



Lux Mundi

37:1 spring 2018

Jesus said: "I am the light of the world." John 8:12

In this Issue

Devotional: Psalm 121

Jesus said "I am the Light of the World"

News from Sudan, India, & North America

The Reformational Study Centre in South Africa

An opinion on the Presbyterian Church in America

The European Conference of Reformed Churches this May

Magazine published by the
International Conference of
Reformed Churches



Rev. Dr. Victor (V.E.) d'Assonville is pastor in the GKSA (Reformed Churches in South Africa). He serves as principal and professor of Church History at the Reformed Theological Seminar (RTS) in Heidelberg, Germany.

PSALM 121

The LORD remains with us

Mountains, even hills, unfailingly call to mind Psalm 121: "I lift up my eyes to the hills ... My help comes from the LORD."

In this Psalm the poet emphasizes repeatedly how the LORD protects us. He is the Creator of heaven and earth: He is almighty. He is the only true God. As Creator the LORD is *able* to help you; as covenant God, as faithful Father in Christ, He is *willing* to help.

In contrast with us humans, our Keeper neither slumbers nor sleeps: He is always alert. His love and help are so all encompassing, so enveloping that He would send His only Son, precisely because all help is from Him.

He remains with us. He is always with us, by day and by

night, also when we are not conscious of it. He is always with us: that's why Jesus Christ is called *Immanuel*, "God with us". And that is why the Christ gave His Spirit, His Comforter, to His church, to each believer, to comfort... In Christ the comfort of Psalm 121 has also become our comfort.

Do you see this well? Do you realize this? Psalm 121 draws the line from that one lonesome traveller to Christ, and further still, to our eternal destination. We read in Revelation 7:16 and 17 how the promise of Psalm 121 is fulfilled: The Lamb, Christ, shall lead God's children to "living springs of water", they shall "hunger nor thirst anymore". This is what is promised in Psalm 121 and is fulfilled in Christ. From this time forth ... and forever more.



From *Dagstukkies*, a devotional published by the Reformed Church in South Africa on its website.
Used with permission.



The logo combines the ICRC logo with the Lux Mundi monogram, an early Christian symbol combining the initials of Jesus Christ (in Greek I and X), referring to Him as the Light of the World (Lux Mundi).



copyright © Bill Frymire

Front cover picture: A mountain in Manning Park, British Columbia, Canada. Photo: K. Janssen.



CONTENTS

02 Devotional – Psalm 121

04 Editorial

Theological

06 Devotional on John 8:12 – *I am the Light of the World*

News & Information

09 Sudan: Sudanese Reformed Churches – Silver Jubilee 2017

12 South Africa: The RSC

15 India: Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship

16 Canada: Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary Conference 2018

Opinion

19 North America: The new PCA

Announcements

23 Europe: European Conference of Reformed Churches announcement

SUBSCRIPTION

The digital version is published free of charge to readers. To receive notice of a new edition posted to the ICRC website, please register with luxmundi@icrconline.com, subject line “Lux Mundi digital registration”. One is free to print and/or distribute the digital version. To receive a printed copy via mail, printing and postal fees will be charged. To receive a printed edition, please register with luxmundi@icrconline.com, subject line “Lux Mundi postal

CONTRIBUTORS

Editors

Karlo Janssen (Canada)

Hans Maris (The Netherlands)

Sjirk Bajema (New Zealand)

Hiralal Solanki (India)

Glenda Mathes (USA)

Ria Nederveen (The Netherlands)

Lawr Khawbung (India)

James Visscher (Canada)

Design & Print

Minuteman Press Chilliwack, BC, Canada

Regional contacts

North America

Glenda Mathes

South America

Chris Boersema

Europe

Africa

Paul Bukenya

South Asia

Lawr Khawbung

East Asia – Pacific

Sjirk Bajema

ICRC liaisons

Missions Committee

Diaconal Committee

Pieter Boon

Theological Ed Committee

Regional Conferences

CONTACT ADDRESS

Lux Mundi

7949 202a Street,
Langley BC, V2Y 1W8, Canada

Email: luxmundi@icrconline.com

Phone: +1-604-854-4011

www.icrconline.com



Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen is a pastor within the Canadian Reformed Churches. He currently serves on an interchurch relations committee of the CanRC and on the ICRC Publications Committee.

INTRODUCTIONS

...one might even say that Lux Mundi has finally found its rightful home.

Introductions

The fact that our volume number reads “37” indicates that the *Lux Mundi* before you is not entirely new. *Lux Mundi* may have moved from the oversight of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) (RCN) to the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), it continues with the same goal of sharing news, content, and opinion globally.

Indeed, one might even say that *Lux Mundi* has finally found its rightful home. For the first edition of *Lux Mundi* appeared in 1982, the year of the Constituent Assembly of the ICRC. The editors back then: the Rev. K. Deddens and the Rev. G. VanRongen of the Netherlands and the Rev. H. M. Ohmann of Canada.¹

Still, the move does signal changes. Hence, introductions are in order.

Purpose

Lux Mundi has become the magazine of the ICRC. The ICRC has as purpose

- to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
- to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
- to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;
- to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
- to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

The purpose of *Lux Mundi* is to serve the ICRC in achieving its purposes. To that end the magazine will seek to acquaint the member churches with each other, provide a forum where common problems and issues can be studied, and serve as a Reformed testimony to the world.

Editors

The editors at the helm of *Lux Mundi* are the following. Undersigned, the Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen of the Canadian

Reformed Churches, will serve as editor-in-chief. Vice editor-in chief is the Rev. Dr. Hans Maris, retired professor of church history at the seminary of the Christian Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. Also serving as editor is the Rev. Sjirk Bajema, about to move from the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia to a Reformed Church in New Zealand. Our fourth editor is the Rev. Hiralal Solanki, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India and instructor at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Dehra Dun. Advisory editors are sr. Ria Nederveen, of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, sr. Glenda Mathes, of the United Reformed Churches in North America, the Rev. Lawr Khawbung, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North East India, and the ICRC Corresponding Secretary, the Rev. Dr. James Visscher, of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Of these people, three have served as *Lux Mundi* editors in the recent past, and a fourth has served on its editorial team. This should assure us of continuity. The plan is that these editors will be assisted in their work by regional contacts and ICRC committee liaisons. That happens to be a network we are still setting up, making grateful use of the work begun by the former editorial board.

Content and Availability

Lux Mundi does not aim to publish new content. Rather, articles are gleaned from magazines published within ICRC membership circles. Editors of such magazines are welcome to submit publications for consideration for a global audience. Please send such submissions to luxmundi@icrconline.com.

To keep costs minimal *Lux Mundi* will primarily be an online magazine. Issues will be published via the *Lux Mundi* page on www.icrconline.com. Those who register (including all former subscribers) will receive a notice via email each time this happens. Readers are free to print their own hardcopy of the digital version, or have it

¹For myself, that has a personal touch. Rev. G. VanRongen was a dear mentor and friend of mine, my love for interchurch relations and church governance is much due to him. I have further had the honour of being Dr. K. Deddens' pastor in the evening of his life.

THE CHANGING FACE OF LUX MUNDI



printed more professionally at a print shop. Using a print shop will probably still be cheaper than the combined cost of printing and postage in North America. Those who opt to have a printed copy sent to them via snail mail will be charged the associated costs.

Continued Blessing

In the previous edition of *Lux Mundi*, the former editor-in-chief, the Rev. Piet Houtman, expressed the hope and prayer for continued blessing upon the work of *Lux Mundi*. On behalf of the current editors we express gratitude to him and the former editors, and all who have served before them, for their service to Christ's church. The fact

that *Lux Mundi* is now not just a magazine "for the global church" but also, in a sense, "by the global church" is a clear indication that this work begun decades ago is worthwhile and fruitful for the furtherance of God's Kingdom.

Our prayer remains that the Lord will bless His church gathering work and continue to use *Lux Mundi* as an instrument in that endeavour. To that end we present you with an issue that will certainly take you around our globe. We've begun with our devotional in Germany, and take you to Canada, to the two Sudans, to South Africa, to India, and to the United States of America.





Rev. Steve Swets is a pastor within the United Reformed Churches in North America and serves on a URCNA interchurch relations committee.

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

A Meditation on John 8:12-20

This is the second devotional on the “I am” series of statements of Christ found in John's Gospel. Read John 8:12–20 prayerfully and then keep your Bibles open.

The statement of our Savior focuses upon light. Light extinguishes darkness. As we come to our passage, we are reminded that by nature humans are in darkness. One way to describe the fall is that man fell from light. The world was plunged into darkness. (R. C. Sproul has written an excellent children's book dealing with this theme called *The Lightlings*. Read it to your children.) The darkness of the human heart is what Jesus addresses in John 8:12–20. As you read this devotional article, ask yourselves what it means that Jesus is the light of the world and what our calling is in reflecting that light to those around us.

A Divine Claim

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” This statement was profound, prophetic, fulfilling, angering or comforting, and divine. To help us wrap our minds around this, we must understand what is taking place. The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths is about to come to an end. This was one of three national feasts the Jews celebrated. In John 7:37, it refers to the last and greatest day of the feast. What happened on the last day of the feast and the others was that in the temple the two golden menorahs were lit, the candelabra with seven lamps or candles. The court of the women would be lit, the city would be illuminated, and from the surrounding hills the temple could be seen lit up. Once the candles are blown out, then darkness hangs over the city. It is in this context that Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

In the previous article, the significance of the use of the term “I am” by Christ was mentioned. In Greek, the two simple words *ego eimi* mean “I am.” Not only is this a reference to the divine and God's revelation of the covenant name at the burning bush, but also, more specific to our text, is the fact that it was God who would be a light to the nations. There is a double reference to God as the light: He is light to the elect Jews and to the nations.

As we turn for a moment to the Old Testament, we can see that Jesus' statement is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Psalm 104:1–2 says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty, Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.” God covers Himself in light. We must understand this to be the fact that God is adorned as light, Himself giving light its source. God is the light, and now Jesus is claiming to be the light.

Isaiah of all the prophets develops the messianic theme of light. Isaiah 9:2 says, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.” That beautiful verse corresponds to John's prologue, where we read, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:4–9; for further reading, see Isa. 42:6–7a [John 9]; Isa. 49:6 [cf. Mal. 4:2]). When Jesus says that He is the light of the world, He is claiming to be the Messiah, the suffering servant of Isaiah, the one who would build His church by bringing light also to the Gentiles.

There is another Old Testament connection taking place in the earlier context of John. This connection is with the wilderness. The greatest miracles and blessings of the wilderness wandering culminate in Jesus Christ. In John 3, Jesus connects His death on the cross for the salvation of sinners with the serpent on a pole in the wilderness. As we get closer to John 8:12–20, we remember that previously Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.” He referred to Himself in John 6:58 as that bread which is greater than manna. In John 7:37–38, Jesus connects Himself to the water in the wilderness. But, unlike temporary water from the rock, Jesus will give streams of living water by way of

the Holy Spirit. Now, Jesus calls Himself the light of the world. What was Israel's light in the wilderness? Exodus 13:21–22 says, “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.” It was that pillar of cloud and fire that gave light and clarity to the Israelites and darkness and confusion to the Egyptians (Exod. 14). Now Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Following the light is what Israel was to do on their way to the Promised Land. Do you see the redemptive theme? We also are to follow the light as we make our journey to the Promised Land. Now it should be getting clearer why the Pharisees were so angry at Jesus.

He not only calls Himself the “I am” a second time, but also He connects His person and work to God's great work of redemption in history. As a light to the world, He expands the church outside of the walls of Israel. He is the light of the world. The bright candles in the temple which illuminate all around the temple are blown out. Jesus is the light that will pierce the darkness. His teaching here is directed at the hypocritical Pharisees, as we will see in a moment. In John 9:5 Jesus repeats this statement. This happens as He heals a man who was born blind. His whole life the man saw nothing but complete darkness, and Jesus miraculously restored the sight he never had. As this man's retinas are filled with light, Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” Jesus' statement comes to the spiritually blind Pharisees and to the man born blind, who because he was healed by Jesus will be excommunicated from the temple.

To put it in other words, Jesus is saying, “I am the light of the world” to the religious elite and to the religiously lost. What He is saying to the Pharisees and to us if we are not on guard is if we are not following Jesus, if we are not looking to the light, if we are not walking in the light, if we seek light from elsewhere, we are like the Pharisees. As Paul tells the Corinthians, to do many amazing things without love is nothing. So too, to live an outwardly

religious life without the inward renewal of the Spirit is nothing. To surrender our time, money, energy, even prayer to the Lord without the surrendering of our hearts, what profit is it?

This is what Jesus means by following Him. It means to believe in Him and to trust Him. The famous book by Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps*, written nearly a century ago, gets at this. What if in every decision you made in life, you asked, “What would Jesus do in this situation?” Now, there are some problems with the question, partly because Jesus would never get Himself into compromising situations as we often do, but the main thrust is the same. The result of believing or of following Jesus is that the deeds of darkness or of the flesh are taken off and the fruit of the Spirit is put on (Gal. 5). The tree must be good before the fruit can be good.

Remember that when outsiders come to worship. Don't expect outward piety if there is not yet inward renewal. To expect people from the outside to act like Christians or talk like Christians before they have followed the light is a contradiction. It doesn't make sense, and even worse, it might encourage a negative form of Pharisaism.

What Jesus is saying to those still in darkness is that there is a light that had come into the world. He will provide the only solution to those things which flourish in darkness: sin, brokenness, frustration, spiritual depression, loneliness. What Jesus provided the man born blind is the same thing He gives to those who follow Him: He gives them eyes to see. So, when sin or temptation arises, they

can see it; when brokenness abounds, they can see through it and sail those waters. Following the light doesn't mean that everything in the rest of your life will be easy. The man born blind was insulted by the Pharisees and then excommunicated. “‘Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.’ They answered and said to him, ‘You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?’ And they cast him out” (John 9:32–34). They threw out the man born blind because they hated the one who healed him. In John 9:35–38, how did the man respond? In faith. He didn't cry because the religious elite had barred him



from their legalistic blindness; rather, he worshipped Jesus.

A Necessary Response

There is always a response to the proclamation of the good news. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." Jesus claimed to be God. The same is true with the preaching of the Word. "The flower fades, the grass withers, but the Word of the Lord stands forever." Jesus is that Word, which John said has come into the world: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:11–12). "His own" is a reference to the Jews. How did they respond?

They raised all kinds of weak counterarguments (John 8:12–20). First, they claimed that Jesus cannot say those things because He wasn't permitted to testify for Himself, so then Jesus' testimony is not valid. This could be true if it was not for the fact that Jesus was the omnipotent, omniscient, sinless one. He says that His Father can testify for Him.

Second, they object about His father as a witness. In verse 19, they ask, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus reply was spot on: "You do not know Me or my Father." They were spiritually blind: the Light had come to shine in the world and they did not recognize it. The law and the prophets testified to it, and the Psalms and the Wisdom literature testified to it. The suffering servant of Isaiah had come as a light into the world, and the very thing that Isaiah said would take place is about to take place. God will lay on Him the transgression of us all.

The third objection was to the fact that where He was going they could not go. They thought He was going to commit suicide (John 8:22). Jesus said He is not of this world, but they are; they are from below. He is not about to commit suicide; they are about to commit homicide. They are about to crucify an innocent man, though verse 20 reminds us that His time hadn't yet come.

But they will commit homicide. They will seek to put out, to snuff out the light of the world, but they cannot. For this light is not a light from men. He is not the light of the candelabra which burns for a week and then everything goes out and all is dark again. No, this is the light sent from God. This is the one who said, "Whoever follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."

The man who was born blind and was healed humbled himself and worshipped Jesus. He believed that indeed Jesus was the Son of Man, the light sent from God. The religious leaders, hardened and angry, sought to destroy Jesus. They said He was a liar and an imposter. Who do you say He is?

Are you following the light? Is Jesus your light among the darkness of this world? A couple of years ago I went camping, and there was a trail, a shortcut through the woods to the bathroom. I went with my wife, and we took one flashlight. The trail narrowed, and she went ahead with the flashlight and I followed right behind her. But something happened. I tripped and fell over a tree root. The problem was that the light wasn't bright enough, and I had not followed closely enough. Spiritually, sometimes we fall as we walk through the woods of life, don't we?

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12–20

We stumble in sin and discontent. When we do, repent, but also ask yourself, are you walking close to the light, or have you slowly fallen back a bit? When you think about your life and your relationship with the Lord, isn't it true that when you are most often in prayer and in devotion, in Bible study and Bible reading and worship attendance, that things seem to go better? The fact is that things might not be going much differently; however, if we are walking close to the light of God's Word, our path is illuminated. We are reminded that we depend upon the Lord for guidance.

When the storms clouds come upon us, we are sheltered by God. In the darkness of a broken relationship, or a struggle with addiction, or a difficult child, or a difficult parent, it is Jesus who sheds light upon our path. Follow Him! He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." Follow Him, live in Him, trust in Him, and be comforted in the truth that you belong to Him. The light has come into the world, and it is Jesus. Hallelujah, what a Savior!



This article was first published in *The Outlook* in August 2016. It is reprinted with the permission of the Reformed Fellowship.



Rev. Patrick Wic is an ordained minister within the Sudanese Reformed Churches.

SILVER JUBILEE SUDANESE REFORMED CHURCH (1992-2017)

Jubilant Celebration

With jubilation and ululation the Sudanese Reformed Church celebrated her Silver Jubilee in the Lord's vineyard at Bethel Sudanese Reformed Church Mangateen, Juba on Saturday 9th December, 2017 under the theme "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch," Lk 5:4b. It was a joyous event of celebrating the past, present and looking



SRC pastors who attended the Silver Jubilee from right to left: Kewy Ismail, Godwin Ale, Adil Markon, Butrus Aguer and Patrick Joks

toward the future.

Historically, SRC seed was planted in early 1992 by Patrick Jok Ding together with his wife Basilica Ropheal Lado at Dar el Salam Jebel Aulia, Khartoum Sudan. With heartfelt joy, SRC has now grown into 16 congregations and 18 small groups in IDPs¹ camps in South Sudan and refugee camps in the neighboring countries. Hence to capture the nature of SRC here below is a historical overview.

SRC Historical Overview

- February, 1992 – SRC started as a small house fellowship in Khartoum, Sudan.
- 1994 – 2nd house fellowship started in Khartoum down town.
- 1997 – 3rd house fellowship in Omdurman and 4th fellowship in Haj Yusif started.
- October 2005 – SRC organized as Christian denomination under the name "SUDANESE REFORMED CHURCHES" with total membership of 500. All SRC leaders subscribed to Reformed confessions (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dordt) in the same year.
- 2008 – 1st mission in South Sudan and church plant of "Immanuel SRC" in Malakal.
- February 2008 – 1st historic visit from Overseas Reformed family, Dr. Flip Buys and Dr. Brian DeVries to Khartoum, Sudan.
- 17th-18th April, 2009 – 1st SRC Synod held in Khartoum, Sudan.
- 2009 – SRC applied and joined the membership of World Reformed Fellowship.
- 2010 – churches planted in Juba, Bor, Bentiu, Aweil and Nyala.
- 27th April–5th May, 2011 – 2nd SRC Synod convened in Juba, South Sudan, attended by CRCNA two delegates, Dr. Joel Hogan and Dr. Mwaya Kitavi.
- 2012 – SRC invited and attended for first time General Synod of Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA) and entered into ecclesiastical unity with 1st Reformed Church.
- October, 2012 – SRC visited by Rev. Dr. Malan Van Rhyn, ecumenical Deputy of RCSA and his team.
- 8th–11th May, 2013 – 3rd SRC Synod convened in

¹ An internally displaced person (IDP) is someone who is forced to flee his or her home but who remains within his or her country's borders.

Malakal, South Sudan, attended by CRCNA two delegates Dr. Joel Hogan and Dr. Mwaya Kitavi.

- 2013 – SRC admitted and joined the membership of International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).
- 2013/14 – SRC 27 members including two pastors, one elder, two evangelists and one deacon were killed at the outbreak of the conflict in South Sudan.
- 2015 – SRC rebuilt the church burnt down during the aftermath of 2013 conflict in Juba.
- 2016 – SRC granted affiliate membership status by South Sudan Council of Churches.
- 2017 – 1st Christian school initiated in Juba.
- Up to date 31st December, 2017 – SRC has 16 congregations, two classes with 6000 total membership served by 12 active ordained pastors, 20 evangelists, 21 ruling elders, 11 deacons and 3 students of theology.

Contextually, SRC is committed to a cross cultural vision of the church. There are more than 27 different tribal groups and nationalities that worship the Lord together as God's family. There are four churches in Sudan and twelve churches in South Sudan. Of those in South Sudan, some are in camps and four are not functioning because of the civil war.

Memorable Past, Rev. Patrick Jok

It was a humble isolated beginning! SRC has passed through rough waves of uncertainty and ecclesiastical identity but the Lord has continued to guide, protect and keep her faithful in Reformed faith. Due to enormous challenges that have been facing SRC, there were days that I personally was in tears and at the edge of giving up the ministry. We have gone through dark and tough days where total failure of the ministry seemed around the corner. Threats of lack, isolation, fatigue, war, sleepless nights, displacement, family separation, destruction, looting, fear, insecurity and famine gave us hope that He who has saved and called us to this noble ministry will not



Bethel SRC rebuilding completed late 2015

fail us. This is definitely true. When we look back we celebrate joyfully the illustrious short SRC history and what the merciful and faithful heavenly Father has done through us. Christ is the Lord of the church, his bride. With this Silver Jubilee celebration and beginning of new era of SRC Ministry, I foresee more exciting and fruitful years in His service.

Prof. Flip Buys in Juba to attend SRC Silver Jubilee

Prof. Flip Buys, the key note speaker at SRC Silver Jubilee landed and arrived at Juba, South Sudan on 5th December, 2017. He conducted two days of meeting and teaching with some SRC leaders on relevant issues affecting the continent and how they should be biblically addressed.

The Convocation

On Saturday 9th December, 2017 in Juba SRC celebrated joyfully her silver Jubilee. It was a colorful celebration which included singing hymns, reading of the Ten Words of the Covenant, narrating SRC history, renewing the journey of faith by reciting the Apostles' Creed, words of encouragement, prayers, cultural display, launching of SRC history book, SRC strategic plan (2018-2028), preaching, collection of thanksgiving offerings, laughing and feasting.

Bethel choir presented a special hymn entitled, "O Lord heal our land". Its text: "You have redeemed us, used us as vessels cleansed by the Precious's blood of your son and empowered by your spirit to preach and teach your word in our land. In you we live by faith, love and hope."

Children sang a song of praise to the Lord with dancing and jumping: you have called us to be fishers of men. The whole congregation responded with

applauding and ululation.

Acholi Cultural Dance

South Sudan is a nation with 72 tribes and 64 languages. This makes it rich with diverse cultures. On this occasion Acholi cultural dance was skilfully displayed and celebrated.

Prayers

Without prayers offered, SRC would have gone nowhere. Indeed prayers have been a milestone of numerous accomplishments. Anne Reitsema, Country Director of Medair, South Sudan and one of Bethel members gave thanks to the Lord for what had happened in the last 25 year and pleaded with the merciful Father for fruitful and successful ministry in the years to come.

Women in SRC

Women as daughters of God have contributed instrumentally in the life of SRC. With ululation their tremendous contributions were appreciated. Mrs. Bazilica Ropheal Lado in her speech as women representative said: "It has not been easy to reach this day. This church started very small and because it was started by faith it endured and overcame all the hurdles on the way and that is why we celebrate today. With joyful hearts we give thanks to God who has enabled us to celebrate Christ today. Today as we celebrate we can see the fruits of our labor in God's kingdom. If we are where we are today it is because



of grace alone."

Key Note Speech

The key note speech was delivered by Rev. Prof. Flip Buys entitled "Our suffering adds more meaning to the suffering of Christ" with Col 1:24 as the main biblical text.

In his speech he emphasized when we are suffering in carrying out the message of the gospel to others we are adding and extending the meaning of suffering of Christ. "SRC, Christians around the globe are praying and will continue to pray for you. God is using your suffering to add to the meaning of suffering of Christ. You are example and model for all the churches around the world. In spite of all the suffering you continue to preach the message of the gospel." It was an inspiring and touching biblical message.

Hon John Dor Majok's Remarks

"Cross has won and cross will always win!" Introductory remarks of the Adviser of the National Ministry of Finance. He applauded the ministry of SRC and the role she has played in Sudan and South Sudan. The footprint of Reformed Witness is evident to all. He concluded by wishing SRC success in her future ministry in Sudan and South Sudan.

Silver Jubilee celebration was concluded with God's blessing by Rev. Prof Flip Buys and then followed by feasting.

Word of Thanks and Appreciation

With heartfelt gratitude, SRC family would like to thank and appreciate the meaningful and practical contributions many churches and institutions have made toward the success of SRC ministry in the last 25 year of her labor in the Lord's vineyard.

Glory to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!



Dr. Buys delivering his key not speech

REFORMATIONAL STUDY CENTRE

Daily, thousands of people in Africa and Asia convert to the Christian faith

Introduction

In what way can the preaching of the gospel in Africa and parts of Asia be enriched and given greater depth? This is a pressing problem of our time. Daily, thousands of people in Africa and Asia convert to the Christian faith and join churches where the preaching is sincere, but often not sound of doctrine nor rich in content. The reality is that by far most of the preaching is done by lay preachers. And even if the preaching is being done by a trained minister, he almost always has to prepare his sermons without access to any good preaching material. The Reformational Study Centre (RSC) is trying to address this problem by means of a few projects, and through the grace of God it seems as if it will be able to make a difference.

Background

The traditional form of theological education in most of the West is to enroll students in a seminary for four to seven years. For most aspiring students in Africa and parts of Asia this is too expensive, and no currently unqualified minister can leave his congregation for so long. In the meantime, in some countries there are very few qualified ministers!

On the other hand, the Internet has become increasingly available to the average African (minister). The projects of the Reformational Study Centre aim to reach all ministers who want to study the Word of God, but do not have the resources to do so. The founders of the Centre believe that, by the grace of God, a studying minister will become a qualified minister!

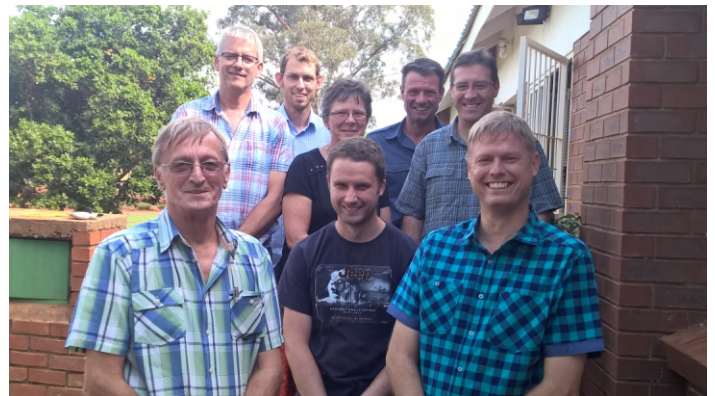
Having launched projects that help ministers, in the meantime the RSC is also making material available to all Christians who wish to deepen their faith and broaden their obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ.

All projects are run from Pretoria, South Africa. The

RSC has a good infrastructure at the moment, but God willing the Centre intends to enlarge the buildings and improve the infrastructure to be able to cope with all the requests it is receiving. The idea is to have a physical Study Centre to enhance study and to collect all important literature for the study of God's Word. The physical buildings are being used as a base and impetus for all the Internet projects.

We have so much wealth

This credo brought the directors of the Reformational Study Centre together: "We have so much wealth! We have a tremendously rich heritage of what it means to live and work with God. But what are we



RSC Board Members

doing to spread and share this wealth of ours?"

This is something that has also touched the hearts of other people who have become involved in the project. It is not only a question of whether we with our rich heritage are committed enough to missionary work and evangelism, but if we really have the zeal and are prepared to make sacrifices to spread this tremendous wealth that has been given to us - for free!

Since starting this service, the RSC has come to realize more and more how big the need really is. After starting with only a few people, at this time a



dedicated group of people is working on the project. In the case of those who are not fulltime employees (and responsible for the livelihood of their families), the work is being done without any form of compensation. In fact, most of the time it costs our volunteers something to do the work! Thanks to the Lord for the great sacrifices and zeal that He is working in the people around the centre.

Vision and mission

In full dependence on the blessing of the Lord, the vision of the Reformational Study Centre is to collect, translate and preserve all Scripturally sound publications in order that everybody may have access to a full library of resources through the Internet. It focuses specifically on:

1. all the ministers in Africa and Asia that are in need of resources and study help, in order to improve and deepen the study of God's Word and the ministry on these continents;
2. theological and educational institutions in third-world situations, to enable students to make a full study of all theological and educational subjects in all their detail;
3. any primary school and teacher in Africa where there is a need for Christian education or Christian schoolbooks;
4. all Christians who wish to study the Word of God in greater depth, but do not have the opportunity and resources to do so.

In other words, "to teach them to observe all things whatsoever Jesus Christ has commanded us" (Matt 28:19b).

The calling (mission) of the RSC is "to distribute resources containing the pure and uncompromised gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We want to eagerly use all the opportunities that our Lord gives us to further the study and understanding of his Word in all churches, institutions and schools. We want to work in full dependence on Christ, each one of us personally committed to follow Him in his work in church and kingdom, regardless of the sacrifices He asks of us. We take all costs on ourselves so that there is no hindrance in the spreading of the gospel and in the obedience and praise to our Lord Jesus Christ."

Reformed character

All directors of the Reformational Study Centre subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Scripture as it is professed in the Three Forms of Unity. In each member's involvement with the Study Centre, this doctrine must be actively promoted and defended.

This is the heart of the organization. Without trustworthy theologians trained in the Reformed faith, the essence of all the services is lost. The mere reason for the existence of the RSC, the helping of other ministers and Christians, is in jeopardy if this section does not function well. As should be clear by now, the aim is that all material must be in accordance with the doctrine found in Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. There are basically three full-time theologians who are responsible for this section, but they also get a lot of help from other ministers and lecturers on an ad hoc basis. The directors are all from South Africa, but there are also



Working on Christ for Africa



specific foundations and groups in Canada, Australia and The Netherlands for the help and support of these projects.


Experience

After a year of preparation, the RSC started an Internet service in July 2008 that provides ministers in Africa and Asia with preaching material. At the moment already more than 3000 ministers (all from Africa and Asia) make use of this service, from more than 50 different countries, and from various denominations.

Although the Centre is situated in a third-world country, the directors still had a lot to learn about the situation in Africa and Asia on how users function, also with regards to computers and the Internet. They have also gained a lot of experience with regard to the best way to make material available to the users, how to work with educational institutes, at which educational level the users in Africa and Asia function etc.

It is with this in mind that they decided to 'build' a Christian Library (through the Internet), specifically for a third-world situation. Although some of the material is 'public' and available to everybody, there are specific services for these people only. They have e-mail contact with thousands of Christians in these countries to encourage them to study and to offer their assistance.

Every time more opportunities have become available, they have tried to start new services in the faith that the Lord will also provide the manpower and finances to help continue the work. "We can only look back in amazement at how the Lord has provided. And now that we need to expand — the Lord knows this! — our trust remains in Him!

"Buy the truth, but do not sell it" (Proverbs 23:23). Every day we are experiencing this truth and command from our Lord in the work that we do. The truth is costing us something, but we want to give it away for free. What a wonderful privilege! We hope you will share in this privilege with us and 'buy' into this work. In this way we will be able to give it away in the same way we received it ourselves: free grace!" 

Note

More information can be found on the website: www.refstudycentre.com.

View of the RSC property



REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE 2018

Twenty denominations, organizations and churches

The 8TH South Asia Conference of the Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship (RPF) was held during 9-12 January 2018 in Bangalore. Ninety delegates from all across the states of India, Bangladesh, Australia and The Netherlands, (comprised of twenty denominations, organizations and churches) attended the conference. The first hour of the conference was observed to commemorate the 500 Years of the Protestant Reformation. Dr. Melle Herman Oosterhuis (DVN), of the Netherlands led the devotion.

Rev. L. Roshyama Hrangchal, President of the RPF, and Vice Principal, PTS, in his keynote address welcomed the participants and thanked the Lord for the opportunity to learn and share our experiences under the umbrella of the Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship. In his address, he spoke on the theme of the conference, "Reformed Perspectives in Ministry Leadership in South Asia," and expressed the need for godly leadership and on present leadership styles and traditional practises in the light of the Biblical principles. PTS teachers and graduates took active parts in the conference.

Based on the theme of the conference, research and reflection papers were presented on the following topics: The Role of a Pastor in the Reformed Tradition (Dr.

Matthew Ebenezer), New Testament Perspectives on Pastoral Ministry (Rev. Vijai Tagore), The Role of Ruling Elders/Officers in Ministry (Rev. Charles A), Ministry Leadership Styles in South Asia, (Rev. Hiralal Solanki), Sustainable Ministry Models in South Asia (Dr. Mohan Chacko), Sustainable Ministry Models with Emphasis on Financial Resourcing (Dr. VL Nghakthang), Legal Aspects of Ministry Leadership (Dr. Sarasu Thomas). Each of the papers was responded by assigned leaders followed by general discussion. Worship services were led by Rev. Abhishek Barla and Rev. Lawrence Ralsun. Delegates from various denominations led each of the seven sessions. The conference was concluded with the ministry of the sacrament. Rev. Paul Billy Arnold, senior pastor of the Bangalore Presbyterian church administered the Lord's Supper.

The conference elected its new officers as follows, most of whom are associated with PTS: President: Rev. L. Roshyama Hrangchal ('91) Uttarakhand, Vice President: Rev. G. Paul Raj (01), Karnataka, Secretary: Rev. Samit Mishra ('07) Madhya Pradesh, Treasurer: Rev. Pau Gualnam (PTS board member) Manipur, Members: Rev. Edwin Singh, Tamilnadu, Rev. Shyam Babu, Madhya Pradesh, Advisor: Dr. Mohan Chacko, (Uttarakhand).



SOVEREIGN GRACE: REAL GOSPEL FOR CHURCH AND WORLD

Annual CRTS Conference, held January 11 to 13, 2018



Mrs. Sarah Vandergugten, a member of a Canadian Reformed Church, taught Bible and World Religions at Credo Christian High School in Langley, British Columbia for 20 years.

2018 CRTS Conference, January 11–13, 2018

Real Gospel: Sovereign Grace for Church and World

Speakers and Speech Titles

1. Dr. Jason Van Vliet, “God the Father and the Real Gospel of Sovereign Grace for You”
2. Dr. Don Sinnema, “A Virtual Tour of the Synod of Dort”
3. Dr. Mark Jones, “What’s the Problem with Arminianism, and Who Are the Arminians Anyway?”
4. Dr. Karlo Janssen, “What Is the Church Order of Dort, and how Does It Maintain Real Gospel?”
5. Dr. Don Sinnema, “The Heidelberg Catechism at the Synod of Dort”
6. Dr. Ted Van Raalte, “God the Son and the Real Gospel of Sovereign Grace for You”
7. Dr. Ted Van Raalte, “Freely-Chosen Faith? Real Gospel and Human Choice”
8. Dr. Mark Jones, “God the Holy Spirit and the Real Gospel of Sovereign Grace for You”

For a British Columbian, a trip to Ontario in mid-January needs to have a good reason.¹ For me, aside from visiting family, the main impetus was the 8th Annual CRTS Conference, held January 11 to 13, 2018 in the Burlington-Ebenezer Canadian Reformed church building. As ordinary church member, this was only the second time attending such a conference. It’s not for lack of interest, but until I retired from teaching, there was little opportunity. Again, the Conference proved worthwhile, though some might wonder how the Synod of Dort and the resultant Canons of Dort might still be relevant after 400 years. By the end of the conference, attendees would have been satisfied. A rich blend of academic speeches, lively discussions, moving testimonials, a varied panel discussion and vibrant social interaction were convincing.

Speakers

Each year, CRTS Conference organizers invite speakers, often leading scholars in the field relating to the conference theme. Dr. Don Sinnema certainly fit the bill with regard to the Synod of Dort, which formed the backdrop for the theme of Sovereign Grace: Real Gospel for Church and World. Sinnema is co-editor at the helm of an international team of forty-five scholars whose goal it is to transcribe all documents of the Synod of Dort in their original languages (Latin, Dutch, German, French and English) in a series of nine volumes. 2019 will mark the 400th anniversary of

the close of the great Synod, but this monumental task will take some time to complete. All material will become readily accessible, hopefully sparking renewed interest in this aspect of Reformed tradition.

The second invited speaker, Dr. Mark Jones, is pastor of Faith Vancouver (PCA). In 2009, he defended his doctoral dissertation on the Christology of the Puritan Thomas Goodwin at the University of Leiden where, perhaps somewhat ironically, Jacobus Arminius had been professor of theology 400 years earlier. Jones is the author of several books that distil academic theology into writing accessible to folk in the pew—among others, *Knowing Christ*; *Faith, Hope, Love: The Christ-Centered Way to Grow in Grace*; and *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God*. Jones is a regular speaker at theological conferences in far flung parts of the world—South Africa to Korea—and is a frequent, lively and sometimes controversial blogger. He is not unfamiliar with the Canadian Reformed community, since the four Jones children attend William of Orange Christian School in Cloverdale.

As is customary, CRTS professors



¹ Editor: British Columbia is the warmest province of Canada.

present papers at these conferences. This year the task was ably filled by Dr. Jason Van Vliet (Dogmatology) and Dr. Ted Van Raalte (Ecclesiology). Dr. Karlo Janssen filled the final spot, relaying his expertise on the Church Order of Dort.

Speeches

The bulk of conference time was devoted to eight speeches over a period of forty hours, a feast for the mind and the heart. (See side bar for topics and speakers.) The goal was three-fold: explore the doctrines of the triune God's sovereign grace and human responsibility, provide historical context, and give real-life context via believers' testimonials. Attempting to summarize the speeches would require thousands of words, so a highlight from each must suffice. All the speeches are available on the resource page of the CRTS website (www.crts.ca) and well worth viewing, perhaps by forgoing Netflix fare for an evening or two.

The first public lecture was by Dr. Jason Van Vliet: God the Father and the Real Gospel of Grace for You. He described a loving, sovereign Father who adopts those he chooses and enables them to persevere. In fleshing out these truths, Van Vliet developed a helpful parable about the Kingdom of Mundus, where a gracious king decreed that a certain number of his recalcitrant, rebellious citizens would receive an undeserved inheritance, gained for them at great cost by his natural son.

On Friday morning, a unique visitor took the lectern. A certain Dr. Johannes Bogerman, apparently fresh from his duties as chair of the Synod of Dort, regaled the audience with a first-person description of all that had transpired: the Synod's international character, the wrangling with and expulsion of the Arminian delegates, and the careful drafting of the Canons in response to the Remonstrant objections concerning predestination and related points.

Dr. Mark Jones provided an historical overview of Arminian teaching. He noted they did not deny grace, predestination and election, but gave their own meaning to these words. Arminians are Christians, believing salvation is in Christ alone, but changes in doctrine are not static, and continue to have a cascading effect to this day.



Dr. Karlo Janssen, in fine detail, described the practicality and importance of Dort church polity, noting this is where the rubber of faith and confession hits the road of church life and practice. He traced the historical developments from Dort to the Doleantie, noting that in the end proper church polity assists in maintaining the Real Gospel of Grace.

In the fourth speech of the day, Dr. Don Sinnema provided an overview of the Synod of Dort's interaction with the Heidelberg Catechism. In effect, it confirmed and strengthened the authority of the Catechism in the Dutch Reformed churches, both as the primary pedagogical tool for Christian instruction and as a confessional standard to ensure orthodox Reformed teaching in the churches.

In the evening's public lecture, Dr. Ted Van Raalte addressed the topic, God the Son and the Real Gospel of Sovereign Grace for You. He argued that Jesus did much more than make possible our salvation (Arminian thought), but that he has fully redeemed, saved, reconciled, justified, and adopted those for whom he lovingly laid down his life.

Saturday morning, Dr. Ted Van Raalte explored the mystery of God's sovereignty and human choice. He traced the theme from Augustine via Luther and Calvin to our Reformed confessions, high-lighting the beautiful words in the Canons of Dort, III/IV.12: "And then the will, so renewed, is not only acted upon and moved by God, but acted upon by God, the will itself also acts. Therefore man himself is rightly said to believe and repent through the grace he has received."

This speech was followed by a lively panel discussion moderated by Jason Heemskerk. The panel was comprised of a professor: Dr. Van Vliet; a preacher: Rev. Peter Holtvluwer; a student: Kevin Wattel; and a teacher (retired): Sarah Vandergugten. Some of the topics addressed: How should we regard our children in the church, family or classroom—as saved, or should we be calling them to faith? As a teacher/preacher how do you explain that so many discoveries and advances in science, math, and the arts are made by non-Christians? How do you explain, biblically speaking, the positive contributions they have made?

In the eighth and final speech, Dr. Mark Jones addressed the role of the Holy Spirit. He works 'immediately' on us with the Word. Christ-focused preaching is essential. The Holy Spirit functions as a flood light on the work of Christ, so that our longing is to become more Christ-like. He

noted that many Christians have to learn that not only they are saved by grace, but that others are as well. We need patience, love, and gentleness in our interaction with others who are not at the same place we are.

Testimonials

I suspect that for many participants the most moving aspect of the conference were the testimonials of three individuals who related their stories of becoming Christians or of returning to the faith. Their first person



accounts, professionally recorded, gave life to the doctrines of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. The first man spoke of his despair as an addict suffering from schizophrenia, unemployed, and reacting to his life in anger and frustration. Thankfully he came into contact with Bible teacher, Richard Bultje. He became convinced of his sin and need for the saviour, Jesus Christ. When asked where he would be if God had not intervened, he answered bluntly, "I would be dead!" God pulled him from the depth of despair. He quipped that his life had not followed the typical Canadian Reformed pattern since he became sober in his thirties, began work in his forties and married in his fifties. He works as a counsellor, ever thankful for GRACE: God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

The second, a woman, grew up Christian, but experienced a disconnect between scripture and life. As a teen, she attempted to fill her emptiness with sexual immorality, beginning with porn. She noted that sin is like cancer; it spreads to fill our emptiness. She ran from home, determined to control her own life, with little success. Years later, God brought her to the bottom of herself. She felt compelled to return to church. On a subsequent Sunday, she cried as she drove, "God, don't let me down, don't let me down." She took a seat in a back pew, and in

God's good providence, witnessed a baptism. She realized the covenant promises were for her, too! She could be forgiven. The road back was not easy, but God was faithful. She urged us to walk alongside those who struggle, open about our own vulnerabilities. Do the loving; the Holy Spirit will do the work!

The third testimonial was equally sincere. This man joined the church in large part because he loved a woman and wanted to marry her. It was a good decision, but he noted that it was not until he suffered a brain tumor that he became a different person. He experienced an ever deepening grace in his life, and realized that God will carry him and his family through all of life's circumstances. He loves his church family.

These testimonials clarified not only the sovereignty of God and human responsibility as it pertained to these particular individuals. It sounded an urgent message that God chooses to use believers in vital ways to bring his elect into the fold. We may not ignore that responsibility.

Reflections:

The schedule gave ample time for refreshments and social interaction, a vital part of such a conference, where participants travel significant distances. One pastor noted, "I appreciate the speeches, but I love the opportunity to connect with my colleagues." In addition, there was an interesting gallery of artifacts related to the Synod of Dort, provided by Dr. Sinnema. Another highlight was the opportunity to view a rare first edition (1637) of the Dort Bible, provided by Rev. George van Popta. (This was the first official translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek into the Dutch language.)

I came away from this conference with renewed gratitude for the work of the CRTS among churches it serves. Over the years, the Conference Organizing Committee has effectively worked to broach a broad range of topics from church planting to Reformed hermeneutics to eschatology to commemorating important milestones in church history—the Heidelberg Catechism, the Reformation and the Synod of Dort. (The CRTS website has links to speeches back to 2012). The goal—one that requires long term vision and planning—is to offer conferences that are both stimulating and relevant to 21st century church members. This year's event affirmed my appreciation for our Reformed heritage. Our history is important. Ideas have legs; changes in doctrine have consequences. *



Mr. John Elliott is a writer, translator, journalist, instructor. He lives in Washington, DC area.

THE NEW PCA

Gender Apartheid

You know something is going on when the left-leaning *The Atlantic* devotes a long article to the Presbyterian Church in America.

On July 5th, 2017 reporter Emma Green delved into the discussion of race and gender that is taking place in the largest conservative Presbyterian denomination. Green's jump off point was "Truth Table," a podcast hosted by three Black Presbyterian women: Calvin College Dean Christina Edmondson, an Orthodox Presbyterian, and Ekemini Uwan and Michelle Higgins, both PCA members. On March 25th, 2017 they were joined by Tyler Burns and Jemar Tisby, of the Reformed African American Network. The topic for this broadcast was "Gender Apartheid." As you might expect this provocative title produced a discussion comparing gender apartheid to Southern U.S. segregation and South Africa.

Michelle Higgins provided the most memorable quotes during the podcast: "What does 'ordain-able' mean? It literally means, 'possesses a penis'." She went on to assert that "no one will hear me unless maybe I design and develop a penis-shaped microphone."

Michelle Higgins is a Covenant Theological Seminary graduate. Her father Mike Higgins is Dean of Students and Adjunct Professor of Applied Theology. Michelle works on the staff of South City Church (PCA) in St Louis. She is no stranger to controversy. Michelle Higgins gained national attention for her speeches at the Urbana Missions Conference in 2015 where she praised the "Black Lives Matter" movement and condemned the evangelical church for its "adultery with white supremacy."

As you might expect the "Gender Apartheid" podcast drew some criticism. Todd Pruitt, a PCA pastor in Harrisonburg, VA, wrote in his blog "The Mortification of Spin" that the podcast contained "typical boilerplate liberation theology which is fundamentally unbiblical and incompatible with the Gospel and the church's mission." Others criticized the coarse language. But Higgins and company also got support. The Atlantic reporter spoke with Tim LeCroy, a white PCA minister in Missouri, who called on Pruitt to apologize: "My sense is that this

became a proxy for a lot of other stuff going on, even in the broader culture." When someone called Todd Pruitt a racist, he took his blog post down.

Change in the air

Welcome to the "New" PCA where a "Black Lives Matter" activist can roil the whole denomination and get applause from other PCA pastors. Why does Michelle Higgins have this kind of a platform? Because the denomination has given her one. The last three General Assemblies have placed racial reconciliation and diversity at the center of church policy. Higgins can hardly be blamed for asking the PCA to consider the implications of a theology of social justice for gender in the church. After all, she learned it at the PCA's very own seminary.

The Atlantic reporter picked up on this. After her discussion of the "Gender Apartheid" podcast, Green visited the PCA's General Assembly in June of 2017. This GA discussed a long anticipated report "On Women Serving in the Ministry of the Church." Contrary to the fears of many, the report did not open a path for the ordination of women. Kathy Keller, a committee member, even said that if you want to ordain women to the ministry, you do not belong in the PCA.

The General Assembly adopted all nine recommendations on how to give women a fuller place in the life of the church. But The Atlantic reporter correctly detected that not all is well on this front. A number of PCA churches are unhappy with the gender status quo. Some have declined to ordain deacons so that they can have diaconates consisting of men and women. The Intown Church in Portland, Oregon, left the PCA in 2016 to join the Reformed Church in America in order to have women elders. Undoubtedly there are more congregations that sympathize with Intown. Gender is also on the move in the PCA.

The "old" PCA

When I joined the PCA's first church plant in New York City in 1980, I encountered a different denomination. To understand where the PCA is today, let's look briefly at the origins and the first two decades of the denomination.

The PCA came out of a thirty year struggle against modernism in the Presbyterian Church United States. The PCUS was primarily based in the South. In 1973, 260 congregations and 41,000 members withdrew from the PCUS to form the PCA. By 1980 the denomination had grown to 500 congregations and 80,000 members. The Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod – Francis Schaeffer's church – united with the PCA in 1982, bringing in more than 25,000 members. Between aggressive church planting and churches leaving the liberal Presbyterian bodies, the PCA totaled 1086 congregations and 242,500 members at its 20th anniversary in 1993.

From the very beginning the PCA intended to become a nation-wide church. In 1980 it was still an overwhelmingly Southern church. But since then the PCA has grown to cover the entire United States. One third of the membership is now outside of the traditional Presbyterian strongholds in the Southeast. The PCA now has 370,000 members and 1892 congregations. About 84% of the PCA is white, 15% is Korean while Latinos and African Americans make up the rest.

In the 1980s, the major point of disagreement was how Reformed a congregation should be. Some pastors and church planters wanted to feed their flocks the Westminster Standards from the very start. Others adopted a broader Evangelical approach. They suggesting going easy on the Reformed distinctives. The former were often labeled “TR's” – the Truly Reformed. It wasn't necessarily a term of endearment.

These two schools of thought worked themselves out in practice in the church plants. In the early 1990's my wife Janke and I moved to Manassas, Virginia, where three PCA church plants represented three different modalities. One congregation, led by a very charismatic pastor, offered praise songs, short sermons and lots of programs. A second was explicitly Reformed. This congregation was marked by large homeschooled families, long sermons and a conscious exercise of discipline. One of the first services we visited included an excommunication. The third congregation was somewhere between the other two – the Trinity Hymnal and praise songs. In suburban Maryland, where we now live, the church plants from the 1980s and 90s display the same variation. One congregation sings the Geneva psalms while another has a loud praise band.

Diversity and the rise of the progressive wing

The contrast of Reformed versus broader Evangelical congregations characterized the PCA for its first 30 years. But the most recent PCA General Assemblies indicate that the church is developing a “progressive” wing. This new modality considers racial diversity to be a defining mark of the visible church in America.

I recently encountered an example of this in the “Church Planter Profile” of a Covenant Seminary graduate aiming to start a church in Hyattsville, Maryland, a gentrifying 'Hipster' community featured in Rod Dreher's book, *The Benedict Option*. In his “Profile” the candidate writes: “My conviction since entering seminary has been to lead a multi-ethnic church. I want to lead a church that reflects the racial, economic and generational diversity of the community.” He lists the strengths that he and his wife bring to the table: “We have proven experience with cross-cultural ministry. We have substantial experience with mercy ministry and fostering awareness of oppression among dominant culture.” He and his wife are looking for a site with racial and economic diversity, particularly in the Black and White population.

In the Profile the candidate says nothing about his ability



to teach or preach. He makes no mention of the Reformed faith, Calvinism or even the word Presbyterian. The closest thing to a statement about his theological convictions is the assertion that he has experience with “fostering awareness of oppression among dominant culture,” which only shows he has absorbed the sociology taught in the systematics courses at Covenant. The candidate also shared comments made by assessors at the denomination's Mission to North America Church

Planting Assessment Center in Atlanta. This is a typical example: “He has the ability to think and lead cross culturally and build strong relationships with those who are different from him.” The comments from the assessors reveal nothing about his aptitude to teach, his commitment to the Westminster Standards or his desire to plant a specifically Presbyterian church.

Recent GA actions

The last three General Assemblies have been the most visible manifestation of the foothold that the theology of diversity has in the PCA.

At the General Assembly of 2015 several teaching elders led by Ligon Duncan, Chancellor of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, introduced personal resolutions asking the PCA to apologize for the opposition of member congregations to the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Emotions ran high. That General Assembly tabled (postponed) the resolutions because they had not been placed on the General Assembly's docket by the lower church courts. In response several dozen congregations formulated similar resolutions, which sailed through the various presbyteries. The denomination's official magazine made racial reconciliation the cover story for its next two issues.

At the 2016 General Assembly three different resolutions made it to the docket. The first was a confession of sin for the active support of some Presbyterian congregations for segregation and their failure to support the Civil Rights movement. The second called for the formation of a committee to investigate race relations in the PCA. The third resolution called for the establishment of a “Unity Fund” to provide scholarships to African American students to pay for seminary in order to pursue ordination in the PCA. The Unity Fund was the brain child of one of my pastors at Wallace Presbyterian. All three resolutions passed with overwhelming majorities.

At the 2017 GA, racial reconciliation and diversity remained major themes. A Korean American was elected moderator while African American pastors played major roles in the daily worship services. The opening worship service featured an African American praise band. The committee to study race relations in the PCA was given another year to complete its work and report back. The leadership of the PCA made clear its commitment to move towards a diverse, multi-racial denomination.

It is important to remember that the 2016 General Assembly declared that racial reconciliation is a Gospel task, not just a fruit of the Gospel. In this regard the resolution commits the PCA to “lovingly confront our brothers and sisters concerning racial sins.” The contributors to “Reformed Margins,” a website for minority voices discussing the Reformed faith, have interpreted the 2016 resolutions to mean active measures. In an article from April 26th, 2017, the writers criticize Rev. Harry Reeder, the pastor of the 4000 member Briarwood Presbyterian in Birmingham, Alabama, for speaking at events organized by the Sons of Confederate Veterans in 2009 and 2012. The authors are aghast that the 2009 event, to celebrate the birthday of Robert E Lee¹, was held on Martin Luther King Day. They found these revelations about Reeder “confusing, disturbing, and potentially damaging for the witness of Christ's Church.” They ask: “Is he a supporter of the Confederate flag, a symbol of hate and oppression?” “How does this fit with the PCA's Racial Reconciliation Statement which Rev. Reeder signed?” Reeder has not responded.

To give the resolutions “hands and feet,” as some delegates put it, the 2016 General Assembly also established the Racial Reconciliation and Ethnic Diversity Committee. It has three tasks: To assess the current situation in the PCA regarding racial reconciliation to identify specific problems; to promote racial reconciliation and ethnic diversity; and to develop guidelines and suggest concrete steps for use by presbyteries and sessions to make progress towards racial reconciliation. The committee is supposed to deliver its report in 2018. In a letter to the elders of Wallace Presbyterian Church, I expressed my concern about the obvious danger inherent in this committee, namely, that the “guidelines and suggestions” will become decrees imposed by the presbyteries on local congregations.

The ordinary means of grace churches versus the churches of diversity

Wallace Presbyterian Church, my own congregation, provides a good example of the issues at stake. Wallace is 117 years old. Its motto has been “The Word of God in

¹ Robert Edward Lee was the commander of the Confederate States Army in the American Civil War, fought in the United States from 1861 to 1865, the controversy over slavery between the Northern and Southern States.

the Pulpit and the Classroom.” The congregation is known for exceptionally gifted preachers and regular Bible conferences. The 400 member church is also “diverse.” 75% of the members are white professionals who work in and around Washington DC. The other 25% consists of African Americans, Pakistanis, Brazilians, and Africans from Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana. Over the past four years increasing numbers of visiting Chinese scholars and graduate students at the University of Maryland have come to faith at Wallace. On Easter Sunday of 2017 we baptized six Chinese who have since returned to China.

If you ask the African Americans why they attend Wallace, they will say that they come because of the preaching and the Reformed theology. In other words, they first came through the “Ordinary Means of Grace.” The same thing can be said about the Africans and the Chinese. The “racial reconciliation” within the congregation has been a fruit of the Gospel. It was never considered a gospel task.

Nevertheless, Wallace is not a “diverse” church because it does not reflect the demographics of Prince Georges County. 64% of the County is Black, 18% Hispanic and 12% White. One of our ministers, a graduate of Covenant Theological Seminary, thinks that we need to correct that imbalance with active measures to recruit African Americans. For example, using hymnbooks from Black churches. Or by calling a Black Associate Pastor. Up to this point the congregation has shown little interest.

The divide between the broadly Evangelical and the Truly Reformed in the PCA will become less defining for the denomination. I suspect that new divide in the PCA is coming into view. On one side will be the congregations which focus on “the ordinary means of grace” and view racial reconciliation and diversity as a fruit of the Gospel. On the other side will be the congregations which view racial reconciliation and diversity as an essential mark of the church. Since the church bureaucracy is pushing the second version, this divide will start to grow.

Women in office, hipster churches and the growing cultural divide in the PCA

The divide in the PCA will likely not be limited to the “ordinary means of grace” churches versus “diversity as the fourth mark of the church.” I am afraid that the role of women will join the discussion. The public remarks of Michelle Higgins show that the denominationally approved social justice theology has obvious implications

for the question of gender. Intown Church of Portland, Oregon certainly showed that some in the PCA are ready for female elders.

Something more is going on. The pastor of Intown Church in Portland, Brian Prentiss, made the very interesting remark that “we don't want to spend any more time than is absolutely necessary itemizing the negative components that we feel are a part of the PCA's culture.” What does he mean by that comment? His blog post from June 2015 following the Supreme Court's Obergefell decision to legalize same sex marriage provides a good clue. He writes that some in his congregation greeted the decision enthusiastically. Others did not. But the blog post makes clear that Prentiss did not think the whole matter to be terribly important. In other words, he doesn't feel at home with the Red State², social conservative voting Republicans who comprise the core of the PCA. This urban hipster lives with people who have other values and concerns.

In this regard the political and social questions which divide the American nation are starting to divide the PCA. The PCA was founded and built by well educated, white, upper middle-class churchmen. They tended to have homogenous political and social views, most gravitating to the Reagan Republican coalition and staying there. Their children and grandchildren, however, have attended elite schools. Through that education many have absorbed the cultural leftist view that racial, gender and sexual equality are all on the same plane. Many live and work in urban communities where those views are simply a given. How do they explain to their coworkers that women cannot hold church office? Or that gay men cannot be communicant members? I hardly think that Intown in Portland is the only congregation of its kind in the PCA. There must be many more congregations embarrassed by the Red State color of the PCA. The question is how do they feel about the future direction of the PCA? The denominational leadership is certainly signaling that it wants to move in their progressive direction. *

This article was first published in Christian Renewal, Volume 35 #16, August 23, 2017.

² Since the 2000 United States presidential election, red states and blue states have referred to states of the United States whose voters predominantly choose either the Republican Party (red, social conservative) or Democratic Party (blue, social progressive).



EUCRC CONFERENCE MAY 15-18, 2018

... a regional conference of the ICRC

The European Conference of Reformed Churches (EuCRC) is a conference for churches in Europe that hold to a Reformed confession of the Christian Faith. It is a regional conference of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). The EuCRC has planned the next conference for 15-18th May 2018 in Staffordshire, United Kingdom.

The purpose of the EuCRC is:

- to express and promote the unity of faith that the European member churches have in Christ;
- to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the European member churches;
- to encourage cooperation among the European member churches in the fulfillment of their missionary and other mandates;
- to study the common problems and issues that confront the European member churches and to seek to make recommendations with respect to these matters;
- to provide opportunities for non-member churches, organizations and persons to meet.
- to present a Reformed testimony to Europe.

Member Churches

CRC - Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (CGK)

EPCEW - Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (including Sweden)

EPCI - Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland

FCS - Free Church of Scotland

FCC - Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

RCN - Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKV)

RPCI - Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

RCS - Reformed Churches of Spain (IRE)

Observers

MTW - Mission to the World

ERKWB - Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche Westminster Bekenntnisse

KKERPE - Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central & Eastern Europe

REC - Romania Evangelical Church

In addition to official delegations from the member denominations, other Reformed churches within Europe can request an invitation from one of the member churches.

History

The European Conference of Reformed Churches has convened six European conferences to date: in Soest (2007 and 2008), in Edinburgh (2010), in Kiev (2012), in Cardiff (2014) and in De Glind (2016).

As with the full International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), the European regional conference (EuCRC) has taken a keen interest in mission since its inception in 2007. The leading concern is to promote effective mission to Europe. Also, having a strong conviction that God's purpose among men is to build his church, the task of church planting (and renewal) is primary. Churches being planted (alongside those established over the longer term) are the clearest indicators of the progress of this mission task.

In March 2008 the EuCRC initiated an exercise to gather information on the church planting projects being undertaken by the member churches. This has continued since, and should be expected to be a continuous scheme, as long as the work of church expansion is sustained by the church federations and denominations represented in the conference.

First information (presented at the 2010 conference in Edinburgh) was gathered from six of the then seven member churches. This showed a concentration of efforts



in The Netherlands – which can be attributed to the two largest member churches being Dutch. There was also a scattered presence in the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland, England & Wales, Scotland), and the Republic of Ireland. It was known that work is also going on in places such as Spain, but specific information was not then available. In the following two years few additions were made, but did include such groups as those working in Austria and Switzerland.

This collection of information is intended to more accurately determine those parts of Europe where there is currently no Reformed, gospel work. In 2008, there was a suggestion the churches should aim to plant 100 new churches in key locations across the continent, in co-operative projects. However, at that point, no one was able to say definitively which of those places are without Reformed churches. Thus it will be necessary to compile data on all existing, developing, or prospective Reformed church presence. This still needs refinement for member churches, and a broader scope to include affiliated work.

Out of the Ukraine 2012 conference came an agreement that member churches should take the draft survey document to: 1) review their own entries; 2) act as conduits for similar information from those other bodies. These bodies will include other European churches whom they are willing to endorse ('affiliates', perhaps) as reliably 'Reformed' groups; and some awareness of such work as that done by 'Redeemer Network' or 'Acts 29' will also be valuable.

On the website there is an interactive map showing the location of mission churches.

At the website also the papers presented at previous EuCRC

Conferences and a survey of theological colleges or seminaries of EuCRC member denominations and other Reformed theological institutions in the EuCRC region.

The next EuCRC conference

The seventh conference is planned for 15-18th May 2018 in Yarnfield Park Training and Conference Centre, Yarnfield, Stone, Staffordshire, ST15 0NL, United Kingdom (www.yarnfieldpark.co.uk).


This year's focus is the theme of 'Caring for the Church of God'. In a world characterised by much suffering and indifference, the Church of Jesus Christ is to show to the world the caring heart of a gracious and loving Saviour as its members live together under the loving authority of their Lord.

We will be considering the care of pastors and of members, together with the place of church discipline and the ministry of deacons. Through prayerful listening to God and each other we hope to strengthen our unity and fellowship in Christ to the glory of God.

Four speakers will present papers on aspects of this theme:

- Dr José de Segovia (IRE) – 'Caring for God's Flock'
- Rev Andrew Lucas (EPCI) – 'Caring for the Pastors'
- Rev William Macleod (FCSC) – 'Pastoral Care and Church Discipline'
- Rev G Drayer (CGK) – 'The Office of Deacon'

The cost for attending the whole conference is £280 or €316.

The full programme is available on the website www.eucrc.org. 

For registration please follow this link:

<http://eucrc.org/index.php/conferences/2018/registration>

