

Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE: TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE



Are we on solid ground?

VOLUME 68 • NUMBER 15 • JULY 26, 2019

OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE GOSPEL
IS THERE SHAME IN SIN?

Clarion

**Clarion: a trustworthy
and engaging magazine,
widely spread and read
in Canadian Reformed
households and beyond.**

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

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

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

2019 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

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2019 ADVERTISING RATES

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Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch.
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PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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We acknowledge the financial support
of the Government of Canada.



Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Issue 15 leads with a timely article from Dr. Arjan De Visser, "Impressions from a Visit to the Dutch Churches. After attending a conference in The Netherlands and extending his stay for a visit, he writes: "It gave me a better understanding of the current situation in the GKv and I thought it might be beneficial to share my impressions with the readers of *Clarion* and draw some lessons from the Dutch situation."

Next, we have an article from Rev. William Den Hollander, entitled "Relationship Evangelism."

There are many of our regular columns in this issue: Treasures, New & Old, Clippings on Politics & Religion, You Asked, *Clarion Kids*, Ray of Sunshine, and Education Matters. There is also a Canticle from Rev. George van Popta.

Laura Veenendaal

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Impressions from a Visit to the Dutch Churches (GKv)

During the 1980s and 1990s, the GKv maintained a firm position and critiqued other federations for having women in office

On May 16, 2019, General Synod Edmonton of the Canadian Reformed Churches decided to terminate the relationship with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKv). As Synod made this decision, I was on my way to The Netherlands to speak at a conference of concerned members of the GKv. The meeting was held on May 18 in Bunschoten, just north of Amersfoort. After the conference, I stayed on for another week and used the time to visit friends and colleagues in “the old country.” It gave me a better understanding of the current situation in the GKv and I thought it might be beneficial to share my impressions with the readers of *Clarion* and draw some lessons from the Dutch situation.

The main reason for the concerns about the GKv, as is well known by now, is the decision of the 2017 GKv Synod to allow women to serve in all ecclesiastical offices (deacon, elder, minister). The synod left it in the freedom of the churches to go ahead and ordain women to the offices or to refrain from doing so. By now, many congregations have ordained women as deacons and many of these congregations plan to ordain women as elders with the next round of elections of office-bearers. I’m not sure that any women have been ordained as ministers yet, but some churches have had female guest preachers on the pulpit via pulpit exchange with the NGK (Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken). Since women are already being ordained to the offices of deacon and elder, it seems very unlikely that the next GKv synod will reverse the decisions of previous synod, even though concerned members are hoping and praying that this will happen.

A lot has been said and written about the decisions of the 2017 GKv Synod: that the biblical foundation for the

decisions was weak, that a new approach to interpreting the Bible is behind it, and so forth. For myself, one of the most surprising aspects of the whole development has been how fast things have gone. I was a student at the seminary in Kampen in the 1980s and at that time there was not even a hint that the question of women in office might become an issue in the churches. During the 1980s and 1990s, the GKv maintained a firm position and critiqued other federations for having women in office. As far as I know, the first time the question was raised at synodical level was in 2002. It is astounding that in 2017 the GKv Synod decided to allow women to be ordained to all three offices. That is only fifteen years after the matter was first put on the agenda!

Shocking

I remember being shocked when I heard about this decision. I had expected Synod to take a cautious approach, perhaps open the office of deacon for women and appoint another committee to study the question whether women can also serve in the offices of elder and minister. But instead there was a radical turnaround. Everything changed at once: from having no women in office at all to opening up all offices for women.

There is a related aspect that I find baffling: It seems that the majority of ministers in the GKv have accepted the new situation. I was at seminary with many of these men and they were strong and solid in their Reformed convictions. Now many of them have either changed their minds or decided to acquiesce to the new situation. I find this to be scary. How is it possible that so many men who defended

one position for decades can be pushed over so quickly with the result that they now hold (or at least accept) the opposite position? It makes me wonder about my own church federation. What are the chances that something similar could happen in the CanRC?

During my visits to friends and colleagues in The Netherlands, this became a question that I would regularly ask: How is it possible that things could change so quickly? Based on the answers I heard, there is not just one reason but rather a complexity of factors involved. In what follows, I will offer an attempt to understand what has happened in the GKv. I do not claim to be able to provide definitive answers, however.

Worldview

First, the secular worldview that is so prevalent in the Dutch society (and by the way, in Canadian society as well), has had a big influence on the thinking of the membership of the GKv, especially the younger generation. People live in a society where gender equality is the norm. They see that capable women (also Christian women) hold positions in government. They cannot understand why it would be wrong for the church to have women in leadership positions as well. If women have leadership abilities, shouldn't their gifts be used? Never mind what the apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 2 and other passages.

Second, theologians at the seminary in Kampen have argued that the instructions of the apostle Paul in passages like 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 should be understood against the cultural context of his time. If Paul had lived in our time, he would have said something different about the position of women, they suggest. In other words, we can put Paul's instructions between brackets and/or reinterpret them for today. The problem with this approach is obvious: the apostle Paul did not appeal to cultural norms when he wrote about the role of women in the church. Rather, he referred to the creation of man and woman (Gen 2), to the fall into sin (Gen 3), and to the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5).

Third, although the GKv Synod never mentioned it, it is suggested that the Synod's haste in opening up all offices at once should be explained against the background of the desire to reunite with the NGK (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken). The schism of 1967 that led to the formation of the NGK is seen by many as a schism that should not have happened, and so there is a strong desire to reunite. But since the NGK had already opened up the ecclesiastical offices for women (including the office of minister, in 2011), the GKv had to catch up with them as quickly as possible.

Teaching

Fourth, during the last few decades, there has been a general decline in preaching and catechetical instruction. While sermons in the GKv used to have a strong expository quality, this is no longer a given. Afternoon services are not well attended. Even if there is an afternoon service, you will not necessarily hear a Catechism sermon. Something similar has happened to the Catechism instruction of the youth. There seems to be a general feeling that the young people should not be taught doctrines but that they should rather be allowed to discuss their own questions. As a result, the younger generation grows up without receiving solid instruction. This general weakness in preaching and teaching has resulted in lack of knowledge and insight. To quote the apostle Paul: "People are being tossed to and fro, carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:14). The foundations have been eroded.

Fifth, the GKv has always wanted to be a church that is with the times. I remember from my own youth in the GKv that we wanted to be *in the world* without being *of the world*. We believed that it was possible to maintain the *antithesis* with the world without having to live in isolation from the world. We looked down on those churches where women were wearing hats and black stockings ("zwarte kousen kerken"). We prided ourselves in wearing the same clothes that the world wears while being different from the world at the same time. Now, looking back at this after so many years, I'm wondering: Maybe we were too naïve in thinking that we could be in the world without being affected by the world.

What are the chances that something similar could happen in the CanRC?

Sixth, one of my co-presenters at the conference in Bunschoten, Rev. Henk Drost, suggested that there is an underlying spiritual problem. People get cranky when you preach about sin, he said. People want "positive" messages. What is behind this? Rev. Drost observed that GKv members in general have lost the humble attitude of the true believer who realizes that it takes the miracle of regeneration for a sinner to be saved. We would do well to study the Canons of Dort as a confession in which believers humbly speak about regeneration as a wonderful and powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.

Sinkhole

I believe that these six factors go some way in explaining the decline that has happened in the GKv. Some aspects may be more important than others. There may be more aspects than the ones listed. But taken together, these factors can to a certain extent explain why the GKv have imploded so suddenly. Or am I wrong to suggest that it was a sudden collapse? Was this coming for a long time already? Yes and no. One of the Dutch colleagues to whom I spoke about these things compared the situation to the formation of a sinkhole: for the longest time everything seems to be fine on the surface but all along the bedrock underneath is being eroded; this process continues till one day, all of a sudden, the cover collapses and a huge sinkhole appears.


Are we on solid ground or are we living on top of a sinkhole that can implode at any time?

What about the Canadian Reformed Churches? Are we on solid ground or are we living on top of a sinkhole that can implode at any time? *My answer would be that our situation is not identical to the situation of the GKv, but that there are similarities nonetheless, and that therefore we should take care*

lest we “sink” as well. If we look at the six factors mentioned before, I would suggest that factors two and three are unique to the GKv (the new hermeneutics in Kampen, the relationship with the NGK). But the other factors can to some extent be said to apply to the CanRC as well. Our context is largely the same: a secular and post-Christian society. Our spiritual DNA is the same: the beliefs and convictions of the Liberation of 1944. I just hope and pray that we will respond differently to the challenges of our time. I hope that we will maintain a strong emphasis on solid biblical preaching and confessional teaching even as we endeavour to be a church federation that is “with the times.” If we do not, we will end up having a membership that is perhaps *culturally* Reformed but not *theologically* Reformed, and therefore vulnerable to various kinds of influences.

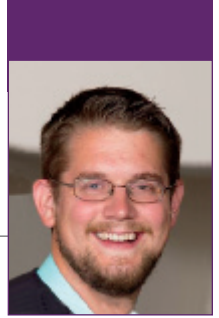
In conclusion

I still love the GKv. I won't say it has become a false church, but I will say it has become a church that is in serious decline. The Synod of Edmonton has called on us to pray for the churches in The Netherlands. Let's do so, and ask the Lord to guide his people, many of whom now feel like they are dispersed and without a shepherd.

¹ For more information about the conference, see <https://www.bezinningmvea.nl/entry/terugblik-18-mei-2019> 



The old city gate, Amersfoort, the Netherlands



A Dangerous Judge

“Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, and the Lord raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The people of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab.”

(Judges 3:15)

One of the challenges we face in understanding the Word of God is that we often approach it with a twenty-first century perspective. We read a word like “slavery” and we might picture in our minds a practice based on skin colour and racial prejudice. We read about David facing Goliath with a sling and we think he was holding a child’s toy, instead of a weapon that has been used in warfare with deadly effect for thousands of years.

The Bible describes Ehud as a left-handed man. Many people have interpreted this to mean that Ehud was at a disadvantage; some have even described him as disabled. You can find numerous sermons in which Ehud’s left-handedness is portrayed as a weakness or shortcoming which God surprisingly used to save his people. But that perspective reflects a more modern bias against lefties; a bias which was especially felt in numerous classrooms in recent years, when left-handed kids were forced to write with their right hands.

Biblically speaking, left-handedness is usually seen as the mark of a great warrior. In Judges 20:16, we read about “700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.” And in 1 Chronicles 12:2 we read about a group of mighty men who “were bowmen and could shoot arrows and sling stones with either the right or the left hand; they were Benjaminites, Saul’s kinsmen.” Left-handedness seemed to be a common trait among the elite warriors of Benjamin, although it isn’t clear if they were all born left-handed or men who trained hard in using their left hands. Regardless, the fact that Ehud is described as a left-handed Benjaminite would have made an ancient Israelite think of him as “dangerous,” not “disabled” or “disadvantaged.”

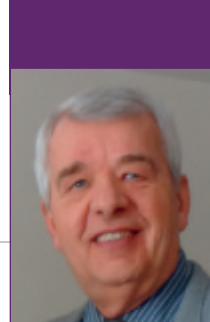
The benefit of Ehud’s left-handedness would have come into play as Ehud came up alongside Eglon, king of Moab, and reached down to his right thigh to draw his concealed weapon.

Ehud’s advantage is found in that moment when he’s up close to Eglon, with his right hand perfectly visible, so that Eglon isn’t suspicious or concerned until it’s too late for the king of Moab. Ehud’s left-handedness is better understood as a blessing, rather than a curse. His Creator had made him that way so that Ehud could play an important role in freeing God’s people from tyranny and oppression.

Today, our Saviour Jesus Christ blesses his people with numerous gifts from his heavenly throne, but we can often lose sight of such blessings because they don’t correspond to the things our society tells us to value. Meekness, kindness, and gentleness are often seen as signs of weakness. Self-control, modesty, and chastity are said to inhibit us from being true to ourselves. The world often mocks what our God calls good, and so we must be diligent to let God shape our thoughts and perspectives through his revealed Word. **C**

For further study

1. What are some other ways in which a modern perspective may mislead us when reading the Bible?
2. What are some of the blessings and advantages which God has given to you?
3. What are some other examples of things which the Bible describes as blessings, but the world sees as curses?



Relationship Evangelism

Introduction

In the spring of 2007, our congregation in Toronto was engaged in a project called “God’s House. . . Open House.” With this project, we were seeking to equip ourselves and each other by doing a unified Bible study on Scripture passages related to our work of outreach and evangelization. Each of our Bible study societies studied texts such as Acts 8: 26-40, the story about Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. We considered texts in Peter’s first epistle (2:11, 12; 3:15; 4:7) to see the importance of our conduct and projection in the midst of a secular society, and equip ourselves for speaking the Word and serving the neighbour with love (1 Pet 4:10, 11). We also looked at the doctrine of election (Eph 1:3-6), the providence of God, and the way the Holy Spirit works in us to give us a heart of love for our neighbour and trains us to use our relationships for the purpose of outreach (Eph 4:7-16). This series of studies was concluded with a number of workshops in which the Rev. Dirk Maurits Boersma, at that time minister of the Denver ARC, guided us through the various possibilities for what we called “Relationship Evangelism.”

“Relationship Evangelism” is a particular and practical approach to outreach. It’s not the be all and end all of everything; there are other ways of sharing the gospel and bringing people to a saving knowledge of God’s gift of love in Jesus Christ. It does not mean to establish relationships among young people for the purpose of bringing an unbeliever to the gospel (as some may wrongly understand this name “Relationship Evangelism”). Rather, it is a natural, spontaneous, and organic way of sharing the gospel with those “neighbours” with whom we have a relationship through work, study, and neighbourhood, or through incidental meetings at the doctor’s office, the dental clinic, on the plane, or in the store, etc. The possibilities are endless! At appropriate times and opportunities, we reach out to those people whom we see on a more or less regular basis. The relationship makes it more effective, because you know them, you can relate to them; you can seek to have a growing relationship and open

up to them. Instead of waiting for people to find you, you go to them; and they’re next door!

In my personal experience, I have seen the Lord providing opportunities when in the chair of the dental hygienist who found out I was a pastor and used the opportunity to ask me many questions or sought me for counsel and advice. At another occasion, it was while my wife was browsing for a dress for the occasion of a special anniversary that the saleslady inquired about our marriage, family, and history. She shared with me her own relationship troubles, soon seeking my counsel and advice for her spiritual questions and struggles. And every time since that first conversation, she makes a beeline for me when we enter the store and she pours out her heart to seek comfort, encouragement, and direction. In my congregation, also, we received a family from Ghana who had moved into a new neighbourhood and ended up living next door to a family of the church with whom a relationship developed. This led them to inquire about their church going, their faith, the upbringing of the children, etc. All of which the Lord used to bring them to our congregation!

From these few examples, you can see the different situations and opportunities we can use to share the gospel with those the Lord brings into our life. We need to seek them, use them, and make the most of them, because it’s not easy to find ways to share the gospel. We are living in an anonymous society; we open our garages automatically and disappear into our houses, creating distance with our neighbours. Incidentally, we may see our neighbours or meet them, but it’s difficult to get into people’s lives, homes, and have occasions for outreach with the gospel. Hence, we need to seek neighbours out and make the most of the times we meet them outside (in Canada, when shovelling the snow or mowing the lawn). After making some more in-depth acquaintance with our neighbours, it also becomes easier to share certain special events in our lives. In my case, I was able to share the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ with my Jewish neighbour whose father had passed away and with my Roman Catholic neighbour at the time when one of their grandchildren died of leukemia.

One of the things that hinders us from being alert to these opportunities and failing to seek relationships is the fact that we are all so busy. Church life and family life are so busy, being engaged as we are in many activities in the church and the schools; we are too busy for our neighbours. Besides, it's easier to talk to people in church and, besides, we feel more comfortable with them. Of course, we should also realize that the relationships we seek to use for outreach to our neighbours are not the same as with our family and church members. The purpose is not to establish friendships with them, but rather, acquaintance and connections, in order that we may come to know them better. We need to know the lives of our colleagues or fellow students or show interest for the lives of people we meet in the plane, train, store, or elsewhere.

Motivation

The motivation for pursuing relationship evangelism is God's love for lost sinners. Our "neighbour" is not only our spouse, our children, our fellow church members or Christian school goers, but also those whom the Father, in his providential care, puts on our path. When we consider reaching out with the gospel, it's not just about getting the message right, it's about relating to people through love. In that way, they experience firsthand what the love of God is all about! Love causes us to look differently at our neighbour: not so much as "one of the world," but as fellowman for whom we care, to whom we show interest. Yes, we do so not only with a view to faith, but also as it relates to the entire life of our neighbour. Hence, listening is important; showing genuine interest, too. In this way, our lifestyle is not something they observe from a distance, but also close up. To our lost and unbelieving neighbours, we are called to project the fruit of the Spirit!

Sometimes we find it hard to love our neighbours. They're sinners and their way of life or sinful attitude becomes an obstacle. If so, we should remember that God also loved us (me) while we were still sinners, enemies. In his love for us, he gave his only Son to save us. Besides, it is important to realize as well that we are still sinners, with our own sinful traits, character, attitude, and inclinations. Our life, by the grace of God, has become a changed life only because the Lord Jesus has set us free from sin. The Lord Jesus came not to save the righteous, but sinners! In his ministry on earth, he paid much attention to the lost sheep of Israel. These are also the kind of neighbours we meet time and again, for these people have become estranged from the Lord and his Word. We should remember the joy of the Father, the Son, and the holy

angels when one of the lost is found (Luke 15, the parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son). During Christ's years on earth, he met many people, spoke to them and with them, and related to them. In John 20, he says, "I am sending you," and thereafter the apostles (and the church!) receive the Holy Spirit to do this work!

Roadblocks

One of the first obstacles to overcome in our pursuit of relationship evangelism is our own frustrations and inhibitions. We feel frustrated when we can't steer the conversation into a spiritual direction. We feel inhibited because of our own lack of confidence in speaking about the Lord, the gospel, and our faith. Hence, we easily excuse ourselves with the assumption that "modern man is not interested in the gospel anyway and doesn't want to be approached with serious matters." Another tendency we have is stereotyping. We fail to realize that they are much like us and we have more in common than we are aware. They are friendly people too, willing to help if there is something you can't do or you don't know how to do. They are willing to help in times of illness, they are concerned about serious matters in society such as abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide, and they are affected by the suffering in the world. Besides, let's realize that they too may have made stereotypes of Christians, so we may have to overcome the skewed view they have of us. We may need to undo a false reputation by a proper use of our gifts and good works.

*Instead of waiting for people
to find us, we go to them;
and they're next door!*

Their alternative (and different, or even worldly) lifestyle should not keep us away! When we learn about their history of brokenness (baggage), abuse, addiction, or other issues, we should understand that this will require much patience, time, wisdom, and a lot of "work." Yet, what great privilege and pleasure it will be to help them, using the light of the gospel! They, too, are born sinners who need forgiveness, repentance, and renewal. They need the light of God's Word for that! They also need to understand the world and its history and background. Therefore, don't preclude that they're not interested anyway. Things can change in people's lives. Through your interaction and conversation, they might become interested!

As we pursue a relationship and share the gospel with our “neighbour,” we may wish to share our church life with them as well. By the grace of God, and under his blessing, we may invite them to church and see them come as well. Then we will need to realize what it takes not only to welcome them warmly, but also to guide them and assist them as they become “regulars.” We should be aware that we are inclined to be introverts in our conversations and interactions, leading guests and visitors to feel like and remain strangers. Hence, it’s not enough to welcome them warmly, we also need to accompany them, introduce them, and pay special attention to them as they continue to attend. In order to deal with this, we should remember the promises of the Lord, who gave us his Holy Spirit for this (Eph 3). We are able to do this in faith! Acts 4 shows us how the Holy Spirit gave them boldness to speak. God is in control; his Spirit does the work! Relax and don’t get stressed out about it!

It’s not just about getting the message right, it’s about relating to people through love, so they experience firsthand what the love of God is all about!

Clearly seeing God’s providential way in the opportunities he provides for the development of these relationships, we may know that the doctrine of election is an incentive to seek relationships and pursue evangelism. In the past, this doctrine has often been misused by people thinking that all it takes is to have the church doors open. Hence, if the Lord wants to bring a sinner in according to his plan of election, then we have accommodated this. Yet that’s not the way God works, not on the mission field and not in our society either. Because of the electing grace of God, evangelization opens the way for people to come to faith. Never think of evangelization apart from the doctrine of election: this doctrine must undergird our approach to relationship evangelism, thus making our approach very dynamic!

Reminders

There is no cookie-cutter approach to the work of evangelism. What works in Toronto may not necessarily work in Southern River, WA, or in Pretoria, SA. The approach should be natural, organic, and spiritually sensitive to the situation,

CALL ACCEPTED

Candidate Dr. Jeff Temple has accepted the call to the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario to serve as minister of the Word and has subsequently declined the calls from the Canadian Reformed Church of Carman East and the Canadian Reformed Church at Chilliwack.

CALLED

The Trinity Canadian Reformed Church of Glanbrook, Ontario has extended a call to

Candidate Mark ten Haaf

to serve as Minister of the Word

The Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington, Ontario has extended a call to

Candidate Eric Onderwater

to serve as Minister of the Word

CHURCH NEWS

circumstances, and opportunities. Believers should be sensitive to the needs and opportunities which their relationships offer so they can be met with the offer of the gospel in a way that’s conducive and sensitive. It should not be approached in a pragmatic way, saying “Does it work?” Rather, we should approach it with the desire to make a difference in our neighbour’s life by being different. Don’t try to fit in, be popular, adapting to their ways and lifestyle. Be yourself, a true Christian with a genuine love! Don’t lose your confidence in the power of the gospel. We have different gifts and God wants to use them in the place and circumstances in which he places us. These are gifts of word and deed. Everyone has a place based on the gifts they have, be that for dialogue, conversation, counsel, volunteering, teaching, etc.

Possible practices

As we pursue this approach of relationship evangelism, we can use our own gifts and talents and seek to engage our neighbour in a course of personal instruction. In my ministry, I have made ample use of a wonderful series of twenty-five lessons called “A Gift from Heaven.” Originally, this was a correspondence course offered via the radio in The Netherlands. It has been translated in different languages, also in English, and is freely and readily available to be downloaded from the website of the *Evangelism Taskforce* (a service of the Canadian Reformed Church of Langley, British Columbia, Canada). I have used it for a variety of inquirers in my Inquirers Classes, while I also know of individuals who used it in their personal pursuit of outreach. It includes and addresses a great list of topics related to the Bible, faith, prayer, and the Christian life.

Of course, this personal pursuit is not for everyone; hence it is also possible to introduce a neighbour, a colleague, a fellow student, or acquaintance to the church and its outreach opportunities. In many churches, much fruitful and thankful use is made of a course called *Christianity Explored*. It is intended for people like you who would rather bring someone to the church's outreach program, joining him/her, for eight evenings after work which start with a meal (or not), a video series, and a discussion of the book of Mark. This series include not only *Christianity Explored* but also *Discipleship Explored* and *Life Explored*, introducing participants to church life, attending services, and the walk with Christ.

Other forms of such organized evangelism could be the well-known Vacation Bible School, inviting children of the neighbourhood (i.e. in the vicinity of the church building) to the church during their holidays and sharing with them the gospel, integrated crafts, and the singing of Psalms and Hymns. Ultimately the goal is to make a connection with the parents and family. The same objectives can be pursued by way of a Summer Bible Soccer Camp (or baseball, basketball, or cricket camp), to teach certain skills in sports, introduce the Bible during the training breaks, and have some of the members connect with the parents/spectators and so establish relationships.

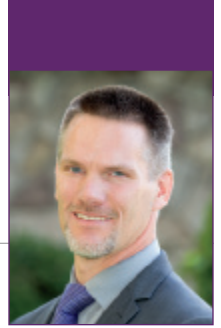
Depending on the circumstances and opportunities, volunteering in a hospital, old age home, food bank, soup

kitchen, orphanage, pregnancy care centre, and the like will also offer ample opportunity to become engaged in the lives of the people frequenting the place or living there. Thus, it supplies an opportunity to become acquainted, show interest, care, and compassion, and a willingness to help, guide, counsel, and advise people with the Word of God and to show his love for them in their broken lives!

As congregation it should also be possible to invite the neighbours in the vicinity of the church building to a pancake breakfast, a concert, or a choir performance, in order to meet them and connect with them. Another opportunity that is used in our congregation is a get-together of "Moms and Tots" or to come together with neighbours in the setting of "Coffee Break." As well, one of the sisters in our congregation was engaged in a "Neighbourhood Bible Study," a regular get-together of the women on her street developing relationships, enjoying each other's company, and introducing them to the Scriptures. As I wrote at the outset, the possibilities are endless and the opportunities countless for us to use a variety of relationships to reach out with the glorious gospel of God's love in Jesus Christ!

This article was based on material for a workshop given in South Africa; the article was originally printed in Kompas (magazine for the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa).





Reflections on the Western Failure to Defend Persecuted Christians

“Aid to the Church in Need” (ACN) states that the persecution of Christians today is worse than at any other time in history. As one example of such persecution, consider the statement in a report commissioned by the Foreign Secretary of the UK, Jeremy Hunt, and released around Easter 2019. It stated that, “A century ago Christians comprised 20 percent of the [Middle Eastern and North African] population. Today, they are less than 4 percent, an estimate of 15 million” (8). Why such a drastic change? One of the reasons for the increased oppression has been the less than helpful response of so many Western governments.

The stance of Western governments regarding the persecution of Christians in other countries has a significant impact on the intensity of the oppression of those Christians. The stronger the stance against and the greater the action in defense of persecuted Christians by the USA, the UK, and European countries, the greater the deterrent against persecution. But when Western governments say nothing or speak but refuse to act – and this especially happens when the left-leaning parties are in power – persecution always increases.

Foreign Secretary Hunt reflected on the reasons why the UK government had failed to speak up in the past decades.

First on his list was the concern for misguided imperialism. Brits with a guilty conscience for past abuses of their colonial subjects withdrew not only their pressure to be British and Christian, but even their insistence on fundamental human rights. They stopped asserting power altogether (overtly, at least). But this hands-off approach is leaving Christians undefended, tortured, and killed.

Secondly, Hunt mentioned the feeling in the West that Christians are all well-to-do, and should be left to fend for themselves. In fact, persecution happens against Christians who are the poorest of the poor throughout the world. The Bishop of Truro emphasized the same, stating that

Christianity is primarily a phenomenon of the global South and the global poor, and no longer at all limited to wealthy white Christians.

Thirdly, Hunt could have specified that left-leaning Western media disdain all things Christian and give a free pass to radical Islam. Many reporters and editors refuse even to consider the fact that Muslim terrorists read the Koran literally. Instead, most news outlets appear to think that accepting transgenderism truly is about human rights. In ignoring the plight of Christians and the roots of radical Islam, the media cut off the branch upon which they sit – freedom of expression is a Christian (and Enlightenment) gift; it does not exist in radical Islam.

One of the staff members in Hunt’s office who helped propel forward this UK study on persecution is an Ahmadi Muslim who had to flee Afghanistan due to persecution by fellow, more radical and fundamentalist Muslims. The Ahmadi sect arose in 1889 and comprises only one percent of the world’s Muslims, but they are the most peace-loving of all Muslims – the famous Nabeel Qureshi (1983–2017) discusses this as part of his own childhood in the book, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*. These Muslims truly are marginalized; in Pakistan, the Ahmadi are prohibited by law from self-identifying as Muslim. Consistent Christians should defend the fundamental human rights even of non-Christians who are persecuted for their faith, just as this man is helping to raise the plight of so many persecuted Christians.

Under God’s watch and in his plan, lately even our own Western governments have failed to help persecuted Christians. But Christianity is the religion of the cross. Yes, our Lord has ascended and is ruling, but the way to glory still is the cross; the eternal weight of glory is being produced by this light and momentary affliction (2 Cor 4:17). Are we willing to defend fellow suffering Christians, even if that means a bit more “suffering” for us? I pray that answer is yes. **C**



Allelulia! When Christ Was Raised

On the third day he arose from the dead.

1. Al - le - lu - lia! When Christ was raised
2. And by his power we too are raised
3. His res - ur - rec - tion prom - is - es

he con - quered death. Let him be praised!
un - to new lives by which he's praised.
and is a stead - fast pledge to us

He lets us share the right - eous - ness
No long - er in dead - but now a - live!
that we in glo - ry will be raised.

which he, in death, ob - tained for us.
For god - li - ness we'll al - ways strive.
Al - le - lu - ia! Let Christ be praised.

Text: QA 45, Heidelberg Catechism (Art. 5, Apostles' Creed) vers. George van Popta, 2019
Tune: César Malan (1787-1864)

LM
DAAR JUCHT EEN TOON



Clarion Kids

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

Jesus told a parable about a man who was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They took all of his things, hurt him, and ran away. A priest came by, but when he saw the man, he pretended not to see him and kept walking. The same thing happened when a Levite walked by the man. But then a Samaritan came by and felt sorry for the man. In Jesus' time, the Jews did not like the Samaritans and often treated them badly. But this Samaritan bandaged up the other man's injuries, put him on his donkey, and took him to an inn. He was the only one who treated the man as he should have.

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



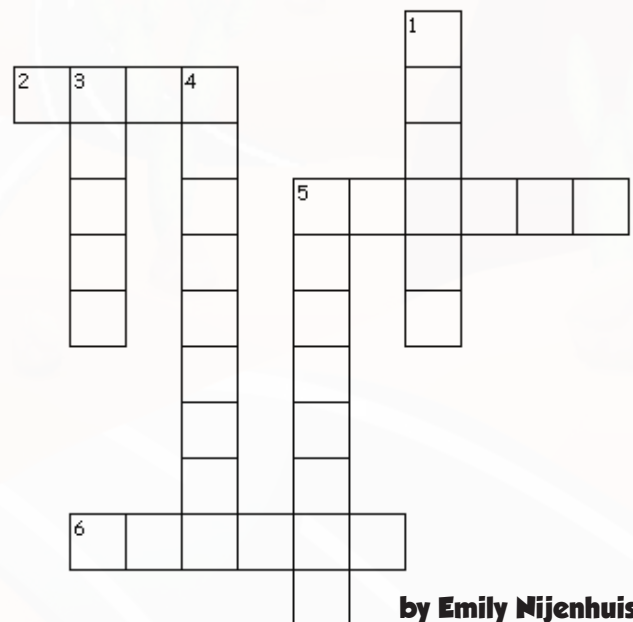
Crossword Puzzle: Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

Across

2. The people who did not like Samaritans.
5. One of the men who ignored the injured man was a _____.
6. The Samaritan put the injured man on his _____.

Down

1. The second man to pass by the injured traveller.
3. This story shows how important it is to help everyone, even our _____.
4. The man who helped the injured traveller.
5. Jesus told many meaningful stories called _____.



by Emily Nijenhuis

Phil Schuurman



Phil was born in Chatham on August 5, 1959. He has two brothers and four sisters whom he sees regularly. Before Phil came to live with us, he lived in many different places, and quite often when we are out and about, someone will say hi to Phil and say, "I know you! You used to live

here or there!" Phil moved in with our family over fifteen years ago. It's through a Family Home within the agency Bethesda.

And family is who Phil is to us. Phil watched our kids grow, get married, and start having families of their own. He is Uncle Phil to each one.

Phil loves his birthday, Christmas, and vacations! Phil loves belonging to a church plant in Niagara Falls, called River of Life, through the URC; his cousin is the pastor there. Phil loves helping with being a greeter and helping with the lunch dishes. Phil also loves to show the ladies his new corking project. Every Christmas, Phil cheerfully hands out these potholders to every lady that's in attendance that day.

Phil is a kind-hearted man who loves to have company over and to show off his library of DVDs in his room. He loves music and dancing and is eager to be off and about in whatever we are doing.

Phil attends a day program in Dunnville and has a flyer route that he does with his sister Barb. It's a joy to him to receive his paycheck every month and watch his money "go up and up!"

When my husband and I decided to be Family Home Providers, we never knew how blessed we would be by having this big Dutch guy who goes to church, has soup and buns, naps, and goes back to church. A perfect fit!

Phil is going to be sixty this year, and we pray that he has many more adventures and that we will continue to be a blessing to each other!

Roger and Katie Draastra

August Birthdays

4 **TERENCE BERENDS will be 43**

c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR 3 Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

5 **PHILIP SCHUURMAN will be 60**

1156 Diltz Road, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W2

9 **ROSE MALDA will be 62**

Mt. Nemo Christian Nursing Home
4486 Guelph Line, Burlington, ON L7P 0N2

23 **JACK DIELEMAN will be 47**

c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive, Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3

31 **KRISTI OOSTERHOFF will be 29**

c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive, Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3

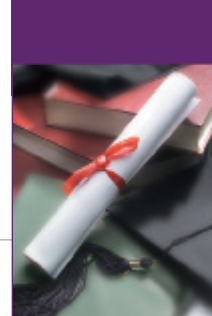
Happy birthday to Terence, Philip, Rose, Jack, and Kristi! We wish you all the Lord's blessing in the coming year. May you be a joy to everyone in your life, spreading the love of our Lord Jesus.

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

If there are any address or other changes that I need to be aware of please let me know as soon as possible.

Rachel Vis

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*Jordan is married to
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Metaphor as Education

Part 1: Education is Relational

Note from the author: The following article stresses the importance of relationships in learning, especially in terms of thinking and brain development, and is the first in a series of four that deals with Metaphor as Education. The other articles deal with Metaphor in Education, Technology and Relationships, and Metaphor and Empathy. Throughout the series, the term “metaphor” is used in a broad sense.

Standing in the empty conservation area parking lot, I held onto the hand of my five-year-old daughter. We were watching a large group of geese that were about five feet away. Looking at them, my daughter laughed, pointed, and said, “Their feet look like garbage bags!”

How interesting. The feet were jet black, textured, webbed, and a bit oily. But what made her draw that particular comparison? Why did her brain jump to this classification? Why relate geese feet and garbage bags?

Educational researchers have asked similar questions, because teachers want to know how their students learn. In fact, many teachers have taken courses to help them understand childhood brain development. Using educational research and building off the Bible as a foundation, it is sug-

gested that humans have been created to learn and develop through comparison and by forming relationships.

Assimilation vs accommodation

Some study in this field was done by a man named Jean Piaget, who studied cognitive development in children. The research shows that “Piaget’s interest in schemas focused on how children organize and make sense out of their current experiences.”¹ According to Piaget, the child’s brain responds basically in two ways to new situations: “Assimilation occurs when a child incorporates new knowledge into existing knowledge. . . . Accommodation occurs when a child adjusts to new information.”²

In other words, suppose that the brain is a bit like a closet. What is in the closet is the existing knowledge, or “schema.” A new experience or bit of information is like a new article of clothing. It must be placed in the closet. Where a new shirt is placed is called “assimilation” – fitting the shirt into the current scheme of things. But notice that a new shirt could cause the rest of the closet to shift as well. The other shirts may be shuffled over or rearranged to “accommodate” and make room for the new shirt. To my daughter, geese feet were placed next to garbage bags in her mental categorical closet (based more on looks than function, I believe).

Educate by scaffolding

Another concept worth noting is one from a man named Lev Vygotsky. He was interested in the “Zone of proximal development [ZPD]. . . [a] term for the range of tasks that are too difficult for children to master alone but that can be learned with guidance and assistance.”³ When we think a child is ready to begin riding a bike, we don’t say, “Here is a bike. Away you go, my son. Learn to ride now. Have fun.” Most children would be daunted by such a task. The amount



we are expecting them to learn on their own is too great. Training wheels and parents holding on to the bike are the ZPD. Children develop a skill more quickly when the challenge is neither too great nor too small. If the challenge is too small, there is no growth; if it is too great, it leaves the child directionless and unsure of how to begin.

In education, giving the right amount of help is important for growth. So, teachers use scaffolding, “a technique of changing the level of support”⁴ given to students. At first, a full example is given. Second, students help work through another example on the board, and finally the students attempt it on their own.

In order to process new ideas, it seems that the brain must connect to previous understanding. Fundamental to learning is connecting new thoughts to older ones. The ideas from Piaget show that when a child learns, the brain relates a new situation to previous experience. Vygotsky’s work shows that the amount of learning relates to the amount and type connection that is given. In both situations, the student is responding to their experiences by using previous knowledge.

Biblical analogies

A biblical analogy about learning yields yet another angle to learning through relationship: a plant grows in response to its environment. A good environment stimulates growth; a poor environment causes wilting. In the Bible, the plant analogy is also accompanied by a gardener. A good gardener knows what his plants need: a touch of water; a bit of shade; oh, pale leaves? Maybe some fertilizer. Just like plant growth can be modified by a gardener, learning depends not only upon previous knowledge and experience, but also on the relationship between learned and learner.

The biblical metaphor of the shepherd even more strongly suggests a two-way relationship for growth. In John 10, Jesus says, “But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. . . . When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” The sheep only follow the voice they trust. The good shepherd protects his sheep and makes sure they are fed.

The shepherd is not unlike the teacher. A teacher ought to change the level of support to increase growth and learning, and the shepherd makes adjustments to increase the health and growth of his flock. The sheep respond to the actions of the shepherd.

Learning relationships

There has been much writing in recent years on the importance of personal relationships in learning. One book about behavioural challenges by Ross Greene, *Lost at School*, claims that the key to solving behavioural issues is to take the “Collaborative Problem Solving” approach, which “helps adults and kids work together toward mutually satisfactory solutions so that both parties’ concerns are addressed.”⁵ Unless there is a working, respectful relationship between the student and the teacher, very little learning will be accomplished.

Another book by Christian author Al Bandstra emphasizes relationships between people as well. He speaks of creating a healthy Christian climate in the classroom. He says that “the way teachers relate to their students and the ways students relate to each other are key factors in the climate of a classroom.”⁶ In addition, he states, “Climate-sensitive teachers pay attention to the attitudes of the students.”⁷ If a student mocks the answer given by a peer, the disrespect changes the classroom atmosphere. Other students will perhaps feel less inclined to share answers. In addition, the student who has done the mocking is developing a destructive habit. But teachers and students who deftly encourage other students stimulate a joyful and safe climate. It is not only the subject matter of the course that affects the amount of learning in a classroom, but also the relationship between teacher and students.

Since we were created as relational beings, it naturally follows that we learn through our personal connections. Solomon makes clear in Proverbs that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” This proverb shows us that all understanding is rooted in a relationship with God. Ultimately this is where learning begins.

The relationships that provide the context for learning can be placed in two broad categories. The first category deals with “thought” relationships, or how our brains connect with previous knowledge. The second category deals with the personal relationships we have while we are learning.

Whether it is the way we organize knowledge in our brain, what we know from before, or whether it is how knowledge and skills are taught, who is teaching us, and which perspective we value, learning depends upon our connections. Education is relational. The amount of learning that is to be done depends upon the quality, quantity, and type of relationships that a child has.

What of geese feet and garbage bags? Knowing that the brain deals with new information in a relational way suggests that my daughter’s metaphor showed a moment of growth; a

moment of connection. More important than linking geese feet and garbage bags is the expansion of her mental closet. Even in a new context, if we can find something to relate to, we can begin to comprehend what is around us. The next article will focus more on how our brains make connections than on how to form personal relationships. Ultimately, metaphors are the language of comparison. And comparison provides the context for understanding.

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.

¹ Santrock, John, Vera Woloshyn, Tiffany Gallagher, Tony Di Petta, and Zopito Marini. 2007. *Educational Psychology*. 2nd CND, p. 41.

² Ibid

³ Ibid, p. 46

⁴ Ibid, p. 47

⁵ Greene, Ross W. 2009. *Lost at School*. New York, New York: Scribner, p. 53.

⁶ Bandstra, Alan. 2014. *Beyond Control: Heart-Centered Classroom Climate and Discipline*. Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College Press, p. 5.

⁷ Ibid.



YOU ASKED

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Q Is There Still Shame in Sin?

A while ago I heard a quote like this: "It is blasphemy to be ashamed of sin, since we ought to live in the freedom God has given us." We discussed it as family and weren't able to come to a conclusion on what that meant. My confusion is less on the sin but more on the "shame" part of sin.

A From the very beginning of the fall into sin, shame and sin have been one. When Adam and Eve disobeyed the command of God, they immediately felt ashamed about their nakedness. Shame is a reaction in man upon his consciousness of wrongdoing. Sin and shame are inseparably united when man becomes conscious of the fact also that sin brings on guilt. Subsequently sin, shame, and guilt show in brokenness between God and the sinner, which shows in man's

fear of God and man's hiding from God. This consciousness of sin and guilt gives a sense of shame in man's conscience, which causes him to flee from God. This effect of shame on man's conscience shows what conscience is: "con-science," i.e., God and man together (*con*) know (*sci-ence*) that sin was committed, which makes man guilty and condemnable before God!

As we confess regarding the New Testament believer in Lord's Day 23, "My conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God's commandments, have never kept any of them, and am still inclined to all evil." It's espe-

cially the regenerated believer who knows his sin and misery so well, whose conscience is keenly aware of God's will, God's commandment, who will be *ashamed* of his sin. Christ died for his sin, paid for his sin, and delivered him from sin. Hence, with the apostle Paul's despair about the fact that "what I want to do I don't do and what I don't want to do I do," the believer's *shame* is expressed in the words, "wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?!"

Then we may find great comfort in the exclamation, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Indeed, he has born our sin and shame. He has delivered us from guilt and condemnation. Yet, that doesn't mean that we don't sin anymore (1 John 1:8-10), and even less that if we sin, we don't feel *ashamed* any longer. On the contrary, the redeemed and forgiven sinner feels *shame* even more; however, he now doesn't need to flee *from* God but may flee *to* God with his sin! God is gracious, as he showed already in Paradise in his coming to Adam and Eve, and as he has shown to us in his coming to us in Jesus Christ! Yet, then we still need to be exhorted not to live in sin again and grieve the Holy Spirit.

As Paul states in Ephesians 5:12 (and in 1 Corinthians 14:35), it's still a *shame* to hear and know how some are indulging in sin. Yes, as he writes the Galatians (5:13), there are those who use their freedom in Christ as an opportunity for the flesh. The Holy Spirit, however, is constantly busy with God's children to lead them to live in newness of life. We are called to be in step with the Spirit. However, when Christians do not live holy lives, but condone all sorts of sins, they grieve the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4 shows how: an unchristian walk of life (17), speaking falsely (25), being angry (26), stealing (28), using corrupting talk (29), and allowing bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and slander (31). Then we confess in Canons of Dort (V/5) that sin has serious consequences such as incurring God's displeasure, grieving the Holy Spirit, depriving a measure of grace and comfort, hardening the heart, wounding the conscience, hurting others, and bringing temporal judgment. In one word, such sinning should lead to one thing time and again: *shame*! "Until they return to the right way through sincere repentance and God's fatherly face again shines upon them."



Is there something you've been wanting to know?

An answer you've been looking for?

Ask us a question!

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

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