



Lux Mundi

42:1 April 2023

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



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Calvin the Pastor

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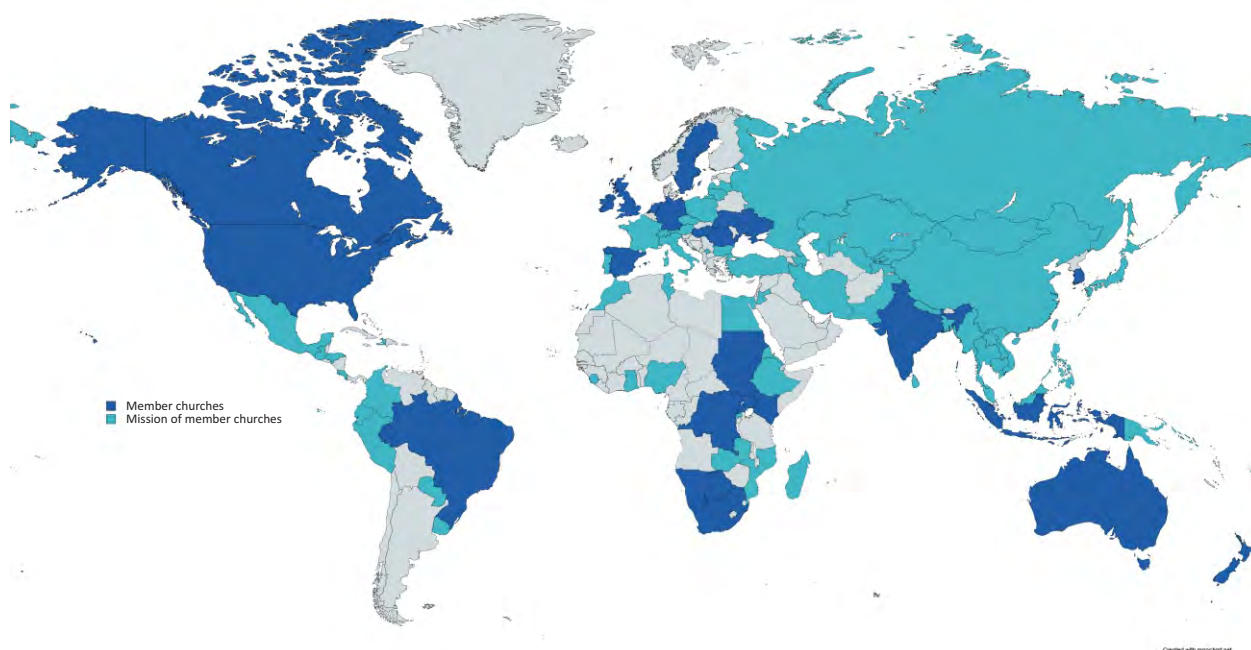
A Squinting God

Psalm 11 has the curious words: "The LORD's eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man." How do you test someone with your eyelids?

The context points us to the answer. Psalm 11 begins with the Psalmist reporting how people despair of security and hope. The Psalmist is advised to flee. "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

The Psalmist, however, does not despair. The LORD is in His holy temple-palace, the LORD's throne is in heaven. His eyes see, indeed, He narrows His eyelids, He squints, He notices everything. God's people can take confidence in God's continued governance over the world.

As the pages of this *Lux Mundi* make clear, our Triune God continues to be involved, continues to guide and lead. The Lord is incomparable, as the devotional reminds us. The various ICRC committees have begun their activities, find some of that reported in the pages that follow. We also share reports of an ecumenical meeting in North America and of the broadest assemblies of two ICRC member churches. There is an article on life in South Africa. Finally, there's a meaty reflection on John Calvin as pastor. Enjoy the read!



Nations where ICRC member churches and their mission projects are located



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).

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The Lord is incomparable!

O Lord GOD, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours? (Deuteronomy 3:24).

Editor: the following devotional was presented the second day of the ICRC 2022.

Deuteronomy 3 is surely one of the most moving passages in Scripture. Here we hear how Moses ... the leader of the Israelites for the past 40 years ... at the ripe old age of 120 ... begs the Lord to allow him to enter the Promised Land. We can almost see the events before our eyes: An old man; years of faithful service behind him; this in the midst of very difficult circumstances and a difficult people; and he begs; his words are full of reverence and humility... And this is followed by the unfavourable answer of the Lord. Moses' request is not answered. He will not enter the Promised Land.

But there's more to Deuteronomy 3. Although it deals with Moses' request and the Lord's answer, the passage is primarily about who the Lord is... what He is doing ... and how we should respond to this. Listen once more: Deuteronomy 3 is primarily about who the Lord is... what He is doing ... and how we should respond to this.

We can summarise who the Lord is according to our passage in a single sentence: He is incomparable! There is no one like Him. He is unique; He is in a class of his own. As we listen to the exposition of our passage, we'll come back to this thought time and again: The Lord is incomparable!

The first reference to this is found in Moses' opening words. He states:

THE LORD IS GREAT AND MIGHTY AND ABLE TO DO ALL THINGS (Deut 3:24)

Moses begins his prayer with praise. He states in verse 24: "O Lord God, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours".

Moses' praise consists of amazement at the Lord's attributes. He is great and mighty ... and his "works" and "mighty deeds" testify to that. More than that, the Lord is unique. Moses compares the Lord to the so-called gods of the nations around Israel and asks: Can one of them do what the Lord has done?

The implied answer, of course, is "no". Moses even makes his field of inquiry as big as the universe itself. Can any god "in heaven" or "on earth" do such things? Could any god anywhere do such a thing? Not at all. The Lord is unique.

The uniqueness of the Lord is a fact that is emphasized throughout Deuteronomy. This is also a major theme in Isaiah, and we find this confession in many Psalms. The Lord alone is God ... and consequently, we should love and serve Him alone with all our heart and soul and strength and mind.

But Moses' praise in verse 24 goes even further. He says: "O Lord God, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand". You have only begun. Moses is convinced that what he saw of the Lord is only the beginning. These words are absolutely striking if we keep in mind who is speaking here:

- The one speaking here is Moses. The leader-prophet-lawgiver of the people of Israel. A man who has been in active service for forty years. Someone with whom the Lord spoke face to face like a man with his friend (Ex 33:11). Someone who saw the Lord from behind (Ex 33:23). If there is one person who, humanly speaking, could have known the Lord the "best", it is Moses.
- Think about all the events that Moses saw. He saw the Lord's appearance in the burning bush; the ten plagues; the pillars of cloud and fire; the manna and quails; the water from the rock; the ten commandments on Mount Sinai, accompanied by smoke and fire and thunder; the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle; the various plagues which the Lord unleashed among his own people because of their rebellion; the judgment on Korah, Dathan and Abiram; the victories over King Og and King Bashan... The list can go on and on. Think about everything Moses has seen. And now he says: "O Lord God, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand"

If there is one thing we need to hear from these words, it's this: The Lord is much bigger and more powerful than we often think. Too easily we think too little of Him. He is capable

of anything. He is God – and He alone! He made all things, takes care of all things, and directs all things according to his will. He can do infinitely more than we can ever pray or think (Eph 3:20). Take to heart: The Lord is great and mighty and capable of all things...

But ... isn't it wonderful to realize that Moses' words in Deuteronomy 3 were absolutely spot on? Moses is convinced that he has only seen the beginning of the Lord's greatness and power. And that was indeed the case. After Moses, the Lord showed his greatness and power with the entry of the Promised Land; and then in the time of the judges, followed by the monarchy in Israel ... eventually in the exile, and the return ... and finally, in the fullness of time, in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ we see the greatness and power of the Lord par excellence. Moses indeed only saw the beginning; the climax of God's greatness and power is seen in Christ.

And at the same time we know that there is another climax that lies ahead: the consummation of all things with the return of Christ. Of this we are certain. As a church we are patiently waiting for this. And in this period between Christ's coming and second coming, the Spirit reminds us of what Christ taught us. He reminds us of the greatness of our Saviour, and He guides us to become more and more what we already are in Christ. The Spirit makes us long for that day, and He enables us to pray with the church of all ages: "Come Lord, and come soon". What a glorious future – and what a wonderful comfort.

The second aspect of the Lord's incomparability that is emphasized in our passage, is found in verse 25 and 26:

THE LORD IS HOLY (Deut 3:25-26)

We hear this in Moses' request to enter the Promised Land, and the Lord's answer.

In verse 25 Moses prays: "Please let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon". Earlier, in Numbers 20, the Lord had forbidden Moses to enter the Promised Land. At the waters of Meribah, Moses disobeyed the Lord by not speaking to the rock, but hitting it. Moses and Aaron did not uphold the Lord as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel. Their punishment is that they will not lead the people into the Promised Land.

Moses' great desire is to enter and see the promised land. From experience Moses also knew that the Lord sometimes relents from the punishment He announced based on a sincere intercessory prayer (Ex 32:11-14; Num 14:13-14). This is what Moses hopes for in his prayer.

But the Lord's answer is different than Moses hoped. Just imagine how the words of Deuteronomy 3:26 must have struck Moses: "But the Lord was angry with me because of you and would not listen to me". The Lord became angry with Moses, and didn't hear his prayer.

The exact reason for the Lord's refusal is not stated in the text. Many commentators have attempted to deduce the exact reason. One possibility is that Moses is still blaming the people for his sin. He states that the Lord was angry with me "because of you". What is clear is that Moses was forbidden to enter the Promised Land, because the Lord had decided so ... and Moses had to accept it. The Lord forbids him to speak of the matter again.

What is very clear is that from this passage and Scripture as a whole is that the Lord is holy. He is perfect and sinless and set apart, exalted above his creation. Complete reverence and obedience are due to Him. Even Moses, the great and important leader-legislator-prophet, is not merely forgiven his sins. When it comes to worship and obedience, Moses is a human being just like us. He too must bear the consequences of his actions. Ultimately, he too needs a Saviour, which calls for the coming and ministry of Christ.

The third aspect of the Lord's incomparability that is emphasized in our passage is

THE LORD IS MERCIFUL (Deut 3:27)

We hear this in the Lord's words that follow. Verse 27: "Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward, and look at it with your eyes, for you shall not go over this Jordan".

Moses requested two things: to enter the Promised Land and to see it. The Lord did not answer Moses' first request ... but the second one He did. Moses will not enter the Promised Land, but he may see it. He can do this by climbing to the top of Mount Pisgah and looking to the west and north and south and east.

The holy Lord is still merciful. The Lord did not have to this. In his holiness He could have decided that Moses will not enter nor see the promised land. But He doesn't. He allows this part of Moses' request. This links on to what we hear in so many passages of Scriptures, and therefore also confess on our confessions: The Lord is completely just... but also merciful.

The Lord answered Moses' prayer, but differently than he hoped. In a certain sense there is a striking parallel between Moses' prayer in Deuteronomy 3 and Paul's prayer in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul repeatedly asked the Lord for something,

but his prayer was heard differently than he hoped. The thorn in his flesh was not removed. The Lord said to him: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). Or think of our Lord Jesus Christ's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. This prayer was also answered differently by his Father. It was God's will that Christ should drink the cup of suffering – all for the sake of his great plan, and our salvation.

If the Lord answers your prayers differently than you think or hope, do not view it as a sign of his anger or indifference. On the contrary. He is fulfilling his great plan. He is merciful. Trust in his will.

The fourth aspect of the Lord's incomparability, which is emphasized in our passage, links on to this:

THE LORD IS FULFILLING HIS PLAN (Deut 3:28)

In verse 28 the Lord gives Moses instructions regarding Joshua: “But charge Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he shall go over at the head of this people, and he shall put them in possession of the land that you shall see”.

Joshua would lead the people into the Promised Land. The Lord's plan for his people to enter the Promised Land continues. It is only the instrument or agent that changes. Joshua will do it, not Moses.

This is a very important principle that we should take to heart. We are but instruments in the hand of the Lord. At the end of the day, it is his will and his great plan that should and will be fulfilled.

There are several examples of this in Scripture. Think of Elijah who had to anoint Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19:19-21). Think of the apostles who appointed someone in the place of Judas as an apostle (Acts 1:15-26). Think of Paul who equipped elders on his missionary journeys, and his correspondence with younger pastors (Acts 14:23; 1-2 Tim; Tit). The work in God's kingdom continues. The only “Person” who had no successor is Christ. He did not need a successor, because his work was perfect and complete. But the work that you and I do in God's church and kingdom will – if the Lord Jesus does not come in our time – always have successors. But what a comfort! What a calling! I may know that God's plan is being carried out - and He will consummate this on the great day of Christ's return. By God's grace I am part of this! The Holy Spirit guides me in the work I do for the Lord, so that it extends to his glory, to the building up of his church, and to the expansion of his kingdom. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, fulfil your calling. Do what the Lord has assigned you to do ... knowing that you are part of God's bigger plan.

To Conclude:

Throughout Deuteronomy 3:23-29 we hear: The Lord is incomparable!

- He is great and mighty: Confess it!
- He is holy: Honour Him!
- He is merciful: Trust in his will!
- He is carrying out his plan: Fulfil your calling!

To our incomparable Triune God all the glory. Amen.





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The 72nd General Assembly of the KPCK

The 2022 General Assembly (GA) of the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCK) was held on September 20-22, 2022 at Podowon Church in Busan. 517 delegates gathered (Pastors 259, Elders 258) out of the 522 delegates (pastors 261, elders 261) total. Rev. John Ohhun Kwon was elected as the moderator and presided over the meeting. The theme of the GA was "In love" (Galatian 5:6).

The GA adopted several reports related to theological and liturgical issues, as well as making decisions on organizational issues. The biggest agenda was the revision of the Church Constitution. The revised Church Constitution will be ratified by thirty-five Presbyteries in 2023 and be finalized in the 2023 General Assembly.

On the Revision of the Church Constitution

The Special Committee for the Revision of the Church Constitution submitted the proposal of the revision of the Church Constitution to the GA. The GA accepted its sections of the Directory of Worship, the Form of Government, and the Book of Discipline, but it did not accept the proposal to remove the two added chapters ("34 Of the Holy Spirit" and "35 Of the Love of God and Missions") which were added to the Orthodox original one (1647) by PCUSA in 1903.

Some important articles of the revision are the following.

(1) In the elements of the worship, 'invitation to worship' and 'greeting of blessing' are added. Several meetings are named as service: Sunday afternoon(evening) service, Early morning service, Wednesday evening service, Sunday school service. Any session of the local church can simply name these

services as 'prayer meetings.' Minority opinion asserted that all services without full elements of service should be called a 'prayer meeting.'

(2) Any members who marry non-Christians should be disciplined.

(3) To the article on the duty of a member, educating children in faith has been newly added. This duty had been assumed in the life of our members. However, putting it in the Constitution will remind parents of the importance of rearing up our children in the faith.

On Active Obedience of Christ

The General Assembly adopted the report on the active obedience of Christ. The points of the report are: Even though the obedience of Christ is one, it can be divided into active and passive obedience. The active one is his obedience to the divine law (Mat 5:17) while the passive one is his sacrifice on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). The division of active/passive obedience has a Biblical basis. It helps us to understand the redemption of Christ more richly.

On the Doctrine of Preparation of Conversion

The word 'conversion' does not appear in the Scriptures and the main subject of the Scriptures is repentance. It is thus not desirable to have too much interest in conversion. However, there are in the churches children and those who are not born again yet. Therefore, we should be concerned with conversion for pastoral purposes. The doctrine of the preparation of conversion was articulated by pious puritan



Delegates to GS-KPCK 2022

theologians and gives us much insight and benefit for building the church. According to this doctrine, conversion is solely the work of God, but the Holy Spirit helps man to acknowledge sins and sense the need of Christ. This is the 'general work' of the Holy Spirit, which is different from the 'special work' such as justification or sanctification given only to the elect.

On Opsigamy (Marriage at an Old Age)

In Korea there has been growing cases of marriage at an old age, mainly as their second marriage. The General Assembly decided that Christians with deceased spouses or who have had a legitimate divorce can practice opsigamy, on the following conditions. First, they should have an official wedding ceremony with a covenantal oath before God. Second, they should register their marriage to the government. Sessions should guide couples toward this direction who are living together without registering their relationship to the government.

On Confessing the Nicene Creed

The GA decided that churches should confess the Nicene Creed and Apostle's Creed in Public Worship and faithfully teach the Nicene Creed to the congregation.

On Conflict of Interest

The GA decided that the principle of Conflict of Interest be kept when it organizes committees.

On the Continuance of the Special Committee on Social Concerns

The GA decided that the Special Committee on Social Concerns shall continue to exist. The GA recommended Presbyteries to organize the Special Committee on Social Concerns.

On Hosting 2026 ICRC

The GA decided to host 2026 ICRC.

Fraternal Greetings

Rev. Stephen Hart and Elder Bert Veenendaal, delegates of the Australian Free Reformed Churches, delivered greetings in person.

The following churches sent video greetings:

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated): Elder Arjan Grashuis and Rev. Simon van der Lugt

The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands: Dr. Arnold Huigen

The Canadian Reformed Churches: Rev. Carl Van Dam

The Reformed Churches of South Africa: Dr. Sarel van der Walt

The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa: Rev. Johan Brintjes

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in America: Elder Mark T. Bube

The Presbyterian Church in in America: Bryan Chapell



The GA in session

NAPARC 2022

Author: Rev. Ralph Pontier

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The 47th annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) convened on Tuesday afternoon, November 8, 2022. It was hosted by the Presbyterian Church in America at the Sonesta Airport North Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia. The outgoing Chairman, Dr. Bryan Chapell, led the opening devotions.

All 13 Member Churches of NAPARC were represented. The Member Churches include the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Reformed Church of Quebec (Église réformée du Québec) (ERQ), the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA), the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) (KPCA), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PresRC), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Representatives of the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) and the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) attended as invited observers.

The basis of NAPARC's fellowship is *"Confessing Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life, we affirm the basis of the fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts, and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms."*¹

One of the first orders of business was the election of new officers. Elected as Chairman was Rev. Michael Ives of the PresRC. Elected as Vice-chairman was Dr. J. P. Mosley of the RCUS. Rev. Ralph Pontier was elected to a fifth term as Secretary, and Rev. Todd De Rooy was elected to a fourth term as Treasurer. The chairmanship and vice-chairmanship rotate annually among the 13-Member Churches following an alphabetical listing. The Vice-chairman this year is slated to serve as Chairman next year, and his denomination is asked to host the following year.

The bulk of the work at NAPARC is to hear from the Member Churches about what the Lord is doing in their midst, and to pray for one another after each report. Reports were heard

of both spiritual blessings and the struggles of ministry. Many of the blessings concerned progress in the work of missions. Some of the struggles included shrinking rural churches, a decline in men seeking to enter the ministry, and a shortage of men willing to enter world missions. Ministerial fatigue and burnout were also of grave concern.

A devotional service was held on Tuesday evening with Dr. Bryan Chapell leading in prayer for the churches and with Rev. Luke Brodine leading the singing of several hymns. PCA pastor, Rev. Dr. Jimmy Agan spoke on "Thorns of Grace" describing how God uses thorns in the lives of his servants to keep them humble and make them strong.

After Member Churches gave reports and prayed for one another, three topics of discussion were taken up. They included ministerial burnout or ministerial wellbeing, responding to gender issues, and the maximum age for infant baptism.

The discussion on ministerial burnout included a 20-minute presentation by Rev. John Medlock, of Geneva Benefits Group (the retirement and benefits agency of the PCA). Rev. Medlock spearheaded a study of 900 PCA pastors about ministerial wellbeing. He has published on the subject and the fruit of his findings can be found at the Geneva Benefits Group website including a free downloadable pdf book, *Pastoral Wellbeing - PCA Pastors Reflect on the Tensions of Ministry*.

The second subject focused on resources dealing with gender issues. An index of reports by NAPARC Member Churches about human sexuality, with hyperlinks, is available upon request from the NAPARC Secretary.

The third topic of discussion was a brief survey of Member Churches regarding any age limit for the administration of infant baptism. One Member Church has a rule that infant baptism must be administered before the age of two years, and they wondered if any other Member Church has a similar stipulation. None have. Some stated that in instances of household baptisms of adult converts, children up to ages 10-12 might receive baptism without the children themselves making a profession of faith, although wisdom is required in every situation to determine whether the children have reached years of discernment and might be capable of a credible profession of faith.

On Wednesday evening, we enjoyed another delicious dinner. The meal and after dinner program were sponsored

by the Geneva Benefits Group. Rev. Dr. R. Carlton Wynne, an adjunct professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia, spoke on “Human Design from a Theological Perspective.”

The NAPARC schedule runs from Tuesday afternoon to Thursday noon and provides time slots for bi-lateral meetings between the inter-church or ecumenical committees of the Member Churches. These smaller meetings have proven fruitful for Member Churches to grow closer together and manifest more fully their oneness in Christ.

In addition to the annual meeting of the Council, NAPARC sponsors consultations where representatives of Member Churches gather to discuss cooperation in a specific area of ministry. For more than thirty years, there have been annual world mission consultations in September of each year. This year representatives from ten NAPARC Member Church world missions agencies (ARPC, CanRC, FRCNA, HRC, KAPC, OPC, PCA, PresRC, RPCNA, and URCNA) met together for their annual consultation at the OPC's administration offices in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. Joining with them were representatives from three ICRC Member Church world missions agencies (who are not members of NAPARC—CRCI, FRCNA, and SRC) and four NAPARC Member Church diaconal ministries agencies/ministries (FRCNA, HRC, OPC, and URCNA). Also participating were representatives from the BPC world missions agency.

Presentations were made and discussions followed on four topics at the missions consultation:

- Planning for going into and transitioning out of a mission work, in conjunction with training godly leaders in global mission (the Rev. Ian Wildeboer, CanRC);
- Ministry to refugees in war-torn regions: Eastern Europe (Ukraine) and North Africa (South Sudan, Sudan, and Ethiopia) (Mr. David Nakhla, OPC)—which included a special presentation by the Rev. Jonathan Eide, MTW's country director for Ukraine and Russia (PCA);
- Dependency issues on the mission field (the Rev. Peter Boon, FRCNA); and
- Pastor care of missionaries and their families (the Rev. David Thomae, PCA).

The next such NAPARC Joint Consultation is scheduled for September 19-21, 2023, with Mr. Bube as the chairman for the world mission agencies, and Mr. David P. Nakhla as the chairman for the diaconal mission agencies.

The Council enjoyed the gracious and generous hospitality of the Presbyterian Church in America and experienced warm and joyous fellowship with fellow delegates, observers, and other guests.

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for November 14-16, 2023, to be hosted in Warwick, Rhode Island, by the Presbyterian Reformed Church.

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General Synod 2023 of the RCSA

The Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA) – referred to in Afrikaans as “Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika” (GKSA) – was founded in 1859. On 11 February 2023, the denomination celebrated its 164th birthday. The GKSA subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity, and has a presbyterian church government. Currently the GKSA has just over 72 000 members (roughly 56 000 confirmed members and 16 000 baptized members). While the majority of church members speak Afrikaans, there is a growing contingent of members who speak one of the other official languages of South Africa (e.g., Zulu, Tswana, Venda, Sotho and English).

The Fifth General Synod of the GKSA was held from the 30th of January until the 4th of February. The Synod was to take place in 2021, but Covid-restrictions pushed the Synod back to 2023. As can be imagined, the Synod was a wonderful blessing to many ministers and elders who saw each other for the first time in years. The Synod was opened by the chairman of the Calling Church Council by letting the meeting sing Psalm 150 (singing a variety of psalms, in fact, was a characteristic of the Synod), reading from Mark 8-9, and leading the meeting in prayer. Credentials were received from the seven Regional Synods of the GKSA, and the moderamen was elected by closed ballot. The open

declaration was read and delegates expressed their consent by standing, and representatives of churches with whom the GKSA has ecumenical ties were welcomed.

A number of important matters were on the agenda of the Synod, of which the following may be of interest for member churches of the ICRC:

Independent Theological Training

The most burning issue at Synod 2023 was the question of independent theological training. The GKSA has one seminary, situated in Potchefstroom, known as the Theological School Potchefstroom (TSP). It has a long history of collaboration with the former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (which originated from the TSP), nowadays part of the North-West University (NWU). Due to a change in higher education legislation in South Africa, the 2006 agreement between the NWU and TSP had to be revised. The easiest way to explain the purpose and outcome of these negotiations may be to quote in full the media statement that was released by the GKSA near the end of Synod 2023:

“At their Synod of 2018, the GKSA gave several instructions to the Curators in matters of theological training, inter alia to continue negotiations with the NWU regarding the training of theological students of the GKSA. This assignment followed various regulatory and legal amendments which meant that the NWU wanted to establish a new agreement. The curators presented several concepts to the NWU, but no agreement could be reached. The new agreement on which the NWU wanted to settle would, among other things, entail that the content of the curriculum for theological training would rest entirely with the NWU. Furthermore, the theological professors' time would belong to the NWU and would only be available to the GKSA with their permission. Theological students would also not necessarily be taught by Reformed professors or lecturers, as the GKSA would have no say in the appointment of professors as agreed in the current agreement. The Synod judged that these conditions are not in line with the Scriptural approach to theological training which underlies the training of the GKSA's ministers. Furthermore, the NWU gave written notice that, if the GKSA



does not accept the new agreement at the synod of 2023, it is the intention of the NWU to terminate the agreement of 2006. The GKSA decided not to accept the proposed agreement and took note of the NWU's intention.

The practical consequence of this decision is that the existing agreement with the NWU will end in 3 years and that new methods of training should be in place. For this purpose, the GKSA decided to set up a private higher education institution and to register it according in accordance with legislation, where students can receive accredited theological training in the future. The name of this institution is the Reformed Theological Academy. The Synod voiced their confidence that the hand of blessing of the Lord would be on this endeavour, such as it was 150 years ago when the Theological Seminary Burgersdorp was established."

This is a major decision, and the GKSA would appreciate the prayers of reformed brothers and sisters from around the world for the Lord's guiding hand in the years that are to come.

Churches not keeping to decisions of Synod

The question about ordaining women in the office of minister, elder and deacon has been a contentious matter that has been on the table of the Synod since 1988. Based on Scripture, the confessions and the church order of the GKSA, all previous Synods concluded not to ordain women in the office of minister or elder. (Since 2003 the office of deacon was opened to women, with the decision of ordination left to the local church.) Despite the conclusions of previous Synods, a small number of churches have appointed women as elders. Various proposals were received from local churches, classes and regional synods about what to do with churches that do not abide by decisions of the General Synod of the GKSA. Synod 2023 decided to appoint study deputies to investigate the matter, and to report to Synod 2026 with practical advice and guidance.

New Afrikaans Bible translation and trial translations of English confessions, prayers and forms

The Synod decided that the Bible text of the new 2020 Afrikaans translation of the Bible is suitable for reading and use in the worship services, as well as for catechism, Bible study and personal use. The Synod also expressed its thanks and congratulations to the Bible Society of South Africa for the publication of this translation.

The Synod approved a trial translation of several documents in English. This trial translation includes the common creeds and Three Forms of Unity with their introductions, prayers, as

well as the liturgical formulas in use in the GKSA. The trial translation was made with the Afrikaans text as a basis, since the former was already approved by Synod. The trial translation will undergo editorial and linguistic editing in the years to come. The ongoing mandate of the Deputies is to investigate the possibility of making translations of said texts into African languages on a similar basis.

"Sing to the Lord!"

The General Synod approved the creation of an English hymnal. This follows a report from Deputies Liturgical Matters: English which was accepted in this regard. The deputies proposed that the hymnal be composed of the following songs: Psalms, Scriptural versifications and Scriptural songs, according to the provisions of Church Order Article 69. Several hymnals of churches with which the GKSA maintains ecumenical unity were consulted and songs were recommended from these. The Book of Psalms for Worship of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America is fully accepted as the basis for the Psalms that will be sung. Scripture versifications and Scriptural songs are borrowed from other hymnals. Sufficient hymns have been accepted without reservation to provide a wide array of hymns that English-speaking members can use. Apart from the hymns that were accepted, a large number of hymns were referred to be carefully assessed for possible inclusion in a future edition of the hymnal.

Synod also accepted the third revised edition of the ImBongi-hymnal for use in Zulu-speaking churches. This hymnal contains Psalms and other hymns already in common use in the churches. This edition also contains the liturgical forms and the church order of the GKSA.

In addition, Synod decided to finalise the publication of a new collection of hymns for Sesotho-, Sepedi- and Setswana-speaking churches. This collection of songs will be based on approved songs from the well-known Lifela tsa Sione, as well as Psalms. Furthermore, the hymnal will also contain the Liturgical Forms of the GKSA.

A new songbook for Tshivenda-speaking churches is on the way after the General Synod of the GKSA decided to approve a hymnal use in worship services. The book will consist of Psalms, Hosanna songs and songs taken from the Tshivenda-language Lutheran Hymns. The title of the hymnal will be Nyimbo dza thendo ("Songs of Worship").

The Afrikaans Psalter of the GKSA also gained two new hymns after Synod decided to include the hymns "Aan u, Heer" ("To

you, o Lord"; based on 1 Chronicles 29:11-13) and "Nogtans sal ek juig" ("Still I will praise").

Youth publications go from strength to strength

The Youth Care Deputies appointed by the General Synod of the GKSA in 2018 delivered a very positive report on their activities at Synod 2023. These Deputies are responsible for Kruispad, an Afrikaans youth magazine published quarterly (www.kruispad.net), as well as a web page that contain many tools and resources for youth ministry, including five new Bible study guides that were published in 2018 (www.gkjeug.co.za). The resources are available in Afrikaans and English.

Die Kerkblad to be published digitally only

With sad hearts Synod decided that the print edition of the magazine Die Kerkblad will be discontinued after April 2023. The final issue will coincide with the 150 year anniversary of Die Kerkblad, after which it will continue to exist only in electronic format. These steps were necessitated because of rising costs, especially with regard to printing, and the decreasing funds available to publish a print format magazine.

Thankful for Deputies Diaconal Affairs

With thankful hearts the Synod took note of the financial aid that the Deputies Diaconal Affairs were able to provide to people and communities in need. This included aid to orphanages and nursing homes, drought relief in the Western and Northern Cape, aid in Mozambique and KwaZulu-Natal after floods, help after fires in the Free State, Northern Cape and North-West, aid after unlawful looting in KwaZulu-Natal, help in Zimbabwe through the deacons of Messina, aid after floods in Brazil, and aid in Ukraine after war broke out.

Blessed with ecumenical relationships

The Synod was once again reminded of the great joy and support of having ecumenical connections with reformed churches abroad – of which many are members of the ICRC! The RSCA distinguishes between three levels of ecumenical relationships: 1) ecumenical unity (the closest possible connection), 2) ecumenical ties (a second level connection), and 3) ecumenical connection. In addition to being a member of the ICRC, the GKSA is also a member of the WRF.

National Synod of Namibia

Twelve churches of the GKSA are located in Namibia (called Classis Etosha). For a number of practical reasons (e.g., distance, government regulations), these churches submitted a point of description requesting the General Synod to allow them to organise their own National Synod. This National Synod of Namibia will still function within the GKSA as a higher assembly. The General Synod approved the point of description, and appointed Deputies to help and advise the new National Synod of Namibia in all matters affecting its practical organisation.

A (partly) virtual Synod?

Up to date no General Synod of the GKSA (or a part thereof) has taken place virtually. Deputies were appointed to investigate the possibility of concluding a part of the Synod's agenda by means of a virtual meeting in order to save costs. These deputies have fittingly been named Deputies Effective Synod.

In closing

The delegates of the General Synod 2023 are grateful towards the Lord for his guidance and blessing in all the decisions that were made, and are reverently lifting up their eyes to Him for his guidance and blessing in the years that come. To Him be the glory for ever and ever!



Outdoor Meal during ICRC 2022



Author: Rev. Dr. Albert Coetsee

Albert Coetsee serves as recording secretary of the ICRC

ICRC Coordinating Committee Press Release

The newly elected ICRC Coordinating Committee had the first meeting the 15th of February 2023. The meeting was attended by all members of the Coordinating Committee from various places and time zones (!) across the globe. The meeting mostly consisted of hearing reports from the Corresponding Secretary (Rev. Karlo Janssen), the Treasurer (Mr. Kyle Lodder) and various committees of the ICRC (Publications Committee, Regional Conferences

Committee, Diaconal Committee, Missions Committee, Theological Education Committee), and planning future meetings of these committees where the task for which they have been appointed will be carried out. By way of speaking, the ball is rolling, and the Coordinating Committee is excited about the forthcoming work of the ICRC Committees.



Author: Rev. Dr. Pieter Boon

Pieter Boon serves as a minister with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa, and as secretary of the ICRC Diaconal Committee

New: Goldmine of Material for Deacons

During the recent years the Diaconal Committee of the ICRC has been working on assembling resources for deacons. Often the diaconal office is the neglected office in Reformed and Presbyterian Churches.

The ICRC has appointed a facilitating Diaconal Committee. Their mandate is amongst others to network between member churches, yet also to serve deacons with relevant resources for the purpose of executing their office to the best of their ability.

Recently the ICRC Website has been updated with a goldmine of material for deacons, subdivided in:

- 1 Websites
- 2 Magazines
- 3 Presentations
- 4 Policies & Forms
- 5 Books & Articles & Brochures

Just click on this link to get there:

<https://www.icrconline.com/resourcesfdf4acc5>



Members Diaconal Committee

Mr. David Nakhla, United States (convener); The Rev. Dr. Aaron Bae, South Korea; Mr. Chris Boersema, Brazil; The Rev. Dr. Pieter Boon, South Africa; The Rev. Gé Drayer, The Netherlands; The Rev. Lungawiruol Khawbung, Inida; Mr. Rick Postma, Canada.



The diaconal committee at the ICRC 2022 (Source: H. Venema)

On behalf of the Diaconal Committee of the ICRC,
Secretary: Dr. P.G. Boon. Email: fampgboon@gmail.com



Author: Rev. Dr. Pieter Boon

Pieter Boon serves a minister with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

Fill your jars with water!

Both the United States and Australia, among others, advised their embassies in South Africa to stockpile water for several days. This is not because there is not enough water in South Africa, but the electricity is the problem. Electricity is needed to pump water to all the neighbourhoods, and the electricity network is on the verge of collapse. The lack of electricity is causing a phenomenon called load shedding, meaning that cities and neighbourhoods must take turns to receive power. Typically, we will experience intervals of power outages several times a day for two and sometimes four hours. This is mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, a notorious lack of maintenance from the side of the government, and secondly the infiltration of mafia groups into Eskom, the main power utility of the country, enabling them to scoop up billions. Often equipment is damaged deliberately in order to get lucrative maintenance contracts. After three decades this situation has become so dire that the country is now facing the possibility of a total blackout, meaning that the entire power grid will collapse. This brings us back to the water. With a total blackout it will take weeks to restart the whole system, and that will not only leave the country in the dark, but mainly the big cities without water.

There are three ICRC church federations in South Africa:

- Free Church of Southern Africa
- Free Reformed Churches in South Africa
- Reformed Churches in South Africa

Living in this beautiful country there is never a dull moment, yet we don't experience that as exclusively positive. It may be worthwhile to update you a little bit on the (trying) circumstances among which your sister churches function. These are some of the consequences of our failing government:

- The first will sound familiar to you. We too cannot rely on government schools, meaning that apart from paying taxes for them, often church members also sustain private reformed schools.

Yet there are more examples:

Because the government hospitals are dilapidated, private health care must be paid for.

- Because the roads are not maintained neither the neighbourhoods kept tidy by city councils, private initiatives must be undertaken.
- Because of the failing electricity network, households, businesses and churches pay major amounts to get off

the grid, yet still paying municipal taxes to maintain the grid – money that often end up in the wrong pockets.

- The government is pursuing an active policy of so called black economic empowerment. Whilst there may be credit in this, an adverse consequence is that especially white middle-aged men (often the breadwinners of families) are laid off, something happening rather often also in our congregations. Thankfully members with their own businesses help to give these men new employment. What is worse though, is that government and para government institutions end up with inexperienced people, causing these institutions to fail more and more.
- Because the crime rate is so high (South Africa raking the sixth most violent country in the world***) and the police force is also infiltrated by criminal syndicates, we must also hire private security companies to protect our neighbourhoods.

Countries with Most Violent Crimes (number per 100 000)

1. El Salvador – 48.71
2. Venezuela – 38.99
3. Lesotho – 35.95
4. Colombia – 35.71
5. Guatemala – 35.4
6. South Africa – 34.4
7. Honduras – 33.84
8. Brazil – 30.42
9. The Bahamas – 29.4
10. Haiti – 28.38

(Source: wisevoter.com)

Especially the last challenge (far more than financial setbacks), prompt many South Africans to emigrate when they get the opportunity, causing a so-called brain drain.

How are the prospects for the future? In general, the 60 million population at large is pessimistic. In addition to these things, the government is overtly sympathising with communist countries around the world. This has a negative effect on the economy. Traditionally South Africa has strong trade relations with the West. Currently the trade export to the USA is for example 97.5% more than to Russia. Yet, will South Africa more and more be pulled into the sphere of influence of communist countries like Russia and China?

Many readers will wonder what the current situation is in regard to racism, because South Africa's name has been associated with this word more than any other country in the world. On the far-right racism is increasing again indeed, mainly in reaction to the failed state caused by a governing party that is predominantly black. And on the far left there are political parties who are overtly racist against white people. What is even worse, also the governing party is using the 'race card' to serve their own interests. So, three decades after

Nelson Mandela was released, the demon of racism is still with us, even increasing again. Between brackets, isn't this a worldwide problem?

In view of these circumstances, it is understandable that foreign countries advise their embassy staff to stockpile food and water. A worst case scenario may be that the occurrence of a total blackout may lead to widespread looting or even civil war.

In the meantime, everyday life continues with all its challenges, and I can assure you that everything is not only doom and gloom. Much happiness is still with us. Often the congregations form strong communities, caring for each other and for the poor and afflicted around them. Although

the worries about the future cast a shadow over the present, a positive effect is we learn to take typical first world amenities not for granted, and to be grateful with the little things in life. Even more important, adversity fosters more trust upon the LORD, making us longing to fill our jars every Sunday with the living water of the Gospel. And, as long as we (still) have the opportunity, to advance the Kingdom of Christ in this part of the world and use the many doors He is opening for the Gospel. God graciously spared the country that was on the brink of civil war in the 1980s and 90s. Our prayer is that He will turn the tide again, and that we won't become the next Syria or Venezuela of the world.

Calvin, The Pastor

Who was John Calvin? For Melancthon, Luther's right-hand man, John Calvin was "The Theologian." For Prince Francis I, the King of France, Calvin appeared as an apologist, the defender of the Reformed Faith. In his first phase of ministry in Geneva, he was just a "that Frenchman" in the Minutes of the council. B.B. Warfield described him as the "Theologian of the Holy Spirit," the greatest exegete of the reformation age and the practical genius of the Reformation. However, John Calvin gives the best description of himself.

In October 1540, in his letters to William Farel, he wrote, "When I consider that I am not in my own power, I offer my heart a slain victim for a sacrifice to the Lord...I yield my soul chained and bound unto obedience to God."¹ Calvin considered himself as a slain sacrifice to the Lord, a willing and living sacrifice unto the service of Chief Shepherd and His sheep. Calvin's "slain victim" description is enough to conclude that John Calvin was a pastor by his calling and character.² Calvin served as a minister of the gospel in Geneva till his last breath. Between 1536 and 1564, Calvin described himself in his last will that he was a "minister of the word of God in the Church of Geneva."³

In this article, we will highlight John Calvin's ministry in Geneva, Strasburg and then in Geneva to draw some lessons from his life and ministry. In doing so, the article will look less

into the writings of John Calvin and focus on him as a minister of the Word.

Calvin in Geneva

When William Farel learned that Calvin had come to Geneva, Calvin had no intention to be in Geneva for more than a night. But, God had a different plan. In Calvin, Farel found a young man with a comprehensive understanding of the scriptures and sufficient academic capacity to deal with and influence the Geneva Council. However, the 27-year old young traveller did not want to stay in Geneva because he wanted to spend time in solitude as a scholar. So he pleaded the old Farel, "I cannot do it...it is not for me....I am a man of books and writing. How can I bind myself to one church if I am to serve them all? In the name of the Lord, have pity upon me and allow me to serve God otherwise." The young Calvin found no pity, neither from God nor from fiery Farel. Instead, Farel pronounced a curse on Calvin's studies. Calvin wrote later, "I felt...as if God from heaven had laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me.....William Farel detained me in Geneva."⁴ He could not resist the call.

During Calvin's time, Geneva was a modern Sodom, filled with drunkenness, open engagements in prostitution and immodesty of all kind. Their protestant confession was more a political move than a scriptural commitment. Soon Calvin



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found that there was more to do than just standing on the pulpit and teaching from God's Word. With sleepless nights in prayer, he spent writing theological truths and pursuing the council with the needs of the time. "Calvin moved quickly to create the resources for a renewed and reformed church: a biblical model of church polity and discipline, a form of worship with the congregational singing of Psalms, instruction for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, a confession, and a catechism for the training of children."⁵

Soon the timid and shy young man was courageous enough to ask the council to make people live their lives under the guidance of confessional standard. He fearlessly proposed that conducts for biblical married life be defined and applied in city laws. The council accepted most of his proposals except on church discipline and excommunication from Lord's Supper. It turned the wave against him. His Reformation in Geneva was soon over. Those who opposed Calvin would shoot their guns outside his residence to disturb his sleep and some even named their dogs after him to mock him...⁶ The people of Geneva did not want a French-Pope in their city.

On Easter Sunday of 1538, the opposition found its culmination when after the preaching Calvin, Farel and the elderly Elie Courault⁷ refused to serve the Lord's Supper. The council asked Calvin, Farel and Courault to leave the city after they had denied administering the Lord's Supper on Easter Sunday of 1538.

Calvin in Strasbourg

Calvin, Farel, and Courault left Geneva on April 25 1538. Calvin was invited to be a pastor to French refugees in Strasbourg. Calvin was reluctant, but Martin Bucer was sure that "God will know how to find a rebellious servant, as he found Jonah."⁸

Things were different in this new city. It was a peaceful Protestant city. There was an orderly program of preaching, teaching catechism and administration of the sacraments, though the town councils still held the right and power of excommunication.⁹ At this Calvin had Martin Bucer as his mentor and senior partner in the pastoral minister. Bucer was a champion of peace and cooperation. It was a pleasant change for young and frustrated Calvin.

The change was also internal. Calvin in Strasbourg was different from the Calvin in Geneva. In Strasbourg, Calvin was willing to celebrate the Lord's Supper according to the custom of the place and did not raise his voice against their clothes which he thought immodest.¹⁰ He even advised Farel soon, "strive to induce the brethren not to dispute the point."¹¹ One

by one, Calvin was putting into practice things that he had wished to do in Geneva. The young and courageous theologian was divinely transformed into a kind, humble, enduring and scholarly generous pastor. Soon it became apparent that Geneva sent away a biblical scholar and lawyer only to get "that Frenchman" return to them as Christ-like shepherd.

Calvin's return to Geneva

Within a few months, Geneva began to feel the need for Calvin. In March 1540, Calvin's friends in Geneva expressed their hope to get Calvin back in Geneva. It was not an easy call. Calvin wrote to Farel in March 29 1540: "Rather would I submit to death a hundred times than to that cross on which one had to perish daily one thousand times over."¹²

On October 1540, the General Assembly wholeheartedly resolved to have Master John Calvin be their minister in Geneva.¹³ Many were writing personal letters to Calvin, yielding him to return to Geneva quickly. Even his enemies, who spoke against him, wrote to him saying, "Come honoured father in Christ, you belong to us, the Lord himself has given you to us. Everyone sighs for you."¹⁴ Viret, Calvin's friend, wrote, "Do not linger, come to build up and gladden the church which lies in misery, grief, and sorrow."¹⁵ God was restoring the honour of his humble servant.

It was not easy as the wounds were still fresh and hurting. Farel continued to pursue Calvin to return to Geneva. Calvin was so upset that he wrote back to him, "The thunderbolts which you strangely hurl at me, for what reasons I know not.....you know that I have dreaded this summons....Then why attack me with such violence as almost to disrupt our friendship."¹⁶ Calvin struggled against the call to return to Geneva. However, eventually, he did submit to the will of his heavenly master. After three years of peaceful and fruitful ministry in Strasbourg, Calvin arrived in Geneva on September 13, 1541.

His first preaching in Geneva after his arrival was more than a sermon. He started his preaching ministry at the exact verse where he had discontinued. It was a great gesture of forgiveness and forgetfulness. He resumed the pulpit with Christ-like manner and became a minister of God's Word in Geneva for the whole of his life. He made the city the centre of the Reformation. In God's strength, he turned Sodom into a city of God. Calvin, once the reluctant and rejected pastor, became the most celebrated pastor of Reformed Faith.

Lessons from Calvin's pastoral character and ministry:

Here are some of the aspects of his great pastoral ministry with important lessons to learn:



A Courageous Pastor. On the basis of faithful biblical reasoning, the minister of the gospel is to pursue the elders to stand together in fencing the table for unrepentant members of the congregation. If the council (Kirk Session) are not willing to submit to the truths, a minister, by virtue of his calling and ordination to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament, has the liberty to deny the privilege of the Lord's Table to unrepentant sinners. In doing so, he is to be prepared to face the temporal consequences, remembering the fact that every truth of the scriptures is worthy to die for. Calvin was willing to pay the cost of his courage and faithfulness to God's truths.

The usual modern tendency is to keep the Lord's Table open for everyone who merely affirms the Apostles' Creed was not Calvin's position. He preached and taught earnestly and was courageous enough to fence the Lord's Table to the unrepentant people of Geneva who persisted in sin. If the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered without considering people's lives and unrepentant hearts, the sacrament becomes just a superficial ritualistic exercise. Faithful preaching of the Word should always be supported by the proper biblical administration of the sacrament. Therefore, church discipline becomes important in the spiritual care of a congregation.

Calvin courageously proposed that "let the church have power of excommunication.....Church be allowed to decide who might partake in communion."¹⁷ Calvin's retractors accused of him becoming a French-pope in Geneva but his focus was to care for the struggling souls with true preaching, proper administration of the sacraments and biblical process of church discipline.

A Self-Critical and Vulnerable Pastor. Calvin was quick in correcting his approach by bringing in-depth Reformation in

Strasbourg. He learned from the experience in Geneva. Calvin acted bold and loud for the right causes in Geneva whereas in Strasbourg he dealt things patiently and quietly. He still stood for the biblical principles, but with grace, generosity and gentleness.

Sinclair Ferguson writes, "Calvin was constantly critical of himself and his shortcomings. He lived physically and spiritually on the edge."¹⁸ Self-assessment is an excellent practice that enables the pastors to assess their calling, character, behaviour and ministry, especially in India, where pastors are held so high that even elders rarely offer spiritual corrections or guidance to their pastors.

Submissive Pastor and Scholar. John Calvin was quite reflective in perceiving God's guidance, primarily through God's Word, but also through the advice of his godly friends. Calvin was blessed with many true and faithful friends. In Strasbourg, he had Pastor Martin Bucer, who ministered and mentored the discouraged Calvin with prayer and patience. William Farel remained a lifelong friend to Calvin. Calvin was around 20 years younger than Farel, yet they were audacious and blunt to each other when they got into arguments.¹⁹ It was Farel that Calvin continued to express his vulnerability in his letters. With Farel, Calvin was often open in confessing his inner struggles, and also, he was humble enough in submitting to his godly wisdom. To quote from a letter that he sent to Farel after re-joining Geneva, he wrote, "As you wished, I am settled here, may the Lord overrule it for good."²⁰ In pastor Bucer and Farel, he had two great spiritual fathers and mentors. Though a high-profile reformer, a committed pastor, and a brilliant theologian, he was under constant spiritual mentoring. There can be no story of Calvin without the contribution of Farel and Bucer.

When Calvin encountered Farel's thunder to remain in Geneva, he felt God's hand upon him and did not persist in continuing his journey. Again, Calvin respected the voice of many friends and the decisions of the Strasbourg Council to allow him to go to Geneva. Even though he was not happy and doubtful of his good reception in Geneva, Calvin did not continue to hold to his reasoning and feelings but bent and went as a slain sacrifice to Geneva. He wrote, "With what grief, tears, great anxiety and distress I did this, the Lord is my best witness."²¹ He wrote about the biblical polity and applied its principles of mutual accountability on himself – listening and submitting to the collective wisdom of godly leaders.

A Local and Beyond Pastor. In Geneva, "Work was constant: preaching and teaching, weddings and baptisms, meetings

of the Consistory or consultations with the city council, visits to the sick and endless correspondence, and more preaching, visits, letters."²² "His ministry of counsel, correction, and encouragement reached beyond Geneva through his extensive correspondence (eleven volumes of his collected writings) with a wide range of people... men and women imprisoned for their faith, people troubled by personal and theological issues, and church leaders of many countries."²³ "Geneva had enough problems to overload a pastor, but Calvin kept watch over the world too."²⁴ Without neglecting the local church, he reached beyond and served the universal church of Christ. He was a minister in Geneva, but his ministry crossed the borders. He managed to serve the local and beyond with perfection.

A Practical Preacher. "More than any other activity, preaching occupied Calvin's time and shaped his life and ministry. Twice on Sundays and daily every other week, Calvin stood before a congregation of townspeople, refugees, and visitors to preach, teach, warn, appeal, counsel, admonish, and encourage."²⁵ His hands were full with preaching engagements, but his preaching never became an exhaustive exercise for other. "When I go up into the pulpit," he told his congregation, "it is not only to teach other men [but] the word that proceeds out of my mouth must serve me as well as you."²⁶ He himself was the first audience to his sermon.

Calvin was an excellent exegete and linguistic expert, yet he was adaptive to the language of ordinary people. In his preaching, he stirred imaginations through figures of speech and involved local proverbs and straightforward illustrations. It was an intentional practice of Calvin. He firmly held that "a good preacher must not only know the word of God but must also be 'in touch with ordinary people and know-how 'to apply God's Word to the profit of His people.' If not, he should 'go and do something else'"²⁷ Calvin worked hard to apply his preaching to the everyday life of the people—a task he acknowledged as particularly challenging.²⁸ He kept Christ as the central content of his preaching and required daily applications of God's Word preached.

A Caring Community Pastor. Though busy in writing and preaching, Calvin always had sufficient time to visit and minister sick and the dying. He instituted a practice that no one is to be totally confined to the bed for more than three days without informing the minister.²⁹ When a plague hit Geneva, despite of his wife Idelette expecting their first child, Calvin offered himself to serve in the plague hospital. But "on account

of the great need which the church has of his service,"³⁰ the council refused his offer. Calvin insisted and wrote, "so long as we are in this ministry, I do not see that any excuse will avail us if, through fear of infection, we are found wanting in the discharge of our duty where we are most needed."³¹

John Calvin was like a father to Geneva. Thinking and caring for the people in all aspects of their lives. "He was always busy in finding a wife, a house, a servant or a job to someone in need."³² He was a wise legal consultant for the Geneva City Council. He revised, compiled and later proposed changes in the laws of the cities. He was a wise counsellor in matters concerning construction and hygiene. He influenced the politics and economics of the city. "Given Calvin's self-confessed diffident and retiring personality, it must have been difficult for him to become involved in the lives of people. But Calvin did it nonetheless."³³ Even though he himself was often sick, he was always available to serve and guide. John Calvin did not confide himself to within the walls of the church. He was a practical genius and a community pastor. He extended his care in every aspect of the community life.

A Pastor without Greed. Calvin, the great theologian of the Reformation, was a humble and poor pastor in Geneva. He delighted in poverty and often denied extra financial benefits. When salary was increased, he would require that portion to be sent as relief to his colleagues in ministry.³⁴ He took loans from the council for the medical needs of himself and his family and repaid them without requesting, and even denying, any financial favour. At the end of his life, he refused the last quarter's salary with these words, "I have not earned it....so why should I receive it." Even the pope in Rome knew that Calvin was poor and that he wanted to be poor. At the death of Calvin, Pius IV commented, "The strength of that heretic came from the fact that money was nothing to him."³⁵ Calvin's attitude towards money is a real threat to those who are in pastoral ministry for the sake of luxurious life and financial advantages.

A Model Leader. As a leading reformer, Calvin knew that the reformation movement was also a reaction against the clergy's corrupt and immoral life. The Reformation was an appeal to restore the pure doctrine, true piety and holy living, and the ministers have to be the examples in all of those. "Pastors must not only be orthodox in doctrine but also must strive to make themselves 'examples to the flock,' that is, Calvin explained, 'They are to excel for the purpose of being eminent in holiness.'"³⁶ A pastor, who neglects holiness by his example, destroys the efficiency of his preaching, reduces the

worth and magnitude of the Lord's Supper, and ultimately becomes a severe obstacle for the practice and process of church discipline.

Conclusion

There is a lot to add, but it is good to end the article with Calvin's own words about his pastoral ministry. In the Institutes, he writes: "God has filled my mind with zeal to spread his Kingdom and to further the public good. I am duly clear in my own conscience and have God and the angels to witness that since I undertook the office of a teacher in the church, I have had no other purpose than to benefit the church."

Calvin, the Reformer, the theologian, the preacher and writer, was a pastor in heart and character. He did not have an easy beginning, he was not willing to face pastoral challenges, yet he submitted to the will of the chief Shepherd of God's flock. Even in his burial, he exalted the resurrected Christ – the only grave to be remembered is His master's empty tomb. Pastor Calvin was buried with the most important pastoral message that the church is to extol and glorify, not any dead minister of the church, but Christ alone! Calvin's lost tomb is a significant monument to his faithful and humble pastoral ministry.

¹ Van Halsema, Thea B, This was John Calvin (2004), I.D.I.A. Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, pg. 130

² There is not much writing on the ordination of Calvin as minister in any particular church tradition.

³ Calvin, "Last Will and Testament," April 25, 1564, in Letters, 4:365. Calvin was a pastor for twenty-seven years, exactly half his life.

⁴ Van Halsema, Thea B, This was John Calvin (2004), I.D.I.A. Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, pg. 77-78.

⁵ Thomos, Derek W. H and Tweeddal, John W. (Eds.), John Calvin (2019), Calvin the Pastor by David B. Calhoun, Crossway, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, page 56.

⁶ Ferguson B., Sinclair, Some Pastors and Teachers (2017), The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, UK, page 13.

⁷ Eli Corault was an old and half blind colleague of Farel and Calvin in Geneva. He was imprisoned for his Reformed faith. He was released from the prison by king Francis and was put in a monastery with Gerared Roussel. Gerared Roussel returned to Roman church, but Eli Corault escaped and found Calvin in Basel. Eli Corault served the church in Geneva with Calvin and Farel. He was the first among the three to be prohibited to preach in the church by the town council. He refused to submit and mounted to preach on the pulpit on the Saturday before Easter Sunday. He was taken off from the pulpit by soldiers and put on prison. Calvin and Farel could not endure such action against the preacher and opposed the council for imposing unscriptural teachings and practices on the church.

⁸ Ibid page. 103.

⁹ Ibid, page 103.

¹⁰ Ibid, page 103.

¹¹ Ibid, page 106.

¹² Ferguson B., Sinclair, Some Pastors and Teachers (2017), The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, UK, page 16.

¹³ Van Halsema, Thea B, This was John Calvin (2004), I.D.I.A. Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, page 128.

¹⁴ Ibid, page 129.

¹⁵ Ibid, page 129.

¹⁶ Ibid, page 129.

¹⁷ Van Halsema, Thea B, This was John Calvin (2004), I.D.I.A. Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, page 89.

¹⁸ Ferguson B., Sinclair, Some Pastors and Teachers (2017) The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, UK, page 18.

¹⁹ Van Halsema, Thea B, This was John Calvin (2004), I.D.I.A. Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, page 158.

²⁰ Van Halsema, Thea B, This was John Calvin (2004), I.D.I.A. Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, page 138.

²¹ Calvin, Commentary on the Psalms, 1:119.

²² McKee, Writings on Pastoral Piety, 19.

²³ Thomos, Derek W. H and Tweeddal, John W. (Eds.), John Calvin (2019), Calvin the Pastor by David B. Calhoun, Crossway, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, page 71.

²⁴ Van Halsema, Thea B, This was John Calvin (2004), I.D.I.A. Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, page 167.

²⁵ Thomos, Derek W. H and Tweeddal, John W. (Eds.), John Calvin (2019), Calvin the Pastor by David B. Calhoun, Crossway, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, page 62.

²⁶ John Calvin, Sermons on Job (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993), 446.

²⁷ Thomos, Derek W. H and Tweeddal, John W. (Eds.), John Calvin (2019), Calvin the Pastor by David B. Calhoun, Crossway, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, page 65.

²⁸ Ibid, page. 66.

²⁹ Van Halsema, Thea B, This was John Calvin (2004), I.D.I.A. Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, page 143.

³⁰ Ibid, page 146.

³¹ Calvin to Pierre Viret, October 1542, in Letters, 1:358.

³² John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 231.

³³ Thomos, Derek W. H and Tweeddal, John W. (Eds.), John Calvin (2019), Calvin the Pastor by David B. Calhoun, Crossway, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, page 69.

³⁴ Van Halsema, Thea B, This was John Calvin, 2004, I.D.I.A. Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, page 166.

³⁵ Ibid, page 164.

³⁶ Thomos, Derek W. H and Tweeddal, John W. (Eds.), John Calvin (2019), Calvin the Pastor by David B. Calhoun, Crossway, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois 60187, page 61.