

*Be joyful always,
pray continually,
and give thanks
in all circumstances*



873

4 ^kPs 2:6; ^r1Ki 10:9; ^mPs 98:9;
ⁿGe 18:19; Rev 15:3
5 ^oEx 15:2
6 ^pEx 24:6; ^qEx 28:1; ^r1Sa 7:5;
7 ^rEx 4:3; ^s1:15
8 ^tEx 10:9; ^uNu 11:25
14:20; ^vLev 20:18

Psalm 100

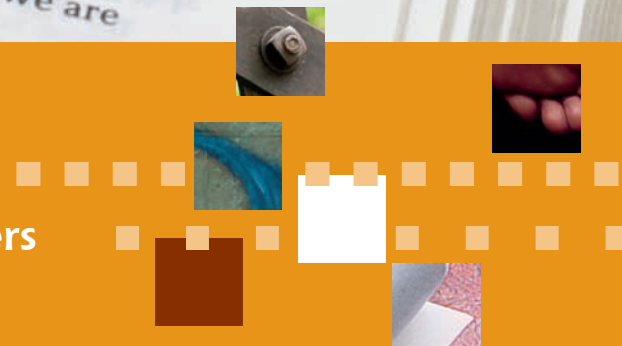
PSALM 101:1

A psalm. For giving thanks.

1 Shout for joy^a to the LORD, all the earth.
2 Worship the LORD^b with gladness;
come before him^c with joyful songs.
3 Know that the LORD is God.^d
It is he who made us,^e and we are
his;^a
we are his people,^f the sheep
of his pasture.^g
4 Enter his gates
and his gates
give praise to the LORD.

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Preaching the Word – Catechetically

“Catechism preaching” has given way to “textual preaching”

What has happened to the Heidelberg?

Something appears to be happening in our churches to what is called “catechism preaching.” What? It is no longer the type of preaching that was once common or expected. Instead of the minister using the Heidelberg Catechism as his point of reference or guideline, there is an emerging tendency to take one of the proof texts listed below a particular question and answer, or something closely connected, and then to preach on it. As for the Lord’s Day itself, it will be read and it may be referred to but there is a sense that it no longer occupies centre stage.

Needless to say, there are consequences to this approach. The first is that the congregation comes away with the impression that while the Catechism has been referred to, it is more in the sense of “lip service.” Perhaps in a formal way what the Church Order in Article 52 means by “catechism preaching” has been adhered to, but that is about the extent of it. The second consequence follows from the first and it is that the older style of catechism preaching has now been shunted aside or become a shell of its former sense.

“Catechism preaching” has given way to “textual preaching,” and that in both services. Invariably this leads some people to ask, “What really is the difference now between our two worship services on a particular Lord’s Day?”

Biblical texts only – please

No doubt some members and pastors will applaud this development. According to them, preaching needs a text and that text has to come from the Scripture, and the Scripture alone. At the same time using the Catechism as “text” is frowned on because then one is making use of a human document. It may be a confession but it is still a man-made product.

This last comment indicates that preachers in our circle have a strong desire to be biblically based and

rooted in all of their preaching. And that is a good thing! At the same time one cannot get away from the impression that this development may also be a reactionary one. We have become so sensitive to the accusation coming from broader evangelical circles that “catechism preaching” is preaching on a man-made text that we now shy away from it and have opted for the purist (or shall we say fundamentalist) approach.

Variety

What shall one say to all this? For a start let me be clear and say that there are a variety of approaches possible when it comes to catechism preaching. One has only to consult the book of Dr. K. Dijk, *De Catechismuspreek in Haar Verscheidenheid* (Franeker: Wever) to see that. He gives at least seven different suggestions as to how a preacher can approach and preach on each particular Lord’s Day. Among these suggestions at least one is textual in nature.

In many respects this too is understandable. Indeed, if a minister has been pastoring one church for a long period of time he may well want to vary his approach occasionally. For one preaching cycle he may stick very close to the actual text of the Catechism. For another he may want to use a special theme be it “comfort,” “covenant,” or “life.” Or else for still another cycle he may want to approach each Lord’s Day from out of a Trinitarian perspective. In short, there is nothing wrong with mixing it up.

One approach only

Yet that is not what is happening at present. In some cases the minister always takes a biblical text that somehow connects to the subject of the Lord’s Day and preaches on it. The new development is not that we have different approaches to catechism preaching today but that now we have only one approach, namely the textual one.



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Now I understand why some of my colleagues are going down this road but there is reason to reflect seriously on the merits of this approach and to discuss it together. At the same time, let no one assume that I am in any way accusing my colleagues of unfaithfulness. I have the utmost respect for them and for their preaching labours.

A different kind of preaching

Getting back to the matter as such, I am from the school which believes that "catechism preaching" is a different kind of preaching than what is commonly called "textual preaching." Let me hasten to add that to a large extent the terms "catechism preaching" and "textual preaching" are misnomers. They convey the impression that the one uses the Bible as its basis, while the other uses the Catechism as its basis. They insist that "textual preaching" is all about expounding the Scriptures and "catechism preaching" is all about expounding the Catechism. From this we then get the further deduction that while the one type of preaching uses a "divine" text, the other makes use of a "human" text. You can see, no doubt, where this is going in terms of implications and conclusions.

What's Inside

Issue 21 begins with an editorial from Dr. James Visscher. He writes about the growing trend in our churches away from "catechism preaching" towards "textual preaching." This editorial provides readers with some insight into the benefits of preaching the Word both textually and catechetically.

We also have an article from Marjorie Korvemaker, a Certified Biblical Counsellor from the URC church in Wyoming, Ontario. She discusses the use and power of the tongue. How do we as believers control our words to build up our neighbour?

Issue 21 also includes two book reviews. The first comes from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, reviewing *Sex, Lies, and the Truth: Developing a Christian Ethic in a Post-Christian Society* by Linda L. Belleville. The second review concerns Dr. Van Dam as well: Rev. Richard Aasman reviews *Living Waters from Ancient Springs: Essays in Honor of Cornelis Van Dam*.

Regular column Education Matters explores the use of drama in Reformed education; the conclusion to this article can be found in the coming issue. Treasures New and Old aptly focuses on giving thanks, as well as a Canticle from Rev. George van Popta. We also include two letters to the editor, a press release and a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

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Revising our terms

It is for this reason, and others, that we do well to revisit and revise our language. I would ask your consideration for a change of terminology. Why not say that what happens on the Lord's Day in the morning service is that the minister preaches the Word "textually;" whereas, what happens in the afternoon or evening service is that he preaches the Word "catechetically." Hence in both services the Word stands central. It is not so that in one service we preach on an inspired text and that in the other service we preach on a non-inspired (human or confessional) text. No, in both services the Word is being expounded.

In both services the Word stands central

So what's the difference? The difference is that in the first service the minister usually expounds on only one text; whereas, in the afternoon or evening service he expounds on a whole series of texts. Or you can say that in the first service we have "textually specific" preaching; whereas, in the second service we have "topically specific" preaching. In the morning the minister leads his flock into an in-depth exploration of a chosen biblical passage. In the afternoon or evening the minister takes the whole Bible as his text and shows his flock how different parts of Scripture have a bearing on this or that particular biblical doctrine or teaching.

Not carbon copies

Now, what this approach does immediately is underline the fact that the first and second services are not carbon copies of one another. The first is very specific and focused; whereas, the second is more general and topical. In both Scripture is being expounded but then in a different manner. In this way it will also become obvious that while in the one service the stress is on "preaching as heralding," in the other the stress is more on "preaching as teaching."

Another benefit from this approach is that it gives the preacher an opportunity to vary his preaching. Currently when you sit under "preaching the Word – textually" in both services, the preacher is following one and the same approach every time. He is, by the very nature of this type of preaching, confined to one text.

This, however, is not the case with "preaching the Word – catechetically" for then the preacher can

range far and wide. His starting point then is that he has to preach on a certain topic, doctrine or teaching, be it comfort (LD 1), faith (LD 7), providence (LD 10), the resurrection of our Lord (LD 18), sacraments (LD 25), good works (LD 32), the Fourth Commandment (LD 38), the Second petition (LD 48), and so forth. Thereafter, he has to make choices as to which Bible passages to use to teach these topics. When he goes through the Catechism cycle of preaching one time he may choose to expound on certain foundational passages. The next time he may choose a set of different passages. The point is that true Catechism preaching is always biblically flexible. It allows a preacher to approach the Scripture as a whole and to show the congregation how rich and diverse it is when it comes to its central doctrines and key teachings.

The whole Lord's Day

In this connection it may have struck you as well that when a preacher uses only one text and somehow ties it to the Catechism, something happens. It is then impossible for him to present the entirety of that doctrine as summarized by the Catechism. The preacher says to himself: "Next week I need to preach on Lord's Day 17 and so I am going to take 1 Corinthians 15:16–20 as my text." Fine, but the problem is that this passage from 1 Corinthians 15 touches on only one of the three benefits of the resurrection of our Saviour as mentioned by the Heidelberg Catechism. What you then get is a truncated catechism sermon on Christ's resurrection. For this Lord's Day tells us that overcoming death is but the first benefit of his rising. Being raised to a new life is the second benefit. Receiving a sure pledge of one's own resurrection is the third benefit. So why not craft a sermon that covers the entire Lord's Day and all three of its glorious benefits? Take for example, 1 Corinthians 15:16-20; Colossians 3:1-5; and Philippians 3:20, 21 as your texts and explain this doctrine in all of its fullness.

The first and second services are not carbon copies of one another

Speaking personally, I have had the privilege of being allowed to "preach the Word – catechetically" for almost forty years and I have never found this approach to be either problematic or tiresome but always fresh and challenging.





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MATTHEW 13:52

Be Joyful Always, Give Thanks in All Circumstances

"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

On Thanksgiving Day, we often look back with gratitude on how the LORD has blessed the work of our hands. As one who lives in an agricultural community, I delight together with the farmers in the joy and satisfaction of gathering in the harvest. This is a special time of the year.

But what if there is not much of a harvest? What if there is no business coming in, if you lost your job, or if your hours were cut back this past year? What if you faced other personal hardships in your life? How do you maintain an attitude of joy and thanksgiving in difficult times? Is that realistic?

Our text addresses this matter. When the LORD called the Thessalonians to be joyful always and to give thanks in all circumstances, they were in a pinch. From Acts 17 we learn about the beginning of the church in Thessalonica. We are told that while some Jews believed, together with a large number of God-fearing Gentiles and some prominent women, other Jews became jealous and ran Paul out of the city and made life miserable for his companions. We're told that Jason (at whose house Paul was staying) and others were dragged in front of the city officials, accused of defying Caesar's decrees, and forced to pay a bond.

And then we learn from the book of Thessalonians that after Paul left, the believers continued


to face great opposition. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6 Paul says that they faced severe suffering. In chapter 2:14 Paul again refers to the suffering they endured at the hands of their countrymen. In 3:2-3 we're told that these trials got so bad that Paul had sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to strengthen and encourage them in their faith.

And yet it is in these circumstances that the Apostle calls the believers in Thessalonica to be joyful always, to pray continually, and to give thanks in all circumstances. What joy is there when you are being persecuted, when you suffer intensely because of your faith? Paul spells out elsewhere in this book that there is much to be joyful about. He thanks God for the faith, hope, and love that God has worked into their hearts (1:2-3). He rejoices that God has chosen them and that the Holy Spirit works deep conviction in them (1:4-5). He says in 1:6 that in spite of severe suffering, they welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. The LORD has done much for them.

Even in the midst of suffering there can be intense joy and gratitude because we are the children of God and we share in the work of our Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives faith, hope, and love to the people of God. These are foundational gifts that give us perspective on all of life. There may be times when we face hardships.

And yet the LORD reminds us that even in the midst of difficult circumstances, we still have reason to experience joy and give thanks.

Now it's possible that you don't experience that joy, and you don't feel thankful when you are in the midst of difficult circumstances. The reality is that at times it is hard to feel in our hearts what we may know to be true in our heads. But the LORD says that he will help us with that too. If you keep reading in this chapter, you see that God doesn't leave you on your own to experience this joy and gratitude. He is your Saviour and he will work joy and thanks in your heart by his power. In the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it."

The point is that after calling us to live a sanctified life, God says that he will take it upon himself to make this a reality. The LORD will teach us who he is and what he has done for us. He will reveal his promises to us and enable us to believe what he has promised. Our Father will work things out in our lives in such a way that we will be joyful always and we will give thanks in all circumstances. He accomplishes our salvation through the working of his Holy Spirit. 

The Tongue is Like a Pair of Hedge Clippers

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Why is it so hard to control the tongue? James 3 says that the tongue is like a rudder on a ship or a bit in a horse's mouth. Let's modernize the analogy, since most of us don't have a horse, let alone a ship. The tongue is a small tool that has so much power. The tongue is like a pair of hedge clippers.

When I was growing up I hung out a lot with my cousin, Erna. We were often found enjoying the outdoors together. One afternoon we came back from the woods and as we put our gear away in the shed, we discovered a whole mess of burdock in one of Erna's pigtailed! We knew we were in trouble because there was no way we were going to get that out. We searched for another means to solve our problem. That is when we eyed the hedge clippers. Erna held her pigtail out to the side of her head and just as I was going to make that great clip to get rid of all our troubles. . . Erna had a revelation. Erna saw herself sitting in grade 3, on Monday morning, with only one pigtail. If I had cut off that pigtail there was no way I could have reversed what I had done.

The hedge clippers are a tool to be used to trim and beautify our shrubs. Some people have the gift of gardening and they love it. Other people love it and are not good at it, but they think they are. Most of us could use some good tips in hedge clipping class before we just go at it. Imagine the damage an inexperienced hedge clipper could do. You don't get a second chance with hedge clippers. The same is true of the tongue; most of us could use some life skills in communications. You don't get a second chance with the tongue. You can't take back things you have said once they leave your mouth. You can apologize, but you can never take back those words.

It would have taken a long time for Erna to forget what I had done in that moment of haste if I had clipped her pigtail.

Many of us think just because we have a tongue, we should use it freely. But the tongue was created to be used to give God glory in some very beautiful ways. So often we misuse our tongues. Have you ever thought about the power of the tongue? With it we build up our families and we praise God; but we also use it to slander, gossip, and shame our Father in heaven (James 3:9-10).

I think we can all think of times when we spoke things we shouldn't have. We abused the other person with our verbal hedge clippers. Once we learn to communicate in a godly way we see how a lot of our problems are our own doing. We need the tools to bless our relationships, instead of tearing them down. In every relationship you have, sooner or later you will realize that you are two sinners who need redemption. God gave us the tongue to encourage and help our brother who is also struggling in this sin filled world.

Dr. Bob Smith has a CD called the "Four Rules of Communication" through Faith Resources, in Lafayette, IN. I'd like to share some of his insight with you.

Be honest

The first rule Dr. Smith gives is: be honest. Ephesians 4:25 says, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body." God cares about how we speak to each other. God wants us to attack the problem not the person. Our first step is to be honest with each other. How often do we embellish, or exaggerate a story to make others think better of us and less of the other person? Sometimes we outright lie or misrepresent others to fill our own agenda.

Maybe you are a person who likes to use one hundred percent words such as "always" and "never." We might say to our best friend, "Eddie, you *always* make fun of my mother!" or "Ellie, you are *never* on time for *anything*!"

Church News

Declined the call to the Free Reformed Church of Rockingham, Western Australia:

Rev. D. Poppe
of Coaldale, Alberta

Some of us use "back door messages," where a husband might say, "My mother cooks way better than this, and she worked outside the home too!"

Sometimes we say "I love you." But our body language is saying something very different.

These would all be wrong uses of our verbal hedge clippers. How do we put on honesty in a loving way? Ephesians 4 says that we must speak. That means that you must deal with the problem if it is something that is going to break brotherly unity. You must not ignore it or talk to everyone else about it first. This also means that both sides take turns speaking and listening. Listen without assuming what the other is thinking. Dr. Smith reminds us that our goal in speaking the truth is not to speak your mind, but to solve the conflict. Don't attack the person; rather, attack the problem in a loving way.

Instead of taking your hedge clippers out and destroying the other person's hedge because they did it first; it would create a far better end result if you went to the person and honestly talk to them about why what they did or said was wrong. For us, it is much easier to use our verbal clippers and make a damaging hole in someone. It gives us a sense of power.

Keep current

The second rule Dr. Smith gives us is: keep current. Ephesians 4:26-27 says, "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." Solve the issue quickly. We give the devil a foothold when we nurture our hurts. Matthew 5:23, 24 tells us to deal with conflict before you worship. Problems, left on their own, tend to surface over and over again. That affects our decision-making skills. This usually leads us to getting nasty and impulsive, and then the chances for unity are hindered. Dr. Smith says that's when our anger ferments, turns into bitterness, and we attack the other person. Hebrews 12:15 tells us that bitterness leads to compounding problems on top of problems, which leads to greater division.

Sometimes we would rather avoid the problem and not make a big deal out of it. We don't want to put the effort into peace. Or sometimes we don't keep current because we feel we might lose the argument. So we bring up hurts or sins of long ago in order to bring down

our opponent. This demonstrates an unforgiving heart and a desire to win the conflict rather than a desire to resolve it and reconcile the relationship.

If we see a small vine growing into our hedge, or into someone else's, we need to deal with it quickly before the vine does serious damage to the health or life of that person. Ignoring a potential danger is not a wise thing to do.

Attack the problem, not the person

Our next rule is: attack the problem, not the person. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph 4:29-30). Use words that edify and help solve the problem. Don't attack the person's character; rather, address the sin of those involved. Avoid words that tear down the person or that are unwholesome. Don't use name calling; instead use the phrase, "When you ____, I felt ____."

Pick words that are timely. Be sensitive. Eleven o'clock at night is not always the best time to start a deep discussion with me. Also look at how you may be partly to blame for this conflict. We are all sinners in need of a Redeemer.

Our goal in speaking the truth is not to speak your mind, but to solve the conflict

Use words that lead to a solution. Offer ways for both parties to deal with the problem together, so they walk away with a solution that blesses; instead of destroying.

"Words that attack the person instead of the problem bypass the conflict," Dr. Smith warns us. Maybe it is your goal to bypass the conflict, but that is sin. When Job speaks to his wife about her unrighteous response to Job's situation, he attacks the issue at hand. He does not attack his wife, who suffered all those losses with him. She also watched her husband go through great suffering and she didn't know how to help him.

Don't use your clippers to hack another person's life just because you are angry, or because their mannerisms annoy you. Always approach another person in love, to restore and build up the relationship.

Act, don't react

The last rule is: act, don't react. In Ephesians 4:31-32 we read, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." This list applies to all of us! Dr. Smith warns us that we tend to be defensive about our sinful nature. We hold tight to those things we don't want to change.

You can't take back things you have said once they leave your mouth

Maybe we are doing things that we know are not right but we don't respect God enough to change. When someone approaches us we are quick to put our walls up. In come bitterness, wrath, anger, slander, and malice. We soon allow ourselves to think of ways to wish another to suffer. We seek revenge.

Be kind, tender hearted, compassionate, and forgiving. Dr. Smith states, "Forgiveness is a promise to not bring it up for the purpose of hurting the other person." Ephesians 4 says we must learn to replace wrong words and behaviour with godly words and action. It is easier to react when we are under pressure.

If you didn't sleep well last night because the baby kept crying and you were helping your tired wife, you still don't have any reason to blow up at your late employee. Your words belong to you and they are your responsibility.

When a bad reaction happens, ask yourself what triggered it. What happened that you didn't like? What did you want to happen in this situation? Why? Who were you worshipping with your reaction? That is a good question for every person to ask often. As brothers and sisters in the Lord we need to remember that the goal is not to get what we want. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31).

Hedge clippers are meant to do works of beauty. We use them to prune, but always for the goal of creating something better. If someone hacks a hole in your "hedge," do you feel you have the right to return that damage to them? Jesus never did. He humbled himself for the glory of the Father. That is our calling too. Think before you react. Changing habits is not easy, but it can be done. We need to go to those who have sinned against us and also to those we have sinned against and try to restore what has been damaged. Do you encourage others? Do people trust your tongue? Pray for wisdom so that your tongue may be a blessing to others.

C





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Canticles

Give Thanks to God

1. Give thanks to God, call on his name; let all the na - tions know
2. Do glo - ry in his ho - ly name; let all the hearts of those

the might - y things that he has done; be - fore him hum - bly bow.
who seek the LORD re - joice in him for he his peo - ple knows.

O sing to him, sing praise to him; his acts are mar - ve - lous.
Look to the LORD and to his strength, and seek his daz - zling face,

Tell of the might - y things he did, so great and fa - bu - lous.
re - splen - dent, shin - ing, full of love and brim - ming with his grace.

Text: I Chronicles 16: 7-36; vers. George Ph. van Popta, © 2010
Tune: Anglo-Genevan Psalter, 1556

Old 137th
CMD

3. Remember all his wondrous deeds,
the miracles, so great,
the judgments he pronounced to all,
his words of massive weight.
Remember these, O Israel –
you are his chosen ones.
Do not forget what he has done
for you, O Jacob’s sons.
4. He is the LORD, our faithful God,
whose love will never fail.
His judgments are in all the earth
and always will prevail.
A thousand generations have
enjoyed his mercy deep.
His covenant he will uphold,
his promise he will keep.
5. Firm stands the covenant he made
with Abr’am and his seed.
To Isaac, Jacob, Israel,
this promise he decreed:
“As everlasting covenant
to you a land I give,
the land of Canaan – it is yours!
A land where you may live.”
6. When they were few, of small account,
and strangers in the land,
while wandering from place to place,
God kept them in his hand.
He let no one oppress his folk;
to kings he did assert:
“Do my anointed ones no harm,
my prophets do not hurt.”
7. Sing to the LORD, sing, all the earth,
proclaim his saving name;
declare his glory round the world,
his marvels and his fame.
The LORD is worthy of all praise,
for he the heavens made,
while trust in idols and false gods
is certainly mislaid.
8. Splendour and majesty abide
in God’s own holy place.
All strength and joy are his alone
and dwell before his face.
Ascribe to God, all you who live
upon the earth below,
glory and strength to his great name;
before him humbly bow.
9. Adore the LORD within his courts
and worship in his tent.
Praise him for all his mighty works
for he stretched earth’s extent.
Let all the nations quake with fear –
the whole vast human race.
The world’s established firm and sure
and cannot be displaced.
10. Let heav’n rejoice and earth be glad,
let seas and forests sing,
let fields and trees be jubilant,
for God is our great King.
Let all creation sing for joy,
all creatures, great and small;
the LORD will come to judge the earth,
our God, who made it all.
11. Give thanks to God, for he is good
and loves us evermore.
“Save us,” we cry, “O Saviour God!
Your people, please restore!
Yes, gather us and set us free,
us from the nations raise,
that we may thank your holy name
and glory in your praise.”
12. Praised be the God of Israel,
Praise to the LORD of hosts,
all praise to him, to God alone,
in God alone, we boast.
We praise him ever and again
with song and dance and word.
Forevermore we’ll always say:
“Amen” and “Praise the LORD.”



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“To Be or Not To Be” in Christian Education (Part 1 of 2)

I have to share this. In her dissertation entitled *A Match Made in Heaven*, Anne Frawley-Mangan (2006) argues that teaching doctrine to children through catechism just doesn't work anymore for catholic schools, nor for the youth of the Catholic Church. She urges religious educators to use parables and drama. Parables, the teaching method that Jesus used, is great, but having children use drama is even better, she writes. Drama, and especially the category of drama that she defines as *process drama*, or what Dorothy Heathcote labels as *informal drama*, connects what you know with what you feel, helping you internalize the message. It connects the cognitive, affective, and the spiritual, she says. It bridges the gap between knowing and living one's faith.

In the Canadian Reformed churches, ministers do not use drama. They still use catechism to teach the covenant youth. I'm sure that they add stories to explain the various doctrinal concepts in the catechism, and I'm sure that they get students to interact with the purpose and meanings of their stories, but that's as close to drama as they get. Should pastors not use some drama in their religious instruction? Should they not do more to help students connect "what they know" with "what they feel" and with "their own self-knowledge"?

A nagging question

In our Christian schools, teachers are using drama more. They use it not only in Language Arts classes, but also in content-area subjects like history or science. They have students role-play situations, make skits, or produce videos to share with the class. They include musicals in junior high music classes, or add drama clubs for noon hour activities. Christian high schools put on plays or musical productions for the community.

One of our high schools now offers an English drama course to its students. When I hear about all this drama, somewhere deep inside me is this nagging question: Is that the way we should go in our Christian schools? To use drama as a teaching tool may seem acceptable, but should we do dramatizations of history, produce stage productions, and teach drama courses in our high schools?

This nagging question arises from a variety of sources. Some early church fathers strongly opposed drama. While Luther and his followers incorporated drama, Calvin and his followers opposed it. In England, the Puritans also opposed the use of theatre and drama. In our time, various Mennonite, Baptist, and Reformed groups reject the use of drama. When checking the literature, it seems that whenever there is a reformation, drama is rejected.

The other reason for this nagging question is the desire to oppose the paganizing culture of the western world in which we live. Our western world is moving away from the Christian faith and its foundational values. It is, simultaneously, moving from a printed culture to a media culture, from a reading culture to a visual culture. Drama lends itself so well to this visual culture – we need to see it to understand it. The electronic stage is now not only in our homes, but also on our workplace computers and on our portable phones. Much of what we watch are dramatizations, done to the perfection of modern theatrical arts. Christians, on the other hand, are people of the Word, students of the print. Our Christian education should inculcate that print and the skills that help us understand the print. Is it therefore good that we incorporate more dramatization and drama in our Christian schools?

Drama and Bible instruction

Ministers and teachers should not use drama to teach students about the Bible. Several authors have written about this topic. Back in the 1970s, when modernity was at its climax, Rev. VanRongen wrote a series of articles in *Clarion* that explored the use of drama. He concluded his five articles with the warning that we should stay away from the dramatization of biblical stories. Peter Smid, a decade later, writes emphatically that "the Holy Scriptures do not allow transmission by dramatization" (*Reformed Perspective*, Jan. 1987). Rev. J. van Popta, in his article published five years ago, also explores this topic and concludes: "So I can only reject any possibility of my four sons playing in a Bible drama" (*RP*, July/August 2006). Rev. C. Pronk purports the fact that "pictures, instead of illuminating the deep things of God, rather obscure them. They tend to becloud the mind. . ." (*Banner of Truth*, Nov 2006), and he uses Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* as a case in point.

The very medium of drama does not focus on teaching the message of the Bible. It does not have us focus on God's work among his people, or on the gift of salvation through the one sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sure, one can construct parable-like stories to illustrate truths of Scripture, but the form of drama makes one focus on man and the relationships among men. In drama, one enacts what biblical characters have done, adding emotion to recorded action. One moves beyond a cognitive message of truth. The biblical story, told through drama, therefore, must be shaped to connect cognitively and emotionally with its audience. Along with the contents of the story are the visual aesthetics which must connect with the aesthetic values of the audience. Beyond these two aspects of drama comes another: drama needs action (the Greek word *drama* means "action"). Simply telling the Bible on stage is not drama. The actors usually rephrase what is recorded in the Bible, adding interpretations of what they say through their actions to provide the audience with a successful biblical drama. Also, drama is to be enjoyed; the Bible is not meant to be enjoyed. Lastly, drama is meant to be experienced; the Bible is not meant to be experienced. Various aspects of drama seem to distract from the focus on God's Word. The medium negatively affects the message. The Bible should not be subjected to the art form of drama. It is fully understandable that Rev. van Popta would not allow his sons to play the Lord Jesus, Peter, Judas,

and Pilate in a school Easter play, and it would be all the more understandable that ministers and teachers would not use drama to teach God's Word.

Drama in the school

If drama does not have a place in our church services, and if drama should not be used to teach students God's Word, does it have a place in our Christian schools? Drama should have a well-defined place in our Christian school curriculum. This thesis may sound shocking to the reader, but drama, as an art form, need not be set aside because God did not use it as a medium to teach his Word. Our Christian schools should more carefully define the use of drama, so that it is used properly and appropriately. Just as singing would not be used by a minister to preach the Word, but would be used by the congregation to respond, so drama should be used, rightfully, in its own place.

Drama should have a well-defined place in our Christian school curriculum

What should be noted is that many Reformed theologians and preachers did not object to drama, but to *biblical* drama. Drama itself can be a valuable educational tool which we can use in our Reformed schools. As an educational tool, drama is usually an *informal* activity responding to what is being taught. In his book, *Development through Drama* (1967), Brian Way states that informal drama is concerned mainly with "experience by the participants, irrespective of any function of communication to an audience," so what's important in informal drama is the acting experience of the individual. Especially in the primary and elementary classrooms, drama can complement direct instruction; it can enable the student to experience and know a concept with mind and feelings, deepening the knowing of a concept (e.g. write up and act out one-minute monologues or dialogues to demonstrate an abstract noun; script and mime steps of a process). It can help students apply what they have just been taught (e.g. having communications in French; playing "store" in math class to learn the addition or subtraction of money). Even in high school, drama can be used as an educational tool to help students think more critically or be more involved in what they learn. In a Grade 11 history class, for example, two students prepare and enact a script in which a citizen of ancient



That nagging feeling about the place of drama in our Christian schools still exists. We may see a place for drama in our Christian curriculum, but the place of it needs to be well defined. For if we read further in Brian Way's book, we read that drama is "concerned with the development of intuition. . . [and] like intellect, needs training. . . . With intuition, all individual differences are developed to their full; there is no single criteria of what is right or wrong, good or bad." A red flag goes up on reading the last part of this quote. Do we not know what is right or wrong, what is good or bad? In our Reformed schools, where education follows God's Word as summarized in the confessions, we sure do. And so again, just as we would do in art and music, we need to apply biblical principles and norms to our use of drama. Even more importantly, if we do not apply biblical principles to our use of drama, we inevitably will apply the principles set by our post-modern culture, whether cognitively or intuitively.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us.



We may see a place for drama in our Christian curriculum, but the place of it needs to be well defined

Students can also learn to analyze text, connecting it with actions and speech that reflect the meaning of the text. Students can become more conscious of their own verbal and non-verbal expressions and how these expressions need to complement one another to be understood by the audience or fellow student. Through formal drama, students develop teamwork and presentation skills, conquer stage fright, and acquire confidence. Through it, students add to their cognitive knowledge of a play that they are studying, the affective knowledge – and for kinetic and audio-visual learners, only when acting out a play do they really "get" it. I recall teaching the play *Still Stands the House* in a Grade 12 Canadian Lit course. The background of the play is the dust-bowl years of the 30s. Only after acting it out did one student exclaim, "Now I know how he felt."



Letter to the Editor

Re: "Those elected shall be appointed," Rev. Karlo Janssen Vol. 60, No. 17, August 12 and No. 18, August 26, 2011

Dear Editor,

I agree that the main issue with respect to women's voting is the matter of whether the congregational vote has authority. I also agree, as Rev. Janssen shows in part 2, that there are different views on this amongst Reformed believers. However, most of the arguments that I have heard or read in support of the congregation's having some authority in certain areas do more to disprove this position than prove it.

This does not mean that the congregation does not have a voice. On the contrary, the consistory should always be attentive to the input of the congregation. But having a voice is not the same as exercising authority. More could be said about part 2, but I will refrain because I actually believe part 2 to be redundant.

It is based on the reasoning and conclusion of part 1, which I believe is wrong. Rev. Janssen focuses on this sentence in Article 3 CO: "Those elected *shall* be appointed by the consistory with the deacons in accordance with the adopted regulations." Some words have only one meaning. When they are used that meaning defines the sentence in which the word is used. Other words have more than one meaning, both in the dictionary and in common usage. When they are used, the context determines which meaning is in play. The word "must" has only one meaning, namely a "command" or an "obligation." If the word "must" was used in Article 3 CO there would have been objections long ago. The word "shall," however, is not the same. It can be a "command" or an "obligation" but it can also be "intent." If the consistory with the deacons nominates more brothers than there are vacancies and gives the congregation opportunity for further input via the election, of course they will appoint those chosen by the congregation (why else the election). To state that Article 3 CO as it is worded now forces us to conclude that the congregation has authority which is binding on the consistory with the deacons is going too far.

In my view there is no need to change the Church Order on the issue of women's voting. The only issue is whether the congregational vote has decision-making authority. Synod 2010 said it did not.

Respectfully,
Jacob Kuik, Winnipeg

Letter to the Editor

Re: "Those elected shall be appointed," Rev. Karlo Janssen Volume 60, No 18. August 26, 2011

If I understand the two-part article of Rev. Janssen well, then Article 3 of our Church Order is the kingpin on which the whole debate about the women's voting right issue rests. Therefore, "out of respect for the Church Order, the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church has decided not to introduce voting by female communicant members at this time, but will first seek to have the Church Order revised on this point."

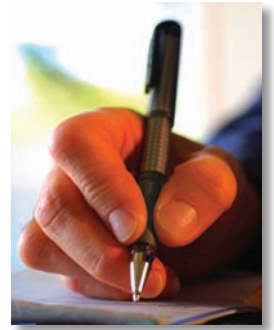
I welcome this decision of the church of Abbotsford not on its own merits but because this will permit other churches within our federation to also submit an overture in respect to the same article and request Synod to include a second option to address this issue. An option that would permit churches to circumvent the whole debate on the issue of female communicant member voting rights by doing away with voting all together while still leaving intact the following three vital steps necessary for a church council to exercise their office in harmony with the dictates of Scripture in respect to the ordination of office bearers.

- a – Recommendations from within the congregation.
- b – Scrutiny by council, who according to scriptural standards determine who is permitted to serve in the office of elder or deacon.
- c – Presentation of those names to the congregation.

After these steps were completed a fourth and final step would involve *calling the whole congregation together in a solemn assembly to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in selecting by lot the predetermined number of office bearers required to fill the vacancies.*

I pray this option will become available to the churches in the future. It will give an alternative to the divisive issue of female communicant member voting rights and make us in the end a more Spirit-led church.

Ed Vanwoudenberg



Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.

**Press Release of the Canadian Reformed
Missions Association (CRMA)
Inaugural Meeting – September 7, 2011
Held at Canadian Reformed Theological
Seminary, Hamilton**

On behalf of the Langley Canadian Reformed Church, Dr. James Visscher called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. He read Psalm 96 and led in prayer.

After welcoming the delegates from various sending churches and mission organizations, Dr. Visscher gave a brief explanation of the background and rationale for this meeting. The purpose is to form an association of Canadian Reformed churches and organizations that are involved in mission work. The hope is that such an association will assist the churches in the fulfilment of their missionary calling by facilitating a better flow of information and expertise between the various churches and organizations.

After the agenda was adopted, delegates were given opportunity to introduce themselves and the church or organization they represented. Sending churches and mission boards represented were the following: Langley, Toronto, Hamilton, Surrey, Smithville, Abbotsford, Burlington-Fellowship (Streetlight Mission). Other organizations represented around the table were: CRWRF, Word & Deed, MERF, CRBA, IRTC, Children of Light.

The meeting then proceeded to discuss the draft constitution of the CRMA. It was agreed that the basis will be the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God, and the subordinate creeds and confessions adopted by the Canadian Reformed Churches.

As for the purpose of the CRMA, it was agreed that the association will aim to assist the churches in the fulfilment of their missionary calling by facilitating flow of information between member churches and organizations, by encouraging consultation about matters of mutual concern, by facilitating cooperation where necessary and beneficial, by organizing conferences where relevant mission topics will be discussed, and by having Canadian Reformed mission projects represented at meetings of international bodies such as NAPARC and ICRC. It was agreed that the association will have no authority over the affairs of its members. While the association is expected to facilitate mutual consultation and cooperation, its power will be no more than advisory.

With respect to membership it was agreed that membership will be open to Canadian Reformed churches (and mission boards) that are involved in

foreign mission or home mission, Canadian Reformed organizations that are involved in international mission aid and relief work, and organizations involved in special mission projects at home (e.g. youth camp ministry). Observer status will be granted to mission organizations in which there is a substantial Canadian Reformed involvement (for example MERF, Word & Deed).

It was agreed that as a rule the CRMA shall meet once a year. This meeting will be organized by an Executive Committee.


The chairman then asked the delegates to adopt the constitution, which the meeting did by way of unanimous show of hands. Delegates were asked to ask their respective churches or organizations to join the newly formed CRMA as members (or as observers, whatever the case may be) and be ready to make a contribution to the budget.

The meeting proceeded to elect a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, and treasurer to serve on the Exec Committee. The following persons were elected: Dr. James Visscher, Dr. Arjan de Visser, Rev. John van Popta, Mr. Otto Bouwman. The committee was asked to prepare the next meeting, propose a draft budget, and do whatever necessary to get the association going.

The last part of the meeting was used to allow delegates to inform the meeting about recent developments in their mission work and also to identify aspects in which the CRMA might be able to assist. Needs expressed included the following: to have a resource center where information regarding 'best practices' is made available (e.g. the process of instituting a church on the mission field; how to go about starting up Christian school on the mission field); to have a website with helpful documents on various aspects of mission and evangelism; to be able to find persons with expertise in specific areas; to be aware of good material (e.g. training courses) that has been developed by others so that there will be no duplication; to find channels for consultation, etc.

In order to get the ball rolling as soon as possible, the meeting requested the executive committee to have a follow-up meeting fairly soon. It was agreed to schedule the next meeting for January 12, 2012, at 7:30 pm, at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton.

The chairman thanked the delegates for their good cooperation. Dr. A.J. de Visser led in closing prayer. The chairman closed the meeting at 12:30 PM.

On behalf of the meeting
J. de Visser, vice chairman 

Reviewed by Cornelis Van Dam



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Linda L. Belleville. *Sex, Lies, and the Truth: Developing a Christian Ethic in a Post-Christian Society*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010

Additional Information: Paperback, 122 pages, \$17.00 US

This is a very useful and needed book. In a clear, concise manner, Linda Belleville biblically addresses key and troubling issues in today's sex-crazed culture. She pinpoints the problem areas, gives clear statistics as to what is going on, corrects wrong assumptions with scientific data, and brings Scripture to bear on the topics she addresses.

She begins with documenting how society's attitudes to casual sex, marriage and family, and same sex relationships have changed dramatically over the last thirty years. For example, polls indicate that "about fifty percent of teenagers are sexually active" and, not surprisingly, the teenage pregnancy rate has tripled over the last thirty-five years so that now, it is even claimed, "one child out of three is illegitimate" (2). In her first chapter she tackles "the casual-sex challenge" and demonstrates that what a libertarian society considers as a basic human right is not the road to happiness. On the contrary, casual sex leads to low self-esteem, depression, loneliness, and even attempted suicide. She gives clear direction from Scripture and shows how sexual sin can be overpowering, addictive, and how it strikes at the very heart of what it means to be human, wounding one's dignity and self-esteem. Sexual sin starts with the mind being preoccupied with feelings of lust and sinful thoughts. Pornography is a major problem, for it is addictive and takes over the mind. Satan's object is to win the mind. To do so is to win the battle. Research showed that forty-seven percent of those who identified themselves as Christians indicated that pornography was a big challenge in the home and "fifty-three percent of Promise Keepers said they had viewed pornography in the past week" (27). But there is a way out. A person's mind must be captive to Christ (2 Cor 10:5; Phil 4:8; Rom 12:2). How important it is to keep one's mind pure!

Chapter two deals with marriage. Over against the current myth of the importance of "test-driving" your future spouse before marriage, Belleville shows the importance of waiting until wedlock. Although I found her discussion of "be fruitful and multiply" unsatisfactory, placed as it was in a discussion of being single, the fact that she tackled the issue of singleness in a sensitive way is commendable.

Chapter three is the longest chapter and it deals with "the same-sex challenge." There is much useful information packed into this part of the book, including solid scientific data which exposes the tenuousness of the theory that being gay is a matter of genetics. Indeed, important scientific studies have concluded that there is no evidence to substantiate a biological theory of homosexuality. One's social environment plays a key role. Belleville shows that the Bible gives no room for a gay lifestyle and counters the arguments of those who say otherwise. The church has the obligation and the means to reach out to those struggling with homosexuality. Homosexual sin is no greater than other sin, but "it is a more fundamental wrong in that it strikes at what is intrinsic to our humanness" (105).

With such major issues at stake, Belleville suggests a way forward in her last chapter. We need to recognize that our society is sexually broken. The implications are profound and far-reaching. For example, sex education in schools "produces a pre-teen public school population in which one out of four are confused about their sexual orientation" (108). What are the consequences for the future? The faithful church which maintains Scripture as God's unchanging Word is the best equipped institution in society to affirm a biblical view of sexuality and to provide meaningful assistance to those who struggle in this area. With God's help, empowered by the Holy Spirit, it is possible to say "no" to temptation. It is a struggle and a process but in dependence on the Lord one can triumph over sin.

Jason Van Vliet, ed. *Living Waters from Ancient Springs: Essays in Honor of Cornelis Van Dam*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011

Additional Information: Paperback, 278 pages, Web Price: \$24.80 at https://wipfandstock.com/store/Living_Waters_from_Ancient_Springs_Essays_in_Honor_of_Cornelis_Van_Dam

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam has served in Canadian Reformed Churches for forty years as preacher, professor, and author. He started teaching at the Canadian Reformed Seminary in 1981. In September 2011, Dr. Van Dam officially retired from teaching at the seminary. As a result, Dr. Jason Van Vliet has organized a Festschrift, which is a book honouring a respected person, especially an academic. This celebratory volume contains original contributions by fifteen scholars: present and retired colleagues at the Seminary, former students, and other colleagues. All have benefited in some way from Dr. Van Dam's knowledge and teaching. The fifteen articles are on average fifteen pages each which allows a reader to enjoy one article at a time, reflecting on each subject. The articles are well footnoted and have extensive bibliographies, opening the way for further investigation into some very interesting subjects. There are two sections to the book: part one contains articles on the Old and New Testament; part two deals with doctrine, office, and mission. At the back of this book is a comprehensive list of Dr. Van Dam's writings – and what an extensive list it is! There are also Scripture and subject indexes which is great for reference. The authors in this Festschrift reflect on their personal relationship with Dr. Van Dam, demonstrating what a blessing our brother has been to his colleagues, students, and the church both near and far. This book is truly a celebration of what our heavenly Father has given to us in a faithful servant.

I had the privilege of writing an endorsement on the back of this book, in which I wrote, "It covers a wide variety of topics that will interest everyone from the theological scholar to the person in the pew." There are articles in this book that will be difficult to read. For instance, Jannes Smith writes a short commentary on the old Greek text of Psalm 57. It is fascinating and insightful for those who know Greek and Hebrew, but will be quite a challenge for other readers. Another article that presents the reader with some challenges because of the Hebrew is by Wolter Rose: "How Will God Deal with Children of Parents Who Have Committed Idolatry?" This focuses on part of the



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second word of the covenant, "punishing the children for the sin of the fathers." A lot of us struggle with the meaning of these words. This article is very worthwhile reading both in its explanation and application of these words.

You will find an absolutely delightful article by Al Wolters on "Wordplay and History in Daniel 5" where he deals with the enigmatic handwriting on the wall at Belshazzar's feast, "*mene, mene, tekel, and parsin.*" In a masterful way he digs into the significance of these words and the history of that time. The reader will appreciate how careful examination of biblical texts uncovers the deep riches of the Word of God. Similarly, Gerhard H. Visscher's examination of James 2 compared to Romans 4 unravels a problem that has plagued people such as Martin Luther. Dr. Visscher's point is that Romans is speaking about justification and James is speaking about sanctification. In other words, these two passages do not conflict but complement each other.

Jakob Geertsema writes about "The Lamb's Scroll of Life in Revelation 5." He has an interesting exegesis of the scroll with the seven seals: he equates the scroll with the Book of Life which becomes the Lamb's Book of Life. Some of us will disagree with that exegesis, but the end result is the same: the Book of Revelation is a great comfort to believers even as we face trials and tribulations of many kinds.

Another must-read is Nelson D. Kloosterman's article, "The Old Testament, Ethics, and Preaching: Letting Confessional Light Dispel a Hermeneutical Shadow." Dr. Kloosterman interacts with the traditional distinction between the moral, civil, and ceremonial laws in the OT. Because of this distinction, some people claim that only the moral law remains valid today. This seriously detracts from the ethical relevance of the OT for today. This article takes a different approach, namely the one found in Article 25 of the Belgic Confession. Seeing the OT pointing toward and fulfilled in Jesus Christ shows its relevancy for moral reflection, ethics, and Christ-centred preaching today.

There are more fine articles in this book that deserve reading. I will conclude with calling your attention to one more, an article written by Dr. Van Dam's son, S. Carl Van Dam, on "Call Me Father! The Grief and Desire of a Loving Father." This article explores the early chapters of Jeremiah where Israel's sin deeply affected their Lord as children hurt their father by disobedience. Aside from the contents of this article, Carl Van Dam openly speaks of his deep

appreciation for his earthly father who not only taught him to walk and swim, but also to read Hebrew and study OT theology.

This article by Carl Van Dam, along with the others, is a wonderful tribute to how Dr. Van Dam has helped so many of us to draw living water from the wells of salvation. You will appreciate this book both for its personal elements as well as its contents that explain the rich mysteries of God's Word.




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Jason and Linda

Owen, Zach, Noah, Logan

Born August 11, 2011

A grandson for Bert and Jane Tenhage and
Albert and Nelly VanSydenborgh

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The LORD will write in the register of the peoples:

"This one was born in Zion." Psalm 87:6

With thankfulness to the LORD, we announce the birth of our fourth child

SULLIVAN COLE

Born September 3, 2011

Shawn and Andrea Schutten

Dawsen, Zoe and Blake

14th grandchild for Herman and Christina Schutten

13th grandchild for Cornell and Wilma Feenstra