

Clarion

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*Each and every
blessing is meant
to fill us with praise
for the Lord*

Inside this Issue

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- *Celebrating Thanksgiving at the Source*





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Target Audience

Indeed, what is the target audience in a worship service?

When a company advertises its product, it is very conscious of its target audience. This means that if the target audience is seniors, an ad should not be filled with images of young people or recently married couples. Keeping in mind one's target audience is also important in such a field as education. It makes a big difference in how you speak to a kindergarten class compared to a university class. In short, there has to be a keen awareness of your target audience as you seek to reach them.

This type of thinking has also influenced evangelism efforts. There are programs tailored to reach women, or teenagers, or people who have gone through divorce. The target audience will shape the program. It has also worked its way through to the manner of worship. The desire to attract people to the faith begins to drive talk about the manner of worship. Traditional styles of worship are seen as a hindrance. One can read of "seeker sensitive services." The idea is that one should shape the worship service so that a complete stranger to the faith can understand what is going on. This thinking may also work its way through with respect to the youth of the church. In an effort to keep the youth, one might hear of "children" or "youth" sensitive services.

Reformed worship missing the target?

We cannot just brush this off as something that is irrelevant in Reformed circles. There is much literature about this. Success stories of groups that have Seeker or Youth Sensitive services may stir up the idea that our lack of growth as Reformed churches through outreach is perhaps due the style of our worship services. Should we not become more Seeker-Sensitive to draw people in, and perhaps more Youth Sensitive to keep our youth from going to some church on the other side of town

that seems to satisfy their needs? A minister may hear remarks on occasion that he should simplify his sermons because they have too many theological terms which outsiders cannot understand, and they are too long and complicated. There may also be complaints about the use of the Psalms in singing.

While we should always pray and work for the conversion of unbelievers, we need to ask ourselves whether they should be considered the target audience when deciding on the manner of worship. Indeed, what is the target audience in a worship service? This can only be answered by asking a more basic question, namely, what is a worship service.

The target audience of a worship service

The answer can be found already in the very word "worship." The word points to someone having worth. Someone is worthy of honour and adoration. This means that those who come to worship already have a sense of whom they are going to worship. They don't need to be persuaded to do so. Basically, a worship service is a meeting of God and his people who have been washed by the blood of Christ and are being renewed by the Holy Spirit. It is a meeting of two parties in a relationship who already know each other. It is an expression and celebration of that relationship. We can even say that a worship service is like a meeting of two dear and familiar friends.

From this we can see what could be considered the target audience of worship. In effect, the target audience is the Lord our God! When we hear a term like "seeker sensitive," we can see that a reversal has taken place. Worship needs to be God sensitive.

At the same time, we can also look at the worshippers as a target audience. We do have to keep in mind that they are worshippers, not seekers. This



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shapes the manner of worship. Two things in particular come to mind that shape worship, namely, familiarity and maturity.

First there is familiarity. Worship was compared to a meeting of two dear and familiar friends. In such a relationship, interaction flows naturally, normally. When two friends meet, they don’t explain each action they intend to do beyond brief words such as, “Let’s eat.” So it is in worship. The liturgy, that is, the order of worship, flows naturally. The worship service comes across as a conversation between God and his people, and the parts move along with ease.

Second, there is the aspect of maturity. While it is true that believers will be at different stages in their knowledge and growth in grace, on the whole one can speak of a maturity in the relationship between God and the congregation. Over the years, there has come a tremendous knowledge of God as he has revealed himself in his Word. On the whole, the congregation is a long way past the stage of taking in spiritual milk. This also means it has grown into the language of Scripture. It has the benefit of clear confessions. This does not mean the language has to be out of reach for most people. God has spoken in plain language. The Confessions are written in plain language. But, it will

What’s Inside

Issue 20 begins with an editorial from Rev. Eric Kampen that discusses the target audience of a worship service. Who do we seek to reach in a worship service. . . and how do we reach them?

From Dr. Jason Van Vliet we have an article looking forward to the upcoming 450th birthday of the Heidelberg Catechism. He outlines some preparations that are being made to commemorate this birthday within our federation, including a website, a discussion guide, and a conference.

Issue 20 includes a report on the forty-ninth annual Fraser Valley Women’s League Day.

We also have regular columns Treasures New and Old, Education Matters, and Roadside Assistance. In addition, there is another Canticle, a book review, two letters to the editor, and a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

be admitted, this is the language adults speak. The language reflects the depth and the maturity of the relationship.

But what about the youth and visitors?

Now the thought might arise that this last admission about adult language makes clear why something needs to be done to keep the youth. If the church is not willing to be a bit more child-sensitive in its worship, at the very least the children should be taken to a different room where they can worship in a manner suitable to their age. This, however, would undermine the two aspects just mentioned, namely, that of familiarity and maturity. The youth reach these stages by being taken along to worship as soon as possible. Even little ones soon become familiar with the pattern of worship. They will notice if a visiting minister does something a bit different. It is also by being present that they begin the process of maturing. To be sure, they don't understand much at first, but maturing is a long process. Again, often the children pleasantly surprise their parents by what they have picked up in a worship service. Further, already at a very young age they love to sing the songs they have learned. Many children will consider it a sign of being grown up or growing up that they may sit with the parents in church. The babysit is for babies! At last, in church, is an activity where Dad and Mom don't send you downstairs to play while the adults talk.

*In effect, the target audience is
the Lord our God!*

And what about the visitor? Of course we should rejoice whenever someone joins the congregation in worship. But, let us be realistic. The church simply does not function like a walk-in clinic. Rather, it functions more by referral. When visitors come, they usually come because someone invited them. They will have heard something about the gospel already and they will have heard something about the worship service. If it should happen that a complete stranger comes in, then someone should make a point of helping them along by finding songs and Scripture readings, if necessary. Hopefully there will be opportunity for asking questions later. In the end, however, it is a worship service of God and his

people. Guests are most welcome, but they do not set the tone. He will expect to see some unusual things. The reality is that anyone touched by the Spirit will come back and over time become familiar and begin to mature. Indeed, those moved by the Spirit will be touched by the marvel of the meeting of God and his people, even though at first it may have been a strange experience.

Be God and congregation sensitive

When it comes to a worship service, we do well to keep in mind the target audience. In worship, God meets with his people. God is the primary target audience of our worship. We, as worshippers, are the second target audience. We are no stranger to each other. There will opportunity for occasional reminders as to why we do what we do, be it in the preaching on relevant parts of Scripture, in teaching at home, or in Catechism classes. In the end, we need to be God sensitive and congregation sensitive. Then we will be right on target in our worship.

C





MATTHEW 13:52

Celebrating Thanksgiving at the Source



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"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another."
(John 1:16)

Maybe you've been to "The Source." It's an electronics store with a good name, because everyone knows if you really want to find something, and you need the guarantee of good quality, you have to go back to the source.

That's a core idea in John 1:16. What's the origin of every blessing we have? The food and drink, the opportunities for employment and leisure, the family and friends, the gospel, and salvation itself – where has it all come from? John tells us plainly, "From the fullness of his grace we have all received." That's "the Source." We go to the God who is full of grace! Grace is his character. So he wants to show us his good will, and he delights in blessing us. And there's nothing lacking about it. Notice how John says two times that God's grace is "full" (vv. 14, 16). He's never a cheap-skate when dealing with his people, but our God is a source of blessing that constantly pours forth.

In our verse John says literally: "From his fullness, we have received *grace in exchange for grace*." It's a picture of God not just heaping up a big pile of blessings, one on top of the next, like pancakes on Saturday morning. That would be good, but this is even better: God giving one blessing, and then giving another blessing to take its place, a fresh one, brand new: "One blessing after another."

Compare it to the waves of the ocean. If you're standing on shore,

you see wave after wave rolling in. They rise out of the depths, and they just keep on coming. Yet they never accumulate. There's no pile of waves on the shore, because the waves are always new – one replaces another. So it is with God's grace. The grace keeps coming, but you never run out of room for it, and there's never a pile too high. Because his blessings are always fresh. His mercies are always new. We keep needing and he keeps giving.


There come times in life when we wonder where God's blessings have gone. We seem to hit a dry spell, where his gifts seem few and far between. But then we ought to have our eyes open. His grace might take the form of just a small blessing, but where there's one, there's sure to be another rolling in soon. One blessing from God is a promise that the next isn't far behind! We see it as a proof that God will keep on giving.

Then we remember the reason: it's all because of his Son. Without Christ, "the Source" would never have had its grand opening. But he's thrown wide open the doors of God's grace. Through him we've gone from being the enemies of the LORD, to being his sons and daughters. As John says about Jesus, "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (v. 12). For the sake of the Son, we may now call the Almighty God our heavenly Father!

And what does a gracious Father do but pour out gifts on his beloved? What does a good Father do but show generosity to his children? We've become God's own family members, his little ones gathered in his holy house. So the Father welcomes us, invites us in for a lavish Thanksgiving feast – it's a feast on Christ, eating the Bread of life, drinking the cup of blessing, being filled to overflowing.

Maybe you're in need today or maybe you have plenty, but let's all go to God through the Son. Maybe you're in trouble or maybe you're at peace, but let's all learn to trust the Father with our lives. Let's expect that all good things come from him, and him alone.

Then there's just one question that remains: What do we do with all these good things that the Father has given? If you're thankful to God for the fullness of his grace, it'll show! So has God's grace turned you into a gracious person? Has your thankfulness to God made other people thankful for you? Has your life been a testimony to the life we have in Christ?

Remember, that's what it's all for. Each and every blessing is meant to draw us closer to our Saviour. Each and every blessing is meant to fill us with praise for the Lord. Each and every blessing is meant to equip and sustain us in following Christ. To God be our thanksgiving, now and forever! 



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A Blessed Commemoration: The Heidelberg Catechism is Turning 450

Next to the mirror in our bathroom is a birthday calendar. When the calendar says it's someone's birthday, we try to visit, call, or send an email to say "Happy Birthday," especially if it's a milestone birthday. (Yes, we also forget some birthdays, but we're trying. . . .)

However, what is the appropriate thing to say when the milestone birthday is not 50, or 75, or even 100, but 450 years old? Surely, a quick "Happy Birthday" seems a bit underwhelming for such an impressive event like that. But what then? That's the question that lies before us in these remaining months of 2012, leading up to January 19, 2013. On that wintery Saturday in the first month of the new year the Heidelberg Catechism will turn 450 years old. And it's still looking pretty spry for its age, wouldn't you say?

After all, the youth of the church are still learning more about "the joy of this comfort" (Q. 2) in catechism classes which occur every week during the academic year. Congregations across the continent, and indeed throughout the world, are still being fed good, solid, savory, and nourishing spiritual food every Sunday afternoon from the Catechism preaching. Missionaries are using this confession to teach new converts. On their deathbeds, God's children are still drawing strength from the unforgettable words of Q&A 1. In short, the Heidelberg is turning 450 and still going strong.

The Lord provides us with so many blessings through this document that it only seems right that we speak of a commemoration, and a very blessed one at that. So, how should we, as Reformed churches, celebrate the Catechism's 450th? Below I'd like to share some ideas and possibilities with you. But before that. . . .

Did you hear about the plumber?

It's a true story. Louis Di Baggio is a plumber in Brooklyn, New York. He's not a member of a Reformed church, but he loves the Heidelberg Catechism. In fact, he loves it so much that he hands out copies of the Bible and the Catechism, for free, to people that he meets. From time to time he has even put ads in international newspapers promising to send Bibles and Catechisms to whomever responds. And he pays personally for all the materials and postage costs. Once he spent \$1000 sending packages to Nigeria. (This story was first published in the *Banner* May 11, 1987.)

Now, if a non-Reformed plumber in Brooklyn is excited enough about the Heidelberg Catechism that he sinks hundreds, even thousands of dollars, into sharing its riches both locally and internationally, what could we be doing? Here are a few possibilities.

A new website:

www.heidelberg-catechism.com

It goes without saying that if people today want information or resources they turn to the Web. Need directions to a new store? People go to Google Maps. Want to buy a textbook? Amazon is the choice of many students. But what about the elder who is going to lead a reading service and needs a sermon on Lord's Day 39? Can he find what he's looking for online quickly and easily?

What about the pastor who is preparing to teach Lord's Day 9 to Grade 10 students for the tenth time in his ministry? Where can he go online to find some resources that will re-invigorate his Catechism teaching for that evening?

What about all those interesting articles about the Catechism which were written in *Clarion*, *Christian*

Renewal, Outlook, and also more academic journals? Are they relegated to a library shelf in a seminary, collecting dust until some theological student comes searching for them?

And what about the Christian who has just recently stumbled across the Heidelberg Catechism for the first time in his life? Maybe he does not even know what a catechism is, but he reads Lord's Day 1 and he wants to know more. Like everyone these days, he googles the name. Will he find a friendly, easy-to-understand online guide which leads him into the treasures of this cherished summary of the gospel?

The Lord willing, by January 19, 2013, the answer to all of the questions above will be: "Yes, just point your web browser to www.heidelberg-catechism.com." On that day, or perhaps the evening before, a new website will be launched, sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. The website will contain a substantial collection of sermons, teaching guides, magazine and journal articles, as well as video and audio files of speeches – all related to the Catechism. In addition, there will be web pages that provide newcomers to the Catechism with an orientation to this confession. The history of the Catechism will also be explained. And all of these resources will be available through an attractive and easy-to-use interface. If you go to the web address now, you'll see a sample of what it will look like when the full website is operational in January 2013.

The Heidelberg is turning 450 and still going strong

Moreover, just like the plumber, Louis Di Baggio, this website has international and multi-lingual aspirations. We aim to launch in two languages: English and Portuguese. The missionaries in Brazil are already providing Portuguese Catechism resource material. Under the Lord's blessing and over time, the goal is to include many more resources in different languages. In this way, Christians from many nations, tribes, peoples, and languages will be able to benefit from the spiritual treasures summarized in the Catechism. As one Canadian Reformed missionary already said, "That would be golden!"

How can you participate in this website project? When it launches, by all means, make good and

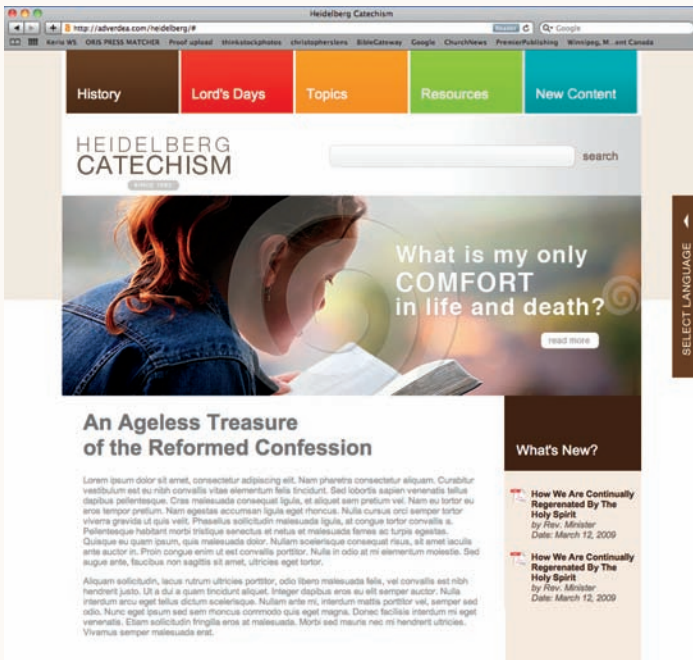
extensive use of it. If you use social media, perhaps you can blog about it or post it on your Facebook page. If you know someone who is beginning to embrace the truth of the gospel, you can point them to this online resource. And perhaps you will think of more possibilities yourself.

A Catechism Discussion Guide

Every so often it's good to take stock of where you are and where you are headed. As Reformed churches, it is healthy for us to reflect together on our present use of the Catechism, and how it might be strengthened in the future. To that end, a Catechism Discussion Guide has been prepared. This guide is divided into four sections: Catechism & Home, Church and School, Catechism Preaching, Catechism & Evangelism, and Catechism & Future Generations. In total some thirty questions are posed which aim to prompt earnest and interesting discussions about the abiding value of the Heidelberg Catechism in our Reformed church life. A copy of this discussion guide has been sent to all Canadian Reformed consistories. If they find it valuable, ministers can use some questions in the guide as part of the local catechism instruction during this fall season. However, the guide is by no means limited to the catechism classroom. Families, Bible study groups, mission and evangelism committees, teachers, and school boards might all find some questions in the guide which they deem profitable to discuss. So why not take a look and see what you find? This resource can be downloaded at no cost from the seminary's website. Go to www.canadianreformedseminary.ca and navigate to "General" and then to "Resources." You'll find it there.

A conference . . . extended to the whole federation?

For the past two years, in January, our seminary has hosted a conference. This coming year, the third annual conference will focus on the Catechism following this theme: "Your Only Comfort: Celebrating 450 Years with the Heidelberg Catechism." Various international experts on the history and present-day use of the Catechism have been invited to speak. Yours truly is also scheduled to give a keynote speech. In addition, workshops are being planned for each of the four topics that are in the Catechism Discussion Guide (see list in previous paragraph). Each workshop will be introduced by short video clips from people with experience in that



And finally a tour

There are many interesting tours available: cruises to the Caribbean, fishing expeditions, and bus tours of Israel. However, from July 11-19 there will be a very special tour through The Netherlands and Germany focussing on beautiful historical sites, all connected in one way or the other to the Catechism. How are the old Dutch fortress of Bourtange and the Bad Bentheim castle in Germany linked to the Catechism? The tour will explore those connections and many more. There's even a boat cruise down the Rhine and it all culminates in the city of Heidelberg where a special celebration is planned in the historic Molkenkur Hotel overlooking the Neckar Valley.

This ten day journey will also have a decidedly spiritual aspect to it. Each tour day will begin with a short meditation on the grace-filled truths summarized in the Catechism. The Lord's Days will be fully set aside for worship. There will even be a couple concerts on historic Dutch pipe organs.

And one more thing. Participants in the tour who enjoy photography and video will be encouraged to submit some of their best digital impressions to the website mentioned above. In this way, even after the tour is over, future generations, perhaps even your very own children and grandchildren, will be able to benefit from what you saw, heard, and learned.

Please go to www.wittetravel.com/calendar-tours/legacy-reformation for all the details.

*It is healthy for us to reflect together
on our present use of the Catechism,
and how it might be strengthened
in the future*

Well, a website, a discussion guide, satellite conferences, and a tour. There are many opportunities to commemorate the Catechism's 450th anniversary. However, considering all that we receive through this catechism, both now and for generations to come, it seems appropriate that we do more than simply say, "Happy Birthday." Let's have a blessed and memorable commemoration together.



particular area. For example, have you ever wondered how the missionaries in Papua New Guinea use the Catechism? What insight can the Canadian Reformed Teacher's College give for strengthening our catechism classes? And, as always, there will be good food and warm fellowship at the conference.

But it's in Hamilton, right? And so long as you're within driving distance of Hamilton you can attend. But what if you live in Ottawa, or Winnipeg, or Edmonton, or Vernon? Well, this time around, you may have an opportunity to join in the conference as well. After all, it's not every day that the Catechism turns 450, so we are going to try to do something special. Plans are already underway to use live stream Web technology to transmit certain parts of the conference to satellite locations throughout the federation. In many geographic areas, local committees are being formed to organize a central location where brothers and sisters, both younger and older, can gather together, watch some of the speeches live, ask questions by email, participate in a workshop or two, and yes, hopefully enjoy some good food and warm fellowship together as well. What better way to commemorate the Catechism's 450th anniversary than by celebrating together, as a federation, as simultaneously as we can in this big country of ours?

More details can be found at the seminary website. Again, go to www.canadianreformedseminary.ca and navigate to "General" and "Conference 2013."

Forty-ninth Annual Fraser Valley Women's League Day

Facing Death and Living Life in the Strength of our Loving God

The sun was shining for the first time in days. . . weeks. . . ok, months, and around 200 ladies from various Reformed denominations descended on Langley church for the forty-ninth annual Women's League Day. It seemed a shame to sit inside on such a lovely day, but the topic promised to be informative, if not cheerful: Facing Death and Living Life in the Strength of Our Loving God.

Debbie Johnson and Christine Hofford of Lynden, WA took turns presenting their speech. Knowing our only comfort in life and death involves knowing God. As it says in the Belgic Confession God is immutable, almighty, and perfectly wise. He is love, he is good, and he does good. When we remember these attributes we can be comforted. We must have faith that the God known by Joseph, Daniel, and Paul is the same God who deals with us.

Knowing our own comfort enables us to comfort the dying. In doing so our inclination is to speak and offer wise words. But instead of being the first to speak we do well to remember this: focus on the person, be attentive and wait for the



person to guide the conversation. Ask questions and wait for the answer. Key questions to ask are how are you doing physically. . . emotionally. . . spiritually?

Debbie and Christine went on to explain the five stages of grief and/or dying: denial and shock, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance.

It is tough to accept the new reality of terminal illness or death of a loved one. It is important to remember that God has a plan and he doesn't make mistakes. Realizing this will help the grieving come to terms with the situation.

Anger tends to follow denial. Rage may be directed at another

person or even at God. Even David asked God in Psalm 22, "Why?" But for believers this must remain respectful, keeping in mind that just as he took care of David, God will also take care of us.

Stage three is bargaining. This stage occurs more in the case of terminal illness rather than with the grieving. Christ spoke like this in the garden of Gethsemane before his death, "If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." It is ok to request a change of plan, but we must also be prepared to accept God's wishes.

The fourth stage, depression, can be a long period of sad reflection filled with feelings of emptiness, despair, and suicidal thoughts. Others may think the person should be getting over it. He might have trouble seeking professional help, thinking it means weak faith. It is important to seek biblical counseling, therapy, or medical intervention if necessary. This is the time to remember that God is good and does good.

Finally comes acceptance. Once again the grieving person is able to find joy in a life without their loved one and express praise to God.

Our role as communion of saints is to offer comforting and encouraging words, recognize the stages of grief, listen, ask questions, and offer practical help. Read Scripture and pray. Do not underestimate the power of prayer. If you say you will pray for them, do it. Have a prayer list. And when you don't know what to pray, pray Scripture and sing the Psalms.

We need to prepare ourselves for these situations, whether we are those grieving or offering comfort. The way to prepare is by personal Bible study. We must fill up on God's Word in order to prepare ourselves for being in the valley of the shadow of death.

After the speech we broke up into a dozen groups in order to discuss the topic. This provided a more intimate setting to ask questions, have them answered and be encouraged. After a simple yet delicious lunch which many enjoyed outside (did I mention it was sunny?) everyone regrouped in the church for a larger group discussion and concluding remarks.

While at first glance the topic may have seemed like a downer, in reality it was wonderful to be reminded of our only comfort, to gain insight into the grief and pain of those who mourn and be given the tools to encourage and help them. Opportunities for fellowship like League Day are a blessing from God, just like the sunshine.

C





Peer Pressure

By Esther Souman

Esther Souman is from
Langley, BC

Let's be positive

From elementary school and up, we've been taught about and confronted by the forces of peer pressure. So much so that for most of us it has become an exhausted topic. Or has it? More and more we hear the terms "positive peer pressure" creeping into our day-to-day conversations. But what is positive peer pressure? Finding a definition for such an idea is impossible. There is no such thing in reality. Positive peer pressure is a contradiction in terms. Peer pressure is all about being a part of the group; it is about fitting in for the sake of fitting in. Should Christians associate themselves with this? If pressure to do good works is what we call "positive peer pressure" – peer pressure under the guise of Christianity – it is harmful to the extreme, reaching beyond superficial societal life, past our relationships with friends and family, and into even our spiritual life. Why so harsh? Well, let us take a look at what peer pressure really does – among fellow Christians and in our relationships with unbelievers – and what it should be replaced by.

Peer pressure in Christian circles

Have we not all had that impression, at one or other point in our lives, that a person was telling us, "You are not a good Christian if you don't ..."? We can fill in the blank with things like attending retreats, participating in fundraisers, showing up for rallies; the list goes on with many trivial and not-so-trivial things. Peer pressure in its various forms (one of the worst of which is guilt-tripping) is the imposition of one's (or a group's) opinion on another. Positive

peer pressure would presumably be the forcing of one's *positive* opinions on another. The opinions here are on what is important or acceptable in particular circles. What is acceptable in Christian society? Nowhere but from the Bible can we take the answers to such questions. This has been the strength of the Reformed doctrine: a constant and faithful return to the Scriptures. The Bible leaves no room for opinions. God's Word is not the truth for nothing.

Think about it in this way: faith is not something that we can have for someone, so we cannot pressure someone into showing thankfulness. If an acquaintance who claims to be a Christian appears to stray, or not act his or her part as a thankful Christian, our opinions are not going to matter. Authority should bring him back, not peer pressure. A Christian should not care about "I think" but "God says."

Peer pressure in Christian circles ends up being a display of power as much as it does in secular settings. Let's take the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages as a classic example: excommunication was a popular form of intimidation between the church and the government. And what good did it accomplish? A king would obey the church because that was the acceptable thing to do, not because the church itself spoke with authority. Under peer pressure, actions are no longer genuine.

When we pressure, we pressure with authority. If we have no such thing to back ourselves up with, we might as well forget it. That being said, there is nothing wrong with influence. If you find yourself placed in a circle of wonderful God-fearing friends, do not take this for granted but always remember that what friends think

Church News

Called by the Free Reformed Church of Launceston,
Tasmania:

Rev. D. Poppe

of Coaldale, Alberta

of you and your life matters little next to what God says of it. We have been created as sensible, rational beings, and we should always discern for ourselves what the Bible has to say. Just because peers or ministers say something is right, that does not make it so. Just as we have all been created rationally, all of us are also prone to making many mistakes. The necessity of reading and meditating on the Word of God is not a matter of opinion; to the Christian, it is a fact.

Peer pressure is also not the same as persuasion. There are things in life that we find more important than others – but ultimately we must let our peers see for themselves (or let ourselves be shown) from the Bible how we are to live. Outside of God's Word, what gives us the right to decide which good works take priority, let alone enforce them on others? The fact is, we do not all have the time, the money, or the talents to do all or any of these "major" good works. God has given all of us different responsibilities. Just because Bob loves going to meetings and rallies in order to make his voice heard, doesn't mean that Billy should. Let us take the Pro-Life cause – very popular in our circles – as an example. Exodus 20:13 states: "you shall not murder." As this text (in context) is repeated to us at least once a week on Sundays, we are all very familiar with it and we can easily justify our plight against abortion. But don't be surprised to hear that Exodus 20:13 is not the only text in the Bible. We cannot all devote our lives to the protection of the unborn, no matter how noble the cause. The fact is that our battles against abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage, etc. are really by-products of what we are ultimately called to do in life: to love God and our neighbour. The strength in our crusades should lie not in our hunger to win a battle, but in our concern for (in the case of abortion) the unborn, the mothers, and even the doctors. With this attitude, it is also no longer a matter of who is doing what, who is doing it when, and how much they are contributing to the Christian cause. A man who takes time from a busy work week to be with his family is not a less worthy Christian than a man who stands in the streets handing out pamphlets. Love is something that cannot remain hidden for long. After all, a Pro-Choice supporter may be more effectively swayed by a display of family love and affection than one of a few-hundred crosses and signs.

Confronting the world

We live in a world where young people are constantly searching for truth. People are sick of post-modernism and subjectivism. As Christians, we have the advantage of consistency in reasoning and life, but this should not make us proud and conceited. What does this have to do with peer pressure? A great deal. There is a fine line between (negative) peer pressure and positive persuasion. We're not trying to convince people that our way of doing things will make them better human beings. We want people to see for themselves why right is right and wrong is wrong. If they do start to see things from a Christian perspective, we should not be surprised if they do not go about their lives in the same way as we do.

This approach may seem very passive. . . isn't it a bit unrealistic when we try to go about fighting for justice? There is a great illustration in a book titled *The Lie: Evolution* by Ken Ham, which is quite applicable to this situation. He gives an image of two fortresses, the one called humanism, the other Christianity, which are engaged in an intense battle. Instead of aiming at the base of the structure, the Christian fortress attempts to pop a number of balloons (labelled abortion, euthanasia, etc.) hanging from the towers. Loud cheers arise from the gunner when he succeeds, even as the foundation of his own fortress is giving way to enemy guns (and meanwhile, another Christian is aiming straight at him). The point is: we cannot effectively pressure individuals, communities, or governments to do (or stop doing) something without first changing something in their worldview. Once we are on that path, nothing but the authority of God's Word can lead us on. If we want the world to stop labelling Christianity as just another philosophy, we should stop propagating it as such. Faith is not a matter of opinion, it is a matter of life or death.

Let it start with the individual, with the fanatically atheist classmate sitting next to you, with the co-worker you're trying to avoid because you know that he does drugs. When you let that light shine out into every aspect of life, people will notice and start to ask questions, and don't worry, the answers will come to you. "So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs" (Matt 10: 26-27).

Peer pressure is not the way to go. Showing the world that life can be lived differently is. Let's take "peer pressure" out of positive peer pressure.





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Diking Identity

The Dutch always had to seek protection from the sea. Trusting God's providential care did not preclude acting responsibly. After centuries of building mounds of dirt, garbage, and manure, during the Middle Ages they started to build ever better (higher and stronger) dikes for protection. The Scheldt Storm Surge Barrier is a high-tech modern example, which closes for extreme high water only. Dikes are crucial in storms when white-crested waves splash over them, and guards walk their lengths to be sure of the polders' safety seven or eight metres below. As dikes developed, so did windmills, like Goliath: Once used to pump excess polder water to the sea, they are now frequently replaced with more potent diesel or electric pumps. Dikes and pumps and watertables are maintained by specialized governing bodies. Until recently, one such body had its head office below sea level in Onderdendam and summed up its mission: *Dei nait dieken wil, mout wieken* – Build dikes or back off.

School dikes

The Dutch also worked hard to build Reformed schools, which, like their land, needed protective dikes. In the late sixteenth century, Reformed synods pushed hard (with some success) for reformation of the schools. Things looked up when the government-sponsored Synod of Dort (1618-1619) formulated the still-valid Reformed triangle ideal of three-fold catechetical instruction in home, church, and school. Later, however, when people adopted "enlightened" perspectives, the funding magistrates' direction and the supervising churches' character could not guarantee the schools' Reformed identity. By the early 1800s, by law, schools had to teach "all Christian and social virtues," but the Bible was considered too offensive to Jews and Muslims to be listed as an approved school book. Teachers caught using or even having a copy in their classrooms faced serious disciplinary action. After the Secession of 1834, and again around 1886, attempts to establish independent *Schools with the Bible* often shipwrecked on the rocks of unfavourable laws, enforcement agencies, and prohibitive costs. Even though there were

dikes, they did not always handle the storms well, or there may have been few schools to protect.

In 1920, *Schools with the Bible* received full funding if they met quality standards, and Synod Leeuwarden stated that establishing Christian schools and seeking government recognition was the *parents'* responsibility. Synod also maintained that *consistories* should encourage the parents to establish such schools and also have supervision over the Reformed character of the teachers and the curriculum. It cited three reasons for this supervision. First, school societies are based on the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity, and the churches have a calling to see to it that the schools hold to that basis; next, parents promise in church to teach their children in the doctrine of salvation and to have them taught in it, and the church must ascertain that this actually happens; and, finally, parents and teachers, as members of the church, are always and everywhere subject to the supervision and discipline of the church. Church supervision remained a dike of protection for the Reformed character of the schools for several decades. It certainly fit with the triangle model for solid Reformed education: There was a strong confessional unity of understanding and purpose between home, church, and school.

The Dutch also worked hard to build Reformed schools, which, like their land, needed protective dikes

Upon immigration, our (grand)parents came to find a nominally Christian publicly funded school system, and soon discovered its deficiencies. As of 1955, they started schools to better align with the promises made at baptism. Their schools' protective dikes took shape in such things as stated purposes and constitutions, restricted membership and voting rights, hiring and admission policies, selections of curriculum content, and close involvement of parents with the school.



Goliath/turbines

Church members were often encouraged to join the school society. Reformed teachers were recruited from the church federation or from sister churches. These were solid dikes of protection, but did not always affect classroom practice as intended. In time, four Markers of Reformed Education were formulated to define our schools' common purpose and basis, or, one may say, to describe the schools' operational world view. Development continues on teaching Christianly, creating school cultures conducive to teaching the Lord's Way, explicitly Reformed curriculum, professional growth and collegial support for teachers and principals, and ongoing active involvement (in prayer and otherwise) of committed parents and community members. While dynamic, we like to think that our protective dikes remain effective, that our checks and balances will catch digressions of any kind, and that we are getting better at translating being reformed into classroom practice.

Changes

Things are changing in Holland as well. In the churches, different voices and perspectives clamour for attention, and, despite full government funding and protective measures similar to our own, Reformed schools are also faced with definite challenges. Constitutions and governance models had to be adjusted to ascertain recognition, funding, and continued existence. In some ways, parental commitment and involvement has dwindled. There is no guarantee that Reformed people will commit to "their" school: Some parents choose school-proximity or perceived quality above Reformed identity, and schools must develop unique and appealing programs to compete with others. Membership meetings sometimes attract some board members, and few others. In such situations, what happens to the dikes that protect the schools' Reformed identity?

Schools seek to remain reformed in various ways, as exemplified by Gomarus College Highschool in Groningen <http://www.gomaruscollege.nl/breed.aspx?steID=10&itmID=12974>. Over eighty percent of the pupils of this 3000-student multi-campus school hails from the Reformed churches in the northern three provinces of The Netherlands. Others come from some thirty different denominations. To enroll their first child in the school, regardless of church membership, parents must have an admission-interview and sign a declaration of agreement with what the school stands for: <http://www.gomaruscollege.nl/breed.aspx?steID=10&catID=2126>. Hiring policies remain restricted to members of the Reformed churches and those in ecclesiastical fellowship. New teachers are supported by a pre-service and in-service Reformed induction program, and they are encouraged (with administrative and collegial support) to develop their ability to deliver reformed perspective and maintain a Christian atmosphere in their classes.

Jelte Verbree lives in Onderdendam, below sea-level, teaches at Gomarus College, and is preparing a Master's study relating to school identity. Better than static 1000-year dikes for protection, he likes the storm surge barrier as a metaphor for protecting students as they prepare to function as Christians in the workplace or post-secondary education. He observes that many Christian schools had their protective dikes fail, losing both the content and the character of being Christian. Reformed schools like Gomarus do not want to follow suit. Verbree's focus is on curriculum content, on what the schools' leaders can contribute to maintaining the Reformed character, and on how all staff can be involved in finding the best avenues to secure a Reformed culture. Answers to these questions require a significant investment, including in-depth consideration of curriculum, staff coaching, performance reviews, regular identity focus days, and team meetings. Verbree believes that performance reviews are especially suitable to evaluate whether all these investments pay off.

Stories exemplify how this works out in practice. One colleague organized a school-wide *Day of Love* with a biblical perspective. Several aspects of this theme were addressed – such as marriage as a gift of God for each other and for enjoyment. Among others, it allowed students to ask and discuss sensitive questions about sexuality. A gay representative of Contrario (<http://www.contrario.nl/>) was invited to explain his struggle to deal with his orientation in a Christian manner. This helped students to understand and have

compassion – as dealing with homosexuality requires struggle, conversation, and prayer. Several teachers also make a special effort to give Christian guidance to their students. One music teacher, for instance, listens with the students to their music, and then analyses and evaluates the lyrics (and artists' lifestyles) with them – to see whether they are in accord with God's will. Some teachers spend recesses with students in prayer for each other and their personal problems. Some business teachers wrote a booklet to get university-level students to think about reformed business ethics, and things like the distribution of wealth and poverty. This booklet was well received in the press. Gomarus graduates also share their experiences at school, and what it might do to make for a better transition into the workforce, college, or university.

Reflections

The efforts at Gomarus to maintain Reformed identity are impressive. There is an impetus to develop several aspects of this identity to a significant extent: Teacher induction and in-service support to focus on integrating Reformed perspective in all courses and special projects; the admission interview and parental declaration; and the personally supported aim for students to live as Christians. There is something appealing in the dynamic character of their dikes, not because they can change from day to day, but, grounded as they are in a long tradition of Reformed education, and supported by strong leadership, they allow for an application that is current and can effectively face the challenges of the day. Here are ideas we may well wish to emulate.

The presence at the school of students from some thirty denominations may be disconcerting to some, as a step towards a decline of Christian identity. However,



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opening windows to share the benefit of Reformed education with those who beg for it does not have to be the same as opening doors for all sorts of foreign ideas. On a lesser scale, several of our schools also have or have had similar practices. Nonetheless, it will take an involved and sustained communal commitment and a conscious effort of all to not slide down the path of declining identity. The competitive context in which Gomarus operates can help motivate people to maintain its distinct identity, and the significant and ongoing efforts towards developing it will help make it more explicit and meaningful.

Over time, dike designs will show shortcomings, and fresh insights are needed to address these – without abandoning their purpose

Low attendance at membership meetings is a concern, even if administrative separation is not the same as pedagogical separation. To prevent becoming insular from their communities, schools need pedagogically involved parents (the triangle concept!), which goes beyond making a one-time conscious choice for this school. However, schools also need a process by which informed and committed people can be widely known and selected for leadership. In line with Synod Leeuwarden 1920, there is always a need for involved parents in education.

Finally, traditional dikes have their value, but do not fully guarantee that students really learn what we would hope they will. Over time, dike designs will show shortcomings, and fresh insights are needed to address these – without abandoning their purpose. The 2011 NPC focus on moving from Worldview to Character in Christian education offered one set of valuable insights that can help strengthen our schools' Reformed identity. At all times, but especially in crises, dikes of protection need to be strong and well-guarded. Let's continue to build dikes, working for Reformed education, and pray for God's care over our efforts.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@echs.ca



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***The Glory of Grace: The Story of the Canons of Dort*, William Boekestein, illustrated by Evan Hughes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012)**

Additional Information: Hardcover, 32 pages, \$10.00

If William Boekestein were a hockey player, we'd say that he scored a hat trick – with assists from Evan Hughes on each goal. He first scored with *Faithfulness Under Fire*, his 2010 children's book about Guido de Bres and the Belgic Confession. He followed up last year with *The Quest for Comfort: The Story of the Heidelberg Catechism*. Some had expressed the hope that he would come through with something on the Canons of Dort and now we have it!

For those who still don't know this author, William Boekestein is the pastor of the Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA) in Carbondale, Pennsylvania. He's a graduate of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids and a former Christian school teacher. He's also a father of three children – children who love to hear stories. They're blessed with a dad who has a gift for telling them.

Who would have thought it possible to tell the story of the Canons of Dort in such a way that it can be learned and appreciated by children? Boekestein pulls it off. He writes clearly and simply, avoiding sophisticated theological jargon. I would think that many Christian parents might even come to a better grasp of the doctrines of grace through this little book.



Now, having said that, I do think that the doctrines of grace (TULIP, five points) are, by nature, more advanced. Therefore, this book would likely best be used with older children, perhaps 10-12 year olds.

The illustrator, Evan Hughes, is a professional graphic designer. His illustrations have a unique style and they add character to the book. The drawings are bold, colourful, not too weighed down with detail, and yet historically accurate.

As with the other two books, this one definitely should be on the wish list of church history teachers and home educators. If we're going to effectively teach our children what we believe as Reformed churches, knowing the history is a must. William Boekestein, Evan Hughes, and Reformation Heritage Books have done us a service in giving us three great books about the Three Forms of Unity and their history.





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Mostly Canticles

The Wastrel Son in Distant Land

1. The wast - rel son in dist - ant land did squan - der all his wealth
2. When fam - ine came up - on the land the boy felt his great need.
3. "Why should I starve? Why should I die? To Fa - ther I'll re - turn.

on wine and wom - en, song and dance, and dam - aged his good health.
A farm - er hired him for his pigs, to give to them their feed.
My sin I will con - fess to him and as a slave so - journ.

Gone was the mon - ey he'd re - ceived from Fa - ther's rich es - tate.
The pangs were bleak, the hun - ger cruel; a - mid the swine he said:
'I don't de - serve to be your son!' is what I will ad - mit.

The wom - en left, the danc - ing stopped, and emp - ty was his plate.
"My Fa - ther's slaves have more than I! They al - ways are well fed.
As la - bour - er for you I'll work, to you I will sub - mit.

Text: Luke 15:13-24; vers. George Ph. van Popta, © 2012
Tune: and harmony: Chris J. Nobels, 2012

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4. The Father lifted up his eyes
and saw his errant son.
His heart was filled with tenderness
and he began to run.
He threw his arms around his boy
and kissed him on his face.
He did not care about the stench
but only showing grace.

5. "Dear Lord and Father, I have sinned,
insulted heav'n and you.
Do not consider me your son,
I know what I am due."
So said the boy in Father's arms
as he felt deepest shame
for wasted wealth and how he'd harmed
his Father's perfect Name.

6. But Father silenced his dear child
and called for robe and ring.
He dressed his son in royal array
and spared not anything.
He gave him sandals for his feet—
his son was not a slave!
He once was lost but now was found.
His sins the Lord forgave.

7. The fattened calf was slaughtered for
a feast of greatest joy.
All laughed and danced and sang with bliss
for God had saved the boy.
And we, my friends, we once were lost
but now we have been found.
Amazing grace, amazing love!
With Christ we're safe and sound.

Dear Editor,

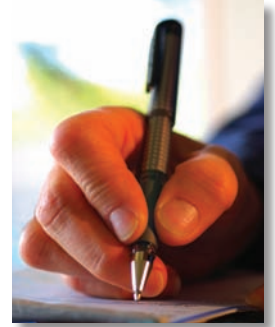
In an article on the revised New International Version (*Clarion*, August 17, 2012, pp. 438-440) Rev. Clarence Bouwman expresses agreement with the fact that our CBT (Committee for Bible Translation) rejected this version, but adds that he personally has more objections to the TNIV than those the CBT mentioned. He focuses on passages that relate to the "male headship principle" and concludes that in various cases the new version, by using gender-neutral (or inclusive) language, "corrodes" this principle.

Although the article is informative, it is, in my opinion, also one-sided. At issue, I understand, is the idea of "women in office." It is not at all my intention to defend that idea. I write this letter for a different reason, namely to question the practice, which is again followed in the present article, of basing our position in the matter exclusively on texts that forbid women to speak, while ignoring Bible passages that appear to teach differently. Such one-sidedness does not do justice to Scripture and should be avoided.

While in some passages (for example in 1 Timothy 2:12-14 and 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35) women are indeed told to be silent, other passages show that this command does not exclude them from various tasks and activities in the church. My question is: why do we in ignore these texts? Are we moved by fear, or adherence to tradition? Here are some examples:

- We read in Scripture of prophetesses – Miriam, Deborah, Hulda in the Old Testament, and Mary, Anna, and the four daughters of Philip the evangelist in the New. (And let us realize that one who prophesies speaks with authority.)
- The prophet Joel states that in the new dispensation "Your sons and daughters will prophesy," a text that Peter quotes in Acts 2:17.
- We read in the Book of Acts of Paul's fellow-workers Lydia and Priscilla, and in Romans 16 Paul mentions not only Junias/Junia (I note that the ESV also calls him/her Junia), but other women helpers, such as Phoebe, a deaconess, Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, and others.
- In Philippians 4:2ff Paul speaks of Euodia and Syntyche as "women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel."
- In 1 Corinthians 11:5 we read of women who pray and prophecy, apparently with Paul's permission. He does not tell them to be quiet, but only to present themselves properly, that is, with their head covered (which suggests that they are praying and prophesying in public).

- And finally, Galatians 4:28 teaches that in Christ there no longer is "male nor female." I admit that this is a difficult text, which I would like to see explained in discussions on the position of woman in the church. The same goes for other difficult texts, including one we generally use as a definitive negative "proof text" in the issue at stake, namely 1 Timothy 2:14.



I have given the above arguments and examples (to which many could be added) not, as I already said, to plead that we allow women in office. Nor am I keen to get involved in a running controversy. Since, however, Rev. Bouwman raises the issue, as he has done before, I feel justified in responding. It is my plea that in this admittedly difficult matter we look for answers by listening to all that Scripture tells us.

Freda Oosterhoff
Hamilton, ON

Letter to the Editor

When one grows older it is amazing the changes one sees by looking back on the years past. It is a great source of joy to notice that through all the years God remains in control.

This is true in world politics, even in times of great turmoil and also in Christ's church. It is a joy to detect his faithfulness in maintaining the truth of the gospel each and every Sunday. We as his people have much reason for thankfulness when we see the younger generation take their place in Christ's church by faithfully taking over the leadership in church as well as Christian schools and other organizations.

Nevertheless, it remains our task to be vigilant in order for us to test the spirits to see if they are of God. With this it is also our task to aide our fellow believers to be awake and watchful.

This is why, after much hesitation, I feel compelled to write this letter to the editor of *Clarion*. My concern is with the recent comments made by Rev. J. Witteveen and Rev. G. van Popta regarding "Contemporary Christian Music." It appears to me that both church leaders expressed a positive sentiment toward this type of music. It makes me wonder why we as children of God love to look over the fence in order to see how wonderful things are in the world without God. We love to see how the world functions in mode of dress, entertainment, dancing, and listening to and performing

music. It is no secret that quite a few churches have very few or no organists, some people seem to think organ music too "churchy." One main newspaper in a large western Canadian city advertised their service with the added attraction "guaranteed no organ music." Is this a warning beacon for us?

Why do we wish to copy the world, because we too are "inclined to all evil, incapable of doing any good." As it happened this morning with personal devotions we came upon Deuteronomy 12:30-31, "And after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.' You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because

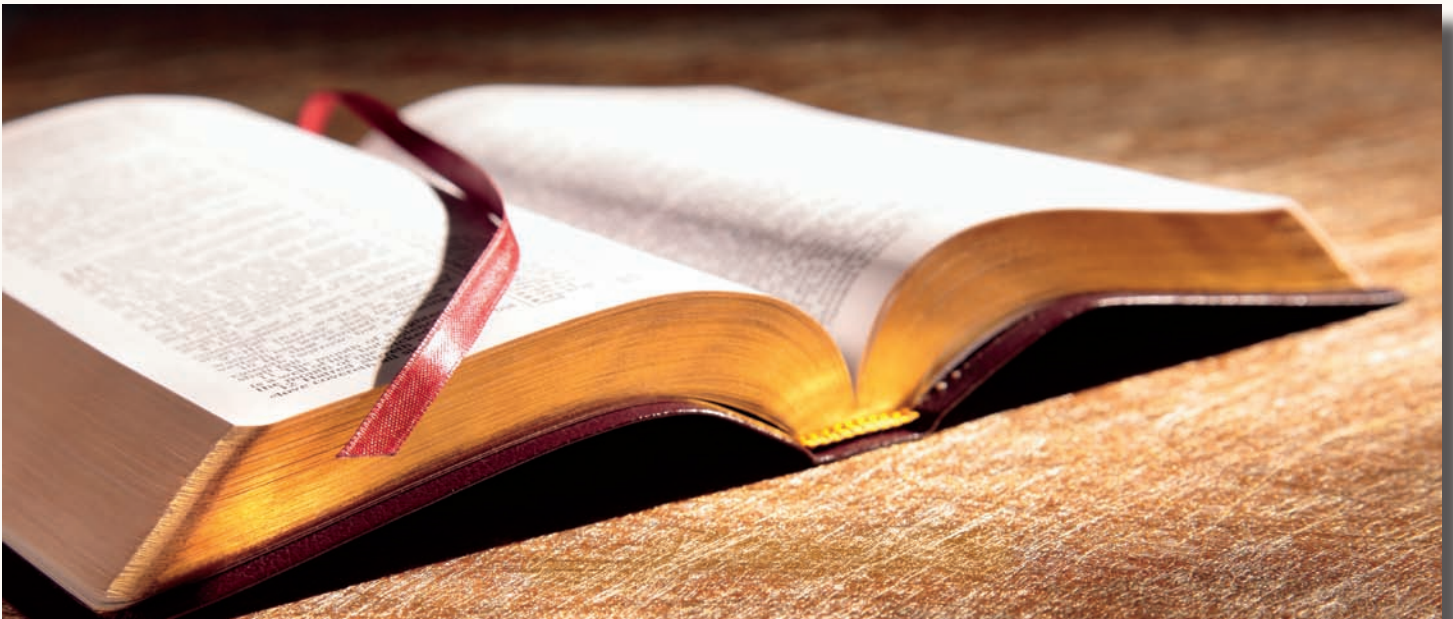
in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates." Therefore let us stop looking over the fence to see how "wonderful" the world functions; instead let us exhort each other to look at the beauty of the Lord and the peace he gives those who love and obey him.

I am illiterate when it comes to music and do not know any of the latest bands or performers, "and I think that I too have the spirit of God" (1 Cor. 7:40b).

*With Brotherly Greetings,
Terry Veenendaal
Carman, MB*

For additional information see:
[http://thechristianpundit.org/2012/08/06/the-songs-we-sing/Drums in Worship – Appropriate or Not?](http://thechristianpundit.org/2012/08/06/the-songs-we-sing/Drums-in-Worship-Appropriate-or-Not?)

*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.*



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