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*The Creating
and Renewing
Spirit*

*Lessons in
Humility*

*Educational
Alternatives*



Male and female He created them



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Male and Female He Created Them

Christians should take the lead in emphasizing gender distinctive clothing

Our culture is in a severe moral crisis. At the centre of much of it lies a deep-seated and sinful confusion about what makes a man and what makes a woman. Because the God-given design and place of each is rejected by many in our society, our current culture too often lacks basic, elementary insight into gender related issues. This lack impacts on our society in many different ways. What used to be considered abnormal a few years ago is now portrayed as okay. The family unit has been legally redefined. Marriage in Canada is no longer restricted to a union of a man and a woman, but can include two men or two women. Confusion on sexual identity also impacts on what is to be taught in the schools. Court battles have been waged to ensure that gay lifestyles and lesbian households are to be seen as normal and acceptable to children as young as grade one age.

Whether male or female, we have been endowed with the gifts needed to fulfil the task God gives us

Repulsive though this is, such is the state of our society where to condemn sinful gay lifestyle is labelled as being intolerant. Small wonder that children, young people, and even adults get confused as to what is normal for being a male or female. In some cases, the confusion leads to doubts about whether one's gender identification really matches the sex one is born with.

The point of this editorial however is not to bemoan the present moral wasteland which our society finds itself in, but to ask ourselves whether we as Reformed Christians are always as aware of the

ungodly trends and as sensitive to the dangers involved as we should be. The world view that lies behind the gay movement is diametrically opposed to the biblical one. Indeed our days are in many respects like those of Sodom and Gomorrah of which Scripture warns us.

Gender blending

Since our society more and more gets rid of any Christian influences that have benefited our country and adopts neo-pagan ways, the confusion about sexuality should surprise no one. After all, pagan societies have been known to blur the boundaries of male and female and extol androgyny, the obscuring or reversing of male and female identities and roles.

Already in biblical times, pagan religions obscured the distinctions between the genders. They did this, for example, when men dressed as women and women as men in order to sacrifice to a particular god(dess). This typically led to immoral behaviour. Indeed, this example and other pagan transvestite practices¹ help us to understand why the Lord condemned cross-dressing. God instructed Israel that "a woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God" (Deut 22:5 RSV). This commandment needs to be understood in the context of pagan religious customs. The fact that cross-dressing is described as an abomination to God also points in this direction. In other words this prohibition does not simply refer to clothing fashion. This command goes far deeper. It is directed against a pagan manner of worship.

At the same time, the principle that is set out here needs to be maintained, namely that there should be clear distinctions between the clothing of male and

female. The Lord considers that important. Without becoming legalistic on matters of dress, we do therefore need to recognize that the Lord wants us to maintain obvious gender demarcations. While current fashion trends may be bent on gender blending, Christians should take the lead in emphasizing gender distinctive clothing.

All of this is especially important for our children who need to see the clear differences between male and female in a time when they themselves are learning to understand their own identity and identify with their gender. Children and adolescents will also seek role models outside the home. In the world, rock stars and movie stars are often looked up to and imitated. These often promote androgyny. The gender-ambiguous dress and makeup of the likes of Michael Jackson sends a message that sexual ambiguity is in. Unisex clothing styles send the same message. The wearing of necklaces and earrings by men can do the same. As parents seeking to write the will of God on the hearts of our children (cf. Deut 6:6-9), our words need to be reinforced by how we ourselves dress and carry ourselves in today's society.

It is surely not by chance that precisely in our culture it is becoming more common for a boy to be given a name traditionally reserved for a girl, and vice versa. Indeed, Christians may do the same in all innocence, but are we spiritually discerning when we do that? Should we of all people not make sure that we maintain clear gender distinctions also in the names we give our children and so show that we are different from an unbelieving world and holy to God?

Male-female role reversals are also becoming more common in our society. For example, a husband stays home to care for the children, do the housework, and prepare the meals while the wife is the one making a living for the family. There can be circumstances where such an arrangement is both necessary and beneficial, also for a Christian home. But it is not the normal way and we should never lose sight of this. As much as possible we must strive not to conform to the culture of gender blending.

I realize full well that some of these examples may be controversial. That's fine, for the point of this editorial is to try to stimulate critical self-examination as to whether we are always sensitive and spiritually alert enough to see that we are in a culture which is at war with God's creational norms. Are we as Reformed Christians positioning ourselves in this struggle in clear confrontation over against world views and practices or are we as compromising as possible? This is an important question, for the



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true way of liberty and life joy is to follow God's plan for creation. He knew what He was doing when He designed and made humankind, male and female, in both the physical and psychological aspects. The more closely our lives are in tune with the Lord's design the more we will realize the joy and zest for living that comes with living in harmony with the Creator and Redeemer of the world.

God's beautiful design

When God created man in his own image, then "male and female He created them" (Gen 1:27; 5:2). The difference in gender is rooted in creation and is at the very core of one's identity. Therefore one's sexuality needs to be protected and cherished. Gender is not something added on later. It is part and parcel of what makes one the person he or she is. Whether male or female, we have been created in God's image. Whether male or female, we have been endowed with the gifts needed to fulfil the task God gives us. After relating how God made man male and female, Scripture continues by informing us that "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it'" (Gen 1:28). Male and female are addressed together. Together they are blessed and together are given a double mandate: to produce offspring and to subdue and so rule creation. This mandate is given within the context of a blessing. It is designed to bring joy.

Children who grow up with clearly differentiated parental roles are blessed children

It is therefore a tremendous event when the Lord brings a man and a woman together in holy marriage. Together they may, if it pleases the Lord, receive children. Together they may do their part in claiming their world and culture for Christ. It starts in a Christian home. And what a blessing such a home is! Because God's creational gender roles are honoured, the wife does not experience the pressure of having to go out of the house for a career in order to find fulfilment. When the Lord gives children, she can find her fulfilment in being a stay-at-home mother, nurturing and raising the children and being a support for her husband. Although there can be situations in which a mother is justified in seeking employment outside the home, this should be an exception. It is normal that the husband, as head of the household, knows and exercises his primary

responsibility of supporting the family. Children who grow up with clearly differentiated parental roles are blessed children. They are being equipped to function as Christians in a culture that seeks to break down God's design for male and female.

Also those who are not married can rest assured that the Lord gives them a specific identity as male or female. It is something to be proud of, to protect, and to cherish. It is a gift of God which may be used for his service. The Lord our God wants his people, married or not, to be distinctive, separate and holy from a world and culture lost in sin. Yes, He insists on it, for his people are to be his instruments to shed the light of redemption in Christ on today's culture and so to seek to renew it.

In conclusion

We are in the middle of a culture war and Christians have been on the losing end. But every defeat for biblical morals and principles has devastating effects for our society both now and for the future. The stunning successes of the gay lobby in the courts is only the latest chapter of this ongoing conflict. Homosexual sin has become a glorified human right, although homosexual practices are a severe health risk and children reared in same sex marriages are likely to experience dysfunctions, especially in gender identity. Besides the virtual collapse of sexual morals, our narcissistic and hedonistic society also practices a culture of death. After all, a culture which often considers children a nuisance and has no desire to protect even the unborn's right to life is a culture set against procreation and therefore has no future. When society is in rebellion against God and his design for creation, divine judgement follows.

Let us be sensitive to the fact that there is a real culture war going on. One manifestation of that battle is the gender blurring. The evil one does not rest. We need to recognize this and be aggressive in combatting the evil of our times. But it starts in the basic and relatively simple foundational elements, like a Christian home, a Christian walk and talk, and a Christian dress and culture. We should also get more directly involved in seeking to stem the tide of gender confusion in our country by becoming more politically active. We owe it to our country. And above all, since God's honour is involved, we can do no less.

¹See Peter Jones, "Androgyny: The Pagan Sexual Ideal", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 (2000) 449-450 and note 32; H.A. Hoffner, "Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966) 326-334.



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The Creating and Renewing Spirit



MATTHEW 13:52

"When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth."

Psalm 104:30

At this time of the year, we marvel at how the seasons are changing. Even if people in some parts of the country have been mowing their lawns for a while now, the coming of spring is noticeable everywhere: longer days and warmer winds; budding trees and returning birds. After a brown or white winter of wet and cold weather, the earth is being renewed.

As we observe this renewal, we recall God's words of promise from Genesis 9, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (v 22). Even from ancient times God has kept his promise to uphold this earth – a promise for our encouragement, also as today's prophets of climate change frantically warn of the impending meltdown!

Particularly when the season of spring begins, God's constant concern for his creation is in evidence. About this the Psalmist sings, "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (104:30). In this Psalm, the writer recounts the wondrous works of God throughout the world: the heavenly lights; the clouds and wind; the seas and their creatures; the earth and its plants, animals, and peoples. These all were created by the Almighty God.

Created by God, to be sure, but the Psalmist is more specific: all things are created with God's Spirit. Already in Genesis 1 we see that the Holy Spirit was involved in the

work of creation, for "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (1:2). This "hovering" has been called the Holy Spirit's governing and preserving role in creation.

For some insight into what our verse says about the Spirit's creative role, we should look at this Psalm's original Hebrew. In Hebrew, there is just one word used for "spirit" (and Spirit), "breath," and "wind." We could say then, that when the Father created by his commands, it was as if his breath – or his Spirit – left his mouth. This accords with the poetic picture in Psalm 33:6, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth." Job says a similar thing: "By his breath the skies became fair" (26:13).

When God speaks, his "Spirit" goes forth, and with the Spirit He creates. Not that the Spirit is only some impersonal force, emitted by the Father. Rather, this shows that the Holy Spirit is closely involved in the Father's work, granting life to what He has created. As we confess in the Nicene Creed, the Spirit is "the Lord and Giver of life."

This same Holy Spirit now renews the earth that God has made. As the seasons change, it isn't simply because the earth tilts on its axis in a certain way, relative to the sun. The seasons change, again because of God's powerful and providential command. God speaks, his Spirit goes forth, and the earth is renewed. God sends his Spirit and the snow melts; the

animals come out of their dormancy; the grass begins to grow again. In this way He guides every season and He sustains every life.

Since the beginning, God's creating "breath" has not diminished at all in power. That's why Paul compares God's words back then to God's words today. In the beginning, God simply spoke into the darkness of nothingness and there came miraculous light. Today, God speaks into the darkness of our sinful lives and again there comes miraculous light, the light of Spirit-given faith. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' [makes] his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" (2 Cor 4:6).

This connection between God's breath, creation, and our re-creation by the Spirit is underlined in John 20:22. There Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." And the Father and the Son continue to send us the Spirit, to renew us "inwardly... day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). By God's breath we were created (see also Genesis 2:7) and by his breath we are re-created.

Meanwhile, another of God's steadfast promises still remains, that this earth will be truly and completely renewed. For God has said that one day it will be a place for Him and his holy people to have perfect fellowship once again! The project that the Triune God began long ago, the project that He continues today, is a project that He will surely finish!



roadside assistance

the magazine for Reformed young people

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word. Ps. 119:8

Roadside Assistance is a bimonthly magazine for and by Reformed youth. It aims to provide a forum for stimulating discussion about faith issues, encouraging each other in the fight of faith, passing on Bible knowledge, building and expressing identity as Christians, sharpening hearts and minds through Biblical reflection, stimulating reading on Biblical issues, and educating one another. As a way of spreading the excitement around the world, we will occasionally be publishing one of our articles as a column in Clarion. We hope you'll enjoy the magazine, and perhaps you'll even consider contributing.

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Lessons in Humility

Jim Fluit

In the evening of December 30, 2006, Saddam Hussein was executed by hanging after being sentenced by the Iraqi High Tribunal for crimes against humanity. After the April 2003 invasion of Iraq by a coalition of American and British forces, Saddam had gone into hiding, shuttling between safe houses and secret bunkers to evade his would-be captors. Eight months later, Special Operations Forces finally cracked the tight shell of aides and bodyguards who were protecting Saddam and captured the dictator. It was a spectacular fall from power for the man who had held absolute control over the people of Iraq for almost twenty-four years.

Power and personality

Saddam Hussein joined the secular, socialist Ba'ath party at the age of twenty and steadily rose in the ranks. When the party took control of the government through a coup in 1968, Saddam assumed the position of vice president. He created repressive security forces that strictly controlled the management of the government

and effectively silenced the dissenting voices of religious and ethnic factions. After becoming president in 1979, he revamped his efforts to maintain social stability and political control at all costs.

Both men had been pulled down from their untouchable positions of power

Through strict control of information, he built the persona of a folk hero. The Iraqi people came to praise him as the strongman of Iraq, a fearless patriot, and a devout defender of Islam. Over time, Saddam used the state media to create a personality cult endemic to nearly every part of Iraqi culture. Thousands of portraits, posters, statues, and murals were erected in his honour all over Iraq. His face could be seen on the sides of office buildings, schools, airports, and shops, as well as on Iraqi currency.

Saddam as a new Nebuchadnezzar

Saddam Hussein repeatedly compared himself to the great military and cultural leaders of the ancient Near East. Many of the references were made to Nebuchadnezzar II. This was the great Babylonian king who, from modern-day Iraq, once built the Babylonian Empire into the most powerful civilization in the ancient world. This was also the same man who had captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and forced the first wave of Israelites into captivity in Babylon.

Saddam presented himself as a worthy successor to Nebuchadnezzar, styling himself as one of history's great political and military leaders. During the 1980s, Saddam spent over 500 million dollars on a massive project aimed at reconstructing the ancient city of Babylon. The new stonework is engraved with the words: "Built in the era of the victorious Saddam Hussein, the great defender of Iraq and its glory." A few years later, he was promoting an Iraqi Arts

Festival called "From Nebuchadnezzar to Saddam Hussein." He had a replica of Nebuchadnezzar's war chariot built and had himself photographed standing in it. He even ordered images of himself and Nebuchadnezzar beamed, side by side, into the night sky over the Iraqi capital of Baghdad as part of a laser light show. Saddam made every possible effort to establish himself as the new Nebuchadnezzar; a victorious ruler with the riches and power of the nations in his hands.

Lessons in humility

However, there was one key lesson that Saddam evidently never learned from his hero. There was a time when Nebuchadnezzar was at home in his own lavish palace, contented and prosperous, as the book of Daniel recounts, when he had a dream that shook

his world to pieces. He saw an enormous, mighty tree that reached to the heavens and could be seen to the ends of the earth. But a messenger came from heaven, announcing that the tree was to be stripped of all its branches and cut down to a mere stump. The tree in the dream represented King Nebuchadnezzar. He was to lose his power, his riches, his family, and even his own sanity to wander in the wilds with the mind of an animal. This was to be done "so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men." And so it happened, just as prophesied.

By the time a long-haired, bedraggled Saddam Hussein was finally pulled out of a hole in the ground by American troops on December 13, 2003, his life had

come to the point where he could identify with his hero in a new and very startling way. Both men had been pulled down from their untouchable positions of power and were totally stripped of their massive egos and all personal dignity.

Nebuchadnezzar was taught to humble himself before God and when he had his own mind restored to him, he expressed the lesson he learned very clearly. He said, "[I] praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble" (Dan 4:37). Unfortunately, we can't assume that Saddam was chastened in the same way. But with or without a happy ending, the life and death of Saddam Hussein remains a powerful warning.



What's New???

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While perusing the bulletins that have come my way, I noticed how various congregations face similar situations. It can be instructive to know how others deal with similar issues. It can also be encouraging to know that others share the same problem. Perhaps reading about it in this column may give reason for one congregation to contact another to find out what solutions they are pursuing.

The church at Calgary and the church at Orangeville both considered the matter of reading the first part of the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper on the Sunday before the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In Calgary, it was decided to implement this change. The rationale for this decision was that it would be very helpful and practical if the members would be reminded of how they should examine themselves in order to be properly prepared. In Orangeville, however, it was "agreed that the Form is meant to be read as a whole." Interestingly enough, and now I may give a slight hint of my age, I can recall the time in the seventies when it was not unusual to have part of the form read on the Sunday before the Lord's Supper but over time that practice was phased out.

The bulletins from the churches at Guelph and Willoughby Heights

indicate that they both are having difficulty with their sound systems. While not having official reports, my impression is that other churches struggle with this problem too. This is not a problem that can be taken lightly, as faith comes by hearing. Our place of meeting is rightly called the "auditorium," the term "sanctuary" having become outdated when the old dispensation gave way to the new. Perhaps congregations that are in the process of renovating or coming up with building plans may want to learn from these experiences and spend as much time on acoustics as aesthetics. Maybe the first question should be, "what will it sound like?" rather than, "what will it look like?"

In a previous *What's New???*, it was mentioned that the Providence Church in Edmonton was involved with a group of Sudanese believers. It appears that they also have their eyes set on foreign mission work. On Sunday, January 28, they had student Dmitry Kiselev speak to the congregation about his planned mission work in St. Petersburg, Russia. They are planning to support Dmitry in this mission work and the Immanuel and St. Albert councils have expressed interest in some involvement in this mission work. We look forward to more information.

The churches at Smithville and Ancaster share the happy problem that comes with steady growth. The Smithville consistory endorsed the plans towards the institution of "Smithville South." In Ancaster, the process is further along. Council expressed "its support for the proposal to institute a new church on the West Mountain and appointed an interim Committee... to oversee the steps leading up to the institution of the new church. Council plans to make a submission to the next classis meeting seeking approbation for the planned institution. Council appoints the members of the 'New Parish Committee' to form an Interim Management Committee to assist with the preparations for institution." While we may be distracted by the phrase "classis meeting," (the word "meeting" is superfluous) and we will not be too familiar with the phrase "Parish Committee," this does not take away that we share in the thankfulness for these developments both in Smithville and Ancaster.

Finally, I encourage all congregations not yet sending their local bulletins to start doing so. For your convenience, my email address is eric.kampen@canrc.org. Till next time.



Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

"A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'"

Isaiah 40:3-5

Have you ever faced difficulties in life? To live as a true Christian is indeed a very difficult thing to do. Each day anew we are faced with temptations and fall short because of the sinfulness within us, and all around us.

In this text of Isaiah 40:3-5, the desert is a picture of life's trials and sufferings. As Christians our lives are not immune to trials, but our faith life may not be affected by it either. Rather, God is moulding us through the trials. We can either turn our backs to Him or we can grow through those valleys.

We may have to go through deep valleys of our own many sins, or of sad events within our families. Whatever the valley may be, we must turn to our faithful God and Father, to carry us through. He has carried all our sins on the road to the cross of Golgotha and through his great sacrifice we may stand before his throne of grace.

Turn to Christ in all of life's struggles and valleys. He will help us through. Every valley shall be raised up, for He is our Almighty God. Hold fast to the end for then "...the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it." Isaiah 40:5a.



It's In the Valley That I Grow

Sometimes life seems hard to bear,
Full of sorrow, trouble and woe
It's then I have to remember
That it's in the valleys that I grow.

If I always stayed on the mountain top
And never experienced pain,
I would never appreciate God's love
And would be living in vain.

I have so much to learn
And my growth is very slow,
Sometimes I need the mountain tops
But it's in the valleys that I grow

I do not always understand
Why things happen as they do,
But I am very sure of one thing
My Lord will see me through.

My little valleys are nothing
When I picture Christ on the cross
He went through the valley of death;
His victory was Satan's loss.

Forgive me Lord, for complaining
When I'm feeling so very low,
Just give me a gentle reminder
That it's in the valleys that I grow.

Continue to strengthen me, Lord
And use my life each day
To share your love with others
And help them find their way.

Thank you for the valleys, Lord
For this one thing I know
The mountain tops are glorious
But it's in the valleys that I grow.

*Comfort, comfort ye My people
Speak ye peace, thus saith our God;
Comfort those who sit in darkness,
Mourning 'neath their sorrow's load.
Speak ye to Jerusalem
Of the peace that waits for them;
Tell her that her sins I cover,
And her warfare now is over.*

*For the herald's voice is crying
In the desert far and near,
Bidding all men to repentance,
Since the kingdom now is here.
O that warning voice obey!
Now prepare for God a way;
Let the valleys rise to meet Him,
And the hills bow down to greet Him.*

Hymn 11:1, 2

Birthdays in April:

- 2 **DEREK KOK** will be 37
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 23 **ARLENE DEWIT** will be 46
31126 Kingfisher Drive, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5K4
- 29 **BRYCE BERENDS** will be 32
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

Congratulations to you all with your birthday. May our heavenly Father continue to bless you in this new year with good health and much happiness as you celebrate another year to your life. Have an enjoyable day together with family and friends. Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East
RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
905-563-0380



John Siebenga

Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow

Juliet and Romeo linger knowing they have to part ways, yet also knowing that it is so difficult to leave someone so loved. Then Juliet utters the famous line: "Good night, good night. Parting is such sweet sorrow...." On Friday, December 29, 2006, the congregation of Abbotsford sadly said, "Good bye, good bye. Parting is such sweet sorrow." We lingered, we procrastinated, and we dragged our feet as much as we could. Finally, though, the parting had to come but still we postponed it until January 1, 2007. However, like Romeo and Juliet, we could not

drag it out any longer. On Sunday December 31, Rev. Schouten delivered his farewell sermon to the congregation. Parting was indeed a sweet sorrow. We will miss each other – even though he and his family are only moving a mere 17.4 km further west.

Rev. Schouten's ministry could be summed up in a call for the congregation to praise and glorify their good and gracious God. The farewell evening was a reflection of that ministry. We were indeed sad to see our pastor, our teacher and his family leave us but we were thankful for the blessing of

his preaching and the contribution of the Schouten family to the congregational life of Abbotsford. This came out in song, in words, in presentations, in games, in music, in verse, and in a ten-rocket salute. As we reminisced over the past years, it was noted that Rev. Schouten had baptized our babies (about 160 of them), had solemnized our marriages, made thousands of visits, preached a few more thousand sermons, and buried our loved ones. The cake and the coffee afterward allowed the congregation to linger yet a while longer.

Church News

Called to the Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs, WA:

Rev. C. Vermeulen

of Elora, Ontario.

Called by the church of Taber, Alberta:

Rev. J. Moesker

of Vernon, British Columbia.

The last day of 2006, the last worship service of 2006, was also to be Rev. Schouten's last day and worship service in Abbotsford as our pastor. He is welcome back any time as a guest minister. He chose as text Hebrews 13:20-21. He mentioned in his introduction that he had been called by God to equip the congregation of Abbotsford through the Word and the sacraments. Now with his move to Aldergrove, there would be lots of changes happening to him, his family, to Abbotsford congregation, and to the church of Aldergrove. Through all the changes, the congregation could be assured of one thing – God will continue to equip him – Rev. Schouten, and all the saints of Abbotsford. That was the prayer of the Apostle, the writer of the book of Hebrews, and that can be our prayer as well. So the Apostle's prayer is that the Lord will equip the church to do his will. This prayer has content and it has a basis.

The word that has been translated equip has the sense of repairing something so that it can do that which it was created to do. God had a design in mind for us. He wants us to use our gifts, ourselves, to his glory. Our service is often hindered by insufficient love, lack of knowledge, failing in courage or faithfulness, or an inability to accomplish what we were meant to do because of an unholy alliance with sin. Therefore we need prayer to equip us. We need prayer to persevere. God is the only one who can bring about change in the hearts and minds of God's people. Every minister, elder, deacon, or member of the congregation then must be a prayer. We can only work out what God has worked in us. Ultimately it is

God who works in us, therefore don't forget to pray. Pray that God will equip us for doing his will and to keep us faithful.

But really how can we be so sure about all this? How can we be sure that He will equip us and remain with us forever? We can be sure because of the work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Verse 20 begins with the words, "the God of peace. . ." God is the origin of peace. Peace begins and ends with Him. There is a broken bond between Him and us, between each other and between us and creation. The God of peace has restored us. He has restored us through the eternal covenant that had been signed, sealed, and delivered in the blood of Christ. Peace is always based on justice. Justice had to be done before there could possibly be peace between God and his creation. Through the death and sacrifice of our Lord, justice has been obtained and we are once more at peace with God. Jesus' resurrection undoes the curse of the Fall – "you shall surely die" and becomes the basis of our prayers and new relationship with God. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's way of declaring publicly that justice has been done, payment has been made and we are reunited with Christ. We died with Him and now we are raised with Him. We are a people who have been accepted by Christ and therefore our prayers will most certainly be heard by God.

Yes, life changes a lot. We are very vulnerable people, very needy people. We need to be equipped to face the dangers that will come. We need to be equipped to stay the course. The Great Shepherd of the sheep, who lays down his life for

his sheep, who also takes it up again, He is the one that will equip us. He is still working. Rev. Schouten reminded us to think concretely of the Good Shepherd. He is the one who feeds us with the living bread, quenches our thirst with the living water, protects with the help of his elders and deacons, binds up the weak, carries the sick, and seeks the straying ones. We are never alone. Our Good Shepherd never abandons us. He never changes. He allowed the fragile clay pot of Rev. Schouten to minister to the congregation of Abbotsford for eleven and a half years. We can give glory and praise to our good and gracious God for those eleven and a half years, for we know that with Him as our Good Shepherd, we shall not be in want.

So ended the ministry of Rev. Schouten and his family in the congregation of Abbotsford. We know we shall not be in want that is true. But we still parted with sweet sorrow. It had been an eleven and a half year relationship that had been marked with harmony, respect, and love.

The cake and the coffee afterward allowed the congregation to linger yet a while longer. Good bye, good bye. Parting is such sweet sorrow. God bless you, Rev. Schouten and thank you for your faithful preaching.

Jesus. . . Our Manna of Eternal Life: A Joyous Celebration



December 21, 2006. 7:15 pm. The residents of Chilliwack in the upper Fraser Valley must have wondered about the sudden traffic gridlock that hit downtown. From every direction hundreds of cars, vans, and SUVs turned toward First Avenue Christian Assembly, the venue for the tri-school Christmas program. Those who have organized such major events will recognize the logistics involved in coordinating more than 420 students from three different elementary schools into one cohesive group. However, these schools in the Fraser Valley have a secret weapon. Her name is Cheryl

Fennema. She teaches music at all three schools: John Calvin Elementary in Yarrow, Credo Christian Elementary in Langley, and William of Orange in Cloverdale (Surrey). With unbridled enthusiasm and a strong sense of purpose and direction Mrs. Fennema has had her students rehearsing for this program since September. Remarkably, the dress rehearsal on the previous Tuesday was the one and only time all the students had been together before this evening. Thankfully things "jelled," no doubt because all the students were fully aware of their teacher's expectations.

A moving sight

The audience comprised of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and younger and older siblings settled into their seats to enjoy the results of months of diligent practice. The evening began with a Christmas carol sing-along led by the Chilliwack Choir, also directed by Cheryl. Then the processional of students began. What a moving sight! From the grade sevens who clambered to the back of the stage to the diminutive kindergartners who perched expectantly on the edge of the lowest riser, row upon row of

children streamed in from various directions. Soon they were all assembled, waiting for their teacher's signal.

The evening's program was based on John 6:48 – 51: "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." In good redemptive historical fashion, the program traced the story of Israel as it looked toward the promised Saviour. In song, we were warned not to follow the example of the grumbling Israelites at Marah. Instead we were encouraged to appreciate the Yahweh's care for his people, "As on wings on eagle



the Lord carried them. Through the wilderness He brought them safely to Him." The songs and Bible passage recitations proceeded through the Old Testament times to the arrival of Jesus Christ, "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus," and on to the anticipation of his second coming, "Come, Lord, soon we pray. We in joyful expectation wait for that Great Day!"

Fully in tune

Throughout the evening, it was evident that the director and

students were fully in tune with each other. And if they weren't, Cheryl would hold up an inspirational sign—one which only the students could see – and immediately the singers would all smile or sing even more enthusiastically. The audience had been requested to hold their applause until the end of the program, but we had difficulty to restrain ourselves. On at least one occasion, the students' animated singing and lovely harmonization elicited a spontaneous, appreciative response. That applause was whole-heartedly repeated at the end of the evening.

It would be difficult to overestimate the appreciation parents and, perhaps even more so, grandparents have for such an evening. Seeing the throng of students gathered on the stage and hearing their clear melodious voices singing with firm conviction about "Jesus our Manna of Eternal Life" makes all those years of paying school fees seem a thoroughly worthwhile investment!



Derek Stoffels is principal at Ebenezer Christian School in Smithers, British Columbia

Educational Alternatives (Part 1 of 2)



Introduction

School is something that most people have an opinion about. As a teacher, I would love it if that opinion was typically enthusiastically positive. Unfortunately, many people view it as a "necessary evil" – some maybe not granting the "necessary" too readily. Currently and historically, much dissatisfaction has been expressed with regards to school and how it is "done." The media has often reported on how public education is failing students. As Canadian Reformed people we may experience a measure of dissatisfaction with school as well. Dissatisfaction is not a bad thing, if it leads us to examine critically and Biblically the way we do things and then improve them.

In this two-part article I introduce briefly some alternative approaches that have been and are being explored by people who are dissatisfied with "traditional" schooling. As you read the summaries of each type of schooling I urge you to be quite discerning in the most positive sense of the word. I will provide a summary of some main points but please look for the good, what can be learned, modified, and adopted as appropriate; also be on guard for what is at odds with God's Word and teaching.

Some basic points

A common view of school, as it is traditionally conducted, is that school is rigid, boring, irrelevant, and is something that teachers "do" to the students. In this view, the redeeming element of a school's existence is often the opportunity for socializing that students get to do, or the need for a diploma/courses to get a job or admission to a post-secondary institution. If it were not for that, there would be no point to school, many people think.

In reaction, each alternative model of education tries to bring the students into the centre and the teacher out of the centre, in a way that critics perceive to be lacking in the traditional model of schooling. They also typically focus on the student creating meaning of life, rather than teachers trying to tell them what the meaning of life is. These reactions have resulted in some good changes, but also in some very "optimistic" and unrealistic thinking about the nature of mankind.

The list of alternatives that I will present is as follows: Waldorf, Montessori, free or democratic schools, and work/school experiences. There are many more alternatives, but these are representative of the most dramatic departure from traditional learning. Classical

schools and home schooling can be quite easily fit into the context of this article and the reader's familiarity with so-called traditional schooling.

In very general terms, all these schools share various similarities with traditional schooling. They are all communities of students (workers) and teachers (whether these are called advisors, directresses/directors, guides, facilitators, coaches etc.) gathered into one physical location, (although this is changing with electronic learning) with parents having a role in the school to varying degrees. Assessment and evaluation of student learning also occurs in most schools.

The differences can generally be described as abandoning the structured school environment of set class times, subjects, physical layout of the building, and the relationship between "teacher" and "student." Rote learning by memorization, drill, assessment by typical tests, and fixed subject matter is what tends to be rejected. The impulse is to let the student dictate the process and direction, with a minimum (positive sense) of guidance. These changes all revolve around the differing views of human nature and the purpose of our existence as people. The humanistic view of man and his purpose is certainly the driving force of many of the educational

alternatives presently offered in the western world.

When people fail to reckon with the reality of man's depraved nature and man's God-centered purpose, educational reforms are doomed to failure in terms of the so-called big picture. Lest we get haughty, one caution to Reformed Christians is to not think so negatively of human nature that we create a school environment that effectively produces hard rocky soil instead of well-tilled and cared for soil. Another tendency might be to think so exclusively of school as preparation for work, that we lose sight of the rest of life – the seemingly less utilitarian areas like art, the environment, relationships, etc. Our history is glorious but not without its blemishes. Our present is no different.

Unfortunately, it is impossible for me to gain a working knowledge of each of the following alternatives, so I have to rely on the words of people who believe in these educational methods to present a picture of what they are like. As a result, the descriptions of a particular alternative will occasionally sound very positive. This is not necessarily an opinion that I share (or disagree with for that matter!). Please see the summary comments at the end for my opinion. Where applicable, I provide a link or reference to my source of information. The Internet has excellent resources on each of these alternatives. Seeing the method in action is better, of course, but time and money prevent most of us from having that opportunity.

Waldorf

The Waldorf method of education is based on the theories of Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian

philosopher. In the early twentieth century Steiner was asked to set up a school for the children of the employees of the Waldorf Astoria Company in Germany. He accepted and soon the school he established was drawing quite a bit of interest because of the non-traditional approach that it took towards education. This approach maintains a religious/mystical element often referred to as anthroposophy. Steiner had a bizarre cosmology and developed all sorts of ideas related to clairvoyance, reincarnation, Atlantis, and future life on planets such as Jupiter. Clearly, Waldorf schools are not for Reformed believers. However, we can learn some other things from them.

Many people view school as a “necessary evil”

Waldorf schools state the goal of their schooling "to produce individuals who are able, in and of themselves, to impart meaning to their lives." They aim to educate the whole child: "head, heart, and hands." Their curriculum is as broad as time will allow, and balances academics subjects with artistic and practical (i.e. hands-on – the sense of touch is very important in determining what materials are used and which activities are undertaken) activities. Proponents of Steiner's methods believe that by freely using arts and activities in the service of teaching academics, an internal motivation to learn is developed in the students, doing away with the need for competitive testing and grading.

Some distinctive features of Waldorf education include:

- Academics are de-emphasized in the early years of schooling. There is no academic content in the Waldorf kindergarten experience (although there is a good deal of cultivation of pre-academic skills) and minimal academics in first grade. Reading is not taught until second or third grade, though the letters are introduced carefully in first and second.

- During the elementary school years (grades 1-8) the students have a class (or "main lesson") teacher who stays with the same class for (ideally) the entire eight years of elementary school.

- Certain activities which are often considered "frills" at mainstream schools are central at Waldorf schools: art, music, gardening, and foreign languages (usually two in elementary grades), to name a few. In the younger grades, all subjects are introduced through artistic media, because the children respond better to this medium than to lecturing and rote learning. All children learn to play recorder and to knit.

- There are no normal textbooks in the first through fifth grades. All children have "main lesson books," which are their own workbooks – which they fill in during the course of the year. They essentially produce their own textbooks, which record their experiences and what they have learned. Upper grades use textbooks to supplement their main lesson work.

- Learning in a Waldorf school is a noncompetitive activity. There are no grades given at the elementary level; the teacher writes a detailed anecdotal evaluation of the child at the end of each school year.

- The use of electronic media, particularly television, by young children is strongly discouraged in Waldorf schools.¹

Montessori

This is probably the most well-known of the alternative approaches covered in this article. Maria Montessori came up with this approach in 1907. She summed up her approach to education with the words, "I have studied the child. I have taken what the child has given me and expressed it, and that is what is called the Montessori method." Montessori methods are praised by objectivists, people who place reason and man very highly, as in the Ayn Rand tradition.

According to Montessori, her approach is designed to help children with their task of "inner construction" as they grow from childhood to maturity. The flexibility of the Montessori approach provides an environment or framework within which "each individual child's inner directives will freely guide the child toward wholesome growth."

To achieve that, the Montessori classroom strives to provide a carefully prepared environment that encourages children to respond to their natural tendency to work. To this end, children are given opportunities to engage in "spontaneous, purposeful activities with the guidance of a trained adult," and "...at their own pace and rhythm, according to their individual capabilities." It is believed that through their work, the children will develop concentration and joyful self-discipline.

Maria Montessori saw children as progressing from birth to adulthood through a series of "developmental planes." Montessori practice therefore changes and adjusts to meet the changing characteristics and interests of the children as they grow up. The goal is to "...allow them [the children] to take responsibility for their own education, giving them the opportunity to become human beings able to function independently and hence interdependently."

The humanistic view of man and his purpose is certainly the driving force of many of the educational alternatives

Montessori classrooms are designed to mix a range of ages (three to six, six to twelve, twelve to fifteen). This is done to allow for both individual and social development. "Beyond the more obvious reasons why it is sensible to group the ages three by three, such as the little ones learn from the older children and the older ones learn by teaching the younger, every child can work at his own pace and rhythm, eliminating the bane of competition. . ." These schools also try to achieve a balance between liberty and discipline,

believing that children who have learned to work freely in a structured environment, will in turn "joyfully assume responsibility for upholding this structure, contributing to the cohesion of their social unit."

A final quote gives a good summary picture of how proponents of the Montessori method try to work by moving the student to the centre: "The role of a Montessori teacher is that of an observer whose ultimate goal is to intervene less and less as the child develops. The teacher creates an atmosphere of calm, order and joy in the classroom and is there to help and encourage the children in all their efforts, allowing them to develop self-confidence and inner discipline. With the younger students at each level, the teacher is more active, demonstrating the use of materials and presenting activities based on an assessment of the child's requirements. Knowing how to observe constructively, and when and how much to intervene, is one of the most important talents the Montessori teacher acquires during training. . ."²

¹ For more information go to <http://www.fortnet.org/rsws/waldorf/faq.html>. Two Websites critiquing Waldorf are <http://www.waldorfcritics.org/> and <http://skepdic.com/steiner.html>.

² Visit <http://www.montessori-ami.org/ami.htm> for more information.

Book Review

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence, David A. Livermore. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

Additional Information: Paperback, 188 pages, \$13.25.

There's no question that the phenomenon of short-term missions is here to stay, also among the Canadian Reformed churches. By now, hundreds of people, young and old alike, have gone on trips to serve in different ways. However, it doesn't seem that we've yet reached the point where we stand back and evaluate what it is exactly we're doing and why. Are we really benefiting the people on various mission fields? Or are these short-term mission trips really about us and what we can get from them? Is it even conceivable that we're actually doing more harm than good?

This book by David Livermore (executive director of the Global

Learning Center at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary) asks those questions and encourages readers to answer them realistically. He comes at these questions from the perspective of cultural intelligence. Many people are familiar with the concept of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) – the theory goes that your IQ is static and never changes. You will never be more or less intelligent than you are today. However, cultural intelligence is different. Cultural intelligence can be learned and Livermore wants to help people grow in that area.

Why? Because a lack of cultural intelligence combined with short-term missions can be enormously destructive, not only abroad, but also at home. In part 1 of this little book, Livermore describes globalization and the impact that it's having on the world and the church. In part 2, he presents the differences that often exist between the way (North) Americans and "nationals" experience short-term mission trips. It's especially in this part that



he outlines the problems that often exist. In part 3, he presents the solution: "Sharpening Our Focus and Service with Cultural Intelligence."

For the most part, this is a book that I can recommend. However, I do have some reservations about chapter 6 regarding the Bible. When someone quotes emergent author Brian McLaren (p. 79), I think we need to be circumspect. Livermore believes that certain theological categories are artificial (p. 84) – I believe he either misses or undervalues the presence of these categories in Scripture itself. Cultural differences do come into play in how we read the Bible and teach and do theology – the question is: to what extent? Having said that, this chapter, and indeed the whole book, gives food for thought and will be profitable for developing in our short-term missionaries a greater sensitivity for those on the receiving end.



Letter to the Editor

The issue of February 2, 2007, contains a letter by Mr. George Hart, wherein he complains that the Canadian Reformed press has paid no attention to developments in our Dutch sister churches. As the Editor pointed out in his reply, this complaint is not based on fact. In the past few years *Clarion* has dealt with several of the issues that are playing in the Dutch churches – such as the Sunday as day of rest, marriage and divorce, hymns, Bible translation, and Bible interpretation or hermeneutics (the series on this last topic appeared not on January 6, 2005, but from August 27 to November 5, 2004).

I am of course not writing to confirm the Editor's statement. He does not need my confirmation. I write because of my concern about the way in which the letter describes developments in the Dutch churches. It speaks of the bad influence of "modern ideas and philosophies," of "backsliding," "questioning of scriptural authority," and "deviations from Reformed doctrine." No qualifications are made and, more importantly, no grounds are given for the accusations. We are referred to speeches by men who are already in opposition and to a website that is outspoken in its criticism of the direction of the Reformed churches. This means that we hear only the arguments of the accusers, not those of the accused.

In the *Clarion* articles, some of which were from my hand, attempts were made to determine with reference to Scripture and confessions whether the issues in question have indeed led to deviation from Reformed doctrine. There was, certainly in my case, no question of a preconceived notion that synods and individual writers were automatically right. Often I began my study with a measure of suspicion, wondering if the Dutch did not go beyond what is written. In all cases, however, I had to conclude that such was not the case. It seems that others agreed with me; at least none of our readers called me to account in this magazine and challenged my conclusions. Those who approached me by private mail expressed full agreement.

This by itself does of course not settle the matter: I may have been wrong after all. I would suggest to Br. Hart that he read and scrutinize the articles. If he can convince me of error in my interpretation I will gladly admit it and I am convinced that the other authors will do the same. We need to know the truth. But let us speak that truth in love. This means, among other things, that we do not rely on hear-say or listen to one side only. Doing so entails in the

present case the risk of condemning and joining in condemning others unheard (LD 43). We would do well, as I suggested in an earlier article (Feb. 17, 2006), to follow the example of the Jews in Berea, who evaluated Paul's teachings with reference to the Bible and were therefore called "more noble" than those of Thessalonica (Acts 17).

As mentioned, Br. Hart refers readers to a Dutch website. In a future article I want to say something about that website and its manner of polemicizing.

Frederika Oosterhoff
Hamilton, ON, fgo@quickclic.net



Dear Editor,

It is with a heavy heart that I write this letter. I am seventy-four years old and I was born and raised in Holland. I lived through the *vrymaking* of the church. It was ugly. I understood then what Jesus meant with bringing fire on earth. Father against son, mother against daughter, etc.

As a family we came to Lethbridge, Alberta (April 1950), where the Lord had started his church through the hard workers in his vineyard, brothers Johan De Haas and Dirk Barendregt Sr. Now fifty years later we are trying to destroy that church through an idea of false unity. We don't seem to understand the adage: "If you don't learn from history, you'll be doomed to repeat it." We all think 1892 was so great; well, the Lord didn't think much of it. He destroyed that church in fifty years. The reason it never worked, rotten from the beginning, was compromise. Not only Kampen, also V.U. (*Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*) and more things, too many to write in this letter.

And now we are doing the same thing again, i.e.: 1) a combined songbook; 2) alterations to Church Order and other forms; 3) and the last but not least Hamilton and MARS. We call that unity. I call it, mildly, horse-trading. When I was a young man in Holland we used this word or saying is this or that "goed gereformeerd." Please think about that before we run headlong into so called unity. I pray to the Lord every day that the leaders or shepherds will do the right thing for his sheep.

With brotherly greetings,
Martin Van Bostelen

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*