

Clarion

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



Costly Comfort

Rick Ludwig

Captives of the Triumphant Christ

William den Hollander

Kept by Grace, Called to Keep

Rob Schouten

What's Inside

Good Friday and Easter are fast approaching and so we are pleased to present an Editorial on living the Easter miracle by Matthew VanLuik, a meditative reflection on our Lord's agonizing suffering on our behalf by Rick Ludwig, and a dive below the surface account of two lesser-known figures involved in our Saviour's burial by John van Popta. As well, William Helder provides us with one freshly-translated hymn and another newly written that allow us to sing both of Christ's resurrection and that of our own. Ponder this gospel and praise our God in this season of heightened reflection!

What does it mean that Christ "leads us in triumphal procession?" (2 Cor 2:14)? Will den Hollander unpacks this phrase's fascinating historical background in "Captives of Christ." Following up a recent series on the death of the old nature, Rob Schouten clarifies for us the Bible's teaching on how God *preserves* us in the faith even while he activates us to *persevere* in the faith. Jan DeGelder's column *Governing the Church* returns with a very helpful description of the authority of the broader assemblies in our federation—what it is and what it isn't. Andrew Douma informs us of the awful plight of Christians in Sudan, giving us new matters to pray about. Thank you for keeping this sober subject before us.

Another retired minister in our federation, the fourth in the last six months, was called home to the Lord mid-January. We can feel the weight of these departures in different ways but as Rodney Vermeulen's *In Memoriam* for Rev. Willem den Hollander reminds us, there is joy for the departed who are now with the Lord and, for all who belong to Christ, an assured reunion on the clouds of heaven. May that comfort all who mourn.

Don't miss contributions from two readers, the *Ray of Sunshine*, and a book review from a source off the beaten track. God bless!

Peter Holtvliwer

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The Easter Miracle Today

The resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter stands as an extraordinary miracle, defying natural explanation and unmistakably revealing the hand of God. Christ's resurrection is central to the Christian faith, for it reveals the possibility of life in a world dominated by death. While so many continue to live under the fear of death, the Christian believer lives in the sure hope of eternal life in our resurrected Lord.

JESUS IS THE RESURRECTION

At the occasion of the death of Lazarus, Jesus says to Lazarus's sister Martha, "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25–26). To prove he really is the resurrection and the life, he commanded the grave to be opened and called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus responded to the voice of Christ by getting up and coming out of the grave. This miracle anticipates the resurrection of Jesus Christ only days before his death on the cross.

This miracle reveals that the Lord Jesus has the power and authority to raise the dead to life. It means that we are anticipating the day when the resurrected Lord will return from heaven to raise our physical bodies to new life. But the miracle of Easter does much more than guarantee that one day our bodies will be raised, just as Christ's body was raised from the dead. Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me, though he die [a physical death], yet shall he live." The Lord Jesus is talking about the *spiritual* resurrection of every believer. His resurrection makes our spiritual rebirth possible, a reality that will lead to life everlasting in the kingdom of God.

Jesus already spoke about the power of his voice in John 5:24: "... whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." Jesus reveals the power of his voice to raise the dead to life. It is a reminder that, in the beginning of time, the voice of Christ called all creation into being. Today, the same voice calls us to new life. His voice is so powerful it causes us to cross over from death to life.

TODAY'S MIRACLES

Christians often ask, do miracles still happen today? Usually we ask this with a focus on some miraculous healing or unexpected blessing, so that we are often blind to the miracle the Lord is working

in our own hearts and the hearts of others. Every time people respond in faith to the voice of Christ heard in his Word, it is a miracle greater than Lazarus responding to Christ's call to rise physically from the grave. Paul says he wants to know Christ and the power of his resurrection (see Phil 3:10). Paul is speaking about more than just having a knowledge of Christ's resurrection; his greatest joy is to experience the power of Christ's resurrection in his own life.

What does that look like for our life? Paul describes it in Romans 6:10–11, when he speaks about being united with Christ in his resurrection. By faith, our old sinful nature is crucified with Christ in his death and we are made alive to God in his resurrection.

LIVING THE EASTER MIRACLE

Christ's miracle at Easter raises us from spiritual darkness into the glorious light of God's kingdom. Through his resurrection, he transforms us into people who no longer live in the corruption of our hearts but desire to glorify our Lord.

Do you truly believe in the power of the resurrected Lord to change your life? While we expect Jesus to raise our dead bodies one day, do you also believe that he can change your life today? Often, when facing sinful desires, addictions, and choices, we act as if turning away from such sinful ways depends on our own strength. But can any good come from what is spiritually dead? No—we can live a new life pleasing to God only through the power of our resurrected Lord. Therefore, we must surrender our independence to him and seek renewal in Christ alone, the worker of miracles both at the first Easter and in our hearts and lives today. 



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Be Still and Know

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” — Psalm 46:10

Sudden and painful changes in life can make us reach for Psalm 46. It’s a psalm that speaks about earth-shattering experiences such as the earth giving way, mountains falling into the sea, waters roaring, and nations raging (vv. 2, 3, 6). Sometimes we feel as if solid ground is collapsing under our feet. Sometimes we experience a sea change in our lives—a big upheaval which turns everything upside down. Psalm 46 teaches that we are safe and secure with the LORD no matter what happens, and that therefore we don’t have to fear.

When Psalm 46 speaks about the security of Jerusalem as the city of God (vv. 4–5), it’s speaking about the security of the kingdom of God and the people of God. That security exists because the LORD is God! Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” The LORD is in control!

Verse 10 is the only verse in Psalm 46 which quotes God. That makes this verse stand out. It’s as if the LORD is underlining the point with a direct quotation of himself. He wants to impress this upon us. In contrast with the roaring and foaming waters, “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God...” (v. 4). The river mentioned refers to the river of God’s blessings of salvation which flow to us by grace through faith. This is about blessings of comfort and hope in all circumstances and an eternal future. It’s a picture picked up in Revelation 22:1–2, with its description of the New Jerusalem: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city...” In the New Jerusalem, the holy city, we will enjoy every blessing of salvation to the fullest!

In contrast with the uproar of the nations (v. 6), “He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire” (v. 9). This is about universal peace through the Prince of Peace, our Lord Jesus Christ. As Isaiah says, “For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5–6). Psalm

46 speaks about the everlasting kingdom of peace founded on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. When Christ returns and brings the new earth, there will be universal peace.

God’s great saving acts are the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ carried our sins to the cross and then arose as victor over Satan, sin, death, and all the brokenness of life. When Christ arose triumphantly from the grave, that was the beginning of Christ’s exaltation. It will be complete on the day of Christ’s return in glory. That’s why the LORD says, “I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (v. 10)!

Because of Christ’s redeeming work, Christians do not have to fear. Hardships and death do not have the last word in the life of a Christian. That’s why Christians can be still. The LORD says to us, “Be still, and know that I am God” (v. 10). To be still means to let go and be at rest. It’s about realizing that everything will be alright no matter what happens because we as Christians belong, in life and in death, to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. That is the only way to live and die without fear, and to live and die with hope and comfort. 📖

FURTHER READING:

Psalm 46

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. What does the phrase “the LORD of hosts” (Ps 46:7, 11) tell us about the LORD?
2. What comfort does the recurring refrain of Psalm 46:7, 11 give you?
3. Read Romans 8:38–39 and reflect on how this relates to



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Psalm 46:10.



Joseph and Nicodemus: Funeral Directors for the Crucified King

JOHN VAN POPTA

SUGGESTED READING: JOHN 19:38–42

The evangelist John tells of two disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus, who arranged for Jesus's funeral. These two disciples buried the dead Messiah as their great King. Joseph and Nicodemus gave Jesus a royal burial in the garden tomb. Who were these men: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus? How do they fit into the larger story?

THE SECRET DISCIPLE

Joseph of Arimathea appears in all four gospels at this point in the narrative of Jesus's life and death, but only here. The four evangelists agree that he took the initiative in securing Jesus's body for burial, but very little is known about him. We don't even know today where Arimathea is located. Luke tells us it's a city in Judea, but he doesn't pinpoint its exact location. We can observe, however,

that Joseph is a Judean,¹ not a Galilean. He comes from the people among whom Jesus's fiercest enemies were found.

Mark tells us that Joseph was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, the council that sentenced Jesus to death. Matthew tells us that Joseph had become a disciple of Jesus and was looking for the coming of the kingdom of God. Luke describes him as a wealthy, good, and righteous man. He had not consented to the Sanhedrin's decision and action when they condemned Jesus to death. However, John tells us that he had remained a secret disciple, fearing the judgment of his peers.

THE TIMID DISCIPLE

There is another man of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus, who had earlier come to Jesus by night. You can read that well-known story

¹ In reading the gospels, we would do well to translate the Greek word *Ioudaios* as *Judeans* in contrast to *Galileans*, and not as *Jews* in contrast to *Gentiles*.



in John 3. He had discussed with Jesus the coming of the Spirit and being born again.

Later, Nicodemus offered a timid defence for Jesus (John 7). The ruling council had sent the temple guard to arrest Jesus, but they returned empty-handed. The elders asked, “Where is Jesus? You were sent to arrest him.”

“No one ever spoke the way this man does,” they replied.

“Do you mean he has deceived you also?” the elders retorted. “Have any of the rulers believed in him?”

Then we hear Nicodemus, one of their own, ask, “Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he’s doing?”

The others disdainfully reply, “Are you from Galilee too?”

Nicodemus offers no further response as far as we know. We don’t know whether he was entirely secretive about his admiration for Jesus, nor about his motives for conferring with Jesus under the cover of darkness (John 3). Still, we know this: he was not completely honest or courageous in his testimony about the Christ.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

These two men had muted their testimony and confession out of fear. They were concerned about what their peers might think, say, or do. The council had decreed that anyone who spoke positively of Jesus risked being ostracized through excommunication from the synagogue (John 12:42–43).

Even today, difficult and demanding situations can arise when we publicly testify to Jesus’s claim to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Society may accept Christians who worship privately, but if you openly declare that the Lord Jesus’s unique claim to the truth applies to everyone, you should be prepared to hold fast to Jesus. You must be willing to face ridicule, mockery, and public condemnation. Just last fall, the BC legislature passed the following motion in a vote of 48–3: “to condemn the intolerant views of the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA), including its harmful discrimination against transgender people, its belief that homosexuality is “immoral” and its explicit policy goal of restricting abortion access in British Columbia.”² The serious significance of this is that 95% of the members of the BC legislature who voted that day supported the condemnation of what the Bible teaches. However, we can also find encouragement in this as we see more of Jesus’s disciples speaking truth to power, not desiring human praise

more than praise from God. When you’re not a secret disciple of Jesus, those in power will try to silence you. Are you prepared?

SUDDEN BOLDNESS

After Jesus’s death, Joseph finds new courage. He goes to Pilate and asks for Jesus’s body. Criminals—crucified criminals—were often given shameful burials, perhaps thrown into a common grave or even left without burial. At times, their bodies were dumped into the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem’s walls. This valley was Jerusalem’s garbage dump, where the “worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48). The Hebrew name for this valley was Gehenna, the common word for Hell. This secret disciple wanted to prevent Jesus from such an ignominious end. Clearly, Joseph was a prominent citizen, as Pilate granted him an audience and then granted his request. Pilate hadn’t enjoyed the spectacle that the Judean leaders had forced upon him during the trial. He was likely glad to approve this request for two reasons: to irritate the jealous leaders who had wanted Jesus dead, and to give some dignity to the man he didn’t wish any evil upon. He had washed his hands of this dreadful deed.

Now, suddenly, Joseph of Arimathea became a public disciple of Jesus, and Nicodemus joined him. They would have noticed that those who had been considered Jesus’s closest followers were now conspicuously absent. Yet, at that very moment, these two choose to publicly align themselves with Jesus. Both are wealthy, influential men, prominent members of the Sanhedrin.

PEOPLE SURPRISE US

What had happened to change the hearts of these two men? The cross demanded a choice from them. It had revealed the cost of remaining silent. These two men witnessed the injustice perpetrated by the Sanhedrin. They saw the Messiah mocked, whipped, crowned with thorns, and then crucified. Their silence would now be taken as agreement with the verdict. Late that Friday afternoon, the cross of Jesus demanded a choice from these two secret disciples. The call to make a choice was urgent. There was no “later” time to answer the call to pledge allegiance to the King. Their silence would now be the death of their secret faith. Joseph and Nicodemus no longer feared losing their position and influence. Instead, they now used it in service to their King.

When all others had abandoned and forsaken the Lord, these two secret disciples stepped forward and ensured that Jesus received a

² <https://www.leg.bc.ca/parliamentary-business/overview/43rd-parliament/1st-session/orders-of-the-day/o251006a.html> (accessed Dec 15, 2025)

“ Jesus of Nazareth was crucified as a criminal but buried as a king.

proper burial. Mark tells us that Joseph went to Pilate *boldly* and asked for Jesus’s body. Nicodemus did not remain the cautious follower we first observed in John’s earlier chapters. People can surprise us. People really do surprise us! Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea turn out to be so very different from what we might have anticipated. What about you? What about me? Will our lives turn out to be a joyful surprise?

CONTEMPT AND CONFESSION

These two wealthy men brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes to prepare Jesus’s body for burial. Following Jewish customs, they prepared Jesus’s lifeless body for the grave by wrapping it in a linen shroud along with the aromatic spices to mask the odours of death and decay. That they brought about 75 pounds of spices and used expensive linen instead of cotton was noteworthy—such quantities and quality were usually reserved for royalty, as seen in King Asa’s burial (2 Chron 16:38).

The two no-longer-secret disciples and the women who were with them (and I speculate, the disciple John too, who was with the women at the foot of the cross) bury the dead Messiah. They laid their king to rest. Jesus of Nazareth was crucified as a criminal but buried as a king. Despite what the chief priests and the Romans might have thought, and despite his disciples’ abandonment of him, John makes sure we don’t forget: Jesus Christ is Lord and King, even in his death. His throne was a cross, and his crown was made of thorns.

During his trial, the governor had brought Jesus out into the courtyard and mockingly declared, “Here is your King!” The Sanhedrin had responded, “We have no king but Caesar!”

However, two members of the Sanhedrin disagreed and, by their actions, publicly testified against the council, “No, you are wrong! Here is our king! The man you crucified.” They also testified against Rome’s contempt. “Actually, in your mockery, you speak the truth! This man you crucified? He *is* our king!”

Near the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a tomb. It was Joseph’s tomb, carved from the Jerusalem limestone; it had never been used. As the prophet Isaiah had said of the suffering

servant, “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (Isa 53:9). He was executed with criminals and buried as a king in a rich man’s tomb.

THE URGENT CALL

Joseph and Nicodemus’s actions remind us that faith requires moving from faintheartedness to courage, from fear of men to reverence for God, and from timidity to boldness. Their boldness was suddenly evident when they went publicly to Pilate to ask for the body of a crucified convict. For these two men, boldness meant honouring their king, even at the cost of prestige, honour, influence, and power. It also meant identifying with their king rather than with those who opposed him.

The Bible doesn’t tell us what happened to Joseph and Nicodemus for their public allegiance to the crucified king. That is unimportant. What matters is their example to us. For you and me, the demand is still clear, and the choice remains urgent. Be prepared! Stand firm! The King will return to gather in all who identify with him. There is no “later” time to choose to pledge allegiance to the King.

The example of Joseph and Nicodemus urgently challenges us to consider what it means to testify to our faith and the hope within us with boldness and humility, even in the face of opposition. This might mean speaking up for our faith at work, even when it’s not welcome; it might mean engaging governing officials with the Lord Jesus’s exclusive claims, even when they condemn us for our faith. It might mean explaining Christian morals and ethics in the university lecture hall, knowing that you will be accused of hatred. It might mean speaking up for the unborn or showing kindness when it is unpopular. Like these two bold disciples, may we seek God’s praise above all else and find strength in Christ to live faithfully, not only in private devotion but also boldly in the public square. 📣



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Costly Comfort

Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. (Psalm 69:20)

RICK LUDWIG

There was a chilling prophetic fulfillment that took place shortly after the birth of Jesus of Nazareth that proved to be foreboding. The slaughter of the baby boys and toddlers in and around Bethlehem, in Herod's vain attempt to snuff out the announced royal child, ushered in a lamentation and weeping amongst the mothers of Israel that was almost unbearable. Rachel refused to be comforted because her children were no more (Matt 2:18). It was an awful bloodletting reminiscent of Pharaoh's murdering of the children of Israel while they were in captivity in Egypt. The individual and communal grief would have been overwhelming with no apparent comfort to abate it. If you try to imagine what it was like, you can only tremble and shake your head.

SEEKING COMFORT

Grief, our natural response to suffering and loss, always has comfort as its target. There would be no point to grieving if there was no expectation of some sort of relief. A break in the pain, the sweet escape of sleep, a glimmer of hope for something better to come, or the assurances of others drawing close to share the load, are all in grief's sights. Grief seeks out consolation and has no rest until it finds it. The writers of the Heidelberg Catechism were so in tune to this. They aim at the heart of Christian theology with a very pointed question about the source of real comfort. There is no more crucial question in the face of sin and its dark consequence, death. And the answer is breathtaking when we truly begin to understand and experience it in our lives. Our *only* comfort is that we belong to Jesus our Saviour. He not only provides this comfort; he also embodies it.

In order to appreciate this gospel truth time and again, we have to do the difficult work of facing the reality of the terrible cross. Good Friday gives us opportunity to get in line with all the miserable wretches who called out, "Crucify him!" We are challenged to recount the enormous cost he paid in our place for our sin to become our only comfort. Easter celebrations are not for cute bunnies, nor for the faint of heart.

The discourse in the Bible is very emphatic that Jesus did not come to this world to simply provide a good example, to demonstrate a perfect way of living, or to offer a bold assurance for better days ahead. He came of his own accord, in submission to his Father, to pay

a terrible price for sin. He came to demonstrate real love by giving up everything for his enemies. He came to restore comfort for God's people in the face of misery. He came to suffer our punishment for sin by standing in our place. The Apostles' Creed describes it as a *descent into hell*.

Rather than get tripped up by this expression or its order in the creed, we need to seriously reckon with what it claims. How did Jesus Christ experience this hellish agony? A number of passages in the Scriptures indicate the reality of Christ being *without comfort* at the apex of his suffering. The well-known cry of dereliction on the cross, recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, echoes the terror of Psalm 22, calling out to God in anguish and not receiving any response. There is no comfort in hell, there is only weeping and gnashing of teeth. There is no hope in hell, no expectation of someone drawing near to help, no prospect of trouble coming to an end or for an agency of relief. It is the place of discomfort, completely disconnected from all that is good; the place that is cut off from God. Let's take a look to see how Jesus ended up in this terrible state as he hung on the cross.

A STEADY DESCENT

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was surrounded by a close band of supporters that included his disciples, some family, a number of friends, and a variety of other helpers along the way. The gospel accounts also make it clear that he travelled closely with his Father in heaven. Early evidence of his Father's devotion to him in the descent of the dove at his baptism and the love proclamation repeated at the transfiguration are amplified by the many observations of Jesus spending time in secluded prayer. Jesus also made his own declarations of his closeness with his Father: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

This earthly and heavenly support is sharply juxtaposed with the constant disdain of the religious leaders, the unrest of the crowds, and the fickleness of the Jewish people. What is increasingly clear in the redemption narrative is that the supporters begin to disappear and the opposition increases as Jesus gets closer and closer to Golgotha. This is not a surprise to Christ, as he prophesies that his disciples will all fall away. In the garden of Gethsemane, his closest disciples accompany him but provide him no help in their drowsiness. This poverty of care is contrasted with the rich comfort Jesus receives from his heavenly

God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ did not settle for a partial payment for sin and only a half measure of comfort.

Father, who sends an angel to strengthen him. The subsequent dramatic story of Peter's denial helps to accentuate the deepening reproach felt by Christ. Even those closest to him begin to swear that they don't know him. He will not be able to count on his disciples or friends for consolation in his hour of suffering.

The church of Rome has made much of the idea that Jesus' mother, Mary, is a co-redemptrix in both her willingness to bear the Christ child as a virgin mother and her life-long devotion to him. The famous sculpture, *Pietà* (Our Lady of Pity) by Michelangelo, suggests she remained close by during his suffering and even received his broken body from the cross. The biblical narrative is clear, however, that Jesus did not experience the comfort of his mother on the cross. Those who knew him, even the women, stayed at a distance.

The appearance of Jesus's mother Mary near the cross, recorded in the gospel of John, actually describes a much different scene. Knowing what is to come, Christ gives up his mother to John's care. This is a tremendous act of honouring his mother, and it symbolizes the new reality of the family of faith. The shadow side of it, however, is that Jesus forfeits his mother's comfort. He will not be able to depend on his mother's love and compassion while he suffers on the cross. She is no longer his mother and can offer him no help as he hangs there for her sins as well. His descent into hell continues with the receding of his disciples and friends and his mother. He is almost all alone. The prophetic words of Lamentations 1 spoken over Jerusalem ring in his ears: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger? . . . This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. . . . People have heard my groaning, but there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my distress; they rejoice at what you have done."

FULL PAYMENT

The three hours of darkness while Jesus hung on the cross is representative of the isolation he endured in bearing the sin of the world. The light of the world was shrouded in blackness as he experienced complete separation from everyone, including his own Father. Not long before, he had predicted to his disciples that they would all scatter and leave him alone. Yet he would not be alone; for his Father is with him. The bitter dregs of the cup of wrath, however, included this final swallow, the abandonment or forsaking of his Father. There was no one to comfort him. Much of modern-day Christendom wrestles with this teaching. It is too ugly, too harsh, too punitive, too unloving. Yet it is at the heart of the gospel. Christ himself testified to it with his own words as he hung cursed, suspended between heaven and earth.

In doing his Father's will, Jesus went all the way to hell on the cross to pay the full price for sin, to conquer death and claim the grave as victory ground for all who believe. God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ did not settle for a partial payment for sin and only a half measure of comfort. A full and lasting comfort was secured for all God's children, for Jesus' brothers and sisters.

EMBODIED COMFORT

What is also very remarkable is that the one who was uncomforted, and who experienced the agony of hopelessness, remained a comforter all along this terrible road of suffering. During his ministry, the Lord Jesus healed and restored many people who were sick and struggling. Even in the garden of Gethsemane, he showed compassion to the Roman soldier who was struck with the sword. As he suffered unbearable shame and physical torture, Jesus looked in pity on Peter at the rooster's third crow, knowing full well how he had just sworn that he did not know him. On the cross he tended to his mother and the disciple whom he loved and gave assurance and hope to the thief beside him. Most telling, he appealed to his Father to forgive the very people who offered him only jeers and hatred. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).

What a wonderful Saviour! What a beloved Son of the Father! It is no wonder he was not abandoned to his grave and his body did not see corruption. Our Easter greeting remains the joyful announcement: *Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!*

Comfort abounds at the heart of the Christian faith. The gospel is comforting and it goes out through the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul impressed this upon the early church in his letter to the Corinthians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Cor 1:3–4).

In this way we are called to emulate our Lord, to be ambassadors of comfort to the afflicted as we share the gospel of grace with all those around us. For we were once all alike, lost in sin and wretched without the Lord Jesus. The cost he paid for this supreme solace was dear, but the dividends are plenty, enough to cover the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). There is no scarcity of comfort at the foot of the cross. 



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CAPTIVES of the TRIUMPHANT CHRIST

WILLIAM DEN HOLLANDER

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

One of the great challenges facing us as interpreters of Scripture is our distance from the ancient world of the Bible. This distance is linguistic, cultural, historical, geographical, and more. That's one of the reasons we spend so much time at the seminary immersed in Hebrew and Greek, studying the historical backgrounds of the Old and New Testament, even acquainting ourselves with the geography of the places where the biblical narratives happen.¹ It's why I'm so eager to share the experience of travelling through the lands of the Scriptures, also with preachers of the gospel.² If you want to understand why Ezekiel's vision of water flowing from the temple into the Dead Sea and transforming it into fresh water where fish are in abundance is such a potent image of the restoring power of Christ's living water (Ezek 47:1–12; John 7:37–39), go float there for a while. Or take a sip, if you dare!

The more we do to familiarize ourselves with the language, culture, history, and geography of the Bible, the more treasures

we unearth in the endless depths of God's Word. Our study doesn't often change our fundamental understanding of a particular text—indeed, it shouldn't, since we want to read with the church of all ages and places, illumined by the same Spirit of Christ—but frequently the text comes to life with greater clarity and vividness when we immerse ourselves in the world of the Scriptures, as I hope this brief investigation into 2 Corinthians 2:14 makes clear.

A CASE STUDY: THE TRIUMPH

Throughout his epistles, the apostle Paul describes his relationship with Christ in various ways. Most familiar is his reference to himself as a slave/servant of Christ, found in the opening remarks of most of his letters. Elsewhere, Paul refers to himself as an ambassador of Christ, even an ambassador in chains (Eph 6:20). But in 2 Corinthians 2:14, Paul evokes one of the most powerful, tangible, and—to our 21st century minds—puzzling images in Roman society to express the nature of his relationship to Christ. He writes, “But

¹ This past semester at CRTS, I taught New Testament Background. Dr. Smith is currently teaching Old Testament Background.

² From May 18 to June 4, 2026, Lord willing, I'll be leading “In the Footsteps of Paul: A Journey through the Early Church,” a tour that will take us through various sites in Turkey and Greece. Stay tuned for future trips!

“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere” (2 Cor 2:14).

thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.”

Our distance from the procession known as the “Roman triumph” has caused not only a misunderstanding of Paul’s meaning, but also an impoverished understanding of how our place in Christ’s triumphal procession should shape our understanding of our life with and in Christ. The Roman triumph was a spectacle of epic proportions and the pinnacle of any general’s career, awarded only for exceptional victories. It lent the general such prestige that, when the Roman world began to be ruled by an emperor rather than the Senate, celebration of a triumph became restricted to the emperor and members of his family. It was not safe to share this honour with anyone else. For the underling generals, a lesser version, the ovation, had to suffice.

The triumph proper was conducted in the city of Rome, but the image was a familiar one to anyone in the provinces of the Roman empire. They would have experienced mini triumphs when generals went on victory tours, especially in the east and Greece, or when emperors paid visits to various large cities throughout the empire. Triumphs were also often memorialized on public architecture, such as the Arch of Titus in the city of Rome, which famously celebrated the victory over the Jews which had culminated in the destruction of the temple in AD 70. On its friezes you can even see the triumphal procession of the temple treasures through Rome, including the menorah and the table for the showbread. It is not surprising, then, that Paul would use this metaphor for his Corinthian audience. The triumph was an event experienced by all under Roman sway.

Before we turn to Paul’s use of this image, however, I’d like to paint a picture in your minds of the supreme spectacle that was the Roman triumph.³ (If you’ve watched *Ben Hur* perhaps this won’t be necessary!) Prior to the procession entering the city, the city itself was made ready. The temples were thrown open, festooned with garlands and smoking with incense. The people lined the parade route, which wound through or past every building that could serve as a vantage point for the spectators. This was an event. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus claims that not a soul could be found indoors when the Flavian emperors Vespasian and Titus celebrated their victory over the Jews.⁴

Meanwhile, the procession ordered itself in preparation for the triumphal entry. The first to enter the city through the Triumphal Gate

was the Senate, followed by a group of trumpeters. Behind these forerunners came the heaps of spoils from the enemy, carried along on floats like a Christmas parade, along with not nativity scenes or sleighs and reindeer, but re-enactments of particular battle scenes. Josephus describes the scene in vivid detail:

For there was to be seen a happy country laid waste, and entire squadrons of enemies slain; while some of them ran away, and some were carried into captivity; with walls of great altitude and magnitude overthrown and ruined by machines; with the strongest fortifications taken, and the walls of most populous cities upon the tops of hills seized on, and an army pouring itself within the walls; as also every place full of slaughter, and supplications of the enemies, when they were no longer able to lift up their hands in way of opposition. Fire also sent upon temples was here represented, and houses overthrown, and falling upon their owners. . . . Now the workmanship of these representations was so magnificent and lively in the construction of the things, that it exhibited what had been done to such as did not see it, as if they had been there really present (*Jewish War* 7.143–147).

On the heels of these floats came the prisoners, specifically chosen for their “stature and beauty,” first the leaders and their families, followed by a host of lesser captives. Any wounds or bodily disfigurements were concealed by fine garments. A ragged bunch of enemies would hardly reflect well on the triumphing general. Instead, the enemies and rivers of spoil were paraded along to magnify his victory and encourage the crowds to celebrate the might of Rome and the splendour of the man of the hour.

Directly behind these prisoners came the triumphal chariot. The general, looking out over his defeated enemies and gazing out over the adoring crowds, was in his glory. In fact, the glory was so great that a slave traditionally rode along with the general, whispering in his ear, “Remember, you are not a god” while the soldiers in his train were given license to shout rude and obscene jokes at him, all in an attempt to keep him human.

In this fashion the procession wound through the imperial forum, the marketplace, the Circus Maximus, past the crowds seated on scaffolding, on the steps of temples, on the benches of the theatres and the circus. Finally, it ascended the Capitoline hill on its way to the great Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, where the headline captives were executed and sacrifices were offered. The day

³ For an accessible and comprehensive study see Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴ Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.122. The entire triumph is described at great length: 7.120–162.



concluded with feasting throughout the city for the general's family and friends, the soldiers, and the general populace. "For," Josephus writes, "this was a festival day for the city of Rome for the end that was now put to their civil miseries, and for the commencement of their hopes of future prosperity and happiness" (*Jewish War* 7.157).

PAUL'S METAPHOR

So, where amidst all this pomp and circumstance did the apostle Paul envision himself? We could let our imagination run wild envisioning our participation in these victory celebrations as soldiers in the salvation army triumphing along with our victorious general, without the rude joking of course. "I'm in the Lord's army, yessir!"

But is this what our passage is saying? The English Standard Version quoted above is somewhat ambiguous but gives this impression.⁵ The King James Version made this interpretation, translating the passage as, "Now thanks [be] unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ." The phrase Paul uses, however, does not normally have this sense.⁶ Instead, the verb is almost always used to indicate the act of leading someone as *captive* in triumphal procession. Indeed, Paul uses it in this sense in Colossians 2:15, where he writes, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."⁷ Here the powers and authorities are clearly in a position of submission to Christ, not triumphing alongside him. This is also the predominant use in contemporary Greek literature, which uses the verb almost invariably within the context of the actual Roman triumph, or as a metaphor evoking its image.

John Calvin recognized this difficulty, yet he proceeded to perform some exegetical gymnastics to avoid what he evidently regarded as a problematic image. In his commentary on this passage, he wrote:

If you take the verb literally it will mean "who triumphs over us" but *Paul means something different from the common meaning of this phrase in Latin*. Prisoners are said to be led in triumph when to disgrace them they are bound in chains and dragged before the chariot of the conqueror. But Paul means that he had a share in the triumph that God was celebrating because it was through his work that it was won, just as the chief lieutenants shared the general's triumph by riding on horseback behind his chariot.⁸

It wasn't only Calvin who felt this way. A late 19th century interpreter wrote, "with the ignominious position of the captive and the miserable death in which the exhibition ended for him, the figure appears most unsuitable to express the relation between the apostle and the gracious God to whom he renders thanks."⁹

With all due respect to Calvin, however, the task of interpretation is not to soften the force of a difficult Greek word or metaphor, but to make sense of it as it stands. More recent translations have recognized this. Thus, the New International Version (2011) reads, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession" while the New Living Translation (2015) renders it, more interpretively, "But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession."

PAUL'S MEANING

So, what does Paul mean? The image is now clear. Paul is a captive and, by extension, a slave, led in triumphal procession with Christ as the glorious *triumphator* following behind in his four-horse chariot, one who was, in fact, God himself in the flesh. After all, "while we were *enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom 5:10)! In his role as prisoner, then, Paul serves

⁵ The NIV 1984 was similar: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ."

⁶ Greek: τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ πάντοτε θριαμβεύοντι ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ.

⁷ Greek: θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ.

⁸ Calvin's reference to Latin is because the Latin transliteration (*triumphus*) of the Greek word is the more common of the two. The Vulgate (Latin translation of the Bible) reads as follows: Deo autem gratias qui semper triumphat nos in Christo Iesu.

⁹ George Findlay, "St. Paul's Use of θριαμεύω," *Expositor* 10 (1879), 404–405.

But there's a paradox here too, because it's in seeking Christ's glory instead of your own that you'll find the greatest joy. And it's in being a captive to Christ, even a slave to Christ, that you find the truest freedom.

to highlight the glory and majesty of the victorious general and to broadcast the activity of God in Christ as a fragrance to the crowds. Moreover, the fate that awaits Paul as prisoner is entirely dependent upon the goodwill of the general, although, of course, we know that the destination of the captives of this general is neither execution nor sale on the auction block.

Read in this way, our passage presents a vivid picture of one of the wonderful paradoxes of Christianity. Captivity to Christ leads to life, not death. Slavery to Christ means freedom, not bondage. When we suffer, then we are more than conquerors (Rom 8:37). The true freedom the Son gives (John 8:36), the freedom for which he has freed us (Gal 5:1), belongs to those who have been crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20).

These paradoxes find both their focus and their foundation in the triumph of the shameful cross, as expressed beautifully by the Anglican poet Malcolm Guite:

See, as they strip the robe from off his back
And spread his arms and nail them to the cross,
The dark nails pierce him and the sky turns black,
And love is fastened firmly on to loss.
*But here a pure change happens. On this tree
Loss becomes gain, death opens into birth.
Here wounding heals and fastening makes free,
Earth breathes in heaven, heaven roots in earth.*
And here we see the length, the breadth, the height,
Where love and hatred meet and love stays true,
Where sin meets grace and darkness turns to light,
We see what love can bear and be and do.
And here our Saviour calls us to his side,
His love is free, his arms are open wide.¹⁰

It is this paradox that the world scorns as foolishness, but which is the power of God for those who are being saved (1 Cor 1:18). For the unbelieving Roman, the idea that Paul, a Roman citizen himself, would imagine himself among the captives in a triumphal procession was utterly absurd. But for the believing Corinthian, Paul's image illustrates the blessed backwardness of the Christian message. It highlights the counter-cultural, against-the-grain nature of the gospel, where the last is first (Matt 19:30), where the least is the greatest (Luke 9:48), where losing your life means finding it (Matt 16:25), and where in your weakness the power of Christ is made perfect (2 Cor 12:9).

But there's more yet. The image Paul uses here also serves paradoxically to underline his calling as an apostle. As apostle, he

is certainly involved with the glorious task of spreading abroad the fragrance of Christ (and maybe Paul is evoking the smell of the flowers and incense that hung over the city), yet the glory is all Christ's. The captives were there to magnify the victory of the general. Their weakness underlined his strength.

In a later chapter Paul puts it this way: "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor 4:7). He supports this with his own experiences: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies" (2 Cor 4:8–10).

Here in 2 Corinthians 2:14 is a profound truth about what it means to be a Christian, united in Christ's death and resurrection: you become less, and Christ becomes more. The Christian declares with John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). To be led in triumphal procession, as the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ emanates from your life—your actions, your words, your character—is to find your redeemed life's purpose: to magnify Christ and display his glory for all to see. You are a way for others to see the glory of Christ. You are the aroma of Christ.

To those who reject Christ crucified, who stumble over the foolishness of the cross, you bring the fragrance of death. But to those who see the glory of the risen Christ and acknowledge him as Lord, you bring the fragrance of life. But there's a paradox here too, because it's in seeking Christ's glory instead of your own that you'll find the greatest joy. And it's in being a captive to Christ, even a slave to Christ, that you find the truest freedom.

When we bridge the gap between our worlds by immersing ourselves in the language, culture, history, and geography of the Bible, we find not only a clearer understanding of the meaning of the text, but also a deeper awareness of our place within it. We find, in fact, that far from being just another ancient text written for another audience in another place and time, all these things "were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11). 



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¹⁰ Malcolm Guite, "XI Crucifixion: Jesus is nailed to the cross," in *Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year* (Canterbury Press, 2012), 42, emphasis mine.





Kept by Grace & Called to Keep: God's Grip & Our Resolve

ROB SCHOUTEN

The letter of Jude is short—just one chapter. But it speaks with unmistakable urgency. After a warm and worshipful opening, it shifts quickly in verse 3 to a serious call: the church must contend for the faith. False teachers are threatening the truth. God's past judgments are recalled. Real spiritual danger is exposed. And yet—despite all this—Jude frames his letter with assurance.

Jude begins by addressing his readers as “those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ” (v. 1). This is no generic greeting. It's a compact, carefully chosen description of grace. God's people are “called”—brought into salvation by his sovereign initiative. They are also “beloved”—held in the unshakable affection of the Father. And they are “kept”—not left to fend for themselves, but held fast by the power and faithfulness of God. The letter begins with assurance: you are not alone, and you are not at risk of slipping through God's fingers.

That assurance reappears, even more gloriously, at the end, when Jude writes, “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.” (v. 24). This is not survival language. It is confidence and promise. God is not merely preventing your collapse—he is bringing you home. He will present you before his glory, not broken and ashamed, but blameless and full of joy. Not reluctantly, but gladly. He delights to do it.

THE CALL WITHIN THE CONFIDENCE

Between these two expressions of that one great certainty—that God keeps his people—Jude

gives a striking command: “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (v. 21). Here we feel the tension. We are kept by God, yet we are told to keep ourselves. At first glance, it may seem contradictory. But Scripture regularly puts divine sovereignty and human responsibility side by side, without apology. These are not competing forces, but complementary truths. God's preserving grace does not make our actions meaningless—it makes them possible.

The Canons of Dort express this truth with care: “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” (CD V.14).

God uses means. He doesn't wave us to the finish line from a distance. He feeds us, guides us, warns us, strengthens us. He preserves us by awakening our hearts and engaging our wills. The Christian life is not a treadmill of self-effort. But neither is it a recliner. It is a path of watchfulness and strong effort. God calls us to walk that path in a life of prayer, worship, and the Word.

Jude reinforces the call to keep ourselves in the faith with several vivid examples from Scripture. He recalls the Israelites, who were saved out of Egypt but later perished in the wilderness because of their unbelief (v. 5). He mentions angels who abandoned their post and are now kept in chains (v. 6). He points to Sodom and Gomorrah, which suffered judgment by fire (v. 7). These stories are not background noise. They are warnings. Jude



We don't keep ourselves in order to earn his love. We keep ourselves because we have already been loved and claimed and called. That is the engine of perseverance.

is writing as a pastor to real people, urging them not to drift. Those who presume on grace and reject the truth do not stand.

The beautiful doctrine that God keeps his people is not a reason to grow passive. It is a reason to stay engaged—his keeping energizes ours. If God's hand is on us, we must keep moving in his strength. His sovereignty never excuses spiritual laziness. It empowers holy diligence.

A RHYTHM THROUGH ALL OF SCRIPTURE

This pattern—being kept, yet called to keep—runs throughout Scripture. It is not isolated to Jude. Psalm 121 says with calm confidence, “The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life” (v. 7). Psalm 119 also reflects the believer's response:

“With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!” (v. 10).

“I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments” (v. 60).

“I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word” (v. 101).

“I have inclined my heart to perform your statutes forever” (v. 112).

We see the same in Psalm 19:11, “By them [the LORD's commandments] is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

This isn't a contradiction. It's a rhythm. God holds us, and we hold fast. He watches over us, and we walk in his ways. The same dynamic appears in Deuteronomy: “What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways... and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD...” (Deut 10:12–13).

This pattern is pervasive. Those who are kept by God are summoned to keep close to him. We don't keep ourselves in order to earn his love. We keep ourselves because we have already been loved and claimed and called. That is the engine of perseverance.

WHERE GRACE HOLDS US

The command to “keep yourselves in the love of God” can be both serious and joyful. Jude is not handing us a burden to carry

alone. He is inviting us to stay where grace flows—to continue in faith, to abide in hope, to walk in love.

To keep ourselves in God's love is not to conjure up strength. It is to remain near the One who gives it. We do this through the Word, through prayer, through fellowship with his people. We do it by refusing what dulls our love for Christ and returning—again and again—to where our hearts are warmed.

God's grace assures us; his call summons us. When we hear the warnings of Scripture, they are not threats to peace. They are instruments of preservation. They wake us and lead us to repentance. They call us back to Christ. Those who shrug them off should not feel secure. But the one who trembles at the Word may rest in deep confidence: the Lord will keep me. The Canons of Dort say it plainly: “God is faithful, mercifully strengthening them in the grace once conferred on them and powerfully preserving them to the end” (CD V.3).

This is not mechanical. It is personal. God's grip is sure—but it doesn't bypass your life. It enters into it. He awakens your heart. He gives you strength to obey. He sustains your prayers. He fills your steps with purpose. So, when Jude says, “Keep yourselves in the love of God,” he is not telling us to hang on by raw willpower. He is calling us to stay where the love of God holds us. To keep walking in the light. To keep trusting, repenting, believing. Not to earn our place, but because our place is secure.

And this is the heart of it all: We can only keep because we know we are kept. Our perseverance is not something we manufacture—it is something God enables. The call to keep flows from the confidence that we are held.

We keep because we are kept. That is our strength. That is our confidence. And that is our joy. 



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WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION UPDATE

"PRAISE THE LORD, ALL HIS HEAVENLY HOSTS, YOU HIS SERVANTS WHO DO HIS WILL" (PS 103:21).

There is good reason to join us in praising the Lord for all the support from church members across the country and beyond! Due to your consolidated efforts, we have had a record donation year. If you had a chance to attend the seminary convocation or to read the write-up in the *Clarion*, you will know that \$55,241.86 was collected for the seminary library by the Women's Saving Action.

NEED FOR GOOD BOOKS

We are thankful for all of you and hope that this news serves to encourage and empower you for prayers for this particular kingdom work. One of our representatives reminds people in her church bulletin announcement that "if you want to have good ministers, make sure they have good books to read." We are blessed as Canadian Reformed churches to have our very own seminary, and it needs many books, periodicals, and access to online resources in order to graduate well-prepared pastors for our pulpits.

As you are likely aware, the seminary library is almost exclusively supported by fundraising efforts of the Women's Savings Action. A student survey reveals that the students very much value the seminary library, so we know that this hard work is appreciated. Every year, the CRTS librarian, Margaret Alkema, presents a library report that—among other things—lets us know where the money is going. You may be surprised to know that digital serial subscriptions and other online data comprise a fairly large chunk of the budget! This cost jumps even higher once enrollment at the seminary surpasses 25. This year, digital subscriptions cost over \$32,000 and print subscriptions around \$6,500 while purchased books came in at about \$14,600. It really has become a digital world, hasn't it? Another fun fact: there are 36,839 books and 58 print journals in the library. Wow! A small portion have been donated but most are there due to the dedication of all of our WSA women over the years spanning our inception to the present. Much reason for thankfulness!

HOW TO DONATE

We have had a handy poster made up to display on church bulletin boards in order to raise awareness and make it easier to access the donation page on the seminary website. The poster features a handy QR code that you can quickly scan to read about us and find donation information. Look for it on your church's bulletin board and go ahead and test it—scan the QR code to see if it works!

Tax receipts are issued for donations over \$10.00 and, for those less inclined to take advantage of modern technology, there are three easy ways to donate:

1. Place your donation, either cash or cheque (written to Women's Savings Action for the Theological College) inside an envelope and pass it on to the WSA rep in your congregation.
2. E-transfer to wsa@crtswsa.ca (password: crtswsa). Please include your mailing address and specific church name in the message box to ensure the donation is attributed to the right congregation.
3. On-line donations via credit card can be made through CanadaHelps.org (search for CRTS and Women's Savings Action should pop up.) The link can also be found on the CRTS website. Please include your specific church in the box marked "company info."

As we exit what for many has been an exceptionally cold winter season, we are thankful for the dedication to the preaching of God's Word shown in the many contributions to the WSA, making it possible to keep good books flowing through the doors and portals of CRTS. We pray that God will continue to bless these efforts in this changing world. 📖

In Christ,
Janet VanVliet, Joyce VanAmerongen, and Corrine Vanderploeg
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Serving Students Across a Broken World

The Realities of a Classroom Beyond Borders

*Bear one another's burdens,
and so fulfill the law of Christ. – Galatians 6.2*

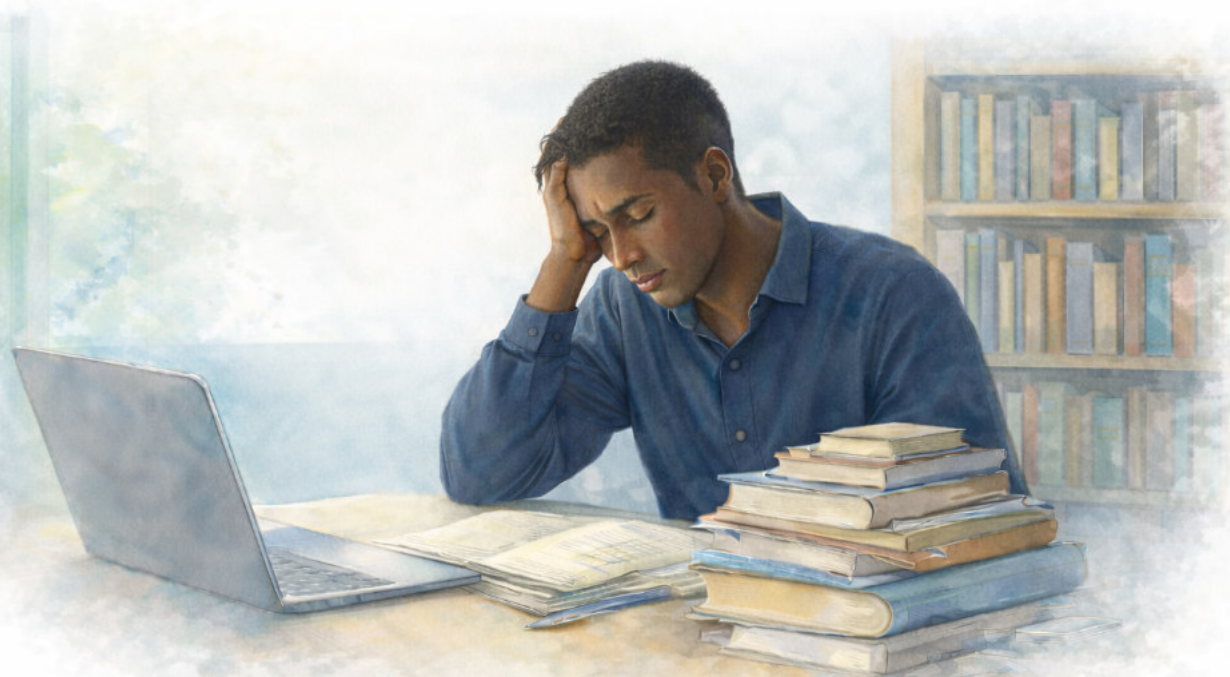
Christian education, at its best, has always been about more than the transmission of knowledge. It is an act of service in response to a call to minister to the Body of Christ, an expression of love for God and for His people. At the IRTC, this calling takes on a particular shape because our classrooms span continents, cultures, and time zones, bringing together students and staff whose lives are greatly influenced by the realities of the world around them.

In a traditional, physical institution, challenges often arise from local circumstances, such as a storm, a strike, or a regional crisis. In a global academic community, those same challenges are multiplied. At any given moment, while one part of the world enjoys relative stability, another is experiencing war, political upheaval, or economic strain. None of these realities are unusual in

themselves. What is unusual is carrying them all at once within a single academic body.

Conflict and War

In 2025, armed conflict disrupted lives in multiple regions where our students and staff live and serve. In northern Mozambique, renewed violence in Cabo Delgado once again displaced families and destabilized communities already living with years of uncertainty. Our students in Israel faced ongoing security concerns that affect their daily lives in ways difficult to imagine from afar. One of our staff members, based in Cambodia, closely monitored border tensions with Thailand and prepared contingency plans to evacuate their family should hostilities approach the capital. These realities interrupt studies and work not only through practical limitations such as electricity shortages, unreliable internet access, and sudden displacement, but also through deep emotional and spiritual strain.



Political Tensions

Political instability and polarization also weighed heavily on many of our students and staff. In Angola, widespread protests following economic and policy decisions led to unrest that disrupted daily routines and created uncertainty for families and churches alike. In Portugal, labor disputes and political tensions resulted in strikes that affected transportation and public services, reminding us that even relatively stable societies are not immune to disruption. In Brazil, ongoing concerns over judicial overreach and political polarization continued to create an atmosphere of uncertainty, affecting freedom of expression and public trust. For students and staff living amid these tensions, the challenge is not only navigating changing regulations or disrupted services, but maintaining focus, peace, and faithfulness in contexts marked by persistent anxiety and division.

Economic Strain

Economic pressure quietly but persistently burdened several of those studying and serving with us. In countries such as Mozambique, longstanding economic fragility continued to affect access to reliable income, infrastructure, and basic services. In Brazil, rising prices for food, housing, and transportation placed growing strain on families, while wages remained largely stagnant. For students balancing ministry, work, and study, these pressures often translate

into difficult choices about time, resources, and sustainability. Reflecting these realities, the past year became a record period for new scholarship requests and for appeals from continuing students seeking deferred fee payments. Economic strain rarely announces itself dramatically, but it steadily erodes stability and adds weight to an already demanding calling.

One Community, Many Realities

What unites all these challenges is not their novelty, but their simultaneity. We serve students living across all continents. Many are missionaries living far from their countries of origin, studying in Portuguese while surrounded by another language and culture. This diversity is a gift, but it also means that the burdens carried by students, staff, and all those bound together in this ministry are many and varied. A global classroom requires patience, flexibility, and a pastoral attentiveness that goes far beyond academic administration.

Yet this is where the privilege lies: to bear one another's burdens. Serving students across a broken world, we bear witness to the faithfulness of God amid instability. We remain deeply grateful for the calling to walk alongside men and women who seek to serve Christ faithfully in uncertain circumstances. We also thank the Lord for your faithful prayers and support for the IRTC, which enable us to continue this work for the sake of His Kingdom.

Voices from the IRTC Community

As part of our review after each term, we invite students to share anonymous feedback on their learning experience. While this feedback is most often encouraging, we also value thoughtful critiques and practical suggestions. All responses are read carefully by the administration, and points raised for improvement are actively considered and addressed as part of our continuing work. Here are some excerpts:

"I would like to commend the IRTC for its strong faculty, solid platform, and an administration that is always attentive and quick to resolve questions and issues. My hope is that it will continue to grow even more."

"The IRTC is excellent; I have been very well supported by the instructors and by everyone involved, without exception."

"The course was excellent; the texts, supplementary readings, links, weekly video lessons, live classes, careful handling of the Scriptures, and forum interaction all contributed significantly to its effectiveness."

"I am very grateful for this first experience and for being able to see firsthand the IRTC's commitment to quality education, with a clear focus and a confessional approach. It has far exceeded my expectations. Congratulations to everyone, and thank you very much for everything. May God continue to bless you! That is my prayer."

"I greatly appreciate the pedagogical format adopted by the IRTC. Live classes foster greater interaction with the instructor and help to clarify questions."

\$227,245
2025 Budget

97%

\$221,341
Raised (Dec 31)



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PRAYERS FOR SUDAN

Sudan is a northeastern African country, immediately south of Egypt, just west of the Red Sea. Sudan has approximately 10 million more people than Canada, living in one-fifth the area of Canada. Couple this with a per capita GDP that is 1/50th of Canada's, and the blessing to have been born in Canada versus Sudan suddenly feels overwhelming. And we haven't even considered the political environment or the fact that half the Sudanese population suffers from acute hunger.¹

Like many African countries, Sudan has a storied and bloody history. Since 2023, the country has been in a civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The civil war roots lie in tensions following the 2019 ousting of Sudan's then dictator, President Omar al-Bashir, in which the SAF and RSF were allies. Both the SAF and RSF are ideologically married to the idea of an Islamic state, but each wants to be the ruler of Sudan's gold and all the privileges that go with that wealth. The life of the average Sudanese person is depressing and demoralizing. These two groups are fighting to see who gets more, and the wreckage left behind is poverty, hunger, and homelessness for 50% of the population.²

TARGETING CHRISTIANS

These combative Islamic groups use the chaos of a civil war to disguise real abuses of Christians. For example, in early 2025, a total of nineteen Christians were arrested by the SAF and accused of being organized supporters for the RSF. According to International Christian Relief, there is no due process for these Christians, who were simply travelling to a prayer meeting.³ It is not known where they are being held as they are classified as prisoners of war.

On August 16, 2025, a burial service in the city of North Khartoum was interrupted, with the pastor and four grieving congregants being placed in handcuffs and taken away to a prison with nobody certain of what the next steps would be. A local pastor referring to this event said, "It was meant to be a quiet, respectful moment to honor the departed. Instead, it ended with arrests. One of the women with us was told to pay nearly a thousand dollars or stay in prison."⁴

Beyond wrongful imprisonment, Sudanese Christians also have their places of worship damaged or destroyed. Since 2023, over 100 church buildings have been vandalized or destroyed. A particularly brazen incident occurred on July 8, 2025, when a demolition crew arrived at a Pentecostal church in El-Haj Yousif and in short

¹ Open Doors Canada: <https://www.opendoorscanada.org/worldwatchlist/country-profiles/sudan/>

² DW News: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNzC2U-P5kM>

³ International Christian Response Canada: <https://www.icrcanada.ca/sudan-jails-19-christians-on-baseless-allegations/>

⁴ <https://persecution.org/2025/10/20/the-cost-of-faith-in-sudan/>



order demolished the worship hall and adjoining offices. Military personnel in the area, while not directly taking part in the church's destruction, prevented church members from interfering or taking video of the event.⁵ Inquiries to city officials indicated the church was an unregulated building and that any reconstruction would require permits, but that such permits were not currently being issued for churches.

The civil war has caused the world's largest displacement of people from their homes or communities. The most fortunate are able to reach a refugee camp in one of the surrounding countries. Many are too weak or poor to make such a long trip so they remain in Sudan, living in tent villages, praying that some food aid would arrive from international relief agencies. As is often the case in war zones, the oversight of such aid is controlled by the military.

As one senior Sudanese church leader put it, "When NGOs want to distribute food, the category of people who will receive this relief is controlled by the government. So, government in these places doesn't give it to minorities. Often Christians here have been told, 'Unless you leave your Christianity, no food for you.'" The pastor goes on to say, "For a long time now, they're [Christians] eating

animal feed and grass. No wheat, no rice, nothing can get in. And, unfortunately now, no medicine—if you have just the flu it can kill you. We don't know what to do. We are just always asking God [to] have mercy on us."⁵

THE ONE WHO CAN HELP

The final words of this pastor's interview were, "But, I believe in God, who can turn this curse to a blessing." When Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel, God showed his power to change a curse to a blessing (Deut 23:4–5). This is a plea for much more than exchanging something bad for something good. It's the magnitude of the change in circumstance that makes it a miracle only God can do. Right now, our brothers and sisters in Sudan are asking for prayers that our Almighty God would again show his power and turn their curse into a blessing. 📢



Andrew Douma

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 agdouma99@gmail.com

⁵ Voice of the Martyrs: <https://www.vomcanada.com/su-2025-07-31.htm>

MEET DEREK KOK

Today I am introducing you to Derek Kok. This has been mostly written by one of Beacon's caring staff members—thank you, Jessica, for a glimpse into Derek's personality and his life!

Derek will be turning 56 on April 2nd, DV. He lives at the Beacon Home in Dunnville. His favourite things are pizza, burgers, or any food! Derek also loves TV shows and movies, and he can name the most obscure theme song tunes. He enjoys participating in the weekly Bible Study and loves going to work at Bert Vis Flooring and Ontario Metal, shredding paper. His favorite part of working is coffee breaks!

Derek helps me get the garden ready every year, turning the dirt over and weeding. He loves to eat the fresh beans right off the vine. He claims to be the champion at playing the card game War, so if you stop in at Beacon Home feel free to challenge him to a match. Derek is also an avid Toronto Maple Leafs fan and can often be found lamenting their most recent loss.

If you have your feet up in the living room and jokingly mention a nap, Derek will come to you and steal your socks or blanket. He loves to fool around and play practical jokes. The only problem is he giggles while he's trying to be sneaky, so if he's stealing a purse or phone to hide in his room we can always tell by his chair getting knocked into high speed, accompanied by uncontained laughter. His favourite joke lately is when I say, "Ok, let's walk outside, or let's walk faster," he will quickly reply, "I can't walk, so I don't have to."

When I found out my grandpa was going to pass away on a day I happened to be at work, I was crying and Derek came up to me and put a reassuring hand on my back. He said "Are you ok? I know what it's like Jessica, my mom and dad are in heaven too." His compassion and care for others are always shown deeply and that specific time really touched my caregiver heart!

Derek has a simple but strong faith in God. He has many special relationships with people in our church community. He has a strong voice that he often uses to sing hymns, and he is always humming a tune. His favourite psalm is Psalm 23. His laugh is contagious and it's so easy to get him in a giggling fit—often while waiting for church to start you can hear him saying "oh no" while laughing.

It is such a joy to work with Derek; laughing and joking with him are something all the staff look forward to.

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

2 Derek Kok will be 56
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, Ontario
N1A 1T8

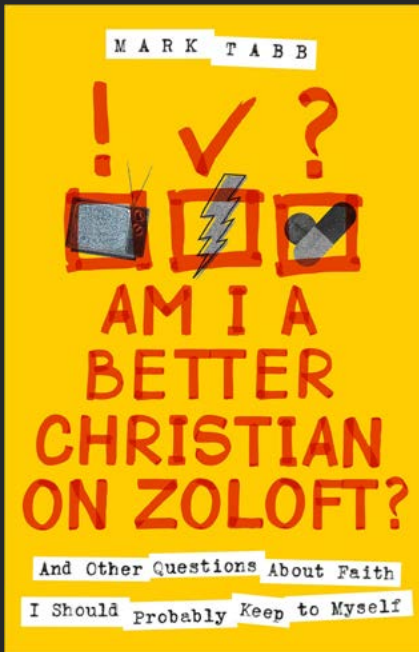
23 Arlene DeWit will be 65
#4 6560 Vedder Road,
Chilliwack, British Columbia
V2R 0Y6

29 Bryce Berends will be 51
c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR #3
Fergus, Ontario
N1M 2W4

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

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Ps 23:1–4).





Am I a Better Christian on Zoloft?

Am I a Better Christian on Zoloft? And Other Questions About Faith I Should Probably Keep to Myself. Mark Tabb, Grand Rapids: Revell, 2025. Softcover, 158 pages. \$26.99.

The title of this one got my attention right away. I wasn't looking for this book and I hadn't heard of it. It just popped up on Amazon as a recommended read and, being on Zoloft myself, I was intrigued.

Though he is a New York Times bestselling author, I'd never heard of Mark Tabb. The bio blurb at the back of the book says he is a "firefighter turned pastor turned writer and ghostwriter." I wasn't able to determine what kind of a church he served as a pastor. At any rate, how he tackles the questions asked in this book reflects well on whatever the author's background might be.

Here's the complete list of questions addressed:

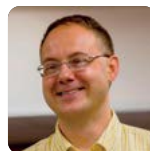
- Am I a better Christian on Zoloft?
- Can I call myself a Christian if I don't watch *The Chosen*?
- Do I really have to chase my dreams?
- Did not allowing my children to watch *The Simpsons* make any difference?
- Is God sort of mean?
- If I believe God is in control, why am I so upset about the last election?
- Why don't I feel it?
- Did the church in ancient Ephesus have a Creative Arts Director?
- Can I claim Jeremiah 29:11 as my life verse if I've never read the book of Jeremiah?
- What if I'm wrong?

Each chapter tackles one of those questions. As you can tell from these questions, Tabb isn't your typical Christian author. Indeed,

the word that springs to mind to describe this book is *unconventional*. The author has a unique style and approach to discussing theological matters. For example, in the chapter on Jeremiah 29:11, Tabb imagines a conversation between Jeremiah and a promotional agent. The promotional agent wants the prophet to tone things down and be more positive if he wants his book to be embraced by readers. When the agent hears about 29:11, he sees coffee mugs, t-shirts, and plaques for hallways. Jeremiah challenges him in the spirit of "a text without context is a pretext."

One thing I appreciated was Tabb's strong position on the sovereignty of God. He writes, "Throughout the Bible, we find God is actively involved in what takes place here on earth" (p. 90). Another thing I appreciated was his take on the relationship between faith and feelings: "The biggest step of faith is trusting God completely as life plods along in the ordinary. No fireworks. No miracles" (p. 112).

This is a well-written book pitched at a broad audience. Tabb has a good sense of humour mixed with a conversational style that holds your attention. Checking out a new-to-you author can sometimes be hit-and-miss, but this was a definite hit for me. 📖



Wes Bredenhof

Minister

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Authority or Jurisdiction? Or both?

JAN DEGELDER

The third section of the Church Order regulates what the churches have agreed on with regard to “The Assemblies” (Articles 29–51). This sets the parameters for how the structure of our federation as Canadian Reformed Churches should function. In this section we find an article that might puzzle the unsuspecting reader, Article 37: “The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the regional synod has over the classis and the general synod over the regional synod.” Our reader may raise his eyebrows, wondering what this means. But then he will probably shrug his shoulders and move on. And that’s unfortunate, for Article 37 is one of those articles that reflect a fundamental aspect of how we work together as autonomous local churches. As such, it is right up there with Article 74.

The intention is to make clear that a classis is not a “higher” assembly, with more authority or power than a consistory, and that the same is the case with a regional synod and a general synod. Yes, our major assemblies have the right to decide matters by which the churches are bound, but it is important to qualify that. That’s why it is too bad, in my view, that Article 37 is formulated in a way that’s not very clear. And thus, since the 17th century already, debate has been going on.

WHAT’S THE PROBLEM WITH AUTHORITY?

Having the right to make decisions to which others must submit sounds very much like having authority to do so. The Latin text of the Church Order has *auctoritas*, which translates as “authority.” However, some authors preferred a different word. They took the Dutch word for authority, which is *gezag*, or *zeggenschap*. The English equivalent is “having a say.” This led to the expression “having the right to say or decide things.” It is hard to explain how this is different from having authority to do so and the disadvantage

of those other expressions is that they don’t clarify what major assemblies can and cannot legitimately decide, and why that is so. So, what is the reason to avoid the word “authority” when it comes to the right of major assemblies to make binding decisions?

As is so often the case, it is a matter of definition. What do we mean when we use the word authority? If one uses it with a hierarchical mindset, the term can indeed lead to the idea that major assemblies have more power than minor assemblies, or that major assemblies have God-given authority to enforce their decisions and demand that minor assemblies must submit.

But Reformed thinking about the church and about the role of the federation has a healthy fear of hierarchy and rejects that kind of authority. The word “authority” is meant to be used in a much more limited sense for major assemblies. It shows again that the Reformed Church Order only works for Reformed people. Avoiding the word “authority” is not going to change that. After all, those who prefer another term still recognize that major assemblies do have the right to make decisions and that the churches are expected to accept those decisions. How is that different from having at least some authority?

WHAT ABOUT JURISDICTION?

Our Church Order also uses the word “jurisdiction” without explaining what it means. The term comes from the Latin *jurisdictio*, which means literally “saying the law” and refers to the legal right to judge or make decisions. Apart from the observation that the Latin version does not have the word *jurisdictio* but *auctoritas*, I am not convinced that “jurisdiction” provides more clarity than the word “authority.”

There is another aspect that comes into play when we consider the words “authority” and “jurisdiction” as options to qualify the

right of major assemblies to make decisions. In contemporary legal lingo, authority and jurisdiction are related concepts, but there is an important distinction. Authority refers to the right to make decisions. Jurisdiction refers to the limitations of this authority. It defines the boundaries or scope within which such authority can legally operate. Those boundaries restrict authority to a certain area or subject matter. A body (like a court) has the authority to make legal decisions, but only within its jurisdiction. All of this may sound a bit dry and rather technical. But when we apply these concepts to the role and place of our major assemblies, it may help us better understand and appreciate how our Reformed church federation works.

ASSEMBLIES WITH AUTHORITY

To begin with, note that Article 37 of the Church Order speaks about the authority of classes, regional synods, and general synods, but not about the authority of the consistory. That's because the authority of a consistory is very different. The consistory is the only body whose authority comes directly from Christ, the King of the church. He calls and authorizes office bearers to govern his church.¹ Their authority is restricted to their own local congregation, but within that jurisdiction their authority is general and permanent. This includes responsibility to proclaim the gospel, administer the sacraments, ordain office bearers, provide pastoral care, and apply church discipline. These things are beyond the jurisdiction of major assemblies.

Major assemblies are not governing councils, but temporary meetings of federated churches in a particular area. Although the Bible does not prescribe such meetings, we do find them in our Church Order. That's because it is clear throughout the New Testament that unity of faith leads to cooperation, consultation, and mutual support among the churches.² It is for this reason that Reformed churches have agreed to maintain ecclesiastical assemblies. It provides the framework for holding each other accountable as churches and so maintains and protects our unity of faith in Jesus Christ. This implies two things: (1) the churches have given these assemblies the authority to make legally valid decisions, and (2) the churches have promised to accept these decisions as settled and binding.

RESPECT JURISDICTION

The authority to make decisions and the promise to abide by those decisions are not unlimited and unconditional. Only God's

Word has unconditional authority. But there are many aspects of how we run the church that are not directly prescribed in Scripture, and it is good to consult each other as churches and so maintain good order in and among the churches of Jesus Christ.³ This is why the churches have determined the jurisdiction of the major assemblies, the limited scope of what these meetings can or cannot do or decide, and the churches have agreed to this as outlined in various articles of the adopted Church Order.

Think of the general restrictions mentioned in Articles 30 and 31. But we have also adopted more specific rules for classes, regional synods, and general synods. Certain matters are the responsibility of a classis, but are outside the jurisdiction of a general synod, and the other way around. Again, the authority of any major assembly never goes any further than what the churches have agreed to. Every major assembly's authority is bound and restricted by this jurisdiction. This is serious business. Any assembly that does not respect this will destroy the mutual trust among the churches, which may eventually break up the federation.

For the churches, the promise to abide by the decisions of the major assemblies is not unconditional either. The provision of Article 31 is crucial here. It outlines the right to appeal a decision of one assembly to the next if churches are convinced that this decision is in conflict with God's Word and/or with the Church Order. However, this should never be a matter of simply ignoring the promise to accept the decisions of major assemblies as settled and binding. Churches that refuse to keep their word to accept the legitimate decisions of the major assemblies, just because they don't agree with it, and then carry on and do their own thing, will also destroy the mutual trust among the churches of the federation. And, if they persist, they may eventually find themselves outside of the federation.

At the same time, it is important to remember that joining the agreement among the churches to give major assemblies the authority to make certain decisions and to accept those decisions as valid is voluntary. No church is forced to be part of the federation. This means also that no major assembly ultimately has the authority or power to enforce its decisions on the churches. 



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¹ Acts 14:23; Acts 20:28, Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1–3

² Consider the meeting in Jerusalem we read about in Acts 15. It was not a major assembly in our church political sense of the word, but it does demonstrate how the churches benefitted from mutual support and encouragement to maintain the unity of faith.

³ See Belgic Confession Article 32 and Article 1 C.O.

Dear Editor,

Please allow me to comment and question some of what we find in Article 184 of Synod Aldergrove 2025.

First of all, does Synod's decision make us less confessional and create a two-tiered membership? Synod states in Consideration 3.1: "The overture proposes to amend the questions in the liturgical forms for Baptism of Infants, Baptism of Adults, and Public Profession of Faith by replacing the term "confessions" with "Apostles' Creed.""

Synod changed this after the Canadian Reformed Churches have used this wording for over 40 years, and the arguments are curious. To quote Pastor Holtvliwer: "I thought our most challenging, potentially most divisive, issue was on the proposed changes to the questions (vows) in the Form for Profession of Faith and in the Baptismal Form(s). My concern was mostly with the reasons presented and what appeared to be a move away from having all professing members bound to the confessions of the church . . . To me a change of that nature would spell disaster for our federation over the long run . . ." (*Clarion* Vol 74, Issue 16, p. 714).

Synod states further in Consideration 4.2: "The initial changes to the wording in 1980 and 1983 occurred outside the normal and proper church orderly procedures for revising such fundamental documents. Church order principles dictate that significant matters affecting the churches in common should originate from the churches through overtures or synodical committee reports, *allowing for careful study and input from the congregations*. The absence of such a process in 1980 and 1983 constitutes a serious procedural error that warrants revisiting the matter" [emphasis, AV]. If the churches have practiced this since 1980 or 1983, did the churches not allow for careful "study and input" during those 40-plus years? I would submit that yes, they have, and several synods have upheld that decision made in 1980. 40 plus years! Doesn't this constitute "careful study and input from the congregations"?

Synod states in Consideration 4.3: "Matters cannot be considered settled and binding which rest on a demonstrably erroneous foundation." One would think that this "erroneous foundation" argument would extend beyond a "procedural" issue. Synod makes this their strongest argument. How many other erroneous foundational (based on procedure) items could/should be scrapped based on this type of argument?

Synod goes on to state in Consideration 4.7: "Currently with the questions in the Baptism and Profession of Faith forms containing "confessions," there are members who answer the question but do not fully comprehend the Reformed confessions. This is a significant problem and not an uncommon one, which the church must avoid as much as possible." So, we now create a scenario where we require office bearers to sign a Form of Subscription to faithfully teach and affirm the confessions but do not require affirmation from those who have been taught by this doctrine?

We should remember that the questions as they were in the forms for Profession of Faith are set as a bar for *belief*, not necessarily a higher bar for *responsibility* to teach what is believed; however, all confessing members should be expected to believe the doctrine of the church as found in the confessions, not just the office bearers. Adherents can now opt out of affirming the confessions and only need to affirm the Apostles' Creed, which most Christians in the world can agree to, including Roman Catholics. This could have far reaching implications for Reformed Christians. There is no doubt that we have become less confessional and have now created a two-tiered membership.

Synod states in Consideration 4.9.2: "It is significant to note that in the context of the previously mentioned struggles in The Netherlands (which involved some desiring to loosen the ties to the Reformed confessions), the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) (GKv) did not change the questions in their forms from "articles of the Christian faith" to "confessions" but retained "articles of the Christian faith." Is it necessarily good to follow the Reformed churches in The Netherlands (liberated) (GKv) from whom we recently severed ties regarding doctrinal issues and practices?

In the past there was perhaps some misunderstanding as to which confessions were referred to in questions posed in the Forms for Baptism and Profession of Faith, but why could we not identify them rather than remove the direct references to them? I hope there will be a reconsideration of this decision and that we all are encouraged to believe the Word of God as summarized in our confessions. 

Blessings,

Aubrey Vandergaag
Aldergrove, BC

Dear Editor,

Brother Wayne Chases's letter (Vol 75, No. 2) deserves further clarification. Rev. Norman Shepherd subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity and his doctrine is sound. He teaches that repentance and obedient works are necessary for justification and that all God's covenants are gracious from beginning to end. He makes clear that the necessity of works is to show that the believer's faith is living faith and certainly not that his works contribute to his salvation.

Because the Bible teaches that we cannot be saved by works, many think that there can be no connection at all between works and justification. Faithful Reformed theologians have misunderstood Shepherd and think that he teaches legalism. For the record, here are some things he is said to teach, but does *not* teach: That Christ's obedience is not enough to justify us; that the believer's works are part of what earns justification in the Last Judgment; that faith saves because of the merit of its obedience; that God counts imperfect obedience of believers as if it is perfect; that it is Christ's sanctifying work in us that makes us justified; that elect believers can fall away and be lost; that the sacrament of baptism regenerates us. Rev. Shepherd teaches none of these things.

Dr. C. Van Dam has written extensively about Shepherd in the following issues of *Clarion*: 57.5–6 (Feb 29 & Mar 14, 2008) and 61.25 (Dec 2012). I also recommend reading what Shepherd teaches. His last book is most helpful: *The Way of Righteousness: Justification Beginning with James* (Kerygma Press, 2009). For a historical review, read: Ian Hewitson, *Trust and Obey: Norman Shepherd and The Justification Controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary* (Minneapolis: NextStep Resources, 2011).

Sincerely,

Ralph Boersema
Minister Emeritus
Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church, Surrey
Bristol, Virginia

The Hope of the Resurrection

Based on I Thessalonians 4:13–18

1. May you be com - fort - ed by know - ing from God's word That when you
 2. Ours is a hope that's firm and an - chored in our faith, For we be -
 3. He clear - ly has de - clared that when He comes a - gain We who are
 4. Then shall the Lord Him - self from high - est heav'n de - scend, And the arch -
 5. Next we, the liv - ing ones who still are left on earth, Shall with them

mourn for those who died in Christ our Lord You do not mourn like those who
 lieve that Christ has tri-umphed o - ver death And that those who have died He
 still a - live and here on earth re - main Will not pre - cede all those who
 an - gel's voice will shout forth His com - mand. God's trum-pet blast will then re -
 be caught up and, in the clouds led forth, Will meet the Lord on high. And

in their un - be - lief Do not share in the hope that we have in our grief.
 al - so came to save So that like Him they, too, will rise up from the grave.
 died in Him, their Lord. Yes, we by His own word of this have been as - sured.
 sound, and first of all The dead in Christ will rise, a - wak-ened by its call.
 so e - ter - nal - ly With Him we shall re - main. Let this your com-fort be!

Music: English traditional melody, 1500s

Text: William Helder, 2026 © 2026, wllmhldr@gmail.com

GELUKKIG IS HET LAND

12 12. 12 12.



Willem “Pim” den Hollander

June 5, 1947 – January 17, 2026

Through Isaiah his prophet our God reminds us, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:9). We are perhaps left wondering why *then* and why *there*? But given God’s revelation through Isaiah, we confess in faith that January 17, 2026, in Aruba, was exactly the right time and exactly the right place. It was then and there that Pim, a faithful husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, preacher, and pastor was called into his eternal rest. As he himself proclaimed from the pulpit on the Sunday prior, “He [God] is working out his plan of re-creation, from day to day, from year to year, in your life and in mine. And behold, it is good, no matter how he planned it. Amen.” Amen, indeed!

Pim was born in Gouda, the Netherlands. At the age of 17, while he and his family struggled with the tragic drowning of his brother, God awakened in him a desire to become a preacher. Before that desire became reality, he married the love of his life, Gerthe, moved his young family to Canada to teach in Northern B.C., then moved them again to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in part so that he could take preparatory studies at Calvin College before finally moving his growing family to Hamilton, Ontario to pursue studies towards ministry. Under the guiding hand of God, he served in the congregations of Winnipeg, Orangeville, and Toronto (Bethel). He entered retirement in 2012.

I had the privilege of doing my pastoral internship with Pim in 2008. That’s when we got to know “The Rev,” as he was affectionately known by many. That experience exposed me to a brother in Christ who had a passion for the gospel that came out in every aspect of his work and most obviously in his preaching. After leading one of my first services as an intern, he said to me, “If it’s what God has revealed in his Word, you can say it with conviction.” That little bit of advice has not only served me well but was indicative of how he conducted his entire ministry. God used his passion and conviction to touch numerous lives during his many years of ministry, as was obvious by the many who attended both the hours of visitation and the funeral service.

As his beloved wife Gerthe will tell you, Pim’s years of retirement were similarly characterized by passion and conviction to serve God among his people. Pim never slowed down it seemed. He eagerly assisted a number of vacant congregations in Canada (both CanRC and URC), Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. For many years he worked tirelessly on the Committee for Church Unity, longing to see Christ’s prayer in John 17:21 answered. He also served on various boards and committees and remained active in pastoral care in the various congregations he assisted.

While most knew The Rev. as pastor and teacher, his family also knew him as a faithful husband, father, Opa, and Opapa. His love for his growing family was a constant. The thankfulness he felt for this amazing blessing ran deep. To his family he constantly showed both leadership and love. To conduct a wedding or a baptism for one of the family was always a joy. That the pain of his loss is being felt as deeply as it is simply reflects the depth of love he shared.

The pain of loss, deepened by the inability to say an earthly farewell, is softened by the blessed reality that Pim is at this moment with his Lord and Saviour, experiencing the joy of the gospel he proclaimed so faithfully. ☪

Rodney Vermeulen

Minister

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At Break of Day a Joyful Shout

Capo 1: A D A E A D A E

1. At break of day a joy - ful shout All through Je - ru - sa - lem rang out,
 2. No grave could hold and keep Him bound. He rose from death, with vic - t'ry crowned.
 3. Now death has lost its bit - ter sting, For He has paid for all our sin.
 4. Our Lord, by ris - ing from the grave, Gave life to those He came to save.

E A D A F A B A F A

And glo - rious tid - ings quick - ly spread: "The Lord has ris - en from the dead!"
 The dark - ness He has put to flight, For He is Lord of life and light.
 Those who to Him in faith draw near Thus nei - ther death nor hell shall fear.
 He by His death pre - pared for us A life of ev - er - last - ing bliss.

Music: Henri Abraham César Malan (1787–1864)

Text: Eduard Gerdes (1821–1892); tr. William Helder, 2026 © 2026, wllmhldr@gmail.com

DAAR JUCHT EEN TOON

8 8. 8 8.

