

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

V 66 N 12 JUNE 16 2017



**"I'm just not
a reader"**

**CLARION KIDS
YOU ASKED
BOOK NOTICES**

I'm Not a Reader

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Connect with him on Facebook or Twitter
where he is currently tweeting on
Christ in the Psalms.

So what if I don't read? What difference does it make?

I'm not a reader. Maybe that surprises you. *He's a minister and not a reader? C'mon!* But it's true. Of course, I *do* read things, and once I'm into it I often enjoy it, but it's not my first love. I don't naturally curl up with a novel or eagerly sit down with a devotional. Commentaries and study books stand open on my desk because I *need* to pour over them to make sermons, not because it's a fun hobby. Even spending time in the Bible requires commitment. For me, reading is work – can you relate to that?

Video culture

I think many of us can, and the younger we are the more this seems to be the case. I and many ministers and elders in various churches have noticed that as a community we are reading less and less, especially those of us under forty-five. Elders ask around: *Do you make time for personal devotions? Not as much as I should*, is the common answer. That's code for: hardly at all. *How about reading faith-building articles or books?* Blank looks. Visiting in homes often shows a sizeable collection of DVDs and a big flat-screen TV but non-fiction books and magazines are hard to find.

We surf the net and watch plenty of YouTube videos; we may even flash through the odd blog someone posts, but fewer and fewer of us are spending significant time reading books and articles. The only hold-outs I see are the fair number of ladies who love to read novels. And that's fine – much can be gained from well-written stories – but how many sisters read non-fiction? Whatever that number is, only a fraction of it applies to our younger men, most of whom rarely read anything that resembles a book or magazine which challenges the mind and heart. When asked why, many say: *I'm just not a reader*.

Big deal?

So what if I don't read? What difference does it make? Is this a big deal? Yes, for at least three reasons. First, it's by *reading* God's Word that we come to know God and our salvation! How can we hope to grow in our love for Jesus Christ if we don't encounter him and his promises in Scripture? How can we know how to conduct ourselves in daily life if we don't learn from the Lord's commandments and example? By choosing not to read we shut off the tap of God's life-giving Word (1 Pet 1:23; 2 Tim 3:15).

Now, maybe you're thinking: *well, I still do read the Bible, at least a little. Meal-time devotions usually*. But do you take the time to ponder it carefully? Compare for a moment: how much time you do you spend searching through your Bible versus scrolling through your phone? The Bible is not a quick-read. Wisdom is not gained in five-minute snippets. While it is valuable to read whole Bible books at time (at a quicker pace) to get the big picture, we need to also slow down and take a magnifying glass (so to speak) to each smaller passage. The Holy Spirit presents us with sixty-six books of varying genres, from narrative (story) to prophecy, poetry, proverbs, letters, and even apocalypse. It takes work to make sense of them.

The Lord knows this and instructs us to *make* time and *meditate* on God's Word: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Josh 1:8). There is nothing quick about meditation. It means taking the Word in slowly and thinking on it carefully. God wants us to chew it over in our minds. What was true for Joshua

is true for all of us; Psalm 1:2 describes the righteous person as one whose “delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.” Day and night – it’s got to percolate in the back of our minds as we do our daily work and even as we lay on our beds at night. Read any stanza of Psalm 119 to have this confirmed.

Preparing to lead

If we don’t read, will we be able to lead the next generation? That’s the second reason we need to take this seriously. No matter how you slice it, those of us in our 20s and 30s will be tomorrow’s leaders – yes, that’s especially you, young men. Many of you will serve as deacons

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 12 begins with Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer’s editorial, “I’m Not a Reader.” There are many people that feel this way about themselves, and it seems to be a growing group. How big of a problem is this? And how do we tackle this problem?

This issue also brings you the fifth part in a series from Rev. Rob Schouten, “Sermons: A Listening Guide.”

Many of our columns are featured in this issue: Treasures New and Old, Clippings on Politics and Religion, *Clarion Kids*, and You Asked. There is a report from Trinity Christian Academy from Vernon, BC, as well as a Canticle and a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

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and elders, so ask yourself: *will I be ready to shepherd God's flock?* Deacons must "keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience" (1 Tim 3:9, NIV): *do I know what these deep truths are?* Elders must watch for doctrinal errors and ward off wolves: *do I know what God teaches?* *Can I defend the truths of the Bible?* You can't start learning these things the moment you get put up for election.

**You can't teach
God's commands
and promises
diligently if you
don't know
them yourself
intimately**

Figuring these things out takes years of soaking yourself in the Word and becoming acquainted with the errors and falsehoods of our time.

You will be charged with the care of souls – have you any idea how to advise or help a struggling believer? Do you know what to say to a young person drifting away from the

faith? Or a twenty-something sister suffering from depression and anxiety? What does the Bible say to the grieving and hurting? To the childless and the widow? What Scripture would you bring to a same-sex attracted church member and how would you pray with him/her? What is a Church Order and how does a classis or synod work? What authority do they hold in comparison with the consistory?

As an elder or deacon, you'll be expected to know such things and more, and you can't just YouTube it a half hour before your visit or meeting! There, no doubt, are some helpful teaching videos out there, but you only get to a certain maturity of knowledge and conviction through a long, steady pattern of reading, starting with the Bible itself. There are also many fine Christian books that help us with these questions and dig out the treasures of Scripture even more, but we must get reading!

Parenting

Many of you (sisters included!) will be parenting children and instructing young men and women in their walk with the Lord, so ask yourself: *am I prepared for that?* Teenagers come with a lot of questions – good ones, deep ones, tricky ones, hard ones! Giving them simplistic answers will not help and may lead them to seek answers from worldly sources. Our children need guiding. We have to shepherd their hearts by teaching them to love the LORD and his commandments as he said through Moses, "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them

when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise" (Deut 6:5).

You can't teach God's commands and promises diligently if you don't know them yourself intimately, and that takes thoughtful contemplation. Thinking and reflecting. Reading and pondering. Reading books on the Bible, doctrine, and the application of it to our lives are also very helpful for this as their insights help us deepen our understanding and obedience. Discussing it with family, friends, and Bible study groups goes even further. But the *start* of it is to read and engage. God takes our teaching task as parents very seriously – are you prepared to explain to God that you didn't teach and prepare your kids very well because you "just aren't a reader"?

Critical thinking

Videos, smartphones, and smart TVs all have their useful functions. We've got them at our home too. They bring many pictures, shows, and programs in to entertain us and occasionally to educate us, but what they aren't very good at is getting us to think carefully and analyze ideas. Videos (at least the common ones we watch for amusement) don't build up or break down arguments. Their purpose is not to reason but to entertain.

Dramas, sitcoms, comedies, romance stories, or action films don't explain themselves or tell us what worldview they are operating out of. We are presented with the end-result, a whole package of perspective which is designed to amuse us, not engage us in critical thinking. And yet, we are influenced by those worldviews and can easily adopt their ideas without realizing it, much less having carefully thought about them.

Selling vs. telling

It's for this reason that people with agendas love to use video to sell their beliefs – think of how shows insert happy gay characters to make everyone think of that lifestyle as normal and good. Beer ads always depict a "happening," cool atmosphere that makes us want to be part of it by buying their product. Or think of how politicians use thirty-second commercials, sound-bites, and photo-ops to sell us themselves, to get us to like the person and vote for him (e.g. Justin Trudeau and his "Sunny Ways") rather than

**It takes prayer
for the Lord's
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changes, but
changes can be
made**

detailed discussions or in-depth debates about the soundness of their policies.

Authors of non-fiction books and articles (like this one ☺), however, can't get away with that so easily. They are forced to *tell* the reader their perspective and their reasoning and to do so in some detail. That's how such writings work. They seek to convince our minds with reasoned arguments. Unlike videos (or novels), there's no way for them to *show* what they intend us to see unless they *explain* it first – and that is a great help to us. It means we are presented with propositions backed up with reasons and proofs. We have no choice but to give thought to their ideas and that leads much more naturally and easily to evaluating them.

Discernment needed

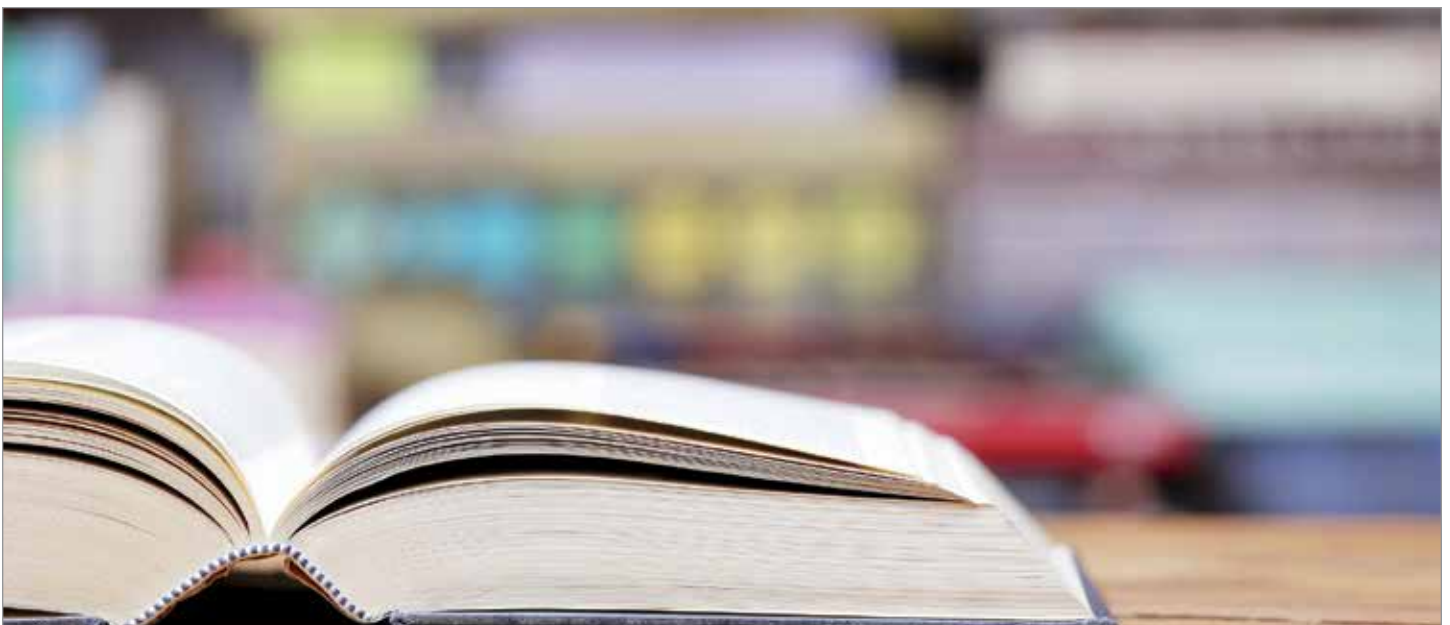
Critical thinking is something we need badly as Christians, for we are called to discern between good and evil, right and wrong, wise and unwise. If we don't read, this skill will not get honed. If we have a steady diet of movies, shows, and videos, we will be well-entertained but only poorly trained at understanding the world we live in and how God wants us to think about it and conduct ourselves within it. How can we guide our children well if we are not well aware both of God's will and of the world's ideas and practices? How can we shepherd God's people and teach them to be discerning if we ourselves are dull in this talent?

Valid reason?

So, reading is necessary and beneficial in many ways, but what if "I'm just *not* a reader"? We have to ask ourselves: *is such a reason acceptable in God's eyes?* Are we born either readers or non-readers? Can we help it if we don't feel like reading? Let's be honest: yes we can. Unless we have a disability of some kind which prevents us from comprehending words on a page, the vast majority of us are *able* to read but many *choose* not to. This is a *will* thing, not a *skill* thing. It's like other things that are good for us but require conscious effort: daily exercise, two-way conversation, thinking about and serving other people ahead of ourselves.

These also don't come easily to many of us, but for most people isn't it simply a cop-out to say: *I'm not into exercise* or *I'm not much of a conversationalist* or *I just am not good at helping other people*? Those are just excuses, aren't they? It takes prayer for the Lord's help and effort to make changes, but changes can be made. By God's grace we can become better at all these things and in the same way we can become people who choose to read, study, and reflect on the deeper matters of life.

Practically speaking, how can we develop a reading habit? I hope to write with a few suggestions in the near future; but for now, go ahead and make a start. There are lots of good books – but the best place to start is with the Good Book.



Submit yourselves

***Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake. . .
to the king, as the supreme authority. (1 Peter 2:13)***

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This meditation was originally published in this magazine in 2005.

As we consider these words of the Lord's apostle to his church we take note of the context in which he writes them. He had written one verse earlier that the believers were to "live such good lives among the pagans." In abstaining from sinful desires (v. 11) and in embracing godly living (v. 12), the apostle tells these scattered saints that God will be pleased to use their good lives to win over their pagan neighbours to Christ and the Christian faith. But what exactly constitutes living a good life among the pagans? Peter answers that question by addressing how we as Christians relate to authority ordained by God – the authority of the government, the master, and the husband. In each situation there is a command given, namely, submit.

In this Word of God there is much for us to meditate on. For we live in a time wherein the authority relationships God has instituted in the world are being challenged and overturned. This is true of the relationship between management and labour. It is true of the relationship between husbands and wives. And, it is also true of our relationship to government. It is to this particular relationship that we give our attention with the words of 1 Peter 2:13.

The command is submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to the king, as the supreme authority. The word "submit" is, as I have already indicated, a word of relationship to authority. It means

to willingly place oneself under the authority that God has instituted. In this case it is the governing authorities that Peter mentions. Practically speaking this means that as citizens of the land we are to obey the laws of the land doing what is good and right. It means that in our personal as well as our congregational prayers we pray for all those who are in authority over us. It means that when we speak about those who govern us or address ourselves to them we show the respect and the honour due those in government.

We submit for the Lord's sake. Our submission is a service we render unto the Lord himself. It is not service simply to another human being. For if that be the case their failings, weaknesses, and sins would make our service to them seem unfair and an unnecessary burden. This is the natural inclination of the pagan – to see a person but not the office. As Christians, however, we see an office and behind that office we see the Lord himself. And seeing the Lord himself, we abstain from that sinful desire to disrespect, disobey, and rebel against the governing authorities. This includes those governing authorities who fail to exercise justice and righteousness. It extends to tyrannies and dictatorships. As Peter refers to the supreme authority of the king, then he in his day was speaking of Nero, the godless pagan ruler who mercilessly oppressed Christians. Nevertheless, in this context he writes submit yourselves for the Lord's sake. We are to obey the governing authorities in all

things that do not disagree with the Word of God. And, furthermore, in our obedience we must be willing to suffer even as Christ did at the hands of the governing authorities.

This Word of God, which calls us to submission and obedience to the governing authorities even if that means suffering, should cause us as Christians to examine carefully our participation in any form of public dissent. As I write this meditation our minority government is being challenged on same-sex legislation even as it struggles with what is called the sponsorship scandal. It is tempting to join in with the pagans and register our public dissent. But all too often such dissent knows nothing of the honour and respect we are to hold the governing authorities in. It knows nothing of the Lord who stands behind these his servants, as wicked or corrupt as they may be.

As we strive on the one hand to hold up God's truth among the pagans as it concerns the authority relationship of management and labour, husband and wife, let us not give away with the other hand his truth about the relationship between government and us as citizens. Indeed, let us particularly now submit to them for the Lord's sake and pray for them that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. And may our gracious God be pleased to use our good lives for his greater purpose – the salvation of those who at present do not know him.



Sermons: A Listening Guide (5)

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In the previous installment, we discussed suitable responses to preaching that is not edifying for a congregation. A situation like that is challenging for everyone, not least of all for the minister in question. However, something more dangerous than preaching which is unedifying is preaching that is false.

Like the Bereans

If you are a member of a faithful Reformed church, it should be possible to have a basic posture of trust toward your minister. After all, he has been ordained after a due process of education and ecclesiastical examination and he has also subscribed to the ecumenical creeds and the Three Forms of Unity. Those who stand before God's people to preach have been thoroughly vetted by the church herself and so we can expect them to bring to us the pure gospel of salvation. An attitude of suspicion toward the pulpit is not appropriate in God's church.

However, trust can never be blind. Even in a trusting relationship with the preacher, God's people have a calling to "test everything" (1 Thess 5:19-22). Like a jeweler will test a gem or a metal for purity, so Christians are to test what we hear to ensure that it is the pure Word of God.

When the Apostle Paul came to Berea, we read that the people there received the Word with "great eagerness." They were receptive to the message he was bringing that Jesus is the One who brings fulfillment of all the law and the prophets. At the same time, we read in Acts 17 that the Bereans were "examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these were so" (v. 11).

In other words, these hearers of the gospel put the message they were hearing through a filter. The filter was the Word of God which they already possessed (that is, the Old Testament). These Bereans wanted to be very sure that what Paul was proclaiming to them did, in fact, line up with what God had previously revealed through the law and the prophets. Notice, however, that this process of sermon scrutiny involved considerable labour on the part of

the Bereans. They "examined" the Scriptures, we read, and did so "daily."

I read somewhere that the best way to train law-enforcement officers to detect counterfeit money is to have them spend a great deal of time with real money. The more familiar they are with the texture and appearance of real money, the more quickly they will detect the phony dollar bills. So it is in the house of God. The more we are immersed in the Scriptures in their unity and diversity, the better we will be able to sense when something is out of balance in a sermon or when a message is leading us away from fidelity to God. Detecting false doctrine depends on a profound appreciation for the true doctrine of the Word of God.

To some Christians, stressing the need for discernment may seem like fear-mongering. In reality, the Bible warns us in various places that false teachers typically arise from within the church (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Pet 2:1-3). Additionally, history shows that false teaching is often very subtle. It uses biblical language, seems to show reverence to Christ, and is often communicated with highly persuasive arguments and great eloquence. Sometimes, false teaching manifests itself initially not so much in what is said but in what isn't said. Sometimes preachers begin well but end up going down a dangerous path.

For all these reasons, we must learn to discern. We should be asking questions about sermons along these lines: Does what the preacher says flow quite straightforwardly from the words of the text? Does his message fit with the rest of the Bible? Does it contradict what God reveals in other passages? Does it conform to the creeds and confessions of the church (not that these are infallible but they are a trusted guide)?

Freedom of exegesis

As we carry out our task of "testing everything," we should remember that the Reformed churches have long valued something called "freedom of exegesis." This means that pastors are not bound in every case to a specific

interpretation of a passage. To be sure, they must explain a text in its grammatical sense and in its historical context. Furthermore, the explanation must be according to the “analogy of Scripture.” In Reformed circles, this phrase means that the explanation of one passage may not be in contradiction with the clear teaching of other passages. God’s Word is one and cannot contradict itself, so every sermon must explain the text in a manner that conforms to the unity and harmony of teaching throughout the Bible. Additionally, Reformed preachers are bound to the doctrines confessed by the churches in the ecumenical creeds and the Three Forms of Unity.

Beyond these necessary constraints, however, the preacher may arrive at an interpretation of a text which strikes you as novel or unconvincing. Don’t assume that he’s wrong or that he’s on a fast-track to apostasy. The church does not impose on pastors a specific interpretation of every passage. There is room for different understandings of a passage. If the explanation you heard is not what you expected and challenges your own understanding but does not contravene the “analogy of faith” or contradict the creeds and confessions, my counsel would be to let the matter be. Let it be for you an incentive for further study and reflection. If, after a period of time, you still feel strongly about a matter of exegesis, you can always set up a visit with your pastor to have a friendly discussion about the right understanding of a specific text.

Expressing doctrinal concerns to your pastor

If it should ever happen that you have doctrinal concerns about what you are hearing (or not hearing) from the pulpit of your church, you should not be afraid to communicate your thoughts to your preacher. “Speaking the truth in love” is the principle that should guide your conversation with him.

Instead of explicitly accusing the pastor of wrong teaching, it’s wise to begin by seeking clarification. You could say, for instance: “In your sermon of three weeks ago, did I understand correctly when I think you said. . . ?” Or: “Could you clarify for my benefit what you meant when you said. . . ?” Or: “Can you show me how what you said in that sermon fits with what we read elsewhere in Scripture, specifically in. . . ?”

After receiving answers, you may find that your concerns are put to rest. You don’t have to continue the discussion. You are reassured that all is well. That’s a beautiful experience. If the answers you get don’t clear the air for you, then strive to

be very specific in your further conversation. You need to be able to show the minister what point of doctrine he has been teaching incorrectly or what point of doctrine he has been neglecting. If no resolution can be found, you will ultimately need to involve the leadership of your church.

Itching ears

In many cases, the tendency to false doctrine emerges not so much from the pulpit but in the pew. Paul tells his readers in 2 Timothy 4 that the time is coming when people “will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (v. 3).

Paul is describing a phenomenon all too familiar to the Christian world in North America. When people today are not happy in a church, they will readily leave to seek “a new church home.” We live in a consumer culture and the spirit of consumerism greatly affects how people view the pulpit. If the pulpit (or the music ministry) isn’t giving them what they want, they will leave. There is little left these days in terms of loyalty to one’s own church. The church has to give people what they are looking for, or else they will leave.

Unfortunately, what people are looking for in many cases is not sound biblical preaching of Christ. Instead, they are seeking preaching that is perhaps “less heavy,” or “has more application,” or is more “casual,” or contains more jokes and stories about “real life.” Perhaps they just want a pastor who is more “charismatic,” more eloquent, and therefore easier to hear. Some people are preoccupied with their own self-defined needs and want preaching that meets those “felt needs,” not realizing that God is the One who actually defines our needs. Other people seem to think that the main task of preaching is to validate them. If the preaching ever challenges them, or steps on their toes, or calls into question their self-image, they react with a decision to leave. They want someone to caress them and certainly not to ever confront them with God’s radical call to repent and believe.

Preachers have many weaknesses and are prone to error, but let’s not forget that those in the pew are also inclined to seek something other than the pure preaching of the gospel. We have wayward hearts and we are easily led astray from the full truth of the holy gospel. Let’s be on guard against the itching-ear syndrome of our Christian world.

To be continued



Conquest by the Cradle

In the March 2017 diplomatic row between The Netherlands and Turkey over the Dutch refusal to allow Turkish political rallies in its country, the incensed President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, made some remarkable statements. The media reported that he urged European Muslims to have big families in order to fight the injustices of the West. He said: "Make not three, but five children. Because you are the future of Europe. That will be the best response to the injustices against you." One of Turkey's leading journalists, Burak Bekdil, noted that "Islamists like Erdogan do not dream of 'conquering' infidel lands with fighter jets and tanks and bombs. In this 'war of religion' their primary weaponry is demographic change in favor of Muslims." He also recalled that in 1999, Erdogan recited at a public rally the poetic lines: "The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers." In other words, Europe is to be conquered by filling the cradles with children so that Muslims will soon outnumber native Europeans who get less and less children each year.

This approach does not come out of thin air, but goes back to Muhammad himself and is therefore encouraged by Muslim leaders. Two highly qualified experts, Sam Solomon and E Al Maqdisi, make this very clear in their book, *Modern Day Trojan Horse*. Solomon, a convert to Christianity from Islam, is a senior lecturer and research co-ordinator who also advises British and European parliamentarians. Maqdisi is a prolific writer and debater on Islam. In this book these scholars show that the primary goal of the *Hijra* (Islamic immigration) is the establishment of an Islamic state. Indeed, the *Hijra* is considered by Muslim scholars to be a preamble and prelude to *jihad*, for the founding of such a state.

Not surprisingly then, Solomon and Maqdisi in the conclusion to their study note that: Islam is neither a religion nor a faith in a personal way, as defined and

understood in the West. It is a whole encompassing political system, garbed in religious outfit, addressing every aspect of the life of its adherents.

So, when Muslim immigrants refuse assimilation and despise integration, it is done as a political move expressed religiously. Hence, it would be in the interest of the host society and its national security to examine all requests, from a socio-political angle. For every Islamic doctrine is a political dictate aiming to establish itself by undoing the existing systems to control, rule and dominate every area.

They go on to recommend that all immigrants, especially Muslim immigrants, be asked to sign an undertaking with built in punitive charges that they will abide by the law of the land, do their utmost to integrate into the host society, accept the equality of all Muslims and non-Muslims, uphold the separation of state and religion, and uphold the right of every individual to choose the religion of their choice.

There is bitter irony in the fact that while a Muslim leader is promoting large families, some of the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church appears to be heading in the opposite direction. LifeSite news reported that Paul Ehrlich, an overpopulation alarmist, was recently invited to give a presentation at a Vatican conference. There was no opposition to his talk. The bishop who heads the Pontifical Academy of Sciences responded "by agreeing that we need to convince women to start having only one or two children, and [he] belittled large families!"

How long will it take for Erdogan's dream to come true?

Sources used: Burak Bekdil, "Erdogan's War on the West" (March 22, 2017) on the Gatestone Institute website; Steve Jalsevac, "Just What, Exactly is Happening at the Vatican?" (March 21, 2017) on www.lifesitenews.com; Sam Solomon and E Al Maqdisi, *Modern Trojan Horse: The Islamic Doctrine of Immigration* (2009).

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Trinity Christian Academy




Trinity Christian Academy, the school run by the Canadian Reformed School Society of Vernon and District, started in 2011 with three students. The students were taught in a meeting room in the Vernon Canadian Reformed Church. The school is considered a homeschool group, where uncertified teachers are under the oversight of a certified teacher. The school was run as a satellite school under the oversight of William of Orange Christian School in Cloverdale, BC. In 2012, the membership built a portable school building behind the Vernon church. That same summer William of Orange provided us with a certified teacher.

In 2015, the society was able to purchase a property adjacent to the Vernon church. On February 11, 2016, after months of hard work by the membership, the students and teach-

ers could begin classes in a brand-new building. Trinity Christian Academy currently has twenty-three students in grades K–5 and three staff. The Lord willing, we hope to hire a certified teacher and become an independent school for the 2018 – 2019 school year.

Our little school has been very richly blessed by the Lord since it opened its doors. The membership has formed strong bonds as we all strive together to provide Reformed education for our children. The teachers have provided loving instruction and support to the students, as they teach the children about God, and about the world around them, all from a Reformed perspective. We have been blessed to work with William of Orange, as their board and staff have offered guidance and support to the teachers and the board of Vernon. We have also felt the communion of the saints as we received many donations from members of other Canadian Reformed congregations throughout Canada and the U.S.

We are excited to see what God has in store for us in the years to come. 



Clarion Kids

Job

Job was a very rich man who loved God very much. One day, God allowed the devil to take away everything he had. The devil thought that if Job had nothing, he would not serve God anymore. Job became very poor and sick, and all his children died. Job had three friends who told him he shouldn't serve God anymore, but Job didn't listen to them. He knew that no matter what happened, he had to serve God. When the devil saw that Job still loved God he was very angry. Then God gave Job many more children and made him even richer than before.

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Word Search

H	P	D	Q	S	Z	G	N	T	N
N	L	Q	E	D	H	E	U	H	L
N	X	R	O	V	R	H	B	R	M
H	V	G	A	D	I	E	T	E	L
E	C	C	L	H	X	L	B	E	Q
Z	C	I	F	R	I	E	N	D	S
X	H	Z	R	H	B	L	F	G	P
C	W	D	K	W	F	T	Q	B	X
Z	A	J	K	T	N	R	O	O	P
U	P	B	V	J	V	V	Q	J	V

Children	God	Rich
Devil	Job	Three
Friends	Poor	Serve

Hidden Message:

Unscramble the tiles to see the names of Job's three friends.

You might need your Bible for this one!

H	A	Z	A	N	B	I	L	O	P	H	D	A	D	L	I	P	A	R	.	.	Z
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by Emily Nijenhuis

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Q May We Have a Cross In or On the Church Building?

Is it right or not to have the cross or any other symbol placed behind the pulpit or elsewhere in or on the church building?

A During my years of active ministry in the church of Toronto, we had the privilege and pleasure of building a new church building. It was a learning experience in more ways than one. One of the interesting aspects of preparing the plans for a church building was the discussion on what we thought about the lay-out and design of the auditorium. Will it just be an *auditorium*, the place where the Word is *heard*, or will it also be a *sanctuary*: the very special place where we worship God, have communion with him and with his congregation, sing his praises, pray, celebrate the Lord's Supper, administer Holy Baptism, as well as listen to the proclamation of his Word. Indeed, in the discussion with the architect we came to the conclusion: it is all of that – worship, communion, proclamation, administration! It's the holy meeting place with God! Hence the preparations entailed more than deciding on the form of the auditorium, the floor, the pews, the light, and the ceiling; also the front with its pulpit in the centre, its podium for the baptismal font, the Lord's Supper table with its utensils, and the idea of the symbol of the cross in the background received ample attention! It had to be the place "Where Everything Speaks of Him," as the well-known book by Dr. Deddens is called.

In his epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul stressed time and again: "We preach Christ crucified." He emphasized this in 2:2, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." In his epistle to the Galatians as well, Paul writes, "But far be it from me to boast except in the *cross* of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . ." He wrote about much, much more of course, but central in all his writings, teachings, and exhortations was the fact that the entire mystery of godliness and the centre of our Christian faith is Christ crucified! Although in Toronto we did not work this out all the way, in the auditorium of a church building however, and in the sanctuary where we worship solemnly, in deep respect before God, and in sincere gratitude for his salvation, we *may* express that the entire Word of God speaks of Jesus Christ crucified, placing the pulpit for the proclamation of this Word in the centre and behind it the *symbol* of the *cross* as an expression of the focal point in this proclamation!

Thus on the podium you could place the pulpit, the Lord's Supper table, and the baptismal font together, and in the background of these marks of the church the symbol of the cross. The *empty* cross points as well at the resurrection of our Lord, since the price he paid was sufficient to save us from sin and death, and the symbols of the sacraments display the glory of his victory! And this being the

heart of our worship and the crux of our existence by faith, in our Toronto church building we *did* place a cross on the outside of our building which was illuminated at night to be the point of attraction for everyone who passes by: there is

salvation in no one else but in Jesus Christ, who was crucified on the cross for sinners, who rose from the dead (the cross is empty!), and who ascended into heaven to be there as head of his Christian church!



Q Why don't we see the LORD's wisdom played out in Solomon's life?

Scripture teaches that wisdom is walking with the LORD in obedience and faithfulness: think of Deuteronomy 4:6 and Psalm 37:30, 31. We read that Solomon asked the LORD for an "understanding mind. . . that I may discern between good and evil" (1 Kgs 3:9). In response to this request he is told that he would indeed give him such a "wise and discerning mind" (v. 12). While we know that Solomon did write the books of Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, and indeed read the wisdom of obedience in them, we don't read about that wisdom being played out in his life. If the LORD had given Solomon such great wisdom, why do we read about so much foolishness that ten of the tribes are torn away from the House of David? Why don't we see that wisdom portrayed in his daily life?

A

In Solomon's days the LORD wanted to open the eyes of his people to the blessings on his prince of peace. The book of Kings, however, was written in the days of the Babylonian captivity when God's people needed to hear the message of this faded glory and the promise of the kingdom of the great Prince of Peace.

In 1 Kings we read about many sons of David. They are seriously criticized by the prophets in their days. They're compared to David, but most of them fail that test. They fail

in their worship of God, their foreign policy, etc. All this information is contained in the books of the Kings; and in great detail it is. They were written in the days of the exile. This exile was the end of the road! David's house had failed to live up to its high position. It's the story of David's line in decline, with only a few exceptions. The future fulfillment of the coming of David's son stayed open, however, despite David's sons. They failed to portray and foreshadow the Son of David, the Son of promise. It's in this context and against this background that we have to see 1 Kings 9, 10, 11, the story of Solomon's glory. It's the story of the begin-

ning of the line, a line of apostasy and decline; the story of the Golden Age written in the age of failure and demise. It actually makes the story rather painful: the line begins with Solomon! Behold, this is how it started!

King Solomon, the son of David, desired to serve the LORD. He progressed from glory to glory because he had prayed that his throne be founded on righteousness and be enlightened with wisdom. In the building of the temple and in the exercise of wisdom and righteousness, Solomon was seeking the kingdom of God. The chapters 9 and 10, therefore, show us the rich fulfilment of the promises given to him (3:11). Solomon's wisdom was rooted in the fear of the LORD; it's a wisdom that enlightens the understanding and gives insight in all practical affairs! Indeed, that's what his writings testify, and how great his wisdom and understanding of life had become! He didn't only explore life, ponder life's questions, he presented conclusions as well: true wisdom is the wisdom of a humble heart that knows the will of the LORD! The principle behind every decision, every opinion, every stand-point, and every answer is the fear of the LORD!

"If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Cor 10:12). That's the warning that comes to mind when we think of Solomon and where he was in his meeting with the Queen of Sheba. King Solomon, however, was not careful; he succumbed to the temptations that came with his position, his riches, and his intelligence. 1 Kings 10, 11, shows us King Solomon's rising, shining, and decline. His kingship was the kingship of the prince of peace, which was supposed to be foreshadowing the Messiah, the LORD's anointed Son of David! It is in this regard that Solomon failed. He succumbed. He could not keep it up. He endangered the throne of his Messianic Son! We're confronted with the failure of *man* to preserve the covenant of the LORD purely and faithfully! It did not go well with King Solomon. His attitude and conduct moved in the wrong direction. The glories and riches in his kingdom were not just blessings only; they also became part of the temptations to which he succumbed. When we consider Solomon's pursuits in the light of the King's Law in Deuteronomy 17, we can see that he was seeking to increase his riches for personal gain, he built up a great collection of chariots and horses against the will of the LORD, and he gathered himself a ha-

rem with wives and concubines that didn't have its equal! That's what he pursued and developed in the later part of his life (10:23-29).

How is it possible, we may ask, that such a pious and wise king came to such disobedience and apostasy? God had blessed him so richly, fulfilled his promises so wonderfully, considering the wisdom and knowledge he had. Yet, he couldn't handle it. He succumbed to the weaknesses of the flesh, to the temptations of the world, and to the assaults of the evil one! Solomon was looking at the neighbours, the kings and rulers around him, and he fell victim to the spirit of materialism and world conformity. What we see in Solomon's life is a bad development, marrying as he did foreign wives, and he "loved them" (11:2ff). As he grew older, they turned his heart after other gods! It's remarkable how often the word "heart" is mentioned in the verses 2-4 (five times!). That was precisely the warning in the King's Law, and even though Solomon had prayed at the beginning of his reign, "Give your servant a discerning heart," no longer was his heart devoted to the LORD, his God, as the heart of David his father had been! As we know, however, from the heart all issues of life originate. That's where the decisions and directions are determined and that's where the apostasy began. His wives and concubines, their idols which he accepted, and their worship of foreign gods, they all caused Solomon to stray and deviate, despite the warnings of the LORD (Exod 34; Deut 7; Josh 23). Yet, Solomon ignored the warning and allowed these women to enter his heart, determine his attitude, and derail his life! His heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, so that the wisdom he had shown and the peace and the blessings and the riches no longer served their purpose of God's glory and resulted in the division of his kingdom! Today too, let him who thinks he stands firm, be careful lest he falls!

*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
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Merciful God and Father

Prayer before Communion

1. Mer - ci - ful God and Fa - ther of our Lord, we thank you for the
2. O may your Spir - it work with - in our hearts that we may have the
3. For - give our sins and turn to us your face. In - clude us in your
4. Grant us your grace that we may bear our cross, de - ny our - selves and
5. All this we ask of you, our God and King, of you, our Fa - ther,

7
bread and wine out - poured. In this Lord's Sup - per we re - call the
faith which he im - parts. Grant that our con - trite hearts may now be
cov - e - nant of grace. Let us not doubt your love for us, your
count this world as loss. In trib - u - la - tion we a - wait the
who rules ev' - ry - thing through - out the a - ges and e - ter - nal -

12
death of your dear Son who breathed his fi - nal breath.
fed with Je - sus' flesh and blood, the heav'n - ly bread.
heirs. Help us, we pray, in all our world - ly cares.
One who will per - fect us— yes, your ris - en Son.
ly. We trust in you, a - men, so shall it be.

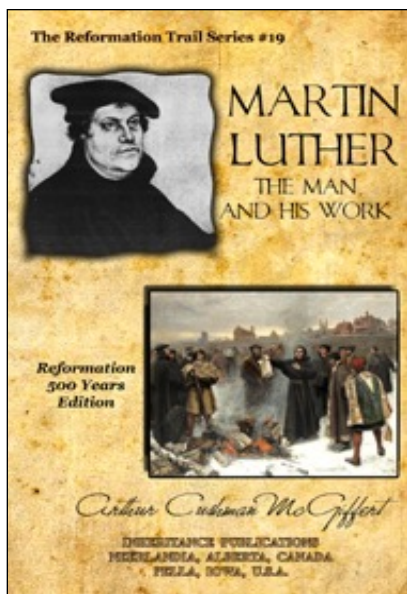
Text: George van Popta © 2017; based on prayer before communion, *Book of Praise*, p. 606
Tune: William Henry Monk, 1861

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Two Books on Martin Luther

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Inheritance Publications is honouring this year's 500th anniversary of the Reformation by publishing two reprint titles that deal with Martin Luther in their The Reformation Trail Series.

The first is *Martin Luther, the Man and his Work* by Arthur Cushman McGiffert, an American Congregationalist. It was originally published in 1911. This 460 page book is illustrated and gives an interesting account of Luther's life using original sources which are often quoted in the text.

The second reprint, written by English author Elizabeth Rundle Charles, is a story set in Luther's time and first appeared in 1862 under the title *Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family*. At the time this popular account was translated in most of the languages of Europe and even Arabic. Inheritance has reissued it in a 436 page edited version with the title *Luther by Those who Knew Him*.

These worthwhile books are set in a very easy-to-read font. They can be ordered from any Christian bookstore or directly from Inheritance Publications at <http://www.inhpubl.net/>. Each costs \$25.95 Canadian or \$19.90 American.

