

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
Volume 62, No. 13 • June 28, 2013



EDUCATION IS GIVING DIRECTION



Dr. John Smith is Professor of Old Testament Studies at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
jsmith@crtcs.ca

Don't Toot Your Own Horn – God Doesn't!

God seldom praises himself in Scripture

Proverbs 27 opens with a pair of proverbs about boasting. Verse 1 concerns boasting about the future: “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” Since we do not know what the future holds and we do not control what will happen, it would be foolish for us to brag about what we will do, because things could turn out otherwise. We make our plans, yes, but we say *Deo volente*, “If God wills” (James 4:15). This proverb applies to all of us. It does not, however, apply to God. He *does* know what a day may bring forth; he *can* speak about what he will do in the future, and he often does. Scripture is filled with passages in which God foretells what he is about to do, and time and again his words prove true. For God to speak about the future is not empty boasting but a trustworthy word.

Verse 2 concerns boasting about yourself: “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.” A bit more literally, one could translate: “Let a stranger praise you, and not your own mouth, a foreigner, and not your own lips.” The point seems to be that praise should come from someone who is not personally connected to you in any way, someone who does not know you or stand to gain from praising you, so that his praise cannot be construed as flattery but as sincere and selfless.

Self-praise

Entirely the opposite is self-praise, “tooting your own horn,” which is self-serving and arrogant. There are a number of examples in Scripture of people who praised themselves. Think of the boast of Lamech in Genesis 4: “I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.” Or the boast of Samson in Judges 15: “With a donkey’s jawbone I have made donkeys of them. With a donkey’s jawbone I have killed a thousand men.” Or think of Haman the Agagite in Esther 5, how he

called together his friends and his wife and boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways that the king had honoured him. Other examples of boasting are not hard to find: that of Sennacherib in 2 Kings 19, of Assyria in Isaiah 10, and of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14.

Solomon’s counsel is to “let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.” It’s a proverb that applies to everyone, but again the exception is God. If anyone could legitimately praise himself, it is the unique, incomparable God, who does all things for his own glory. For God to speak highly of himself is not vanity or arrogance, but simple truth. He cannot overstate how great he is because his greatness is infinite. It would be arrogance on our part to take it ill of God that he praise himself. After all, only he knows how great he is, and only he can say it as it should be said. Even if the Bible were filled with divine boasting, it would be nothing less than the truth.

Interestingly, however, God seldom praises himself in Scripture. He is not constantly speaking about himself in glowing terms. Most of the praise for God is not found in first person speech – God speaking about himself – but in second and third person speech: others speaking about God. To be sure, even second and third person speech is divine revelation, and yet it is striking that such revelation is usually framed in the second and third persons: not “How great I am,” but “How great you are,” “How great he is.” The Lord does not behave at all like Lamech or Haman, singing his own praises to all who will listen. Rather, he listens, while others sing his praise.

When God speaks about himself

God does, of course, speak about himself quite often in Scripture. When one considers all the instances of first person divine speech, they fall broadly into three categories.

In the first category are instances in which God *identifies* himself: "Abram, I am your shield" (Gen 15:1); "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land" (Gen 15:7); "Jacob, I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac" (Gen 28:13); "Israel, I am the LORD who heals you" (Exod 15:26); "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of slavery" (Exod 20:2); "Aaron, I am your share and your inheritance" (Num 18:20). Notice that when God identifies himself, it's not just *who I am*, but *who I am to you*.

In the second category, God *characterizes* himself. "I am grieved that I have made mankind" (Gen 6:7); "If you take your neighbour's cloak as a pledge and don't return it at sunset and he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate" (Exod 22:27); "I am a jealous God" (Exod 20:5); "I am holy" (Lev 11:44); "I make you holy" (Lev 20:8); "Your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates;

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

This issue begins with a guest editorial, written by Dr. John Smith. He writes about boasting, self-praise ("tooting your own horn"), and how God speaks about himself in his Word.

Issue 13 also has an article from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, originally a presentation made to a school membership meeting, which takes a look at the influence teachers have in the lives of their students. In fact, teachers are called "fathers" in Scripture! Dr. Van Dam discusses the implications of this metaphor in the education of our children.

We bring readers regular columns Treasures New and Old and Ray of Sunshine. There is also a Canticle from the hand of Rev. George van Popta, continuing a series of Canticles from the book of Revelation. In addition there is a Roadside Assistance article and a book review.

Laura Veenendaal

- 314 EDITORIAL**
Don't Toot Your Own Horn – God Doesn't
- 317 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
Slip-Slop-Slap
- 318 A School of Sons and Daughters**
- 322 Canticle**
- 323 ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE**
The Awesome Self-Revelation of God
- 325 RAY OF SUNSHINE**
- 326 BOOK REVIEW**

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P. Holtvliwer, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

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

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg MB Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

Subscriptions clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca
Advertisements clarionads@premierpublishing.ca
Website www.premierpublishing.ca

2013 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

			Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada			\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds			\$69.00	\$ 92.00
International			\$98.00	\$149.00

***Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra.**
GST/HST no. 890967359RT

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

2013 ADVERTISING RATES


Advertisements: \$19.00 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch. We reserve the right to refuse ads.

PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

We acknowledge the financial support of the  Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

... I am weary of bearing them" (Isa 1:14). Notice again that these self-descriptions are not of God in isolation but in relation to his people

The third category is the biggest. Most of God's first person speech concerns his *actions*, what he has done, is doing, will do. Often his actions are proof of his identity and character. "By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood" (Exod 7:17); "I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD" (Exod 12:12); or think of the refrain of the book of Ezekiel: "Then they will know that I am the LORD."

Not self-praise

Yet none of these three categories of divine first person speech can be called self-praise. Such passages are few and far-between, and even where they do occur, there are often other reasons for them, reasons that relate to God's concern for his people. Let's consider a few examples. In Deuteronomy 32:39 God says, "See now that I myself am he! There is no God besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand." Self-praise? Perhaps, but in context it's God's response to a people who have abandoned him for idols. It's part of a song for God's people to sing, a song meant to function as a witness and a warning to them. In Psalm 46:10 the LORD says, "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." This is no mere self-aggrandizement but a message of comfort for a vulnerable people, reassuring them that they are safe with him. The most extensive passages in which God speaks highly of himself are found in the second half of Isaiah (e.g. 42:14-17, 45:18-23). But why? Because God's great name was being blasphemed among the nations by his association with a powerless people (Isa 52:5). They may be downtrodden, captive, and weak, but their God is sovereign over the nations of the world, he is mighty to save them and gather them together again.

In short, even though the truth of Proverbs 27:2 is intended for people, God chooses to apply it to himself. He does not praise himself, but evokes the praise of others – of his own people Israel, yes, but also of strangers and foreigners. Why does God do that? Part of the answer is simply that God commands respect (Lev 10:3, 16:2, 22:3); we owe him love (Deut 11:13, Matt 22:37). It is not the task of a king to praise himself but of his subjects to praise him (Mal 1:14). God made *us* for his praise (Ps 22:3; Belgic Confession, Article 12, Lord's Day 3, Q.A. 6). Another

part of the answer, perhaps, is that God leads by example: as we live out the truth of Proverbs 27:2, we're being renewed after the image of God himself, learning to reflect his character. Still another part of the answer may be that God reveals himself to be entirely different from Satan: he's not proud, attention-seeking or power hungry the way Satan is, and he reveals himself in such a way that we could never confuse his qualities with those of the devil.

All of this helps us to understand our Saviour better. The Lord Jesus left behind heavenly glory and humbled himself by taking on flesh and blood. When we think of his humiliation we think especially of his human nature. Yet we should not think that depriving himself of glory is foreign to his divine nature. Scripture does not give us the picture of a God who needs to praise himself all the time in order to feel fulfilled, nor of a God who lives in splendid isolation with the angels because human praise just isn't good enough. No, we read of a covenant God who relates to sinful people, who wants their lips to praise him, and who is longsuffering when that praise does not come. It is this God who comes to us in Jesus Christ. Our Saviour did not praise himself, but he did receive praise and worship from others, also from the lips of children (Ps 8:2; Matt 21:15, 16). Christ fulfilled Proverbs 27:2 when he said in John 8, "I am not seeking glory for myself. . . my Father. . . is the one who glorifies me." He also said that he brings glory to the Father (John 17:4). So the Father glorifies the Son, and the Son the Father. There, in the blessed communion of the Trinity, we see the perfect truth of Proverbs 27.

A word of caution

Even at the basic human level, Proverbs 27 gives a wise word of caution: "Let another praise you, not yourself." Don't toot your own horn. But the caution becomes much more urgent if God holds even himself to this principle. If the one who deserves all glory and praise in heaven and on earth is willing to wait and to work for others to give it to him, how do we, who deserve no praise at all, dare to snatch it for ourselves? We would then put ourselves ahead of God.

One last comment: Proverbs 27:2 gets a new twist in the New Testament age. In 2 Corinthians 10:18, Paul writes, "It is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends." In other words, let the Lord be the stranger who praises you. If he was willing to wait and to work for you to praise him, how much more should you be willing to wait to receive your commendation from him!





Rev. Arend Witten is
minister of the Canadian
Reformed Church at
Vernon, British Columbia
arendwitten@gmail.com

Slip-Slop-Slap

"It is like precious oil poured on the head. . . ."

(Psalm 133:2)

Launched in 1981 by the Cancer Council of Victoria, Sid called on all Australians to "Slip-Slop-Slap" ("You help prevent skin cancer like that"). This singing, dancing seagull has gone down in history as one very successful public health campaign. I have noticed his influence even on signage by our local Lake Okanagan. Sid had Aussies slipping on a long-sleeved shirt, slopping on sunscreen, and slapping on a hat, on the way to the beach on a sunny day.

Tourists will tell you that Israel can be hot and sunny, too. If you work outside, the sun can dry out your skin quickly. It can blister, become cracked and infected. Before the advent of sunscreen, part of getting ready for work was rubbing oil on your skin. And at the end of the day, instead of a shower you'd be refreshed by oil.

King David (who had worked outside a lot) uses oil as a simile in Psalm 133. "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes" (vv. 1-2). When Aaron became a high priest there was a special anointing ceremony. Precious, scented oil was poured on his head, and ran down upon his beard. This was a symbol that he was ready to go

out – not to the beach – but to go to work among God's people.

Good friends are like that precious oil. Brothers and sisters who live together in unity are refreshing. Spending time in our church community with people who know us and care about us encourages and equips us to get out and take up our calling in life. Simple things like fellowship in the foyer, sitting around a campfire, or sharing a summer BBQ, can be occasions where we have open conversations about our faith. It is one of the ways that we are refreshed for work.

King David knew that well. In his twenties he had to flee home and hearth, and live in caves in the wilderness. Lots of campfires, but it wasn't a good thing. One man who stood by him was Prince Jonathan, son of Saul. Jonathan came to visit David to encourage him and remind him of the things the Lord had promised to do for him. The bond that David and Jonathan shared built him up when he was weak and needed it most. It was like refreshing oil.

Today too, in a wilderness of disrespect and selfish competition, where many people look out only for themselves, the loving care of brothers and sisters is like refreshing oil. It helps to keep us from getting burnt. Slip-Slop-Slap. In the last line of the

Psalm, David tells us why: "For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore" (v. 3).

The reason why good friends are refreshing is because the LORD blesses us through them. On Mount Zion, the church, the place where brothers and sisters are united – that is where the Lord showers his blessings. When we remind a friend that God does what he says, or when you warn a young sister against a path of sin, when you encourage a defeated brother to see the blessings of the Lord in every situation, the Holy Spirit works with that. The Holy Spirit uses that to grow us, mature us, correct us, to get us ready to go out and do our work under the sun. Friends and family who live together and minister to each other are indispensable. We can't survive without them. We will get burnt from exposure.

It is good then, that this unity is not an achievement of people, but a gift from God. The oil flows down. The oil on Aaron's head flows *down* over him on his beard, onto his robe. It is all from God. The unity, the fellowship, the refreshment are his gift.

That is something you want to be a part of, isn't it? That is something you want to see flourish in your church. Grow close friendships, fellowship, peace and unity, and so be refreshed.





Dr. Cornelis Van Dam is professor emeritus of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

A School of Sons and Daughters

What follows was presented at the membership meeting of the Timothy Canadian Reformed School Society of Hamilton on May 2, 2013.

No one will deny the great importance of schools or the considerable influence which teachers exercise on the lives of their pupils. Indeed, our being here this evening testifies to our interest. Teachers in a sense work with pliable clay, moulding the lives and ideas of their pupils or students.

In the Bible there is a term to describe teachers which we seldom use. Teachers are called “fathers” and the students are “sons” (and therefore also “daughters”). According to this terminology, students in school not only have parents at home, they also have a “father” or “mother” at school. Let us take a look at this terminology as used in Scripture and then touch on some implications of this metaphor for the education of our children.

Fathers

The term “father” is used in the Scriptures as a term of honour (e.g. 1 Sam 24:11; 2 Kgs 6:21). It is therefore not surprising that teachers be given this title. When Elijah was taken up into heaven by a whirlwind, then Elisha cried: “My father! My father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” (2 Kgs 2:12). The meaning of the term “father” as used here certainly includes the meaning of teacher, especially when one considers that Elisha was a student of Elijah and that the students of the prophetic schools were called the “sons of the prophets” (cf. 2 Kgs 2:3, 5). The teacher was the “father.”

Similarly when David wanted to give instruction, he set himself up as father. “Come, O sons, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the LORD” (Ps 34:11). These “sons” are not his natural offspring, but are the saints (cf. v. 9). Indeed, the heading of this Psalm suggests a time when there is no record of David having sons (cf. 1 Sam 18-21). We find a similar usage of “father” in the

book of Proverbs. Proverbs is often the voice of a teacher to his pupils. “Hear my son, your father’s instruction” (Prov 1:8).

Similar terminology is found in the ancient Near East. In ancient Sumer, the land which came to be known as Babylonia, texts dating from about 2,000 B.C. indicate that a school teacher was among other things called a “school father” and a student was called a “school son.”

In the New Testament we see that the Lord Jesus called students of the Pharisees who perform exorcisms “sons of the Pharisees” (cf. Matt 12:27). Paul, a student of Gamaliel, a Pharisee, called himself “a son of the Pharisees” (Acts 23:6).

The Bible emphasizes that the parents have the first responsibility to teach their children. Indeed, the school terminology of “fathers” and “sons” in a sense underlines this. The other teachers in Israel were the prophets and priests. Especially the priests had to educate Israel in the Law and their obligations to God (Deut 31:9-13; 2 Chron 17:7-9). Today, besides the parents, we have the office-bearers in the church and the school teachers who instruct our children. Indeed, the teacher in a Christian school has an important task.

Purpose of education

According to Scripture, children were to be taught the great deeds of God (e.g., Deut 6:6-9) as well as the practical skills of life. With respect to the latter, that would include being able to read and write. It appears that a normal family was literate. For example, Gideon could ask a young man from Succoth who had been captured to write down for him seventy-seven names (Judg 8:14). Literacy was widespread (cf. Deut 6:9; 27:2-8; Isa 10:19), for Israel’s education was not only geared for the spiritual but it was also very practical. Think, for example, of the practical teachings present in the book of Proverbs. Indeed, would a father not want his son to do well? Common thinking in Judaism was that a man who

did not teach his son the Law and a trade, the ability to work, reared him to be a fool and a thief.

Israel's education was geared so that boys could earn the bread and butter and girls could be prepared for their future task in the home. At the same time, this education was religious. The fear of the LORD is the basis of all knowledge and wisdom (Prov 1:7). The Bible does not separate the practical and the spiritual. This life and the life to come is one continuum, for as we confess in our Catechism, we start eternal life here (Q/A 58 and 103). The great duty of the father and the mother was to see to it that their sons and daughters could live; that is, to make a living before God in obedience to him and so receive the covenant blessing of a long life, yes eternal life! The practical and the spiritual belong together and are to be integrated. Just as fathers and mothers are God's instruments to impart physical life, so also they are to be instruments to impart eternal life.

If we see this as the root meaning of what it means to be a parent, also when speaking of education, then the implications of what it means that a teacher is called a father (and by analogy also a mother) are quite staggering. Israel and later the Jews saw that clearly, especially when professional teachers more and more took over the education of children. In view of the awesome life-giving function of father, one can understand how an ancient Jewish exposition even dares to place the relationship of the student to the teacher as father, higher than his relationship to his physical father, "for his father has brought him into the world, but his teacher, who has taught him wisdom, brings him into the future world." Teachers were held in very great respect.

In ancient Israel *the* education was to be given in the home; later schools developed more and more. Today, *the* education is to be given in the home, but much time is spent in our children's going to school to prepare for life. This can put strains on the education which the home is to provide, for the school has much to say. This situation has also given our children two sets of earthly parents.

Authority

It is noteworthy that the term for instruction or teaching in the Old Testament is *torah*. Among other things, the word denotes giving direction. Not surprisingly, the term also came to mean the instruction as given in God's law. Education is giving direction. Christian education is giving direction in accordance with God's norms so that life is possible on earth in all its aspects, before God, even to eternity. Because God's Word forms the ultimate foundation for all teaching in a Christian school, the

teaching and providing direction to life needs to be done with authority.

This reality means that teaching cannot consist of seeking the truth together as can be done in a secular environment. The teacher, the school "parent," has the godly task of presenting biblical truth authoritatively. Because the unbelieving world does not recognize the authority of God or of his Word, its concept of authority must of necessity be only utilitarian.

Today, besides the parents, we have the office-bearers in the church and the school teachers who instruct our children

Because the teacher as father or mother has to impart to children the fear and wisdom of the LORD, that is, true life, therefore the authority of a teacher must be life-producing. It must be exercised as a parent would do it, with love, encouraging the pupils in the Lord. One sometimes reads of overzealous teachers who make all kinds of rules which cannot be enforced. Then such a teacher is not a school "father" or "mother" but a police officer. As the saying goes: "If you act like a warden, your students will behave like prisoners." Something of the beauty of a family atmosphere must be present in the school, for the teacher is as a parent and the teaching is for life instruction. After all, properly seen, the school is ideally nothing but an extension of the home.

The nature of such life-inducing authority does not of course mean a lack of discipline, as teachers know only too well, for our sons and daughters are inclined to sin. For them accepting the direction and teaching for life here on earth and starting a life eternal neither comes naturally nor easily. But the discipline can never simply be a conditioning, a making of something from a blank slate. Our sons and daughters are recipients of God's covenant promises and a school father or mother has the holy obligation to recognize that reality and encourage the true life in Christ. Therefore Proverbs 13:24 can extol the virtue of godly discipline. "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." The late Prof. H.J. Schilder has shown in what a sly and humorous way the Proverbs often speak. According to his translation, Proverbs 23:13-14 goes something like this: "Do not withhold discipline from a child; give it to him with a stick. Don't worry. It won't kill him! Just give him a spanking. You will save his life from death."¹

Memory work

Scripture makes clear that parents have to entrust the great deeds of God to their children. God's works have to be written on their hearts (cf. Deut 6:6-9). Undoubtedly much was therefore committed to memory. Nowadays memory work is often viewed with disdain. But it was and still should be a very important means by which the father and mother can fulfill their task. Also the school parents should ask their students to memorize for with memory work great principles are at stake.

Judging from the first part of Psalm 78 these principles include, in the first place, the transmitting and remembering of the great deeds of God in life and, in the second place, in this way to learn from the sins of the parents and so to be encouraged in true obedience to God with the result of having life with God (Ps 78:4-8). It was therefore important that the fathers tell their children the great deeds of the LORD, lest they forget the LORD and stray from his ways. Fathers are repeatedly told to keep on telling the LORD's doings to their children, continually, whether they were sitting, standing, lying down or rising (Deut 6:7-9). In this way, God's works would be committed to memory. Sometimes the LORD aroused the curiosity of the children to help them remember his saving works. For example, stones were placed in the Jordan River so that the children would ask their parents concerning them (Josh. 4:4-9, 20-24).

This continual instruction and the memorization that went with it resulted in later generations being able to speak of the Exodus in detail that exceeded the written record so that the LORD could use details of the memorized accounts to be included in his Word at a later stage. So, for example, one can find in Psalm 77:18-19 a reference to thunder during the crossing of the Red Sea which we do not read about in Exodus. Clearly the fathers had an important task. They had to keep operative in the lives of the people the reality and greatness of their God.

There was an added urgency in passing on God's great deeds for written copies of the Bible (as far as it was then written) were probably relatively scarce. In all likelihood, only the priests and the wealthy had access to written copies of the Word if the example of the Middle Ages before the advent of printing can be of any guide. It is possible therefore that for many the Scriptures were the memorized words of the LORD as they had been handed down by their parents and the priests. If this was the case, as it appears to be, then the memory aids which the

CALLED

Called by the Langley CanRC to serve as co-pastor:

Rev. Harry Zekveld

of Strathroy, ON (URCNA)

Called by the Emmanuel CanRC at Guelph:

Rev. A. Bezuyen

of the Trinity URC of St. Catharines, ON

DECLINED

Declined the call to the Fergus North CanRC:

Rev. J. Poppe

of Winnipeg (Redeemer), MB

Declined the calls to the Bunbury and Southern River Free Reformed Churches of Australia:

Rev. R.J. den Hollander

of Winnipeg (Grace), MB

Declined the calls to the Flamborough, Toronto, and Guelph (Emmanuel) CanRCs:

Rev. A. Bezuyen

of the Trinity URC of St. Catharines, ON

CHURCH NEWS

LORD gave, such as the piled stones (Josh 4:4-7) and feast days (e.g., Deut 16:9-12) take on added significance. The Word of God and the great covenant deeds had to be kept alive in the memory of the people.

The living Word

Keeping the contents of the Word functioning is perhaps where the greatest challenge lies today. We do not have to worry about the Bible dying out, in view of the many printed copies available. The easy access to the Scriptures discourages committing the Word to memory. When we need it, we can always read it. But, then the Bible is not readily integrated into the fullness of life the way it was to be in ancient Israel by speaking of it during the day and by being reminded of the LORD's great doings in everything they did (Deut 6).

This integration of the Word into life is of course the beauty of a Christian school. It can thus be a great help to the home, for in a controlled atmosphere of a school we have "fathers" and "mothers" who teach students subjects all day long in the light of God's Word. At school the great deeds of God can be transmitted in such a way that they are not left forgotten in a book, but are relevant and meet the needs of the day. At school all facts, whatever the subject may be, can in one way or another be related to the Lord and his plan for us and the world. Then teaching is "*torah*," giving direction for life, for the full life in

Jesus Christ on this earth, but which is at the same time the beginning of life eternal.

In view of all the subjects and circumstances one can meet in the classroom, this direction will be given concretely, for the wisdom of God is not an abstraction, but relates to real life. We see this relevancy for example in the book of Proverbs, but it is true of all Scripture. The Word of God never speaks of things on a theoretical plane. Rather it relates to life's issues and temptations so that one can learn from the sins of the previous generation and be encouraged into a true and full life in fellowship with the Lord. The "fathers" and "mothers" in school must therefore bring the truth of the various subjects to bear concretely on the lives of the students, their "sons" and "daughters." Such teaching in the fear of the Lord is the beginning of true knowledge which is so relevant to life here on earth which is to be the beginning of life eternal.

Fathers and their sons

The above has important repercussions. We are once again reminded of how great the influence of teachers can be. They are like fathers and mothers, for they fill the lives of their "sons" and "daughters" in a very real way. Daily and systematically, with the authority and discipline which come with a school situation, the students are worked on, at a time when they are most productive and attentive. When the biological parents see them, they have already given their best. The potential impact of the "fathers" and "mothers" in school is therefore immense! We should never underestimate it. Life direction is given in the school. Yes, life – which must include eternal life.

Such is the impact that the successful teacher literally moulds his "children" in his image. Just as a biological parent has children in his or her image. This can happen and does happen in the classroom. Teachers are like parents. They give life instruction and influence life outlook and the very image of their students.

One can sense that this can raise problems. A teacher's influence is immense. Is it not too great? Do parents not have the first right to influence? Do the sons and daughters not belong to them? An Aramean story recounts how a mother took her child to school and entrusted him to the teacher with these words: "His flesh is yours, his bones are mine." That is, the teacher is given the authority to teach and discipline the child, but the child belongs to its parents. The flesh is given to the teacher to be moulded or beaten, if necessary, but the bones, the basic structure, remains with the parents.

There is something sound about this approach, for the teacher is not to remake the child he receives; the child belongs not to the school but to the parents. We are reminded that the first five or six formative years are in the parental home. This is also of comfort if one happens to be living where Christian education is not possible. However, the fact that children belong to their parents is also a reminder that we cannot just leave our children in the care of the "parents" at school without any further involvement, no matter how good the school is. The school is to be an extension of the home; that's where the real father and mother are. Therefore parents must be very much involved with the teachers at school.

Education is giving direction

This involvement does not mean interference. It means praying for the teachers. It means using the channels available to show interest in their work and to find out how our children are doing. It also means equipping the teachers as well as possible so that they can do their work and calling with undivided attention. It means above all that our children clearly see that there is no competition between the home parents and the school "parents" but that in the unity of the faith both are steering the child in full obedience to the Lord in all areas of life.

This unity of home and school is the beauty of true Christian education. The "problem" of the teacher moulding students in his or her image is then in a sense always limited. For when our children are moulded in the image of the teacher, it should not be a direct source of concern, for both the "father" in the school and the father at home have another Teacher to whom they both submit. He gives true wisdom, yes, he is true wisdom. He gives and is life, even life eternal (1 Cor 1:30). He was not called "father" as a title of honour, as teacher, for his teaching ministry revealed the great Father in heaven. Those who saw him, the Lord Jesus, were to see the heavenly Father (John 14:9), and those who obeyed him would be the image of Father on earth (Rom 8:29; Col 3:10)! And is it not the image of *that* Father that we seek to impress on our sons and daughters, also in school?

¹ My translation from his Dutch version in H.J. Schilder, "Education and Upbringing in the Old Testament (II)," *Almond Branch*, 1:2, 16.



Rev. George van Popta
is minister of the Jubilee
Canadian Reformed Church
at Ottawa, Ontario
gvanpopta@gmail.com

Canticle

Smyrna Revelation 2: 8-11

1. These are the words of him who is the First and Fi - nal One, who
 2. "Be not a - fraid of suf - fer - ing the dev - il's wick - ed - ness. For
 3. "Let him who has an ear give ear and lis - ten to the word the

died and came to life a - gain, who ev - ery vict' - ry won: "I
 ten days he will per - se - cute and test your faith - ful - ness. Be
 Spir - it speaks to ev - ery church: Pay heed un - to the Lord! The

know your pain and pov - er - ty, the slan - der that you face, but
 loy - al to the point of death - en - dure the pain - ful strife - for
 one who o - ver - comes the foe will not at all be hurt by

you are rich be - cause you share in my a - bun - dant grace.
 I as - sure you that I will give you the crown of life.
 se - cond death, or fire, or hell - I will all harm di - vert."

Text: Revelation 2: 8-11; vers. George Ph. van Popta, © 2012
 Tune: Henry S. Cutler, 1872

ALL SAINTS NEW
CMD



The Awesome Self-Revelation of God:

A Brief Look at Ezekiel 1:1-4 & 25-28

In the summer of 2012, I had the opportunity to go on a road trip into the United States with a few friends and visit many incredible places. Highlights would include seeing the Grand Canyon, the Hoover Dam, and the Pacific Ocean, among other amazing sights, both natural and man-made. Throughout this trip, a constant refrain that kept running through my mind during these ten days of sight-seeing was just how small we humans really are. If we each look at ourselves individually and then compare ourselves to something as awe-inspiring as the Grand Canyon or a large city, then really, we seem relatively insignificant.

The passage before us relates how one of God's prophets also felt small and insignificant. When Ezekiel saw God's revelation of his power and glory, then we read at the end of verse 28 that Ezekiel fell facedown. The awesome majesty and power of God was just too much for Ezekiel. Falling facedown was a form of worship; Ezekiel was showing reverence to this awesome God. He was humbled by this revelation, and he was aware of his lowly position in comparison.

To provide some background information about Ezekiel, verse 3 reveals that he was a member of the priestly family, the son of Buzi the priest. Through his story, we see that the Lord continues to work through his priests – even those in exile, as Ezekiel was, sitting by a river in Babylon. But God is about to call Ezekiel to another office, to that of a prophet.

Throughout the Scriptures, the Lord often gives prophets special revelations. Moses, while on Mt. Sinai, saw the Lord's back (you can read about this in Exodus 33 and 34) and he saw all the Lord's goodness and heard the LORD pronounce his personal name! Isaiah received his own revelation in Isaiah 6 where he saw the Lord sitting on a throne. Again, the Lord gave Jeremiah a special rev-

elation, reaching out his hand and touching Jeremiah's mouth (Jer 1). To prepare them for their task, God gives them just a small glimpse of his glory and majesty.

Now before we go into more of the specifics in this vision, you may be asking why we are only focusing on these specific parts of the vision. After all, when we look at chapter 1 as a whole we see that the majority of this vision Ezekiel receives is spent dealing with the four creatures and their appearance. If we really study this vision closely, however, it soon becomes evident that these four creatures are not the main focus. They are certainly important, for if they weren't our Father would not have included them in the Scriptures. But the central point of this vision is the Lord's self-revelation to Ezekiel. Without the revelation of God's majesty, the account of the four creatures is really unnecessary. Therefore, in this article, I want to focus on God's self-revelation.

In verse 4 Ezekiel sees a windstorm coming from the north. Notice here that he does not say something *like* a windstorm, but he *sees* a windstorm, describing it as an "immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light." This is one occasion in the vision where Ezekiel does not need to use a metaphor. He is actually seeing a windstorm. And notice the vivid language that he uses here. This was not a regular cloud; it was an immense cloud. Right from the outset, we as readers cannot miss the weightiness, the awesomeness of what Ezekiel is seeing.

Details included in this revelation are mirrored elsewhere in Scripture. Often, when God is approaching in his majesty, we read of lightning. In Exodus 19, when the Lord descends to Mt. Sinai, we read that there was thunder and lightning. The Psalms are also very vivid in associating lightning with the coming of the Lord. Psalm 18:12 says, "Out of the brightness of his presence clouds

advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning.” Psalm 29 speaks about the God of glory who thunders or the voice of the Lord striking with flashes of lightning.

We are all very familiar with thunderstorms – most of us have seen them firsthand. We are aware of the awesome power that these storms are capable of displaying. Yet, despite the knowledge provided by science, for many people a thunderstorm remains a very moving or even a very spiritual experience. It fills them with a sense of awe. Now, if a thunderstorm gives off this much power, makes us feel this much awe, then the power of the Lord is that much greater. It is something that we cannot even fathom. It is awe inspiring. It is humbling.

Reading Psalm 18:7-15 you will quickly see that these verses are also very powerful in describing the majesty and the power of the Lord. Also, the language used is remarkably similar to some of the language found in Ezekiel. Both of these passages are describing the Lord in a very specific way: portraying the Lord as the great warrior; as the God of justice; the God who is holy and is deeply offended by sin.

The central point of this vision is the Lord's self-revelation to Ezekiel

When we read Ezekiel 1, this description of the Lord needs to be clear in our minds; he is coming to Ezekiel as the God of judgement and justice. God's people had sinned, and because of their sin they are in the process of being exiled from their land. Some have already been taken away; others are going to be taken away. This exile had been prophesied for many years and now it has come into reality. God's justice is now clear – not only to us who read this vision many years later, but also to the people who were in exile at that time. They saw firsthand the consequences of their rebellion against the Lord.

However, the fact that this God of justice reveals himself to Ezekiel is actually very comforting! Perhaps this may not be so obvious right away. But even in their punishment, God has revealed himself and come down to his people! He has come to them, even in the land of Babylon where there is no temple of the Lord! God has not forgotten the promises he made to his people; he remains faithful to the covenant that he established with them.

This also has meaning for us today. We do not need the temple of God to be able to worship him. Rather, Scripture says that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit dwells in each one of us! And this God of justice is the God who not only punishes people for their sin and rebellion but he also fights for his people. In Exodus 15:3, the people praised the Lord for being a warrior. This God of justice and righteousness, he is fighting the ultimate battle, the battle against all the forces of evil! God is not only the God of justice for his people but he is the God of justice for every person from every time and every place!

This God is the same God that demands that sin is punished. And because we could not pay for sin ourselves, he sent his Son, Jesus Christ to pay for us. Yet this just God is also a God of mercy. He is a God of love and a God of compassion. This is one of the great truths of the Christian faith: the many perfectly reconcilable, complementary attributes of God. For a comprehensive list of these attributes, read Belgic Confession, Article 1.

At the end of Ezekiel 1, we read more about Ezekiel's vision of the Almighty God. We read about the throne of sapphire, the figure like that of a man, and we read about how from his waist up he looked like glowing metal and full of fire while from the waist down he looked like fire, surrounded by brilliant light. And notice all the metaphors used here. Ezekiel tries to find human terms and human words that describe what he is seeing, but he comes up woefully lacking. John Calvin, in his commentary on this passage, says it very well: “God did not appear as he really is, but as far as he can be beheld by mortal man.” Our English language, with its outstanding vocabulary, cannot demonstrate the glory of our awesome God. There is so much more that we humans are simply unable to grasp.

Having such a revelation of God as this one puts each one of us in perspective. We are tiny humans. We are sinful humans. And yet, this great God, this God of justice, he does not just tolerate us or treat us with indifference. Rather, he covenants with us! Through his Son, Jesus Christ, he adopts us as his own children! We have an intimate relationship with a holy God. What a humbling reality. As we read in Psalm 48:12, this God, the God of justice, the God of compassion, the God of love and the God of mercy, he is our God. And he will be with us to the end.





Derrick is the fifth child in our family of six. He has lived all his twenty-five years in Burlington and has some wonderful memories of his years at John Calvin Christian School. He also attended Hamilton Christian High school, so he knows a lot of people!

Derrick lives at home with his parents and younger sister and has one niece and one nephew, which he adores! This year he is very excited since Lord willing there will be two new babies born in the family.

Derrick has many things to do to keep him busy. He works at Shoppers Drug Mart, U-Haul, and Select Sprinklers, and then he volunteers at Bibles for Mission and Joseph Brant Hospital. He helps out around the house with grass cutting and housework.

His favourite pastimes include watching videos and playing video games, but he also enjoys reading and doing puzzles and going out with his friends. He loves the Toronto Maple Leafs and is a big fan of the Dutch Soccer team. He enjoys camping with his extended family and Anchor Camp and tries to go regularly to BC to visit family there.

He loves to get letters and email especially, so if you would like to correspond with him his email address is derrickvanderhorst@gmail.com.



Birthdays in July

4 JAMES BUIKEMA will be 52

653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

14 SARAH VANDERGUGTEN will be 18

23 Jane Street
Smithville, ON LOR 2A0

20 CHARLIE BEINTEMA will be 38

29 Wilson Avenue
Chatham, ON N7L 1K8

20 DERRICK VANDERHORST will be 26

939 Sanford Drive
Burlington, ON L7T 3G7

29 JANINE KAMSTRA will be 28

532 Moxley Road N
RR2, Dundas, ON L9H 5E2

29 TOM VANDERZWAAG will be 60

c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2

Derrick, we thank you for your contribution to the Ray of Sunshine, and we would like to take this opportunity to wish you and all those celebrating a birthday in this month of July a wonderful birthday!! We hope you are all well remembered with cards and emails for your special day.

May our heavenly Father grant you all his peace, love, and joy, as we all continue to serve him in all we do!

Birthday blessings, till next month!

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of, please let us know as soon as possible.

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms

8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0

Phone: 905-957-0380, email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



***Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians*, Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, Nina Shea, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013**

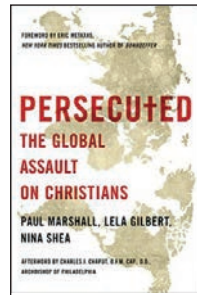
Additional Information: Soft cover, 405 pages, about \$13.00

If you are looking for an informative and well researched book on the persecution of Christians around the world, read *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians*, a production of the Hudson Institute in Washington, D.C.

As Christians living in North America we tend to be ignorant about the persecution of Christians in other parts of the world. We know that it exists but we do not know how bad it is. An important reason may be the fact that we have been blessed with religious freedom which makes it hard to imagine the situation of Christian communities in Communist or Muslim countries. Another reason would be the fact that the persecution of Christians is under-reported and ignored in the media. We hear rarely about Christian persecution. Such stories are mostly glossed over in favour of the latest political news or another triviality about some celebrity. Yet, if truth be spoken, Christians are the single most widely persecuted religious group in the world today, and the situation is worse than we think. Pope Benedict XVI made a statement about this in 2011: "At present, Christians are the religious group which suffers most from persecution on account of its faith."

Persecution of Christians comes in many forms. It could be the bombing of a church full of worshippers in Nigeria. It could be a Muslim mob attacking a Christian community somewhere in Pakistan. It could be the incarceration of individual Christians in Iran. The book *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* gives an overview of the various kinds of persecution around the world. Three causes of persecution of Christians are identified: first, Communist and post-Communist ideology; second, Hindu and Buddhist religion; third, Muslim religion.

After an introductory chapter, chapters 2 and 3 of the book describe the situation in Communist and post-Communist countries where regimes try to hold on to absolute political control. Since Christianity is seen as a danger for the political system, Christians are persecuted. This may take the form of killings and executions (North Korea). It may also take the form of imprisonment or detention in labour camps where Christians are subjected to abuse and sometimes torture (China, Vietnam).



Chapter 4 describes the situation in Hindu and Buddhist countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. In these countries persecution of Christians is not part of government policy but mob attacks on Christians are not uncommon. Hindus and Buddhists tend to equate their religion with the nature and meaning of their country itself. Other faiths represent a threat to them. As a result, Christians are treated as outcasts. Christian communities may be left alone for long periods of time, only to become the victims of sudden outbursts of violence, with police often turning a blind eye to the attacks.

Chapters 5 to 8 describe the situation in the dozens of countries in which Muslims are the majority population. It is in the Muslim world where persecution of Christians is the most intense and cruel. Perhaps the symbolic example of Muslim violence against Christians is the bombing of a church full of worshippers, something that happens regularly in countries such as Nigeria, Iraq, and Egypt. Another form of persecution is the persecution of individuals who convert from Islam to Christianity. Sometimes the fate of these Christians draws the attention of Western media, for example the case of pastor Youcef Nadarkhani in Iran. Usually, the suffering of these individuals goes unnoticed.

The last chapter of the book identifies ways in which Christians in the West can support their brothers and sisters who are persecuted in other parts of the world. Prayer is an important means, but more can be done. Christians can put pressure on political leaders to take action and put pressure on repressive regimes. An interesting case in point is how in 2001 churches and Christians organizations put pressure on President Bush, urging him to do something about the persecution of Christians in Sudan. This led to the Bush administration developing a strategy of putting the Sudanese regime under heavy pressure and, ultimately, the southern part of Sudan being able to secede from the northern part. Today there is religious freedom in southern Sudan.

Eric Metaxas, author of a best-selling book on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writes in the Foreword: "We in the West desperately need to know about our fellow believers who suffer for their faith." The book *Persecuted* is a good place to start working on this.



Dr. Arjan de Visser is professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
arjan.devisser@canrc.org