

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

V 66 N 3

FEBRUARY 10 2017



**Is there a
biblical
basis?**

RESPONDING TO ATHEISM

CLARION KIDS

YOU ASKED

Dutch Report on Women in Ecclesiastical Office

Cornelis Van Dam
Professor emeritus of
Old Testament at the Canadian
Reformed Theological Seminary
in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org



*The church can expect opposition from
an unbelieving world*

At the end of January our Dutch sister churches officially came together to begin meeting in General Synod, although according to their website regular plenary sessions are not planned to begin until March. One of the items on the agenda is a report, commissioned by the previous synod, on whether women can be ordained to ecclesiastical office. This report, *Rapport deputaten M/V en ambt: samen dienen*, is a huge disappointment. It recommends that women be ordained to all the offices of the church: minister of the Word, elder, and deacon. After about two thousand years of the church's consistent understanding of Scripture that it is not God's will that women be ordained into ecclesiastical office, this report boldly says the opposite and recommends accordingly. How did this come about? How can this report justify such a course of action? This article is a brief preliminary look at some of its features.

This seventy-five page report (to which reference will be made by page number) is available on the Internet and is well-written. As a matter of fact, the whole set up and development of the report, starting from Scripture and moving through history to today, is very cleverly written so that it will easily convince any church member who is not very knowledgeable about the issues involved. For those who wish to go with the times and not be too different from the culture in which we live, this report fits the bill. And culture is a major issue here.

The place of culture

This report attaches great significance to culture, both in biblical times and now. Those who wrote the report are convinced that their recommendations are based on Scripture and they emphatically deny that they are influenced by the demands of our current culture (61-62). Without

questioning the integrity of the deputies, this denial has some credibility issues within the context of this report. It is, for example, remarkable that the report states that the husband's authority over his wife is basically determined by the culture of that time and is thus in essence not normative for today (13, 15). It is also striking that among the grounds given for urging the churches to create room for women to show their gifts in proclamation and education, the pastorate, and diaconate, is the matter of our current culture. Since both men and women are now educated and have equal access to positions in society, the same should be the case in the church (67-68). This is not the first time that such a rationale is mentioned in our Dutch sister churches. Myriam Klinker-de Klerck in her 2011 study, (*Als vrouwen het woord doen*, 134), voiced similar sentiments.

Most important are, of course, the actual grounds for opening up all the offices to women, which the report seeks to base on Scripture. Here too we run into a reasoning by which the cultural context of a biblical text (e.g., 1 Tim 2:11-14) is used to interpret Scripture in such a way that the Bible ends up meaning the opposite of what the text plainly says. We will come back to this example. The point that needs to be made is that the report's use of culture in understanding and applying Scripture is a central feature and it is also the report's Achilles' heel, its vulnerable point and fatal weakness. The deputies have followed a method of interpretation by which Scripture is read and explained through the lens of the culture of that time, as they understand it. So, unless you are familiar with the culture of, for example, the time of the Apostle Paul, you cannot correctly understand what he has written and apply the text to today. This method of interpreting which places such a high premium on culture has enormous consequences. When you stop to think this

method through, then logically speaking it is only in our time with all the available resources of archaeology, cultural, and historical studies that we can finally find out what the Lord our God is actually teaching us in the apostle's writings.

It is of course true that the latest discoveries can help us to better understand Scripture. But, God's Word is clear with respect to the intended basic meaning, not just to our generation but to all those who have preceded us as well. No reader of God's Word should be held hostage to the latest cultural studies in order to finally find out what God really meant to tell us about female ordination to ecclesiastical office. Yet this is essentially what this report says and it admits that their recommendations mean a break with the past (62).

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 3 begins with Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's editorial: "Dutch Report on Women in Ecclesiastical Office." He discusses the contents of the report that has been completed for the upcoming synod of our Dutch sister churches.

Ongoing in our efforts to bring readers material on the topic of the Reformation this year (as we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Great Reformation), this issue contains the first of a three part series by Keith Sikkema, entitled, "Billy, the Reformation, the Bourbons, and the Breach."

Rev. Rob Schouten reviews several books in one article, all on the topic of how we can respond to atheism.

In news, we have the report from Neerlandia on Rev. Veurink's ordination and welcome as well as MERF news. This issue also brings readers regular columns Treasures New and Old, Clippings on Politics and Religion, *Clarion Kids*, and You Asked.

Laura Veenendaal

- 70 EDITORIAL**
Dutch Report on Women in Ecclesiastical Office
- 74 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
Jesus Christ, Our Advocate
- 75 Billy, the Reformation, the Bourbons,**
and the Breach (1)
- 78 Responding to Atheism**
- 79 CLIPPINGS ON POLITICS AND RELIGION**
- 80 Neerlandia Welcomes Rev. Veurink**
- 82 MERF News**
- 84 CLARION KIDS**
- 85 YOU ASKED**

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliet, E. Kampen, C. Van Dam, M. VanLuik

ADDRESS FOR MAGAZINE CONTENT

Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J5
Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: 204-663-9000, Fax: 204-663-9202

Subscriptions subscriptions@clarionmagazine.ca
Advertisements ads@clarionmagazine.ca
Website www.clarionmagazine.ca

2017 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

			Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada			\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds			\$69.00	\$102.00
International			\$98.00	\$171.00

*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra.
GST/HST no. 890967359RT

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

2017 ADVERTISING RATES

Advertisements: \$20.00 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch.
We reserve the right to refuse ads.

PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Is such a break with the traditional understanding of the biblical text which has served the church since Pentecost warranted? Since the biblical evidence is critical, let us consider two key passages. 1 Corinthians 14:34 reads: “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says” (ESV). In 1 Timothy 2:12, the apostle writes: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet” (ESV). How does this report deal with these texts? (These passages can be found with some context in a sidebar to this article.) Within the constraints of this article let us briefly consider these texts.

1 Corinthians 14:33b-35

The report begins by stating that we do not know for sure what this passage means because we do not have enough information about the situation to which the apostle is reacting. A number of exegetical points are covered. The report correctly mentions that the command to keep silent in the churches is meant for all the congregations and not just the one in Corinth. The report then notes that the demand for silence only applies to a specific situation since women were permitted to pray and prophesy in church (1 Cor 11:5; 14:26). The report repeats that what the words mean for our time is unclear (19-20). However, this passage should not in this manner be shunted aside and made of little consequence in this discussion. More can be said that is relevant for the topic at hand.

In 1 Corinthians 14, the Apostle Paul deals with prophecy and speaking in tongues with a view to ensuring that all things be done for building up. Thus to prophesy is better

than speaking in tongues unless the prophecy is interpreted for the benefit of those who hear it. Prophecies, however, need to be carefully weighed (v 29) for there was the danger of false prophets (cf. 1 John 4:1). In that general context the apostle says that women should be silent because they “should be in submission, as the law also says” (1 Cor 14:34). “The law” probably refers to the Old Testament, with the creation account being specifically in view since the apostle had appealed to creation earlier in regard to the relationship of men and women (1 Cor 11:8-9). The point is that when prophecies are being judged, women are not to speak for that could involve having authority over a male prophet. The demand for silence is repeated three times (1 Cor 14:34-35) underlining the importance of this prohibition.

With respect to 1 Corinthians 11, it should be noted that the practice of women praying and prophesying (1 Cor 11:5, 13) does not constitute a warrant for their having an official ecclesiastical office. The passage does not specifically state where this praying and prophesying was done. Some scholars have argued that the praying and prophesying of women in 1 Corinthians 11 took place outside the official worship services (cf. Acts 21:9-11). There is then no contradiction with the demand for silence in church in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35. However, this interpretation is not completely convincing since nothing in 1 Corinthians 11 gives the impression that this prophesying was a private activity and prophecies were to be evaluated in church (1 Cor 14:23-29). Regardless whether one interprets this activity as inside or outside the church, more to the point is the fact that the gifts of prophesying and tongues were temporary gifts of the Spirit in the apostolic era of the church. Prophets were part of the foundation of the church along with the apostles (Eph 2:20). Since a foundation is only established once, there are no more inspired prophets or prophetesses today. Such prophesying and speaking in tongues as well as the manner in which they took place are therefore not normative for the church today. The cessation of the gifts of prophecy and tongues means that 1 Corinthians 11 has no direct bearing on the issue of whether women should be admitted to ecclesiastical office.¹

One of the most important and clear passages in dealing with the issue of whether female ordination is biblically warranted is 1 Timothy 2:11-14.

1 Timothy 2:11-14

The report correctly notes that in this chapter the Apostle Paul appeals to both men and women to behave properly in church, each in their own way, with an appeal to creation. The report then states that the words: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man” do not constitute a

1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 (ESV)

“As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

1 Timothy 2:11-14 (ESV)

“Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”

general pronouncement (19). In other words, it is not normative for all times and places. This is so, according to the report, because Paul told Timothy that he had to see “older women as mothers” who had authority over their daughters and sons (1 Tim 5:2). This reasoning however does not hold. Within a domestic setting, mothers indeed have authority over their sons but in 1 Timothy 2:8-15 the context of the prohibition to teach and have authority over a man is public worship.

In trying to make its case for women in ecclesiastical office, the report asks whether women had to be silent because they lacked knowledge. As reason for raising this point, the report notes it was not usual in the culture of that time for women to be educated, yet in 1 Timothy 2:11 the apostle says: “Let a woman learn quietly and in all submission.” So it appears that women were to be silent because they needed further instruction. That would also explain why the apostle did make use of gifted women such as Priscilla. The essence of the matter, according to the report, is that everyone is permitted to prophesy and to speak, but knowledge and insight is needed and without education it is not wise to speak. Furthermore, it is incumbent on men and women to behave appropriately when speaking. What is appropriate is culturally determined and what was culturally fitting in the apostle’s day does not have to be culturally fitting in our day. Thus the passages telling women to be silent (1 Cor 14:34 and 1 Tim 2:9-10) form no basis for keeping the ecclesiastical offices closed to women. Rather, according to this report, these passages “contain a call to let oneself be educated in all modesty – something that pertains to both men and women – although that means something different for each of them as also determined by the culture of the time” (20).

The report basically argues that these critical passages do not speak of barring women from ecclesiastical office, but rather these verses tell women to get educated so that they can teach and exercise authority over a man. A difficulty with this analysis is that nowhere does the apostle say this. There is no reference to the fact that their lack of education is the reason that they are not able to teach or have authority over men. Rather the reason given is that God created Adam first and then Eve. In other words, the prohibition is not based on their lack of education but the text clearly justifies it by the order in which God created male and female. The text explicitly gives this as the reason. The passage reads: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (1 Tim 2:12-14, my emphasis). In other words, the reason for a woman to keep silent is based on creation, just as in 1 Corinthians 14:34.

In sum, there is no biblical basis in the passages just discussed for the report’s conclusion that women may be ordained to ecclesiastical office. The report’s imagined cultural rationale for silence that women needed more education before being allowed to speak has no warrant in Scripture. Indeed, the report makes the text say the opposite from what it actually states.

A major omission and problem

Surprisingly the report has no discussion of the biblical qualifications for the office of elder which assume that males are in view (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). Judging from the direction of the report as a whole, if it had dealt with the criteria for becoming an elder, it would probably have said that those were the relevant qualifications for the culture of that time but they no longer apply to today since men and women have equal education and employment opportunities in our current society. Such an approach makes the biblical text mean something different from what the text states and denies the clarity and authority of Scripture. This method of interpretation leads to the church absorbing worldly thinking and cultural values and thus losing its distinctiveness as the holy body of Christ.

In conclusion

The church can expect opposition from an unbelieving world (cf. John 15:18-19). The church must be obedient to the plain teaching of Scripture and if that means being counter-cultural and assigning different roles to men and women than what is customary in the society in which we live, so be it. We must be prepared to endure the possible scorn and ridicule, and even suffering (1 Pet 4:12-17). The biblical norms for office bearers as understood for millennia must be upheld in obedience to the head of the church.

We hope and pray that Synod Meppel does not adopt this report.

¹ For more detail on the gifts of prophecy and tongues and their cessation, see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979) 55–116.



For further reading

Gerhard H. Visscher, “1 Timothy 2:12-15. Is Paul’s Injunction about Women Still Valid?” in Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher, editors, *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth* (2014). This book is also available on Kindle; Cornelis Van Dam, *The Elder* (2009) 207-218.

Jesus Christ, Our Advocate

Eric Kampen
Minister of the
Canadian Reformed Church
at Orangeville, Ontario
rev.e.kampen@gmail.com



"...We have one who speaks to the Father in our defence." 1 John 2:1

This meditation was originally published in this magazine in 2005.

The Apostle John had a most remarkable way of encouraging his readers to walk in the way of the Lord. In his first letter he writes, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1, 2).

What a great encouragement this is. For who can keep God's commands perfectly? Despite the best efforts, there will be stumbles, falls, and failures. Does it not happen in normal life that failure brings forth rebuke, perhaps even punishment? If you are certain of failure, why even bother to try? John indicates, however, that there is a provision for failure, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is at this point that John touches on one of the key aspects of our Lord's work for us while he is in the heavenly sanctuary before the throne of our heavenly Father. He is there as "one who speaks to the Father in our defence." To use a familiar term, Jesus is our advocate.

John explains why it is of such great benefit to us to have our Lord Jesus Christ as our advocate, speaking on our behalf. First, it is a great benefit because he is the Righteous One. For

sinners, it is so important to remember that our advocate is sin-free. This is an absolute qualification for the advocate in the heavenly court. This was foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacrifices: only unblemished animals qualified. The letter to the Hebrews spells this out in great detail too; our Lord is like us in every respect, sin excepted.

The picture, however, is not yet complete. What makes our Lord Jesus Christ such a suitable advocate for us when we commit sin is that he is the "atoning sacrifice." Again, our minds go to the Old Testament. By means of animal sacrifices, offered as substitutes for sinners, sin was paid for, and the sinner was reconciled to God. The Lord's anger was taken away because sin was punished in the substitute animal. All the sacrifices had their climax in the seventh month, on the great Day of Atonement when there was a general payment for all the sins of Israel. All this was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist called our Lord "the Lamb of God." Our Lord himself stated that he had come to give his life as a ransom for many. The letter to the Hebrews is filled with references to show that Jesus paid for sins once for all. Our Lord Jesus is therefore a most suitable advocate because he was the atoning sacrifice.

What an encouragement we have. John tells us that when we sin and we stand guilty again before the throne of God, Jesus Christ stands at our side. He

does not try to find loopholes in the law to see how he can get us off the hook. Rather, he basically says to his Father: "Look at me! I have already paid for their sins. Let them go free!" If we want to think about it in terms of a courtroom, we can picture God asking us what we plead with respect to the charges against us. Our plea is always the same: "Please look to Jesus. He has paid."

We notice that John does not leave it at that. He adds that the Lord Jesus made atonement not only for our sins, "but also for the sins of the whole world." We should not think that John is teaching that everyone will be saved. Reading through this letter as a whole makes it clear that John knows that there are those who will perish in unbelief. One of the purposes of this letter is to warn against those who live in unbelief. What John is doing is putting penitent sinners at ease as he points to the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice. John teaches that the well of salvation will never run dry.

When you reflect on these words, you will realize John is not encouraging people to sin because the Lord Jesus will always cover up for them. What it comes down to is that God says, "I want you to walk according to my commands and I have already made provisions for your failures." For the believer, this is not an invitation to carelessness, but an encouragement to keep on striving. We dare to try because we know Jesus Christ is our advocate.



Billy, the Reformation, the Bourbons, and the Breach (Part 1 of 3)

Keith Sikkema
Full-time lecturer
at the Covenant Canadian
Reformed Teachers College
ksikkema@covenantteacherscollege.com

On February 2, 1576, a German mercenary army fighting for the French Reformed (or Huguenots) successfully breached the wall of Billy's castle in central France. This "Huguenot hole" remains today as a reminder of the sixteenth century French Wars of Religion. Billy, which derived its name from "Billius," an ancient chief, does not feature big in these wars, but its local story serves as an example of the tragedies that came along. In this anniversary year of the Reformation, we want to remember the Lord's ongoing care for his church, but shudder at the bloodshed associated with taking up arms.

These weren't just religious wars, as personal and aristocratic rivalries, as well as domestic and international political motives, played significant roles. The St. Bartholomew's Massacre of August 24, 1572, for instance, followed on the heels of a potentially pacifying but politically controversial wedding between representatives of rival factions of contenders for the French throne – which also happened to



Billy (far right) in the French Allier Valley

represent religiously opposed parties. Within a week after the wedding (of the Huguenot Bourbon Prince Henry of Navarre to Margaret of Valois, the King's Catholic sister), the groom was forced to turn Roman Catholic to escape death. The first victim was the Huguenot leader, French Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, who planned to help the Reformation-minded Dutch suffering under Spain's ruthless Duke of Alba. (The Dutch, led by prince William of Orange, had just begun to show resolve to oppose Spanish tyranny following the Sea-Beggars' capture of Brielle in April, 1572). De Coligny's plan risked a French-Spanish war! In 1576, Henry became Huguenot again, but reverted to Catholicism once more in 1593 (to help secure the kingship and French unity). In 1598, his Edict of Nantes entailed extensive religious freedoms, which rapidly diminished after his assassination in 1610. Meanwhile, the ongoing civil strife motivated many Huguenots to flee France for safer places in, among others, Geneva, Germany, England, Holland, and New France.

From Rome to Renaissance

Julius Caesar would have known Billy as an administrative centre in a strategic location in central France, important enough to have a Roman garrison. Protected by the Allier River in the west and the Boucé Marshes to the



*The Huguenot Hole
in Billy's castle wall*

north, it also occupied the western-most peak of the Forez Hills. It had a commanding view of the lovely plains across the river and Auvergne territory to the south. On a clear day, Clermont's dormant Puy-de-Dôme volcano was visible eighty kilometres to the south-west.

After black-robed Cluniac monks turned the Boucé Marshes into fertile farmland by the twelfth century, a stone wall was built to replace Billy's palisade. The aristocratic House of Bourbon, known for the lily in its coat of

At the dawn of the Reformation, it was common for clergy to be illiterate, pastorally negligent, immoral, and selling church offices and salvation

arms, bought the castle in 1232 AD, one in a string of seventeen defensive castles around their feudal territory, and continued to develop it for that purpose. Billy also became the administrative and judiciary centre for as many as three manors and sixty-two church-parishes. By the end of the fifteenth century,

terraces were constructed around the castle, for offices and rather tightly-packed homes for management and staff. Each terrace had its own perimeter wall, adding to the overall defensive structures of the fortress. "La Paroisse," the village-proper with the church and priory, half a mile to the east, remained undefended from attackers. In case of military threats, the villagers and friars could seek refuge in the castle, along with food supplies, livestock, and valuables, and people from the perimeter terraces. If they avoided "heresy," they were also safe from papal interdicts. Billy had seen much threat and turmoil during the preceding millennium or so. Consider, for instance, the invasions of barbarian Germanic Franks in the fifth century, and King Clovis' acceptance of Christianity around 500 AD, when Billy's original church was built; the Muslim menace, and their defeat by Charles Martel near Tours in 732; prosperity under Charlemagne, but subsequent unrest and decline; the calls for Crusades starting with Pope Urban II from nearby Clermont in 1095, and their associated horrors and transformations; the papal persecutions against Waldensians starting in the twelfth century; the Plague by 1348; the Papal Schism (1378-1417) and gloom during the 100 Year

War (1337-1453); and then, of course, the Reformation itself. Such upheavals drive reflection on the meaning of life and the basis of hope, and the clergy might well have told Billyans to seek help through saints and other superstitions. For instance, the church was dedicated to St. Julietta and her little son St. Cyr, fourth century martyrs in Tarsus. Little Cyr saved Charlemagne from a wild boar once (in a dream), making him a fitting patron saint by the bishop's hermeneutic and popular belief. Billy also honoured St. George, who helped in battles against evil and in slaying dragons. In fact, the church's pleasantly cool eleventh century crypt was used for storing wine, not coffins, and aptly named after George. Fighting evil and slaying dragons under influence, "by George"?

Deformation and Reformation

At the dawn of the Reformation, it was common for clergy to be illiterate, pastorally negligent, immoral, and selling church offices and salvation. Despite earlier efforts of people like Waldo in Lyon (100 miles east of Billy), truth, comfort, and knowledge of God often remained buried under threat, ritual, and superstition. Questioning papal decrees was "heresy" punishable by interdict, torture, and death. Yet, the Lord led Reformers like Luther to turn from papal to scriptural authority, as they recovered the truth of salvation by grace, through faith in Christ. They presented it in the vernacular, bringing hope and life to many, but also dangerously upsetting social and ecclesiastical structures.



View across Billy from the castle towards "La Paroisse"



The church in "La Paroisse"

By God's mercy, many French peasants, tradesmen, nobles, and clergy embraced the Reformation. The printing press also made Bible translations and successive works by humanists, Luther, Calvin, and others affordably available. The Renaissance return to classical learning was initially even stimulated by France's King Francis I (1494-1547), who pursued absolute monarchy. In the church, he was authorized by Pope Leo X to appoint nearly 600 chief clergy. He first wavered regarding the Reformation, but, in October 1534, when some posted anti-mass placards in Paris (heresy!), he framed all Protestants as rebels, and sentenced several to die at the stake in front of Notre-Dame. Reformers and many of their followers now fled to safer places.

John Calvin (1509-1564) had fled Paris the previous fall, after being implicated in helping Nicolas Cop, the rector of the University of Paris, to prepare a Reformation-oriented speech. In 1536, with the Lord's blessing, he published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* which set the Protestant record straight as a return to Scripture. He dedicated its first edition to "the Most Mighty and Illustrious Monarch, Francis, Most Christian King of the French," but it did not convince Francis. It did convince Guillaume Farel, however, who then persuaded Calvin to help him reform the church in Geneva. With a hiatus of just over three years, mostly spent in Strasbourg (1538-1541), Calvin stayed in Geneva until he died in 1564, and laid the groundwork for

much of what the Huguenot, Reformed, and Presbyterian churches embraced later on – including our Psalter, Church Order, and Three Forms of Unity.

During the reign of Francis' son and successor, Henry II (1547-1559), persecutions of the Huguenots increased – as did adherence to the Reformed faith. Between 1555 and 1559 alone, nearly seventy trained pastors were sent into France from Calvin's school in Geneva. In May, 1559, just before King Henry's death, the Huguenots held their (first and secret) Synod of Paris, with over seventy churches represented. After Calvin's example and advice, they prepared their Gallic Confession (later, with some adjustments, known as the Confession of La Rochelle) and a Reformed Church Order. By 1562, when, by some counts, the French Wars of Religion started, there were well over 800 Huguenot churches and 2,150 preaching points, with as many as two million members, including more than half of the French nobility. Yet, tears and tumult were upon them, leading many to flee the country, taking their faith and trades along to benefit others.

C



A French patchwork of feudal territories

<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/564x/c9/bf/22/c9bf226d023726bd4c77e76e18416e78.jpg>

Responding to Atheism

Rob Schouten
Minister of the
Canadian Reformed Church at
Aldergrove, British Columbia
schouten61@gmail.com



For some years now, the number of people in Canada who self-identify as atheists has been growing. This trend has been encouraged by the writings of the “new atheists,” notably Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and a host of lesser-known writers. Close reading of these authors reveals a lot of aggressive bombast but little in the way of new arguments against Christian theism. If you are familiar with earlier atheists such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Bertrand Russell, the rantings of these “new atheists” will actually seem quite shallow. Additionally, their prose is not nearly as powerful and elegant as that of their predecessors.

In view of atheism’s move from a fringe group to mainstream society, it’s imperative that believers equip themselves to defend our undoubted catholic convictions about our God. At an academic level, Christian scholars have published excellent defenses of Christian theism. Prime among these are the books of Alvin Plantinga, especially *Warranted Belief* (2010) and *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (2015). Plantinga’s books demonstrate the rationality of Christian faith in God and expose the futility of the attacks of modern atheism. His approach focuses on epistemology which is the philosophical study of how human beings know things.

For many readers, Plantinga’s books may prove quite daunting. For that reason, we can be thankful for books aimed at non-academic readers. A survey of the field yields several treasures. In the first place, I want to mention a book by James R. Spiegel entitled *The Making of an Atheist. How Immorality Leads to Unbelief* (Moody Publishers, 2010). His main point is that atheism is never a purely intellectual stance based on rational arguments. Instead, there are moral dynamics involved in the abandonment of faith. Atheism is a position based not so much on evidence and argument but on choice. Behind all the loud posturing of the new atheism, there is a decision of the human heart to not submit to God, a choice which is not at all based on arguments but which flows from a stance of rebellion against

God. In short, sinful humanity doesn’t want there to be a God and therefore invents arguments against his existence. Despite the brevity of the book (128 pages), Spiegel explores this theme in considerable detail and with great persuasive effect. This book would be a real help for those who are engaged in study at colleges or universities where atheism runs rampant. It will bolster their confidence in defending their faith. It would also be a great resource for busy pastors seeking to equip themselves so that they in turn can equip their congregations for the work of defending their faith.

Another excellent book is that by Frank Turek entitled *Stealing from God. Why Atheists need God to make their case* (NavPress, 2014). In an original and quite compelling manner, he shows that atheism has great difficulty accounting for what we experience as human beings. What we know about the origin of the universe (it had a beginning and therefore a cause) fits better with a theistic explanation than one that excludes God.

Similarly, atheism struggles to give an account of the laws of nature (why should there be laws of nature?), the laws of logic (these are non-material and therefore can’t be explained in purely natural terms), the existence of extremely sophisticated coded information in the DNA of living creatures (codes imply an intelligent creator of the code), the existence of morality (how can nature alone generate non-material value judgments), evil (does evil even exist in a non-theistic world and if so on what basis), and science (atheistic scientists must depend on theistic pre-suppositions to do their work).

Turek’s book utilizes an engaging combination of dialogue, story, and analysis. His approach is to engage with his opponents in an honest and detailed manner. He is very thorough but never pedantic. The book is fresh, energizing, and convicting. I highly recommend it for all interested and motivated readers.



Saudi Arabia's Islamic Exports

Cornelis Van Dam
Professor emeritus of
Old Testament at the Canadian
Reformed Theological Seminary in
Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org



Saudi Arabia's exports of oil are well-known. There are, however, other, less favourable exports that are not as widely recognized. This Islamic kingdom also exports its conservative version of Islam, called Wahhabism. From 1938 when oil was discovered up to about 1976, the Saud family had spent an estimated one hundred billion dollars to promote their fundamentalist version of Islam. After 1976, the flow of money for this cause has increased substantially. This enormous flow of cash is a primary reason for the growing dominance of fundamentalist Islam.

A most effective way for spreading the Saudi notion of Islam is their funding Wahhabi schools, mosques, libraries, and Islamic centres world-wide. New generations of Muslims are thus nurtured and indoctrinated in Wahhabism. Such indoctrination spawns and feeds Islamic terrorist groups. The European Parliament justly identified Wahhabism as the main source of global terrorism in July, 2013. Saudi Arabia is its main sponsor.

The spread of this form of Islam has not only been very effective in poor countries but increasingly so also in the West. With Saudi money come Wahhbi preachers who will accept nothing but Islamic domination. Muslims worshipping at such mosques have little desire to integrate in any meaningful way into Western society. Wahhbi mosques publish extreme literature that can incite to violence against those who are not Muslim. All this goes on while Saudi Arabia refuses to give permission for the building of a single Christian church in its country.

Another way that the Saudis seek to spread their Islamic brand is by donating large amounts of money to Western universities with strings attached. Denis MacEoin has noted that Oxford and Cambridge, the two oldest British universities, have accepted more than 233.5 million pounds sterling from Saudi and Muslim sources since 1995. However, "several agreements made between Oxford's Middle East Centre and donors appear to indicate that funders have sought to influence the centre's output and activities." This is only one example. MacEoin states that the scale

of donations is staggering. "The universities involved are among the top academies in the world, the money involved is hundreds of billions of dollars, and the targets of Islamic finance are, for the most part, specific and form part of a distinct agenda."

The agenda for the Saudis is "to propagate their puritan form of Islam, Wahhabism, across the globe." This means that if the Saudis do not get value for their money, they will stop funding. A remarkable example is that "in 1981, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education paid for a lectureship at Britain's Newcastle University, to teach Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Department of Religious Studies. The appointee, a non-Muslim British teacher with a solid research record, embarked on an ambitious range of topics designed to give students a wide background in Islamic history and doctrine." However, he strayed into territory that was anathema to Wahhabism and so the funding abruptly stopped. When universities become dependent on such Saudi funding, professors will watch what they say and dare not criticize Islam. Such a university context becomes fertile ground for charges of Islamophobia and a compromising picture of Islam.

Campus Watch, an American organization, monitors campuses in an attempt to ensure that professors do not try to mislead, indoctrinate, and validate extreme Islamic views. This organization "exposes professors who make exaggerated claims about Islamophobia or who offer support to terrorist entities such as Hamas. Its steady record of news associated with Middle East Studies provides ample evidence of the distortions now hawked as balanced scholarship."

Saudi money is exporting to the West fundamentalist Islam and corrupting university scholarship in Middle East studies. Students beware.

Sources used include: Daniel Pipes, "No Saudi Money for American Mosques," Middle East Forum, August 22, 2016; Denis MacEoin, "Western Universities: The Best Indoctrination Money can Buy" Gatestone Institute, June 26, 2016



Neerlandia Welcomes Rev. Veurink

Ordination service

The ordination service took place on October 30, 2016 in the morning worship service, with Rev. Slomp officiating. The sermon began with the exclamation, “How wonderful it is to have your own minister,” and I’m sure it was agreed with unanimously. Rev. Slomp went on to compare a minister to a farmer for, after all, this is Neerlandia and farming is quite common. As a crop will not be successful without the help of the farmer to care for it, so a minister is equally as important to a congregation. A minister is absolutely essential for the watering, feeding, and growing of the flock and has been given something very precious to take care of in his flock. Rev. Vanderlinde then read off the form for the ordination of the minister of the Word and concluded the worship service.

Inaugural service

That afternoon Rev. Veurink proclaimed his first sermon as an ordained minister of God’s Word. He began



with reflection on Reformation Day and how salvation is based on grace alone through faith alone, in Jesus Christ. Remember your leaders of old; the past is not something we should ignore, we must remember and learn from it. We remember them because of the message they proclaimed, the message of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ does not change. Rev. Veurink expressed how privileged he feels to proclaim the good news in Neerlandia. Over the years we’ve had other ministers proclaim that same message. We are doing nothing new, but are continuing to build on that firm cornerstone. The service continued with Rev. Veurink performing baptism. What a special day it was!


Welcome evening for Rev. Veurink

The Canadian Reformed Church of Neerlandia held a welcome evening for Rev. Veurink on November 10, 2016. Rev. Vanderlinde and Rev. Tiggelaar joined as well. Each of the societies helped to welcome Rev. Veurink with a skit, story, or song and ran smoothly thanks to M.C. Wilf Vanlaar. The evening began with a few letters from neighbouring





churches who could not be present. Skits, stories, and songs began with the Wednesday night women's society asking a series of questions where the fastest answer won, followed by the Choir, formed by Barrhead, Neerlandia South, and Neerlandia. Tuesday morning Women's Bible Study introduced the congregation, pointing out who was who and who did what, if Rev. Veurink ever needed to find himself a framer, plumber, or farmer. Mr. John Vanassen told an interesting story and Saturday Morning Men's Society presented Rev. Veurink with a map of Neerlandia marked with the location

of each family's address. Ard Doornbos brought Rev. Veurink up on stage to participate in Jeopardy, along with two other council members. This skit received quite a few laughs mainly because of the participants and their noise makers. Young Peoples made Rev. Veurink guess a council member based on a hint and Youth Group read a few members thoughts via the thought bubble. After each of the societies had a turn there was time to socialize and enjoy the many desserts prepared by Barrhead's Ladies Aid. The evening ended with Rev. Veurink expressing his thanks and ending with prayer. 





www.merf.org

METF News

Middle East Reformed Fellowship—"Declaring the Whole Counsel of God"

December 2016



BY PASTOR IAN
AND MRS. HELEN
MCCLEAN

Fruit of Work and Prayer



2016 METF International Council

At METF's International Council (IC) at John Calvin Center in Larnaca, Cyprus last month, the General Director stated: *"Islam is a complex but crumbling world and life view, and as it crumbles it needs to be replaced by a complete, biblical world and life view. The gospel is the power of God. We must believe in His power and trust the Holy Spirit."*

The power of the gospel was indeed well demonstrated in updates from throughout what is often called the Muslim World. It is impossible to convey the joy experienced by hearing of God's work among Muslim peoples!

Indonesia

Indonesia, a group of some 13,000 islands inhabited by 250 million people, has a large, mostly nominal Muslim majority, but the number of Christians is steadily growing. METF has been training pastors, elders, schoolteachers, and other spiritual leaders as well as producing radio, television, and Internet-based programs. Just recently we have published a 600-page book mainly for church leaders, and are in the process of preparing Bible lesson books for children.

Ethiopia

The report from Ethiopia highlighted a very encouraging response to the Amharic and Oromo radio broadcasts and growing interest in the Reformed faith. And although Somalia is claimed to have an almost 100% Muslim population, a Somali METF staff member at our gathering spoke of the Lord's rich blessing on the Somali gospel broadcasts, targeting hundreds of thousands in the Horn of Africa.

South & North Sudan

Hundreds of pastors and evangelists from South Sudan (SS) have been trained

in our center in Lokichoggio (Loki) in northwest Kenya, near the borders of SS. After four months of in-depth biblical training, the men return to their beautiful but war-torn country to proclaim the Gospel of peace. Reports from the Loki center are very encouraging. One teacher reported that on average 5 or 6 students obtained 100% in their exams!

A joyous report was also received from mainly Muslim northern Sudan. On a weekly-basis, METF produces an hour of uncensored broadcasts aired on the government-controlled national TV and radio free of charge. We are also very active in



Pastor and Mrs. McClean are active volunteers in MERF ministries.

producing and distributing Christian literature in Bible schools and colleges.

Pakistan

In Pakistan (reportedly 95% Muslim) MERF's work continues among the 2,200 students in the four Calvin Academies. We have helped with a number of church-planting projects. One pastor reports that he reads Bible passages over a loud-speaker. A local Muslim, taking his water buffalo to feed, was moved by what he heard and made a point of seeking the pastor to thank him. Muslim neighbors came with their local imam to urge the church to keeping airing "the beautiful words of God."

MERF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support! Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through www.canadahelps.org

Lebanon and Syria

The population of 4.5 million in Lebanon has increased by roughly 2 million of mostly Muslim Syrian refugees. MERF's daughter organization, Lebanon Reformed Fellowship (LRF), has been active in reaching out to such destitute people. Local churches are encouraged by the growing numbers of Syrian Muslims turning to Christ. There are now 5 house groups among the Druze (Muslim sect) in the Lebanese mountains.

After almost six years of civil war in Syria, the situation is very bad. Over 6 million children need humanitarian

We wish to inform supporters that the partnership with Back to God and Words of Hope for Arabic work has been discontinued. They no longer contribute to any MERF ministry. The strategic and effective Arabic Media Ministries, operated by MERF alone, continue to grow and reach millions. They have been kept faithful to the Scriptures and the historic Reformed faith.

downloads from one of the two websites. In Iran itself, Christians are enjoying more and more liberty as the government has shifted from emphasizing Islam to emphasizing Persian culture.

Arabic Ministries

Most exciting was the report from the Arabic Media team.

Muslim peoples.

Medium and shortwave broadcasts along with online radio and websites reach millions in the 22 nations of the Arab League and other Arabic-speaking people in different parts of the world. One website nets over 25,000 a month of biblical material downloads. Issa-almasih Facebook page has received 305,000 'likes,' while the Dardasha7 online radio Facebook page reports more than 705,000 'likes.' The vast majority are from young people.

Thank You!

We are grateful for the fellowship with friends old and new from all over the world and the care of the John Calvin Center staff. But above all, we were so encouraged to know that God is at work, especially among Muslims. We thank you for your prayers and would ask you to continue to pray. Only eternity will tell the result of the combined work of those in the field and those who support by prayer and giving. To God be the glory!

*"He shall have dominion from sea to sea."
—Psalm 72:8*



aid. There are many opportunities to present the gospel in Damascus and other places along with material aid. Please continue to pray for the churches in Aleppo, where much of the fighting has been concentrated.

Iran

The Farsi Media Ministry team leadership is now based in America. The use of Internet streaming has proven not only cost-effective but also very successful. Over the past few months there have been over 400,000

We eagerly and joyfully received the very professional audio-visual presentation by this Internet-savvy media crew—well-trained in effectively reaching Muslims. What a heartwarming and assuring experience of the work of this dedicated staff, augmented by many local Arab volunteers—theologically sound and spiritually mature. Their fruitful efforts reflect the Lord's goodness and rich blessing on MERF's growing outreach to Arab and

Clarion Kids

David and Goliath

1 Samuel 17

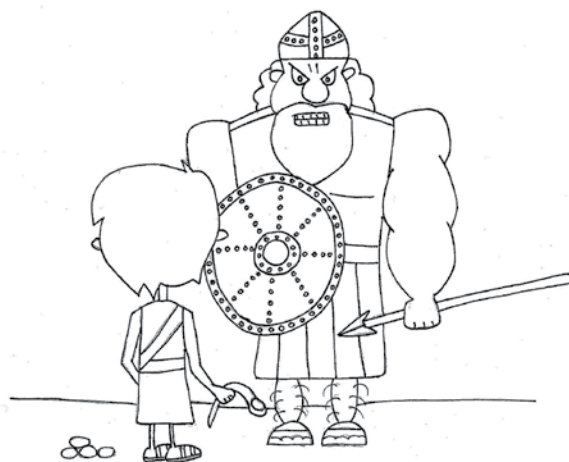
The Philistines were Israel's enemies, and they attacked Israel. They had a warrior named Goliath who was very tall and strong. All the Israelites were afraid of him and were too scared to fight him. When David saw Goliath he decided he would fight him. He didn't wear any armor. His only weapon was a sling and a few smooth stones. David trusted that God would protect him. Goliath wasn't afraid of David, but David slung one stone and it hit Goliath so hard in the forehead that he died. From that day on David had great success in every battle he fought and the Israelites loved him.

Matching:

Match up the important words and phrases from the story.

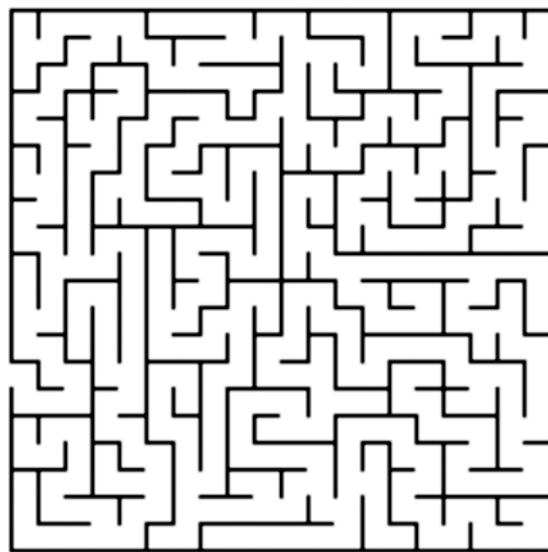
Philistines	Killed by David
David	Protected David
Goliath	Israel's enemies
God	Fought Goliath
Sling	David's weapon

Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this picture!



Maze:

Help David find his way through the battle to get to Goliath!



by Emily Nijenhuis

William den Hollander
Minister emeritus of the
Bethel Canadian Reformed Church
of Toronto, Ontario
denhollanderw@gmail.com



Q Can you be blotted out of the book of life?

Revelation 3:5 speaks of the possibility of having one's name being removed from the book of life. How do we understand this in light of election?

A Books were opened, we read in Revelation 20:12; the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books; *another* book was opened as well, which is the *book of life*. Ultimately, we read, “if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (20:15).”

So, it’s on the basis of this book of life that people are acquitted; apparently regardless of their deeds! How come? How can that be? What is it, this book of life? Is that a *secret* book, a *hidden* list, which makes the other book irrelevant? Is God going to judge people ultimately irrespective of their thoughts, words, and deeds, just on the basis of this secret book, this hidden list? He does not! This book of the living is not secret at all, according to the Scriptures, but it functions *openly* throughout the history of the world as well!

In Philippians 4:3 the Apostle Paul is writing about his fellow workers, men and women. He encourages the Philippians to help certain women, “together with Clemens and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.” In Luke 10:20, the Lord Jesus says to seventy of his disciples, returning from a mission trip, “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” This same Jesus writes in his letter to the church at Sardis, “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels” (Rev 3:5).

Hence, this book of life is a book in which the Lord records those who are his! This is not something secret or hidden; it shows in the lives of his disciples. Yes, fellow believers, like Paul, know this about each other, so that you can say: your name is written in the book of life. Those who confess the Lord Jesus before men may know that he will acknowledge them before his Father, and won’t blot them from the book of life. Indeed, if and when you belong to the Lord Jesus, nothing can separate you from his love, and nothing can snatch you from his hand, and not even the worst sin can keep you from being acquitted.

Indeed, there is a large measure of unrest and anxiety in chapters like Revelation 3, 13, 20, and rightly so. When we consider our lives and look at our thoughts, words, and deeds, we know we won’t escape judgment in any way. Even if we were holier than the holiest saints in the Scriptures, we would still know that we stand condemned before God. The gospel of the book of life, however, shows us the way of escape through him, our Saviour! In his book of life he will write all those who flee to him with all their sins, and who seek their lives outside of themselves in him (Matt 11:28). With him there is life! By faith in him something is going to happen with your life: then his love will be evident in your life; his desire for obedience and service to the Father will reflect in your life. Choosing for him, you will do it so naturally, so spontaneously, that you won’t even realize it. It’s on the last day, the Day of Judgment, that you’ll find out what you did in him, for him, and with him!

Is this gospel not a bit too easy? Does it not make people self-assured and arrived citizens of the kingdom of heaven? Could this not make people careless and profane, arrogant, and indifferent about their life, their obedience to God's commandments? Not at all! Remember, you can also be blotted out of the book of life. When you truly belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, *it will show* in your life. We *also* learn from Revelation 13:8, however, "And all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain." The followers of the *beast*, they are the ones who live for *themselves*, who do their *own* thing, defy the God of heaven, and transgress his commandments. Indeed, among them there are those who preferred the mark of the beast over the mark of their *baptism* (with its promises for life!). Yes, there are those who *separate* themselves from the Lord Jesus and live their life as *they* please. There are those who do *not* seek to conquer sins, the devil, in the

Lord, but who think they can take care of their salvation by themselves. *Their names* will be blotted out from the book of life! That's not something secret and hidden or arbitrary; it's something you do in full responsibility, something for which you only have yourself to blame!

Only those who truly live, will live. Those who are convicted owe their condemnation completely to their own wilful disobedience, but those who are acquitted must thank the elective grace of God from beginning to end for their justification in Jesus Christ! Their faith is the fruit of God's election. Their faith and the renewal of their life is the fruit of the regenerating Spirit and Word in their life. They responded to the proclamation of the gospel with faith and repentance, seeking their life outside of themselves in Jesus Christ. They were chosen in him, and thus the Father works out his plan of election. This is how that plan appears and is worked out in man's life!

Q Does the present distress make the time too evil for marriage?

In Corinthians 7 the Apostle Paul talks about the time when there is a crisis in the church. He advises some not to marry, though he doesn't forbid marriage. My question is: when is the time ripe in this godless dark world (terrorism, shoot-outs, divorces, also in the church, etc.) that we must say the times are too evil to marry?

A There is a time of distress in the days preceding Christ's return, in these "last days" since Christ's ascension into heaven. The Corinthian Christians are persecuted; Paul has been in prison often. It's a time of struggles and troubles.

Why are we living in a time of distress?

Because everyone who belongs to Christ will have trouble in this world, as Paul has experienced so much (1 Cor 4:9f). Christ warns us that the way to life is narrow, and

few will find it. Turning to Christ by faith leads to distress and persecution. These are some of the symptoms of "these last days" which Paul holds up to make his point: married people will have (more) worldly trouble (v 28): in a time of distress life is harder with the two of you than when you are by yourself.

Paul does not want to make the unmarried state more glorious than the married state; there are advantages, however, he adduces, in a time of distress. Then the unmarried have it somewhat easier than the married. During the dis-

trous in these last days the married have more troubles because they have the care for each other. The apostle wants to spare the believers all these extra troubles because of their weaknesses. Paul also writes in this context that “the appointed time has grown very short.” God is hastening to the end. Satan also knows that his time is short. As also the Apostle Peter writes, “Be sober, be watchful. The devil is prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.” In the last days times will be difficult. Whoever is married today may have to leave wife and children behind (as we also hear in the stories of refugees from Syria, Africa, for instance). Be prepared for this!

In these last days, however, Paul is not suggesting that we leave this world, avoid marriage intentionally (as the questioner implies), but use God’s gifts with care and caution. We may still receive God’s gifts, also of marriage, with joy and thankfulness; yet, we may not use them as if that’s the one and all, as if only the things of this world can make us happy. Satan will try to make God’s gift the one and all, a trap in our life with God. Satan is attacking the beauty and riches of marriage with alternative forms of relation-

ships. Satan will make us doubt God’s promises when we have to deal with grief and sorrow. Satan will bring trouble in days of joy; he will tempt business men to seek gain by fraud. Whoever has built up a good business today, a flourishing company, he may have to give up tomorrow because an anti-Christian government will confiscate it. Still, in all these troubles and temptations, we have to resist the devil. We have to keep our eyes on the future, and not live as if this world is what we’re living for: “the present form of this world is passing away” (v 31).

In conclusion, therefore, we may never need to say that “this present distress makes the world too evil for marriage.” Yet, we do have to oversee the consequences and realize that with marriage the troubles might increase. Marriage, labour, trade, joy, and sorrow are part of life, but they’re under distress for those who are in Christ Jesus. Paul warns us not to make this life with marriage, trade, joy, and sorrow the one all and end all. More is yet to come! The end is in sight! The world of a new heaven and a new earth, a life without marriage, is coming!



**Is there something
you’ve been wanting to know?
An answer you’ve been looking for?
Ask us a question!**

**Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander
denhollanderw@gmail.com**

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0