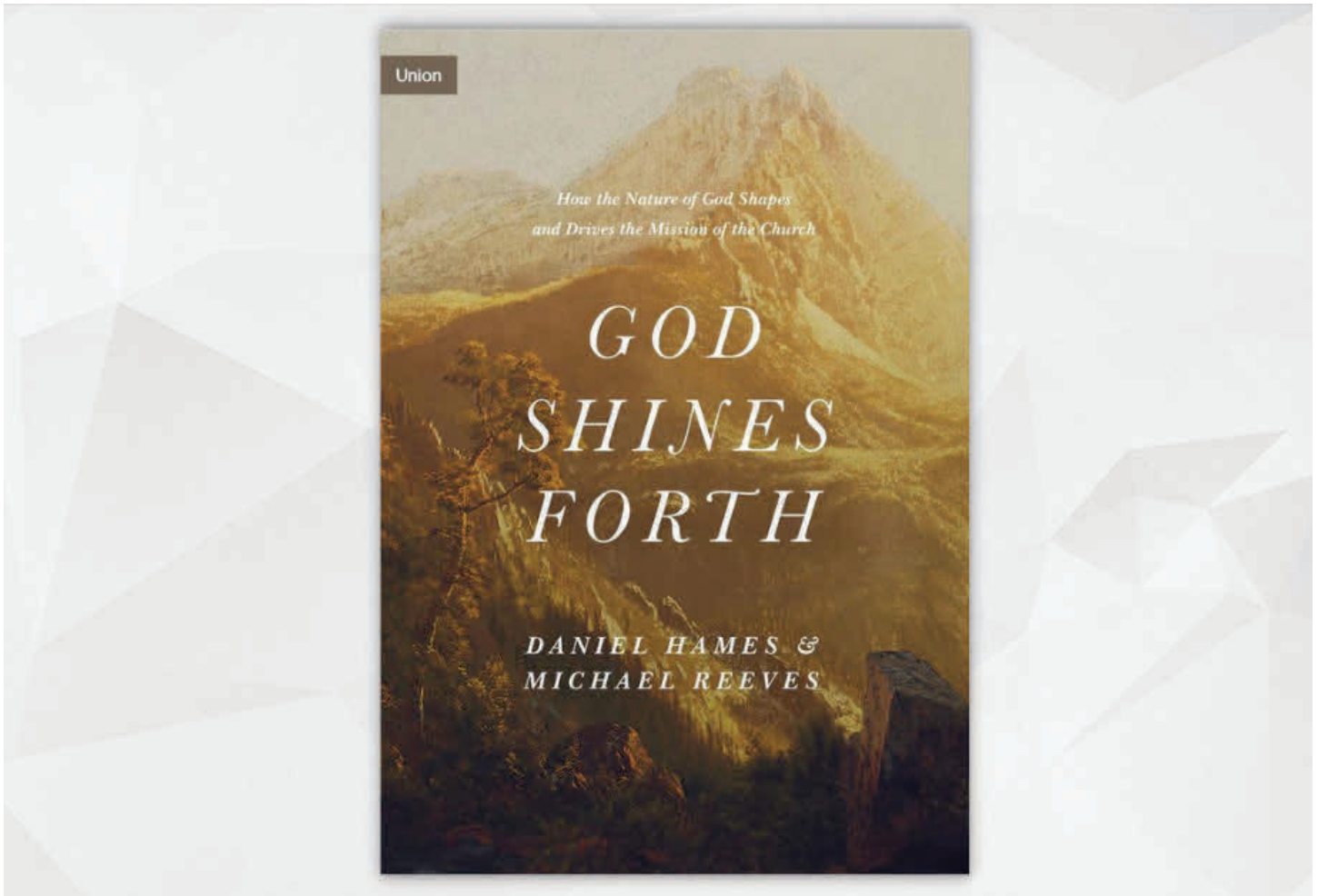
On at least one other topic, Bavinck's thinking apparently changed. In RD, Bavinck argued on the basis of 1 Peter 3:19 that Christ preached to the dead. In the *Guidebook* he writes: "There is no mention of the gospel being preached in the world of the dead, even if one invokes Matthew 12:32 or 1 Peter 3:18–22" (p. 184). The *Guidebook* represents Bavinck's most mature theological reflection and should be taken as the last word on what he thought about any particular issue.

The translation reads well though I do question why the authors gave us the corresponding Dutch word for just about every technical term. The volume of it is rather distracting. The *Guidebook* also has many footnotes, many of which are comparing the text to a higher-level compendium of the *Dogmatics*, *Magnalia Dei*. Here's one of those rare situations where endnotes could have been used to no one's regret.

In Hosea 4:4, God says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." In 2 Peter 3:18 all believers are told to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Nothing is more important than developing a deeper knowledge of God so we can have a deeper, more meaningful relationship with him. That's the point of theology. Do you want to go deeper? Bavinck can help you along the way. 



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MOTIVATION FOR MISSION

God Shines Forth: How the Nature of God Shapes and Drives the Mission of the Church,
Daniel Hames and Michael Reeves. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022. Hardcover, 174 pages.

No serious student of the Bible can escape the conclusion that the church of Jesus Christ is supposed to be a missionary church. Christ sent his church out into the world to preach and witness to the good news of what he has done. Yet there are so many in our churches who are, at best, lukewarm about this cause. If you recognize that in yourself, how can it change? If you're a church leader, how can you help yourself and others get fired up about mission and evangelism?


That's what *God Shines Forth* is about. It's not a manual for mission or a theology of mission. Instead, it's an attempt to get

to the roots of why so many Christians are blasé about it. Hames and Reeves are diagnosing the pathology, but also providing a cure. They write: "Unless we honestly find God to be beautiful and enjoyable, we'll have nothing worth saying to the people around us...This book is an invitation to start again at the beginning with our vision of God" (p.21). The authors want to get beyond the surface issues and strike right at the heart of why Christians don't evangelize. They argue that the solution isn't better training programs or guilt trips, but a better understanding of how God is so fathomlessly beautiful and delightful.

The road to that better understanding travels over Calvary. In Christ crucified, we see God in his most wondrous glory. The authors write, “At the cross, God was giving himself to us. There we see God going, reaching, and shining out” (p.52). They work with Luther’s distinction between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross – they argue that, similarly, there’s a missiology of glory and a missiology of the cross. A missiology of glory exalts human skill and accomplishment, whereas as a missiology of the cross directs us to the God who makes his power perfect in weakness.

One thing I really appreciate about *God Shines Forth* is its use of church history. We hear of how the hymn writer Charles Wesley served as a missionary in colonial America – **prior** to his conversion in 1738. What motivated an unregenerated man to be a missionary? Jonathan Edwards is well-known for his sermon ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.’ Edwards learned something powerful about gospel persuasion from his missionary colleague David Brainerd, who was ministering to the First

Nations in New Jersey. John Calvin often gets a bad rap in mission literature. But as Hames and Reeves point out, Calvin actually had a remarkable missionary fervour directly tied to his understanding of the nature of God.

I only have one complaint: I wish it had been published twenty years ago. Not only would it have been helpful for me as a missionary, but it would also have given a good grounding for encouraging others to care about the spread of the gospel too. I highly recommend *God Shines Forth* to missionaries, mission boards, church leaders, and every Christian who wants to care more about the cause of the gospel and help others to do the same. 



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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

TREASURES CAN BE SHARED


Clarion magazine has been enjoyed over many years, by many people including me. Usually, on the third page, we find a devotional write-up, which is called *Treasures, New & Old*. For several years now, I have been able to give these devotions a “second life.”

With two other Christian men, we take turns each Saturday morning and go to a local (Langley) Seniors’ Home, to do devotions with the residents who are interested—prayer, Bible reading, devotion, and much singing of God’s praises before, after, and in between.

My reason for this letter is to share that I am using the *Treasures, New & Old* page for my devotions there, and it is much appreciated by the senior members of the home.

My hope is that others who read this, will consider doing the same and visit the seniors in their area; those who cannot attend church anymore, but who are eager to hear God’s message of salvation, his words of comfort, admonition, and love.

And may *Treasures, New & Old* be a welcome blessing to you, and to many seniors!

My sincere thanks to all who faithfully contribute to writing this worthwhile devotion. 

Bram Vegter

