From losing everything to finding hope in God’s Word

Ethiopia: Fleeing deadly tribal attacks in South Sudan, Pastor John escaped with his family and joined thousands of others in a refugee camp. Though they had lost all material things, they were blessed of God to be together.

Pastor John saw how easy it was for his hurting community to lose hope for life and fall away. He says, “I knew I needed to show them the love of God—it would give them hope—and the Talking Bible was the way to tell them.”

The refugee pastor says he has learned how to depend on God by having everything removed. “We are a displaced people, refugees, but we’ve learned to pray in the open, worship without shelters, and through it all God is with us in His Talking Bible,” he explained.

Please, help us send more Talking Bibles into the refugee camps in and around South Sudan. Give the refugees a way to find hope in God’s Word.
Faith Alive offers a variety of resources that support faith formation for people of all ages, from preschoolers to adults, including

- Sunday school curriculum
- youth group resources
- small group studies
- resources for worship planning
- products to support church leaders
- and much more!

Shop online today and view a PDF of the new 2017-2018 Resource Catalog!
Funds Available

For new construction, renovation, building purchase, or refinance, the CRC Loan Fund offers churches

- competitive rates
- flexible terms
- fast approval
- low closing costs
- no fees or points
- knowledgeable staff

We’ve helped churches with more than 200 loans totaling over $70 million.

Connect with us today.

Christian Reformed Church
Loan Fund

crcna.org/LoanFund
(616) 224-0829 or (800) 332-0012
LoanFund@crcna.org
FEATURES

18 The Reformation: What Did We Gain? What Did We Lose? 
Does the Reformation still speak to 21st-century Christians? 
by Karin Maag

Hope in the Face of Death 
The goal of palliative medicine is living abundantly. 
by John Mulder

DEPARTMENTS

Editorial: We Need a New Reformation by Shiao Chong 
Have we insulated ourselves from embracing the Holy Spirit’s untamed flames and unpredictable winds of revival?

Catch Your Breath: Robed in White Apparel by Gordon Van Zanten 
I saw Roger dressed in a white baseball uniform—home whites.

Statement on Charlottesville, Virginia by Colin P. Watson Sr. 
Calling Christians to love, repentance, and prayer.

Letters to the Editor 

News: Educating Behind Bars: From Guantanamo Bay to Canadian Federal Prison 

Frequently Asked Questions 
Reporting harassment at work is the right thing to do.

On the Journey: Thanksgiving Ice Cream by Diana Boot 
Through my dad’s illness, we learned to delight in small pleasures.

Just for Kids: Miracles, Mold, and Medicine by Sandy Swartzentruber 
Next time you’re feeling under the weather, thank God for your amazing body.

Tuned In: Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity by Todd Statham 
A theologian argues for the way the five solas of the Reformation can shape the church today.

Reformed Matters: Reading the New Testament with Jewish Eyes by Shiao Chong 
Things sometimes get lost in translation.

Next: The Potter’s Hand by Justin Verwoerd 
How comfortable are we with the idea of the Creator God remaking us?

Punch Lines

TOGETHER DOING MORE

Breaking Barriers to End Hunger by Taylor Smith 
People’s stories can be rewritten as testimonies of hope.

The View from Here: Nothing Like This Has Happened Before by Steve Timmermans
We Need a New Reformation

THIS OCTOBER MARKS THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY of the Protestant Reformation. Christian Reformed churches and ministries, as well as The Banner, have been busy commemorating the event. Commemorating the past is important, but I am also concerned about our future. I believe the Christian Reformed Church needs a new reformation—not of theology, but of our spiritual posture.

As pivotal as Martin Luther was in sparking the Reformation, the Christian Reformed tradition owes more to another Reformer, John Calvin. Calvin certainly influenced our theology and confessions. But he also deeply shaped our spiritual posture—how we approach theology, church, and mission.

William J. Bouwsma, in his biography John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait, observed that there were, so to speak, two Calvins at odds within the same person. One was a rationalist philosopher who craved intelligibility, order, and certainty. This Calvin was driven by a fear of uncertainty captured by the image of the abyss. The other, however, was a 16th-century humanist, flexible and revolutionary. This Calvin celebrated paradox and mystery, affirmed experience over theory, and tolerated a great deal of individual freedom. The “theologian of the Holy Spirit” Calvin’s fear was symbolized by entrapment in a labyrinth. This internal tension was part of Calvin’s genius.

When I look over our denomination’s history, I believe our dominant spiritual posture defaults to the rationalist Calvin, losing the counter-balancing side. We crave boundaries, order, and certainty, fearing our own versions of the abyss. But in the process, we may have unwittingly entrapped ourselves in a rationalist labyrinth of our own making. As a result, have we insulated ourselves from embracing the Holy Spirit’s untamed flames and unpredictable winds of revival?

Don’t get me wrong. I believe the Holy Spirit uses our intellect and reason. But is it possible that we have excessively relied on rules, boundaries, and theological certainties and so fallen into spiritual pride, losing sight of freedom and flexibility?

Many factors account for our denomination’s declining membership. But I believe it will take more than our rationalist defaults—five-year plans, structural changes, church order revisions, study committees, church growth techniques, retrenchments of tradition—to turn us around.

We need a new reformation. I see signs of this in the CRC. I see some of us leaning more into Calvin’s more flexible side. I see many putting God’s mission above their need for certainty and fear of chaos. I see churches taking more risks, being more flexible, allowing more freedom, and getting messy, in order to seek the lost. I see young people daringly and unconditionally love prodigals. I see more people being sensitive to the Spirit’s guidance—even when they are not sure how it ends. I see these as signs of relying more on God and less on ourselves. We need more of this. We need to embrace a new reformation. The future of the CRC depends on it.

Editor’s note: The Banner is commemorating the Reformation’s 500th anniversary by publishing a series of articles on each of the five solas, culminating with Karin Maag’s feature in this issue (p. 18). We have compiled all these articles, with discussion questions, into a Banner Study Series for online and free PDF download at thebanner.org/study-series.

P.S. In response to the anti-Semitic and racist acts at Charlottesville, I have called us to prayer, self-examination, and action. Please see my online article “Are We Part of the Problem?” [tinyurl.com/thebanner-problem] Also see Colin P Watson’s statement on page 8.

Shiao Chong is editor-in-chief of The Banner. He attends Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Toronto, Ont.