

Clarion

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



Sing the Genevans!

Peter Holtvlüwer

Redemption Worries

Rick Ludwig

Justification by Faith Alone

Iraldo Luna

What's Inside

Ascension Day has just passed us (May 14) and as we dive into the many things happening in our federation and beyond, and as we give thought to unsettling world events, let us remember that our Lord Jesus Christ is on heaven's throne. He rules over all things for the glory of his Father and the salvation of his church. As Rick Ludwig's piece reminds us, God in Christ has paid the full price of our redemption and will not fail to bring it to completion.

In that light, things like the rise of Artificial Intelligence (see Wes Bredenhof's book review) or challenges to the doctrine of justification by faith alone (see Iraldo Luna's article) or other disturbing things need not frighten us. We may simply press on in our daily calling, fight the good fight of faith, and do so with the rock-solid assurance that our Saviour has already won the spiritual war and one day we will stand beside him as conquerors over all that opposes him.

Calvin Vanderlinde's editorial argues for the value of expositional preaching in series, working through a whole book of the Bible—what do you think? Rob Schouten shows us how to sing psalms which include references to the Old Testament feasts and times in a fully Christ-centred way. Speaking of the Psalms, a "Sing the Genevans!" day of workshops was recently held in one of the churches with a view to strengthening congregational psalm-singing, and a report on that is included. A MERF newsletter updates us on the spread of the gospel in Arabic lands.

There is more! How does a married Reformed couple with six children, with husband working as a firefighter and wife as a paramedic, manage to do it all? Ilse Vandermeulen's *Witness at Work* interview is very revealing. Two letters to the editor, a *Readers' Forum* piece, a *Service Snapshot*, a song, and another book review are also included. Please also don't miss the note from our publisher who writes about some big but (we trust) beneficial changes coming up at *Clarion*. Happy reading!

Peter Holtvliwer

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor in Chief: Peter Holtvliwer
E: editorinchief@clarionmagazine.ca
Managing Editor: Anna Nienhuis
Contributing Editors: Eric Kampen, Jason Van Vliet, Matthew VanLuik, Calvin Vanderlinde

CONTENT INQUIRIES

E: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADMINISTRATIVE INQUIRIES

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

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Dietary Determinations

I recall hearing an older, experienced minister once offer younger budding preachers this sage advice: “What happens in the kitchen should stay in the kitchen.” By this he was referring to the preliminary work of preaching, which involves choosing a text and its parameters as well as translation and exegetical work. Such things, while all necessary components of sermon preparation, constitute “kitchen work” that does not belong in the sermon “meal” set before the congregation.

He was not wrong.

However, there are times when it is good to pull back the curtain and venture inside the metaphorical kitchen to examine how a preacher determines what to preach and, as the saying goes, see how the sausage is made.

MEAL PLANNING

Just as most well-functioning households operate with someone—often the wife or mother—planning the meals the family will eat, so also in the household of God, the church. It is primarily the minister who develops the preaching plan by devoting prayerful thought and attention to what the congregation needs for a healthy, balanced diet of spiritual food. Of course, just as a mother may consult others in the household and evaluate their requests, a preacher may do the same. These servants of God exhibit wisdom and humility when they seek the input of fellow office-bearers who know the pulse of the congregation and are able to discern what the sheep need to hear. Ministers are also free to entertain ideas that members of the congregation may propose for consideration.

To put it in terms of Reformed church polity, this collaborative form of meal planning is neither hierarchical nor congregational but presbyterial and serves the church well.

MENU

In Reformed churches, there is no question that the preacher must preach the Word of God. One could say this constitutes the only “menu” from which every sermon must be derived. Only when there is faithful alignment with Scripture will the sermon have power and authority. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 together with Acts 20:27 make clear that all Scripture is useful for building up God’s people and that the preacher’s aim must be to declare “the whole counsel of God.” The only acceptable basis for preaching, then, is the Word of truth—the whole truth and nothing but the truth which God has revealed. Nothing beyond the bounds of Scripture is permissible.

Such confinement certainly squares with what we confess about the sufficiency of Scripture (BC, Art. 7).

THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

It is worth asking how this gets fleshed out practically. In other words, what are Reformed churches “serving up” these days? What does “sermon meal planning” look like in the churches? Are there any trends developing, perhaps inconspicuously, which may contribute to an imbalanced diet and consequently malnourished souls?

As the saying goes, the proof is in the pudding. To stretch the metaphor then, the pudding comes in two “flavors”: expositional and topical. Expositional preaching walks through a specific Scripture text (doing biblical theology) and topical preaching weaves together a theme from various passages (doing systematic theology). Reformed churches have a long and rich history of both, devoting, in general, one service to expositional preaching and the other to topical preaching (ie. catechetical preaching).

However, as is often the case with dietary questions, it comes down to matters of balance and proportion. With a 50/50 split already, is more topical preaching good for the diet or detrimental?

Consider what a diet of predominantly shorter topical sermon series can produce. The congregation may be deprived of hearing messages on difficult passages or texts not ordinarily preached, which have, perhaps to the surprise of some, tremendous edifying value. With sequential exposition through whole books of the Bible—thus following the order and arrangement God has given—preachers are prevented from riding hobby horses and relieved of the pressure of continually having to choose what to preach next. Besides, the preacher will have more time for the text to marinate in his mind, rather than relying on preparing microwaved meals that are far less satisfying.

Of course, preaching 66 sermons from Isaiah or 150 from the Psalms would be a lot to digest and should not be attempted without incorporating some breaks. But over the long haul, a preaching diet that expositors the books of the Bible as God gave them to his church impresses upon everyone that God sets the agenda for what is preached in the pulpit. Who would want it any other way? 🍲



Calvin Vanderlinde

Minister

Nooksack Valley American Reformed Church

calvinvanderlinde@gmail.com

From the Publisher

Dear Reader,

Some exciting changes are coming to *Clarion*! To serve our church federation better, we are preparing to hand over publishing responsibilities to an independent, not-for-profit organization led by a dedicated board.

Premier Printing has had the honour to publish *Clarion* for more than fifty years. We continue to support the vision of an unofficial Canadian Reformed magazine. So why make this change now?

In God's providence, the idea that the time has come to change our model came both from us as a business and from our editorial committee. An independent board of committed volunteers overseeing *Clarion's* publishing will be able to give more focussed attention to working on the magazine. At the same time, such a change will allow Premier to focus more fully on our core business.

Premier and the *Clarion* editorial committee believe this move will, under God's blessing, position *Clarion* to be stronger and more effective at fulfilling its vision and mission into the future and thus be a greater blessing to the churches.

We are forming a steering committee to lead us from our current arrangement to the not-for-profit model. We expect this process could take about a year, the Lord willing.

Premier is committed to ensuring a smooth transition, so while this work goes on behind the scenes, our editorial committee and writers will continue to bring you quality, relevant content, and our magazine should continue to arrive in your hands without interruption. We aim to keep you informed of key developments as the process unfolds.

For now, we ask that you join us in praying that God will bless our efforts and plans for the good of the churches and the glory of his name. Please join us in praying that *Clarion* may be an effective vehicle for discussions within our church community as we together seek to encourage, educate, and engage one another while strengthening our faith and unity in Christ. 

For Premier Printing,
Will Gortemaker



APPOINTED TIMES:

The Moon and God's Calendar

ROB SCHOUTEN

We sing it in worship – the exuberant lines of Psalm 81:

*With the trumpet's tune
herald, in due season,
feast-days of the moon.
Let its echo sound.
To let joy abound
God gives every reason.*

(Psalm 81:3, *Book of Praise. Anglo Genevan Psalter*)

While familiar, there is something peculiar about these words on our lips. We are not blowing trumpets at the new moon. We do not observe the feast-days of Israel's lunar calendar. The ceremonies and symbols of the law have

ceased with the coming of Christ, and all shadows have been fulfilled, so the use of them has been abolished among Christians. Yet we sing this psalm. Why?

The answer is that while the specific ceremonies have passed away, their truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. The testimonies taken from the law and the prophets still confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel and order our life according to God's will and to his glory (*Belgic Confession*, Article 25). And so, these ancient words, rightly understood, continue to speak to the church today.



TIME IS THEOLOGICAL

Psalm 81:3 commands, “Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day.” This verse rests on a conviction modern readers could easily miss: that *time itself* belongs to God. Time is not a neutral container in which life simply happens—it is arranged by God so that human beings are repeatedly brought back to him.

Genesis 1:14 tells us why the heavenly lights were made: “Let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.” The sun and moon therefore do more than illuminate the sky. They mark the passage of time and establish rhythms within which human life unfolds.

In Israel’s life, those rhythms became connected with worship. The lunar cycle marked the beginning of months and the timing of several great feasts. The heavens thus provided the natural framework within which Israel’s calendar operated.

To understand what people actually saw at the “new moon,” we need to be concrete. Toward the end of a month, the moon disappears from view for a short period. Then, one evening, just after sunset, a thin crescent appears in the western sky. That first sighting meant a new month had begun. It functioned like turning the page of a calendar. A new span of days had opened. For Israel, it meant that God had granted his people another cycle of time in which they might gather before him for worship. Sacred time had arrived.

Numbers 10:10 tells us that trumpets were blown at these new moon moments. The trumpet blast summoned the people into the presence of the LORD. Numbers 28:11–15 shows that special sacrifices also accompanied these days.

The reference to the full moon in Psalm 81 points to the middle of the month, when some of Israel feast days occurred. The Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles both fell around the fifteenth day, when the moon was bright and full. The psalm therefore stretches from the first crescent of the month to the brilliant fullness that illuminated the great pilgrim festivals.

WHAT THE FEAST REMEMBERED

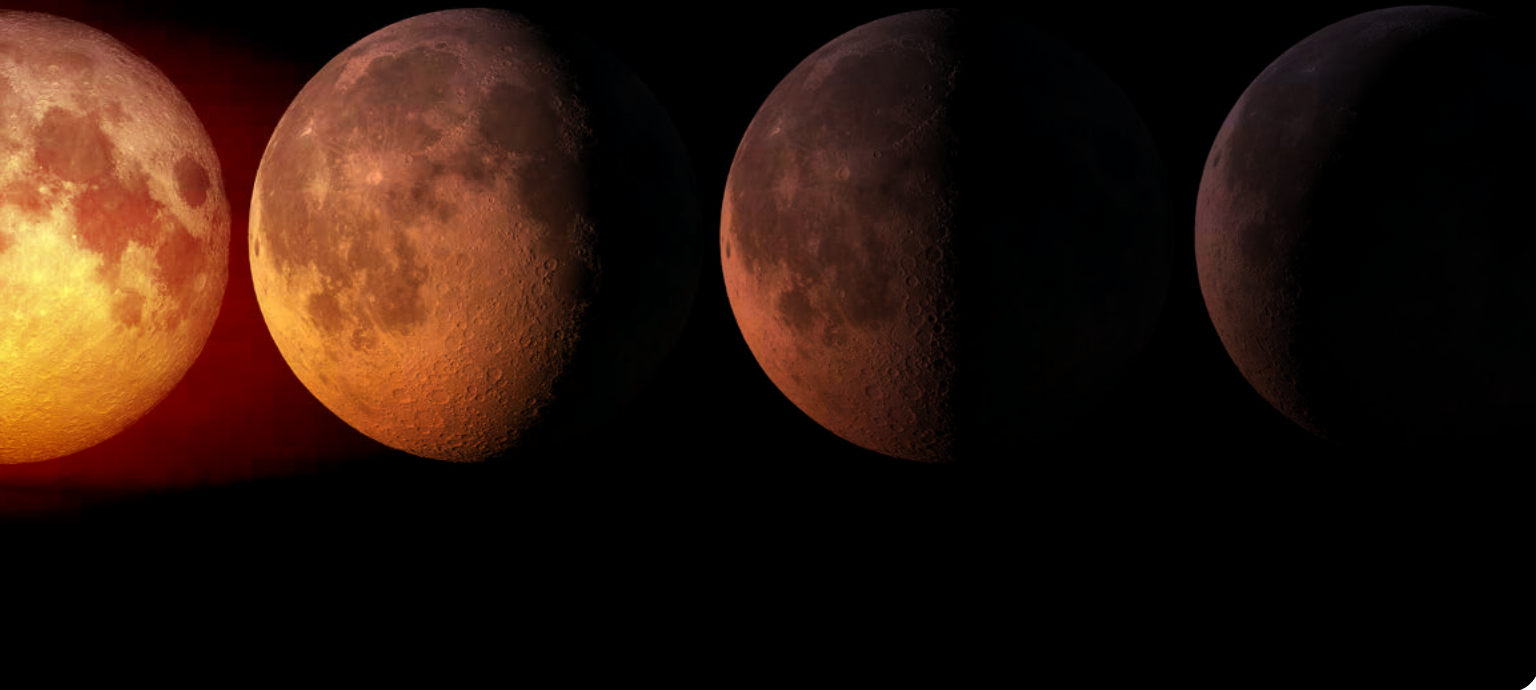
Psalm 81 explains the meaning behind these celebrations: “I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket.” This is the language of the exodus. The lunar calendar did not just track astronomy. It guarded memory. Each recurring feast brought the people back to the saving act by which God had delivered his people from slavery in Egypt.

The moon governed the month, but redemption governed the meaning of the month. Israel rejoiced because they had been rescued.

THE WIDER TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

Other passages of Scripture reinforce the connection between the ordered heavens and the faithfulness of God. Jeremiah 31:35–36 points to the fixed order of sun, moon, and stars as a pledge of God’s covenant mercy. The prophet declares that only if that order were to collapse would Israel cease to be a nation before the Lord. The regularity of the cosmos therefore serves as a powerful image of the reliability of God’s promises.

Psalm 104 speaks in a similar way about the wisdom of the Creator’s ordering of the world: “He made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting” (v. 19). The verse appears



within a larger hymn celebrating God's providential governance of creation—springs flowing in valleys, lions seeking prey at night, and human beings going out to their labour at sunrise. In this ordered world nothing is random. The cycles of nature reflect the stability and wisdom of the God who governs them.

Psalm 89 uses the same imagery when speaking about the covenant with David. God promises that David's throne will endure "as the sun before me" and will be "established forever like the moon." The point is not that the moon itself proclaims the Messiah but that its steady return illustrates the permanence God intends for the royal covenant which was fulfilled in Christ.

The heavenly bodies thus serve as visible reminders of stability in a world that often appears uncertain. When the New Testament announces that Jesus is the Son of David whose kingdom will never end (Luke 1:32–33; Heb 1:8), it declares the fulfillment of that ancient promise. The permanence symbolized by the sun and moon finds its true realization in the reign of Christ.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US

The church today does not organize its worship by watching for the crescent moon or by following Israel's ceremonial calendar. Those shadows have been fulfilled in Christ. Yet the heavens still mark the passage of time. They still testify that the world is governed not by chaos but by the faithful hand of its Creator.

Perhaps modern believers, surrounded by artificial light and detached from the rhythms of the natural world, have lost something that earlier generations felt instinctively: the regular movements above us quietly remind us that God's promises do not fail. The moon

continues its patient course, appearing and disappearing according to the order God established at the beginning.

For Israel, those movements once signaled the arrival of appointed feast days. The trumpet announced that sacred time had begun and that the redeemed people of God were to gather before him in gratitude and praise. The church no longer keeps those liturgical appointments. Christ has fulfilled the shadows, and our worship now centres around the Lord's Day, the day of his resurrection. Yet the underlying truth has not changed. Time still belongs to God, and the people he has redeemed are still called to assemble before him in gratitude and joy. That is why it remains fitting for the church to sing Psalm 81.

When we sing about the trumpet sounding at the new moon and the full moon, we are not pretending to observe Israel's calendar. Rather, we are confessing the truth those ancient ceremonies once taught: that God orders the times and seasons of human life, that he summons his redeemed people into his presence, and that every gathering of his people is a response to his saving work.

The moon still moves through its appointed course. And the church still gathers, week by week, to rejoice in the greater redemption accomplished by the Son of David, whose kingdom endures forever. 



Rob Schouten

Minister

Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church
robert.a.schouten@proton.me

Sing the Genevans!

Have you wondered if our singing of the Genevan Psalms can be improved? In our churches, the historic Genevan tunes (from the 1500s) provide the melodies to which the Psalms are set in our *Book of Praise* and have been our mainstay in church and school for many decades. While there is widespread appreciation for the Genevan melodies and many congregations sing them well, for a variety of reasons not everyone appreciates them—or understands them.

Since, as a federation of churches, we have recently re-committed to the foundational importance of Psalm-singing, would it be worth the effort to bring accompanists and singers together to try and understand the Genevans better—that is, to understand how they were meant to be sung and how accompanists can help congregations to sing them well? Can we embrace our own tradition with renewed vigour and sing the Genevan Psalms the way they were meant to be sung—with all the emotions of heartfelt praise to our God out of faith and love?

A DAY OF LEARNING

Ancaster Canadian Reformed church thought so and, toward achieving that goal, organized a day of workshops on April 11, calling it “*Sing the Genevans!*” All 35 Canadian/American Reformed Churches in Ontario and Michigan were invited to send singers and accompanists alike. With thanks to God, several hundred singers attended as well as more than eighty piano and organ players. In all, 23 churches financially and prayerfully supported this event, which did much to make it a success. Reformed Book Services kindly added to the learning by providing a book table full of edifying resources related to the Psalms.

Sing the Genevans! was divided into three parts: a morning workshop for psalm singers (of any skill level); an afternoon of workshops for accompanists (also of any skill level); and a second (repeat) evening workshop for interested singers who couldn’t attend the morning session. While singers came and went for either the morning or the evening workshop, accompanists were hosted for the day, providing opportunity to learn from and encourage one another around two meals. Many accompanists later commented how they appreciated this time of camaraderie as an added blessing beyond the workshops.

WORKSHOPS

The first workshop of the day pertained to singing the Genevans. It was led by Mrs. Alisha Boeringa, a knowledgeable and passionate student of the Genevan melodies and their use of the church modes. Her presentation was a mix of teaching the Genevans’ historical background, the deliberate design of the melodies to match each psalm’s lyrics and mood, along with a very practical “how-to” session in singing the various laments, praises, thanksgivings (etc.) of the Genevan Psalter. Her two stimulating workshops were informative and fun, and the recordings of each can be found on Ancaster’s YouTube page.

The afternoon session for accompanists began with a thoughtful keynote address by highly trained and experienced organist Mr. Frank Ezinga, in which he directed us to the very purpose of singing in congregational worship. Accompaniment, he emphasized, must aid the congregation to meet that purpose. This worthwhile address is also on YouTube.

From there, the accompanists were divided up into five workshops where they discussed tips and guidance on how to guide congregational singing. Two organ workshops were led by Mr. Frank Ezinga and Dr. Martin Jongsma, and three piano workshops were led by Mr. Jon Kingma, Dr. Arjan de Visser, and Mrs. Rita Faber.

The organizers from Ancaster church felt that *Sing the Genevans!* was an encouraging boost to all who attended. It now remains for accompanists and congregations to work together on the home front to put into practice some of the helpful things learned. A conference like this could stand to be held in other provinces and even to be repeated with additional workshops here in Ontario. The Genevan Psalms may not be the only way to sing the Psalms but they certainly are one beautiful way to bring honour to our God, letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom (see Col 3:16) as we sing back to him the songs he first gave to us.

To find out more about the organization of this conference, email Mr. Gerard Woudenberg (gwoudenberg70@gmail.com). 



Peter Holtvlüwer

Minister

Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church

pholtvluer@gmail.com



Alisha Boeringa



Frank Ezinga



A dark, grainy photograph of a night scene. In the background, there are several out-of-focus lights, some of which are bright and circular, suggesting a bokeh effect. On the right side, there is a neon sign that is partially visible, showing the letters 'CL'. The overall mood is somber and mysterious.

REDEMPTION WORRIES

RICK LUDWIG



I have to admit that I'm a soft touch for a silent auction for charity. The activity of supporting a good cause and engaging in the fun of jockeying for a prize with an unknown bidder can be both enjoyable and rewarding. Sometimes you purchase the item, other times you just drive up the price for the benefit of the charity. At times, if you claim a prize you don't need, you can pass it on to another charitable auction and pay it forward. It always feels like a win-win deal.

Just prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, I participated in an auction and bought a gift certificate to a long-established local restaurant. I was happy to have contributed to the charity and have a ticket in hand to go out for dinner with my family for an upcoming birthday celebration. Win-win! However, a couple of weeks later, everything shut down under public health restrictions and the restaurant owners decided it was a good time to close their doors and retire. I felt like I got left holding the bag. *I had paid the price but had no opportunity for the redemption.* What seemed like a sure thing turned out to be a risky venture.

A HIGH PRICE

As things worked out, the pandemic was a much larger issue than my minor problem. However, the experience stuck with me and I could not help but think about it when our church book club recently poked its way through a tome on the significance of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

One of the key points of our book study had to do with the cost that needed to be paid for sin, both the power of sin in the world and our own daily sins. The discussion not only included how much had to be offered in terms of suffering and death and alienation from God, but also who was qualified to deliver it. The cross was so terrible because it had to match the debt that needed to be covered. It was a high price because it had to meet the consequences of the terrible actions of our rebellion against God. The good news is that the price has been paid by Jesus Christ and there is redemption!

REDEMPTION INSECURITY

Redemption means that the debt has been cleared. But for whom? And how secure is it? And are the doors ever closed on the redeemed?

Redemption insecurity is not a new topic. In fact, it runs parallel to the gospel message because of our incredulity about God's free grace in saving us by sacrificing his Son in our place while we still hated him. In a "what have you done for me lately" world this makes no sense and can make us feel unsteady. It seems too good



to be true and a bit risky to rely on. What is our part in this? Can we be sure for ourselves, for those we love, and for our neighbour that redemption has come and is coming?

Our thoughts may go to the distressed father of a demon-possessed son who cried to Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief,” (Mark 9:24), or to the harried apostle Paul bemoaning, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24), or even to the rich young ruler who sorrowfully walked away from Jesus, eager to obey the law but weighed down by his own riches (Matt 19). We can be thankful that the Lord Jesus understands our weakness and reluctance in accepting the generous terms of his Father’s love and that he was eager to speak to it before he left the earth.

A UNIFIED WORK

Jesus’s words of assurance about redemption are recorded in John 10, but they are not well received by the Jewish leaders. Jesus reveals that he is the *good shepherd* who manages the sheepfold. The sheep remain under constant attack from robbers and wolves, but they remain safe because the good shepherd is committed to their safety with his own life. Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that this is why his Father loves him, for his willingness to give himself up for the sheep. The sheep are his and he cares for them.

Although this figure of speech from the Scriptures should be very transparent to the Jews, they do not understand. When pressed further by his detractors, Jesus does not step back but makes his boldest statement about his identity. He boasts in his Father’s strength and says that the Father, who is greater than all, has given him the sheep and they can’t be snatched away, for he and the Father are one (John 10:30)! The work of redemption is a collaborative effort of Father and Son.

What is remarkable is that the ongoing agitation of the Jews, who considered his claim to be blasphemy, works to further confirm the certainty of the redemptive work of the Christ. As they pressed for

clarity on his identity, they exposed their unbelief. Jesus tells them they don’t hear and understand him because they don’t believe.

The effective work of redemption also requires the transforming activity of the Spirit to give us faith. It is a unified and complete work of the triune God. Ultimately, those who don’t believe him are not his sheep. Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27–28). Hearing the voice of the good shepherd is our assurance of redemption!

HEARING HIS VOICE

One of the popular hymns that is a favourite of the seniors in a local nursing home at their Sunday devotionals is *In the Garden* written by C. Austin Miles. It is inspired by the Bible story about Mary meeting the risen Lord Jesus in the cemetery garden and the eye-opening impact of her hearing his voice call her by name. Although it may be considered a touch sentimental, I understand more clearly why these aging saints were drawn to it again and again:

*I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses...*

*And he walks with me, and he talks with me,
And he tells me I am his own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other, has ever, known!*

*He speaks and the sound of his voice,
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing,
And the melody that he gave to me,
Within my heart is ringing . . .*



*And he walks with me, and he talks with me,
And he tells me I am his own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other, has ever, known!*

If we understand that the hymn writer is speaking figuratively, we can bask in the warmth of this little melody. The sweet voice of our Saviour emanating from his Word and Spirit is the calming tenor that brings peace and assurance for our unsteady faith. What a joy and comfort to be able to hear and recognize his gentle voice say, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28).

So how do we know when we are hearing his voice? His Word is his pulpit. It contains stories and poems and songs and visions and letters about the arrival of his redemption on the cross and its coming upon his return to earth. And then there are preaching and singing and articles and podcasts and friends in faith, all sharing the inflections of his voice.

In bleaker times and in days of doubt, our Saviour’s persistent call can even be heard in the questions and thoughts of our minds. The shepherd pursues his sheep who are wandering from the flock. Even in watching the sun go up and down, and seeing the birds busily building their nests, and in the warm companionship of a cat purring on our lap, we can sense his voice. The creation all around us hangs on and echoes his every word. Whether we are in doubt for ourselves or anxious for another, God’s still small voice remains our assurance. Those whom he loves will hear his voice.

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS

Once in a while, I still drive by the vacant restaurant in town with the shuttered doors and windows. I can’t help but recall the unredeemed gift certificate that I held onto for a few months in the hopes that the retiring owners would have second thoughts. Since then, I have

tossed it out and realize it is not worth the paper it was written on. Although I did not get the meal I expected, or redeem the coupon I bought, I have benefited from some introspection and insight that helps me process the anxiety I can feel about my own redemption and that of my loved ones and neighbours when I get bogged down with the sins and uncertainties of daily life.

Our redemption is secure because it rests on God alone. This further encouragement from Jesus’s own lips sticks with me: “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:25–28).

Following the voice of Jesus eases our fear and uncertainty. Redemption is a *win-win* that is secured in Jesus’s precious blood, in the Father’s love, and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. No one he calls his own can be snatched away. When he returns, we will hear his voice and recognize it, and we can lift up our weary heads because it is his glorious work from start to finish. “What a joy we will share as we tarry there, that none other has ever known!” 



Rick Ludwig

Streetlight Christian Church
rludwig@kitchingsteepeandludwig.com

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Contact Us

607 Dynes Rd, Burlington
ON L7N2V4

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We praise God for enabling MERF to bring life-changing biblical content 24/7, in Arabic, online and by radio across the Arab world and beyond. This touches the lives of hundreds of thousands of Muslims. For several decades the efforts of MERF's Arabic Media Ministry team, staff and volunteers, have been blessed with steadily growing interest in the gospel of Christ. Many have come to saving faith. The team prayerfully works together to write and produce engaging scripts and short radio and video programs sharing the Savior.

In the last three months alone, the team has produced more than 60 new episodes along with daily posts. They have also introduced many new AI-animated videos. Over the past year, interactions across various social media platforms have continued to steadily increase, reflecting a growing desire for spiritual guidance.

Past gospel programs remain available online. New episodes are regularly recorded. New gospel programs are always being developed and produced. The team takes a 3-pronged approach to reach three different target groups at the same time. The newest website provides solid biblical literature for Arab Christian leaders and others interested in serious Bible study. The other two sites appeal to the young Arab Muslim majority who have never heard the gospel.

MERF-ArabicLibrary.com offers valuable resources to Arab Christians for personal and group Bible and theological study for free download or in print form. New materials are regularly introduced. The website and social media pages regularly introduce new Arabic books and materials freely offered for download or in print form. *This has dramatically expanded access to solid Christian literature across the Arab world.* The books and articles are received with joy. MERF-ArabicLibrary.com not only gives Arab churches and seminaries much needed resources, it also inspires individuals to learn and grow in faith. *Praise God for this vital tool which equips Arab Christians for service.*

In contrast, ***Dardashaz.com*** (Chat 7) reaches out very very widely, drawing the interest of hundreds of thousands in the young Arab majority by a variety of engaging short programs. The programs gently weave quotes of Christ's sayings and Bible teaching into compelling drama and interesting discussions on various topics relevant to youth. They stimulate meaningful conversations about faith and daily struggles.



"Word of Encouragement" is a Dardasha7 Program

Direct engagement is growing, with thousands of comments and messages. Some take serious interest in the gospel and inquire in private chats. *Please pray for them.*

Issa-alMasih.com (Jesus the Christ) is specifically directed to the growing numbers of Muslims who actively search for more information about Issa-alMasih. *It focuses on the teaching of Jesus and biblical truths, with clear and accessible resources.* There are hundreds of direct inquiries from serious seekers. By God's grace, many are encountering the love of Christ, asking deep spiritual questions, and wanting to learn more. Some express the desire to follow Him. *Please pray for the Lord's wisdom and grace to those who follow up contacts and provide them with confidential personal care.*

Ramadan Programs

Last month was Ramadan, the lunar month of Muslim fasting from sunrise to sunset. It provided a springboard to share the gospel. MERF's Arabic Media Team made Ramadan related episodes in regular programs and even prepared a special program on fasting. Rather than belittle the four weeks of daylight fasting, the radically different gospel perspective of Christ's teaching on prayer and fasting in the Sermon on the Mount is presented so that the purity, wisdom and love of Christ clearly shine the gospel far above all forms of man-centered and man-made religion.

The program "Fasting is Our Right" was promoted on various social media platforms by short videos, with this description in Arabic: *A spiritual journey during fasting that moves us from form to essence, from habit to true meaning. It explores how fasting provides the opportunity for self-examination, a genuine recognition of one's sinfulness and need for divine redemption. Fasting is not just abstaining from food; rather it develops a desire for a transformed life.*

During Ramadan, there were about 800 thousand views of the program and about 10 thousand reacted directly.

Some reactions were negative and even included some name-calling. Such receive gentle and polite responses and invitations to seek after Christ's saving grace. Others with partial knowledge, seek to know more. For example:

- *Was the Christ who came in the flesh God or the Son of God? How did the Christ take the form of a dove?*
REPLY: "The gospel does not say that Jesus did that. Jesus is God in the flesh and as such he is called the Son of God."

- *As Muslims we believe that Jesus the Christ (Issa-alMasih) is God's Word and Apostle. Is it true that he is God's Son in the flesh?*
REPLY: "John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...."

Praise God for:

- Open doors to reach new audiences through different platforms and formats, especially in seasons like Ramadan.
- Clear signs of impact, as content continues to resonate deeply and spark meaningful conversations.
- Faithfully sustaining the ministry despite challenges and changing circumstances.
- Creative growth and collaboration in the team, leading to more diverse and relevant programs.
- Encouraging responses from viewers who engage with the gospel message behind the programs.

Please Pray for:

- Deeper impact, that content would not only be viewed, but truly transform hearts and lives.
- Guidance in developing new programs to address real questions and struggles people are facing today.
- Open doors for wider reach into regions and communities that are still difficult to access.
- Protection over digital platforms and communication channels, ensuring continuity and effectiveness.
- Continued provision of resources to sustain and expand this vital ministry.



"Fasting is Our Right" Program for Ramadan

Justification by Faith... By Faith Alone Even!

REV. IRALDO LUNA



The issue of the relationship between Paul and James regarding justification always comes up whenever the debate about justification by faith alone is revived. In this case, the text of James 2:14–26 becomes the target of the debate, and at times it is used as a means to cast doubt on whether *sola fide*—by faith alone—is biblical teaching. I hope, with this text, to convince you that “by faith alone” is indeed by faith alone.

“SAYING” AND “SHOWING”

The context in James 2 is clearly the relationship between faith and works since he speaks about someone who “says” he has faith (v. 14) and someone who “shows” his faith (v. 18). By using the verb “say” in his imaginary dialogue, James is not assuming any reality on the part of the one who speaks. But at the same time, we might think that James is issuing a critique of the one who simply “says.”

Verses 15 and 16 seem to strengthen the argument that it is a critique. It is an illustration in which the kind of person who *says* he has faith but does not *show* it is empty of what he claims to have. And the conclusion is, “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (2:17). In this case, it is not a matter of a type or quality of faith, but of its nonexistence. There is no such thing as dead faith. If it is dead, it is because it does not exist.

The discussion escalates to someone who issues a challenge: “But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works; show me your faith apart from works, and I will show you my faith by my works’” (v. 18). It is obvious that this is a challenge in which the outcome is already known; it is a challenge that functions as a rhetorical question. James has already told us that whoever says he has faith but has no works, does not, in fact, have faith at all—it is dead.

The issue then turns to *showing* (Greek: *deiknyō*) what one claims to have. A very similar argument is used by James in chapter 3, when he says: “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him *show* his works in the meekness of wisdom” (v. 13). The same Greek word is used there because something must be known and *demonstrated*—in this case, wisdom. If you say you are wise and understanding, then show by your

works that you truly are. If your works do not confirm such wisdom, it means you are not wise. Works are a testimony. It is the same principle as in James 2:14–26.

SHUDDERING DEMONS

But what about the faith of demons (v. 19)? The issue must still be linked to verse 14 since it concerns someone who claims to have faith but does not show it. In this case, the opening statement “You believe that God is one” refers to what the person claims. But it is an assertion that lacks evidence of impact. James continues to emphasize that it is useless to claim something without evidence that it affects you. What you think about God is not faith—it is a superficial recognition.

John Calvin’s words on this are important: “You believe that there is one God. From this one sentence it appears evident that the whole dispute is not about faith, but of the common knowledge of God . . . Besides, it would be ridiculous were anyone to say that the devils have faith; and James prefers them in this respect to hypocrites. The devil trembles, he says, at the mention of God’s name, because when he acknowledges his own judge he is filled with the fear of him. He then who despises an acknowledged God is much worse.”¹

It is an absurd comparison between someone who claims to have faith in God and demons who are certain of God’s existence. As Calvin said, it is not about different kinds of faith—as if there exists the following: a) the faith of one who has no works; b) the faith of demons; and c) the faith of one who has works. James is merely showing that *claiming* to have faith is not enough; it is only a kind of intellectual recognition of God that even demons have. This is not biblical faith, nor true faith. Nor is it a faith that is different in quality from true faith—it is simply not faith at all. The dispute here is not about the *type* of faith but whether it exists and can be seen. This supposed faith that cannot be seen is “useless” (v. 20), dead (Gk. *nekra*).

ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED BY WORKS

It is in this context that we must interpret what James says about Abraham. The famous question “Was not Abraham our father justified by works?” (v. 21) arises

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1855), 312–13.

from the understanding that mere words do not guarantee existence of faith; professing without demonstrating is useless. In this sense, Abraham's works justified him because they *testified* that his faith was genuine. Some may argue that the word "justified" has the same meaning (to be declared righteous) as in Romans 3. That may be true, and it need not be denied. The point is how James uses the word here. The relationship is between *saying* and *showing*, and Abraham showed the faith he professed by offering his son Isaac on the altar.

Does this mean Abraham was only declared righteous at that moment when, by works, he showed his faith? It is obvious that this is not the case! Verse 23 (and the consistency of the biblical record) attests to this. But what, then, would this justification of Abraham (of v. 21) be? James's rhetorical question simply attests that the act of justification that occurred when Abraham believed can be regarded as certain because his works later on testified to it. Abraham did not profess a hollow faith like the one who claims to have faith and does not show it. As Calvin says: "We have already said that James does not speak here of the cause of justification, or of the manner how men obtain righteousness, and this is plain to every one; but that his object was only to show that good works are always connected with faith; and, therefore, since he declares that Abraham was justified by works, he is speaking of the proof he gave of his justification."²

In the next verse, James says that "faith was completed by his works" (v. 22). The Greek verb translated as "completed" (*teleioō*) means "to reach its goal" or "to fulfill its mission." Does this mean that faith reached its goal only when works came into play, as if works were necessary for faith to be complete or to be genuine faith? That is, was faith only made true when works were performed? Certainly not—James' point here concerns *demonstration*, not making something exist.

As we see in John's first letter, when he speaks of God's love being perfected in us (1 John 4:12), he uses the same Greek word (*teleioō*) as evidence of what already existed—that the purpose of God's love was being fulfilled, not that God's love would be "completed" by our love for others; that would be unthinkable. God's love in us is *evidenced*, not completed, when we love others. God's love does not need to be supplemented; it is complete in itself. Thus, the meaning of completing or being completed as both James and John use this verb is to make evident that faith's purpose has been achieved—not its existence but its purpose.

ONLY THROUGH FAITH!

Faith walks with works. They cannot exist separately in the sense that we will always demonstrate the existence of our faith in how we live.

Faith and works must coexist, but beware: it is not that faith can only exist as genuine faith if accompanied by works. The distinction here is necessary, not only for a temporal reason but primarily a logical reason and also with respect to the purpose of each. Regarding justification, faith is one thing and works are another. They are in different places and exist independently because they operate with different purposes. Faith enters the divine courtroom of justification; works remain outside.

True faith embraces the righteousness of Christ, and that is the end of it. That is where justification occurs. When this happens—when someone is justified by faith—works come into play to *show* that justification has occurred. It is necessary to maintain the distinction between their roles in justification, for *being* justified is one thing, and *showing* that one is justified is another.

Only faith participates in the act of being justified. Works participate as the evidence that this act is true.

Only faith participates in the act of being justified. Works participate as the evidence that this act is true. This is important to preserve the character of justification, which is to be declared righteous by God in his tribunal. God does not declare us righteous because he sees our works. They remain outside the courtroom until the verdict is declared.

Therefore, it is not biblical to conclude that works participate in justification. If justification is being declared righteous before God, and God does not consider any of our works in that act, we cannot say that works participate in justification. In this case, in the act of justification, faith is entirely alone and separate from works. 



Rev. Iraldo Luna

Pastor at the Reformed Church of Brasilia, Brazil
CRTS Masters student
iraldolira@gmail.com

²Ibid, 314.

Meet Isaac and Deanna Allin:

Firefighter and Paramedic

ILSE VANDERMEULEN

A career change from arborist to firefighter might seem unexpected—but when you get to know Isaac Allin (35), it makes perfect sense. Isaac now serves with Six Nations Fire and Emergency Services in Ohsweken, Ontario, and is married to Deanna (37), a paramedic with Norfolk County.

Deanna grew up in Dunnville, attended Guido de Brès High School, and graduated from the paramedic program at Niagara College in 2008. Isaac completed high school in Newcastle, including a co-op placement with the Canadian Armed Forces. He later studied arboriculture and forestry at Fleming College's Lindsay campus while continuing his work with the army.

With a love for heights and climbing, Isaac became a rope access technician—someone who uses ropes, harnesses, and specialized equipment to safely perform jobs in hard-to-reach places. Whether cutting trees or rigging cables high above the ground, his work has taken him to sports stadiums and movie sets. Nearly four years ago, he brought those skills into a new role as a career firefighter.

At home, Isaac and Deanna are busy raising six children, ranging in age from 2 to 11. The Allin family attends Living Water United Reformed Church in Brantford. They've transformed an old dairy farm into a unique family space, converting the barn into a climbing wall and creating rope activities to enjoy together. Deanna loves music—especially piano and singing—and stays active with sports like beach volleyball on the courts at their home. When Isaac finds a quiet moment, he enjoys repurposing old firefighting equipment into creative pieces of art.

Isaac, how did you go from being an arborist to becoming a career fire fighter?

"If you had asked me a couple of years ago if I would become a firefighter, I would have laughed. I've been a bit of a dabbler, doing a bunch of different things. It doesn't seem like these things are related at all, but looking back I can see God's providence in my career path.

I worked for the army for six years in armoured reconnaissance, which basically means gathering intelligence using armoured vehicles. I started as the GIB—'guy in back'. . . [laughs]—the army and emergency services love their acronyms!—and worked my way up to driver, gunner, and group commander. I did not go on any tours; the vast majority of my time was spent training, mostly in New Brunswick.

Growing up, I did a lot of fishing and camping. I loved the outdoors. I studied fish and wildlife to become a conservation officer, but those jobs are few and far between. Staying in the army was not desirable, as it often requires moving your family. At school, I participated in logger sports, and I decided to pursue that professionally until 2012 when I met Deanna and my priorities changed.

I worked as an arborist for over 10 years, after which I became a sales specialist in equipment for arborists, rope access, and fire industries. I also joined the volunteer fire department, completing my requirements for the National Fire Protection Association. It was then that I decided to pursue a career in firefighting. Since then, I have completed many additional fire, rescue, and rope certifications, specializing in technical rescue disciplines and helping to develop technical rescue guidelines and bylaws for the fire department. I also assisted in procuring the required equipment."



What does a day at the job look like for you?

Isaac: As a career firefighter with Six Nations Fire and Emergency Services, I work a 24-hour shift seven out of every 28 days on a four-week rotating schedule. Our platoon consists of eight firefighters, a captain, and the platoon chief, and we respond to various 911 calls. Some calls are medical or to assist paramedics, others are for smoke alarms, car accidents, or structure and grass fires. We also take part in community engagement and public education. When we're not responding to calls or attending events, we complete station duties, work out, cook and eat together, and take care of chores. Basically, between calls and events, we are living life together at the station.

We do have some free time to play pickleball or board games. We also spend time training for specific tasks, like water rescues or studying fire behaviour. Last week, we had defender training with a fire in the woods. I felt like a kid again—we had UTVs out and spent a few hours driving through the mud and it was fun.

Deanna: As a paramedic, I provide emergency pre-hospital care in Norfolk County. I always work with the same partner on an ambulance, responding to calls and filling downtime when we get it. We see a wide variety of situations, but we also have a lot of fun at work. My partner and I like to make our patients laugh when we can. Many calls are from elderly people who have fallen and can't get up. We

Allin family



come in, help them up, chat with them, check their vitals, and then head out again—just pouring kindness on them.

What do you like about working as first responders?

Deanna: I like being busy and responding to a variety of calls, including trauma and serious medical situations. I would hate to wake up at the same time every day, knowing exactly what I'm going to do while sitting in the same place. I like being there on someone's worst day, trying to make it a little better. Today we responded to a serious car crash—you have to think quickly and act carefully, doing treatments in the right order, starting with what's most important.

If you go into this work to "save people" you'll burn out quickly, because we cannot help everyone. We see many people we simply can't fix, including those struggling with fentanyl use and mental health, especially youth aged 13–21 who grew up in the foster system. We often transport them back and forth to mental health wards and see them regularly. One day I would love to start something for them. But you can't save everyone, and to do this work you have to entrust that to God's providence.

Isaac: I like the camaraderie—working together on intense tasks. I also enjoy the physical aspect of the job. I wouldn't say I'm an adrenaline junkie, but I definitely enjoy heights and climbing more

than the average person. On my days off, I still do some work as a rope access technician as well—some tree work, but mostly for a company that installs cables for TV cameras that move over film sets or sports fields, like BMO Field in Toronto.

Deanna: He spent a week on a roof with Jackie Chan!

Isaac: Most rope work that I still do on the side is setting up spider cameras for football or soccer. I've worked in all the CFL stadiums and I'm heading to Vancouver soon for FIFA to prepare for the world cup soccer. My favourite job is Mosaic Stadium in Regina. It's the largest CFL stadium and it's beautiful. It's challenging to rig because it's not symmetrical and it's very high—the roof is about 150 feet above the playing field—but the view over the prairies is amazing.

How do you manage to both work full-time and raise a family of six kids?

Deanna: I wanted a job that allows me to be home with my family a lot. Shift work is ideal for that. I work seven days a month, plus seven night shifts. I have five weeks of vacation, and I've had six maternity leaves. I'm home more than moms who work regular part-time jobs.

Isaac: We both work one Sunday a month, but we can attend most church services with our children. My schedule gives me time

at home with the kids when my wife is working. It does create a unique rhythm—sometimes our “weekend” falls on a Wednesday or Thursday. There’s one week each month that’s pretty hectic, but the kids also enjoy having a babysitter. Having weekdays off allows us to spend time together as a couple or attend school activities.

When Deanna is on night shifts, a number of young men come over for mentoring after the kids are in bed. We’ll go out to the barn and work on something, so I try to make good use of those evenings.

Deanna: We really share the load of caring for our family. Neither of us can just sit still when the other is away—or get by on Kraft Dinner every night. We both have to pitch in. There’s a real blessing in that, because we both understand what it’s like to come home after a long day of work or to spend a demanding day with little ones.

Isaac: Our marriage has become very complementary. As first responders, it helps a lot that we both understand this kind of work from the inside so we can share the stress of the day.

What are some challenges in your work?

Deanna: Night shifts can be tough, especially when calls keep coming in and you don’t get any sleep. Downtime at the base can also be challenging—it’s easy to waste time watching TV or scrolling on my phone. I felt a nudge from God to use that time better. Now I do a Bible reading challenge every year, and I try to spend time reading, calling my mom or sisters, or exercising.

Isaac: One of my biggest challenges is that the worldview in Canada in general—and on the reserve specifically—can be very different from my Christian beliefs. Some coworkers from other platoons won’t give me the time of day because they know I’m a Christian. Because of the history of residential schools, several churches on the reserve have been burned down, and there is hostility toward institutional religion outside of their traditions. That can create difficult dynamics with the Indigenous people sometimes during medical calls. In serious emergencies, people just want help—but there have been times when I’ve been told not to touch someone’s family member or have been called a “white devil.”

What do you bring to your job as a Reformed believer?

Deanna: We do have opportunities to talk with patients during transport, but I can’t be openly proselytizing. Sometimes you can tell from someone’s home or conversation if they’re a Christian, and then you can talk a bit about faith. But mostly I try to show

Christ’s love through how I care for people. My coworkers know I’m a Christian, and I bring my Bible to work most days.

God’s providence is a key doctrine for me. As paramedics, we are constantly around death, trauma, and suicide. Knowing that God is in control—that this is his creation and these are his people—gives perspective. I can’t save them. My job is to show them love.

Isaac: Coworkers can tell I’m different. When you spend 24 hours together, you really get to know each other. Having Christ as my foundation gives me a different perspective on life; it keeps me balanced. Over time, coworkers start asking questions.

I also have several tattoos on my arm that are meaningful to me. One is Psalm 1:3: “like a tree planted by streams of water . . . its leaves do not wither, and it yields its fruit in season.” It’s a nod to my background in arboriculture, but also a reminder that where you root yourself spiritually matters. Those tattoos have sparked some interesting conversations at the fire department.

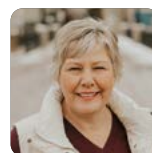
What recommendation do you have for young people thinking of becoming a first responder?

In unison: Don’t become a cop! [laughing]

Isaac: There’s always banter between the services—firefighters and paramedics say don’t become a cop, and police say don’t become a hose monkey (firefighter) or a bus driver (paramedic).

But on a serious note: not everyone knows exactly what they want to do when they come out of high school, and that’s okay. I’ve done many different things. It is important to have a balance between ambition and contentment. I’d encourage people who are content to be a bit more ambitious—but also not to become so laser-focused on their own plans that they miss where God might be leading them.

Deanna: As a first responder, you need to be a kind person who is willing to work with all kinds of people. It gives you the opportunity to brighten someone’s day. But this work can also be heavy. You need to be able to laugh sometimes, and your Christian foundation helps to give perspective. You can’t fix everything, and you need to trust that God is in control. I do pray for my patients afterward—but then I have to leave it with the Lord. 🙏



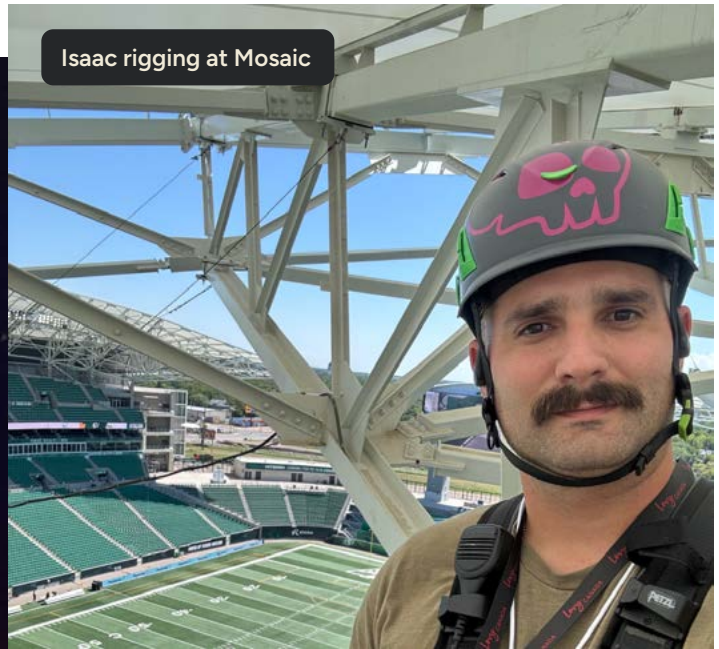
Ilse VanderMeulen

Elora

ilsevandermeulen@hotmail.com

Deanna on ambulance

Isaac rigging at Mosaic





Redemption's Journey in the Dominican Republic

As the plane lifted off for the Dominican Republic, members of Redemption Canadian Reformed Church carried more than luggage in the overhead bins—they carried tools, purpose, and a partnership more than a decade in the making. Since 2012, Bill Van Huisstede has led teams from the Ontario-based churches to serve alongside local partners, building relationships rooted in faith and strengthened through years of shared work. This January, the latest team set out, bringing skilled trades, eager hearts, and a shared commitment to the mission of EduDeo Ministries.

THE MISSION OF EDUDEO

EduDeo Ministries is a Canadian charity driven by a vision to see every community transformed by the gospel through Christ-centred education. EduDeo believes that, while education is a powerful tool to alleviate material poverty, education alone is not enough. True, lasting change requires a foundation in Christ.

By partnering with locally-led organizations in the majority world, EduDeo invests in teachers, strengthens school infrastructure, and

supports students with practical needs like bursaries and disability aids. Co-Impact teams, like the one from Redemption, work on projects chosen by partners who contribute to them and maintain them when the teams are gone. Co-Impact teams serve as opportunities to build relationships with fellow Christians and add some elbow grease and funding to help local schools flourish.

BRICKS, MORTAR, AND GROWING PAINS

The focus of this year's trip was Espacio de Gracia, a school facing the problem of overcrowding. The school is based in an area of material poverty, but the building—painted in a shade of pale green—is vibrant and lively. Currently offering classes up to Grade 11, the school has been desperate for space to accommodate a 12th grade and alleviate the cramped conditions for its current students.

The Redemption team stepped into the first phase of an ambitious construction project: building a much-needed third level for the school. For team members like Fred Dantuma, a landscape contractor, and Calvin Vanderlaan, a carpenter, the work was familiar, but the





Kevin van Delden



Kevin van Delden



context was a new one. The days were long and filled with lots of brick laying, often starting bright and early to beat the heat.

However, progress isn't always linear. One particularly rainy day brought construction to a halt, but in the Dominican Republic, a delay is rarely a lost day. Instead, it became an opportunity for a different kind of connection—to play games and interact with students in the school courtyard. The team ended that afternoon with a dinner party. This “dance card” of nightly invitations into local homes is a unique hallmark of the Redemption team, showing the deep-rooted friendships built over fourteen years of service.

A ROOKIE'S PERSPECTIVE

For Katie Hutchinson, a business owner, mother of three, and member of Redemption, the decision to join a Co-Impact trip was nothing short of a leap of faith. For nearly three years, she had watched Bill's teams with growing curiosity. She'd been on short-term mission trips as a teenager, but as life shifted into marriage and the beautiful busyness of raising a family in Canada, those opportunities faded into the background.

Still, the desire to serve never went away. Katie felt a steady tug back toward service opportunities, particularly through EduDeo. She was drawn to EduDeo's emphasis on Christian education, believing that while building structures matters, real and lasting change takes root through education.

But stepping away from her business and young family was no small task. Katie laughed as she described it as a “logistical nightmare of coordinating kids and coordinating life.” Yet, amid the chaos, both she and her husband sensed God nudging them forward.

“I think it's something that's very important,” she shared. “As church members, there are sacrifices we're called to make. And I

think God often works in those moments—when we give something up, he uses it to shape us, to change our hearts.”

Life in Ontario, she noted, often feels like “a rat race. . . it gets to be a lot. When we decide something trivial in our lives is so important, “God steps in and says, ‘No—let me show you what is actually important. Let me show you my full work.’”

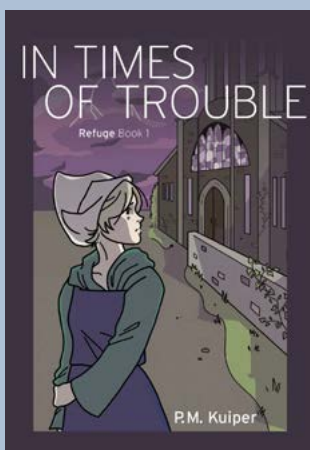
Katie was prepared by Bill to value the moments of connection just as much as the productivity on the building project. The trip offered a stark, refreshing contrast to the urgency of life in Ontario. This often happens for Co-Impact participants. Being immersed in a different culture brings to light different perspectives and a sense of what really matters. Inspired by the experience, Katie and her husband are already dreaming about serving on a future Co-Impact trip together.

A LEGACY CONTINUED

For Bill and the Redemption team, the “why” remains simple: to see their Dominican family and support the work of the gospel. They return to Canada tired (and likely covered in mortar dust) but with a renewed understanding that Christ-centered education does more than develop minds—it raises a generation courageous enough to stand for justice and peace. As Katie Hutchinson summed it up, the trip was an eye-opener, a reminder to sacrifice for the things that truly matter in God's kingdom. 

Victoria Veenstra

EduDeo Communications Manager
Barrie, ON



A Secession Story for Youth

In Times of Trouble (Refuge Book 1), P.M. Kuiper. Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2025. Softcover, 218 pages, \$28.99.

Mention the Secession of 1834 and eyes may well glaze over. Try to describe it to young people and you may encounter a worse reaction. Yet this event was pivotal in our Reformed church history—it's a need-to-know.

Prior to the Secession, there was essentially one Reformed church in the Netherlands, which was basically a state church. By the early 1800s, this church was in the grip of theological liberalism. Essential Bible teachings were being denied by pastors and theologians. The gospel was in grave danger of being eclipsed. However, under the leadership of men like Hendrik de Cock, God brought a reformation—known in Dutch as the *Afscheiding*. In English we call it the Secession.

A GRIPPING STORY

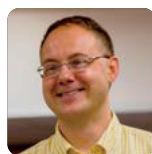
This story is set just over a decade (1846) after the initial Secession movement. While we call it the Secession of 1834, the reality is that it occurred over a number of years, spreading around the Netherlands. In some corners of the state church there were still faithful preachers, so the need for reformation wasn't felt until these preachers moved on or died and they were replaced with liberals.

In Times of Trouble follows the family of Tess, a thirteen-year-old girl. They're compelled to leave the mainline Reformed church and

begin worshipping at a Secession ("free" as it's called in the book) church. The book relates the persecution and pressure such families faced and how they responded to it.

P.M. Kuiper wrote this story for younger readers (pre-teen – early teen), but adult readers may equally enjoy it (as I did). It's well-written and has an engaging plot. It's Book 1 in a series and I'll definitely be keeping my eye out for subsequent titles.

Most Reformed churches of Dutch descent (including the CanRC, FRCA, URCNA, and the CRC) trace their history back to the Secession. A wide spectrum of readers should therefore find this book an attractive way to learn about our shared roots. Kuiper helps modern readers understand the price that had to be paid for maintaining the truth of Scripture. Most importantly, we encounter again the great deeds of our God in preserving his church in history. Buy this one for a young man or woman in your life and keep the memory of this great event fresh in the minds of the next generation. 📖



Wes Bredenhof

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston, AU
bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca

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The Perils and Promise of AI

2084 and the AI Revolution: How Artificial Intelligence Informs Our Future, John C. Lennox. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2025. Softcover, 359 pages.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming a big part of our lives, whether we realize it or not. I was teaching recently at the Reformed Churches Bible College in Papua New Guinea and even students there were learning to harness its power for better and for worse. I now use AI every day, many times just as a glorified search engine. I'll also often use it to improve my writing and sermons. Or, if I have an idea for a picture to go along with a blog post, I'll ask AI to create the picture. This technology is rapidly developing and I'm afraid our ethical reflection on it isn't keeping up. This new edition of a 2020 book represents a valuable effort.

The author is a retired Oxford professor and author of numerous books, many on the intersection of Christian faith and science. Theologically, Lennox isn't Reformed. In this book that comes out in a couple of brief instances with regard to his doctrine of the future things. He is also a sort of theistic evolutionist. He believes that animals may have evolved over millions of years, but human beings were a special creation of God. This view pops up a couple of times in *2084*, but isn't central to the book's purpose. Those are just a couple of things to look out for when reading this otherwise good book or reading other Lennox books.

BENEFITS & CONCERNS

Lennox describes what's happening right now with AI and what's on the horizon. Some of it is really fascinating and holds great potential to serve human flourishing. But there are also serious concerns that AI is being harnessed for surveillance capitalism and communism and that this trend is on the upswing. There are concerns about AI making many human jobs redundant. AI pornography is another serious danger hardly being discussed. Deepfakes and AI-generated propaganda or misinformation are well-known threats to the well-being of society. Finally, there's also the concern that AI technology will continue to evolve to the point where a super-human intelligence will turn on human beings.

2084 provides a thoughtful Christian analysis of all these aspects of AI tech. Lennox isn't a Luddite—in fact, some parts of the book he generated with AI just to prove certain points. He recognizes the

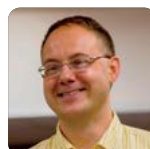
value in AI, but he's also even-handed in identifying the dangers. It's not a light read, but when he uses technical jargon, he usually defines it for the reader.

As I was reading it, I explored more of the capabilities of AI in conjunction with what I was reading. It is remarkable. Yes, we all know stories of AI getting things wrong (when used as a search engine). But the technology has developed so fast in the last three years that it's now amazing how AI gets so many things right. It's only going to accelerate. Especially Christian leaders need to get on top of this and this book will help.

TRANSHUMANISM & SPEED OF CHANGE

An example of an area that we need to watch is the connection of AI to religion. Lennox quotes Neil McArthur, "In the next few years, or perhaps even months, we will see the emergence of sects devoted to the worship of artificial intelligence" (p. 287). This is already happening. On the next page, he quotes from Yuval Noah Harari on what he calls Data Religion: "Data Religion believes that the entire universe is a flow of data, that organisms are algorithms, and that humanity's cosmic vocation is to create an all-encompassing data-processing system—and then merge into it." This is also known as transhumanism.

I want to leave off with a complaint. It's not the author's fault, nor the publisher's. It's just that between the time the book was written and the time it got into my hands, so many things have already changed in this field. For example, GPT-5 was released with great hype in August 2025. Sam Altman touts it as being a quantum leap forward. Whether it is or not is being debated. My point is that, because of their production time, books are going to have limited ability to keep up with developments in AI. Therefore, readers who want to stay informed should make use of blogs and other timely resources as well. 📖



Wes Bredenhof

Minister

Free Reformed Church of Launceston, AU
bookreview@clarionmagazine.ca



JAMES BUIKEMA

Hello everyone. It's been a while since James Buikema was featured in Ray of Sunshine so here's an update. As many of you may know, James is the oldest of 11 and this year he will be the first one to become a senior citizen. He's looking forward to his birthday and plans to invite 65 people to his party! He'll be thrilled to receive cards, especially if they're addressed to "Mr. James T. Buikema."

James currently lives with a sibling and loves to (re)arrange his basement quarters. During the week, he has different caregivers who are amazing at keeping him busy. He loves to go to his cousin's farm every Monday where he helps to gather eggs, do farm chores, and assist with cooking supper. Other days he helps to clean Lincoln church and aids in packaging and labelling dehydrated food at the Gleaners, which is sent off to people who have no food. Sometimes he gets to help with grocery shopping, yard work and visiting people. He loves the variety of work and the people who care for him.

On Friday afternoons he goes to stay with one of his family members for the weekend. He loves to go to church and is often welcomed to join a church family for lunch. On Sunday evening, he heads back to his sibling's home, ready to start another busy week.

James loves to see all of his nieces, nephews, and great-nieces/nephews and is eagerly awaiting the arrival of four more little ones this summer, DV!

As a family we are very thankful for all the people who help in caring for and showing love to our beloved son and brother.

Thank you to James's mom for a peek into James's life! He will be celebrating his 65th birthday in July.

JUNE BIRTHDAYS

16 Edward Bultje will be 30
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive,
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3

17 Joan Koerselman will be 69
2113-16 Ave.
Coaldale, AB
T1M 1J8

20 Lars Huijgen will be 35
2629 Aspen Drive
Coaldale, AB
T1M 0A2

26 Devon Niezen will be 26
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road
Grimsby, ON
L3M 0L1

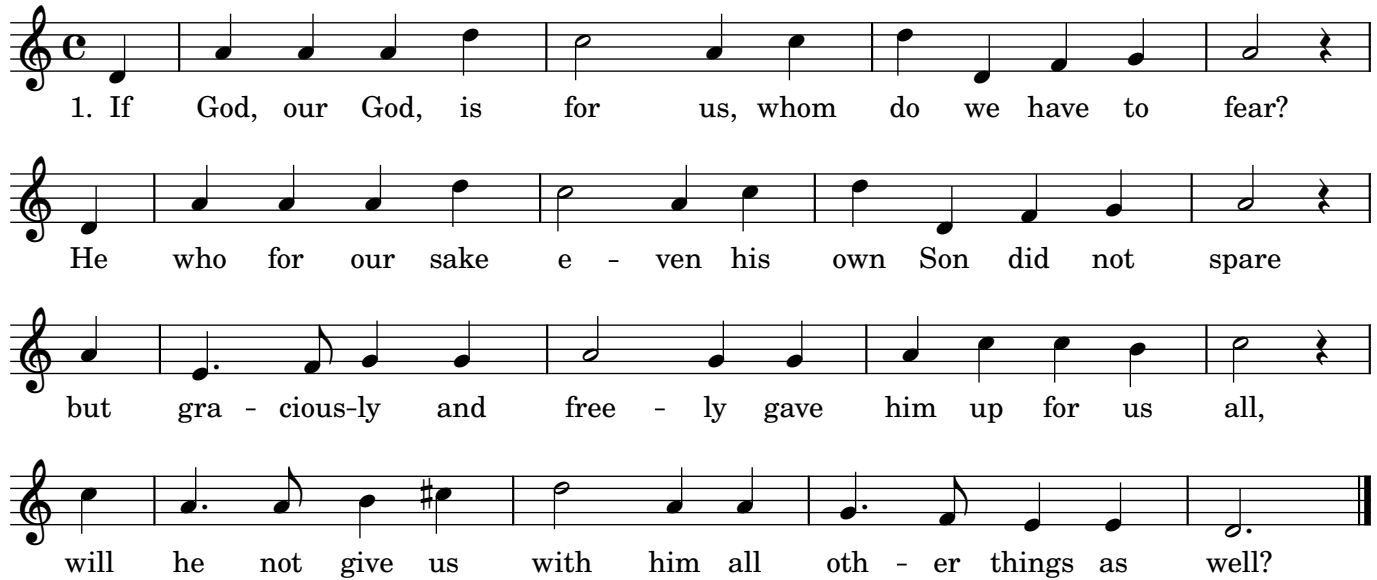
30 Beverly Breukelman will be 64
222 5-19th Street
Coaldale, AB
T1M 1G4

Happy birthday to Edward, Joan, Lars, Devon, and Beverly! We wish you all the Lord's blessings in the year to come.

Rachel Vis
tom.rachelvis@gmail.com

If God, Our God, Is for Us

Romans 8:31–39



1. If God, our God, is for us, whom do we have to fear?
He who for our sake e - ven his own Son did not spare
but gra - cious-ly and free - ly gave him up for us all,
will he not give us with him all oth - er things as well?

2. Who then will yet accuse us
whom God chose as his own?
It's God who justifies us
in Jesus Christ, his Son.
Who would dare to condemn us?
Christ, risen from the dead,
now at God's right hand seated,
for us will intercede.

3. Who then shall separate us
from Christ's great love for us?
Shall famine, persecution,
or sword, or nakedness?
As Scripture says, "For your sake
are we killed all day long,
for we like sheep are slaughtered
by haters fierce and strong."

4. In spite of all our trials,
the victory is ours,
for we through Christ our Saviour
are more than conquerors.
Through him, because he loved us,
we in his triumph share.
In all our tribulations
we are in him secure.

5. I fully am persuaded
that neither life nor death,
no angels and no rulers,
not any height or depth,
the present nor the future,
nothing in all the world,
can rob us of God's favour,
his love in Christ our Lord.

Alternative to Hymn 35 in the *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter* (2014)

Text: William Helder, 2025

Tune: IST GOTT FÜR MICH, *Vier und zwainzig Geystliche Lieder*, Augsburg, 1609

Dear Editor,

For many today, denominational names don't communicate depth or faithfulness the way they once did (re: *Keep the Name* by R. Schouten, Volume 75, No. 5). There's research that consistently shows these labels can be confusing rather than inviting. It's not that people are rejecting doctrine or truth—they often just don't know what the labels mean, and the name alone can signal "this probably isn't for me" before they ever hear the gospel. Are we placing something non-essential in front of Christ for people who are still searching?

Consider what Paul wrote in Corinthians, "For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not being merely human?" (1 Cor 3:4). He's not criticizing faithful teachers or rich tradition. He's warning against allowing labels, even good ones, to become the thing people identify with first. Paul keeps pulling the church back to what matters most. A few verses later, he puts it as plainly as possible: "No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (v. 11).

Christ is the foundation. Everything else—tradition, structure, history, even denominational identity—rests on him. Those things can be gifts, but they shouldn't come before him.

I don't see de-emphasizing the Canadian Reformed name as a rejection of the Reformed faith or lack of gratitude for the past. I see it more as a question of ordering. How do we make sure that what people encounter first is Christ himself, and not something they need to decode before they even walk through the door?

I think it's possible to remain deeply Reformed in preaching, worship, and conviction while also being open about how we present ourselves to the outside world. Paul's emphasis was always on Christ at the centre—not on who planted, who watered, or what banner people gathered under.

Stuart Kampen
Coquitlam, BC

Dear Editor,

Thanks for the timely editorial on church names (*Keep the Name* by R. Schouten, Volume 75, No. 5). A church name does provide an outward facing message to the community as to what the church stands for and also who is welcome. I think we have to be honest and admit that many of the Reformed monikers in Canada (CanRC, CRC, URC, FRC, NRC) have a community subtext of *Dutch* church, understandably due to the shared immigrant experience in their formative years. If I had a nickel for every time I told someone in my community where I attended church and they responded, “Oh, the Dutch church” it would be a sizeable offering! The reality that the church is often closely affiliated with a member-only Christian school drives the impression home.

This begs the question: does adding the name *Canadian Reformed Church* to the functional name of the congregation have the desired result of expressing a stable and multi-faceted European Reformed heritage with a catholic bent or does it project something else?

I believe the churches who have purposefully separated the federation name from their official name are not embarrassed of their heritage, but do see it, if left front and center, as an impediment to appearing open to others who don’t share the same blend of ethnic church history. This change in the name is mostly to help the established group to remember that, despite their cultural heritage, a church in most Canadian cities should be multicultural and quite diverse ethnically if it is truly open to others.

The goal is to remain sound in doctrine but not insistent that newcomers adopt all the family history and their identifying markers. Afterall, our witness is to Christ and his Name. I think of the Apostle Paul, resisting his Jewish identity and his own cultural history, proclaiming to the Corinthians: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

With warm regards,

Rick Ludwig
Streetlight Christian Church
Hamilton

Dear Editor,

We are deeply grateful for the letters published in the *Readers' Forum* recently. These discussions are essential, maybe even existential. In following the concerns shared around the recent General Synod decisions, a strong focus on and call for unity, peace, and trust is commendable. However, it should be carefully observed that God arranged authority structures into four categories to keep order and unity in society: self, family, church, and state must all be underpinned by a firm and sure objective ethical moral standard. If not, history is clear of the resulting dire consequences.

Unity is sadly not a given characteristic of God's people or the church. Paul tells us unity is to be maintained (Eph 4) and Jude tells us to contend for the faith; true unity in all spheres is a fruit of personal holiness and faithful dedication to God. Is this not the reason historically we have been given summaries of the faith in The Three Forms of Unity, which we should study, know, and love?

As church, we need to be reminded at what cost these confessions came to us. Unlike the Westminster Confession penned by 121 delegates sitting around a table, we need to read the stories of the men who wrote confessions under duress, at the peril of their lives. They were faithfully contending for and defending the faith as Jesus called them to do in Luke 12:11 "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." We do not claim that these confessions are the inspired word of God like the Bible, but they have been used by God to aid his church in defending the truths of his Word.

Today, like many times in history, we see conflict all around us as we witness our society drift into liberalism—another religion, the root of conflict being the antithesis. Many churches claiming to be Christian today think they can function without creeds and confessions, which is a creed and confession itself—an individualistic claim of "my truth" and "your truth."

As Canadian Reformed Churches, we should be aware of and grateful for the glorious history around our view of the covenant. Our view points out that all covenants contain two parts, the promises and the obligations. By faith, we are called to a fitting response to God's gracious invitation. Not all the promises lead to blessing and

eternal life—many of them are also threats leading to curses and eternal death if we do not fulfill the obligations (Deut 28–32). The covenant was not just made with individuals, but corporately—with families, churches, and even nations (LD 30).

Underpinning the covenant is a clear objective standard to questions such as "What is a Christian?" "How do we know our sin and misery?" "What are good works?" "What is our assurance of faith?" "Why must the law be preached so strictly?" Was not part of the reason we separated from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) the fact that their standard shifted from God's law to the situational, rational ethical standard?

We are all idol factories, claiming our own truth and willing to afford others that benefit as well. When in positions of authority, we can quickly give ourselves autonomous, arbitrary authority over our neighbour, even doing one of the most eschatologically dangerous acts known to man: "you keep people from entering the kingdom because you have not entered yourself" (Matt 23:13). We can serve in a position of authority all our life only to one day hear Jesus, the final judge, say, "I never knew you, you lawless one" (see Matt 7:23). Jesus warned the Pharisees that in their God-given mandate as teachers of the law, they were hypocrites, not practicing the law themselves from the heart. He told his disciples to obey what the Pharisees said but not follow what they did.

One of the obligations of the covenant is the duty to join a church which teaches his covenant law as our rule of thankfulness, to show us God's character and the path of life; that law which Psalm 19 says "is perfect, refreshing the soul . . . making wise the simple . . . giving joy to the heart . . . enduring forever." Psalm 119:1–2 says, "Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his statutes." It is our fervent prayer that God would keep us faithful to himself and true to his covenant so that we may continue to experience the blessings we have experienced as lifelong members of this Canadian Reformed federation.

Sincerely,
Kevin and Christina VanderZyl
Neerlandia, AB

