



# INTERNATIONAL REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

TEACHING REFORMED THEOLOGY ONLINE  
TO PORTUGUESE SPEAKERS WORLDWIDE

Newsletter

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*“that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,”*  
(Philippians 3:10 ESV)

## Why Does God Permit His Children to Suffer?

*Dr. Leandro Lima*

**Recently, someone told me about the rape of a sister in the faith and, once again, the often-raised question was heard, “Why does God let such things happen to believers?”** It may be that this is the question believers have most frequently asked in the course of history, “If God is good, why does he let his children suffer”?

The majority of the IRTC students are mature men with years of experience in spiritual warfare, as leaders in Christ’s church. Surely, they have heard this question more than once, almost always in the context of a specific situation of suffering or testing.

God allows his children to suffer. Cases such as the one just mentioned or of believers being murdered or suffering from cancer or losing children are, sadly, more common than we would like to think. Sure, there are some circumstances that, humanly speaking, could have been avoided. For example, a Christian might lead a life of poor habits and contract an illness that brings much suffering. Even some cases of rape might have been avoided by keeping away from certain people and situations. Nevertheless, we know that not all suffering is preventable, by any means. Job could not have prevented the loss of his goods, his family and his health. Paul could not have avoided the 40 lashes less one that he received five times from the Jews, for if he had tried to do so, he would have denied his faith.

Unfortunately, because of the triumphalistic doctrine of many churches, the idea has developed that God will never allow his children to suffer need, if only they are really faithful, pay their tithes, and are submissive to their leaders. On the other hand, the question of suffering has aggravated some other preachers of our time to the point of preferring to declare the folly that God has nothing to do with it. Relational theology even says that God cannot know the future. And does not know what will happen with each one of us, even though he is always with each, ready to comfort us and to go with us in the way of pain. Although this message appears to better reflect reality, it leaves us with a God in whom we cannot place our trust.

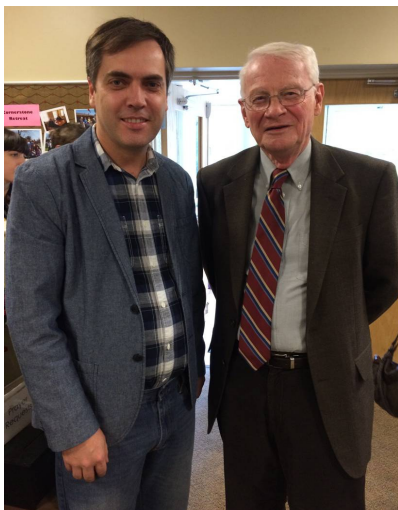
Why does God allow suffering? Biblically, we need to think of two reasons. First, it results from the fall into sin. Second, suffering is integral to redemption from sin. When sin entered the world, God sent pain to Eve and sweat to Adam. This is now the order for fallen creation. This is the reason there is so much pain and the pain will continue until the world is renewed. However, someone might say, “But Christ has redeemed us. Why does the suffering still continue?” Then, we need to remember that this redemption was accomplished through the greatest act of suffering the world ever saw: the cross. It was Paul’s understanding that his personal sufferings were a way of conforming to the death of Christ, in

fellowship with him, in order to attain to the resurrection (Phil 3:10-11). After he was stoned in Lystra, Paul got up, dusted himself off in the presence of the stupefied brothers, and went back into the city. Later he returned to the same city and, encouraged the disciples to continue in the faith, telling them “. . . that through many afflictions we must enter into the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Echoing these words, Peter says that there may be cases in which we need to suffer grief in various trials (1 Pet 1:6) and then explains why this may be necessary, “that the proof of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes even though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. . .” (1 Pet 1:7).

Those who suffer must not regard God as an insensitive tyrant, who knows nothing about suffering, nor imagine a fragile God, who can only suffer at our side. Rather, they need to recognize that, in God’s mysterious ways, these are the terrible means given by which faith becomes more precious than gold. And all need to remember that God is a just Judge, who does not leave the wicked without punishment, even though this punishment is not always seen in this life.

These are some of the biblical and realistic perspectives that students trained by the IRTC can share with the lambs that God has entrusted into their care.



**Leandro Lima** is a doctor in Literature, author, and Presbyterian pastor. He is married to Vivian and is the father of little Vicktor Daniel. In the IRTC he holds the position of Academic Vice President and teaches in the Systematic Theology department

### Mr. Lima’s testimony about the IRTC

*“It is an institution of high quality, with the clear purpose of teaching Reformed theology to the glory of God. It is a very serious institution and fully committed to God’s word. It has been a challenge to satisfy the high demands that this school requires. However, at the same time, it has been a reason for thanksgiving to serve together with so many faithful and dedicated brothers in this service”*

Dr. Lima (on the left) with Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., when he recently spent time in research at Westminster Theological Seminary, Phila., PA. Dr. Lima is enrolled in doctoral studies at the Reformed Theological University in Kampen, the Netherlands. Dr. Gaffin, a friend of the IRTC, has taught post-graduate courses at the Andrew Jumper Presbyterian Center for Post-Graduate Studies, in Brazil and his book, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, has been translated into Portuguese.

## New Virtual Learning Environment



The IRTC IT Department, in the person of brother Charles Marinho, has been working on setting up a new distance learning environment for the College. Charles lives in Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil, where he is a member of the Eighth Presbyterian Church. He is a computer technician with expertise in support, training and customization of business and education management systems. He tells us in this article about this exciting project that he is developing to further streamline the process of teaching and learning in our esteemed institution.

The IRTC is currently investing in upgrading its virtual learning environments.

For the academic term that has just begun we launched a new virtual learning platform on a new server at: [fitref.online](http://fitref.online).

Based on the most popular content management system in the world, *WordPress*, the *fitref.online* upgrade consists in the WordPress Learning Management System (WPLMS).

An e-learning platform needs to meet a variety of technical and educational requirements. *WordPress* stands out with its wide variety of resources, its security and its world community. As it is “open source”, all the computer code is accessible to any tech, and our installations are being customized especially for the IRTC.

The WPLMS provides a virtual classroom for accompanying students and conducting learning activities. The available tools break through some of the limitations of traditional classrooms and facilitate the formation of virtual learning communities.

All this aims to ensure quality educational practices through interactive digital technology resources. One of the many advantages of online education is that at any time of day or night, a student can attend a class on the subject he wants with the teacher he chooses.

The IRTC innovates again, with a view to its responsibility to ensure quality education and to promote the concept that the practice of online education is very worthwhile.

Working with the *WordPress* LMS is a new experience for the students. The social interactivity tools enhance fellowship and cooperation among the members of each class in ways that well surpass the email exchanges that have predominated until now. Students have a customizable personal dashboard for following the activities of all their courses. The discussion boards are places for healthy class discussions and the content of the courses can be diversified by means of audios, videos, podcasts, pdf's, slides and other formats.

Assignments and quizzes can be personalized by the instructor in a wide variety of ways, both objective and subjective and with several options for both automatic and manual grading.

Integration with other learning tools is a major feature of the new e-learning environment. We have taken advantage of this to introduce two very important capabilities that have been altogether lacking until now. One is BIGBLUEBUTTON, which is integrated with all courses and allows good-sized groups of students and teachers to meet in real time by means of live web conferences, which can also be recorded for later viewing by other students. The second is an integrated digital student management system for keeping academic records, obviously an addition of great impact.

Student testimonies have mentioned appreciation for the viewing speed, the speed of downloading files, interactivity among students and the easy visualization of activities.

We are progressing. Much has been done to reach this point of being able to use the new platform. Much remains to be done. As is to be expected, now that we have active users, a number of problems are coming to light and quickly being addressed. The users also are making suggestions for improvements and other features. These will receive attention in due time.

We are ready for the challenges. It is a new moment, and we are counting on the support, patience and perseverance of all of the IRTC community. There will be setbacks along the way, but we believe that the Lord, in His infinite grace, will bless us with His wisdom on this new journey. Please pray for us.

## IMPORTANT: Support for the IRTC

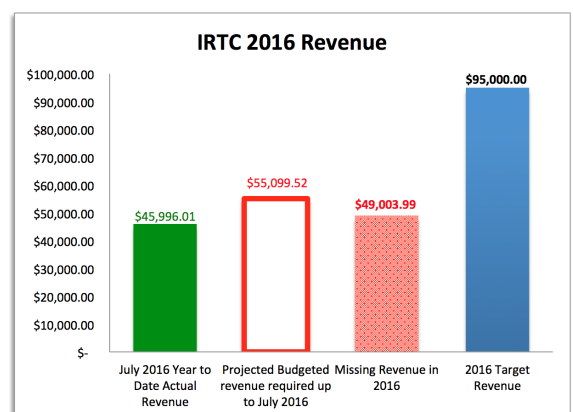
We invite you to join us in equipping workers for the harvest. This year, our goal is to raise USD\$95,000.00 to sustain the IRTC. This amount will be used for teacher gratuities and to cover costs of the educational platform, administration and other special projects.

Thankfully, we serve a great God that awakens His people to sustain the work of the Kingdom!

There are several ways in which brothers and sisters can help:

1. Pray for the IRTC, its teachers, leadership, students and financial situation
2. Contribute financially to the IRTC
3. Call the attention of potential students to the advantages of studying at the IRTC
4. Share this newsletter to disseminate the work and the needs of the IRTC

If the Lord moves you to contribute in some way, please visit the “Donations” page on our website ([www.pro-rege.net/ds14.htm](http://www.pro-rege.net/ds14.htm)). There you will find all the information necessary for making your contribution in the USA. Canadian donors, please make your donations at [www.irtcsociety.ca](http://www.irtcsociety.ca).



Clovis Alexandre Oliveira  
[clovisalexandre@gmail.com](mailto:clovisalexandre@gmail.com)  
Newsletter Editor