

Clarion



What's Inside

Being focused on the solution – and, more specifically, finding solutions – rather than the problem is important in the business world. What Dr. Jason Van Vliet writes about in his lead article, however, is whether that same principle applies beyond the workplace. Is it a scriptural principle to strive to be a solution-provider?

Over the past number of issues, Clarion has been running a series by Dr. Cornelis Van Dam: "Being a Christian." Here we publish his fifth and final part, "The Cost of Being a Christian." We also have an article by our editor, Dr. James Visscher, on the character and place of the second Sunday worship service, particularly with a view to the Catechism.

Issue 19 also brings readers a Treasures, New & Old meditation, the Ray of Sunshine column, and MERF newsletter.

Laura Veenendaal

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Clarion

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LEAD ARTICLE



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Solution Providers

Some time ago I spoke with a man who had retired from managing a good-sized business. He reflected on some of the ups and downs of his career. One thing he mentioned stuck with me. Here is my paraphrase of his comment.

When I first started in management, employees often came to me with many problems – problems with customers, with workflow, with fellow employees. I spent many hours coming up with solutions to overcome all these obstacles. At a certain point, I changed my approach. If an employee came with a problem, I listened carefully, acknowledged the issue, posed a few questions to circumscribe the difficulty more carefully, and then asked the employee to return to his or her desk and to think of two or three possible solutions. With potential solutions in mind, they were welcome to return to my office at which point we would discuss the ideas and together choose the best one.

This man also indicated that, after this change in management style, his business ran better, and his own days were more enjoyable. Could aspects of this approach be applied more generally, beyond the workplace? More importantly, is it grounded in scriptural principles? Here are some further reflections.

Designing solutions is hard work

Perhaps you yourself have experienced the following scenario. You are part of a committee. You agree to tackle a certain problem and propose a solution at your next meeting. One month later your fellow committee members subject your well-crafted solution to a few rounds of

We have Christ-focused motivation to be a solution provider

criticism, pointing out all its weaknesses and warts. But no one suggests a better alternative either; all they do is criticize. Disheartening, isn't it?

Usually your colleagues are not trying to be unkind to you. It is just that coming up with solutions – or better solutions – can take a lot of time and effort. This fallen world is a miserably messy place. Untangling the strands of yarn that our sinful natures twist into knots requires insight, wisdom, creativity, and often more than one try. That adds up to a fair amount of mental sweat. By contrast, pointing out a weakness is a walk in the park.

So, like water, we naturally chose the path of least resistance and default to pointing out problems and obstacles. This is

easier, but is it right? Better said, does God's Word motivate us to also do the tough slugging of proposing solutions?

The golden rule applies

Here are the familiar words of our Saviour Jesus Christ: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 7:12). So, when you are stuck with heavy burden or a sticky situation, what do you wish? Don't we all wish that some genuinely helpful person would come along and say, "I've been through a similar situation before and here's what I did" or "Why don't you consider trying this"?



Even if it is not the silver bullet that solves everything, it is already encouraging that someone else cared enough to step forward and suggest a (partial) solution. It gives you a sense of relief. Now you have something new to consider. It also provides you with the assurance that you are not in it all alone. A team of at least two people is working together to make things better.

When we are stuck, we appreciate others who offer solutions – sincerely and humbly, without meddling or micromanaging. Therefore, our Saviour commands, “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.” Rather than simply pointing out all the obstacles and omissions, be a solution provider – sincerely and humbly, without meddling or micromanaging.

Far from being yet one more tip from a business management seminar, this is a sovereign command from our Beloved Redeemer, who died and rose for our eternal salvation. That gives us Christ-focused motivation to be a solution provider, not just at our workplaces, but also in our congregations and our communities, in our marriages and our families.

Taking this a step further, our Lord’s Golden Rule concludes with this often-overlooked phrase: “For this is the Law and the Prophets.” In other words, this command is a summary and fulfilment of the entire collection of regulations and exhortations in the Old Testament. That is quite a concentration of divine revelation! Earlier in his Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17). So, the whole Old Testament finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, and now he, as the culminating summit of the law (Rom 10:4), says to all of us, “Whatever you wish others would do for you, do also to them.”

Clearly, providing solutions is not just for those who have a special knack for it. This command from Christ stands front and centre in sanctified, Spirit-enabled living.

Like father, like children

The fifth chapter of Ephesians begins with this awe-inspiring instruction: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” Within the context of Scripture, this makes perfect sense. In the beginning we were created in God’s image and likeness. Through the sin of our first parents, we became the polar opposite of God’s goodness, being totally unable to do any good and inclined to all evil, unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God (LD 3).

Yet, that is also the point. As those who are being regenerated by the Spirit of God, we are being refashioned once more after the image of our Creator (Col 3:8). As God’s adopted children, our calling now is to be “imitators of God,” as overwhelming as that mandate may be. We will certainly need the Spirit of Christ to work this in us!


This leads, then, to another question. Does God offer criticism or provide solutions? Asking the question in that way forces us into a false dilemma, which should be avoided. Consider the experience of Adam and Eve. God did criticize their conduct. “Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen 3:11) But immediately thereafter our heavenly Father also provided a solution in the so-called *protoevangelium*, his first gospel announcement: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15).

More broadly, through his law our LORD exposes all our flaws and failings. But he never stops there. By shining light on our every sin, he leads us toward his ultimate solution, the atoning work of his Son applied in our lives through the loving power of his Spirit.

In Article 17 of the Belgic Confession, we affirm:

When God saw that man has thus plunged himself into physical and spiritual death and made himself completely miserable [yes, that is our problem! JVV], our gracious God in his marvellous wisdom and goodness set out to seek man when he trembling fled from him. He comforted him with the promise that he would give him his Son, born of woman, to crush the head of the serpent and to make man blessed [yes, this is the solution! JVV].

We cannot, indeed, we may not, imitate our God in the sense that we attempt to duplicate our Lord’s saving work. But by the strength of the Spirit, we can, indeed we must, imitate our God in this way: when we notice shortcomings in the plans and labours of others, then *like our heavenly Father* we do not stop merely with a word of well-intentioned criticism, but we also step ahead together with them and point to a better way forward.

Of course, our God did far more than suggest a solution. He both planned and accomplished our salvation. We are not God. We will not always accomplish solutions to our all problems. Still, be imitators of God. Like Father, like children. It begins with the initiative of love for others, obeying our Saviour’s golden command. Then we prayerfully commit the outcome to his sovereign and gracious guidance. 

Healed by the Name of Jesus Christ

*"I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you.
In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"*
(ACTS 3:1-16)

The man had been lame from birth. Acts 4:22 tells us that he was more than forty years old. He had weak feet and ankles and could not walk. Every day some friends carried him to one of the temple gates where he would lie and beg money from people entering the temple.

The gate was called Beautiful, but what a contrast. A poor, sick wretch, unable to walk begging at the Beautiful gate! This lame man was a sign of the ugliness of sin. The Lord was not punishing him for any specific sin – he had been lame from birth – and yet his poor health was a symptom of the brokenness of life caused by the sin of man. If man had not sinned, there would be no sickness.

Peter and John were going to the temple to pray when the lame man asked them for money. Peter looked at him and said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" Peter took hold of the man's right hand and pulled him to his feet. The man could walk. For the first time in his life he walked. He entered the temple with Peter and John, walking and jumping and praising God.

The people recognized him, and were amazed. Peter seized the opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He pointed out that neither he nor John had healed the man by their own power or piety; rather, the man was made well by the name of Jesus Christ. The Author of life had healed the man.

The Jews of the day had killed Jesus, the Holy and Righteous One. They asked for Barabbas, a murderer, and killed the Author of life. But God raised him from the dead.

The Lord Jesus, the Author of life, is the great Physician. He heals us of our illnesses. He took our illnesses upon himself. The Lord gave this man "perfect health" (v. 16).

How many of us have perfect health? Not many. I know that I don't. We struggle with illness, disease, mental and physical weakness, paralysis. The Lord will heal us, although not necessarily in this age. The Lord often calls his people to struggle with

illness. The apostle Paul, who himself had the gift of healing, was not able to heal himself of the thorn in his flesh. He had to bear it for the sake of Christ. His friend Epaphroditus became so ill once that he almost died (Phil 2:27). Paul had to leave his fellow worker Trophimus ill at Miletus (2 Tim 4:20).

The apostles could not use the gifts of healing whenever they pleased. Today, the Lord Jesus, the merciful Physician, will let some of us remain ill. In his great wisdom he will not heal us in this age so that the wonderful works of God might be made manifest on the day of the Lord's return.

We have the promise that he will give us perfect health in the age to come. He has borne our illnesses. He will glorify his name by giving us complete health. We will run and jump, we will walk and leap, we will praise the name of Jesus Christ in the temple of God forever.

*Hear him, you deaf; you voiceless ones,
Your loosened tongues employ;
You blind, behold your Saviour come;
And leap, you lame, for joy!*
Hymn 81:6 (Book of Praise) ☐

For Further Study

1. Why was the man in John 9:3 born blind? How could that truth shed some light on your suffering?
2. Why was Paul given a thorn in his flesh (2 Cor 12:7)? How ought we to respond to the thorns we are given?
3. How can Isaiah 40:30-31 be of an encouragement to you?



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The Cost of Being a Christian⁽⁴⁾

In previous articles we have been considering the situation of the early Christians in the Roman Empire and reflecting on what we can learn from their experiences as believers who sought to be faithful as prophets, priests, and kings within a pagan culture. One standout feature of their lives was the constant threat of persecution for not being loyal to the imperial religion. The mere fact that you were a Christian made you suspect of disloyalty or worse.

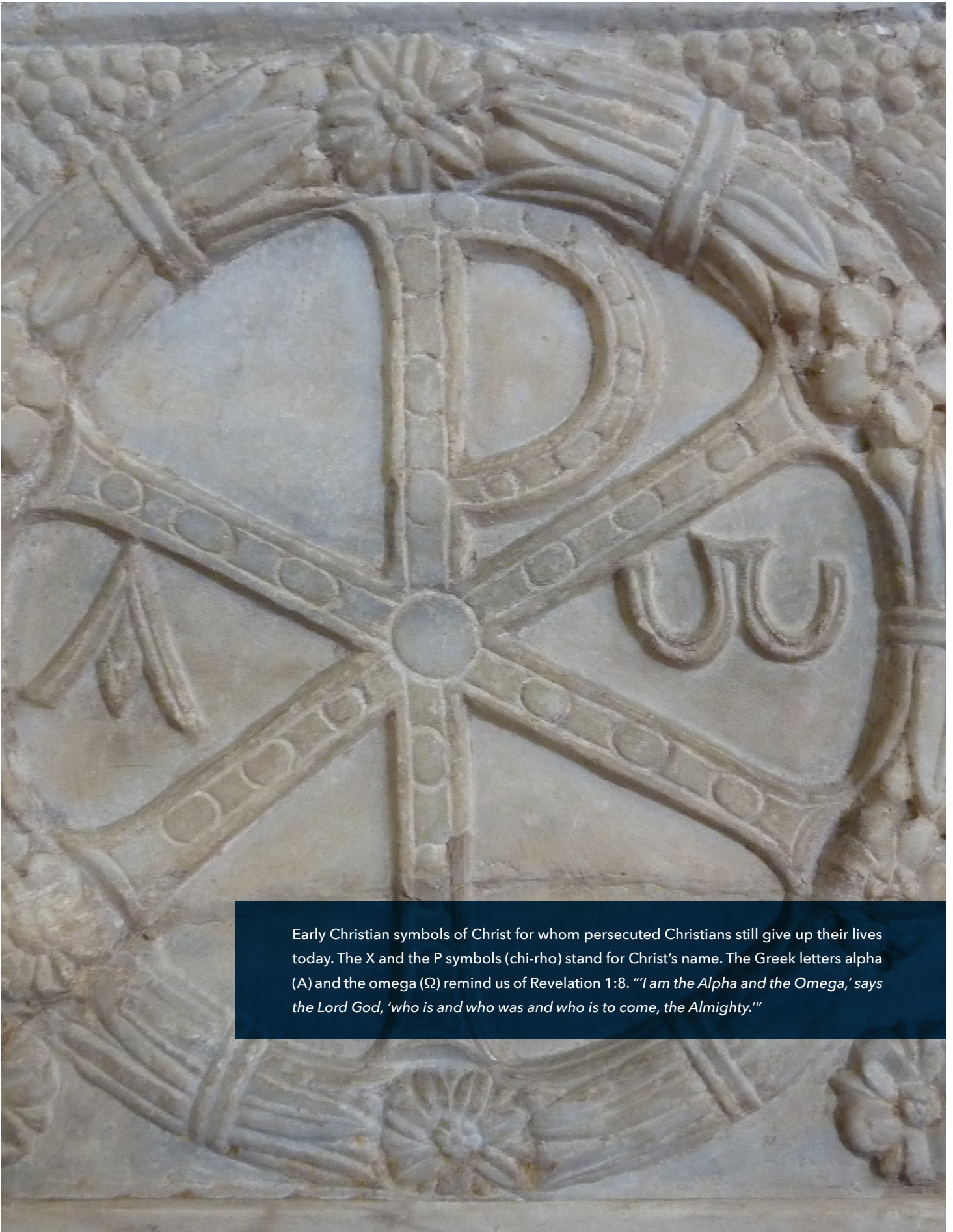
The reality of persecution

Our situation today as Christians is obviously not the same as in the days of the Roman Empire. Those living in the Western world do not suffer the kind of persecution that Christians

did in the centuries after Pentecost. We also have freedoms unheard of in classical times that give some protection against unjust harassment.

This situation can change of course. Christians suffer enormously in countries like North Korea, China, and some Muslim-majority nations. There is no guarantee that Christians will not experience oppression and jail time in the West. It has as a matter of fact already happened. Although legal issues are sometimes difficult to disentangle, it remains a fact that long-time pro-life activists have been jailed from time to time, sometimes repeatedly for minor offenses.¹ A Canadian father who objected to the decision of his fourteen year-old daughter to undergo medical treatments to become a male had to

¹ See, e.g., for Canada, Kaiden McIntyre and Peter Bowal, "The Story of Linda Gibbons." Found in <https://www.lawnow.org/the-story-of-linda-gibbons/> (dated January 4, 2017).



Early Christian symbols of Christ for whom persecuted Christians still give up their lives today. The X and the P symbols (chi-rho) stand for Christ's name. The Greek letters alpha (A) and the omega (Ω) remind us of Revelation 1:8. *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'"*

Are we prepared to pay the price of being a Christian?

endure six months in jail.ⁱⁱ In Finland, the Prosecutor General has brought criminal charges against a politician and a church leader for holding to the biblical view on sex and marriage.ⁱⁱⁱ Such developments would have been unthinkable just a few decades ago when Christian influence on Western society was stronger.

Yet, to be oppressed for being a Christian is, in a sense, normal. Christ warned that those who believed in him would face hostility and persecution (John 15:19-20), but he also said: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:10). The Lord God will give the necessary faith and courage for his children who trust in him so that they can stand up to the challenges of an unbelieving culture. As he blessed the first Christians who put their trust in him and confessed him regardless of the consequences, he will also bless us today when we meet opposition and even persecution.

In a pagan culture, only true Christianity will survive. As Derek Thomas perceptively noted: "Sooner or later, nominal Christianity will accommodate itself to the pagan culture; it will adopt its values and conform to its levels of acceptability.... The result will be that such Christianity will itself become increasingly pagan."^{iv}

Are we prepared to pay the price of being a Christian? It is noteworthy that when the empire-wide Decian persecution started, Cyprian, to his horror, saw how quickly many denied the faith even though Scripture had said that there would be oppression. In his treatise, *The Lapsed* (§7) he wrote: "Immediately at the first words of the threatening enemy a very large number of the brethren betrayed their faith, and were laid low not by the attack of persecution, rather they laid themselves low by their voluntary lapse." There were obviously several factors contributing to this abandonment of the faith, but the main one seems to have been an unsound relationship to the world. Cyprian lamented the worldliness as seen in materialism, vanity, intermarriage, and worldly clergy. When faced with a choice for or against Christ, they choose the way of least resistance. The church was simply not prepared, and its leadership had not made the church ready for oppression. This is a sober reminder for us to be prepared. The apostle Paul warned that "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12). This warning implies that Christians should have a visible presence. An invisible Christian cannot be harassed.

In the world, but not of the world

It is noteworthy that in his high priestly prayer Christ did not pray for the Father to take believers out of the world that hates them but that they be kept safe from clutches of the evil one. They belong to the Son, and Satan must not have them (John 17:14-15). To that end, Christ also prayed: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). With this petition, our Savior asked the Father to confirm our separateness from the world as Christians, since we are to be consecrated, sanctified, to holy service in accordance with the word of truth, the Scriptures. With the agency of the Spirit, the Word is to be our guide for holy living and for developing a godly culture that challenges the decadent one of this passing age. Living counter-culturally that calls into question and disputes the dominant sinful norms while providing a godly alternative will evoke a response from the evil one. That can even include possible persecution. But

ⁱⁱ Erin Perse, "Father Jailed After Referring to Biological Female Child as His Daughter."

Found at <https://thepostmillennial.com/rob-hoogland-canada-prisoner-of-conscience> (dated at March 16, 2021).

ⁱⁱⁱ Julian Mann, "A Finnish Politician is facing jail for her Biblical Beliefs" *Christianity Today* May 2, 2021.

^{iv} Derek W.H. Thomas, *Acts, Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 324.

we must not hold back on that account. Early Christians, like the apostles, even rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” of Christ (Acts 5:41). Peter also exhorted: “Rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings” (1 Pet 4:13). The point is that suffering should not be a reason for bitterness, but as evidence that our reward will be great in heaven (Matt 5:11–12).

In this context it is good to remember that the thriving and growth of Christianity does not depend on being in a society that has a Christian heritage. The history of the last centuries of what has been called Christendom has shown an overall steady decline of biblical Christianity in the Western world. On the other hand, the history of the early Christian church shows that the church can flourish within a hostile environment. The same can be said of the current flourishing of Christianity within the China in spite of the attempts of the communist dictatorship to crush it.

In conclusion


Christians today face challenges not unlike those that the early Christian church had to contend with in the first centuries after Pentecost. But, like them, we can be encouraged by the fact that the Lord who equipped his people in the past to stand up to the wiles of Satan and to testify to his name and salvation has promised to do the same today. On his departure into heaven, he declared: “I am with you always to the end of the age” (Matt 24:20). The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a fulfillment of that promise.

The Lord made it clear that he expects his people to use the gifts and abilities he has given them in his service. The gifts vary, but the responsibility to use them is the same (Matt 25:14–30). However, all Christians have in common the gift of the enabling Spirit so that they may share in Christ’s anointing in his prophetic, priestly, and royal offices. The early Christian church gives us examples of how we may exercise those responsibilities. It may be useful in conclusion to summarize some highlights.

In fulfilling our prophetic office, we need to simply confess that we are Christians and let the chips fall where they may. Identifying with Christ and the Good News is foolishness to an unbelieving world, but it is the power of new life for those who believe (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18). Confessing Christ has ramifications and consequences in all of life. Similarly, as those sharing Christ’s priestly office, we exhibit the love and compassion he

has shown to others by being considerate, charitable, helping the poor, and following government health guidelines during a pandemic out of love for our neighbor. In this way we give ourselves wholeheartedly in a sacrificial life of thanksgiving. At the same time, we show that we belong to the victorious King by sharing his royal office. We denounce sin in our own life and in the life of our nation. We detest the evil one and his demons but show compassion to those enslaved by sin and try to show them the freedom of the gospel.

When we seek to live up to Christ’s expectations for our life, then our testimony has impact. Christ said that Christians are the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13). Salt seeks to preserve and fights deterioration and decay. But it acts very slowly and almost unnoticeably. A little at a time. If our witness to the truth of the gospel does not bear immediate fruit, we must not be disappointed, but be patient. You cannot rush the effects of being salt of the earth. Believers are also “the light of the world” with the mandate “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:14, 16). By showing the light of the gospel through our walk and talk, we also give hope to the despairing. The apostle Paul characterized children of God as being “in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life” (Phil 2:15). “Walk as children of light” (Eph 5:8), indeed, as those sharing in the anointing of the light of the world, Jesus Christ (John 8:12).

The example of the early Christian church underlined the importance of exercising patience. Christ said that a Christian witness and life works like leaven. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened” (Matt 13:34). Leaven has an effect through slow fermentation. It also takes time and patience for the effects of the gospel to be felt. Good to keep in mind lest we become too easily discouraged. After all, as we have seen, a dominant characteristic of a Christian must be joy – a joy in the Lord whose promises will all be fulfilled! 



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The Second Sunday Service and the Catechism

This article was originally prepared in 2006 for *Diakonia*

At a recent local ministerial of Reformed pastors in the Fraser Valley, a discussion was being held on continuing education in the church when the character and place of the second worship service was raised. It was mentioned that originally, in the life of the Reformed churches in Europe, the second worship service was more of a teaching service. When further clarity was requested on this, one of the colleagues present mentioned that he knew of an article that shed some light on this subject. He could not remember the author, name, or magazine but he would get back to us, and he did.

The article that he was thinking of first appeared in *Calvin Theological Journal*, volume 32 (1997), pp. 298-333. It was written by Donald Sinnema and was entitled "The Second Sunday Service in the Early Dutch Reformed Tradition."

Upon being told about it, I went to a local library, tracked it down, photocopied it, and read it. It made for interesting and insightful reading. What follows is the concluding summary of that article:

The second service in the early Dutch Reformed tradition was from the beginning a catechism service, following the pattern of such services in Reformed churches elsewhere, especially in the Palatinate and in London. It was the second of only two regular services held on Sundays, although there were also some weekday services. It was held in the afternoon, which is to be expected in an age before modern lighting made evening services viable.

In the Netherlands, this catechism service was the earliest and only means of catechizing youth in the church, at least until the latter years of the sixteenth century, although support was

It is my hope to create some serious reflection and discussion on the nature and character of the second worship service as a teaching service.

expected from catechizing in the school and the home. Separate catechizing of youth by a pastor only began to appear in the late sixteenth century in places where there was no schoolmaster to catechize, and later with short-term preconfession classes to prepare those seeking admission to the Lord's Supper. Separate catechizing in the church then began to flourish in the seventeenth century, especially under the influence of the *Nadere Reformatie* or Dutch pietism, after it was realized, particularly at the Synod of Dort, that the catechism services did not effectively catechize youth.

Within a decade or two after the Reformed churches appeared on the scene in the Netherlands the afternoon catechism service rather quickly became a common practice, especially in city churches. Gouda was the notable exception. It was difficult to establish the second service in rural areas, however, for various reasons, including shared pastorates and a common rural disregard for Sabbath keeping because of work and Sunday amusements. Yet, evidence suggests that gradually this service was held in more and more churches, especially after it was prescribed by the 1586 Church Order of The Hague. Even the silence on this matter in the acts of many provincial synods can often best be understood to indicate no major problem then existed, since the synods generally responded to problems in implementing church order policy. The catechism service then suffered during the Arminian controversy but was revived after the Synod of Dort.

Nevertheless, a widely available afternoon service did not guarantee its success. The fact that a service was held did not mean that many people attended. This appears to have been a greater problem than a neglect in having the services. In some cases, a lack of attendance led pastors to give up holding the service. The issue of neglect in offering the second service the synods could deal with. They rather effectively used their synodical authority with all its available means, including synodical

deputies, classical visitors, and threat of ecclesiastical censure, to insist that all churches hold these services. The issue of attendance was quite another matter. It could not be legislated, although on occasion the synods, even Dort, appealed to government authorities to prohibit activities that violated the holiness of the Lord's Day. This was considered a matter of state authority. Though Sunday laws were enacted, they were often not enforced at the local level.

As for the character of the second service in the early Dutch tradition, it was first of all didactic, a teaching service focused on instilling Reformed doctrine, quite distinct from the morning preaching service that centered on a sermon directly expositing the Bible. This didactic character is readily understandable, given the fact that in early years the catechism service was the only means of catechizing in the church. Thus it was geared especially to the youth, and the local schoolmaster was expected to accompany them to this service, although adults were also present and could also benefit from hearing the Catechism taught.

The didactic character of the second service is also evident from its basic liturgy. In its early form it typically included reading of the five or six hooftstukken of the Christian religion on which the Catechism was based, reciting by several children of answers to the Catechism questions, and reading of the questions and answers of the Lord's Day section to be treated in the sermon as well as the actual catechism sermon, which was an explanation of the Catechism, rather than a direct exposition of Scripture. Since the church orders of The Hague and of Dort did not prescribe a precise liturgy, some freedom was allowed in the number and order of elements in the service. Prayer and Psalm singing were probably also included.

A significant challenge to this typical early form of the second service came from the Arminians who wanted a pertinent Bible text read before the sermon to make it clear that the teachings explained in the sermon were based on Scripture. Dort

addressed this issue, but did not prescribe the addition of such a text to the liturgy; it only allowed this in places where this liturgical usage was already practiced. The South Holland synod had opted to add the Scripture reading already before Dort and was the first to prescribe it.

Later changes to the second service would also weaken its original didactic character. The reading of all the hooftstukken would be dropped. And with the introduction of special catechizing outside of the second service, a key didactic feature, the reciting of the catechism answers, could be removed from the second service and transferred to that context. When these changes eventually occurred, the second service more clearly became a service of the Word.

(Note: *Hooftstukken* is a Dutch word referring to the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the institution of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.)

Readers of this magazine who are especially curious about this topic may want to read the whole article and not just the summary that I have quoted above. In any case, whether in whole or in summary, this article makes for interesting reading and it both raises and clarifies certain matters.

The character of the second service

For one, it highlights the fact that from its very beginnings in the Dutch Reformed Churches the second worship service on the Lord's Day was meant to be a didactic or teaching service. The use of the Catechism by the minister, the interaction of the minister and the young people, the recitation of the "*hooftstukken*" and parts of the Catechism by the youth, all testified to this didactic thrust.

As well this article highlights the close cooperation that existed in the past between the church, the home, and the school when it came to catechetical instruction. One even notes the involvement of the state, although that raises an entirely different issue, namely church-state relations.

Another interesting aspect here relates to the fact that it took some time before all of the churches came onside in this matter, and that in the end this only happened as the result of persistent reminder, as well as gentle and not so gentle persuasion.


Aside from these and other points of interest, an article such as this also brings several other issues to the fore. First of all, there is the question of whether it is proper to hold a catechetical-type service in the morning or as the first service of the Lord's Day? Up until now, as far as I am aware, local churches

exercise some freedom in this. While it is normal to have catechism preaching in the afternoon, it may on occasion be done in the morning instead. However, if the two worship services are considered to be distinct from one another with the first being more kerygmatic and the second didactic, is it not improper to alternate or switch the order?

Secondly, if the second service is to be of a decidedly didactic nature, one may ask if our current practice is not a step back from this. In many of our churches there is no discernible difference between the first and second worship service except that in the second Creed replaces Commandment and Catechism question and answer seems to replace Scripture text. Long gone are the practices of having the children recite their answers publicly before the congregation or of their being questioned from the pulpit by the minister.

Now, I am not suggesting or urging that such practices be restored; however, I am wondering whether or not our second service is still truly didactic. If not, should attempts be made to make it more so or should it be allowed to become more and more like the first worship service? Also, and if not, what changes would bring the second service back to its original intention? In this regard one can think of congregational interaction with the minister in the reading of the Catechism text, the memorization of the Catechism by the whole congregation, the use of handouts, as well as brief and simplified explanations of the Heidelberg, and even more singing. More controversial would be the use of overheads and PowerPoint presentations to complement the preaching/teaching, as well as the inauguration of a discussion time during or after the service.

In bringing all of this to the fore, it is not my intention to create unrest or to promote wholesale change; however, it is my hope to create some serious reflection and discussion on the nature and character of the second worship service as a teaching service.

Dear reader, if this topic has your interest and you have some constructive comments or suggestions to make, it would be nice to hear from you on this matter. 



James Visscher *Minister emeritus*
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Nelena Hofsink



Hello! My name is Nelena Hofsink. I am now sixty years old!

I live in Bethesda Clearbrook Home, and have enjoyed living here for about forty-five years. I visit my family in Smithers whenever I can, but was unable to do so for a long time because of COVID. Recently I made the trip to see my family for ten days and it was so wonderful to spend time with them again! God is good to me. He has given me a wonderful home and a loving family. Although I miss them a lot, we keep in touch. Every week I try to call my Mom and each sibling for a chat! We talk about fond memories, my great nieces and nephews, singing together, watching movies, and going for walks.

I enjoy spending time with my friends here in Bethesda, and my hobbies are puzzling, rug-hooking, and knitting. I listen to music on my iPad, and love to watch the Little House on the Prairies series.

A big "Thank You" to all who have sent me cards over the years! I love receiving them in the mail and feel blessed!

Nelena

October Birthdays

3 Janell DeBoer will be **30**

6311 Silver Street RR 2
St. Ann's, ON LOR 1YO
Email: janell.db90@gmail.com

3 Jeanette Wieringa will be **25**

610 Belsyde Avenue East RR 4
Fergus, ON N1M 2W5

6 Henry Vander Vliet will be **53**

c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

8 Lindsay Kottelenberg will be **30**

6528 1st Line RR 3
Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

13 Nancy Schipper will be **64**

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

17 Alan Breukelman will be **54**

2225 19th Street
Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

21 Cameron Dantuma will be **28**

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

22 Nelena Hofsink will be **60**

Bethesda Clearbrook Home
32553 Willingdon Cr.
Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2

28 Mary Ann De Wit will be **64**

#4 6560 Vedder Road
Chilliwack, BC V2T 5K4

Happy Birthday to all of you celebrating a birthday in October! We wish you the Lord's blessing in the year ahead and a wonderful day with family and friends.

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS If there are any address changes that I need to be aware of please let me know as soon as possible.

Rachel Vis >> 731 Lincoln Street, Wellandport, Ontario LOR 2J0 | tom.rachelvis@gmail.com | 905-329-9476



www.merf.org

MERF News

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

August 2021



From Hate to Joy!



AD of a Gulf State was an arch-enemy of Christ. He directed his hatred and animosity against those he considered "Christian." He says that for about twelve years he focused his efforts on two things – attacking what Christians believe about Christ and the Bible and seeking to persuade Christians to convert to Islam. He also believed in the legitimacy of violent "Jihad" (fight against the enemies of Islam), though he never felt comfortable to personally practice it.

He gave an example of his former Jihadist convictions: A few years ago, when French journalists were massacred because their magazine published pictures

of the Muslim prophet—"I went out and celebrated with my friends and discussed ways to support the families of the murderers." He also confessed that he made generous contributions to Islamist militants seeking to establish Islamic states in Tunisia, Libya and Syria.

Celebrating Death

One day he exuberantly celebrated the killing of tens of rival Shiite Muslims in Iraq by a Sunni Muslim suicide bomber. When he got home, he was disturbed to see his wife and her sister shaken and crying as they watched on TV the horrible scenes of the carnage in a busy Baghdad neighborhood. Later his wife's father

and mother came for dinner with the family. So, he complained that their daughters seemed "displeased by the murder of infidels." Their reaction shocked him. Both were angry that he rejoiced in the death of innocent people and the sufferings of their loved ones.

His wife then said something that eventually shook his whole belief system. She tearfully said, "What if this happens to my husband and I become a widow and our baby daughter becomes an orphan?" This brought total silence.

Disturbed Soul

AD shared that for many days and nights he was totally lost in thought. On

his own, he began to ask questions such as: "Does Allah truly require violent actions of Jihad? Is Allah a true God? What if I were born Shiite or Christian? What about the children who were killed and those who lost father or mother in the Baghdad carnage?"

He says, "I lost interest in reciting the Koran and no longer zealously performed daily prayer rituals. I stopped socializing with my fanatical friends."

Gradually, AD became a secret atheist and developed some peace about his new conviction. He would go for a long walk in the mall and return home pretending that, as usual, he was with his friends in the mosque.

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Continued on back



Providence Not Chance

One evening while going out to watch a movie alone, he met OM, a distant relative. Before, he had always despised him due to his lack of religious devotion, although he had noticed that OM always seemed peaceful and contented. This time, he felt an urge to converse with him and thought this was a good opportunity. They could watch the movie together and perhaps later discuss it. So, he proposed that his relative, who was a few years older, accompany him. He seemed pleased and accepted. The movie was about a man laboriously searching for his father's murderer. When he

finally tracked him down, he changed his mind and decided to only badly beat him rather than kill him. Afterwards, he asked OM what he thought made the man change his mind. His relative replied that he had no idea. Yet, this led to a long, yet friendly discussion about religion and human behavior. It was the beginning of a very warm friendship. AD was able to confide in his relative about becoming an atheist. He was no longer afraid to share his secret. So, he explained to

that shocked his new friend. He told him, "It was our prophet who led me to this different God."

At first, AD expected OM to tell him that he had reason to think that Mohamed secretly believed in that different God. To his surprise, he heard the opposite. OM told him that he rejected the prophet's god and was attracted to Christ's life and teaching. Finally AD was ready to hear the full gospel. That same evening, he used his relative's online link to read the whole of the gos-



OM why he rejected the god and religion of his family and community.

OM listened attentively for a long while until AD asked him, "How can you believe in the existence of a god?"

Different God

The answer was brief and low-key, "But I believe in a different God!"

Now it was AD's time to listen attentively with great curiosity. OM mustered the courage to say something

pel of Matthew. For weeks he struggled with all the arguments he had used to try to convert Christians to Islam. OM continued to gently help him understand the divine plan of salvation revealed in Scriptures.

Bearing Witness

AD gathered the courage to share his new faith with his wife. He was surprised, however, that she did not seem to be upset. Rather, she merely said: "I have often wondered about the God of some of my

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."

— Isaiah 60:1

Christian friends and I am glad that you are happy with Him!"

In time, the seed of faith germinated in her life and also the life of her father. Also, OM's wife and her sister came to faith in Christ. As other Christian fellowship is not available where they live, OM and AD now take turns sharing Bible readings and prayer together twice a week, along with their wives and AD's father-in-law. Give thanks for the many others like them in Arab and Muslim lands. Please pray for them as they quietly witness to other family member and friends. Pray also for MERF's gospel ministries online and over the radio and for the training of local spiritual leaders who disciple converts and provide them with pastoral care.



MERF-Canada

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