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Editorial	
Piet Houtman	3
ICRC Report	
Michael Zwiep	4
Solus Christus	
Dick Moes	6
Christian Missions in India	
Hiralal Solanki	8
Sola Gratia	
Dick Moes	12
Calvin's Preaching on Job	
Derek Thomas	13
Sola Fide	
Dick Moes	18
Reformed Faith to India	
Matthew Ebenezer	19
Sola Scriptura	
Dick Moes	24
Reformed Piety	
Joel Beeke	25

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Expansion and Unity



Piet Houtman | Editor in chief

This is a farewell: from the old editorial team to the new. This transfer marks a development of *Lux Mundi*: from a periodical from one Dutch church and denomination, to a magazine of an association of churches worldwide.

This development has the character of growth and extension. *Lux Mundi* started as a biannual from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) – to be precise, from their Committee for the Relations with Churches Abroad. Its modest purpose was conveying information to the churches in various parts of the world with whom ‘we’ had a certain relationship, whether closer or more distant, whether formal or less formal. At the same time, it wanted to be a platform for sharing content in the field of the Reformed faith and theology that would be edifying for our sister churches and Reformed churches worldwide.

The circle of churches worldwide with whom the RCN maintain relationships has expanded. At the same time, the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC) has developed and expanded. Churches felt that they should ‘express and promote the unity of faith that (they) have in Christ’ and ‘encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches’ – to quote just the first and second out of five purposes stated on the ICRC’s website.

Recently, in its conference in July 2017, the ICRC adopted a plan to take over responsibility for *Lux Mundi*, expanding it to include information about the activities of its Mission Committee and other committees. This takeover is in line with a request from the RCN.

We can only be thankful for this milestone in a development of growing fellowship among Reformed churches worldwide.

Humility is also in place. Maintaining meaningful relationships across the world has its limitations in practice, as Rev. Karlo Janssen, a link pin between the old and the new editorial committee, reminds me this very morning as I’m writing. There are large distances, the cost of travel, and differences in the time of day and night. Churches also differ in their history and culture, and in their position in their own countries and societies.

We are reminded of this in a painful way by another decision of the recent ICRC meeting: the suspension of membership of the RCN because of their ruling on women in office in the church. This is not the place to comment on the controversy. The consequences of the split are limited: the RCN can continue to cooperate in the committees.

Humility is in place when it comes to the unity of the church, which we all confess. The ecumenical longing is increasing again as a result of intensified means and opportunities of communication. We should not take it lightly and be resigned to the fact, or view, that we are just ‘denominations’ (let alone claim that our denomination is the only true church). Worshiping and sitting at the Lord’s Table together is an ideal we are called to foster and pursue. It is the Lord’s ultimate goal with his church. At the same time, church unity is more than being in one institution. Our Lord Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven that his believers may be one ‘even as we are one... that they may become perfectly one.’ This unity is something we will need to pine for as we realize its imperfection till the last day.

At the same time as *Lux Mundi* and the ICRC evolved, in broader society the concept of the ‘network’ developed. Each of the ICRC’s member churches has its own network of churches and associations around it as well as those more remote, such as missionary activities. In many respects, the ICRC itself is a network of churches. This is how it should be. The church does not have one centre on earth, whether Jerusalem or Rome, whether Geneva or Westminster, whether the Netherlands or certain English-speaking countries in the West. It is ‘spread and dispersed throughout the entire world’ (Belgic Confession Art. 27) and opportunities for fellowship are restricted accordingly. At the same time, this church ‘is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith’ (ibid.).

May the new editorial committee serve this vision of our common faith and hope in continuing *Lux Mundi*. May they receive all the gifts and strength from above – we are reminded by the serious illness of Rev. J. Visscher, Corresponding Secretary of the ICRC, how much we are dependent on our heavenly Father even in the most elementary earthly matters. May the magazine in its new setup respond to the needs of a church in expansion (as a leaven in the bread) in years to come.

Thank you, fellow editors and contributors to *Lux Mundi* for your cooperation up till today. God’s blessings to all. ■

Report ICRC conference – July 12 to 19, 2017



Michael Zwiep, member of the Vineland Free Reformed Church in Vineland, Ontario (affiliated with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland) and contributor to Christian Renewal.

A fellowship of thirty-two churches gathered together for the ninth general meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), hosted by the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) in Jordan, Ontario, Canada. After the pre-conference prayer service on Wednesday evening, July 12, Rev. Richard Holst welcomed all delegates, observers, and visitors and informed the conference about an addition to the agenda regarding the decision of the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN), June 2017, to open all ecclesiastical offices to women.

Rev. Dick Moes (URCNA) was appointed Chair; Dr Matthew Ebenezer (Reformed Presbyterian Church of India) as Vice-Chair; Dr James Visscher (Canadian Reformed Churches) as Corresponding Secretary; Dr Peter Naylor (Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales) as Recording Secretary; Kyle Lodder (Canadian Reformed Church) as Treasurer and Rev. Bruce Hoyt (Reformed Churches of New Zealand) as Coordinator.

■ The RCN discussion

In the afternoon session Dr Melle Oosterhuis of the RCN presented an explanation of the decision of the General Synod to open all ecclesiastical offices to women. Opportunity was given for questions of clarification. On Friday afternoon, delegates addressed this decision of the General Synod, as well as a proposal, ratified by the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, to the conference: 1. declare that the RCN is in its doctrine and/or practice no longer in agreement with the constitution of the Conference; 2. calling for the immediate suspension of the membership of the RCN; 3. encourage the RCN to reconsider the synodical decision and to restore the doctrine and/or practice; and 4. proposing termination of membership at the tenth meeting of the ICRC if the RCN continues to permit the ordination of persons to the offices of minister and ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture. Dr Moes clarified the parameters of the agenda item regarding the synodical decision of the RCN and the proposal of the OPC, noting the deliberations on the RCN's decision were procedural matters and not a debate regarding the ordination of women. The Chair cited the constitution of the Conference, noting the RCN was no longer in compliance with the ICRC's constitution. An earnest discussion followed, in which the delegates of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (CRCN) proposed an amendment on the second motion of the OPC, to give the RCN time to reconsider their membership of the ICRC. They mentioned the decision

has been made only three weeks ago and not all member churches of the ICRC were able to study the underlying grounds of this decision. A vote on the membership status of the RCN was called for Monday, July 17. On Monday afternoon the assembly considered the four motions of the proposal from the OPC. Following extensive debate, delegates voted on the first, third and fourth motions of the proposal by ballot, 28 in favour, one against and two abstaining. Delegates considered the proposed amendment by the CRCN of the second motion. After the substitute motion was defeated, the delegates voted to the second motion 25 in favour, four against and two abstaining, resulting in the immediate suspension of the membership of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

■ Two new members

The ICRC did add two denominations as members to the Conference, the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, and the Presbyterian Church of Uganda, whose delegates were invited to take part in discussions and deliberations.

■ Lux Mundi

A report from the convenor of the Website Committee, Dr Karlo Janssen (Canadian Reformed Church) presented a proposal regarding *Lux Mundi*. The Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands requested to transfer to the ICRC the responsibility for oversight of the quarterly publication *Lux Mundi*, to become a platform for mutual edification in the Reformed faith. Delegates accepted the proposal, voting to create a new publications committee with the task of formulating an editorial mandate for the publication. The editor of *Lux Mundi*, Mrs Ria Nederveen-van Veelen, was thanked for her editorial work.

■ Diaconal matters

A report was received from the Diaconal Committee of the Conference. Dr Pieter Boon (Free Reformed Churches in South Africa) presented a number of recommendations regarding the ministry of mercy and relief and development efforts of various member churches. The mandate of the Diaconal Committee is not to coordinate acts of mercy or engage in relief and development, but to facilitate an alliance of diaconal aid between member churches. Committee members, Rick Postma, Director of Public Relations of Word and Deed Ministries, and David Nakhla, Short-Term Missions Coordinator of the OPC, responded to delegate enquiries regarding the recommendations.



photo Michael Zwiép]

Delegates and observers at the ICRC conference 2017

■ Sharing and supporting

The ICRC as a conference is not so much a deliberative body, as it is a forum, a meeting place for fellowship, for sharing and for support. Toward that end, delegates provided information about their unique situations in places such as India, where persecution is ever present; and in Eastern Europe (Hungary) where the need is great for Reformed education for church leaders, and the challenges unique to their location and situation.

Rev. Marianus T. Waang (Reformed Churches NTT in Indonesia) documented the growth and development of the Reformed Churches in his country, noting the immense geographic expanse of the chain of islands bridging the Indian and Pacific oceans. Dr. David Charles Gomes (Presbyterian Church of Brazil) documented the growth and development of the church in Brazil.

A review of the membership status of the Free Church in Southern Africa revealed that the federation of churches has not been represented at the conference since the sixth meeting. The conference voted to postpone action on the membership of the FCSA until the next conference.

■ Evening presentations

A number of presentations filled the evening hours, with visitors welcome to attend.

Rev. Hiralal Solanki (Reformed Presbyterian Church of India) presented *A Brief Overview of Christian Mission in India*. He documented the gospel efforts of American and Scottish Pres-

byterian missionaries in India. Rev. Solanki noted a number of contemporary spiritual challenges in India, including growing persecution of Christians and persistence of the caste system. Dr. Derek Thomas (Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church of Columbia) focused his presentation on the preaching of John Calvin on the Book of Job. He noted the pastoral heart of Calvin in preaching the proclamation of the sovereignty of God in the affairs of human experience.

Dr. Matthew Ebenezer (RPCI) presented *Bringing the Reformed Faith to India*, in the context of early church history and Portuguese and British colonization. He stressed the importance of 'calling' in the Reformed tradition in the Indian context and highlighted the strength of a Reformed witness in the Indian context.

Dr. Joel Beeke (Heritage Reformed Congregations in Grand Rapids) presented his lecture about *Reformed Piety: Covenantal and Experiential*. He called for the recovery of Reformed piety to guard against subjective introspection and presumed regeneration.

On Saturday, delegates and visitors took time to explore the Niagara area, visiting wineries and the Niagara Falls. On Sunday a number of Reformed churches invited visiting ministers to lead worship. And during the conference singing, prayer, and special music, combined with the fellowship and hospitality of area families, strengthened the bonds of unity.

The next meeting of the ICRC is tentatively scheduled to be hosted in India in the year 2021. ■

Solus Christus – Christ Alone

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved

(Acts 4:12).



Dick Moes is emeritus pastor of the Surrey Covenant Reformed Church in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada. This church belongs to the federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America. He served as Moderator of the ICRC 2017 in Jordan, Ontario, Canada.

Solus Christus meets a lot of resistance in today's culture. Knowledge is considered to be a subjective opinion. All truth is relative and contextual. Every community has its own perspective. Accordingly, there is no place for the exclusivity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Solus Christus also met resistance at the time of the Reformation. Both sides believed that the Lord Jesus was the Son of God incarnate, but the resistance concerned the sufficiency of Christ for salvation. According to Rome, Christ's death paid for our original sin, but our present and future forgiveness is a combination of Christ's work and the sacraments, which infuse grace into us through the church by means of the priests. *Solus Christus* can also meet resistance in our own lives. The more we know from personal experience our own guilt and corruption, and how much we need the blood and the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the more we will embrace the exclusivity and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus. However, the less we know from personal experience our own guilt and corruption, the more we will resist the exclusivity and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus. We will seek our salvation elsewhere in addition to seeking it in Christ.

Yet, even though there is resistance to *solus Christus*, Christ alone needs to be preached! For this is what

the apostle Peter does. The Lord Jesus healed and the apostles healed. Peter and John heal a lame beggar, through faith in the name of Jesus. Peter's preaching of the name of Jesus had brought people into a crisis as the Lord Jesus himself had prophesied. The Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). Consequently, people need to repent and believe, otherwise they will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

We see this crisis in the fact that the authorities do not believe, while many of the people do believe. We also see this crisis in the fact that the Sanhedrin demands that Peter and John confess by what power and what name they had healed the lame beggar. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, tells them that the Lord Jesus Christ, whom they had crucified, but God had raised from the dead, had healed the beggar. The authorities think the Jesus case is finished. Not so. God continues with the Jesus case and sets this on their agenda again. They need to decide again: either for or against the Lord Jesus Christ. For there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Peter gives three reasons for this. First, the name Jesus is a name *given* to humanity. Accordingly, we cannot find salvation in the Jesus of our own imagination, but only in the Jesus given to us. This was precisely the problem for the Jewish leaders and many of their people. They had rejected the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ because they believed in a Jesus of their own imagination. Consequently, his cross became a stumbling block for them. This is also the problem of the



ICRC Moderamen
[photo Laurens den Butter]



Delegates at the ICRC
conference 2017
[photo Michael Zwiep]

Church of Rome. The death of Christ is not sufficient for all sin. Present and future sins still need forgiveness through a combination of Christ's work and the sacraments. Rome does not accept the name given to them. Instead, they believe in the Jesus of their own imagination. This is really also the problem of our culture. It does not believe in a Christology from above – the name given by God, but in a Christology from below – knowledge is a subjective opinion. Ultimately, believing in the Jesus of our own imagination is really our problem too. We boast of believing in Christ our only Saviour, but we deny him by our deeds. In doing so, we do not really accept the only name given to us.

Peter's second reason for insisting on *solus Christus* is that our salvation is found only in the given name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Creation is groaning in the pains of childbirth since it has been subjected to futility because of sin. But one day it will share in our redemption in the coming kingdom. We are groaning in the pains of childbirth too as we eagerly await the redemption of our bodies in the coming kingdom. The only way to enter this kingdom of heaven is to be rescued from sin and to be transformed into the image of Christ. Only in the name of Jesus are we given this salvation.

Peter's third reason for *solus Christus* is that there is a divine necessity for humankind to be saved through the name of Jesus. Stephen Wellum distinguishes three aspects to this divine necessity. The first aspect is that God has a plan of redemption. Before the foundation of the world the Son was appointed as Mediator of his people and the Son voluntarily accepts this appointment. This plan of salvation needs to

be fulfilled by being worked out in the history of this world. The second aspect is the requirement of obedience. Having been created in the image of God, Adam failed to obediently display the glory of God. Having been created in the image of God, Israel also failed to obediently display the glory of God. Accordingly, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the second Adam and the true Israelite, as our representative and substitute, needs to obediently display this glory of God so that God can have a big family of human sons and daughters that display his glory (Hebrews 2:10). The third aspect to the divine necessity is the problem of sin and forgiveness. On the one hand, God must punish sin; on the other hand, he wants a family of human sons and daughters who display his glory. So how is God going to achieve this? The only way is to forgive sin; he must do this. But the problem of forgiveness goes even deeper. It goes right into the nature of God himself. Because God cannot tolerate sin, he must provide his own solution to the problem of forgiving sin. He must satisfy himself by having his Son identify with himself in his divine nature and having him identify with us in his human nature. In doing so, the Lord Jesus satisfies God's justice by dealing with the problem of sin with his obedient life and obedient death. God can now forgive and have his big family of human sons and daughters that reflect his glory.

And so we must be saved by the name of Jesus. God continues to put the Jesus case on the agenda of our lives. In doing so, he brings us into a crisis of faith and repentance every day again. The more we know from personal experience our own guilt and corruption and how much we need the blood and the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the more we will embrace the exclusivity and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus. ■

Reformed and Presbyterian Mission Work among Indians



Rev. Hiralal Solanki is ordained Minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India in New Delhi and Academic Dean at the Caleb Institute / Global Leadership Institute.

1. Introduction

The present India has people from three stocks, namely Aryan, Dravidian and Mongoloids. It is popularly believed that in earlier days dark coloured people, known as Dravidians, inhabited India. The Aryans entering from the north settled mainly in the northern plains. They pushed natives/Dravidian people to the south or subdued them into slavery. The Aryans had the Varna system of four 'colours' or classes. The existing native people they called 'untouchables' or the classless/outside caste. Later by invasions other races (religious groups) entered India as well. Each group struggled for its own unique identity in society, but intermarriage also occurred. Altogether these encounters created hundreds of major and thousands of small or sub-people groups. The colour of the caste ranked high came to be understood as white. The people who were pushed away from the plains settled in the forested areas of the Deccan plateau. Most of these are known as tribals today. The Aryans brought the Vedic religion with them, which developed and changed into what is now known as Hinduism.

The Christian religion arrived in India in AD 52 with the apostle Thomas, which led to the founding of many churches (according to an old tradition recorded from the 2nd and 3rd century itself). Portuguese sailors, followed by the notable missionaries Francis Xavier and Robert De Nobile also arrived in the south and southwest coast. They reached Brahmans (as claimed by Syrian Orthodox churches), Paravars in Kerala and Tamilnadu and Goans in Goa.

Not only Jesuit missionaries but also Englishmen brought the Christian witness to North India before the arrival of Protestant missions. They came to the Mughal emperor's court as early as the 16th century. Official Protestant missionaries arrived in July 1706 at Tranquebar, Tamilnadu, South India. This was a mission sent by the king of Denmark Frederick IV. The first team consisted of Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Henry Pluetschau. Henceforth this paper will focus on the Reformed and Presbyterian mission in India, dividing the area into four geographical parts. Occasionally we will cover neighbouring countries' areas as well, as they were part of larger India especially in the days of the English colonization.

2.1 North and Northwest India

This area has been home to a great ancient civilization known as Mohenjo Daro and Harappa. Today it is a heavily populated area: about half of the entire popu-

lation of India lives here. Among the numerous people groups, based on either cultural distinctives or religious followings, the two prominent groups are: the people in castes; and those outside caste or untouchables. It is among these untouchables where most of the mass conversion movements have occurred.

From 1834, missionaries from North American Presbyterian churches reached this part of India, later followed by Canadians and New Zealanders. Rev. John C. Lowrie, Rev. John Newton and Rev. C.W. Foreman established their new headquarter in Ludhiana. In 1835 they acquired a printing press. By publishing tracts, Scriptures, and dictionaries of Punjabi, Urdu, Persian, Hindi and Kashmiri, they helped in standardizing the languages of this region. During the 1860s the Reformed and Presbyterian missions created a chain of stations throughout the northwest in a continuous line from Allahabad to Dehradun. They worked in the areas of education, medicine, translation and printing. One of the reasons for success in the area was that the Reformed churches (in contrast to Roman Catholics) trained and did their ministry in vernaculars, paving the way to reach into many people groups. This area witnessed mass movements among two untouchable groups: the Meghs (a weaver community) and Chuhars. The first ordained native in this region at Lodiana mission was Rev. Golaknath.

The Zanana mission of the Reformed Churches was initiated in the north by Miss Morris around 1912. It reached out to women, who would not venture outside their home in many places. It resulted in a breakthrough, soon almost doubling the number of baptisms.

In Delhi, the capital and all-important city in this belt, the first missionary to arrive was Rev. James Thomas of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1818. The first converts of Delhi were Dr. Chaman Lal, assistant surgeon of Delhi, and professor Ram Chandra of Delhi college from the high caste of the Kayastha (scribes). The period 1800 to 1857 was a period of small beginnings: by 1857 there were still less than 200 native Christians in the region of Delhi.

The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 badly disturbed Christian missions in the northwest. Another serious backlash was the endeavour of the Arya Samaj, a revivalist mission, a movement of Hinduism, which can be compared to the Jesuit Counter-Reformation. At one point, more than half of the 40,000 Meghs gathered were converted to Arya Samaj.

Various Reformed and Presbyterian denominations

Presbyterian
Theological Seminary



are working in this area. Even today poor, underprivileged, and untouchable people are more responsive to the gospel. Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Dehra Dun, which trains most of the Reformed and Presbyterian leaders in Southeast Asia is in this region. This is one of the areas in India with the least Christian presence.

2.2 West and Central India

In this region, apart from Hinduism and Islam, is the presence of a variety of tribal people groups, animistic in religion. There is significant presence of Parsis also in the Bombay region. American Presbyterians were involved in missions in Bombay from 1812. S. Nott and Gordon Hall worked here, soon followed by Scottish Presbyterians. Their activities included street preaching, operating schools, translating Scripture and publishing Christian evangelistic literature.

In 1840 the Presbyterian Church in Ireland commissioned its first foreign missionaries, Alexander Kerr and James Glasgow, who worked at Rajkot, Gujarat. These missions were very successful in education and have left some famous institutions in education.

The Presbyterian Free Church of Scotland sent missionaries to Central India: Rev. Stephen Hislop in Nagpur in 1844, Rev. John McNeil in 1898, Miss Elizabeth MacLeod at Seoni in 1905, Dr. Annie Mackay in 1921. There were also missionaries from Northern Ireland and Australia. This led to the Presbyterian Free Church of Central India, with churches in Jabalpur, Lakhnadon and other places. From 1959, natives were ordained for ministry; the first of them was Rev. Prakash Kumar. There have been some recent surges in tribals coming to Christ in these areas. This has fuelled the recent persecution in Chattisgarh and a few years back in Gujarat. The right wing Hindu organizations are performing Ghar Vapsi ('Home Coming'), conversion back to Hinduism among tribals.

2.3 East and Northeast India

This area includes mainly states along the east coast as well as those in the northeast, east of Bengal. The latter have a mongoloid population. They have a strong Christian presence. In some small states, Christians are even the majority. Among Reformed and Presbyterians, the first to arrive in this area was Alexander Duff in 1830. He was an educationalist and worked toward establishing many institutions to this end. In 1870, the Free Church of Scotland began working in Bihar, Bengal, Assam and Orissa. William Macfarlane, missionary of the Church of Scotland, arrived in Darjeeling in 1870, paving the way for evangelization of the hills. The efforts of missionaries into these areas have resulted in a significant number of Christians in the areas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong.

The Welsh Presbyterian missionary Rev. Thomas Jones with his wife came to the northeast in 1841. Various other missions followed and the gospel spread in east and south Assam and Mizoram, later on to Manipur and Tripura. Also from Wales came Watkin Roberts to south Manipur, evangelizing Hmars, Paites and Kukies. Welsh Presbyterians contributed to Serampore College, helping to reach out and influencing missions to many people groups.

Various Indian Reformed churches continue missionary work in these areas. Still there are many unreached people groups.

2.4 South India

This is a predominantly Dravidian region. Apart from Hinduism and Islam, Christianity is a major religion here. The Tranquebar mission from Denmark was the first official Protestant mission to arrive in this region of India. One of its most notable converts was Kanabadi Vathiar, who was baptized in 1709. From 1834, American missionaries established many schools, hospitals, seminaries and churches. Dr John Murdoch from Scotland wrote lots of tracts.

The Arcot Mission of the Reformed Church of America in India began with Dr. John Scudder. As the mission grew, the missionaries taught agricultural practices and helped with medical assistance, as well as with the building of churches, hospitals, and schools. The mission built up an indigenous church in which the Indians had full membership and equality. Missionaries learned the local language: 'Missionaries along with their indigenous collaborators, functioned as dubhashis – as go betweens or conduits for information flowing between two civilizations.' This way they helped create an infrastructure for the gospel, which became instrumental in later mass movements. These mass movements occurred among suppressed castes such as the Paravars and Mukkavars and other underprivileged castes such as carcass cleaning and leather working people. By 1950, the Arcot mission claimed to have 35,000 converted Indians in Andhra and Tamilnadu. Vellore hospital is one of the most prestigious testimonies of this work today. Historically it is accepted that converts in the St Thomas tradition in the state of Kerala were Brahmans. Later high caste converts had to go through heavy persecution resulting in martyrdom.

3. Constantine Moments

In the history of missions in India there were some moments that I term as Constantine moments. In any one of them, success could have converted the ruler of that time and given the church a significant foothold. The first opportunity came when from 1609, Captain William Hawkins served in the court of the Great Moghul Emperor at Agra, the then capital of India for quite some time. As an ambassador he brought a letter from King James. However, Jesuits were already here in the court. They defiled the letter as primitive in style and hostile to the Mughals, portraying a divided picture of Christian faith. They were more interested in business than faith. A second opportunity came in Nepal, when Capuchin missionary priests convinced the king to issue an edict in 1737 that gave liberty of conscience and liberty to preach and convert. This could have been favourable to the mission in North India. However, the king began to look at missionaries suspiciously as they seemed to be on the side of his attackers, the British troops. From then for 150 years Nepal was a closed country, but missionaries continued working in the border area and the Bible was translated into Nepali. The first Nepali to become a pastor was Rev. Ganga Prasad. In 1953 Nepal was opened



Solanki presenting his paper at the Immanuel Congregation of Jordan

[photo Laurens den Butter]

for medical missionaries only. During the closed years since 1914 Sadhu Sundar Singh preached in this area on his way to Tibet.

4. Native for Natives

When we look at the mass conversions in India it was always a local native who reached out to his own and became the catalyst in their communities to influence them to Christ. Here I would like to pay tribute to these unsung heroes. In mass movements in Punjab, two very special people in these communities were Mastan Singh among the Megs and Ditt among the Chuhars. Ditt is described as: 'A dark little man, lame of one leg, quiet and modest in his manner, with sincerity and earnestness well expressed in his face, and at that time about thirty years of age.' After his conversion he refused to move into the mission compound and went back to his village and family. He endured hardship and went around doing his regular work and preaching the gospel in the course of work. In the Ao tribe, one of fifty in Nagaland, the gospel was taken by Godhula, a low caste washer man, before missionary Clark's arrival in 1872 at Molungkimong. While Godhula was imprisoned in the village, he began to sing day by day and hearers increased. This made them friends and he was released. His work became an opening for the greater conversion to take place in Nagaland. In south India an unbaptized volunteer missionary, Mr. Kornapati Souri, preached and read the tracts to people while going on his business of procuring oxen for his village farmers. Another important convert in the south region was

Vedamanikam from the village of Mayiladi in Travancore of the caste of Simbavar, an Adi Dravida. Together with the missionary William Tobias Ringeltaube of the London Missionary Society he became an important help to bring Nadars to Christ.

The catalysts for mass movements that occurred in Madigas and Malas were a couple, Periah and Nagama. Frykenberg writes: 'Periah and Nagama ... spent ten years wandering from village to village throughout an area within a radius of eighty miles, telling Madigas that their only hope lay in Christ.'

5. Conclusion

Many people groups came to conversion *en masse* because of the dignity they would obtain by becoming Christian. People like Ditt in Panjab, Vedamanikam and Kanabadi Vathiar in Tamilnadu, and Kornapati Souri in Arcot missions, who were from low caste, proved better evangelists bringing masses with them, rather than high caste converts like Krishna Mohan Banerji, a Brahman, a notable convert in Alexander Duff's ministry in Bengal. Most of the dramatic mass movements were Avarna caste movements. They originated from the deprivation of these people in society by Brahmans. This was very painful and inhuman at times. Frykenberg writes about the 'movements of conversion among peoples whose despair, leaving them nowhere else to turn, responded to the Christian faith.' These conversions of low caste into the Church created caste problems. When people who

projected themselves of higher caste than other converts began to discriminate, some missionaries resorted to the use of powers of state authority. In one instance in 1834 in Thanjavur, when missionaries asked the district magistrate to flog the Hindu Christians, one person was so beaten that he required the professional help of a surgeon. These incidents were taken as intrusions of foreigners into the domestic systems, and created an atmosphere of fear, alienating further conversions in certain people groups.

75% to 90% of the converts in the church until the early 20th century were from mass movements from lower caste. The resistance to accept them as equal Christians resulted in slowing down their coming to church. In many such groups of people the converts were not given adequate leadership. This hampered further growth of Christianity in many of these groups, especially in northwest India.

Culture, outlook and ownership are very important issues in mass movements to affect a particular people group. Among most mass movements in India it was someone within the group who owned up the gospel and carried it as his own.

For today's missions to succeed it has to turn indigenous as Hedlund defines it: 'Indigenous missions mean missionary work rooted in the Indian churches, generally of Indian origin, control, direction, and finance.'

In my understanding there are various stages of reaching out to the native communities, such as:

1. Preaching a sermon or giving the gospel orally, distributing tracts etc.,
2. Baptizing a few people in the community,
3. Significant numbers become Christian, a very visible presence,
4. The culture/life of the community begins to be transformed by the gospel,
5. The community becomes the missionary to others.

Various native-reached communities are at one or other stage in this process in India. The work needs to be continued from there. This is the challenge to us today, in which we endeavour to succeed. ■

■ Appendix

Some of the Reformed and Presbyterian church groups working in India

1. Reformed Ecumenism – Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship, formed by the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in India. It generally meets once a year in January. Most Reformed churches are members of this body and cooperate with each other.
2. Reformed Presbyterian Church of India – Historically drawn from AP and RP missions; it has some 14 churches and various worshipping fellowships. It has presence in UP, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.
3. United Church of North India – A union of old Presbyterian churches, still having a good presence in Ludhiana, Darjeeling, Kolhapur and some other areas.
4. Evangelical Church of India – A new start-up by Mission of Peace Making, having its work in Himachal, Punjab and Chandigarh in the north.
5. Presbyterian Church of India – A major denomination based in Northeast India, doing serious mission work in the north; not part of RPF.
6. North India Presbyterian Church – Being sponsored and led by Korean missions mainly in Haryana.
7. Presbyterian Church of South India – This church group started with the friendship between Kiran Kumar, a young Christian man in Andhra Pradesh, and Dan Harris, a Presbyterian elder in PCA USA in 2002. PCSI serves with 37 ministers and 31 evangelists in partnership with MTW.
8. Presbyterian Church of India Reformed – The division of the presbyteries in the North East India General Mission in 1951 was due to tribal/linguistic factors. On April 14, 1984, a new church for Paite speaking people was organized, namely the Presbyterian Church in India (Reformed). At present it consists of 3 presbyteries with 41 local churches and 9 mission churches. The total population is approximately 10,000 members from different tribes speaking different dialects.
9. South India Reformed Church – a church group started under the leadership of Rev. Abraham, partnered by Reformed churches in The Netherlands.
10. Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Sikkim – A very strong and vibrant denomination. It has a very commanding position in the state of Sikkim.
11. Presbyterian Free Church (Kalimpong) – It started with a meeting of believers in 1973. Its first ordained minister was Rev. A.H. Subba. It is now a strong group of churches involved in various ministries of church. They have a strong mission presence in Nepal.
12. Presbyterian Free Church of Central India – This is a historical denomination working in Central India, a former mission field of Free Church of Scotland. It has now five main churches and several mission fields.
13. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India – The RPCNEI broke away from Evangelical Assembly Church in 1979. It was in association with RPCI till 1995, when it separated due to geographical distance. It has 12,671 members and 58 ministers. Its mission outreach is spread to 11 language groups.
14. Christian Reformed Fellowship of India – Started in 2006 with the help of the Christian Reformed Church of Australia and the Reformed Churches in Netherlands (Liberated). Serving in the state of Gujarat and Maharashtra, also some places in Rajasthan. Having some 80 evangelists leading 300 worship centres.
15. Covenant Reformed Assembly – A church group started from Ramchandrapuram in Andhra Pradesh with the help of URC in USA, now under the leadership of Rev. Moses.
16. Reformed Church of South Africa (RCSA) – This is relatively new, beginning 2010, and currently having ministry in Gujarat state.
17. Presbyterian Church of Brazil – IPB has started its mission work in Goa and Maharashtra in 2015, having three church plants.
18. Bible Presbyterians from Singapore – Especially involved in education and social work.
19. Presbyterian Evangelistic fellowship – Dr Dasan Jayraj, an M.Th. from Serampore, PhD in Missions from Utrecht University in the Netherlands, is the leader. It is working in partnership with PCA.

■ Note

This is a summary by Drs. Piet Houtman of the paper 'Brief Overview of Christian (Reformed and Presbyterian) Missions in India' that Rev. Hiralal Solanki presented at the ICRC meeting. The full article with text references and footnotes can be found at the ICRC website www.icrconline.com/library.

Sola Gratia - By Grace Alone

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them

Eph. 2:8-10.

By Dick Moes, Moderator of the ICRC 2017.

There is a certain kind of gift giving popular in our culture. It is characterized by two criteria. First, you carefully choose to whom to give a gift, for the recipient needs to be worthy to receive the gift. You look for a quality in the person or an achievement of the person that makes giving a gift fitting, such as the Nobel Prize or a graduation gift. Second, gifts are given within the context of reciprocal relations with the purpose of not only cementing these relationships, but also in the expectation of receiving a gift in return, such as in the world of business and politics.

John Barclay has observed that this kind of gift giving was also popular in Paul's culture. The gods carefully chose to whom they gave gifts. Only individuals or cities worthy to receive a gift would receive one. Human beings followed the same pattern. Furthermore, gifts were given in the context of reciprocal relationships with the expectation of some kind of return.

I mention this because our text is about gift giving. The word 'grace' in our text is the normal word for gift. Grace is central to the teaching of the apostle Paul. We cannot understand Paul without understanding his teaching about grace. However, what makes the good news good is that Paul departs from the dominant view of grace in his culture. Grace is for those who are unfit and unworthy. The beginning of Ephesians 2 is a case in point. We are unworthy of grace because the element of our lives was sin and trespasses, we had the mindset of those alienated from God, we were under the control of Satan and our life was about gratifying the own needs. Furthermore, because we were enemies of God, we were by nature children of wrath. We were also unfit to receive grace for we were spiritual corpses unable to save ourselves.

But God gives grace. Not 'therefore', but 'nevertheless'. Despite our unworthiness, our unattractiveness, our weakness, God gives grace! Unmerited favour! Paul roots this grace in the nature of God himself, in his love. The God who eternally lives in a fellowship of love with his Son through the bond of the Holy Spirit wants a family of sons and daughters who share in the privileges of this fellowship of love. So he creates a world and

people in this world. But they refuse to be his children and to act as such. In fact, they become his enemies. And yet God continues to love the world and people in this world because he is rich in mercy, having pity on their unfit and helpless state.

And so God sends his own Son to rescue people from sin and transform them into his image. He includes his people in what Christ does and blesses them with every spiritual blessing in Christ. He makes them spiritually responsive by having them share in Christ's resurrection power so that no longer is sin the element of their lives, but the risen Christ. Consequently, they no longer have the mindset of the world, but the mind of Christ, spiritually raised and alive in him. And one day they will physically rise from the dead with spiritual bodies like the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, sharing in the privileges of his sonship, and ruling with him on a new earth. All this is because of the great love, the rich mercy and the free grace of God.

Because God included his people in Christ, he also seated them with him in heaven. Consequently, they are no longer ruled by the passions of the flesh, but rule these passions with Christ. No longer are they controlled by Satan, but they control Satan with Christ. When Christ was exalted at the right hand of his Father, they were exalted with him. God saved us for this because we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.

You will recall that grace is given in the context of reciprocal relationships, in the expectation of some kind of return that will cement this relationship. But this return – this thankfulness – is all grace. It is the mystery of Christ in us as he does in us what he has done for us. For we were created in Christ for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Thus, the Christian life is all about putting on Christ and living in him.

The whole purpose of this good news of grace is so that in the coming ages God might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. The good news is all about grace: the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ and our union with him, our own unworthiness and unfitness, and the unmerited favour and kindness of God. The coming ages will be one big display of this grace. One big family of human sons and daughters drawn into the love, light and life of the Father and the Son in the Spirit sharing the rights and privileges of the Son for all eternity. The mystery of Christ in us, the life of glory!

This understanding of grace – gift giving – radically changed Paul. At one time, he used to be proud of his worthiness and fitness for the service of God. But after

his encounter with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ he considers his former criteria of worthiness to be null and void. This understanding of grace is also good news for the Gentiles. For God did not call them because they were wise, powerful and of noble birth. But God had chosen the foolish to shame to wise, the weak to shame the strong, the low and despised – even things that are not – to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being would boast in the presence of God. This understanding of grace is also good news for congregational life, for in the congregation the distinctions of Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female do not determine one's worthiness and fitness, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Remembering Reformation 500 is a good time to rediscover and celebrate *sola gratia* – by grace alone. The communion of saints vertically is only for the unworthy and unfit. But the communion of saints horizontally is also only for the unfit and unworthy. The church is a community that welcomes everyone who puts on the Lord Jesus Christ in faith and lives in him through faith. Last but not least, grace is given in the context of reciprocal relationships with the expectation of some kind of return. What Christ has done *for* us he now wants to do in us as we live in his Spirit through faith, so that we thankfully embody the worthiness and fitness of the Lord Jesus Christ. ■



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As yet, we know not what will be the event. But since it appears as though God would use your blood to sign his truth, there is nothing better than for you to prepare yourselves to that end, beseeching him so to subdue you to his good pleasure, that nothing may hinder you from following whithersoever he shall call. For you know, my brothers, that it behooves us to be thus mortified, in order to be offered to him in sacrifice.

(Letter from John Calvin to the Five Prisoners of Lyons)

Calvin's Preaching on Job

The study of Calvin's sermons on Job reveals that the Reformer is aware of pastoral needs and issues. In an illuminating passage, Calvin seemed to be self-consciously aware of the importance of his task as a preacher to those in pain: 'For afflictions are as diseases. A physician shall kill his patients, if he have not a regard of their diseases. And it becomes him also to be acquainted with the complexions of patients. Even so ought we to consider of those whom God visits with afflictions.' This paper will examine Calvin's preaching on the book of Job.

■ Historical setting of the Joban sermons

That Calvin should have turned to the book of Job in the years 1554-1555, is, in one sense at least, without surprise. Six months before the commencement of the Joban sermons, on 13 August 1553, Michael Servetus arrived in Geneva, making his way that afternoon to hear Calvin preach in Saint Pierre. Despite Calvin's

protests for a more humane method than burning, the eventual decision of 25 October 1553 by the Venerable Company of Pastors of Geneva to have Servetus executed as a heretic was to bring down upon the Reformer a torrent of criticism. In the years leading up to the Servetus affair, Calvin's enemies had been looking for opportunities to criticize him. Writing to Bullinger in September 1553, some seven months after the commencement of the sermons on Job, Calvin recounts how the Servetus issue still troubles his relationship with the *Conseil*: 'Indeed they cause you this trouble, despite our remonstrances; but they have reached such a pitch of folly and madness, that they regard with suspicion whatever we say to them.'

In 1553, the issue of ecclesiastical discipline, thought to have been decided in the *Ordonnances* of 1541, was challenged by the so-called *Petit Conseil*. In the February elections of 1552, Calvin's long-standing opponent Ami Perrin was elected as first syndic. Pierre Tissot,



Job Rebuked by His Friends [painting
William Blake (1805)]

Perrin's brother-in-law, became the city's lieutenant. The 'Perrinist' party (otherwise known as the Libertines) sought to challenge the agreed policy with regard to ecclesiastical discipline insisting that, prior to the Easter communion of 1553, they be sent a list of all those currently excommunicated. The challenge to Calvin was incontrovertible. On 15 February 1553, Calvin wrote to the persecuted French believers on his need of being tamed by such trials: 'It is very difficult for me not to boil over when someone gets impassioned. Yet so far no one has ever heard me shouting. But I lack the chief thing of all, and that is being trained by these scourges of the Lord in true humility. And therefore it is all the more necessary that I should be tamed by the free rebukes of my brethren.'

By Monday, 24 July, Calvin asked to be allowed to resign. The request was denied. Matters worsened in September. By Sunday, September 3, following a warning for the excommunicated not to present themselves at the Lord's Supper, Calvin evidently thought this might be his last sermon in Geneva. He preached on the farewell address of Paul to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:13-38). During the administration of the sacrament, the armed Libertines present made a gesture as though they might seize the sacrament forcibly. Calvin spread his arms over the table and defied them and they left. However, Calvin was not dismissed as he had feared.

Calvin's health was always a matter of great concern. Job would seem to have been an obvious choice for Calvin to turn to in his preaching. Earlier that summer, perhaps recalling the very issues in Job, Calvin writes to five French prisoners in Lyons. After exhorting them to faith and constancy in their trials, Calvin muses on the apparent injustice of their condition: 'It is strange, indeed, to human reason, that the children of God

should be so surfeited with afflictions, while the wicked disport themselves in delights; but even more so, that the slaves of Satan should tread us under foot, as we say, and triumph over us. However, we have wherewith to comfort ourselves in all our miseries, looking for that happy issue which is promised to us, that he will not only deliver us by his angels, but will himself wipe away the tears from our eyes.'

What is immediately apparent in Calvin's Sermons on Job is their dissimilarity to the great works on Job that preceded them. Gregory the Great, for example, had written thirty-five books on Job, viewing the Old Testament allegorically and typologically, each verse of Job alluding to Christ in some way. Calvin, on the other hand, was careful and reticent in his use of typology and critical of the use of allegory. The book of Job was for him a book, first and foremost, about God. Calvin had not turned to Job because of its obvious themes of suffering and trial; he did not believe the book of Job contained solutions to these great moral dilemmas of the universe. Rather, he sought to turn the congregation in Geneva, and his own soul, to the reality of God's sovereignty and power in the contingencies of seemingly disordered life.

The sermons, recorded by a professional stenographer, were first published in French in 1563, during Calvin's lifetime. This was the period of the outbreak of the first of the Civil Wars of Religion in France, following the Massacre of Vassy in 1562. Perhaps, not incidentally, a second edition appeared in French in 1569, following the reformer's death, at the point when the Huguenot cause looked bleak during the second Civil War. A third French edition appeared at the beginning of the seventeenth century (1611) following the assassination of Henri IV and the persecution that followed it. Several translations in English, German and Latin were made, barely over a decade following their initial publication in French. Given their popularity – four English editions were published within the first ten years – it is difficult to understand Calvin's initial reluctance in seeing their publication. Concerned as he was with the exposition of the text, the relevance of these sermons became immediately applicable wherever they were read.

■ Calvin's analysis of the argument of Job

A problem arises for any interpreter of the book of Job: how to consistently maintain Job's integrity. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that testimony to his righteousness is given both by the author of Job (Job 1:1), and by God himself as bookends to the work (Job 1:8; 42:8). That Job was not sinless is a point Calvin stresses in the exegesis of the book, 'but herewithal we have further to mark, that in all this disputation, Job maintained a good case, and contrariwise his adversaries maintained an evil case. And yet it is more, that Job maintaining a good quarrel, did handle it ill, and that the other setting forth an unjust matter, did convey it well. The understanding of this will be as a key to open unto us this whole book.' How, then, can the righteousness of God be sustained in the face of such testimony? The issue depends upon the integrity

of Job's claim to 'innocence'; but it is a claim, concerning which Calvin is ambivalent. In the opening sermon he gives eloquent testimony to Job's godliness:

'It is said, that he was a sound man. This word "sound" in the Scripture is taken for a plainness, when there is no point to feigning, counterfeiting, or hypocrisy in a man, but that he shows himself the same outwardly that he is inwardly, and specially when he has no starting holes to shift himself from God, but lays open his heart, and all his thoughts and affections, so as he desires nothing but to consecrate and dedicate himself wholly unto God. The said word has also been translated "perfect". But forasmuch as the word perfect has afterward been misconstrued, it is much better for us to use the word "sound". For many ignorant persons, not knowing how the said perfection is to be taken, have thought thus: "Behold here is a man that is called perfect, and therefore it follows, that it is possible for us to have perfection in ourselves, even during the time we walk in this present life." But they deface the grace of God, whereof we have need continually. For even they that have lived most uprightly, must have recourse to God's mercy: and except their sins be forgiven them, and that uphold them, they must all perish.'

Throughout his exegesis, Calvin upholds this defence of Job's character, against the view taken by Job's counsellors, who maintain that Job's suffering is due to sin on his part. A case for 'innocent suffering', then, can be made.

Since Job has a 'good case', the immediate cause of Job's suffering must not be seen as retribution for personal guilt on Job's part. Taking up Job's protest in Job 9, Calvin remarks: 'Thus you see what Job meant by saying that he was wounded without cause: that is to wit, as if a man should have demanded of him, know you any evident cause in yourself why God punishes you? I see none. For Job was handled after a strange fashion ... Job therefore saw not to what end God did this: there was reason in it, as to his knowledge. That is true: for he speaks not in hypocrisy.' The theology of instant retribution is an inappropriate measurement of suffering. It is the canon of Job's friends to be sure, but it is one which Calvin consistently repudiates.

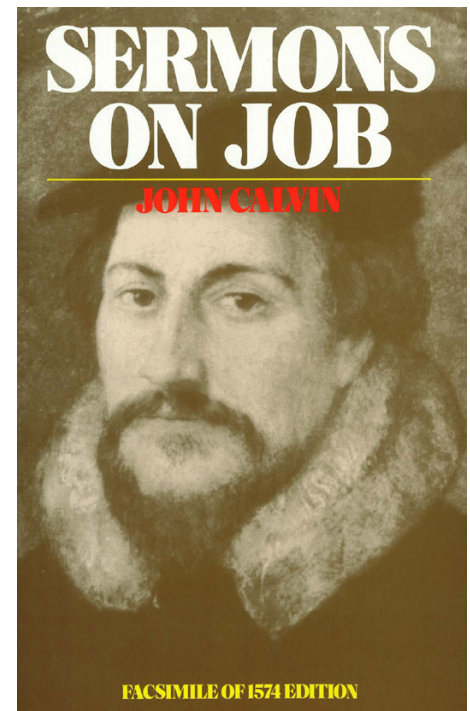
■ Interpreting the Hand of God

For Calvin, the book of Job is about the doctrine of providence. Whereas in the *Institutes* Calvin could concern himself with the profound issues of the relationship of divine providence and sin,

Calvin's overriding concern in the sermons is that we learn from, profit from and apply God's providence. Sometimes, he compares man to beasts, unable to discern the hand of God in all things. Consequently, it is possible to 'mis-read' providence. Equally, Calvin insists that afflictions do no good unless God works in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That is why Job needed wisdom to discern the misplaced counsel that he received from his friends suggesting that his afflictions were judgments from God. Calvin complains, at one point, that, 'Job turned God's providence quite upside down, and that instead of comforting and cheering himself therewith, he would fain that God were far off.' Similarly, he complains at Bildad's simplistic and monotheistic interpretation of God's works of providence, insisting as he does that Job's suffering is a judgment from God. A measure of discernment is necessary, Calvin insists, in order to interpret God's providence correctly.

Whilst Calvin is consistently critical of Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar, he is untiringly supportive of the contribution of Elihu. In particular, Elihu sees adversity as educative rather than necessarily retributive. Adversity is often pedagogic, for sometimes it is his will to try the obedience of good men. In sermon 140 (Job 36:6-14), drawing on Elihu's distinctive contribution, Calvin brings to the surface the various pedagogic inferences of suffering. Thus, affliction serves several ends: it is the true schoolmistress to bring men to repentance; it weans us from dependence on the things of this world. Significantly, afflictions are by God's appointment; they are God's 'archers', his artillery. Afflictions are a part of God's 'double means' whereby he humbles us (the other being his Word). Applications of this nature underline the importance of Elihu for Calvin. It forms the basis upon which Calvin understands the entire book of Job, and the lessons that are to be learned throughout the book.

Following the opening lines of the *Institutes*, afflictions serve in knowing God, and knowing ourselves. Though Calvin accepts Job's innocence to a degree, he is not averse to the suggestion that our sins well deserve afflictions. Thus, afflictions show us our sins and cause us to flee in repentance. But in the main, Calvin is concerned in Job to allude to other features of afflictions, lessons which emerge from the mysterious and unexplained occurrence of diverse providences. Hence, whilst afflictions are blessed, good, and



for our profit, we are not always privy to their purpose. They should humble us, and cause us to be more reverent before God. Afflictions also drive us to desire more of God's help, provoking us to return to him, and thereby taming us. Furthermore, Calvin insists that the afflictions of the godly last only for a time, and that God afflicts the believer no more than he can bear.

Calvin adds that such providences are unavoidable. They light upon everyone, at God's good pleasure. None are too insignificant to avoid God's attention. Trials are periods of peculiar temptation that require God to moderate our afflictions. Not that everyone experiences equal measures of trial; there are degrees of suffering. Not everyone is afflicted alike. Trials are to be welcomed by God's children as a privilege. There is a reason for suffering; providence is intelligent and purposive. The distribution of trials is not whimsical or arbitrary. The purpose of the trial may be hidden to us, but not to God. God has another will which may be compared to a deep abyss. In this respect, God's providences are essentially incomprehensible to us. There are secret and incomprehensible judgments. There are high mysteries, which are above our ordinary capacity. In our comprehension of certain providences, we ought to be content to limit ourselves to that which God has revealed about them. The information necessary to decipher certain providences is withheld at God's behest. Consequently, we ought not to fret



The hand of God, Gothic boss at Saint Catherine parish church, Freistadt (Austria)

about the means of our deliverances. It is this perception – that a fatherly hand guides our lives, even as the source of trials – that make it possible for the believer to view all affliction as a joy, rather than a sorrow. We are not to judge God harshly just because we fail to see the reason that lies behind certain providences.

■ Providence and sin

Calvin would have us learn that some providences are meant to be clear in their instructive qualities. For example, Calvin alludes to the two purposes which afflictions serve: firstly, to mortify visible sins; secondly, to bring to the surface those sins that are not immediately apparent. Thus, providence ought to cultivate self-examination. It facilitates the conviction of known sin, and the drawing out of hidden vices within us. This explains why, for Calvin, providence is to be praised. Providence is proof of God's interest in us. However, Calvin insists that blessing is not automatically derived from providence; some do not profit by affliction. For Calvin, such conviction of God's wrath against our sins is the greatest of all afflictions. There are secret sins that continue to lurk within the heart which providence ought to bring to the surface that we might acknowledge them. Trials are profitable only for those who are exercised to piety as a result of them. Unless the Holy Spirit works in us, trials will only harden and destroy. All of this calls forth our submission to God's providence. Calvin is fond of using the expression: 'we play the horses that are broken loose' to convey the

notion of an unwillingness to yield to God's rule. We are to honour God's judgments and not fight against them even when they are incomprehensible to us.

■ Meekness and Reverence

For Calvin, meekness is an essential quality of every Christian. What is meekness? It is that teachable spirit that receives what God says to us. Trials ought to cultivate sincerity and openness before God. Thus, all religion is summarized by the fear of God. Understanding Job as a model, Calvin differentiates godly fear from servile fear. Godly fear is a response to the *goodness* of God as much as it is to his Majesty. Fear and awe is the response of the soul to God's omniscience, steadfastness, and power. Does this mean that we ought never to be *afraid* of God? No, for Calvin, such would border on presumption. The judgments of God are meant to make those afraid who have cause to be afraid. Such godly fear explains Job's initial response to the trial. The judgments of God should provoke in the godly a similar response. Contemplation of providence ought to induce awe in our hearts towards God, and a sympathy towards others in adversity. Such fear involves having a right understanding of God and his works, a mind and heart that is not given over to speculation. Godly fear reveres Scripture and desires to profit from it. Such godly fear in response to God's providences ought to shut our mouths, cause us to renounce ourselves, prevent us from presumption, overboldness and vanity. It should result in true joy, 'the

true mark whereby to discern God's flock from all the wild beasts that rage abroad.' Adversity, in particular, is suited to the cultivation of the fear of God since it underlines our frailty and insecurity apart from God's fatherly hand upon us. This godly fear is not known by any, save those who are in Christ.

■ Patience

Another consequence of the sometimes dark and mysterious providences of God is to teach us patience. Calvin gives an interesting definition of patience. Insisting that it does not mean insensitivity to pain, he goes on to amplify it in this way: 'when they can modestly moderate themselves, and hold such a measure, as they cease not to glorify God in the midst of all their miseries.' Calvin accepts that Job was a patient man, but cautioned on the misuse of James' commendation. Job was deeply troubled by his passions during the course of his trial, thereby causing him at times to become impatient. Impatience manifests itself in striving against God and finding fault with him; in making ourselves 'equal' with God. Furthermore, unrepented impatience will add to the rigour of our final judgment!

■ Prayer

Calvin makes mention of prayer several times in the Joban sermons. Prayer is an expression of our utter dependence upon God. Prayer is also expressive of our communion and closeness to God, a response to the revelation of Fatherly goodness to us. Thus, the Christian life is prayer; it is the greatest privilege we know. Prayer thus expresses the (subjective) act of believing *and* the (objective) focus of what we believe. It is an expression of our belief in God's sovereignty. The *need* for prayer is our frailty; our tendency to collapse under pressure thus calls from us a cry for help from God. In this way, adversity encourages prayer when, perhaps, prayer has become neglected. Interestingly, Calvin reiterates in the Joban sermons something that he made explicit in the final edition of the *Institutes*: that prayer be made according to the tenor of the covenant of grace. Thus Calvin can insist that we request nothing which is not agreeable to his will. In this way, Calvin links prayer with God's promises. Thus Calvin is scathing on those who subject God to their own demands whatever they may be.

As to the *manner* of prayer, Calvin again insists upon sincerity. Prayer is thus part of a *spiritual battle*, one in which we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit to enable us to persevere in prayer, and to keep us from stumbling. In this way, prayer is a microcosm of the Christian life. In the same way as we struggle with adversity in *life*, so we struggle with it in *prayer*. What seems to be ‘unanswered’ prayer calls forth from us both patience, and perseverance. In this way, prayer is a means of grace in adversity.

■ Self-denial

Trials may bring out the worst in us. They manipulate the affections in a way that is inappropriate. Our affections, therefore, need to be tamed. According to Calvin, the godly must respond to providence by learning self-denial. The proper response to cross-bearing is a true repentance. In the person of Job we have both a positive and negative model: positive, in that Job appears again and again to be a model of the pious life; but, negative, in that Job’s excessive passions sometimes got the better of him. There is a need for us to learn to put ‘both feet upon our affections’ lest we be guilty of an intemperate response to providence. Our affections blind us; they rob us of our understanding; they make us ungovernable. A due sense of God’s majesty and greatness should encourage us to temper our response. Calvin calls on us to mistrust our affections, even to repress them. In this way, Calvin treats Job’s lapses into melancholy as expressions of the passions of the flesh.

■ The Spiritual Battle

Calvin speaks with great clarity as to the nature of providence that believers like Job can expect in this world. Thus, God may treat us roughly as certain physicians might in order to cure us from some ill. It may appear as though God picks us up and throws down again ‘at his own pleasure.’ Though Calvin is careful not to suggest that Job is being punished for his sins, he does, nevertheless, allow for general comments about chastisement throughout the sermons. Such chastisement is painful. God need but raise his hand and we would all perish. That is why providence ought to teach us to be humble before God, recognizing that apart from his grace and mercy we would all know greater affliction than we do. God does not cease to love us even when he afflicts. In the midst of affliction, he makes us taste his goodness.

Painful experiences of providence have a bearing on our relationship to others. We may learn to profit from affliction by learning sensitivity to others who likewise experience trials. In this way, providence cultivates our experience of the communion of saints. We have already noticed that prayer is a microcosm of the Christian life, reflecting in its struggle the difficulties encountered with providence. The nature of this struggle is that the Christian life is meant to be a fight all the way. This is in harmony with Calvin’s overall portrayal of the Christian life. Sensitive to Job’s great loss, the emotional, psychological trauma he experienced, and, in addition, his physical sickness, none of these equal in intensity the spiritual struggle within Job’s soul. Prayer prepares us for this battle. The nature of the Christian life is a race requiring us to persevere with all diligence. Calvin emphasizes the imagery of pilgrimage and conflict, the Holy war in which the believer is inevitably engaged. For Calvin, Job is proof that the experience of strife and opposition is not indicative of the lack of faith; suffering is to be expected, opposition is normative. We ought to prepare ourselves for battle.

The conflict is internal and subjective as well external and objective. Internally, Satan knows the sin that lies within our hearts. He makes full use of it. Calvin sees affliction as a means of enabling mortification. Satan does not understand that as believers we are no longer in bondage to the flesh or to him. But, since Job’s suffering is not directly related to any indwelling sin as such, the focus of opposition in Job is not so much the world or remaining corruption with Job’s heart; the opposition is primarily the result of Satanic intrusion. Satan seeks to drive the saint to madness by despair. Though Calvin insists that Satan is ultimately powerless, what power he has, he has by virtue of God’s decree and permission. Satan is the destroyer, the hinderer, the devourer, and the seducer. With his wiles he accuses, he tempts, deceives – convincing us that he is our friend and that God is our enemy; but the Devil is our real enemy. Without God’s continual supervision, Satan would overpower and destroy us. But in all this, God overrules Satan’s activity for our good, using the bitterness of the providence as medicine for the cure of our souls. In some, God permits Satan to wreak greater havoc than in others. God allows Satan to do his worst, thus reminding us that, apart from God’s grace, we are altogether without hope.

■ Service

It is against such opposition that we are called upon to live out our Christian lives. And although we see much hardness in ourselves, let us pray God to give us such an invincible strength, as we may continue in his service even to the end. Continuing in his service is something Calvin was desirous to preach to his congregation in Geneva. Surrounded as they were by many difficulties, beyond the city there were friends in greater distress and need. Calvin sought to encourage his listeners against the malaise of despair and dysfunctionism. God orders his rule in such a way as to encourage new areas of service for us to perform. For Calvin, God’s providential ordering of trials was also a means of cultivating and encouraging usefulness in the kingdom. In the very opening sermon on Job, Calvin sees in the patriarch a model of pious service rendered to God. In that sense, Job exemplifies the role for which we were created. Every detail of God’s self-revelation to us is in order that we might know him and serve him better. And our chief service? It is to praise God in every circumstance.

■ Knowing God through adversity

As Calvin alludes to these many pedagogic lessons of adversity, one appears to emerge again and again: that through adversity, we come to know God better. Through adversity, we grow in our understanding and appreciation of God, expanding from a knowledge of God as Creator to a knowledge of God’s goodness, greatness, wisdom, and love. Of particular interest is the way Calvin draws attention to God’s fatherly love in the midst of trials. In particular, adversity enables us to appreciate the immensity and mystery of God: that he is beyond our grasp, hidden from us, and in many ways incomprehensible to us. ‘It behooves us to humble ourselves,’ says Calvin, ‘and to wait till the day come that we may better conceive God’s secrets.’ Calvin is drawn to the conclusion that there is nothing better than to submit all things to God’s majesty. We do not have the mental capacity to grasp God adequately: God’s judgments are too deep a dungeon for us to go down into. In summary, therefore, Calvin urges: ‘we must know the incomprehensible majesty of God.’

■ Notes

Summary by Ria Nederveen of the paper *Calvin’s Preaching on Job* presented by Dr Derek Thomas. The full article can be found at the ICRC website www.icrconline.com/library.

Sola Fide – by Faith Alone

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God

Romans 5:1-2.

By Dick Moes, Moderator of the ICRC 2017.

The Bible begins and ends with the God who has life in himself sharing this with us so that we participate in his life (Gen 1:1: John 1:1). We clearly see this participation in the life of God in the Garden of Eden when God breathes the breath of life into Adam's nostrils so that he becomes a living being. We see the same when we read they hear the sound of God walking in the Garden so that they are able to have fellowship with God in the Garden. The Bible ends the way it begins: with the God who has life in himself sharing this life with us. We read about a new heaven and new earth, a holy city, a New Jerusalem where there will be no tears, death or crying, for the former things have passed away and all things have been made new – physically, emotionally and relationally. Yet, the most profound delight is the satisfaction of God's presence with his people: 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God' (Rev. 21:3).

In between the beginning and end God promises to be present with his people even when they seek to flee from his presence. In other words, when we refuse the life he gives by living in sin, God graciously give us life again in Christ. We see this with the Tabernacle and Temple, the dwelling place of God with his people in the desert and in the Promised Land. We also see this in the incarnation of the Son of God, the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us: Immanuel, God with us. This finds its consummation in the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, Christ and the church living together forever in a one-flesh union on a new earth. The God who has life in himself sharing this life with us. This is the hope of glory.

What is the ground of this goal of salvation? This question presses all the more since this glory is reserved for the righteous while we are by nature unrighteous. The answer lies in the sacrifice made for the unrighteous (Rom. 3:21-26). God's wrath is removed through the appeasement of sin. This was foreshadowed with the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat hidden behind the

veil on the Day of Atonement. But this sacrifice was only a passing over of sin because it did not satisfy the justice of God. This satisfaction happened with the sacrifice of Christ publicly displayed for all. With this sacrifice God demonstrated that he was righteous by appeasing himself through the removal of sin.

This is how he can declare us to be righteous, i.e. justified. He pronounces us righteous like a judge in a courtroom. He does not reckon our sins to us, but imputes the righteousness of Christ to us and, in doing so, declaring us to be righteous. He redeems us from sin through the blood of Christ and makes the enjoyment of God's presence possible.

God does this through faith alone. Not as the ground of our justification, but as the instrument that unites us to Christ. This faith trusts in Christ for our right standing with God. It takes hold of Christ and embraces him, puts him on so that we are clothed with Christ, receiving his righteousness as our own. This faith is a gift of God. Actually, it is the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the pioneer and perfecter of faith (Heb. 12:2). As our representative and substitute, the Lord Jesus believed for us. As we take hold of the Lord Jesus Christ and embrace him in faith, it is the Lord Jesus Christ believing in us, joining us to himself.

With the word 'therefore,' Paul picks up on this whole train of thought. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God. The sacrificial offering of Christ changes God's attitude to us from wrath to peace with God because God reconciled himself with us. We have this peace not as a truce, but a definitive peace. We have this peace not just through the once-for-all sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also through his continual interceding for us at the Father's right hand because he was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). As such, we can rest assured that our peace is secure. Consequently, we can enter into God's presence as accepted children of God and experience his grace. We can stand in this grace. The guilty cannot stand before God. The reconciled and accepted can. They can freely and boldly stand in God's grace.

Moreover, they rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. The God who has life in himself shares this life with us so that we participate in his life. This is the goal of our salvation. But entry into this salvation is being justified by faith alone. God's legal declaration grounds the goal of our salvation. Just think of a marriage. What is the goal of a marriage? Is it not that husband and wife live

together in love? What is the ground of this marriage? Is it not the legal declaration? Just think of the adoption of a child. What is the goal of this adoption? Is it not that the adopted child lives together in love with his new family? What is the ground of this adoption? Is it not the legal declaration? This is the way it is with our salvation. The goal of our salvation is participating in the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a fellowship and ministry of love. The ground of this goal is the legal declaration of being justified through faith alone.

We receive a foretaste of sharing in God's life today. The church is the temple in which God's Spirit dwells. Our body is a temple in which God's Spirit dwells. As such, the church and Christians are dwelling places of God. That's why God's love is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). And the hope of glory is Christ in us. The God who has life in himself shares this life with us so that we participate in his life. This is all through faith. Faith that takes hold of Christ and trusts in him. Faith that puts on the Lord Jesus Christ as our righteousness. ■

Bringing the Reformed Faith to India



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Introduction

This paper is a proposal for mission strategy in twenty-first century India for the Reformed faith. The study briefly surveys missions in India from the early centuries. With this background we explore how we can bring the Reformed faith to India. In discussing this issue, we must hold on to the mandate of the Great Commission, and yet communicate the gospel within the contemporary developments that are present in India.

To meaningfully formulate an appropriate response, it is necessary to know the religious and socio-political conditions in the country, especially the developments in the present context. The paper will be divided into five sections: historical insights from early church history; Christian missions in India up to the time of colonization; the arrival and growth of the Reformed faith in colonial India; the importance of 'calling' in the Reformed tradition in the Indian context; and, bringing the Reformed faith to India in the 21st century.

1. India: Early History to the time of Colonization

■ Early missions and up to medieval times

The Syrian Orthodox churches in south India trace their beginnings to the Apostle Thomas. Tradition holds that Thomas was martyred for his faith. Over the years, the Syrian churches focused primarily on preserving their traditional beliefs.

Roman Catholic friars and priests visited India during the Middle Ages and up to the fifteenth century, at which time they began to colonize parts of India. In the sixteenth century Goa became the headquarters for their work in Asia. Portuguese colonies were made up of Portuguese Catholics as well as those who had intermarried with Indians.

The work of modern Protestant missionary activity in India is closely connected with the various European colonial enterprises in India, especially from the early eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Protestant nations emerged as maritime powers and soon made their settlements in India. The Dutch and British East India Companies and the Danish, which came for trade, brought their own chaplains to serve their employees.

Education played an important role in the early missionary efforts in India. Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, German Pietistic Lutherans sent by the King of Denmark to Tranquebar, South India, in 1706, are considered the first Protestant missionaries to India. Their ministry included schools for children, and from this time education has been an integral part of missionary activity. In the early eighteenth century, Mr & Mrs Joshua Marshman, colleagues of Baptist missionary William Carey, established a network of schools for boys and girls; Carey himself established the now well-known Serampore College. The Scottish Presbyterian missionary Alexander Duff was the pioneer of introducing Western education as a missionary tool to demolish unscientific, non-Christian superstitions. Many others followed in Duff's footsteps. The British consolidated their position in India by

Mission School at Chhapara, operated by the Presbyterian Free Church of Central India, established in 1895 by missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland



Photo: Ria Nederveen

taking a neutral attitude to Indian religions. It was the efforts of evangelical members of the British parliament that made the British East India Company revise their Charters (1813, 1833) so that missionaries would be permitted to work in India. In 1857, an uprising in the ranks of the British East India Company marked a turning point in British interest in India. The mutiny was brutally suppressed, and the Crown took over the administration of India from the Company.

■ Humanitarian assistance

In India, missionaries were quick to identify the needs of the masses. The humanitarian assistance that the missionaries provided became natural tools for evangelism. In many respects their goals and intentions were at cross-purposes with the initial British policy of only trade. The British strongly discouraged missionary activity, believing that tampering with the religious sentiments of the Indians was unhealthy for their trade relations. Some of the areas in which missionaries worked are as follows: direct evangelism (street preaching, and distribution of Christian literature), apologetics (debating with non-Christians on religion), education (establishing schools and colleges, and encouraging female education), medicine (operating mobile clinics and dispensaries, establishing hospitals, and medical colleges for training women nurses and doctors), agriculture (pioneering in scientific farming methods), animal husbandry, and developing technical and vocational training institutions.

Presbyterian and Reformed missions made significant contributions in many of the above-mentioned areas. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the Presbyterian missionaries to India was in the field of education. Although ancient vernacular languages and learning were present in India, there was no exposure to Western thought and science. Furthermore, there was an initial

belief that the evangelization of India must take place not only through direct evangelization, but also through 'indirect methods' such as the establishment of schools and colleges.

2. Reformed Missions in India: Origins, Growth, and Work

The Presbyterian churches throughout the world have made significant contributions towards the work in India. The following are some of the larger Presbyterian missions, and The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), which worked in India.

- *The American Board (ABCFM).* The ABCFM, founded 1810, was primarily a Congregational venture in which Congregational, Presbyterian, and Reformed missionaries participated.
- *Scottish Presbyterians.* In 1823, the Scottish Missionary Society sent D. Mitchell who established several schools at Fort Victoria, 60 miles south of Bombay. Mitchell died within a year of arrival having established 10 schools with nearly 500 pupils.
- *American Presbyterians.* In 1817, the General Assembly approved the 'Society of Foreign Missions'. In 1833, of the two missionary couples sent to India by the WFMS, only John C. Lowrie reached Ludhiana, in the Punjab, where he established a successful mission station. The Presbyterian Church of the USA engaged in aggressive evangelism. The church ordained nationals and placed them in key positions of leadership.
- *The Associate Presbyterians.* The Associate Presbyterians sent Rev. and Mrs Andrew Gordon as their first missionar-

ies to North India in 1855. Gordon established a mission station at Sialkot the same year. The mission established other stations subsequently. Particularly interesting in this context is the mass movement that resulted from an Indian convert named Ditt. The Welsh Presbyterians established a mission among tribal groups in the Khasi Hills of North East India. Their first missionaries, Thomas Jones and his wife, arrived in Cherrapunji in 1841. The Welsh Presbyterian mission established a network of schools, which supplied leadership for the growing church. By the end of the century, the mission began evangelizing other areas of the North East. Today the church, known as the *Presbyterian Church in India* (PCI), is one of the largest denominations in North East India. The PCI operates schools and hospitals, and has two theological seminaries in the area.

■ The Growth and Variety of Presbyterian Missions

In the Mutiny of 1857 many British soldiers and civilians, men, women, and children were brutally massacred. The hatred of the rebels seemed to extend broadly to any persons who identified with the British. The tragic result of this attitude led to the killing of several missionaries, their families, and also of many Indian Christians. This severe test of the Indian Protestant Church in the North resulted in several martyrs who, even when given the option of renouncing their faith, stood by their commitment to Christ. Of these Dorkhal Prashad is outstanding. The martyrdom of Presbyterian missionaries and Indian Christians is generally overlooked in Indian church history. Some, like the Indian Presbyterian minister Gopi Nath Nandy and his family, narrowly escaped death. After the 1857 uprising was put down, the administration of India came under the Crown. Missionary activity was promoted when the British saw that Indian Christians could be loyal associates alongside them. The Presbyterians and Reformed missionaries enjoyed the best that the land had to offer because of their proximity to some sympathetic members of the British administration.

Presbyterians also furthered the emancipation of women in India, chiefly through education. Education among women in India before the nineteenth century was extremely rare. The first record of women being admitted to school comes from Serampore, in 1817. Later, Robert May of the London Missionary Society, Mrs John Wilson in Bombay, and Mrs Wilson (wife of an Anglican missionary) in Calcutta, involved themselves in female education about the same time. Soon Presbyterian missionaries ventured into this field. The Scottish missionary educator Duff opened a Christian day school for girls in 1857. In 1859, the American Presbyterians founded a girls boarding school in Dehra Dun, which produced the first female matriculate of Calcutta University. Another means of education was *zenana* visitation with the dual purpose of evangelism and education. American Presbyterian missionaries were also instrumental in founding several hospitals for women. Presbyterian and Reformed medical missions have played a significant role in the founding of hospitals and medical colleges.

Reformed and Presbyterian missions also involved in promoting agriculture and animal husbandry. Presbyterian missionary Sam Higginbottom started the Allahabad Agricultural Institute. The American Arcot Mission of the Dutch Reformed Church of America founded an Agricultural Institute in Katpadi, South India. The commitment, sacrifice, and achievements of these missionaries, pioneers in their respective fields, are commendable. It is unfortunate, however, that socio-economic considerations eclipsed the burden of evangelization. With the rise of the 'social gospel' theology in America, the perception of missions changed from a myopic and constricted view of salvation as being individualistic and personal to a holistic view that included the social and material liberation. Increasingly, broad-minded missionaries turned their attention towards economic and social, rather than spiritual, freedom.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, due to the overwhelming attention given to the poor and oppressed, Presbyterian missions became centres for social activity. This led to the original evangelistic interest of Presbyterians being replaced by social action. With the growth of nationalism, conversion was considered anti-national. Further, any humanitarian assistance was seen as having an ulterior motive. What had once begun as a preparation for the gospel, and an expression of Christian commitment, became an end in itself. Along with this phenomenon, the original interest in evangelistic missions morphed into social service and nation-building activities. The reason for this could well be that mission was not organically grounded into the heart of a missionary vision.

3. The Importance of Calling in the Reformed Tradition in the Indian Context

■ The Idea of Work and Calling in the Reformed Faith

Both Luther and Calvin saw work as something positive, though with slight differences. For instance, Luther believed that a person who is called to a particular occupation should remain in that for life. Calvin, however, provided for learning of another trade and changing one's occupation. Hart observes that for Calvin the purpose of work was mutual service between fellowmen, and that work 'is a bond which unites a man to his neighbours; work provides mutual contact and communication.' This mutual interdependence provides a foundation for an ideal community. Another major area of difference was the taking of interest on loans. Luther rejected interest and trade itself. Calvin, however, had a positive view of both business and the lending of money on interest, with careful safeguards. Calvin made a distinction between the prohibition on taking interest in the Old Testament and the taking and giving of loans in Geneva. Whereas in the former a loan was taken because of poverty, in Geneva loans were

taken for investing in business and making a profit. Calvin says, 'I now conclude that it is necessary to judge usuries not according to some certain and particular statement of God, but according to the rule of fairness.' Calvin was so broadminded in his understanding of the importance of trade and economic progress that he transformed Geneva into a model city, not just in terms of being a safe haven for refugees, but in making it a hub for business and banking.

■ Calvin's Use of 'Calling'

Despite the trials Calvin endured in Geneva, he sees a 'high calling' before him. He writes, 'But I readily agree with you that, after this sanctification, we ought not to propose to ourselves any other object in life than to hasten towards that high calling; for God has set it before us as the constant aim of all our thoughts, and words, and actions.' This 'high calling' appears to be with Christ. Writing about the suffering Christians in Europe, he prays, 'In a particular manner, we commend unto thee our unhappy brethren who live dispersed under the tyranny of Antichrist, and deprived of the liberty of openly calling upon thy name [...] that thou wouldst deign, O most indulgent Father, to support them [...] so that they may never despond, but constantly persevere in thy holy calling [...]'. 'Holy calling' appears to be faithfulness to God. Again calling appears as simply the call to Christian living: 'Now, although being called to do good works, we produce the fruits of our calling, as it is said (Luke 1:75), that we have been redeemed in order to serve God in holiness and righteousness, we are however always encompassed with many infirmities while we live in this world.' In order to bring the Reformed faith to India in the coming decades, there is need to evaluate the current situation and identify key issues that are before the Church.

Dorcas training centre for women [photo Corrie Geerds]



4. Bringing the Reformed Faith to India in the Twenty-First Century

■ The gospel within the contemporary developments

Rapid economic changes have brought India to self-sufficiency. Today the country stands on very strong ground economically, and is a support to the smaller nations of south Asia. India's selfhood is growing visible both in the part that it plays globally and as an important force in the region. India is no more a 'poor' country. The government is keen on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). What this means is the government is willing to invite foreign investment that would help set up manufacturing concerns and provide employment for Indians. Many car manufacturers produce a certain percentage of car parts locally thereby providing employment and business. Are there Christian entrepreneurs who are willing to invest in a company and make it an exemplary business model?

To bring the Reformed faith to India the church has to rediscover the concept of the divine call. It is wrong to assume that a stereotypical missionary approach used in the past is valid for today. We need to rediscover the idea of Christian calling, both at a local and a global level, and be partners together in fulfilling the Great Commission. This becomes even more necessary considering the contemporary situation. A few important matters highlight the current state of affairs.

■ Materialism and Persecution

Materialism is on the rise in the country due to the growing standard of living. Concurrently, persecution too is growing. Christians, as a minority, in places where they are few in number feel insecure. However, though they are small in number their influence and impeccable reputation for their social work and outstanding contribution to healthcare, education, and other humanitarian services are widely recognized.

One cause for persecution is opposition to direct evangelism. The days for open preaching of the gospel are closed in most parts of India except in places that are predominantly Christian. The main reason for this is the revival of the majority religion. In such a situation how does the church need to proceed?

■ Spreading the Reformed Faith: The Task of the Indian Church

Before considering the idea of bringing the Reformed faith to India it is important to consider what is distinctive about the Reformed faith. First, the Reformed faith ultimately seeks the glory of God. Believers submit their lives to God and seek what God wants of them. Secondly, the Reformed faith is a holistic approach to life. It is not interested in the soteriological and spiritual aspects of life alone. All of life is lived in the consciousness that ultimate accountability is to God. A Christian's life and work cannot be separated from who he is. In India, in the context of corruption and unethical ways of doing things, a Christian businessman, a builder, a home-maker, a teacher, a doctor, or a lawyer becomes someone whose life is a witness to the society in which he/she lives. This means that we need to rediscover the idea of Christian calling: all of life is to be lived for the glory of God.



Further, in India a Reformed approach to life calls Christians to engage with society so that they are a leavening influence in it. Reformed Christians need to help evangelicals to understand that there is no need for them to segregate themselves from society in general. While the idea of separation is often found in Scripture, it needs to be understood in the context in which it is used. Jesus called his followers to be salt and light in the world. The preserving action of salt takes effect slowly; light is seen instantly. Both these aspects, the immediate and the extended, are necessary for the gospel to take root in India. In a society where what you are speaks more than what you are saying, a Christian's life and lifestyle is a reminder of a better way of life that man can aspire to.

■ How can the Indian Church and Its Partners Bring the Reformed Faith to India?

One uncompromising element in bringing the faith to India is that the Indian Church needs to take the responsibility for spreading the faith. It needs to go out in faith and take risks. It has done so in the past and is called to do so now. The role of an evangelist needs to be reconsidered. Evangelists, whose primary call is to preach the gospel, need to be engaged in legitimate occupations. The idea of an evangelist dedicated solely to preach the gospel is better avoided in India today. Rather, all evangelists must have legitimate occupations. Communicating the gospel is best done holistically. The diversity of India also means that in other parts of the country, especially where Christians are a majority, preaching is still welcome. Though this state of affairs is changing slowly in some areas, there is still the possibility of tolerance for an evangelist. However, the spiritual needs of the country are not in the largely Christian areas, but in the predominantly non-Christian regions. Can the church think of unique ways to address this challenge? Can evangelically-minded Christians go as families together, gradually over a period of time, and establish themselves in a virgin field in order to plant a church?

The Reformed faith can take root in India through visible evidence of Christians engaged in legitimate occupations and businesses. Living a normal Christian life is as important as sharing the gospel through

different types of evangelism. Christian entrepreneurs should take advantage of business opportunities in India and be part of the development of the country. Their lives can show the gospel to their neighbours.

Jesus said 'make disciples'. What takes a moment in many parts of the world may take much longer in India, whether in making relationships, trying to understand someone, or being open to talk about one's life. The opportunity to do legitimate businesses in India would give Christians the opportunity to show their faith through action and lifestyle.

■ Bringing the Reformed Faith to India from anywhere in the world

Probably the greatest opportunity for all believers worldwide to bring the gospel to India is right where they are placed. There are hundreds of thousands of Indians resident abroad, some permanently and others as students. Reaching out to this diaspora is within the reach of anyone genuinely interested to bring the Reformed faith to India. This applies even to other non-Western countries. The opportunities for Christian witness are limitless. With proper guidelines there could be a movement that would have immense ramifications.

Simple guidelines include: 1. Do not have any pre-planned agenda with a specific goal in mind; 2. Take the admonition of James 1:19 'quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger' seriously. 3. Be humble and willing to learn about another faith rather to show how your faith is superior; 4. Avoid condescension; 5. Avoid getting into tough subjects like predestination and election (many Christians struggle with these; how much more would an outsider); 6. Try to make lasting friendships. 7. Show Jesus Christ through your life and attitudes.

■ Conclusion

The church in India should never turn its back on the call to preach the gospel and make disciples. It should become more vigorous in this calling by doing those things that are consistent with godly wisdom. The church should in every way be obedient to the laws of the country (Romans 13:1,2) and claim the freedom of religion guaranteed to all citizens and enshrined in the constitution. Indian Christians should obey the authorities and ought to obey God. The same Word that talks about obedience to authorities also speaks about Peter saying, 'We must obey God rather than human beings' (Acts 5:29). God has placed the Indian church in one of the most spiritually sensitive countries of the world to be salt and light. Together with fellow believers from far and near, Indian Christians are called to be involved in preaching the gospel through word and deed. The process may be slow and painful, but the results will be of eternal value.

■ Note

The author himself made this summary of his paper *Bringing the Reformed Faith to India*, presented at the ICRC meeting. The full article with text references and footnotes can be found at the ICRC website www.icrconline.com/library.

Sola Scriptura—by Scripture Alone

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work

2 Tim. 3:16-17

By Dick Moes, Moderator of the ICRC 2017.

The goal of the Christian life is participation in the life of God. Entry into this life of God is through being justified by faith alone. God's legal declaration grounds the goal of our salvation. Today we have a foretaste of participating in the life of God as he pours out his life in us through the Holy Spirit. No longer I who live, but Christ Jesus who lives in me, giving me the mind of Christ.

What is the primary means God uses to draw us into his own life? Our text from 2 Timothy 3 gives us an answer. Notice how the text ends: '... that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.' Part of the goal of our salvation is doing good works for which we were created in Christ Jesus, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them because we participate in the life of God (Eph. 2:10).

Notice the means to this end of being equipped for every good work is the Holy Scriptures. Paul gives us four reasons why they enable us to participate in the life of God. First, they teach us. We need to learn how to participate in the life of God and do good works. By nature we are bleary-eyed old men, as Calvin remind us. Yet, the Scriptures function as a pair of glasses showing us how to thankfully participate in the life of God. The essence of what they teach us is to love God and our neighbour. The Ten Commandments are all different aspects of this love. All the other imperatives in the Scriptures are likewise different aspects of this two-fold love. As such, all good works are works of love, because God is love. When we participate in the life of God we learn to love like God loves and the Lord Jesus Christ loves. We become the eyes, ears, mouth, hands and feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, the ultimate man who went around doing good. The Scriptures are the primary means to teach us his love.

Second, the Scriptures also enable us to participate in the life of God because they reprove or convict us. By nature we are curved in on ourselves. We love ourselves more than we love God and our neighbour. The Scriptures convict and admonish us about this. Take, for instance, the story of David, Bathsheba and Nathan. David is so curved in on himself that he is willing to commit adultery and murder to satisfy his own carnal

desires. Yet, the spoken Word of God that comes to him through Nathan exposed this and convicted David of this. The written Word does the same. But the Scriptures also reprove and convict others. At the beginning of 2 Timothy chapter 3, Paul talks about the love of many growing cold. People have become lovers of self, pleasure and money instead of lovers of God and their neighbour. Paul's point to Timothy is that these people need to be admonished and reprovved because they are not thankfully participating in the life of God. And the Scriptures are the primary means to admonish them for this so that they can repent.

Third, the Scriptures enable us to participate in the life of God because they correct us. This is the positive side of reproof. Having been admonished we and others need to be corrected. Once David has been convicted of his sin he needs to be set on the right path, as he himself explains in Psalm 51. When others are convicted of their loveless and thankless lives, they need to be set on the right path. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures for this correction.

Fourth, the Scriptures enable us to participate in the life of God because they train us in righteousness, i.e. God's good order for life that does justice to our relationship with God, each other and creation. They train us in this righteousness because they show us what God's good order for life looks like. Moreover, they train us in this righteousness because they point us to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our righteousness both passively and actively. Passively, because the Lord Jesus Christ did and does justice to our relationship with God. Actively, because the Lord Jesus Christ did and does justice to our relationship with each other and creation. The Scriptures train us to put on this righteousness by living in Christ through faith and maturing in him through faith, because he is not only the entry into our participation in the life of God, but also the source of that participation. It is from him that we receive grace upon grace to enable us to do good works by participating in the life of God (John 1:16).

The Scriptures enable us to participate in the life of God because the God who has life in himself, and shares this life with us, inspired them. As God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils, so he similarly breathed his own life into each book of the Old Testament and the New Testament. This breath moved the authors of the Bible to write what they did and superintended what they wrote. The mystery of the concursus between God and humanity that we see in God's providence we also see in the mystery of the concursus between God and

humanity in the inspiration of the Scriptures. This inspiration by the breath of God makes the Scriptures clear. They are a lamp for our feet and a light on our path showing us how to participate in the life of God, although we will not always agree on the details of this participation. This inspiration by the breath of God also makes the Scriptures sufficient for our salvation. Not the only authority, but the final authority, either directly or indirectly. This inspiration also makes the Scriptures efficient in equipping us for every good work prepared in advance for us to do. Because it is Christ Jesus who lives in us, teaching and reproving us, correcting and training us in righteousness through the inner teacher, the Holy Spirit.

Is this how you view the Scriptures? As the primary means God uses to draw us into his own life? There is a little test: is it your experience that the Scriptures teach you to love God and your neighbour more so that you increasingly become the eyes, ears, mouth, the hands and the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it your experience that the Scriptures convict you that by nature you are curved in on yourself? Is it your experience that the Scriptures correct you by being curved out from yourself in love toward God and your neighbour? Is it your experience that the Scriptures train you in righteousness through putting on the Lord Jesus Christ as your righteousness by living in him through faith? May celebrating Reformation 500 increasingly lead to intentionally viewing the Scriptures in this enriching manner. ■

Reformed Piety: Covenantal and Experiential



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During this 500th anniversary of the Reformation it is critical to ask the question: What was the Reformation all about? A good case can be made for asserting that it was primarily about the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith alone. Others would argue that its primary emphasis was on the doctrine of salvation. Or on biblical worship. Or biblical authority versus the claims of the papacy. Or in a host of other areas!

One key concern of the Reformation is that of the great revival of *biblical piety*, particularly as it manifested itself in the theology and lives of the Reformers and later, the Puritans.

In this address, I want to accomplish four things: First, to give you a bird's eye view of what Reformed *piety* is by looking at John Calvin. Second, to examine how we should understand what Reformed piety should be in relation to the covenant of grace. Third, to consider what Reformed piety should be in the context of Christian experience. Finally, to present some conclusions that explore the interface between these three concepts in Reformed thought: piety, covenant, and experience.

■ Calvin's Piety

John Calvin's *Institutes* earned him the reputation of being the preeminent systematician of the Protestant Reformation. For Calvin, theological understanding

and practical piety were inseparable. Theology first of all deals with knowledge – knowledge of God and of ourselves – but there is no true knowledge where there is no true piety.

Pietas is one of the major themes of Calvin's theology. In his preface addressed to King Francis I, Calvin said that the purpose of writing the *Institutes* was 'solely to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness [*pietas*].'

For Calvin, *pietas* designates the right attitude of man toward God, which includes true knowledge, heartfelt worship, saving faith, filial fear, prayerful submission, and reverential love. Knowing who and what God is (theology) informs and leads to right attitudes toward him and right conduct, or doing what pleases him (piety). The goal of piety, as well as the entire Christian life, is the glory of God – acknowledging and magnifying that glory that shines in God's attributes, in the structure of the universe, and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Glorifying God supersedes personal salvation for every truly pious person. The pious man, according to Calvin, confesses, 'We are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal.'



10.1 *Transfer of the tablets of law to Moses* [Relief from the former pulpit of the Liebfrauenkirche Ravensburg, 1899 by Theodor Schnell the Younger, via Wikimedia Commons]

But how do we glorify God? As Calvin wrote, ‘God has prescribed for us a way in which he will be glorified by us, namely, piety, which consists in the obedience of his Word.’ Obedience to God’s Word means taking refuge in Christ for forgiveness of our sins, knowing him through his Word, serving him with a loving heart, doing good works in gratitude for his goodness, and exercising self-denial to the point of loving our enemies. This response involves total surrender to God himself, his Word, and his will. Thus, for Calvin, piety involves all truth, and all of life. It is comprehensive, having theological, ecclesiological, and practical dimensions.

■ A Theological Piety

Theologically, piety can be realized only through union and communion with Christ and partaking of all his benefits. Only in Christ can the pious live as willing servants of their Lord, faithful soldiers of their Commander, and obedient children of their Father. Communion with Christ is always the result of Spirit-worked faith – a work that is more astonishing and experiential than comprehensible. Faith unites the believer to Christ by means of the Word and Spirit of God, enabling the believer to receive Christ as he is clothed in the gospel and graciously offered to us by the Father. By his Word and Spirit, God also dwells in the believer. Consequently, Calvin said, ‘We ought not to separate Christ from ourselves or ourselves from him’, but partake of Christ by faith, for this ‘revives us from death to make us a new creature.’

By faith, believers both belong to and possess Christ, and grow in him. From Christ they receive by faith the ‘double grace’ of justification and sanctification, which together provide a twofold cleansing from sin and uncleanness. Justification confers imputed purity, and sanctification produces actual purity.

■ An Ecclesiological Piety

For Calvin, piety is nurtured in the church by the preaching of the Word, administration of the holy sacraments, and the offering of

praise by singing the Psalms. Spiritual birth and growth happens within the church, for the Holy Spirit acts in her and through her ministry. Under the care and instruction of the church, believers progress from spiritual infancy to adolescence to full manhood in Christ. This lifelong education is offered in a context of genuine piety in which believers love and care for one another under the headship of Christ. Piety is thus fostered by the communion of saints. The preaching of the Word is our spiritual food and our medicine for spiritual health.

The sacraments confirm or strengthen our faith, make us grateful to God for his abundant grace, and are a means by which we in turn offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God.

Calvin viewed the Book of Psalms as the canonical manual of piety. In the preface to his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin wrote: ‘There is no other book in which we are more perfectly taught the right manner of praising God, or in which we are more powerfully stirred up to the performance of this exercise of piety.’ Psalm-singing is one of the four principal acts of church worship. It is an extension of prayer. It is also the most significant vocal contribution of people in the service. Under the Spirit’s direction, Psalm-singing tunes the hearts of believers for glory.

■ The Practice of Personal Piety

Although Calvin viewed the church as the nursery of piety, he also emphasized the need for personal piety. It is involved in numerous practical dimensions of daily Christian living, with a particular emphasis on heartfelt prayer, repentance, self-denial, cross-bearing, and obedience.

Calvin strove to live the life of *pietas* himself—theologically, ecclesiastically, practically, and personally. Having tasted the goodness and grace of God in Jesus Christ, he exercised himself in piety by seeking to know and do God’s will every day. His theology and ecclesiology worked itself out in practical, heartfelt, Christ-centred piety—piety that ultimately profoundly impacted the church, the

community, and the world. This piety was always grounded in the covenant of grace.

■ Covenantal Piety

In much contemporary discussion, the word ‘covenantal’ has become rather nebulous. For older Reformed theologians, however, ‘covenantal’ almost always has specific reference to God’s covenantal dealings with man, primarily in the covenant of grace. In the eternal, intra-Trinitarian divine council, God purposed to redeem a specific people to himself. The outworking of that purpose in history was first announced in the ruins of Eden in Genesis 3:15, and then progressed through God’s dealings with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, until finally it came to fulfilment in Christ. The Reformed have called this purpose and plan of God the covenant of grace. Seeing their redemption through this specific lens, the Reformed have articulated a covenantal piety. This covenantal piety has been intensely relational, providing both definite ethical content and a communal dynamic.

■ A Piety of Relationship

In the first instance, covenantal Reformed piety always has been a piety of relationship because relationship is at the heart of covenant. As Moses declared to the Israelites, God’s intention in the covenant of grace is to bring men, women, and children into a relationship with himself. The Scriptures assert that relationship repeatedly and clearly via the ‘Immanuel principle’; through the covenant of grace, God declares, ‘I will be their God, and they shall be my people’. The covenant of grace is God’s method of calling and transforming a heterogeneous mass of men and women, young and old, into the people of God.

The intimacy and power of this covenantal relationship between God and his people are frequent themes of the Scriptures, which present God’s redemptive acts as expressions not simply of his character, but also of the outworking of his bond with his covenant people. The Scriptures reveal God not only as the God of grace, but also as the God who names himself through his people, whose relationship with those people is reflected visibly in his actions, who has eyed those people from the beginning of time, and who accomplished the great work of redemption with those specific people in view. God expresses the intimacy of that relationship by calling his people his children.

The personal nature of this covenantal relationship creates mutuality – a dynamic of reciprocity. While in his sovereignty, God initiates and establishes the covenant bond between himself and his people, the relationship resulting from it is so precious that it commands and elicits human response and invests that response with meaning. The covenantal relationship, though not between equals, is by the very nature of a covenant mutual. This mutuality of the believer’s covenantal relationship with God reflects the nearness and permanency of the bond.

This covenantal relationship between God and his people has infused Reformed piety with a strongly personal character. God offers himself to us, and we offer ourselves to God, our Creator. Reformed

Christians have found comfort under persecution in knowing that they are adopted children of God; they have written of their Saviour with the rapture of personal love; and they even have undertaken personal covenants to specify actions and habits through which they will seek greater nearness to the God who has saved them.

■ A Relationship with Ethical Content

Covenant theology also provides specific ethical content for this covenant relationship and the piety it fosters in us. We are not left to discover or determine how God is to be loved and served. Classical covenant theology has understood the law of God to be the living and accurate reflection of the holiness of God. In the moral law, God describes what his holiness looks like when it is lived out in the midst of human society. Given this connection between the law and the divine character, it is no surprise that the Reformed also have insisted on a basic continuity of that law from the Garden of Eden to Mount Sinai to the New Testament church. Thus, while some consign the moral law as summarized in the Ten Commandments, to another time or place, Reformed Christianity has always asserted the abiding character of the law, the obligation of all men to obey it, and its usefulness as a rule of life for all who are in Christ. In the context of the covenant of grace, what God said and did at Mount Sinai is inseparably linked to what he did at Calvary, and to what he is doing today among his people. In the Ten Commandments, God describes the holiness that he desired to mark the lives of those whom he has redeemed according to his covenant promise. In the New Testament, it is evident that this law-defined understanding of holiness has not changed. Jesus saw his earthly ministry as establishing the law in its full spirituality rather than abolishing it. Jesus spoke of the life he desired among his people in precisely the same way as the Old Testament had spoken of law-abiding life. Paul called for Christians’ lives to be guided by the commandments of the law that he described as holy, and just, and good. As the covenant holds forth exceeding great and precious promises to God’s people, so also it imposes on them the obligations of faith, love, and obedience. These two parts of God’s covenant of grace must not be put asunder. The law that once condemned them as sinners has become a rule of life to all who are saved in Christ. Reformed piety, via its covenantal structure, has definite parameters, and those parameters *are* the Ten Commandments of the covenant of grace.

The vital role of covenant theology in shaping Reformed piety around this ‘third use of the law’ is seen in the very genesis of that terminology itself. It was Philip Melancthon who first spoke of the third use of the law, but Lutheran piety has tended to neglect the normative role of this third use because Lutheranism was flavoured by a strong division between law and grace. The Reformed, on the other hand, emphasized the unity of God’s covenantal dealings under both testaments and they saw this third use of the law as ‘the principal use’ thereof. Reformed piety has generally remained free from unbiblical mysticism; and, simply because it has a clear and authoritative articulation of what constitutes a life of piety, it contains inherent guardrails against both the tyranny of man-made legalism and the chaos of



Preaching of Saint John the Baptist [painting Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn]

license. What keeps us from legalism is our theology of grace. Since covenant theology has placed the Ten Commandments at the centre of Reformed piety, it is no wonder that some of the most profound Reformed treatments of piety take their shape explicitly from the Ten Commandments. Expositions of the Ten Commandments have figured prominently in Reformed preaching, devotional literature, and catechesis, being taken as authoritative instruction for the Christian life. This impulse has continued into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

■ A Communal Dynamic

The same law that requires us to love God commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves. This other-focus has led Reformed piety to attach particular importance both to the church and to the family. In the first instance, covenantal Reformed piety has maintained Calvin's attention to a decidedly ecclesiastical piety. Through the communion of the saints, the means of grace dispensed in public worship, and church discipline, the Reformed have understood personal piety as something that is pursued in fellowship with the body of Christ and never in isolation from the church. The Immanuel principle itself establishes the importance of this commitment. The Lord's promise, 'I will walk among you and I will be your God, and you shall be my people', declares that God's covenantal work is not to redeem a large number of individuals, but to redeem a *people* unto Himself. Elsewhere, the Scriptures speak of God's people as a 'nation' or a 'church' or a 'building'. The Reformed have seen the implications of this corporate identity for piety very plainly, for example, in the Fourth Commandment, by which God commands not only that his people hallow the Sabbath as a day of rest, but also make it possible for their servants and livestock to enter into that rest. Within Reformed piety, the awareness of being part of a covenant people has created a dynamic whereby growth in holiness

draws one out of isolation and into the life, work, and witness of the church.

Secondly, Reformed piety gives special attention to the Christian family. This connection is clearly stated in Psalm 103:17, 18: 'The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.' Here, David exalts God's grace and faithfulness not only to the present generation of his people, but also to their children and grandchildren, and by implication, from generation to generation, from everlasting to everlasting. Calvin saw this inter-generational steadfastness as 'the principal part of the covenant'. The most visible result of this covenant principle is the Reformed practice of infant baptism, and the implications of that sacrament for the larger communal aspects of Reformed piety. The Reformed piety embodied in infant baptism is the piety of inter-generational discipleship, in which the older generations live their lives driven by the desire to communicate the faith by word and action to the next generation who share the same supper table with them (Deut. 6:6–9). The younger generations are not left to cast about for answers to their most yearning questions; those questions are answered by older Christians (parents, pastors, teachers, *et al.*) who speak of God and apply his Word to the mundane realities of everyday life. This inter-generational dynamic has sustained the Reformed emphasis on catechesis and family worship, in which covenant children are earnestly instructed about their need to come to personal repentance and faith in Christ, according to the covenant promises signed and sealed to them in their baptism.

While piety is always personal, never does it push toward isolation – ascetic, monastic, or otherwise. Rather personal Reformed piety draws the Christian toward the other, serving, loving, and being served and loved.

■ Abuses of Covenantal Piety

While the covenantal character of Reformed piety is a glorious strength, the human heart is expert at distorting and perverting this strength, so that it becomes a weakness. At various points, the personal, ethical, and communal components of the Reformed covenantal piety have been distorted and used to promote doctrinal error and spiritual neglect. In general, these abuses are the result of exalting one aspect of the covenant of grace at the expense of another.

In the history of Reformed Christianity, different movements have elevated the personal and devotional elements of Reformed piety and minimized the ethical and communal elements. The result has been an antinomianism that focuses on a privileged standing before God while neglecting or denying the obligations of duty that belong to it.

Similarly destructive are those movements that prioritize Reformed piety's ethical content to the detriment of its personal component. Piety is reduced to doing one's duty in church, at home, and at large. Membership in the covenant community is taken as a guarantee of eternal life. Piety is reduced to purely external conformity to the laws of God and man, reducing true godliness to mere morality. Such legalism views the law as constitutive of one's relationship with God rather than as a guide of duty; a confusion stemming from a prior failure to recognize the personal component of Reformed piety, the believer's union with Christ through faith, and the communication of life from him by the indwelling Spirit, through which alone ethical conduct is possible.

The most distinctive error within this tradition has been the tendency to exalt the communal aspect of Reformed piety above all other components. This particular error has taken two different forms. In the first instance, some have concluded that God's ordinary inter-generational work is a guaranteed and effectual work. Thus, the children of believers have been seen as necessarily regenerate. In some versions of this error, its exponents have advocated baptismal regeneration, while others have urged that children of believers be at least presumed to be regenerate, unless or until there is evidence to the contrary. Whatever forms the particular error has taken, however, they share the same root. In each instance, the communal dynamic of Reformed covenantal piety is seen to work independently of either personal, divinely-initiated relationship or personal manifestation of ethical conformity. One might say that these errors appeal to Psalm 103:17 ('But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children') but ignore verse 18 ('to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them'). The communal vitality of biblical piety always manifests itself in successive generations of ethically-expressed personal relationships.

The second error that has stemmed from the communal element of Reformed piety's covenantal character has been an impulse toward so-called 'hyper-Calvinism'. God's ordinary working through familial and ecclesiastical relationships has caused some Christians to focus so much on those avenues that they neglect or deny the imperative

of evangelism to bring sinful men and women out of the world into a relationship with Himself. The church and the families belonging to it become a closed society. Such churches are not as cities set upon a hill so they cannot be hid; their members are candles put under a bushel, thus defeating the very purpose for which Christ builds his church in the world.

In its true form, Reformed piety organically emerges from that covenant of grace by which God first redeems his people, gathers them out of the world, enfold them in his church, and then calls them to, and gives them the spiritual capacities for a life of devotion to him. Such a life became known over time as a life of experiential piety.

■ Experiential Piety

Until the mid-nineteenth century, Calvin and the Reformed were often labelled 'experimental' or 'experiential.' The term *experimental* comes from the Latin *experimentum*, meaning trial. It is derived from the verb *experior*, meaning to try, prove, or put to the test. That verb also can mean to find or know by experience, thus leading to the word *experientia*, meaning knowledge gained by experiment. Calvin used *experiential* and *experimental* interchangeably, since both words indicate the need for measuring our knowledge gained by experience by the rule or standard of Scripture.

The Reformed churches have historically regarded the ministry of the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit as inseparable from one another. This coupling of Word and Spirit has its practical result in the primacy of preaching to plant and cultivate experiential piety. Experiential piety arises when, by God's grace, the truth of God's Word is applied to the whole range of the believer's personal experience, including his relationship with God, and with his family, the church, and the world around him. Experiential preaching seeks to explain biblically how a sinner must be stripped of his self-righteousness, driven to Christ alone for salvation, and led to the joy of simple reliance on Christ. It aims further, to show how a redeemed sinner encounters the plague of indwelling sin, battles against temptation, endures trials, suffers affliction, and gains victory by faith in Christ. God's Word must be preached experientially, for it is the power of God unto salvation that transforms men and nations. Such preaching is transforming because it faithfully proclaims the gospel, accurately describes the vital experience of the children of God, clearly explains the marks and fruits of the saving grace, and sets before believer and unbeliever alike their eternal futures, calling all to faith in Christ as the only Saviour.

When God's Spirit is pleased to use such preaching, Reformed divines have noted that the resulting piety has the following characteristics.

1. Piety Based on the Written Word

Reformed piety is biblical piety. Calvin said, 'In order that true religion may shine upon us, we ought to hold that it must take its beginning from heavenly doctrine and that no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture. Hence, there also emerges the beginning of true understanding when we reverently embrace what it pleases God there to witness of himself.' Reverence for God entails reverence for his Word. Calvin warned, 'The Holy Spirit so inheres in his truth, which he expresses in Scripture, that only when its proper reverence and

dignity are given to the Word does the Holy Spirit show forth his power.’

Therefore, Reformed experiential piety springs up where the seed of the Word is sown. All of our beliefs, including our experiences, must be tested by Holy Scripture. That is really what the word *experimental* intends to convey. Building on the written Word preserves experiential Christianity from unbiblical mysticism. Mysticism separates experience from the Word, whereas historic Reformed conviction demands biblical and experiential faith. That kind of scripturally informed godliness is essential to the health and prosperity of the church.

2. Piety Centred on Christ

The great theme and controlling contour of experiential preaching and piety is Jesus Christ, for he is the supreme focus, prism, and goal of God’s revelation. Since the Spirit always testifies of Jesus Christ, sound exegesis finds Christ not only in the New Testament, but also in the Old. Such preaching teaches that Christ, the living Word and the very embodiment of truth, must be experientially known and embraced. It proclaims the need for sinners to experience who God is in his Son. As John 17:3 says, ‘This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.’ The word *know* in this text does not indicate casual acquaintance, but knowledge in the context of a deep, abiding relationship, ‘that knowledge which forms us anew into the image of God from faith to faith’, as Calvin said.

3. Piety Applied to Practical Life

While Calvinistic preaching is rooted in grammatical historical exegesis, it also involves spiritual, practical, and experiential application. Exegesis offers sound analysis of the words, grammar, syntax, and historical setting of Scripture. Experiential preaching does not minimize these aspects of interpretation, but neither is it content with them. The Word must be applied spiritually.

The Reformed and Puritan tradition is summarized by the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God, which says: ‘He [the preacher] is not to rest in general doctrine, [...] but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers: which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God.’

4. Piety Probed by Spiritual Discernment

Preaching that cultivates piety must discriminate between the distinct spiritual states and conditions of human beings. It clearly defines the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. The Heidelberg Catechism identifies preach-

ing and Christian discipline as the keys of the kingdom of heaven: ‘by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and shut against unbelievers.’ Jesus Christ modelled this kind of preaching in the Sermon on the Mount, in the manner that his introduction, the Beatitudes, summarized the spiritual marks of the true member of Christ’s kingdom, while in his conclusion he posts a solemn warning for those who do not hear and obey the Word. If our religion is not experiential, we will perish – not because experience itself saves, but because the Christ who saves sinners must be experienced personally as the foundation upon which the house of our eternal hope is built.

5. Piety Energized with Idealism, Realism, and Optimism

The piety of Reformed Christianity has the perspective of a soldier in a violent battle when the overall war is already won. Consequently, Reformed experiential piety is idealistic, realistic, and optimistic.

Piety is idealistic when it knows how matters *ought* to go in their lives. ‘True godliness shows itself when one makes a sincere resolve, and comes to a firm decision, to walk from henceforth in all the ways of the Lord, always making God’s good, acceptable, and perfect will a rule of life, and making God’s glory the chief end of all one does’ (William Teellinck). Piety is realistic insofar as it understands how matters *actually* go in the lives of God’s people that even the holiest men in this life have only a small beginning of this obedience. Christianity is a struggle, a hard fight for eternal life. Christians often find themselves disappointed and discouraged, especially with themselves. And piety is optimistic because it holds to an assured hope of how matters ultimately *will* go for God’s people, for they are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus.

All three – idealism, realism, and optimism – are essential. Telling how matters do go without indicating how they should go allows the believer to cease from pressing forward to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Only telling how matters should go rather than how they do go may deprive the believer of the assurance that the Lord has worked in his heart. Dwelling on the hard realities of this present age will dampen the believer’s hope of seeing Christ coming again in glory. But the combination of idealism, realism, and optimism encourages him to leave the past behind, and ‘press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus’.

6. Piety Rooted in Heart-Knowledge

The old Calvinistic preachers were fond of stressing the difference between head-knowledge and heart-knowledge in Christian faith. It is one thing to know that Christ died for sinners, and another to know that he died for your sins. Heart-knowledge of God results from an experiential encounter with the Christ of Scripture through the wondrous work of the Spirit. Such knowledge transforms the heart and bears heavenly fruit. It pierces the soul with conviction of sin



Piety is idealistic when it knows how matters ought to go in their lives [scene from “The Pilgrim’s Progress” by Simon Speed]

and unbelief. It causes the believer to savour the Lord and delight in him. Heart-knowledge does not lack head-knowledge, but head-knowledge may lack heart-knowledge.

7. Piety Fruitful in Holy Love

Reformed experiential piety is not self-absorbed, but oriented upward in love to God and outward in love to others. It is experience for the sake of the glory of God and the good of human beings. What does this mean in our relationships with our fellow human beings? Calvin quoted the apostle Paul to remind us that love is patient and kind; it does not seek its own. Whatever good things God has given to us are not for us alone, but for ‘the common good’ as we share them with others, especially with fellow members of the body of Christ. The Reformed ethic of self-denial is not stoic inhumanity or dualistic asceticism, but compassionate service to others in body and soul. Everyone must fulfil his calling with mercy to others: the civil magistrate in his government, the minister in his preaching, the businessman in his stewardship and charity, and the employee in his conscientious work.

The practical holiness of true piety places a special demand upon the preacher. Do we think that we will ignite others with the love of God if we are not burning and shining lights ourselves? ‘No man preaches that sermon so well to others who does not preach it first to his own heart.... Unless he finds the power of it in his own heart, he cannot have any ground of confidence that it will have power in the hearts of others’ (John Owen).

■ Conclusion

Reformed piety seeks to weave together its covenantal and experiential emphases into a seamless garment of truth and godliness. The result, when God blesses his Word, is a piety that sustains life in biblical balance, gospel power, and spiritual richness.

Reformed piety engages people both in a personal response to God’s Word and in communal relationships under the triune

God. As piety of the Word, it embraces both gospel and law, both the warm relationship established in Christ and the vital obedience empowered by the Spirit. Its communal dynamic guards against self-absorbed mysticism and morbid introspection, and its discriminatory preaching protects against the dangerous presumption that outward participation in a Christian family and church equates to salvation.

Covenantal preaching and teaching that de-emphasises experiential preaching and teaching is prone to produce congregations where all the children grow up under the assumption that they are saved even if they do not show the fruits that they are. Experiential preaching and teaching that ignores covenantal preaching and teaching can easily slip into a misguided experientialism that ends in spiritual experiences rather than in Christ. That can lead to a kind of presumptive ‘unregeneration’ in which there is little expectation for the Lord to work along covenantal lines in the church.

Biblically balanced piety follows the Reformation track of gospel holiness. *Contra* nominalism, it demands the application of biblical truth to the practical life. *Contra* formalism, its experiential discernment exposes the hypocrite and commends heart-knowledge of God. *Contra* antinomianism, its ethical dimensions mark off authentic Christian living with the rule of the Ten Commandments. *Contra* legalism, its evangelical theology flies the banner of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Reformed piety must always be profoundly theological because of its roots in the knowledge of God. Although the term ‘piety’ today may suggest a folding of the hands in quietistic devotion, Reformed piety stirs Christians up to love and good works. Personal devotion and public worship drive a life of service according to each person’s gifts, place, and vocation. The motivating force and essential nature of holiness is love: supreme, adoring love for God and compassionate love for our fellow human sinners and sufferers.

The constant motion of holiness presses the godly into warfare against Satan and indwelling sin. Reformed experiential preaching equips the saints in Christ for this battle. It imparts to them the high ideals of the Christian life after which growing Christians constantly strive. It cautions them with the gritty realism of human folly and sin that remain in the best of believers. And it lifts their eyes to see Christ, now seated at God’s right hand and one day coming on the clouds of heaven.

Thus, Reformed piety is the godliness of pilgrims passing through this spiritual wilderness on their way to the glories of the celestial city. It is a piety of enduring faith and unshakeable hope, and contains within itself the very spark of heaven. ■

■ Notes

This is a summary by Ria Nederveen of the paper *Reformed Piety: Covenantal and Experiential* that Dr Joel Beeke presented at the ICRC meeting. The full article with text references and footnotes can be found at the ICRC website www.icrconline.com/library.

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Jesus said,
“I am the light of the world.”

John 8:12