

Clarion

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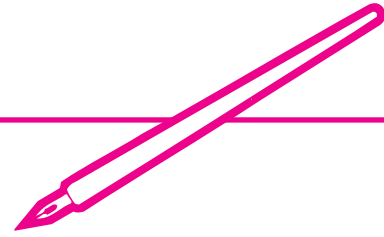


*Church history:
Meeting place in Hamilton,
Ontario (1951)*

Numbers

10:1-10

By J. Visscher



No Accountability Christianity

A new type of Christianity?

It would appear that a new type of Christianity is becoming more and more popular in North America, and perhaps elsewhere too. What does it look like? It is a form that is characterized by a strong stress on a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus but also with an ambivalent attitude toward his body, the church. It professes to believe in holy living but is reluctant to give concrete shape to that holiness. It says that worship is important but regards regular worship as largely optional. It finds refuge in the fact that there is a catholic, universal dimension to the church but does not really commit to the local, concrete expression of the church. It professes a desire to be biblically rooted and grounded but then is selective in terms of what biblical principles it puts into practice.

It professes to believe in holy living but is reluctant to give concrete shape to that holiness.

To clarify what I mean, an example may be helpful. A young man decides to join a certain church in the community. He attends the morning worship service but sees no need to attend the afternoon or evening service (if there still is one). He has decided that on the Lord's Day the morning is for the Lord (most of the time) and that the rest of the day is his to do with as he pleases. As for the kind of activities that he chooses to participate in for the remainder of the Sunday, that is all rather wide open: sporting events, eating out, etc.

Getting back to his Sunday morning worship experience, he appreciates the fact that the music is contemporary and the songs are easy to sing. He likes the pastor's messages because they are personal and direct, short and funny, low-key and upbeat. He knows some of the people, but none of them really well. They are all very friendly, but that friendliness does not extend to too many invitations to "come on over." When he comes to the morning worship service people are happy to see him. When he is not there, no one calls him to find out if he is sick or in difficulties. No, they leave him alone.

You see, he is really quite free to do his own thing. No elders ever inquire about his spiritual health and well-being. No one questions his moral fitness to attend the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. No minister issues warnings

from a pulpit. No, this is religion that is strictly between him and the Lord. Private.

As for his conduct during the week or how he lives his personal life, those too are untouched areas. His entertainment choices are not questioned by other believers. Life style issues are not addressed. Should he happen to be living together with a member of the other sex (or even same sex), nothing is said.

We are into a new era of Christianity. It has to do with personal religion, some worship, and a degree of involvement. However it requires no real commitment in terms of faithful worship attendance or holiness as connected to the Ten Commandments, nor the giving of first fruits, and, above all, there is no one who will hold you to account.

Is this biblical?

Now, whenever a new trend emerges we should not dismiss it out of hand. No, we have a duty to study it, to discuss it, to weigh it and to come to some conclusions about it. The same applies to this newest brand of Christianity. Is it biblical?

Before we can answer that we first need to get a grip on what biblical Christianity is all about. In that connection a number of principles stand out. The first is that biblical Christianity is indeed personal. There is no doubt that faith in the Triune God is a fundamental requirement. Each and every believer has to believe in God and thus to love, serve and honour Him (Matt 22:37).

How many churches still have elders?

A second principle of biblical Christianity is that it is communal. Faith in the Triune God unites believers not just to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but also to other believers. John Donne, the English poet, used to say that "no man is an island unto himself." The same applies to believers, for "no believer is an island unto himself or herself." Personal faith is commanded; individualistic faith is a perversion (Eph 4).

A third principle is that all believers have an obligation to worship God together on a regular basis. Hebrews 10:25 states, "let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." There is a pattern here, namely of setting aside one day for the Lord (not just a few hours) and meeting together faithfully on that day.

A fourth principle of biblical Christianity has to do with mutual responsibility. Believers are supposed to look after one another. They are to be "kind and compassionate to one another" (Eph 4:32). They are to "speak truthfully" to one another (Eph 4:25). They are to "carry each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2). They are to confront one another about their sins (Matt 18:15).

A fifth principle deals with the elders in the church. Now, this may well be the most neglected aspect in modern Christianity. How many churches still have elders? How many churches that have elders also see to it that they function as real elders? Still, the Scripture is very clear on this matter. We know that elders were appointed wherever a New Testament church was instituted (cf. Acts 14:23). We know about their qualifications (cf. 1 Tim 3, Tit 1).

We know too about their work. Elders are supposed to keep watch over themselves and over "all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made (them) overseers" (Acts 20:28). They are to "be shepherds of God's flock" (1 Pet 5:2). They are to "encourage others by sound doctrine" (Tit 1:9). They are "over you in the Lord and . . . admonish you" (1 Thess 5:12).

Now, these five principles are by no means exhaustive. There are many others that could and should be mentioned; however, space hinders us from doing so. At the same time we have enough to come to a preliminary evaluation of this new brand of Christianity.

What's inside?

Individualism pervades all aspects of life. We have seen it in the field of education in recent decades, to the point that a student is encouraged to do whatever makes him or her feel good. Sadly, what makes a person feel good can come at the expense of others. The spirit of individualism also creeps into the church. It hurts both the worshipper and the communion of saints. The editorial by Dr. J. Visscher shows how being free to do one's own thing in church life is an unbiblical practice. This is a subject which needs close examination.

Dr. J. Faber offers us an insight into the church history of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton. Since Dr. Faber got his hands on some new documents in recent years, he brings to our attention some new and relevant information about early church life in the Hamilton area. These historical facts had implications for all our churches.

Rev. G.Ph. van Popta provides us with his Observations column in which he examines the plight of Christians in India. Dr. C. Van Dam completes his presentation on the education of the Lord's special children.

We have our columns, Ray of Sunshine and Education Matters. We also have a thorough review of a recent book by Dr. F. Oosterhoff. This review is by Dr. C. Van Dam. The review will no doubt make many want to read the book.

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A word of lament

For openers, I would say that a word of lament needs to be uttered here. When I hear of people attending churches where the members are not held accountable I can only express deep regret that these churches have strayed so far from the biblical norms.

Of course, it is understandable in a way. After all, accountability cannot be totally separated from disagreeable work like posing questions, confronting people, getting personal, even from words of admonition. Worse than that, it cannot be divorced from church discipline either. Yes, and is that not something which has fallen almost universally out of favour in our world? As it is so much easier to let sleeping dogs lie, so it is to let wayward fellow believers wander.

Churches and members who are willing to turn a blind eye to sin in their ranks do a grave disservice to their members.


Yet the question always needs to be asked, “Does such a hands-off approach really benefit the saints? Does it help them? Does it bring them closer to the Lord?” The answer is obvious. It does the opposite. Not to hold someone accountable when necessary is really to say to that person that it does not matter whether or not they fall into the hands of an angry God. It is a denial of all that the Bible teaches about

God’s justice and integrity. Churches and members who are willing to turn a blind eye to sin in their ranks do a grave disservice to their members. They are not really intent on seeing the spirits of disobedient saints “saved on the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:5).

A word of warning

Even more than that, they do an even greater disservice to the Lord. They violate his holiness. They invite his wrath. In short, a word of warning is also in order here. Those assemblies and believers who fail to promote accountability among their members will not be around for long. Is that not a basic lesson that can be learned both from the Old Testament and New Testament? God’s patience with an Israel in which priests, prophets and people lived careless and disobedient lives reached a breaking point. Christ’s words to the seven churches of Asia Minor remain a reminder to us that toleration of sin and worldliness of life is a sure recipe for extinction.

A word of encouragement

On the other hand, repentance and change offer a different route. Also today there is hope, hope for believers and churches who decide to do things God’s way. Churches that are devoid of elders need to appoint them and give them real spiritual work to do among their members. As for the members, they need to realize that they are the keepers of their brothers and sisters in the Lord. So a word of encouragement goes out to all believers and churches who truly desire to be ruled by the Word of God. He will surely bless such efforts. 



“Common Grace” in Canadian Reformed History

By J. Faber

Two occasions made me think of the history of our Canadian Reformed Churches. The first was the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of Canadian Reformed Churches in the province of Ontario. We should never forget that by faith we may be members of the holy catholic church that exists from the beginning of the world and in celebrating anniversaries we should ever be cautious not to glorify man. But a fiftieth anniversary of the institution of a local church can be a good opportunity to relate some historical facts and try to retrieve and save some material for the archives.

As far as the history of our Canadian Reformed Churches is concerned, in 1987 I published in *Clarion* a series of articles on “the ‘Volendam’ congregation” and received in reaction some collections of letters, papers and some personal stories. Such collections are and should be stored in the library of our Theological College.

One collection was sent by the late John J. Knecht and his wife Geertruida (Grace) Hart. Those names, Knecht and Hart, came up again at the recent celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the church in Hamilton. I would like to relate something from this collection.

The second occasion was a press review written by my esteemed colleague Dr. J. De Jong in *Clarion* of June 22, 2001. It dealt with the history of the Christian Reformed Church, its adoption of the Three Points on Common Grace in 1924, the disciplinary action against the Rev. H. Hoeksema (and others), the subsequent establishing of the Protestant Reformed Church and the 1939 attempt of Dr. K. Schilder in the Pantlind Conference to facilitate a discussion on “common grace” with a view to a possible reunion of CRC and PRC. It is interesting material and also

timely, given the fact that the Ecumenical Relations Committee of the United Reformed Churches has firmly distanced itself from any doctrinal or ecclesiastical attachment to the Three Points on Common Grace of 1924. This fact evoked proposals to and discussions at the 2001 General Synod of the URC in Escondido.

Now Dr. De Jong wrote that later history has shown that the Christian Reformed Church has never been comfortable with the 1924 declaration on common grace. This remark made me go back to the Knecht-collection in our library.

The Christian Reformed Church has never been comfortable with the 1924 declaration on common grace.

Beginnings after World War II

At the beginning of the history of the Canadian Reformed Churches and especially of the congregation in Hamilton not only the “presumed regeneration” at the baptism of infants but also the “common grace issue” played an important role.

The “liberated” immigrants, coming from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands – Gereformeerde Kerken (*vrijgemaakt*) – were strongly opposed to denominationalism. They did not want an unnecessary and sinful plurality of Reformed denominations. They had been advised by Dr. K. Schilder, among others, to join an existing North American Reformed Church and to go the “ecclesiastical way,” if changes or corrections had to be brought about in

those churches. Therefore, they joined the Christian Reformed Church or the Protestant Reformed Churches.

In 1948 some of the later “founding fathers” of the Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton had become members of the Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines. Our br. J.J. Knecht Sr. soon became even an elder there. However, together with the brothers C. Groenewegen, Th. J. Hart, J.J. Knecht Jr. and W.J. Hamoen, he wrote a letter to the consistory and aired his objections against the Three Points on Common Grace of 1924. The letter is dated December 3, 1948 and is written in Dutch. The following quotations or paraphrases are my translations. We ascertain from the address in the answer that the letter had also been signed by sisters. Let us listen to their conscientious objection and their earnest request.

Objection against “common grace”

The brothers and sisters wrote: Having come from the Netherlands, we judged it to be our duty to join the Christian Reformed Church. According to the official data only this Church stood on the foundation of the Bible and the Three Forms of Unity. Joining another Church would, therefore, not be permissible for God’s sake.

But now they object against the doctrine of common grace as preached in church and taught to their children in catechism class. They reject the three points:

1. that there is, besides the saving grace of God shown only to those chosen unto eternal life, also a certain favour or grace of God which He shows to all his creatures;
2. that God through the general operations of his Spirit, without renewing

the heart, restrains sin in its unhindered breaking forth, as a result of which human society has remained possible;

3. that God, without renewing the heart, exercises such influence upon man that He is enabled to perform civic good. We cannot and may not take this doctrine for our responsibility and instruct our children or have them instructed in it. This doctrine is not in accordance with the Old and the New Testament and the Three Forms of Unity. The Word of God and our confession teaches the opposite, namely, that we are only then capable of any good, when He regenerates us. Further, the pleasures of sin that the godless people enjoy in this present world, cannot be favour or certain grace from God's side. In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man Jesus taught us, the godless one would then enjoy God's favour or certain grace, while Lazarus would have been stricken by God's curse. But Scripture teaches us that God loves the righteous and that He hates and destroys the wicked. He sets them in slippery places and casts them down into destruction. (This last sentence must refer to Psalm 73:18, jf.)

The brothers then state that they do not acknowledge the disciplinary action against faithful servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. They must have thought of the Revs. Danhof and Hoeksema. The extra-Scriptural binding and these disciplinary actions have caused schism in the Church. They petition the consistory to seek, in the ecclesiastical way, purification of the Church in doctrine and discipline.

While at the moment we are especially interested in "the common grace issue," I leave aside other requests and only mention that the brothers express their expectation that the consistory will invite them to a brotherly discussion. They end with Christian wishes and brotherly greetings.

The answer

What was the answer they received? Well, under the official letterhead of "Immigration Committee of Canada of the Christian Reformed Church. Local St. Catharines Ontario," the consistory wrote to the brothers and sisters on December 22, 1948.

The answer dealt with "the doctrine of common grace, as based on Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity, accord-

ing to the judgment of the 1924 Synod, and therefore maintained by this Synod in the Three Points, quoted in your letter." The consistory solemnly declares that it will uphold this doctrine. (The consistory "*betuigt . . . hiermede dat zij zich houden wil aan deze leer.*"). They expect that the letter writers shall not openly reject this doctrine or militate against it:

The extra-Scriptural binding and these disciplinary actions have caused schism in the Church.

Before you officially joined us, you knew that the doctrine of common grace was maintained in the Christian Reformed Church You may not immediately use your position in the Church as an opportunity to oppose the doctrine of the Church.

A remarkable element in this answer is that the consistory "deems it not necessary to defend the position of the 1924 Synod." It simply refers to the Acts of this Synod.

As far as the disciplinary actions are concerned, the consistory is of the opinion that Synod 1924 dealt leniently with the brothers Danhof and Hoeksema. The suspension from office by Classis was caused by the refusal not to teach against the doctrine of the confession as elucidated by Synod.

Article 79 spoke of office bearers who have committed any public, gross sin, which is a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by the civil authorities.

At the end of their letter the consistory pleads for maintaining the unity of Reformed immigrants (orthodox Dutch Reformed, Reformed, Liberated, Free Reformed and others, all within the Christian Reformed Church). It should be noted that the consistory clearly distinguishes between "Gereformeerden" and "Vrijgemaakten" and rejects the request, as they phrase it, "to side with your denomination (Reformed Churches, Art. 31)."

Suspension of elder Knegt

The Knegt-collection does not give any indication that official discussions took place between the consistory and the brothers and sisters who had written the December 1948 letter. It contains, however, an important document: the official letter to br. J.J. Knegt Sr. in which he was notified of his suspension as elder of the Christian Reformed Church at St. Catharines.

The letter is dated January 10, 1949. Let us note the speed with which the consistory acted: the objection against "the doctrine of common grace" and the request for seeking purification in the ecclesiastical way was brought forward on December 4. Only a month later, on January 10, 1949, elder Knegt, who had co-signed the letter, was suspended from office according to Article 79 and 80 of the Church Order.

Article 79 spoke of office bearers who have committed any public, gross sin, which is a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by the civil authorities. Article 80 summarizes as follows: "all sins and gross offenses, which render the perpetrators infamous before the world, and which in any private member of the Church would be considered worthy of excommunication." Nevertheless, the letter of suspension of elder Knegt began with the words "*Waarde Broeder.*" Let me translate it fully:

Esteemed Brother.

The combined Consistories of Hamilton and St. Catharines, assembled on Monday evening the tenth of January 1949 at Hamilton, must announce to you with sorrow, that they deem themselves obliged, according to Art. 79 and 80 of the Church Order, to suspend you in your office as elder of the Christian Reformed Church at St. Catharines. They base this their decision on the following grounds:

1. It has become manifest from a letter, sent to the Consistory of St. Catharines and co-signed by you, that you are in conflict with the doctrine on common grace taught in Holy Scripture and the Confessional Standards of our Christian Reformed Church.
2. By opposing aforementioned doctrine of Holy Scripture and the Confession of the Church you have broken the promise you gave when you put your name under the Form of Subscription. This promise reads as follows:

And if hereafter any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrines should arise in our minds, we promise that we will neither publicly nor privately propose, teach, or defend the same, either by preaching or writing, until we have first revealed such sentiments to the consistory, Classis or Synod which preside over us that the same may be examined, being ready always cheerfully to submit to the judgment of the Consistories, Classis or Synod, under the penalty in case of refusal to be, by that very fact (ipso facto), suspended from our office.

3. Although the Consistory granted you time for consideration in order to return from your error, in

a later letter to the Consistory you refused it resolutely. Further, the Consistories of Hamilton and St. Catharines decided unanimously that this suspension shall be for a period of three months. If in the meantime you acknowledge your error and you promise to abide by the standpoint of the Holy Scripture and the Confession, this suspension can be lifted again. In the opposite case the Consistories will be under the necessity to depose you from your office.

This letter was signed by four brothers, two on behalf of the Consistory of the Christian Reformed Church at Hamilton and two of that at St. Catharines.

Conclusion

There are some more interesting letters in the Knecht-collection. But what

I transmitted is sufficient for reaching two conclusions. First, the fiftieth anniversary of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton is a good occasion for relating the suspension of br. J. J. Knecht as elder in the Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines. Our brother, together with br. Hart, became one of the first office bearers in Hamilton's congregation. He declared that God had bound Article 7 of the Belgic Confession upon his heart: "*Ik wil me niet gebonden weten aan menschen, maar uit gehoorzaamheid alleen aan Gods Woord.*" (I do not want myself to be known as bound to men but in obedience only to the Word of God.)

Second, after Synod Kalamazoo (1924) and even after World War II (1949!) the binding to the Three Points on Common Grace remained stronger than sometimes is suggested. C



The Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches

The Thirty-second Anniversary Meeting
and the
Twenty-seventh Convocation of the Theological College will be held,
D.V., on

Friday, September 7, 2001 at 8:00 p.m.

in the auditorium of Redeemer College (777 Garner Road East, Ancaster, Ontario)

Prof. J. Geertsema will speak on the topic:
"Is Conversion after Apostacy Impossible? A look at Hebrews 6:6"

The Master of Divinity Degree

will be conferred on

Carl Antony Vermeulen

The Diploma of Missiology

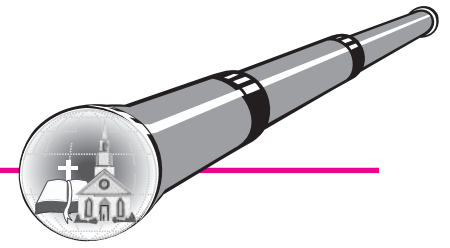
will be conferred on

Rev. Wesley Bredenhof (in absentia)

* * * * *

A collection will be taken for student bursaries

(TAX RECEIPTS AVAILABLE)



Observations

By G.Ph. van Popta

Opportunity and hazard for Christians in India

The following, from *Presbyterians-Week*,¹ indicates that Christians and faithful churches in India have a great, though very dangerous, task:

Reports from India suggest that the Dalit (untouchable caste) population of India (250 million people) have been driven to look for liberation and dignity in other faiths, including Christianity. Dr. Joseph D'Souza, president of the All India Christian Council, says that a whole generation of politicians without convictions or ideology has left the nation without credible leadership. Hindu radicalism has expanded to fill part of the vacuum, with the result that lethal religious conflict may increase, filling India from one end to the other. Yet with the hazards comes an enormous opportunity for the gospel.

Rejection of Hinduism is at the heart of developments among the lower castes thus far. On October 14, Ram Rajya with his leaders of the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes federation comprising the educated and employed sector of Dalits in government, will turn en masse to Buddhism in a public ceremony in Delhi. A million people are expected to participate. Those who do not want to become Buddhist are being encouraged to embrace other faiths as a way out of caste oppression and spiritual liberation.

Other Dalits, a truly oppressed people, plan to move to the Christian faith. The Press Trust of India reported June 30 that over 1,000 lower-caste Hindus had converted to Christianity at one time in Tamil Nadu, a southern India state.

This great movement that appears to be building will present the Indian church with an equally great challenge. Dr. D'Souza comments that the church will either stand or fall by its ability to accept the socially lowest classes of people during the coming months. A supportive stand by the Christian church will be a fitting reply to the Hindu extremists who have lied about the church with regards to forcible and fraudulent conversions.

Dr. D'Souza adds, "It is also the hour for the Indian church to once for all rid itself of the caste system in some sections of the church. Only caste-free Indian churches will be relevant to the India of this new millennium. This will mean a firm determination to encourage and allow for intercaste marriages within the church, giving many more opportunities for the Dalits and the other backward caste Christians for leadership in the Indian church. It will also mean a firm resolve to work for the economic and educational development of

these people for whom Jesus died." The Dalits and OBCs (Other Backward Classes – GvP) together make up 75 percent of the Indian population.

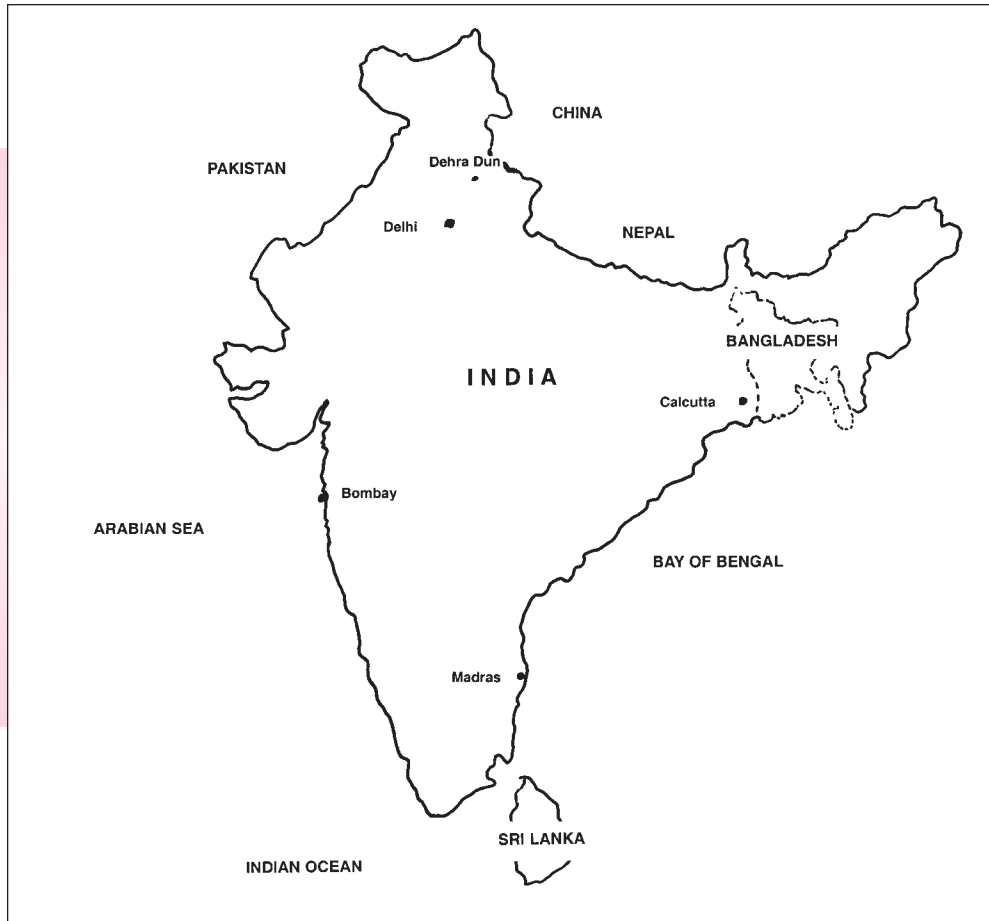
He asks prayer for peace among Indian communities in the midst of tumultuous changes. It is unknown how the Hindu extremists will respond to this movement away from Hinduism by the Dalits. Also, "Pray for the Indian Church. Pray there will be no compromise by any section of the Church. Pray that the hearts of the Indian Church leaders will be big and courageous to welcome all those who want to come to the Christian faith for the spiritual and social needs. Pray also for much wisdom.

"Pray for the rule of law to be established against all those who are engaging in violence and are arming themselves for civil conflict." Reading the rhetoric of the Hindu radicals, it is not hard to imagine a campaign of wholesale slaughter of those peoples who abandon Hinduism.

A few minutes of browsing on the Internet shows the vicious cast of the radical Hindu mind. HinduUnity.Org publishes an online black list <hinduunity.org/hitlist.html> which lists the "enemies of Hinduism." The web page, which opens with a noose and dripping blood, screams: THIS PAGE EXPOSES THE EVIL FORCES THAT ARE AGAINST THE MOVEMENT OF HINDUTVA. EACH OF THESE PERSONS AND OR ORGANIZATION (sic) HAVE BEEN FOUND GUILTY OF LEADING EFFORTS AGAINST OUR MOVEMENT THROUGH THEIR ACTIONS OR OTHERWISE. THEIR CRIMES ARE CRIMES AGAINST THE HINDU PEOPLE. GUILTY AS CHARGED! THEY WILL PAY FOR THEIR CRIMES! The hit list includes people like the Indian Christian leader, Dr. Joseph D'Souza (mentioned above), the Pope and Pat Robertson. The militant Hindu hate website calls on Hindus to commit acts of violence against those registered on the hit list.

When we hear about things such as this, our thoughts go to our brothers and sisters in the Free Church of Central India and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India. We meet representatives of these two churches at the ICRC. May the Lord grant them his blessing in proclaiming the gospel to the downtrodden in India. May God protect our fellow believers from violence perpetrated by those who hate the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹From miscellaneous reports, largely via World Evangelical Fellowship's Religious Liberty Email Conference, Mark Albrecht, moderator; MarkAlbrecht@xc.org.



BASIC FACTS ABOUT THE CASTE SYSTEM

- The Hindu beliefs about caste (jati) derives from the creation myth in the Rig Veda. In it, all Indians descend from the sacrifice of Purusha, a primitive cosmic man, whose thousand heads became the Brahmins (highest caste of poets and priests); from his arms came the Kshatriya (warriors and kings); from his thighs the Vaishiya (merchants and landowners); and from his feet the Shudra caste (serfs and day laborers) were born.
- But these last are not the Dalits (untouchables or, literally, broken people). They are below the caste system. They have traditionally carried out tasks of vital importance for the upper classes: they are the toilet and road cleaners, the cremation workers, leather workers, carcass skiners, and so on. Even though Article 17 of the Indian constitution has expressly forbidden any form of untouchability since 1950, ancient prejudice has deep roots and dies hard, and the social disability of the lower castes is still a reality in rural India.
- Some say there are as many as 3,000 sub-castes, with the Dalits at the bottom. Sharing the precarious existence of the Dalits are the “backward castes”: Those whose ritual rank and occupational status are above the Dalits but who themselves remain socially and economically depressed. Also referred to as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) or Shudras.
- Most Dalits continue to live in extreme poverty, without land or opportunities for better employment or education.
- Dalit children make up the majority of those sold into bondage to pay off debts to upper-caste creditors.
- Dalit men, women, and children numbering in the tens of millions work as agricultural laborers for a few kilograms of rice or less than a dollar a day.
- Dalit women face a triple burden of caste, class, and gender. According to a Tamil Nadu state government official, the prevalence of forced prostitution, sexual abuse and rape of Dalit women shows that “no one practices untouchability when it comes to sex.”
— *Presbyterians-Week*



The Privilege and Challenge of Educating the Lord's Special Children¹ (Part 2 of 2)

By C. Van Dam

In the first installment, we saw that parents and teachers ("school parents") have an awesome, life-giving task with a view to equipping for life service and with a view to eternal life. We now consider the nature of the goals of educating and how these goals are to be reached.

The goals and how they are to be reached

The key goal of what to impart to your child or to your students is wisdom in the biblical sense. What is that wisdom? In the context of our topic we could put it this way: having wisdom enables one to function in life so that the purpose for which God put that person on earth can be realized. That purpose will be different for a normal child from that of a handicapped child or a special needs child. Each has received different gifts and God has different expectations of each. But each has received a task here in this life and they must be equipped for that task by the parents and by the teachers who continue the role of the parents in this respect. Equipping them for the task means imparting wisdom to them.

Wisdom is all-comprehensive in Scripture – encompassing both technical skills as well as insight and understanding in general (cf. e.g., Exod 28:1-3, Prov 1:2-6), but it starts with knowing God. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7a, Ps 111:10) or elsewhere: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10).

It is obvious then that imparting to our children, also those with special needs and challenges, a sense of the fear of God, the love of God, and the knowledge of God is absolutely essen-

tial if we are to give life in its fullness to our children. Only by knowing God will their life have a firm basis and orientation point. Only then will it have direction, purpose, joy and fulfillment!

How is all this to be accomplished? It will come as no surprise that effort is needed for teaching and learning this wisdom that is rooted in the fear of God. It is not automatic (cf. Prov 4:1-7). Indeed, the Old Testament (Hebrew) word for "instruction" (*mûs_r*; Prov 1:2, 3) also means "training" and has the idea of discipline. The instruction is therefore a teaching accompanied by correction and reproof, a teaching presented with authority. We need to be firm with our children, also the special needs children and set clear perimeters for their behaviour and clear expectations.

Each has received different gifts and God has different expectations of each.

Such firm discipline and training would be in vain, however, if it was not a discipline that was life-producing. As parents and school "fathers (and mothers)," our "sons and daughters" must sense our deep love for them. In a sense it is love that will determine so much. The love for God and our neighbour (in this case our children) will define our approach to discipline, how we execute it and what expectations we set for it. This love really is a critical ingredient. And is that not encouraging? After all, the Lord our God equips and will equip us as Christians with this

love. If we feel inadequate here, God will provide an answer to our prayers. Love for God and our neighbour is basic to the Christian life and love will communicate in many ways, also with respect to our special needs children and their requirements.

When the firm discipline and training (*mûs_r*) that is necessary is applied to those with special needs – within the realm of what can be expected of them – such firm discipline will be conducive for equipping the special needs child for the task God has given them.² Put differently, the pattern of authority and teaching will not be stifling, but life-producing; not discouraging but encouraging for the students. In disciplining, something of the great love of God must be present, both in the home and at the school. Teachers too are fathers . . . , mothers Discipline must be life-producing.

Such firm instruction of our children in love must have as constant goal to give our special children a very clear sense of their identity as a child, not only of father and mother, but also of God, the Father in heaven. They need to know that there is a God in heaven who is for real and who has come down and claimed him or her as his very own. A God who has attached his name and promises to their life. A God who will go through life with them, moment by moment. Now all this can seem very daunting and difficult. How can we adequately tell that God so loved the world that He gave his only Son to die for sinners so that we may have life? Can the special needs child understand this?

Let us take a step back. Can we understand it? Do we not need to take all this on faith ourselves, without being

able to understand the incomprehensible love of God in Christ? Often a child, also those who are challenged and have special needs, will simply accept things because mother or father or teacher has said so. Their faith can be so strong that they put adults to shame. In this way the Lord also equips the special needs children to know the comfort of the gospel and so also meet their own need for a clearly defined sense of identity and belonging. They may know for a certainty that they do not just belong to an earthly father and mother, but to God himself and his family!

In disciplining, something of the great love of God must be present.

As God's representatives, as parents and teacher-parents, we will do everything possible to underline that basic message by the way we deal with those special children entrusted to us. Because they belong, we also need to spend time with them, to talk to them, try to understand them and communicate to them. They need to know that we are there for them – within reason, as other children have a right to the same expectations.

We also need to teach them to remember the basic truths of Scripture and the basic truths which they need to function in life here on earth. Memory work and routine is extremely important. Children love routine and memorizing. We should not become discouraged if our challenged and special needs child takes a long time to learn something. They learn very little on their own and we must keep at it. For example, teach them a simple Psalm by singing it with him or her over and over. At set times such as before going to bed, but also during the day. They will eventually learn.³ As a pastor, I once came to a congregation which had special needs children and was asked to remember them from time to time by giving the Psalm they are learning in worship services. Of course, I gladly complied. That gave those children such a thrill! They belong. The worship service is for them too! And so patient, constant instruction to get the truths across, in song or otherwise is very important. It is disciplined instruction and such a routine and memory work gives them a sense of specialness and identity.⁴

Of course we also need to teach by our own example and attitude and our body language. Our words must match our actions and life style. Indeed our example may be the only way we can teach those special needs children who have great difficulty learning concepts. Such children will be able to imitate godly lifestyle and attitude. It is very important that they learn to be friendly and polite and not nasty to others, for they will receive similar treatment. They must also learn from their parents to watch their tongue and be careful what flies from the lips. It is very difficult to undo bad habits. More examples could be mentioned.⁵

There is another important element here that needs emphasis. As redeemed children of God, one of the things the Lord wants his people to experience is joy – the joy of redemption, the exhilaration of forgiveness, the joy of belonging to Jesus Christ. Negatively that means that we must not burden the special needs child with expectations and obligations that are beyond their capacity. It is important to know and stay within their limits. Otherwise, such a child will feel like a failure and there will be little of the joy left or experienced.

Their faith can be so strong that they put adults to shame.

Positively, recognizing the key element of joy means that we can reinforce and engender the feeling of happiness and joy in the life of the special needs children by reminding them of their special status as God's children within this world. There are different ways of doing that. If our challenged or special needs child has done something wrong and can be held responsible, he or she should be told and shown the seriousness of their guilt. But then also, the joy of forgiveness can be passed on and how Christ makes this possible. There should be many ways to reinforce this basic message and give joy to the child.

Another way, to encourage and promote the joy of life is to integrate them as much as possible in family life. Special needs children should be treated as normally as possible, as part of the family or class at school. Then they can participate with a sense of belonging in the joys of singing and family fun and outings. That is also good for the rest of

the family, for the other children should not think that only the special brother or sister gets the attention. All belong to the family! And so integration as much as possible is important. Having the special needs children share the joy can mean having these special children who of necessity may have to go to a public school participate in a simple way in part of a Christmas or Easter program of our own Christian school. They belong, also with the other children of the church.

Having them share the joy also means that when our challenged child struggles with questions around his or her own condition we take time to listen and respond with the gospel. For instance, such a child may ask, if God is all-powerful and good, why did He make me the way I am?⁶ I would like to be like the ones who are not handicapped and limited the way I am? Also school teachers who deal with special needs individuals must be prepared to offer a listening ear and give biblical emotional support for those with these type of questions. After all, home and school are in this together and also school teachers are "parents" in a real way to their student "children." We should not be afraid to confide that we too do not understand everything, but that like little children, we too have to learn to trust in God who does work all things for our well being and salvation (Rom 8). Our God is not mean and nasty. He is our Father (cf. Matt 7:9-11) and seeks our good! Also by our life example, they should see that we leave our problems and difficulties with the Lord and live in faith and trust. That will be of great encouragement to those with special needs and to all our children.

We can reinforce and engender joy in the life of the special needs children by reminding them of their special status as God's children.

The life wisdom that God wants us to pass on to our children also includes the practical everyday work world. Where possible our special needs children should learn social and technical skills and be integrated as much as possible in family life, in the classrooms of the schools and in the workplaces of

society. Much progress has been made in this area and it is to be lauded.

Conclusion: the sum of the matter

The Lord our God has a purpose in placing each one of us in this world at this particular time of history. He has given us all a task in his service. As parents and as parent-teachers we have the task to give life to the children entrusted to us, also those challenged and with special needs. To that end wisdom needs to be passed on by disciplined instruction and example. The heart of what we are to impart to those in our care is a sense of the fear and love of God. That is essential for enjoying life in its fullness.

Since God is the one who has entrusted our children to us, we can also be sure that he equips us to do the task he expects of us.

Since God is the one who has entrusted our children to us, we can also be sure that He equips us to do the task He expects of us. This does not mean it will always be easy. We will need to go to the throne of grace often. But it does mean that God is behind us all the way and will strengthen and encourage us in this task. We can count on Him! According to the testimony of those who have special needs children, one way he encourages us is by the openness, honesty, thankfulness and happiness often exhibited by such children.⁷

Our key task is to make sure that those with special needs and challenges also feel included in the family and church of God. They belong and they too must know the joy of redemption.

Knowing this identity and joy means that those with special needs will be able to do their life calling and task. Ultimately that life calling and task is to praise God and thank Him for his goodness. We are here on earth to glorify our heavenly Father (cf. 1 Cor 10:31). Also our special needs children have that task and the Father equips them for that obligation, also through the work of the natural and teaching parents.⁸ We need never doubt that. Even the most severely handicapped or challenged child is used by God to

bring glory to Him. After all such a child will leave a tremendous mark on our life and give our life a joy and a meaning we never knew could exist.

A handicapped or special needs child, even one that is able to respond little, can change our life in a way a normal child never can. Parents of such a child have told me that a special needs child can drive us closer and closer to the Lord than we would otherwise never have been. That makes life rich and beautiful beyond measure. The heartaches, sleepless nights and worries about our special child can result in a walk with God that is the envy of our brothers and sisters in the faith. And let's face it, if the purpose of life is to glorify God, could anything more beautiful than a close walk with God be imagined? We will daily thank God for the special child He has put in our life path for such a child has made life so unbelievably rich, a richness surpassing the treasures of this world. And when we tire and grow weary, He will sustain us by his grace, just as He does with the so-called "normal" children who can also cause us much anguish and worries. If we only go to Him, He will show us the way, also with our special children. May you all experience his nearness and grace as you deal with the challenges God has put on your path. It's a challenge that also includes

the very rich privilege of being an instrument of God for good for eternity!

¹An introduction given in various churches in Southern Ontario during the past year or two. The occasion for the speech was an invitation from the Board of ASC Committee (ASC = Assistance to the Special Child). The ASC Committee is a committee of the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies and functions as a type of think-tank which also creates awareness for and functions in the interests of the handicapped child. This speech has benefited from the input of some members of this Board as well as from Henry and Analies Homan of Attercliffe.

²On the necessity of discipline, think, e.g., of Prov 19:18, "Discipline your son while there is hope. Do not set your heart on his destruction."


³See "'Anchor': How do we tell it to our Children?", *Clarion* 32:24 (1983) 513. See also, J.C. Evink-Bult, "Gezinsbegeleiding van gehandicapt" *Dienst* 27:1 (1979) 12.

⁴See also for other aspects of telling our children about the gospel, such as the main events of the history of salvation bit by bit, H. Zipp, "How do we tell it to our Children - 2," *Clarion* 33:6 (1984) 128.

⁵E.g., to share toys with friends, to think of others and not just oneself, etc.

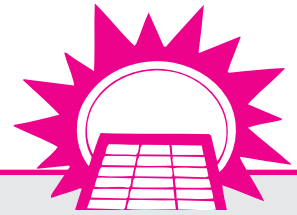
⁶ Cf. R. Gunnink, "They Shall Always be Among Us," *Clarion* 32:23 (1983) 492.

⁷See W. Pouwelse, "Special Children," *Clarion* 35:7 (1986) 101.

⁸See on this also E. vander Weij, "Fully Capable Work Force - Valuable Employees," *Clarion* 32:6 (1983) 125-126. 



RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*“Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to God,
how pleasant and fitting to praise Him!”
Psalm 147:1*

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

The hot summer days are here. When we awaken in the early morning, the birds are busy singing their songs. Yes, there are days that we may even wake up because of their loud chirping. It is also at this time of year when many of us may be going on vacation or outings. It is a time in which to relax, and to be in a different setting than the normal day to day surroundings and activities. Some may even try to escape for a while from their problems and pressures.

All around us, the fields and forests are filled with life and growth and vigour. We may travel along mountain sides and stand in amazement at the enormous size of it. We may even be at the beach, where we can see and hear the rolling waves as they crash on the shorelines. But when we see all this, do we ever stop and take time to realize that this is all what the Lord created? Do we look at the beauty of nature and see God’s hand in all of this? Indeed, we have a God who has blessed us with more than we ever need or deserve. We may be very grateful and thankful to God for all his richness.

At times in our life, we may feel as though we are trapped. Even with all the beauty of creation around us, we may still struggle inwardly, or feel as though no one cares, and all are against us. David may have felt this too, especially when we look at Psalm 124. Here David turned and looked to God in trust and prayer. In our daily prayer we can show our thankfulness to God for his many blessings. Through this thankfulness we also give praise to Him. We have to give praise to God in good and bad days. The Lord demands this of us that we always give Him our thanks and praise. Even when we endure trials we can still have praise on our lips because we know that He will never leave us. We read in Hebrews 13:15,16: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

When we turn to God, there is always a way out, for He is the Creator of all that exists. No problem is too big for Him to solve, and no circumstance is too difficult for Him to handle. We can always turn to our Creator for help in our times of need, for He is on our side. David compares this to a bird who has escaped the fowler’s snare or trap (verse 7).

As we continue to read through the Psalms, we can read how the last five, namely Psalms 146-150, are

overflowing with praise. They all begin and end with “Praise the Lord.” Yes, these Psalms show us how, where and why we should praise God.

For what happens when we begin to sing to God? Our minds are taken off of our problems and shortcomings, and we begin to focus on God. Our perspective is also lifted from the earthly to the heavenly when we praise our God. Thus we can keep our focus on Christ when we daily sing to Him. All praise be to God alone, who has created us and all that is around us. He is our faithful Rock, and his promises stand firm: He will take care of us throughout our whole life.

The next time you hear the birds singing, be reminded to sing praises to God our Creator. May we end with the words of Psalm 150:6: “let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.”

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

Hymn 6

Birthdays in September:

8: MARSHA MOESKER will turn 24
P.O. Box 164, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

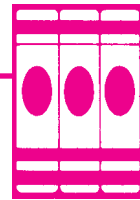
11: MARY VANDE BURGT will be 45
c/o Family W. Togeretz
32570 Rossland Place, Abbotsford, BC V2T 1T7

14: JERRY BONTEKOE will turn 37
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

29: PAUL DIELEMAN will be 32
3 Northampton Street, Brampton, ON L6S 3Z5

Congratulations to you all on your birthday. May you all have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends, and above all with the blessing of the Lord. Till next month,

Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman
Mailing correspondence:
548 Kemp Road East
RR 2 Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
Phone: 1-905-563-0380



By C. Van Dam

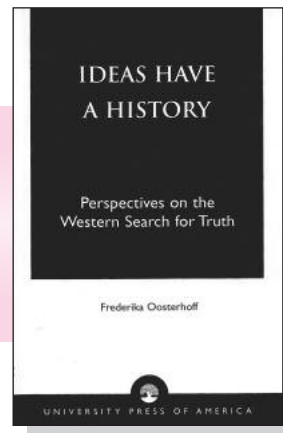
Searching for the Truth

Frederika Oosterhoff. Ideas Have a History: Perspectives on the Western Search for Truth. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2001; 376 pages; \$ 44 US; available at 15% discount from the publisher at www.univpress.com

Dr. Oosterhoff has made us indebted to her with this excellent publication. If there was ever any doubt that knowing history was critically important to understanding the present, this book should dispel any lingering uncertainty on that front. The author shows very clearly that in order to get a meaningful grasp on why our civilization which was nurtured and shaped by Christianity has lost the faith and turned to moral relativism, you need to understand the philosophical background of today's intellectual climate. Deftly and with a sure brush, the author paints the philosophical journey that lies behind the current skepticism and secularization. She had set herself a most challenging task, but in my view she has succeeded very well. She does not get lost in too much detail, surely a most tempting pitfall in a work like this, and keeps the focus on the main issues and does so in a most understandable manner.

Purpose

The author's stated goal is twofold: first to help us understand our own times, and second, to help us find the intellectual means to evaluate and challenge the present day mentality. To that end she especially concentrates on sketching the history of the philosophical roots leading up to the present theories of knowledge. The subtitle of this publication therefore aptly describes the focus: perspectives on the Western search for truth. In twenty-two chapters the reader is guided from the time of the early Greek thinkers, through the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, evolutionism, positivism, existentialism and postmodernism.



It is obvious in reading this material that decades of teaching lie behind her firm grasp of the enormous amount of literature and philosophical understanding that is worked into this book. As a good teacher she is able to communicate effectively the main lines of thought. As a Christian scholar, she also knows what subjects are of primary importance and what we as believers need to comprehend so that we can deal with the issues of our day. Furthermore, she makes pointed observations and critiques as necessary and reminds us of the blessing of being able to work with biblical absolutes.

In pursuit of certainty

As Dr. Oosterhoff makes clear, one of the big issues that western culture has been wrestling with is the matter of certainty. How can we know something for sure so that there is no doubt about its truthfulness? Certainty has been sought in accepting only what you can see, or what is logical according to human reason, or what is traditional, or what is scientifically verifiable, or what feels good. Skepticism and uncertainty especially occur when a current worldview breaks down, and what has long seemed self-evident is called into question. That is what is also happening today as postmodernism becomes more entrenched in mainstream thinking.

Points to ponder

It is impossible to do justice to a book so rich in insights and detail as this one in a short review. Let me therefore pass on, by way of example, two points that struck me as being particularly helpful for us to keep in mind today.

Human logic and reason, as obvious and airtight as it may seem, can never be accorded infallibility or normative status. As Augustine said so many centuries ago, only in God's light can we see the light (cf. Ps 36:9). All knowledge depends on faith and not just Christian knowledge. "Reason's pretension that it could reach objective truth had never been proven and indeed could not be proven; it was simply believed" (p. 32). Indeed faith in God should precede reason, and true knowledge is only possible if reason submitted to divine revelation. As Augustine put it: unless we believe we shall not understand (p. 32). This truth needs to be remembered. For example, the temptation is constantly there in our day to make fallible science the basis of our faith and the basis of the surety of what Scripture says (p. 237). Rather we should accept Scripture as God's Word on the basis of its self-attestation as indicated by the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that it is so (Article 5, Belgic Confession).

A second point which Dr. Oosterhoff's book causes us to consider is that belief systems lie at the base of worldviews and thus not in the first place empirically verifiable knowledge. Well before our modern understanding of the universe, belief in a boundless universe, containing a plurality of solar systems, grew during the Renaissance (p. 73). Well before Darwin and the systematic collection of scientific data, evolutionism was believed in as a philosophical and worldview system (p. 140). Today's secular worldview which consciously excludes God is also not based in the first place on empirical evidence, but on theories that eliminated the need for a Creator and divine providence (cf. p. 162f.).

Task of Christians

Part of Dr. Oosterhoff's motivation for writing this book is that we find the intellectual means to evaluate and challenge today's secular postmodern mind-set. To that end, Oosterhoff not only gives regular critiques throughout her book of the philosophy under discussion but also gives a separate chapter, "A Christian critique of Modernism," in which she introduces Abraham Kuyper. Among others, she highlights Kuyper's stress on the an-


tithesis between believing and unbelieving scientists ("a virtually unscalable wall") as well as his conviction that all knowledge has a subjective element. There is no such thing as purely objective knowledge. Oosterhoff does raise the question how exactly a believing scientist is to work with the antithesis. "Believers are not necessarily more successful in their scientific work than unbelievers" (p. 290). In this context she stresses the tentative nature of all scientific models and theories.

Dr. Oosterhoff ends her book with an epilogue in which she suggests some lines of building a Christian theory of knowledge for the future that takes into consideration the work of Augustine, Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel and Michael Polanyi. Christians will take into full consideration "the confession that God is the source of all knowledge and truth, and that in Christ all things hold together (Colossians 1:17). This means that it can serve as basis for truly biblical view of knowledge" (p. 326).

In closing

Much, much more could be said about this book. For example, the author raises the question of whether

Christians can work with non-Christian paradigms and theories or philosophies (e.g., pp. 31-32). What about the place of language and word in philosophical discussion and how this impacts on the Christian faith (pp. 256-274)? This book is rich in content and more issues could be raised, but the purpose of this review is to whet your appetite to read more for yourself.

I highly recommend Dr. Oosterhoff's work for college and university students. It will be of great help in understanding the basic philosophical issues that one is up against in higher education. Reading and reflecting on this book will open one's eyes to much which one otherwise would not even be aware of. Also educators, teachers, ministers should study this book, as well as all others who are interested in the issues she raises. This is a scholarly work, but Dr. Oosterhoff has written it in a very lucid style. She has also tried to make her work as accessible as possible, by including a selective index which can function as a glossary. There is also a helpful chronology of all the major moments of the subject matter she is dealing with as well as bibliography. May this book be a blessing for many. 





How do we discipline Christianly?

By A. Kingma

Discipline is an integral part of teaching in the elementary schools. In a more general sense, discipline begins with setting the stage – students lining up, following classroom routines which the teacher has set, following the school rules which the staff has adopted, and then, listening respectfully to the teacher when the teacher notes *misbehaviour* – behaviour that does not follow that accepted set of classroom rules or school rules. It goes without saying that our elementary students need a well defined set of rules for proper conduct. Respect, routines, rules and the consistent maintenance of them is essential to good discipline in the school.

Discipline is effective only in a spirit of “pleasantness.”

How does discipline break down in an elementary school? Discipline can break down because the student or students misbehave. The students may not follow the written or unwritten expectations of the teacher. The students, due to outside influences, may not respect the teacher. Yes, despite the fact that the students are covenant children, they can and do show evidences of their totally corrupt natures.

Discipline can break down because the teacher may show a sinful reaction or may show a lack of wisdom. The teacher may not show respect to the students. The teacher may not be enforcing the rules consistently. The teacher may not be “bumping up” discipline measures in the classroom because he or she doesn’t recognize that the student has bumped up the discipline problem. The teacher may be over reacting to the discipline problem.

The teacher may not recognize the background or origin of the discipline problem. The teacher may not understand or be able to deal with the “culture” or “sub-culture” of the students. Hopefully not, but the teacher may not even recognize that there is a discipline problem. Discipline may break down further if the principal or the parents may not support the teacher. Teachers and principals are sinful too, and must do all they can to stop discipline from breaking down.

To ensure good Christian discipline in our schools, we need to first provide the right atmosphere of discipline in our schools, as we do in our homes. Douglas Wilson writes in his book *Standing on the Promises* that discipline is effective only in a spirit of “pleasantness” (124, 129). He expounds:

But in many homes chronic unpleasantness reigns all the time. When discipline occurs, it is simply a matter of going from bad to worse. Godly discipline is not like that; of course there will be acute unpleasantness from time to time during the discipline, but an atmosphere of joy and peace and graciousness reigns most of the time (129).

So what is an atmosphere of “pleasantness?” An orderly, happy atmosphere. How do we accomplish this in our schools? Good routines and school rules are a must! Other factors should be considered. Principals and staff should not overload the calendars. Teachers must seek help from more experienced teachers. Share problems! Teachers must recognize discipline problems before they frustrate you the teacher (and therefore the rest of the class). Teachers must call parents for support and help. Teachers must not be bogged down with planning and marking so that they feel that discipline is a nuisance for which they don’t have time. Teachers must have enough sleep to deal with the dear students the next day! Students should be praised for positive actions, and can encourage each other to do so too. An atmosphere of togetherness or family should

be cultivated among students. In the end, principals and staff must work on upholding an atmosphere of pleasantness by consciously gauging the atmosphere in the school.

Perhaps a lot of unpleasantness in our schools is our own fault. Douglas Wilson also mentions that discipline should be done quickly. Children easily forget. Is our system of discipline too “slow?” Is our system of detentions,

Discipline, like every thing else, must always be an act of love.

suspensions and expulsion too drawn out for the elementary school and thus too ineffective? Is our system too “punishment” oriented? What about those students who are always in the hall, or always in the detention room? According to Wilson, if detentions are anything like grounding at home, he detests them and says that all they do is create an atmosphere of unpleasantness. Perhaps we should revisit our written or unwritten “discipline” policies and procedures to see if we are not causing an unpleasant atmosphere because of our “system” of discipline.

Disciplining, like every thing else, must always be an act of love. The first step of discipline must be to state the wrong, but that the second and third steps of discipline must be present too: instruction and restitution. Instruction is teaching the child the reason for proper behaviour: How should we behave? What does Scripture teach us? Restitution means a proper apology that states the wrongdoing, admits the guilt, and asks for forgiveness. Proper restitution for serious offenses should also include prayer – a prayer for the strength of the Holy Spirit. If we now reflect on this aspect, have our elementary schools not erred in the past, and perhaps are we not even erring now? And by skipping the last two steps, doesn’t discipline automatically become a negative experience?

The discipline in many homes may not be similar to the school's, but the school cannot change that. School must provide and enforce a fair discipline policy (produced with parental input) in their parent handbooks. Schools could ask parents to sign that discipline policy to have them show their support of it. Yet, if a student continuously breaks the school policy, what can a school do but call a meeting with parents? For is it not the parents that have the divine authority to nurture their children? If the meeting(s) between parents and school do(es) not produce the desired results, what can a school do but suspend or even expel from school?

As a principal, I can assure you that disciplining in a scriptural way is a difficult task. It's time consuming. It seems to interfere with our lessons. It's practising self-control to discipline in love. May we not become frustrated with this task of disciplining. Fennema in *Nurturing Children in the Lord* writes: "Christian teachers should not be overly dismayed or discouraged over the presence of problems within the school. The distinctiveness found within the Christian school is not the absence of problems . . . but in the manner in which they are resolved." Teachers, parents and principals should do all we can to discipline in love. In our Reformed schools, we should work together to have our covenant children recognize that misbehaviour is sin, that it breaks down, and they must seek restitution. Only then can the misbehaviour be "forgiven and forgotten," and only then can covenant children build one another up.

Called to the office

By K. Sikkema

George was rather cool and fun-loving, and well accepted by several of his peers. Unfortunately, his enjoyment was not always very considerate of others who were serious about their tasks, and showed itself in repeated unauthorized strolling through the class, chatting with people who needed to concentrate, tapping rulers or pencils, cracking inappropriate jokes, and other distractions. His own work was not nearly at the level where his talents and reasonable effort would have put him. Despite hearing repeated admonitions from his home room teacher, do-

ing community service, enduring follow-up one-on-one conversations, and even visiting the office, George did not learn to apply these lessons about the expected type of behaviour. Certainly, the follow-up conversations were always pleasant, loaded with good intentions, and George was always very

The school's efforts would be largely ineffective if they were not supported by the home.

agreeable to suggestions – but the subsequent practice was not in line with such nice conversations. The teacher had talked with George's parents about the situation, but that, too, was ineffective. And so, George found himself facing the principal in the office once again.

George was given the chair for people who needed a talking-to. The principal took his time, filling out some forms, reading a flyer or two, filing a few items in the cabinet . . . After sufficient momentum was built up, he took a copy of the student hand book. It contained a section on discipline, and George knew it. Would it be suspension or expulsion this time?

The principal, a parent himself, knew that his task was *in loco parentis*. He understood that the parents had received an office from the Lord with regards to the upbringing of their covenant children, and that he, the principal, had received some delegated responsibility for part of that task. It was the parents' responsibility first of all. But also, within the communion of saints, it was fitting that he hold before


Within the communion of saints, it was fitting that he hold before George what the Lord's covenantal demands would be.

George what the Lord's covenantal demands would be. After all, God's covenant had been made with his people, and they therefore had a joint covenantal responsibility for bringing up the next generation and for helping one another to grow in the fear of the Lord.

The principal set out before George what beautiful promises the Lord had confirmed to him by the sign and seal of his baptism, and how these promises made him responsible to show true thankfulness. He explained that Christ died for George, and also for the others who were affected by his behaviour, and that therefore, out of sheer thankfulness, it was fitting that he loved them as Christ had loved him in the first place. He showed that *to love his neighbour* was George's calling, his office, and that to neglect that office was not only dangerous and grievous, but also to risk losing the benefits of Christ. "George," he said, "you would make the angels in heaven so happy if you would seriously work on that. You would make a lot of us so happy if you would take the covenant promises of God seriously. And if it is hard, George, God also promised his Holy Spirit to live in you and work with you, and to enable you to do just that. Work at it, and pray for it, George."

George was surprised. He had expected a thundering sermon to chew on, with a final blast of a fist on the desk for dessert, and a topping of suspension or expulsion. Instead, he received one more gentle fatherly word of admonition, a longing plea for repentance, and an implied promise of getting another chance in a marvelous context. Tears welled up in his eyes, but he was not ashamed; being cool and tough didn't count in these circumstances. He stood up to offer his hand. "Thank you, Sir, for explaining it to me like that. I . . . I should get serious about this."

The principal was moved himself. He took George's hand, encouraged him to clean himself up, and to prepare himself to return to the next class. And he would talk with the teacher.

When reflecting upon the discussion with George, the principal realized that the school's efforts would be largely ineffective if they were not supported by the home. How soon would George forget the impact of this moment in the office? Between the home, the school, and the church, there needed to be one direction, one vision, one thrust that would move the educational effort forward to help George reach Christian maturity. It was necessary that parents, too, be reminded of their office. It would be a challenge to reach them all. 

A New Venture

“Voters are Frustrated with Direction of new Government;” “Citizens Fight Proliferation of Casinos in their City;” “Curriculum (sex-ed) much More Explicit.” Headlines such as these are all too common in our daily newspapers on a regular basis. And all too often, Christian Canadian citizens do not know where to turn for help in dealing with issues such as these.

The hope of a new group formed in the last year is that a resource centre staffed by a full-time coordinator will be available to give information and advice on where to turn for help in these matters. Five men from four different provinces have formed the Reformed Canadian Political Research Council (RCPRC) and hired a full-time coordinator to:

1. Motivate and instigate the formation of Associations to promote social/political awareness and involvement in local environments and
2. Provide material regarding social/political issues on an ad hoc basis and upon request.

Let me try to explain the history and plans for this organization and its national coordinator/consultant. As early as the 1960s Reformed Canadians discussed the need to be knowledgeable and active concerning political and social matters in their country. Eventually, a number of ARPA's were established in various congregations. ARPA is an acronym which stands for Association for Reformed Political Action. Boards were elected to run the affairs of local ARPA chapters. Members became involved in matters such as Sunday shopping in their local communities. Regularly members bemoaned the fact that it seemed impossible to organize a national organization which could coordinate the work done by the different groups.

Later, it seemed that the whole ARPA concept was not feasible anymore. Some members became involved in political parties, others became frustrated by the lack of cooperation between the different associations and others simply were too busy with other kingdom work. In the early part of 2000, brothers Pete deBoer, John Voorhorst, Henk Vandeveld, Jacob Kuik and Bill Gortemaker got together and decided to fulfill the dream that had been unattainable before. They advertised a position of National Coordinator for the RCPRC and hired brother Peter Veenendaal of Carman for the position and gave him a job description which is summarized in the two points mentioned above starting on August 1, 2001. Peter will be doing his work partly from his home in Carman, Manitoba and further during visits to the various Canadian Reformed congregations across the country.

Every word of the name chosen for this organization needs a bit of explanation. The R for Reformed means that the Council is based on the Bible as it is faithfully confessed in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. This means also that, initially, the work will be done with members of the Reformed faith. This does not mean that other Christians will be excluded. However, we cannot be everything to everyone in this endeavour. If other groups request our input or help in similar matters, we will do what we can to provide that. The C means that our primary focus will be on Canadian issues. Here too we have to limit ourselves somewhat. We all know

that political institutions in different countries do not work the same. The issues we deal with, however, are often very similar and therefore contact will be sought with other similar Reformed organizations in other countries. The P in the centre of our name stands for Political. The political arena is where most of our activity will be aimed. We must be (come) knowledgeable about our various governments and how they work in order to be involved effectively in working for change. Does this focus on politics restrict us too much? I don't believe so since most social matters with which we are concerned, at one time or another, have input from politicians at different levels as well. The R for research points not only to the work of the national coordinator of this council but also to the various groups of active Christians in the various congregations who will be encouraged to research local topics and share their findings with others via the national office. The C for Council refers only to the five brothers mentioned earlier in this report.

The Coordinator of the Council urges people who are interested to become contact people or association leaders in their congregations to contact him. It would be beneficial if all associations use the name ARPA, so that the name will become recognizable, and then simply add the name of the town or city in which they live to it (e.g. ARPA Carman West). In order to keep people well informed, we recommend that an Association will be established in each Reformed congregation in the near future. Hopefully, by the fall of 2001, the coordinator will visit all interested groups to help them in organizing their particular groups and to receive their input in the work and goals of the Council.

Peter may be contacted via the following addresses:

RCPRC

P.O Box 1713, Carman, Manitoba R0G 0J0

Business phone no. 1-204-745-6238

Home phone no. 1-204-745-3163

Fax no. 1-204-745-6238

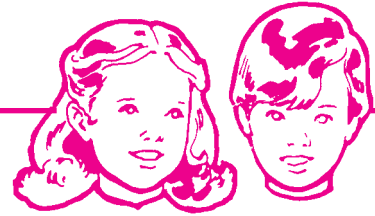
e-mail address pveen@mb.sympatico.ca

Regular office hours are from 7:30 am to 4:30 (Manitoba time) on weekdays. However do not hesitate to call at other times. If no one is available to take your call at the time, leave a detailed message, and the call will be returned as soon as possible.

I will conclude this initial introductory report with words which I wrote in my first monthly report to the Council, “ I hope and pray that the Lord will bless our endeavours to promote faithful Reformed citizenship among our brothers and sisters in this country and that this faithfulness may lead to positive changes in the way our elected officials govern in the positions where God has placed them. It is a large task that we are taking upon ourselves and, when we stand in front of it, may seem like a huge mountain which has never been climbed before and of which many will say that it is insurmountable. And definitely, it is humbling to stand before such a task. However, we know that we have an awesome God who cares for his own and will surely provide for us as we do this work in his service.”

Peter Veenendaal, July 30, 2001

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers and others,

This time we have a puzzle which may be a quite interesting and may keep you occupied for quite some time. These are called tangrams. They were invented a long time ago by a Chinese man named Tan. Tangrams have been a great puzzle ever since the Chinese first began working with them.

The first step in solving tangram puzzles is to make your own set of seven pieces. Use very stiff paper or thin cardboard to make your tangram pieces. It is a good idea to have the material a solid colour, but if it isn't available, don't worry about it. You can cut tangram pieces out of a cereal box.

Every now and again I receive letters from children who are not members of the Busy Beaver Club. It is wonderful to hear from others, but to become a member of the Club, you have to ask for membership. It does not cost anything, so all you have to write in your letters, apart from the news you wish to tell me, is a request to become a member. You see, I cannot give you membership if you do not ask. This goes the same as asking your mom for an apple. You ask her for it, you don't just expect her to give you one when you write her a letter.

So please, if you are not yet a member and wish to become a member, write me another letter and ask for your membership and you will be heartily welcomed into the Club.

Love from Aunt Betty

Puzzles

TWO IN ONE!

To each of the groups below, add a Bible name to form another Bible name. The name added is placed unchanged at the beginning or end of the group of letters given.

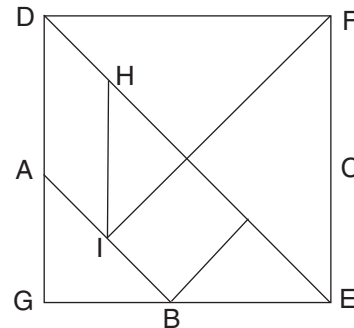
For example, "JOR" are the letters you are given.

Another Bible name is "DAN,"
making the completed word "JORDAN"

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| 1. JAH | 11. JOT |
| 2. B | 12. HIB |
| 3. IEL | 13. AM |
| 4. JO | 14. IAH |
| 5. IAS | 15. AEL |
| 6. AB | 16. PI |
| 7. PERG | 17. AN |
| 8. AS | 18. JERU |
| 9. US | 19. EB |
| 10. AH | |



TANGRAMS



In order to make the seven pieces correctly, you must follow these directions exactly. Begin with a piece of material that is absolutely square. A 6-inch square piece is a good size, so let's use that.

As shown in the illustration above, locate points A, B and C. They are at the exact centres of three sides. On a 6-inch square piece of material, these points are 3 inches from the corners. Put a dot to show the location of points A, B and C.

Now draw the lines shown in the illustration in the following order: Draw the line connecting points A and B. Next draw the line from corner D to corner E. The third line to draw connects corners F and G, but don't draw it all the way to G. It begins at corner F and stops when it reaches the line connecting points A and B. Take a look at the illustration before you draw this line.

Now get ready to draw the line which begins at point B and runs halfway to point C. Once again, look at the illustration. This line ends at the line joining corner D and E. Just one more line to go - from point H to point I. To draw it correctly, measure exactly 1½ inches from the left-hand side of the tangram and make a dot for point H on line DE. Point I is where AB and FG meet. Now connect points H and I with a line.

Finally, using scissors, cut along the lines you just drew. When you finish, you will have seven tangram pieces to make your puzzle. Tangram figures are constructed using all seven tangram pieces. No piece may overlap another piece. There are possibly hundreds of figures that you can make with your tangram pieces.

Here is a list of figures that my book shows:

- Dog •Running man •Kneeling person •Goose •Rabbit
- Cat Bowing •Chinese Ice Skater •Swan •Duck

See how many you can make and what names you can give them.



Aunt Betty

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