

*The
Hospital Visit*

*Be Filled With
the Spirit and
Not With
Spirits!*

*Digging Out
Those Dug In*



*As Christians we have a calling to show
compassion to the sick.*



R. Aasman

Rev. R. Aasman is minister of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church at Edmonton, Alberta
raasman@canrc.org

The Hospital Visit

Someone who has been in the hospital for a while longs for normalcy and just to be part of daily life

Hospitalization

It seems that hospital stays have been dramatically shortened in recent years. A mother giving birth to her child might be in the hospital for less than twenty-four hours. People having what I would consider major surgery have only a one night stay. In such cases, a patient will probably only have visits from immediate family and very close friends. Quite frankly, I don't think a young mother appreciates having a visit from me as minister when she is resting, busy with the baby, and getting ready to go home. However, there are patients who remain in hospital for many days or weeks.

Often it is just listening and empathizing that is such a huge support for a patient

A long stay in the hospital can be an emotionally difficult time. Both patient and family have some anxiety about recovery and health. There can be boredom. Another factor is the feeling of being disconnected from family and community. Everyone else is busy with family, work, hobbies, vacations, and plans. But meanwhile, the patient's life is on hold and cut off from the rest of the community. Life in the hospital is a different world altogether. Someone who has been in the hospital for a while longs for normalcy and just to be part of daily life.

What a blessing it is to receive visitors for encouragement and companionship. What a blessing to feel connected with the community outside the hospital.

Our calling

As Christians, we have a calling to show compassion to the sick and troubled and therefore to visit them in hospitals. Of course this would include those in other kinds of institutions or those confined to their own home. The Old Testament has some remarkable guidelines about taking care of the sick and the troubled. Our Lord Jesus Christ set for us a powerful example in caring for the sick, the disabled, and anyone suffering from physical and emotional ailments. We remember what He said in Matthew 25: "I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then He explained what He meant by this: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Also in the Form for the Ordination of Deacons we read:

Also today the Lord calls on us to show hospitality, generosity, and mercy, so that the weak and needy may share abundantly in the joy of God's people. No one in the congregation of Christ may live uncomforted under the pressure of sickness, loneliness, and poverty ... They [the deacons] shall promote with word and deed the unity and fellowship in the Holy Spirit which the congregation enjoys at the table of the Lord. In this way God's children will increase in love to one another and to all men.

Having enjoyed the grace of God and the depth of his love in the gift of his Son Jesus Christ, we are now to love one another, not just in word but also in deed. How obvious it is that this would definitely include visiting someone in the hospital.



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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: R. Aasman, W.B. Slomp, Cl. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2
E-Mail: veenendaal@shaw.ca


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Recovery

Hospitals acknowledge the value of visitors. Visits enhance the recovery rates of patients. I have first-hand experience of doctors who were amazed at the recovery of a patient who was supported by the communion of saints. One person suffering from suicidal depression recovered so fast and so well that the doctor told the patient, "your church community's support has done this." Even if visiting did not speed up recovery rates, having the loving support of family, friends, and church community will make the time of recovery more rewarding.

Do it

What some people discover when they are in the hospital is that people whom they considered friends or people who promised to visit them do not do so. For some who fail to visit it is an unconscionable lack of love. They are too caught up with their own interests to bother making the hospital visit. Shame on them! But there are also those who are afraid to go. Apparently, some people are about as afraid of making hospital visits as public speaking. They are afraid of what they are to say and do. They are thinking, "What can I say to make a real difference in this person's life and to help them get through their illness or recovery?"

Of course there may be legitimate reasons for not making a visit: you should not go if you are feeling ill; sometimes only immediate family is allowed. But being afraid and not knowing what to say is no excuse. In fact, experts tell us and personal experience backs this up, the main thing about a visit is simply being there. We mentioned earlier that patients who are in the hospital feel disconnected from their regular world. When you come as a friend or member of the congregation, you are connecting them with that world. You normalize what is not a normal situation. You show friendship, love, compassion, and support to someone in need. A visitor does not have to say a lot or answer deep theological questions such as, "Why does God do such things?" Often it is just listening and empathizing that is such a huge support for a patient.

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Etiquette

As important as it is to make visits to those in hospital, it is also important to exercise proper hospital etiquette. One expert on hospital visitation states that without proper etiquette, one had better stay away. It is important that we take the personal needs of a patient into consideration. For instance, if a lot of pain and disability is involved, we might want to consider contacting the family and asking whether a visit is appropriate. Keep in mind a hospital's visitation times and never get in the way of the hospital staff. Proper rest and proper medical attention are very important. When coming into a room where the curtains are drawn, announce your presence in a calm voice and ask whether you can come farther. Be very respectful of a patient's personal space and dignity. For instance, don't plop down on the bed or pick at their food tray; don't poke around in cards and personal items; don't grab their arm or give a big hug unless you have the kind of relationship that would allow that.

Perhaps the biggest thing to keep in mind is that this visit is not about you or about your desire to be needed. Be careful not to offer all kinds of opinions about medical conditions and don't offer stories about other people who have had similar experiences. This is not helpful. Show that you care and focus on the person who is lying or sitting there with suffering or problems. Let them talk and set the course of the discussion. Periods of silence can be just fine. When a patient opens up and tells of their suffering or anxiety, sometimes the best thing you can do is show that you care, to express sympathy, and to promise that you will think of them and keep them in prayer. A suffering person wants support and to connect with you and to feel that you care.

Keep the visit short if the patient is tired or in pain. Ask whether it is a good time to go. And only promise that you will come back if you fully intend to do so. You can ask whether the patient would appreciate Bible reading and prayer.



The love of Christ

We read in 1 John 4, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." God's love is perfected or made complete in us when his love leads us to love our brother or sister who is in need. Visiting those who are in hospital, visiting the lonely, the shut-in, and any one in need demonstrates the love of God. And it is a powerful and wonderful way for our brother or sister to come to this conclusion: how beautiful it is when brothers and sisters dwell in sweet communion.

W. Geurts



Rev. W. Geurts is minister of the Fergus North Canadian Reformed Church in Ontario
wgeurts@canrc.org

Be Filled With the Spirit and Not With Spirits!



MATTHEW 13:52

“ . . . Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

Ephesians 5:17-18

Is there anything wrong with a drink now and then? Despite what some Christians believe, it isn't wrong for us to have an occasional beer, a glass of wine, or another drink that contains alcohol. As long as we enjoy these things in moderation and as long as we always maintain control over ourselves and over the alcohol that we consume, also this can be seen as one of God's gifts to us.

The problem that Paul is addressing in Ephesians 5:17-18 isn't the use alcohol as such but rather the foolishness of abusing of it and being enslaved by it. The world in which we live is full of this kind of misuse of God's good gift and we as the Lord's people are taught here to be different.

All around us alcohol and drugs are used as a way of escaping a life that sometimes seems miserable and without hope. However, we who have experienced God's grace and love know that there is no real and lasting way out of misery and hopelessness except through faith in our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

Having set us free from the control of sin and Satan, the Lord also freed us from the empty and meaningless life that is lived by so many other people in our world. As his Spirit lives in us and causes us to grow in fellowship with Him, we are increasingly lifted out of despair and hopelessness. We are changed so that a new joy begins to characterize our lives even when we

still go through great struggles and difficulties. Those who experience this true and meaningful joy will then no longer need to look for artificial and superficial sources of happiness.

Those who fill themselves with alcoholic spirits or with other mind altering substances are foolish because they continue to live in the darkness of sin. They refuse to come into the light of God's grace and to live in unity with Him and according to his will. True wisdom is to be filled with the Spirit of God so that our sinful nature no longer controls our lives and so we learn to submit to Christ as our only Lord and master.

If we allow ourselves to get drunk on alcohol or high on drugs we put ourselves back into the slavery that Christ has freed us from. As we fill ourselves with these things we lose control and we leave the door open for sin and for Satan to come in and to determine our behaviour. Paul warns that this leads to debauchery or to further ungodliness. We lose a sense of caring about what we do or about the consequences of our behaviour. By giving up our self control it becomes impossible for us to withstand temptation and to choose wisely.

Putting oneself under slavery to sin instead of to Christ only grows with the misuse of these spirits. Those who continue to fill themselves in this way will become

dependant on them and then the spirits that they consume will begin to control them.

Belonging to Christ and serving Him as our Lord demands our total loyalty and commitment. As He Himself said, we cannot serve two masters. In this case we either serve Him or we serve the substances that we are addicted to. Paul also makes it clear we can't have it both ways; we can't be filled with both alcoholic spirits and the Holy Spirit.

When we as God's people struggle against addictions or the temptation to seek comfort in alcohol or drugs, we are strengthened by focusing on Christ as the only real comfort. As we turn away from the foolishness of worldly thinking and no longer oppose the work of the Holy Spirit by filling ourselves with other things, He will fill us more and more. Then by his power we will grow in true wisdom as He teaches us about God's will for our lives and as He guides us in applying this by living according to God's will.

The Holy Spirit makes us new and different than other people in the world around us. He builds our self control so that we can use the good things that God has given us in ways that show our thankfulness for his continued blessings. Alcoholic spirits and drugs that help us are God's gifts and through faith we learn not to abuse these things by using them as a substitute for our real and lasting comfort.



Rev. R. Lankheet is minister
of the Covenant Reformed
Church (URC) at
Toronto, Ontario
lankheet@sympatico.ca

Rev. G.Ph. van Popta is
minister of the Canadian
Reformed Church at
Ancaster, Ontario
gvanpopta@canrc.org

Towards a Common Songbook (Part 7)

Intelligible and Edifying

As we continue looking at the eleven guidelines adopted by the United Reformed and Canadian Reformed synods, we come to the fifth which is:

The songs of the church must be intelligible and edifying to the body of Christ.

Two New Testament texts are added to this guideline:

1 Corinthians 14:15 and Colossians 3:16. To understand this guideline well, it would be useful to take a closer look at these two texts.

1 Corinthians 14:15 says, "So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind."

In this part of his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul gives instruction about worship. It seems that the style of worship in Corinth had become somewhat chaotic. Several church members were abusing the gift of speaking in tongues in their worship services. Whether this tongues-speaking was ecstatic speech or foreign languages is a question that would take us too far afield for the purpose of this article. Whatever the case, it was causing a problem since people were uttering words that many in attendance at worship could not understand. Paul says that is not very useful. Whatever is spoken in church must be intelligible to all. He used the example of musical instruments. We want a trumpet, flute, or harp to

give a distinct sound. If it is just uttering noise, it has no value. Similarly, if a person utters words that are just sound and noise to others, the words have no value.

Better than tongues is prophecy, says Paul. Prophecy, by biblical definition, is more than foretelling the future. Prophecy is speaking about the great deeds God has done and will do for his own glory and the salvation of his people. The Apostle says, "Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air" (v. 9). "In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue" (v. 19).

Everything he applies to speech Paul also applies to song. In verse 15 he says that not only does he want to sing with his spirit, but he also wants to sing with his mind. God has given us minds with which to think. Among other things, that differentiates us from the other creatures. We are not irrational animals that bellow out sounds but people who use our minds to say and sing very specific and understandable things. Let our singing be prophetic!

And so the songs of the church must be intelligible. They must also be edifying. In Colossians 3:16 Paul says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all

wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

How are we edified? By the Word of Christ which speaks to us about our salvation, about the great things God does for his people, and about how we are to live in thankfulness. All of that ought to come out in the songs of the church as well. Our songs need to be governed by the Word of God. That is why we give priority to the Psalms, God's own songbook, and to other versifications of Scripture. When we sing the words of Scripture and other songs entirely faithful to Scripture, we are teaching and admonishing ourselves and each other with the wisdom of the Word of God. If we start singing songs that are not faithful to Scripture, we will begin to tear the church down rather than build it up.

We do not hold the position that all Praise and Worship music is bad, though some of it surely is. Some songs say very little, say it poorly, and say it over and over. We do well to keep simplistic, overly repetitive choruses out of our songbook. Let us strive for songs that are intelligent and which will build us up in faith, knowledge, and obedience. In this way the body of Christ will be built up not only by way of the preaching from the pulpit but also through the church's song.

Rev. C. Bouwman is minister
of the Canadian Reformed
Church at Yarrow,
British Columbia
cbouwman@canrc.org

Digging Out Those Dug In

For those who take God's Word seriously, some issues are beyond discussion. Prostitution is simply wrong and so is murder and deceit. We're all agreed.

Other things are not that straightforward. Should one watch the movie based on Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*? Is it acceptable to celebrate the Lord's Supper using only individual cups? May one take a job that has you begin work late Sunday evening? May one participate in professional sport? What conditions must one insist on before the churches can rightly establish ecclesiastical fellowship with another federation of churches? We all have our thoughts on each such issue and generally don't mind to state them. As long as we're flexible with each other, expressing our thoughts and having a good debate on any such issue can be stimulating and encouraging.

What do you do, though, when one (or both) of the brothers in such a debate digs his heels in and inflexibly insists that his position is correct? How do you overcome hot heads, hard hearts, and the resulting distrust and aversion?

The Apostle Paul received a letter from the church of Jesus Christ in Corinth. Included in that letter was a question for the Apostle to answer concerning "food sacrificed to idols" (1 Cor 8:1). Paul's instruction shows us how to dig out those dug in.

A problem addressed

Before the gospel had come to Corinth, it was common practice for Corinthians to take food to the numerous temples in town as sacrifices to the gods. Part of the offering was burned for the gods, some was given to the priests for their consumption, and the remainder was for the self to eat in the temple. The priests could eat the food themselves, or (as they received more than they needed) they could sell it in the temple as a "restaurant-service" to the public. In a town without the restaurants we're used to, going to the temple for a meal (be it for a family or a work event) was a relatively common practice.

The manner of the debate needs addressing before the matter of the debate

Through Paul's preaching, several Corinthians came to faith in Jesus Christ. Their repentance meant that they denounced the existence of the idols as real gods and acknowledged only the Lord as God. As a result, they now knew certain practices of their heathen past to be distinctly wrong. They no longer, for example, offered sacrifices to the heathen gods. In other areas of life, however,

questions arose that were not so clear-cut. Some in the congregation were adamant: a Christian can no longer go to the temple restaurants to buy food the priests had for sale – for it was food sacrificed to idols. Others of the congregation disagreed. The idols to which the food was initially offered don't actually exist and so the food available at the temple is as good as any food you can get from your garden. They saw no problem taking the family to the temple for a meal. Debates raged after church. . . heels were dug in, heads heated, hearts hardened. . . and Corinthian Bob distrusted Corinthian Bill. . .

How does Paul answer? We half expect the Apostle to jump up and down impatiently to point out in no uncertain terms that going to the temple restaurant is flatly wrong. In fact, the Apostle eventually states precisely that position fully three chapters *after* he's begun addressing the question of food sacrificed to idols! (1 Corinthians 10:19-22.) Why, we wonder, does Paul take so long in giving an answer to (we'd say) a relatively simple question? That, dear reader, is because Paul considers another matter more important than the actual answer to the Corinthians' question. To Paul's mind, the *manner* of the debate needs addressing before the *matter* of the debate. For in Corinth the issue *drove brother from brother* – and

that may never be. So Paul dumps the solution onto the table: "If what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall" (v. 3).

The solution proposed

Notice how important the brother's well being is to Paul. In that one little sentence of verse 13, the Apostle twice mentions causing the brother to fall. The repetition is very deliberate; it's Paul's way of putting his conclusion into bold print.

What, though, are the grounds for Paul's emphatic decision? Why is he so adamant that he must give away even his favourite dish in order to prevent his brother from falling? To answer that question, we need to follow the Apostle's line of thought in 1 Corinthians 8.

He begins his comments on the topic of food sacrificed to idols with this statement: "We know that we all possess knowledge." On any given issue – whether it's the right or wrong of eating food sacrificed to idols, or watching a particular movie, or using individual cups at the Lord's Table – we all have our opinion (we call it "knowledge") and can state it well. The person we're talking with has his "knowledge" on the issue and will state it too. Perhaps we're agreed – and we feel good that our "knowledge" is vindicated. Then again, perhaps we don't agree and so repeat our arguments again and maybe again (we dig in our heels. . .) – and end up convinced that our "knowledge" is superior and the other person is dumb for not being able to see our light. It's as Paul says next: "knowledge puffs up." Stating and restating our opinion convinces us that we've got it right – and the other person is

wrong. Ironically, he feels the same about us (though we don't realize that). "Knowledge puffs up," says Paul, "but love builds up." Knowledge drives brothers apart, but love draws brothers together. If you think you know and thereby lose your brother, you simply prove that you don't know as you ought to know (v. 2), for knowledge (an opinion) without love is nothing. After all, the Lord did not save the world through knowledge, but saved the world through love.

*If you think you know
and thereby lose your
brother, you simply prove
that you don't know as
you ought to know*

Paul agrees with the Corinthian Christians that an idol is no god, even though the heathen people of Corinth claim the opposite. Instead, there is one true God. But who is this God? Paul refers to Him as "Father" (v. 6), a term gleaned from the Old Testament and from Jesus' instruction that describes God's mercy in making sinners his children. It's a term that captures love for the unworthy. Similarly, though the pagans of Corinth insist there are many (divine) lords, Paul agrees with the Christians of Corinth that "there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ," through whose sacrifice on the cross sinners again have life with God. Paul's reference to the Lord as Jesus Christ, the anointed saviour, points out the Lord's love; He gave Himself to the cross of Calvary to redeem the unworthy.

These references to God's love for sinners become building blocks that Paul uses to address the wrong-headed attitude of the Corinthian Christians in their debates with each other. There are those Christians of Corinth who are so accustomed to taking idols seriously (after all, their mothers raised them to respect the idols!) that even their conversion to Christianity hasn't freed them from some fear of the idols. You can bamboozle such brothers and sisters with your arguments that idols don't exist anyway and so talk them into coming along with you to the temple restaurant for an evening out – but when such a brother or sister wakes up in the middle of the night, his conscience may eat away at him because he's done what he thinks he shouldn't have done, or perhaps he's even tempted to revert to the temple sacrifices and feasts of his youth. And he tosses and turns in his bed, with a heart in anguish and a soul confused and perhaps his faith stressed – all because you insisted to him that logically there's nothing wrong with going to the temple restaurant since those idols aren't real anyway.

It's against this possible consequence of your "knowledge" that Paul warns the Corinthian Christians. Your actions can be cause for your brother to stumble. Your actions, rooted in good theological arguments, could destroy one "for whom Christ died" (v. 11). That is sin *on your part*, sin against the brother, *and* sin against the Christ who redeemed that brother. It is sin because this action on your part *does not reflect the same love* for the brother that Christ displayed when He died for you and for him. Hence Paul's

conclusion: "Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall" (v. 13).

We may wonder, is Paul's conclusion not too strong? Ought Paul not to take into account that perhaps the weak brother ought to grow up?

In point of fact, the Apostle is simply applying for the Corinthians what Jesus once said to his disciples. When Jesus had a little child stand among his disciples (Matthew 18:2), He pointedly warned the twelve: "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large milestone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (v. 6). Jesus' reference was not just to adults tripping up a six year old;

There is a distinctly Christian way to discuss matters where opinion differs

his reference was also to any disciple (or Christian) tripping up a fellow Christian who we might consider weak or immature (a "child"). The disciples (and all Christians) must respect the other *for what he is* – including his limited insights. Under no circumstance may a child of God be cause for another child of God for whom Christ died – irrespective of age or talents or insights – to stumble. One ought rather to cut off one's hand or foot than be a stumbling block to another; talk about self-denial! Paul knew Jesus' instruction in Matthew 18 and therefore determined for his brother's sake – yes, and for his own salvation's sake! – never to eat meat again, if that would save his

brother from stumbling. Truly, this is love for the neighbour – as God loved us in Jesus Christ.

The lesson taught

How were the Christians of Corinth to respond when they heard Paul's answer to their idol food question? Surely the answer is clear: they had to conclude first of all that there was a distinctly Christian way to discuss matters where opinion differed. In fact, they had to conclude from Paul's answer that the manner of conducting the debate was more important than the actual answer to the issue being debated – for Paul delayed his answer to the issue till chapter 10, while he laid a finger first on the manner of the debate.

That meant in practice that the Christians of Corinth had to respect the other and had to deny the self to spare the other. The emphasis was not to be on knowledge, for "knowledge puffs up" – and drives the brother away. The emphasis was instead to be on love, for "love builds up" – and therefore seeks what's best for the other (as Paul will draw out in much more detail in 1 Corinthians 13). So the temple restaurant became off-limits for the Christians, not first of all because of the theological grounds Paul will mention in 1 Corinthians 10:19-22 (behind the non-existent idols are real demons), but primarily because of the sensitivity you must feel to your brother who doesn't see things your way.

In Canadian Reformed circles opinions differ on particular points of practice. Positions are taken, heels are dug in, communication breaks down, appeals are lodged at major assemblies, perhaps church discipline ensues. What is the way forward? It seems to me that the focus needs to rise above the matter of "knowledge" (my position is correct because...) and



Church News

Called to the Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland (Vrijgemaakt) at Tilburg, Neth:

E. Venema

set aside for mission work by Surrey, British Columbia.

Granted an extended study leave under the provisions of article 14 of the Church Order (temporary release):

Rev. T.G. Van Raalte
of Winnipeg-Redeemer.

rest instead on the topic of love. When we disagree and dig in our heels, we can smother our brother with the force of our arguments – but in his heart he is not persuaded and he ends up in the ditch – a brother for whom Christ died.

More important than being theologically correct on a given issue is the need to show love for the other

We need to back up and in self-denial assist the brother out of the ditch. More important than being theologically correct on a given issue is the need to show love for the other, as abundantly and as selflessly as the only true God displayed when He made Himself our Father, and as abundantly and selflessly as the only true Lord displayed when He showed Himself on Good Friday to be our anointed saviour. Paul catches the point: "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2).



Dr. R. Faber is professor
of Classical Studies
at the University of Waterloo
rfaber@watarts.uwaterloo.ca

High Notes in the History of the Hymns: “Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep”

Little is known of Jane Eliza Leeson (1807-1882), the author of “Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep.” For a time she was a member of the Catholic Apostolic Church, which had been formed in 1832 by Edward Irving. A minister in the Scottish Presbyterian Church at Glasgow and later at London, Irving was a popular preacher and author. He became interested in the study of the end of times and especially in the apocalypse as recorded in the book of Revelation. He was fascinated with the idea of speaking in tongues, uttering prophecies, spiritual healing, and raising the dead.

Deposed from his ministerial office for promoting these practices, Irving formed the Catholic Apostolic Church, which initially comprised about eight hundred members. As the name implies, the new denomination was modelled upon the church of the apostolic era: twelve “apostles,” not elected by the church but “divinely appointed,” became the leaders of the sect. As a member of the Catholic Apostolic Church, Jane Leeson wrote five hymns for its new song-book; she later converted to Roman Catholicism.

Loving Shepherd of Thy sheep,
All Thy lambs in safety keep;
Nothing can Thy power withstand,
None can pluck them from Thy hand.

Hymn 45:1

Eliza Leeson’s hymns have been studied in the context of writings by other women of the Victorian period in England. In that chauvinist society women writers were frowned upon; however, exception was made for those who wrote hymns, especially if these concerned the ill, young, poor, or feeble. Thus one comes across *The Invalid’s Hymn Book* (1841) and *Hours of Sorrow Cheered and Comforted* (1836), both by Charlotte Elliott. Cecil Frances Humphreys published a popular collection of songs with the title, *Hymns for Little Children* (1848). Leeson’s first collection of hymns was entitled *Infant Hymnings*. “Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep” became the most popular of Leeson’s hymns; though much altered over the years, this poem appears in many current hymn books.

First published in *Hymns and Scenes of Childhood* (1842), “Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep” consisted of three verses of eight lines each. Its subject is a fanciful embroidering upon John 10:27-28, in which the Lord Jesus Christ says: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (KJV). It is addressed to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the vocatives “Loving Shepherd” and “Loving Saviour” (in the original) attest.

Hymn 45
Text: Jane Eliza Leeson, 1842
Tune: Orlando Gibbons, 1623
Original Function: Children’s Prayer

The version of the hymn that appears in the *Book of Praise* differs considerably from the original song, which was composed not for corporate singing during the worship services but for private prayer by young children. To them the themes of security (verse 1), happiness (verse 2), obedience (verse 3), and belonging (verse 4) are appropriate. Moreover, the picture of little children walking in the footsteps of their father and the pastoral image of lambs and their loving shepherd further reinforce the infantile flavour of the hymn.

The following verse (now removed from many modern hymn books) reveals not only the deeply personal character of the poem, but also an emphasis on the child's relationship with Christ, whose

possession he or she is. Note the repetitions of "bought" and "Thine" and the anaphora in "holy, harmless, humble" in this verse, which make the hymn appealing to children:

Bought with blood, and bought for Thee,
Thine, and only Thine, I'd be,
Holy, harmless, humble, mild,
Jesus Christ's obedient child.

Whereas the hymn in the *Book of Praise* is accompanied by a tune from the hand of Orlando Gibbons (1623), "Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep" is more commonly sung to "Buckland," a tune that appeared first in the *Merton Tune Book* (1863) authored by L.G. Hayne, organist at Eton College and vicar in Cornwall, England.



J. Moesker

Rev. J. Moesker is minister
of the Canadian Reformed
Church at Vernon,
British Columbia
jmoesker@canrc.org

Conflict in Church



It's always disappointing when you hear about or experience conflict in a local church. We're supposed to be the assembly of believers who all expect their salvation in Christ and are also called to love one another as we have been loved by Christ. So how can there be serious conflict in the church? How is it that conflicts escalate so quickly in the Reformed community that they end up, in some cases, even tearing churches apart? Sadly, the rapid escalation of conflict in Reformed churches has caused some to throw up their hands and to walk away from the church altogether. Others may have stayed, but have become somewhat cynical. And still others remain with pain that stays for a lifetime.

A recent article by Jan Westert in *De Reformatie* (March 25, 2006 issue) shows that the rapid escalation of conflict in Reformed churches is sad but not surprising. It is due to the unique nature of the church. The article is entitled "Conflicts in the Church Escalate Quickly." The (rather free) translation is mine. Westert introduces his subject as follows:

Conflicts can take place in the church just as elsewhere. This is sad, because isn't it exactly in the church that we're taught to

love our neighbour? Of all places the church should be the place where you can overcome "hardness of heart." Apparently, though, it's just as difficult in the communion of saints as elsewhere to take the step to be reconciled and to forgive and ask for forgiveness. And the window of opportunity to create solutions sometimes fades away just as quickly.

The church has had all sorts and sizes of conflict, from small incidents to issues which blow up and result in entrenched positions where communication is no longer possible. Who decides where the flowers are supposed to stand and where the projector has to be located in the church building? Who decides about the architecture and construction of a new church building? How much credibility should a critical newcomer be given in a consistory where everything has always been done a certain way? How do you deal with a minister who, in the eyes of the congregation, has not

functioned effectively in his office for a long time? I haven't even mentioned the tensions that originate when it comes to liturgy or difference in doctrine. There are all kinds of things that can cause conflict in churches. And it's astonishing to what extent and with what hardness apparently superficial incidents can play out over time.

Obviously church conflicts have a unique dynamic. That's not surprising, as the emotional and normative factors play a big role. Moreover, the church is a very complex organization in which all kinds of aspects play a part and people deal with each other in all kinds of relationships. If a conflict starts, a broad network of brothers and sisters are immediately involved.

Westert outlines three factors which can cause a conflict to escalate very quickly in the church.

1. The church is a diverse group of people

In the church a diversity of people comes together. Older and younger people; highly-educated and learning-impaired people; members who give themselves fully for the church and their fellow church members and those who aren't as involved; rational people and people who go more by their emotions ... people with a huge variety of backgrounds and viewpoints. That diverse company of brothers and sisters form the church, the assembly of believers.

How is it that conflicts escalate so quickly in the Reformed community that they end up, in some cases, even tearing churches apart?

It is different from an organization of like-minded people who all have a singular purpose or an association where you can terminate your membership whenever you wish. The diverse composition of the church already gives it a unique character. In short, members of a church don't just have a passing acquaintance, but are involved in the church with heart and soul. That is one factor that plays a role.

2. The church is a normative organization

Additionally, you could typify the church as a normative

organization. Together you confess your relationship with the Lord our God. That church has also received a fixed form, is institutionalized. The members are bound to the confession of the church. . . differences in church matters are easily drawn into the dogmatic sphere. The mark of a dogma is its absolute character. Many conflicts aren't about such deep differences of opinion that maintaining one particular stand is commanded by God. It is beneficial not to lose sight of the difference between *my truth* and *the truth*. A fundamental difference of opinion about something doesn't mean that you need to condemn the adherents of the opposite view as persons or as fellow Christians. The point is that in the church we strive for unity and truth. That striving easily brings about tension. Before you know it everything has to do with everything – binding to the confessions, experiencing of faith, liturgical change, differences in lifestyle, issues of form, and even practical administrative matters all become matters of principle. In this context even an issue such as where flowers should be located in the church can become an issue that ends up going beyond normal proportions. It's understandable that conflicts in which one is completely involved become absolute. It would be beneficial, however, if more attention was paid to the element of imperfection and one-sidedness in our own interpretation or our own view about a certain issue.

3. Cooperation

The third factor has everything to do with cooperation. A church

exists through the cooperation of volunteers. They all have their own motives for serving. At the same time, the church community has its own small kingdoms: the bookkeeper, the minister, the caretaker, the organist, the office bearers, and various committees. They all have their own tasks and they all need to cooperate with each other. Obviously cooperation requires a lot of skill.

It is beneficial not to lose sight of the difference between my truth and the truth

Communication between those various groups takes a great deal of care. "Governing and serving" often hinders good cooperation. The minister has a very unique role when it comes to conflict. He is the one who has to give spiritual leadership and it is expected of him that he give clear direction. At the same time he is responsible for pastoral care. That can be a source of conflict for members of the church as well as for the minister himself.

Westert states that these three factors, which make the church so vulnerable to conflict, could easily be expanded. The point is that there is a whole range of factors that can cause conflict to escalate rapidly especially in a church. Brother Westert also shows in his article by means of a sociological study (Glasl, 1997) how a conflict goes through three main phases of

escalation – a “win-win” phase, a “win-lose” phase, and finally an “everything or nothing” phase. As a conflict moves through these three phases, the two parties communicate less and less and are less and less tolerant of each other’s positions until finally they only see each other as enemies. This process makes a conflict in a church difficult to deal with and even people who are not directly involved easily end up becoming entangled in it. Westert describes how church conflicts escalate:

A conflict is never isolated as the church environment means others become involved and take sides

In a situation of escalating conflict, one’s own perception becomes more important than knowing the facts or trying to convince the other party. A conflict is never isolated as the church environment means others become involved and take sides. This leads to quarrelsome and obstructive behaviour. The various aspects strengthen each other and so the conflict is further escalated.

In church we like to keep a difference quiet as long as possible. A conflict then has a long time to simmer quietly and this also contributes to quick escalation. In the background there is this idea that there should never be conflict in a church. The church is then more

or less self-protective over against quarrels and conflicts. This avoidance doesn’t help deal with matters. When the conflict really does boil over, it can hardly be stopped anymore. . . .

All those involved in a conflict are part and parcel of the church. Conviction, emotion, relationships, and “my opinion” and “the truth” are then all closely connected. Paying attention to one’s own role in a conflict and being able to examine yourself in your own mirror is one of the biggest steps towards finding a solution and to reconciliation. That may not sound like much of a conclusion. But as believers we

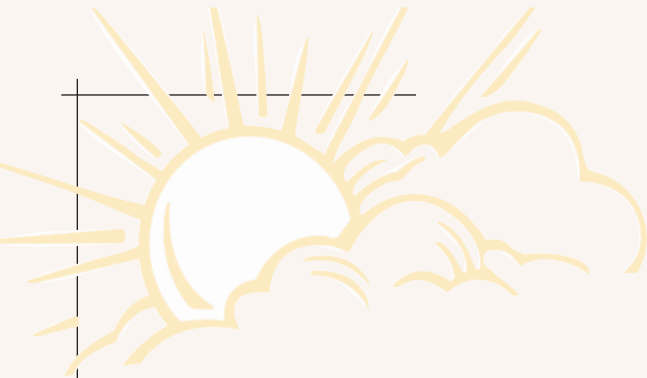


need to seek reconciliation and that’s what we need to work at.... Meanwhile, enjoy the many-coloured flowers in the church without becoming annoyed. Try to find enjoyment in the brother or sister who is doing his or her best to contribute to the life of the church, even if your opinion differs from his or her opinion. And above all, if you’re stuck, suffer pain, are hurt, then get down on your knees before Him who bore all our pain. That’s where new freedom and openness has to start.

Paying attention to one’s own role in a conflict is one of the biggest steps towards finding a solution

Westert’s conclusion is very brief and I’m sure we’d like to hear more about prevention and solutions when it comes to conflict in a church. However, his description of the reasons why conflict so easily escalates in a church community is helpful. It helps us to understand what is happening and I believe that understanding what is happening is a big part of the solution already. If we realize that there are reasons why conflict can easily escalate in church, we won’t throw up our hands and walk away from the church in frustration either. We’ll stay and do our best to become part of the solution, to the glory of God and the good of our brothers and sisters.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.’ Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.”

Isaiah 49:13-16

In this text we receive a tremendous amount of comfort. At times when we face hardships in life we can so quickly think that God is not there for us. Yet this text shows us that He is always there, even through the difficult times in our lives.

In the Old Testament the names of the tribes of Israel were engraved on stones and fastened to the ephod of the high priest as a memorial before the Lord. Similarly, we also know that our names are engraved in the book of life through God’s mercy and grace as we continue to run the race of faith here on earth.

What a great comfort to know that our heavenly Father watches over our lives. No matter what we face in life, be it in happy times or in difficulties, God is moulding our lives to his glory. Praise be to our sovereign God who so directs our lives. All honour and glory to Him alone!

I Will Not Forget You!

Based on Isaiah 49:15, 16

SEE! I will not forget you,
I have carved you
In the palm of My Hand!
JESUS, my SAVIOUR said.
Long ago these words HE spoke,
Precious words, still trustworthy, for ALL who believe!
Precious words, FOREVER TRUE!
Come unto me, all you who are weary,
And I will give you rest.
Keep holding on to the nail-pierced Hands of Jesus,
THE ONLY SAVIOUR you and I will EVER need;
The ONE who says:
I love you My child,
My Hands were pierced just for you!
Cast all of your cares upon Me,
I will ONLY give the VERY BEST of everything!

This poem was prepared by: Connie VanAmerongen

*If God is on our side, against us shall be none.
He did not spare His own, His well-beloved Son,
But gave Him up for us that He might save us truly.
Will He with Him not give us all things free and fully?
Who then will yet accuse those whom He has elected?
’Tis God who justifies in Christ, the Resurrected.*

Hymn 27:1

Birthdays in October:

- 3 JANELL DEBOER will be 16**
6311 Silver Street, RR #2, St. Ann’s, ON LOR 1Y0
- 6 HENRY VANDER VLIET will be 39**
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2 Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
- 17 ALAN BREUKELMAN will be 40**
19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4
- 22 NELENA HOFKINK will be 46**
Bethesda Clearbrook Home
32553 Willingdon Cr., Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2
- 28 MARY ANN DE WIT will be 50**
31126 Kingfisher Drive, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5K4

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday this month. May our heavenly Father bless you in this new year with good health and much happiness. Have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends.
Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
905-563-0380

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

Rev. W. L. Bredenhof is
co-pastor of the Canadian
Reformed Church at
Langley, British Columbia
wbredenhof@canrc.org

Missionary Theologian: A Reader, introduced and compiled by Paul Weston

Lesslie Newbigin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).
Additional Information: Paperback, 287 pages, \$16.00 US.

When I was asked to write a review of this book, I warned the editor that I'd read a few books of Lesslie Newbigin already and had mixed feelings about him. I said that it wasn't very likely that this was going to be a positive review. Nevertheless, I was told to go ahead.

Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998) was a well-known British pastor and missionary. He served in India for a number of years and towards the end of his life was a pastor of an inner-city congregation in England. He had also served as

associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches.

This book provides an anthology of Newbigin's writings dealing with mission and theology. The editor, Paul Weston, provides a short biography and introductions to each of the chapters. An extensive bibliography rounds out the work.

As mentioned, I have several misgivings about Newbigin and these are found also with this anthology. Most broadly of all, it seems that his general approach to theology is neo-orthodox or Barthian (he was very enthusiastic about Karl Barth). There are at least a couple of occasions where Newbigin sounds as if he believes in universal atonement. Most troubling of all, his view of Scripture cannot be described as the historic Protestant position. There are other things I could mention, but this, being a short review, will have to suffice.

On the positive side of the ledger, Newbigin's emphasis on the gospel as public objective truth is a message that needs to be sounded out. Here and there he makes helpful observations; for instance, about the need for the gospel in the West. At certain points, he argues for themes and concepts that, at least superficially, have much in common with a confessionally Reformed approach to apologetics.

Given all that, the negative points of Newbigin outweigh the positive. My concerns are not with respect to minor points of doctrine. Furthermore, his positive emphases and contributions can be found in other, more trustworthy authors. The end result is that there is really nothing in this book that would compel me to recommend it to a general audience.

