

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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Who is reading Scripture?

SERMONS: A LISTENING GUIDE

CLARION KIDS

YOU ASKED

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



Who Reads Scripture in Public Worship?

Is this practice something new or would there be a precedent?

When visiting The Netherlands the last number of years and worshipping in our sister churches, it struck me how in virtually every service, the reading of Scripture was done by a female member of the congregation from a lectern usually somewhere in front of the pulpit. This piqued my interest and raised some questions. Why would someone other than the minister read Scripture and had women done the public reading of Scripture in worship before? Is this practice something new or would there be a precedent for such reading in the history of Christian worship? To answer these questions, let's consider what Scripture and the history of the church can tell us.

The biblical evidence

Reading holy Scripture is a most solemn event. It means having an audience with God. He speaks through his Word and we listen. This demands an atmosphere of complete reverence as when God himself spoke from Mount Sinai to Israel. This event was followed by Moses reading the Word of God as he had received it from the Lord himself on the Mount (Exod 20:1-23:33). As God's spokesman, Moses had a special place, but what he did in reading God's revelation would in principle be done by others who read Scripture in holy worship.

Whenever the Bible informs us about who reads Scripture, we are told it was men with a special office. In Old Testament Israel, God through Moses entrusted the Levitical priests and the elders with God's revelation of the law and with the responsibility for reading it out loud for all Israel every seven years in the joyful year of release at the

Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 31:9-11). In this way the reading of the Word of God was to be integrated into public worship. Godly King Jehoshaphat sent officials, Levites, and priests to teach and therefore to read the Book of the Law throughout Judah (2 Chron 17:7-9). It is clear from the rediscovery of the Book of the Law about two hundred years later in the days of King Josiah that the regular reading of the Law had stopped at some point. King Josiah himself read to all the people the words of the Book of the Covenant (2 Kings 22-23). When the exiles returned, it was Ezra, a scribe and a priest, who read from the Book of the Law at the Feast of Tabernacles to renew the covenant (Neh 8). These were most solemn assemblies of covenant renewal and reformation. The Lord reminded his people through the prophet Malachi that priests were to be his messengers (Mal 2:7) and that surely included the public reading of Scripture.

In New Testament times the Lord Jesus read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah on the Sabbath in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-19). Such a reading from Scripture was done every Sabbath (Acts 13:15, 27; 15:21). The Apostle Paul charged Timothy to devote himself to "the public reading of Scripture" (1 Tim 4:13; see also Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27). It is noteworthy that this reading was to be followed by exhortation and teaching (1 Tim 4:13), or as we would put it, a sermon. The apostolic admonition that "women should keep silent in the churches" (1 Cor 14:34) is consistent with the fact that the Bible only mentions readers of Scripture who were men with a special office.

The early Christian church and the Reformation

There is no patristic evidence from the early Christian church that those who read Scripture in public worship and then frequently explained it included women. The readers were men and by the third century such a reader even underwent ordination (Cyprian, Epistle 32) and this office became a way to enter the ministry. However, by the early ninth century the office of reader had declined and became redundant. Its function had been taken over by deacons and elders.¹

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Dr. Van Dam has written an editorial entitled, "Who Reads Scripture in Public Worship?" We see an increasing trend of churches inviting members to read Scripture, rather than having the minister read. He examines the trend in light of Scripture. Dr. Van Dam's column, Clippings on Politics and Religion, also appears in this issue.

A new series begins from Rev. Rob Schouten, "Sermons: A Listening Guide." This series will appear in the next five issues as well.

In federation news, there is an article from Elora welcoming the Chase family. Issue 8 also has a Treasures New and Old, Education Matters, *Clarion Kids*, You Asked, as well as a book review.

Laura Veenendaal

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliwer, 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

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The Reformation in Scotland briefly revived the office of reader. *The First Book of Discipline* (1560) commended this office as a temporary measure for congregations without a minister. “The most apt men” were to be appointed to read the prayers and Scripture. Through further training a reader could eventually become a minister. This office was however short-lived. By 1580, the General Assembly “decreed that, as the reader’s office was ‘no ordinary office within the kirk of God,’ existing readers, on examination, should either become ministers or be deposed. In 1581 the Assembly prohibited the appointment of further readers.”

The sixteenth century Puritan Prayer Book mentions Scripture reading before the service begins. “Upon the days appointed for the preaching of the word, when a convenient number of the Congregation are come together, that they may make fruit of their presence till the assembly be full,

**We need to
be aware of
and resist the
pressures of
the egalitarian
culture in which
we live**

one appointed by the Eldership shall read some chapters of the canonical books of Scripture, singing Psalms between at his discretion: and this reading to be in order as the books and chapters follow, that so from time to time the holy Scriptures may be read through.”

The Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God (1645) specified that “reading of the Word in the congregation, being part of the public worship of God. . . is to be performed by the pastors and teachers.” The Westminster Larger Catechism (1648) also made it clear that “all are not permitted to read the word publicly to the congregation” (Q/A 156). Since such reading is closely tied to the preaching, this is to be done “only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office” (Q/A 158). It is clear that within the church service, the privilege of reading the Word was restricted to the ministers of the Word.

Like Scotland, also The Netherlands had the dilemma of churches without pastors. The first official synod of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands which convened in Emden (1571) decided that “where the ministry of the Word cannot be established the ministers of the classis should appoint readers, elders, and deacons so that the

congregation may be gathered together” (Art. 41). And so here and there some churches had readers. As in Scotland, not everyone was comfortable with this. In answer to the question whether it was a good idea to appoint readers where there were no ministers, the Synod of Middelburg (1581) answered that such appointments can be made but should not be done lightly. Classis needed to be notified ahead of time and its positive advice secured (Question 12). This synod was therefore concerned to maintain the position of ministers and the purity of doctrine and feared that without close classical involvement the position of reader could gradually transform into some kind of an office which was not ecclesiastical. In congregations without a minister, the consistory, being responsible for the worship service, could appoint a competent elder, or if such should not be available, a gifted member of the congregation. This type of reader still functions today, but it is not really the same as the reader who only reads Scripture before or in public worship.

There are however also sixteenth century Dutch examples of that type of reader. There were churches which had ministers but also had readers declaim the Scriptures either before the service started, as took place in Amsterdam, or during the service, as occurred in Dordrecht where the consistory decided to ask elders to read Scripture before the minister preached his sermon. For the most part, the reader who only read Scripture did so before the service began. We usually have organ playing before the service, but in those days, since Scripture knowledge was at a low level, the time before the service was used for reading God’s Word. There is no evidence that this was ever done by women, either before or in the service.

Special readers in the worship service?

Abraham Kuyper desired to see the reader, who should be an office bearer, function as a regular feature within the church service. He reasoned that involving more than one person in the liturgy would do more justice to the church service as a gathering of people, rather than people coming simply for that one person who preaches. It has also been argued that since the Bible belongs to all the people and not just the minister, a male member from the church, as representative of the congregation should do the Bible reading in public worship. Then the congregation also speaks.² Putting the matter this way, however, does not do justice to the nature of a public worship service as a meeting between

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CHURCH NEWS

God and his people who come to worship. The minister speaks as God's representative and so reads the Scripture and proclaims the message in a sermon. There is no need for a special reader. This is also the conclusion of a liturgical committee that advised Synod Middleburg (1933). In their view, the law and selected passages of Scripture should be read by the minister because he is "the mouth of God" in the gathering of the congregation.³

It is precisely this point that needs to be stressed. The reading of Scripture is listening to God himself, an activity that requires great solemnity and reverence. But this reading is closely tied to the preaching that follows. This close relationship was evident already when the apostle exhorted Timothy: "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13). Reading and expounding Scripture belong together as the task of the minister. This is not a matter of worship being a one-man show. The minister is executing his office. And the congregation is not side-lined. Listening to the Word read and proclaimed is participating in the awesome reality of worship and adoration of the Lord our God. This includes responding by singing, praising, and serving him.

We need to be aware of and resist the pressures of the egalitarian culture in which we live, a culture which demands that everyone be treated the same. In this case, that suggests that everyone should have a chance to read Scripture in public worship. There is little understanding of divinely ordained office. This becomes evident when people can speak disparagingly of a "one-man show" when it comes to worship. In an instructive article, OPC pastor Gregory Reynolds notes that the very use of the term "one-man show" is "very instructive in analyzing the problem we face. In a world strongly flavored by, and motivated with, entertainment, we have become a world of spectators who tend to envy those on stage. Thus, in smaller venues like bars and churches it is expected that everyone gets their moment in the spotlight. But public worship is not karaoke."⁴

In conclusion

When we look at the available biblical and historical evidence, the notion of having specially appointed people, other than the minister of the Word, to do the Scripture reading in public worship does not stand on very solid ground. It is therefore understandable that where the practice occurred, it has historically died out. Where it did take place, only ordained people normally did the reading. There

is no evidence anywhere of women doing the reading in churches of the Reformation. That has changed.

Many Protestant churches today allow unordained male and female members of the congregation to be readers. Our Dutch sister churches have joined them. In the different reports on the place of women in the church, no specific answer to the question whether women should read Scripture in public worship seems ever to have been given, even though to answer that question was part of the mandate of the Deputies appointed by Synod Zwolle-Zuid (2008) to study the role of women in the church (Art. 44, Besluit 8). By 2010 the practice of women reading Scripture in public worship is noted as a fact in a workbook published by these Deputies.⁵ And so the practice seems to have simply become acceptable without any official decision by a major assembly. Was it the pressure of egalitarianism and the felt need for more "participation"? We hope not. For when a church accommodates to society's culture, it eventually becomes part of the culture and loses its distinctiveness as "church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). One thing seems certain. Since women have been reading Scripture in public worship, resistance to their being on the pulpit as an ordained minister seems to have lessened, judging from the latest report to this year's Synod Meppel recommending that women be admitted to all the ecclesiastical offices.

Endnotes

¹ H.G. Davies, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (1963): 11, 13. "In the early church, readers were men who were appointed to publicly read from Scriptures during the assembly of the church." David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrikson, 1998), 552.

² Kuyper, *Onze Eeredienst* (Kampen: Kok, 1911), 172, 270.

³ T. Hoekstra and et al., *Rapport Inzake de Uitbreiding Van Den Bundel "Eenige Gezangen"* (Kampen: Kok, 1933), 30.

⁴ Gregory E. Reynolds, "Who Reads Scripture?" *Ordained Servant* 22 (2013): 11.

⁵ Frans Wisselink and et al, *Handleiding M/V met het oog op het gesprek over de inzet van mannen en vrouwen in de kerk* (2010), 25.





B.J. Berends
Minister emeritus of the
Canadian Reformed Church
at Brampton, Ontario
bjberends@canrc.org

The Open Bible

***"There is an open Bible, and. . . it must remain open!"
(Revelation 22:10)***

This meditation was originally published in this magazine in 2005.

Near the end of Revelation, the Lord said to his apostle John, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near." This is in connection with what Daniel was told after he received his prophetic visions towards the end of the Old Testament, visions touching the future, visions of severe persecution of God's covenant people by brute world-powers, specifically the one led by Antiochus Epiphanes who ruled from 175-164 BC.

We may consider this oppressor the forerunner of the man of lawlessness, the anti-Christ. This king sought to replace the only true religion with the pagan customs of the Greeks. Worship of the only true God had to be suspended. All the religious ceremonies were strictly forbidden. In fact, the prophet Daniel gave such an accurate picture of what was going to happen that many present-day "scholars" theorize that the second part of the book Daniel must have been written by someone else. However, we who believe that the Bible is divinely inspired, and that God is the God of the ages, will immediately accept that Daniel is the author of the whole book.

Daniel is charged not to publicize his prophecy. Unlike John at the end of Revelation, Daniel is told to seal up

the words until the hour appointed by God. It was still going to be many years, at least three centuries, before this prophecy was going to be fulfilled. That's why Daniel had to roll up the scroll and seal it, until some time in the distant future, when the Lord God wanted to open it up for a specific purpose. He wanted to convince his people living in that future time that he is the God of the ages, and that he is the One who is in control of all world events. They would have to learn to understand that his prophetic Word was true and trustworthy. It would prove to his people that this one-time sealed prophecy did not have its origin in Daniel, but that it had come from him, the eternal and ever present God. For Daniel, too, had been carried along by the Holy Spirit in what he was told to record and seal.

Well, there is no talk of sealing the testimony of the Lord as given in the book of Revelation. The Apostle John not only had to record everything the Lord told and showed him, but he also received the Word to reveal it all. This meant that there was no longer any part of Scripture hidden. There was now a completely open Bible. Nothing was allowed to be kept back from his people, from the Church of Christ.

In the New Testament the members of the church had to know all that God had revealed over the course

of the ages, from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. This Revelation of God, as recorded in the Bible, is now open from cover to cover. It is to be kept open in the church, so that the whole counsel of God will continue to be proclaimed from Lord's Day to Lord's Day. This one undivided Word of God will be kept open at home, and will be read both collectively by the family around the table and personally from day to day in our "inner" room.

Only in that way will we be able to accept and know the truth of the saying "the time is near." Only in that way will we have some understanding of what the Lord wills and permits to take place. Only in that way will we be able to observe the wonderful workings of the Son of Man, in the gathering and preservation of his catholic universal church. Only in that way will we be able to discern what the man of lawlessness is presently allowed to achieve. Only someone who knows of the open Bible, who under all circumstances keeps it open, will be able to hear the footsteps of our Lord and Saviour coming closer. And it is only he who will then await his Saviour's appearance with ardent desire.

Therefore, let us show in word and deed that we treasure this one complete Revelation of God, by keeping it open in every sphere of life, to his glory and our own salvation.



Sermons: A Listening Guide (1)

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



It pleases God to save his people through the preaching of the gospel. So writes the Apostle Paul in the opening section of his first letter to the Corinthians. As believers, we know that “faith comes from hearing” and for this reason we gather on the Lord’s Day to “hear God’s Word.”

Because of the sacred role of preaching in birthing and nurturing faith, those called to preach the gospel have a solemn responsibility to bring God’s Word with clarity and cogency. Reflecting the same priority, the program of instruction at any Reformed seminary will contain a significant emphasis on preaching. Additionally, most pastors will have a collection of books and journal articles focused on improving their work as preachers of the good news of salvation.

What is sometimes missed, however, is that preaching is really a joint venture between preachers and those who are listening. While the Bible says a great deal about the nature and practice of preaching, it actually says a lot more about the need for the proper hearing of God’s Word. One of the favourite sayings of Christ is, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” To really benefit from the many sermons which they hear, worshippers need to see themselves as partners with the preacher. Preaching is a very demanding work but the same is true of listening.

When preachers bring the Word with energy given by the Spirit into an assembly of worshippers who are hungry to know God, something special happens. As one writer says, “Nothing creates a more explosive, life-changing atmosphere than when the lightning bolts from a Spirit-empowered preacher hits the lightning rod of a Spirit-illuminated listener.”¹

Everyone is hearing-disabled

As Christians, it’s important to acknowledge that we are by nature hearing-disabled. Ever since our fall into sin, we are not able of ourselves to respond to the Word of God.

Even when it is set forth to us in its purity and power, we can’t receive what is being communicated. As Christ Jesus once said to people who were resisting him, “You are *unable* to hear what I am saying” (John 8:34). Similarly, Paul declared that “the Word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing” (1 Cor 1:18). When we read the Old Testament, we might well summarize it like this: “The LORD God spoke to his people, but they refused to listen.”² Israel was deaf to God’s Word and the same is true for everyone today.

Through the miracle of regeneration, however, God imparts to his people the ability to hear and respond to his Word (Eph 2:1-4). By the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us, God overcomes our hearing disability. The blockages innate to our human nature are removed so that the truth of God’s Word can be received. Because of the inner transformation accomplished by God, we are able to recognize the truth and respond to it with the spiritual delight that springs from faith.

Ironically, the regeneration we require is accomplished by the very Word to which we are impervious. Just like the stone-cold body of Lazarus was awakened by the voice of the Lord Jesus, so the preaching of the gospel can regenerate those who have no interest in the message of salvation (1 Pet 1:23-25). Working through the instrumentality of the Word, the Holy Spirit awakens those who are dead in sin and gives them ears to hear the message of salvation. In short, the Word of God creates its own audience.

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While regeneration transforms us in a dramatic way from being enemies of God's truth into those who know him and desire to hear his Word, it does not in this life make us perfect. This means that even those born anew to the life of the Spirit will have a life-long struggle to truly hear God's Word. They have a definite ability to hear God's Word but doing so will require constant spiritual discipline. Even mature Christian people will have to work diligently to internalize the preaching of the gospel. Fruitful hearing of the Word will require of us a constant battle against spiritual laziness, distraction, and indifference.

What is hearing God's Word?

To see the spiritual challenge of listening to a sermon, we need to grasp what the Bible understands by hearing the Word of God. To help in this, we could imagine a highly literate and well-informed visitor to a worship service. This individual knows much about literature ancient and modern, she is well-versed in religion, philosophy, and cultural analysis, but she is not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.


At one level, a person with such a sophisticated background is certainly able to understand a typical sermon. She can make sense of the vocabulary, the grammar, the syntax, and the reasoning. She will feel the claims being made upon her by the message. At another level, however,

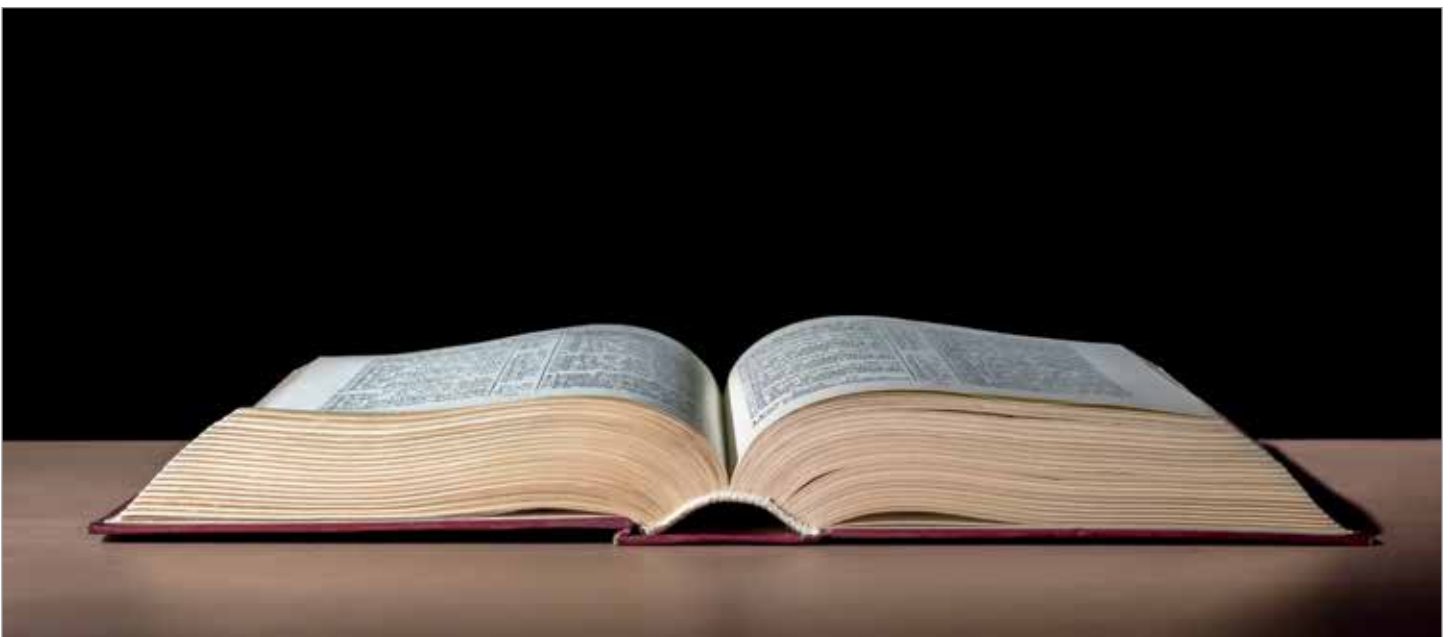
the message will be lost to her. She won't recognize in the message the glory of God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ. The call of the gospel to repent and believe won't penetrate to her heart. What the Word demands will be offensive to her and may well elicit indignation and scorn. She has ears but she isn't really hearing.

From a biblical perspective, hearing God's Word consists of hearing it with your ears and *accepting* it in your hearts as true. Beyond this, true hearing involves also a commitment to *doing* whatever the Word of God says. As long as we are not *believing* what the gospel promises and *doing* what it commands, we are not yet truly hearing the Word of God (James 1:22). Those who hear the words of Jesus Christ without doing them are like a foolish man who built his house on the sand (Matt 7:26). If we hear a sermon without being ready to amend our lives, we are not truly hearing the Word of God.

¹ Christopher Ash, "Listen Up! A practical guide to listening to sermons" (The Good Book Company, 2009), pg. 4.

² Ken Ramey, "Expository Listening. A Handbook for Hearing and Doing God's Word" (Kress Biblical Resources, 2010), pg. 17.

To be continued 



The Reason for Current Massive Immigration

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



Why are Canada and the Western world opening the door to so many immigrants? If you listen to some politicians, it is pure altruism. We need to love our neighbour in distress. The real reason is, however, far more selfish. Canada needs the 300,000 or so immigrants it is annually committed to for economic reasons. The refugee component of that number is very small. Official government figures put the percentage of refugees at a mere 13.3%. However, it is not just a matter of having people with appropriate skill sets for the economy. The problem is far deeper.

There are not enough babies in Canada's cradles to sustain future growth and take care of the aging population. According to Statistics Canada, our country's fertility rate has been below the replacement level of 2.1 since 1971. It is currently about 1.6 children per woman. Very low birth rates are also the problem for Europe. Thirteen years ago Phillip Longman already wrote in his book, *The Empty Cradle* (chapter 6), of nations literally fading away because of low birth rates. The scary scenario he then presented is much closer to reality now. Consider the example of Germany.

Soeren Kern reported that a recent study (February 1, 2017) showed that massive immigration was needed to stabilize the German population. "Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to allow into the country some 1.5 million mostly Muslim migrants between 2015 and 2016 was not primarily a humanitarian gesture, but a calculated effort to stave off Germany's demographic decline and to preserve the future viability of the German welfare state." The cost for this immigration is very high, not just financially, but especially politically and culturally. Germany's Muslim population now surpasses six million and has already changed Germany forever. "Mass migration is fasttracking the rise of Islam in Germany, as evidenced by the proliferation of no-go zones, Sharia courts, polygamy, child marriages and honor violence. Mass migration has also been responsible

for social chaos, including jihadist attacks, a migrant rape epidemic, a public health crisis, rising crime and a rush by German citizens to purchase weapons for self-defense – and even to abandon Germany altogether." Kern goes on to note that "the government has not said how it plans to integrate potentially millions of additional Muslims into German society. The price for reversing Germany's demographic decline appears to be the further Islamization of Germany under the guise of multiculturalism."

Further Islamization will take place in an increasingly unstable political environment which a leaked German intelligence report warned security agencies would be unable to deal with. It is estimated that the Muslim population in Germany will swell to 20 million as early as 2020. More than ten years ago, famed historian and expert on Islam, Bernard Lewis, warned that Europe will be Islamic by the end of the twenty-first century. This prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes in Germany, as well as other European nations. The lesson for Canada is obvious.

Here we see one result of the foolishness of despising the gift of children as God ordained it for marriage. There are many blessings in obeying the divine command to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Gen 1:28). One of the blessings in the current political context is that a country can retain all the benefits of its institutions and practices as inherited from its Christian past. Not to obey and to import those of the Islamic faith who do want to honour this command is to invite Islamization and eventually to lose the country you once called your own.

Sources: Sheryl Ubelacker, "Fertility Rate Continues to Put Onus on Immigration: StatsCan" (Feb 8, 2017) on CBC News website; Kathleen Harris, "Canada to Open Door to More Skilled Workers" (Oct 31, 2016) on CBC News website; Soeren Kern, "Germany's Muslim Demographic Future" (Feb 8, 2017) on the Gatestone Institute website.



Serving the Lord from Different Nations in Elora, Ontario

The past year was a special year for the Canadian Reformed Church in Elora. As congregation we assisted a Syrian refugee family starting a new life in Canada. Also, we received a new minister from our faithful heavenly Father and witnessed the ordination of Jonathan Chase.

After weeks of preparation and eager anticipation, the Saad family arrived in Elora from Lebanon. They fled Syria four years prior to escape the violence of the civil war. They had not seen their eldest son and brother who studied in Cyprus for several years. He had come in contact with Rev. Attallah from Middle East Reformed Fellowship and there the LORD brought him to publicly profess his faith. The Saad family could be reunited with him here in Canada.

Seeing a refugee family adjusting to a new life has humbled us deeply as congregation. With new eyes we see

all the many opportunities we receive in this free country, including the great blessings of worshipping and living in freedom. Despite the cultural differences our faith united us with this new family and despite the language barrier many good conversation and visits were held to get to know each other better and to introduce our new brothers and sisters to life here in the cold North.

During the summer months Elora extended a call to candidate Jonathan Chase. He accepted this call and after his final classical exams, he was ordained as minister of the Word in October of 2016. Rev. Agema led the service encouraging our new minister to “rightly handle the word of truth,” based on 2 Timothy 2:15.

Welcome evening

With a new minister from the United States, married to a lady from Brazil, coming to serve a congregation in rural Ontario, Canada, with members who have roots in The Netherlands and even Syria, the Elora congregation celebrated with the words of Psalm 117: “Praise the LORD, all you nations!” The welcome evening for our new pastor, his wife Dani, and their son Abel was a great opportunity for all of us to celebrate both our heritage and what we have in common: living in Canada and our unity in Jesus Christ.

Many interesting characters showed up to join the fun and enjoy the international dishes for this special night: Don Cherry and Ron MacLean, Anne of Green Gables and her beloved Gilbert, a box of Timbits, and our new minister was even greeted by Sinterklaas and two of Pietsen.

The Chase family received warm words of welcome from delegates from several sister churches. The girls’ club sang and young people of the congregation and others provided entertainment. A competitive game of trivia challenged our knowledge of the different countries that were represented that evening.



*New minister
personally welcomed
by Sinterklaas*



Anne of Green Gables and Gilbert joined the evening



The ultimate Canadian combination of hockey and Tim Hortons

Conclusion

Our new minister is settling in and has taken up his new tasks with much enthusiasm and energy. And his wife Dani unfortunately already has to get used to quite a bit of snow, but her warm personality shone through when hosting several stranded truck drivers at the church parking lot and manse!

What a special year it has been! The LORD has shown us how to look beyond our own comfortable lives, push our-

selves to show hospitality and reach out to brothers and sisters from other parts of the world, crossing many barriers. He asked us to give, but yet we have much received. Under his blessing, the year of 2017 started with a very special Sunday when we witnessed Rev. Chase baptizing the members of the Saad family and their public profession of faith. Praise be to him!



Welcome gift for the Chase family

Power to flourish

James Bisschop
Grade 5 teacher and Vice-principal
at Ebenezer Canadian Reformed
School in Smithers, BC



In October 2016 I had the opportunity to attend a large Christian teachers' convention in Lynden, Washington with over a thousand other educators. Andy Crouch, well known author and executive director of *Christianity Today*, was the featured speaker. He spoke on power and authority within our culture and the role of education within that.

As Crouch spoke on power and authority, he touched on various themes which linked back to power and how it can be exercised. He spoke on various types of power and how they are viewed today, including another type of power, which he calls *creative power*. This power requires a balance of vulnerability with authority. Crouch showed how God displayed this *creative power* in creation and how we, as image bearers of God, can work to utilize *creative power* in a fallen world.

Power

Much of what Crouch focused on was power. He identified that when people think of power, it is often viewed in a negative way. We picture power as someone imposing their dominance and will on others. We are often skeptical of people in power. With government seemingly ignoring promises and acting in a way that can appear to abuse the power they have, people become cynical of those in positions of power and power itself. Yet, being cynical of power keeps us from having a hopeful view of power and how it could be used for good.

People who hold positions with titles naturally have power because of the authority that those positions have. Parents have power over their children. Teachers have power in their classrooms. Administrators have power within their schools.

Crouch articulated that power is everywhere and that there are different types of power. For example, power can simply be a neutral force that is applied to something else. Power can be coercive, violent, and or used to conspire against others. Yet, power used properly does not have to be a negative. Different situations and circumstances call for different types of power. We need to learn how to discern which type of power to use and how to do so correctly.

Crouch went on to introduce another type of power. A power that enables lasting change. Coercion and force work for a time. They are able to achieve a given result while being applied, but these powers do not sustain growth. Power transfigured by love has the power to create and enable lasting change, to allow others to flourish. This is the power that will be focused on through the rest of this article.



Authority and vulnerability

Crouch believes that in order for power to foster lasting change and for authority to be effective in its use of power, it needs to be infused with vulnerability.

In order to show how authority and vulnerability fit together, Crouch used four quadrants to demonstrate their relationship (Fig. 1). Authority without vulnerability leads to a position of control-control with no strings attached. Control with no accountability is a dangerous scenario. Vulnerability without authority places one in a position of poverty. When you are completely vulnerable and have no control to do anything about it, you are in a state of poverty. Having an absence of both vulnerability and authority is a place of safety. There are times in an individual's life when it is appropriate to be in a place of safety. Take young children, for example. They do not have authority and they should not feel threatened or vulnerable. As they mature and grow they will have increased amounts of authority and vulnerability. We should all begin in a place of safety, but it is moving back into that place when we do not thrive. Crouch argues that when a balance is able to be struck between both authority and vulnerability, people are led to place of flourishing. People who are in positions of power and authority have an obligation to lead others to a place of flourishing.

Creative power

Crouch spoke about creative power as a means of creating conditions so that people can flourish. He gave the example of God exercising a perfect display of power in creation. God created a world full of abundance and order. He used his authority perfectly. This power makes things around it multiply and grow. God created a world that was flourishing by using, as Crouch named it, *creative power*.

Crouch showed how God's *creative power* is evident in the grammar and verb usage of Genesis 1. Throughout the creation account, the familiar phrase, "let there be" is repeated. At the climax of creation, there is a creative community evident at the heart of God, as he utters, "Let us make man in our image." The Triune God shows himself. Interestingly, this is the same phrase that Mary spoke after hearing from the angel Gabriel. She replied, in Luke 1:38, "Let it be to me according to your word." Jesus used the "let" language on the cross when he uttered the words, "Yet [let] not my will be done, but yours."

Where *creative power* is exercised flourishing takes place. This is evident at the very heart of his created order where God created Adam and Eve, image bearers of him. This *creative power* shows God exercising authority while displaying vulnerability by giving man a will to choose. He displayed power and authority that enabled creation to flourish. This *creative power* is one where there is a balance of authority and vulnerability; not vulnerability as a result of a lack of ability, but a vulnerability that gives freedom to what was created. God's *creative power* led to and enabled flourishing, a flourishing that could multiply and grow.

Image bearers

Crouch went on to ask, what happened? What happened with the image bearers who were enabled to flourish? They were given authority coupled with vulnerability.



However, as we know, Adam and Eve wanted control. They desired to be like God. They wanted power without limitation. Satan enticed them into believing the lie that they could have control without any vulnerability. This is a form of idolatry; idols promise control. This was something that Adam and Eve desired. They went from a state of flourishing, having a balance between authority and vulnerability, to desiring control without any strings attached.

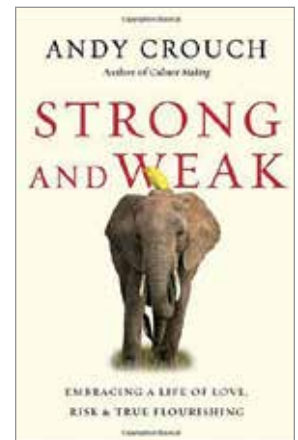
As children of Adam, how do we learn to discern which type of power to exercise? How do we go about exercising *creative power* rightly? With sin at work, how do we exercise authority that leads others to flourishing? Crouch believes that this flourishing can take place within institutions. Crouch spent extensive time describing and defining institutions and how institutions have various features. Crouch also stated that institutions become especially influential when they endure beyond three generations. Interestingly, many Christian schools in Canada

are in their third generation of existence. This means they are in a position to create lasting influence by using power that enables its members to flourish.

Power used properly does not have to be a negative

Several aspects of Crouch's presentations have stuck with me over the months. Not only were they highly engaging, they also invited me to reflect on my own practice. As a teacher and vice principal of a covenantal Christian school, what type of power do I use? How do I go about utilizing power in a God honouring way? How can I exercise *creative power* so that flourishing can take place? In my life, does choosing safety imply that I am forfeiting flourishing? If this article has piqued your interest Crouch has written articles and a book, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*, which look more deeply into power and how it can be restored.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@echs.ca.



Clarion Kids

Elisha

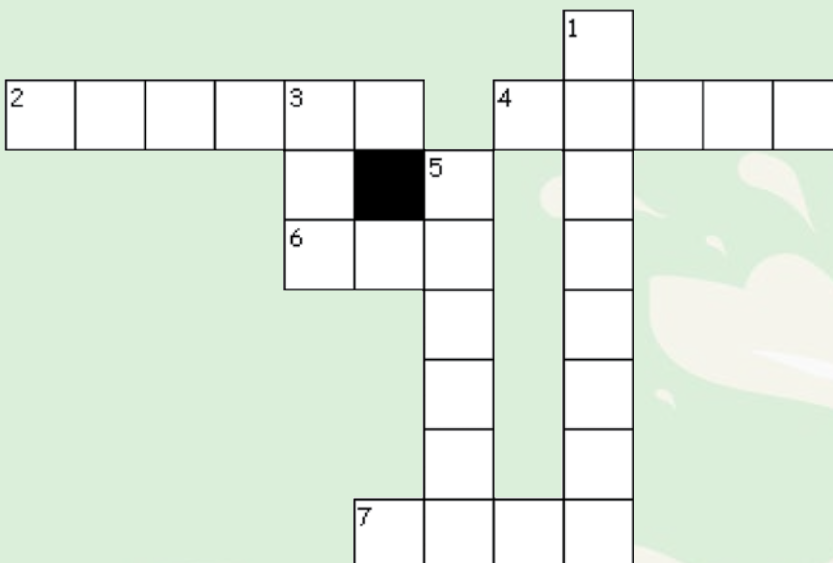
2 Kings 2:15 - 13:25

Elijah had a servant named Elisha. When Elijah was taken to heaven, Elisha became God's prophet. God allowed him to perform many great miracles. One time he helped a woman whose husband had died. She had two children and she was afraid they would starve because all she had was a little bit of oil. Elisha told her to borrow empty jars from all her neighbours. He told her to pour the oil into them until they were all full. The tiny bit of oil she had filled all the jars her children could find. What a miracle! Then Elisha told her to sell the oil, and she had plenty to take care of her family.

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



Crossword Puzzle: Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle!



Across

2. The woman had _____ after selling the oil.
4. A woman whose husband has died.
6. The woman had only a little bit of this.
7. Elisha told the woman to find as many of these as possible.

Down

1. Elisha performed many of these.
3. How many children the woman had.
5. The servant of Elijah.

by Emily Nijenhuis

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



Q Article 11 C.O.: the end of a calling?

Article 11 often means the end of a calling for a pastor. Is there not a better way to deal with a situation where a pastor is “judged unfit and incapable of serving a congregation fruitfully and to its edification, without there being any reason for church discipline?” Could Classis not interfere and transfer the pastor to a vacant congregation, which he might be able to serve fruitfully?

A The reality surrounding any and every Article 11 situation is always sad and painful for every party involved: the minister and his family, council and congregation, church visitors and Classis. Yet ever since the General Synod of Dort the church of Christ has had to deal with it, and to this very day. In the early days after the Great Reformation it did happen that the bonds between a minister and his congregation had to be severed and that a practice as found in the Roman Catholic Church was still applied, namely the transfer to another congregation (as practised before, by the bishop of the parish).

Such situations happened due to the man's lacking abilities, lack of study, or due to shortcomings in his character and personality, as well as due to a broken relationship between him and his congregation, which made a fruitful and effective ministry undesirable or impossible. In this broken and sinful world these sad realities still occur, despite the fact that the minister was called initially and came to serve his congregation for life. The development of these circumstances has led and can still lead to the necessity of the termination of this calling and the release from the congregation. These and other experiences highlight the importance and necessity of doing due diligence in preparation to the calling of a certain minister to a particular congregation.

Of course, this is not the place to enter upon a consideration of the complexity of all the aspects involved in situations like this which might lead to the use of Article 11 C.O. (for this, see Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene's *With Common Consent*, p. 58-62). However, the suggested solution by the questioner is not a possible way out for the minister, namely, having Classis place him in a different congregation. Even though this was practised in some situations prior to the days of the Synod of Dort (and still is done in denominations with a board or superintendent, even making regular transfers every so many years), moving a minister to another congregation by a broader assembly is contrary to Reformed principles of church polity. It might seem like an amiable solution for all parties involved, however a classis is not a church board that can overrule the autonomy of the local church and the authority of the office bearers in the local congregation! Reformed church polity is against any and every form of hierarchy!

This, too, would be in conflict with the principle of calling by God to the special office and ministry in a particular church. This calling and bond may be undone only for very weighty reasons. Hence, the church visitors and meeting of Classis may be of great help in seeking to prevent such situations and controversies; yes for the protection of the minister will have to concur with the decision to dismiss him; yet, ultimately it is the responsibility of the local of-

fice bearers to make the decision to apply Article 11 C.O. As much as possible and as long as responsible, therefore, all parties must make every effort to correct, heal, or restore broken relationships and remove controversies from the midst of the congregation.

The churches have agreed, however, that in the case a minister is released from his call and congregation, that he will retain his ministerial status for three years. During these years, he is declared eligible for call. Thankfully we do know also from the history of our federation of churches

that such ministers did receive a call again and served a subsequent congregation fruitfully and to its edification!

*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. den Hollander
denhollanderw@gmail.com
23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0



BOOK REVIEW

Walking and Talking with God

by Dr. John Smith, (c) 2016

**Additional Information: 70 pages.
Published by Pro Ecclesia Publishers.
Available from ILBP, \$7.00**

This book is a collection of four lectures delivered by Dr. John Smith, professor of Old Testament at CRTS, during a recent six-month sabbatical sojourn in Western Australia. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia support CRTS, and it is a blessing to them and to us for the professors of CRTS to visit them from time to time.

As Dr. Smith wrote in the preface, the topics dealt with in the four speeches are quite diverse, but they are held together by a common thread that runs through them, that of walking and talking with God.

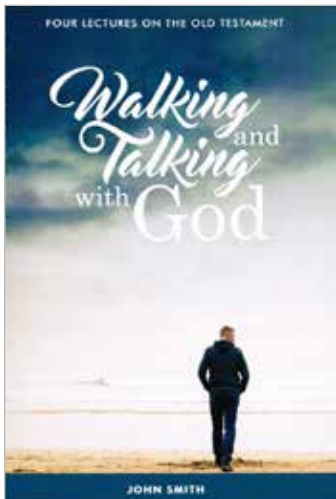
George van Popta
Minister emeritus of the Jubilee
Canadian Reformed Church at
Ottawa, Ontario
gvanpopta@gmail.com



Exodus

Chapter 1 is entitled "Excavating Exodus." Excavating means digging, and this lecture is divided into three parts: 1. digging into the book, 2. digging into the ground, and 3. digging into the past.

In the first part, digging into the book, Dr. Smith gives an overview of the whole book of Exodus. It is not meant as an explanation of all the chapters and verses; rather, two big questions are asked: how is the book set up, and what is the Bible's perspective on Egypt? As for how the book is set up, Dr. Smith provides a helpful twelve-point outline of the book. Keeping this outline in mind will aid someone, or a study society, make the way through Exodus. The second big question, about the perspective on Egypt, also provides one with a helpful way to understand Exodus: Egypt is a



place of bondage, of refuge, and of wisdom.

In the second part, digging into the ground, Dr. Smith gives another overview, of what is called “Egyptology,” the study of the archaeology of Ancient Egypt. This is a huge field of study and it is difficult to condense it into a few pages but Dr. Smith gives a great bird’s eye view. For further study, several websites are referenced.

In the third part, digging into the past, Dr. Smith explains that what we have come to know about the history of ancient Egypt is not all that helpful in understanding the book better. This fact may, at first, be somewhat disappointing. Archaeology has not found any evidence of the ten plagues, the exodus, or the drowning of an army in the Red Sea. Also, we cannot know for sure who the Pharaoh at the time of Joseph was nor of the time of the exodus. Despite the fact that there are not many points of contact between the findings of archaeology and the history recorded in the Bible, we can appreciate the increase in background knowledge this science gives. We do well always to remember what Dr. Smith says on page 18, “We do not put our trust in *our reconstruction* of the past, our history books, but only in the text of Scripture, because that’s what the Spirit inspired, and that’s what the Spirit uses. Our reconstructions are always fallible, but God’s Word is infallible.”

Psalms

The second lecture is “Studying the Psalms as a Book.” The book of Psalms is one of the better known books of the Bible since we sing the Psalms in church, home, and school, and often choose a Psalm for the Scripture reading at all sorts of occasions. But how do you study it as a book? It lacks the historical flow of many books where a story line is followed from chapter to chapter. As well there are many human authors, some of whom are anonymous. When you decide to study the Psalms as a book, you face a number of questions: Why is the book of Psalms arranged the way it is? Why are they found in the order that we have them in? What holds them all together? What makes it a book?

In seeking to answer these questions, Dr. Smith introduces the book of Psalms as 1. a Bible book, 2. a Law book, 3. a History book, 4. a Poetry Book, and 5. a Prayer book. As he takes us through these five sections of his speech, we learn that Dr. Smith has a deep, broad, and detailed understanding of the Psalms. He begins by saying that he really loves the book of Psalms, and that is obvious from the lecture.

A friend?

The third lecture is entitled, somewhat provocatively, “Can we Call God our Friend?” Does Scripture ever refer to God as the friend of his people? What about the song, “What a friend we have in Jesus”? Abraham is called the friend of God, but God does not introduce himself as the friend of Abraham. Jesus called his disciples his friends but the Bible does not say that Jesus called himself their friend. Right? Is Psalm 25:7 of our *Book of Praise* correct when it has us sing that God has shown us his friendship?

I remember overhearing – maybe even participating in – discussions about whether we may call God our friend. What does the Bible actually teach about this question? To learn what Dr. Smith’s answer is on this you will need to buy the book.

Vows

The fourth lecture is “Vows in the Old Testament, and what we Can Learn from Them.” This, too, is a very interesting chapter. As Dr. Smith delves into this topic he addresses the questions: What is a vow? How were vows made? How were vows paid? Are the laws related to vows still applicable to us?

In conclusion

This is a gem of a book. Each lecture concludes with some recommended literature, several discussion questions, and a few suggestions for devotional reading and singing. I would encourage all to buy it and use it as a guide into different aspects of the study of especially the Old Testament. From a publication such as this we experience that our professors are not men ensconced in an ivory tower but are busy studying the Word of God and learning how believers can apply it to their lives – to walking and talking with God.

