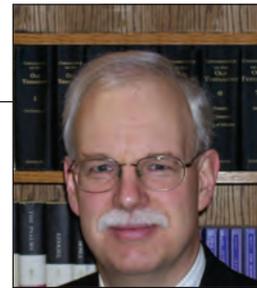


Clarion

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ENJOY YOUR VOCATION!



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I Need a Vocation!

It would indeed be nice if everyone could say they had some clear direction from the Lord about what to do with their lives

No, it is not a spelling mistake. In this editorial I want to deal with the matter of vocation, not vacation, although I am sure that, at this time of the year, many readers might long for a vacation in some warmer location. In the big picture, a vocation is more important than a vacation, for vocation touches on what we do with our lives. It gives a sense of purpose.

The question of vocation is of particular relevance to young people, especially those coming to the end of their high school years. They will have had to make decisions about life after high school. Many will have applied for admission to university or college. While admission requires specifying a field of study, many students are still not fully sure that it really touches on what they really want to do, or even how they can do anything with what they would like to study. Others are planning to enter the work force, but they don't necessarily know what they would really like to do. All this need not be written off as a matter of youthful indecision. There may be serious thought about what the Lord really wants. In some cases, the question may even be formulated in terms of, "What is the Lord's will for my life?"

I have put it in terms of the youth, but it is not an issue restricted to the youth. People may have certain stages in life when they wonder if they made the right choices, if they are really using their talents in the way the Lord wants them to use those talents.

It would indeed be nice if everyone could say they had some clear direction from the Lord about what to do with their lives. Then one could speak of truly having a vocation, right? When we listen to Scripture, we will learn that we are not going to get such specific direction.

We do, however, get some direction to point us in the right way. This comes out if we give some thought to the word "vocation."

What really is "vocation"?

The term "vocation" can be traced back to the Latin word "vox" for "voice." When the word is turned into a verb, it has the sense of "to call, to summon." In history, we can see how the term vocation was the term of choice to describe those who entered into religious service. Vocation was seen as different from just a job. It seems much more important to be able to speak of having a vocation than having a job, for it suggests there must have been some direct involvement by God. It can even be put in terms of having an office or a calling.

While the word "vocation" has been linked to religious service, this is too limited. The word vocation can be applied to any and all jobs. Just think of how there are vocational programs, geared to help people enter the trades. This view of vocation, including also the trades, is not something new to our time. The Heidelberg Catechism contains evidence of this liberation from narrow thinking about vocation when it explains the third petition, "Your will be done." In the second half of the answer we read, "Grant also that everyone may carry out the duties of his office and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven" (HC 49). You could just as well substitute the word "vocation" for "office and calling." We see in this answer of the Catechism that the Reformation of the sixteenth century brought about a major change in how people looked at their daily work. The farmer as well as the minister had an office and calling, that is, a vocation.

When it comes to vocation, it is not so much about how one ended up in his or her particular task but how one looks at it.

Mediated calling

While it is true that in Scripture we do learn of those specially chosen by God, with the most vivid example being our Lord Jesus Christ, it is safe to say that the general rule is that no one can claim

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

What is God's will for your life? How do you know what kind of education or career path you should follow? Your vocation – your calling – is the topic of Rev. Eric Kampen's editorial.

This issue also brings you an article from Dr. G. H. Visscher. "Connected preaching" and theological education is his topic. Here we read about how very important it is for a preacher to connect with his listeners is a variety of ways. Of course, a sermon should and must be doctrinally sound – but it must be more than as well!

Issue 3 brings news of the ordination and installation of Rev. Ben Schoof in Surrey, BC. There are regular columns Treasures New and Old, Ray of Sunshine, and Education Matters. On these pages you will also find a letter to the editor and a Mission News insert.

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to have an immediate call from God indicating what task they should pursue. We can, however, speak of a mediated calling.

I use the term mediated calling because the Lord is pleased to use various media, that is, various means of directing us in our lives. These means include things learned from his Word as well as the realities of who we are and the situations we experience in our lives.

Enjoy your vocation!

First, there is what we learn from his Word. We can bring it back to the creation commission as found in Genesis 1, which also has been called the cultural mandate. To put it in terms of vocation, God called the human race to subdue the earth. We might say in broad terms: we are called to get to work. It is good to start off with this broad calling to make it clear that inaction is disobeying God's calling. This call to work is reinforced in the eighth commandment. To be sure, the commandment is phrased negatively in terms of "You shall not steal," but the positive sense of that commandment is: work! Paul indicated this in the letter to the Ephesians when he wrote that the thief should no longer steal but work (Eph 4:28).

While it is good to be reminded of this broad calling, it does not, of course, tell each of us specifically what to do. What work is right for us? It is at this point that we go to the realities of who we are.

In terms of the realities of who we are, we speak here about how the LORD has made each of us as individuals, with our own personalities and abilities. There are a wide variety of talents to address the wide variety of work that needs to be done. The LORD God made mankind different from all the other animals. Part of that difference is the ability to think, evaluate, and come to conclusions. We need to use these abilities and evaluate what the LORD has entrusted to us. Some people are more suited for jobs that involve intense mental concentration, but they have no aptitude for holding a screwdriver. That should be a clear indication they were not cut out to become mechanics or carpenters. Others are just naturally inclined to hold a hammer and fix things. We can think of Bezalel and Oholiab, who were the two main craftsmen assigned to construct the tabernacle. They had been endowed with the necessary skills to do that.

While this does begin to narrow the field somewhat, there is still tremendous variety. Again, we see the hand of the LORD in the way he gives people different interests. Some are fascinated by machinery while others by construction. Some are fascinated with zoology while others are fascinated by ancient history.

There is one more factor to consider, and a very important one at that. One may be aware of one's own abilities and have an interest in a particular area, but even then there are so many different possibilities. This brings us to the third aspect to consider, namely, opportunities. There may not always be a position that matches one's abilities and interests exactly. It is then necessary to apply one's abilities and interests in the possibilities that present themselves. Very fitting are the words found in Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." We can also think of the words of Paul in Ephesians 6 where he told slaves to obey their masters, serving them wholeheartedly, as if they were serving the Lord (Eph 6:7). This impresses on us that we just can't sit around waiting for the opportunity that matches our interests and abilities but we are to apply our interests and abilities in the opportunities that present themselves.

Enjoy your vocation

When you reflect on the creation commission along with God's providential guidance of our lives in the way he gives us abilities and interests, along with providing us with opportunities, we realize there is no special voice which will tell us which vocation to pursue. We should always be wary when someone says, "The Lord told me to do this." That is true even for those whose vocation we tend to describe in terms of a calling, such as ministers. They get no special voice from heaven either. There too it is a matter of abilities, interests, and opportunities. What is required of all of us is that we reflect on who we are in terms of our abilities and interests, and apply those in the opportunities that present themselves. As we go through life, more opportunities may present themselves. Yet, whatever our hands or our minds find to do, we may see it as our vocation. It is our task, ultimately given by God, and a way to serve God.

To mention once more the words from Ecclesiastes, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." In short, enjoy your vocation!





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Angels in Christ's Service: The Benefit of Their Deaconry

"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14)

Last time we saw the angels in their heavenly liturgy as examples to us. Our text also shows them as deacons for us on earth. They're ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. Of course, that doesn't mean they're at our beck and call, but they're always in service to God. And God uses them for service to those who are to obtain salvation.

You could compare them with our deacons. They're not the "errand boys" of the congregation. Rather, Christ gave them to equip the saints for the work of service, to encourage the members of the congregation to be a hand and a foot to each other. Well, that's the goal of the angels' deaconry, too! Christ governs and uses them for our benefit. They serve him with a view to the execution of his plans, implementing the work of salvation that he accomplished with his death and resurrection. The purpose of the entire work of our Lord is to bring God's children home to the Father. That's what he uses the angels for: they're the heavenly host who is available to accompany the church on earth, to defend and preserve her.

Throughout the old dispensation they were ready to serve, as we learn from Daniel 7:10, "Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him." As the LORD made Daniel aware, time and again they went out as hosts for the benefit of his people, individually and collectively. They were there at

the important moments in the history of salvation, protecting Jacob personally or defending the whole people of Israel. At the time of the conquest of Canaan, Joshua meets the commander of the LORD's army, ready to go ahead and break down the walls of the city and open the gates to the Promised Land. The angels are there on the night of the birth of our Saviour. They are there on the day he started his public ministry, when "angels came and attended him." They are with him in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the morning of the resurrection. They were sent for service, for *diakonia*, as our text puts it.

They still do so, serving those who are to obtain salvation, serving to prosper the progress of the work of salvation. And do we ever need their service! What great resistance and hostility the church has met on its way. Over against the angels' deaconry we know Satan's demony! The hatred and enmity of Satan with his host of devils necessitate the service of the holy angels. But we may rest assured that they're up to the task and their numbers are adequate; as Elisha with his servant observed: "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kgs 6:16). They had all come to protect just one prophet and his helper! In the New Testament too, we read about the miraculous delivery of Peter from prison (Acts 12:7-10), and about Paul who tells the people on that ship in the midst of a

terrible storm, "Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me, and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul'" (Acts 27:23-24).

Yes, they're able to do so much if God wills it! They're the angelic deaconry for the benefit of God's people, as we face threats and terrors from the side of man, from the powers in nature, from the dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12). That's really where the front lines are today. In their midst we can be so vulnerable, or ignorant, even sloppy, when it comes to our awareness and resistance. How easily we bring them into our lives and homes via the channels and the cable! The angels are holding their breath – they can't understand such ignorance, since they are sent to attack them, those demons.

Thankfully, Christ governs his church and sends his angels for the benefit of those who are to be saved. The angels are there, also when you are struggling with physical difficulties and challenged with chronic diseases – they're beside your wheelchair and your sick bed. They're our guardian angels, not in the personal sense, but they stand on guard even when you're on your deathbed. They are there, so that when the time has come they may carry you into heaven in order to inherit salvation in Christ!



“Connected Preaching” and Theological Education



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“All Scripture is . . . useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

A headline caught my attention a number of weeks ago. It read: “Forget Generation Y: 18- to 34-Year-Olds Are Now ‘Generation C.’”¹ It went on to talk about people in this category being the most connected of all generations because of all their digital devices. It’s Generation C, connected, because “they consume media, socialize and share experience through devices more than other age groups.” According to some, this kind of connectedness is integral to postmodernity; people living in this fragmented society have more autonomy and are able to create their own environment. The electronic gadgets and the social media of Twitter and Facebook, and whatever else, allows them to let in people and things that matter and shut out that which doesn’t. Everyone gets to easily create his or her own environment, and whatever works for you is just great.

Now my point is not that we must now use all of this media to do our work (although I think there are definite advantages), but my point is that *effective and powerful preaching must necessarily take into account this accent on “connectivity.”* We are preaching to a generation and a culture that like never before is making daily decisions, consciously and unconsciously, to turn off and turn on, to let in and to block out. And it’s not just a select number of people who are like this. Preachers are speaking to listeners who come with clickers in their heads. They are used to flicking through the channels, deciding in twenty seconds whether to turn off or turn on; they are quite accustomed to flipping through magazines and websites scanning headlines and first sentences that seem interesting, skipping over the vast

majority. Never before has it been as urgent for preachers to engage in what I want to call “connected preaching.”

The preacher today, to be sure, has to be “connected” in many ways. Above all, he has to be connected to God, through prayer and an appropriate personal godly lifestyle, connected to the Word, and to the culture. No man is an island. But today, in preaching, he really has to work extra hard so that people will let him in. He has to convince them that his message really matters to them.

Let me suggest to you that there are two kinds of preaching: “connected” and “disconnected” and let me sketch for you what they are like. It should be said from the outset that no one is really entirely in the one or entirely in the other; it is more like a continuum, and every sermon can be found somewhere along this line.

Disconnected preaching?

“Disconnected preaching,” in its extreme, is where it does not matter whether you prepared this sermon last week or last century; it is not specifically directed to one congregation, but vague enough for all; it has no allusions to what happens in the world today, nor in the lives of the people of God today. It is strictly busy with the exegetical and dogmatic details of the text, finds its introduction within the text or the context, and has little or no application. While the motives of the preacher here may be as honourable as ever, and the sermon may be ever so doctrinally correct, and even Spirit driven, the preacher here makes no attempt to connect with the pew, or to help the pew go home with an awareness of how this sermon impacted them. The only ones who are really following the sermon and really interested are those who are already mature in the faith, theologically astute, and biblically knowledgeable. All others, including today’s youth, would have little or no ability after the service to express what the sermon was actually about. In fact,

without a bulletin in front of them, they probably can't even tell you what the text of the sermon was. This is probably one major reason why so many Reformed people are listening to the John MacArthurs and Alistair Beggs of this world on the side; it is not because they are more doctrinally correct or exegetically sound; I suspect it is because these kind of preachers are better at connecting with them and their world.

Purpose of Scripture

In my view, “disconnected preaching” has failed to meet the biblical goals of preaching. Just look for a moment at 2 Timothy 3:16. I have deliberately left some words out not because I don't believe them – of course, I do. The Scriptures are the God-breathed, inspired, authoritative words of God, beyond a doubt. But while that is the major reason most people bring up this text, I believe that Paul's first intent in this context was not to remind Timothy about their God-breathed character, but the dying Paul is seeking to remind young Timothy about the relevance of these Scriptures and why he really needs to preach them: because those OT Scriptures which he heard about from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Tim 1:5), and were later added to by way of those who wrote New Testament Scriptures, are so very useful. It's a very pragmatic purpose. It is this very body of Scripture which will keep Timothy faithful even despite persecutions (3:12). It is this very body of Scripture which has the power to turn Timothy and all those in his charge into men and women of God who are righteous and equipped for every good work.

Notice, by the way, that while you could translate it “every Scripture,” translations don't do that because Paul is not saying that every passage of Scripture has this power. We can all cite passages that we would never preach on even if we had a million years to preach. But he is saying that that body of writings, inspired by God, is “*useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” And if elsewhere Paul's writings are thought to be a model for preaching,² so they are here too. Paul's writings are driven by the occasion, shaped by the needs of his hearers; even if we long for more indicators regarding the situation of the first readers, there is plenty even for today's readers to feel the impact of these words both then and now.

Connected preaching

So what is “connected preaching”? It is more than just preaching that has application, as essential as that is.

It has to do with *text choice* already. Not every Scripture passage speaks to the occasion one is in. Appropriate text choice has to do with finding a good answer to the “so what?” question. So, what will this passage say to the people? What message will it send them home with?

It has to do with *a love for the people of God*. Preachers have to love their people. Preachers who begin to berate, scorn, and otherwise show that they look down on their people, would be better off to stay home and leave the ministry. Think of Paul who, despite the abuse he suffers even from his own people, is always going on about his love for them. His love in Christ. For the right connection to be made, preachers have to love the people so that they passionately want them to get the message, and to be affected by it and all its nuances.

It has to do with the *introduction*. Preachers have about two minutes at the beginning of every sermon to convince the hearer that this message is something they need to hear. You have to motivate them to get on this train before it leaves the station. The best introductions are ones that are so engaging that almost effortlessly everyone is on board. Connections have to be made at the very beginning; while reconnecting is possible later, it is so much more difficult.

*Never before has it been as urgent
for preachers to engage in
“connected preaching”*

It has to do with *a solid and easy-to-follow argument* thereafter. Once the hearers are onboard, convinced that the topic is relevant and the journey is worthwhile, they will be quite willing to listen to some heavier exegetical or doctrinal content for a while.

It has to do with *application*. Preachers often suggest that the application is something the hearers can do themselves later; they'll just stick to the theory, and let the pew worry about its practical consequences. Such preachers will be very surprised then by the kind of applications that people actually draw, if they draw any. I think this confuses implication and application.

While the implications of a given message may be different from person to person, the application seeks to force out the text into today's audience as far as it can while still saying "thus says the Lord." While preachers have no right to insist on their own opinion regarding a matter (their opinions don't get elevated to divine status just because they are in the pulpit), they have a solemn duty to help people understand the practical differences and consequences of a given passage or doctrine. This is especially where the preaching is *administered* to the people of God by men called to be *ministers*. It all has to do with a level of connectivity that is there throughout the preaching. Preachers who refuse to do this would do well to consider carefully the purpose of Scripture and hence of preaching on the Scriptures, according to Paul.

It has to do with *the occasion*. In my twenty-two years of pastoral ministry I realize that the most powerful preaching moments were times when great tragedy hit the congregation – a premature death, a time when someone's personal failure is disclosed, or some such thing. Then the pew is, as it were, straining forward for comfort and direction to the pulpit, and the pulpit has little difficulty making the connection and moving on to pastor the hearts and lives of the people of God.

If it is connected preachers rather than disconnected ones that we want, how do we shape young men to be like that?

It has to do with an awareness of *the culture of the day*. I don't mind mentioning that as a young person, it was not the church that convinced me that it was relevant to the world; it was men like Francis Schaeffer who in the sixties and seventies connected with us because he understood our culture so well. And for all my criticisms of N.T. Wright,³ I think he is the same kind of person: acutely aware, despite his age, of where our culture and our youth are at. We only get that by being well-read and daring to venture out into that world ourselves.

It has to do with *the whole person*. Essentially, "disconnected preaching" in the extreme is convinced that all that's needed in preaching is some more information. The right weekly dose of extra information poured into their brains will do what is necessary. I believe that this is really a fruit of enlightenment philosophy. The Enlightenment taught that information is the key. If only

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CHURCH NEWS

we give them more information, everything will be fine. Those who think thus ought to read James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*.⁴ Therein he rightly argues that man is not first of all a thinking being, but first of all a desiring being, a worshiping being. Not *homo rationale* but *homo liturgicus*. It resonates with a scriptural theme. It's not just *information* that's needed, it's *transformation*. The people of God don't just need more information; they need to be changed from the inside out by the power of the Spirit of God who works through the preached Word. God is not just trying to make corrupt people a little better. He is recreating them. He is making them new by the blood of Christ. And if connected preaching has to do with the whole person, that applies not just to the whole person of the hearer, but also the whole person of the preacher. Connected preaching is not just one brain connecting with all those other brains out there. It is heart to heart communication about the things that matter in a world that has gone wrong to a people gone wrong about what God is doing in Christ to repair the wrongs to the depth of our being and to the ends of the earth. It necessarily involves also the preacher's intellect, emotions, heart, and life, and it's goal is not just to feed the brains of the people of God; instead, the goal throughout the sermon must be: *how can I reach their hearts?* How can I best be an instrument of the Holy Spirit whereby he truly turns their hearts to the glory and praise of God? That starts already with text-choice, and with the introduction. Speaking about the introduction to a sermon, one author says:

If the opening sentence aims at the listener's head, the development must aim at the heart. This is the most critical step in the introduction. Fail here, and we imply that we will be talking about a subject rather than speaking to living, breathing, feeling, needy people. Succeed here, and people will be unable to pull away from the sermon.⁵

Preaching is not just a matter of lecturing the people of God about how things were thousands of years ago in a

land far away to a people long dead. Nor is it a matter of broadcasting some news in radio announcer style.

As James Daane puts it:

This is the agony and the glory, the power and the foolishness, the high honor and awesome responsibility of the Christian minister. The Christian ministry functions on the borderline between the cross and the resurrection, between heaven and hell. This frontier is no place for the faint-hearted; those who have little faith in the message and its power do not belong in the pulpit.⁶

This is why connected preaching also has to do with *the person of the preacher*. Paul had it right. The Scriptures have a lofty goal. But if Timothy's hearers are going to be trained in righteousness, equipped for every good work, it must begin by Timothy himself being a man of God who is so trained, corrected, and complete.

In the words of Joseph M. Stowell III,

The most powerful sermons are forged out of the heart of a preacher who has sought to live out the principle of the text in the week or weeks prior to its presentation. Sermons forged in life smack of the reality of life and will find easy transition into the life of a listener. Sermons formed only in the mind of the preacher will probably affect little more than the mind of the listener.

And again:

While it is true that transformation is the work of the text under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and that it is he who will ultimately do the convicting, comforting, healing, helping, encouraging, motivating and transforming; it is also true that our messages are the conduit. We craft the instrument. He is the enablement. Our challenge is to do our best to create a useful tool in the Master's hand.⁷

Seminary education

And that leads me to some other thoughts about seminary education. Thoughts about which I'd like to get some feedback from men who have been to seminary and are now in the ministry.

This is the issue. *If it is connected preachers rather than disconnected ones that we want, how do we shape young men to be like that?* It will obviously take more than just handing out iPhones and iPads, as much as our students would love to receive them.

But think about this: is it not true that if preaching is only about excavating exegesis and building dogmatic

constructions, then academics is all there is to seminary education, but if preaching is more than that, if preaching is about the whole person, then seminary education needs to be more than that as well.

I am deliberately again exaggerating things, but sometimes there may have been an approach to seminary education which looked like this: *here is this mass of information which you need to have, and over four years of education we as professors are going to do our best to implant it all into your brain, and the degree to which you'll be able to receive all this data will determine the answer to the question whether you will be a good pastor.*

Dan Allender, a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, writes this in his book called *Leading with a Limp*: The training process for leaders – secular or religious – can usually be broken into three areas content, skill and ethics/character. At the seminary I attended, 90 percent of the curriculum was devoted to content, 10 percent focused on skill, and our character and ethics, or how we lived in relationship with others, was never addressed beyond a few talks in chapel. It was assumed that who we were as people and how we related to others had been addressed prior to our arrival at seminary. The place for personal growth was thought to be the church, not the seminary. The seminary trained men and women in the Bible, theology, church history, and other academic rigors, and then it taught those who would pastor how to preach and conduct themselves in the church. Practical skills were assumed to be learned from classroom input and field experience. . . .

We enable troubled and manipulative men. . . to devour their colleagues, their staffs, and their congregations simply because they've passed exams, written papers, matriculated through a degree, and gained the credentials to be called professionals."⁸

Accreditation

It is also because of these kind of concerns that the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), which recently was granted full accredited status by the Association of Theological Schools, is very grateful for the process of accreditation in which much has been learned. The process has led to much consideration and reflecting on what seminary education should look like, as we seek to ensure that theological education is more well-rounded than it used to be.



In the ATS standards about the M.Div. degree, for instance, one finds these kinds of statements:

- “The program shall provide opportunities to develop a critical understanding of and creative engagement with the cultural realities and structures within which the church lives and carries out its mission” (A.2.3).
- “The program shall provide opportunities through which the student may grow in personal faith, emotional maturity, moral integrity, and public witness. Ministerial preparation includes concern with the development of capacities – intellectual and affective, individual and corporate, ecclesial and public – that are requisite to a life of pastoral leadership” (A.2.4).
- “Faculty shall relate the insights of their disciplines to the practice of ministry and shall be attentive to students’ spiritual development and professional growth” (A.3.3.2.1).⁹

While there is no intent to reduce the necessarily academically rigorous program, there is now a more conscious and deliberate attempt to bring both cultural and personal elements to the fore. Presently, this is being done by means of:

- the Pastoral Training Program, wherein more attention is paid to the personal and practical component of ministry;

- a mentorship program whereby each professor attempts to mentor a number of students;
- seminars and readings that focus also on personal formation and pastoral leadership;
- building personal and cultural objectives into the projected course outcomes;
- being more generally aware of these necessary components throughout the seminary training.

In the service of the King and his church, nothing is too much. Thus, CRTS attempts to do everything possible to prepare young men to be the best ministers of the Word they possibly can be. And that means: biblically faithful, doctrinally sound, and confessionally strong, but also personally and spiritually mature as well as culturally aware and engaged.

May also this labour of love lead God’s people to the increased praise and adoration of or glorious God.

¹ <http://mashable.com/2012/02/23/generation-c>. Accessed April 24, 2012.

² Cf my article, “How Should the Pulpit Address the Pew? Some Lessons from Paul” *Clarion* 42, no 55 (2006). (Cf. *Lux Mundi* 26 March 2007).

³ See my *Romans 4 and the New Perspective on Paul: Faith Embraces the Promise* (Peter Lang Press, 2009) 19-25 and throughout the rest of the book.

⁴ Baker Academic, 2009.

⁵ Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson, *Preaching that Connects: Using Techniques of Journalists to Add Impact* (Zondervan, 2009), p. 38.

⁶ *Preaching with Confidence: A Theological Essay on the Power of the Pulpit*, Eerdmans, 1980, p. 29.

⁷ “Preaching for a Change,” *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to the Pulpit*, 144.

⁸ *Leading with a Limp : Take Full Advantage of your Most Powerful Weakness*. Waterbrook Press, 2006 Location 401.

⁹ See “Educational and Degree Program Standards” on www.ats.edu.

OTHER RESOURCES

Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, NAVPress, 2002.

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How Beautiful Are the Feet of Them That Preach the Gospel of Peace

Any time a congregation has the opportunity to welcome a new minister and begin a new journey of shared ministry, it is cause for celebration.

But when the Lord presents the opportunity to not only welcome a new minister, but to witness the “birth,” if you will, of a new minister, there is double cause for celebration and the congregation rightly rejoices.

Such was the joyous celebration recently at the Surrey–Maranatha church in Surrey, BC. On October 27, 2013, Candidate Ben Schoof officially donned the rightful title of “Reverend” as he was ordained by the Rev. James Visscher in the morning worship service, then preached his first official sermon in the afternoon’s service.

Worship and ordination

The day of worship began with the singing of Psalm 98: “Sing to the Lord, a new song voicing, for mighty wonders he has done.” As Rev. Schoof reminded the congregation later, it is not because it was a day of celebration that the worship service began with praise to the Lord, but that every day, every gathering, every service begins with praise, as the Lord has called us to worship.

Rev. Visscher then reflected on the call of a minister in his sermon, “A Mighty Angel, A Little Scroll, and a New Pastor,” based on Revelation 10.

Just as the two-sided scroll is open in the angel’s hand, he reminded the congregation, the Word of God is open and gives life to God’s people, but it has a two-sided nature.

“There is [great sweetness] in preaching forgiveness and love and grace and mercy, righteousness and eternal life to God’s people” he said directly to Rev. Schoof. “That will be the joy of your ministry.”

“But at times you’ll also experience bitterness and sadness. Proclaiming wrath and judgement to those who refuse to repent is also part of your task. And that’s never easy.”

He then reminded the congregation to “not only to listen to what [this pastor] says, but you also need to be content with [the message] he brings.”

And just as he had pointedly reminded Rev. Schoof of the task that lies ahead of him, he also had pointed words for the congregation.

“As for you ... keep on hearing. Keep on embracing the Word of God preached by this preacher. Keep on living as God’s visible and vocal people in this world.”

This both joyful and sobering call was echoed in the Form for the Ordination of Ministers of the Word, which exhorted the congregation to receive their new shepherd with joy, that his work might not be a burden.

The Form also reminded the congregation of the Scripture, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” – a phrase that echoed several times throughout the day. (Isa 52:7).

The ordination was capped with the laying on of hands, where all elders present laid hands on Rev. Schoof as he knelt, and which was a particularly joyful and visual symbol of the Lord’s grace, blessing, and charge to the new minister, as well as of the communal nature of the shared ministry of minister and consistory.

Then, after the worship service ended and with a slight turn from tradition – a welcome one, if this author may be so bold – one elder stood on behalf of the Maranatha Council to address the congregation. In the Form for the Ordination of a Minister of the Word, Rev. Schoof had been asked to verbally state his promise to faithfully carry out the duties of his office. Thus, the Maranatha Council saw it fitting that since the Form also includes a charge to the congregation to “receive him with joy,” that the congregation should likewise make a promise verbally to support and sustain him in the ministry to which the Lord has called him. The congregation stood enthusiastically and answered, “We do.”



Worship and a new beginning

The day of worship continued as the Maranatha congregation gathered for a second service of worship, this time led by Rev. Schoof.

In his afternoon sermon, he addressed the many congregants and visitors specifically with this question, "Why are you here?"

He asked this not with any grand existential meaning in mind, but a significant, practical, immediate one: *Are you here in this worship service to get a first impression of this new minister and see if he's any good? Or are you here to worship and to rejoice because the Lord has called us to worship?*

Through the service, the new minister's passion for Scripture was certainly apparent and he chose a solidly Reformed text with which to begin his ministry: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph 2:8-9).

A joyous welcome

Later that evening, the church welcomed Rev. Schoof, his wife, Danika, and their two young sons, Daniel and Ethan, with an evening of song, speeches, and presentations.

The evening began with a welcome from Br. Will Faber, prayer, and the singing of Hymn 83.

Elder John Vanderstoep then officially welcomed the family on behalf of Council and presented them with a gift on behalf of the congregation.

Both the adult and children's choirs sang enthusiastic songs of praise and joy, under the direction of Sr. Michelle Faber, and the aria, "How Beautiful Are the Feet of Them That Preach the Gospel of Peace," from Handel's Messiah continued the theme of celebration and blessing.

The Thursday Morning Bible Study officially welcomed Mrs. Schoof and presented her with a reusable grocery bag full of goodies and recommendations for where to find the best grocery deals near her new home.

Representatives from Classis Pacific West as well as the Canadian Reformed churches of Cloverdale, Langley, and Aldergrove each stood and gave their greetings and blessings, as well as letters of similar sentiment were read from neighbouring congregations and previous ministers of Maranatha.

The Young People's Society presented Rev. Schoof with a gift certificate to join them in a round of mini-golf.

The tone of the evening was unmistakably joyous.

To close, the congregation sang together and Rev. Schoof closed the evening with prayer.

Guests and members of the congregation then informally congratulated the new minister and his wife during a coffee-and-cake reception.

May the Lord indeed bless the new Rev. Schoof with a long and fruitful ministry!





CRTA Convention West

James Meinen
Principal of
Covenant Canadian
Reformed School in
Neerlandia, AB

On October 9-11, 2013, the CRTA West held its annual convention. Teachers made the long trek from Winnipeg, Coaldale, Calgary, Neerlandia, and Edmonton to the venue in Caronport, Saskatchewan. Over the next few days, teachers had the opportunity to hear some great keynote addresses, enjoy Christian fellowship, and network with one another.

Neerlandia, host for this year's convention, chose the theme "Being Reformed, Teaching Reformed" for the conference. In a time where secularization and humanism is creeping into all facets of society including curriculum, it is critical that our schools stand up as a bulwark to these antithetical values. This of course takes work. A lot of time has been spent in Neerlandia working towards this end, and the conference served as great opportunity for Neerlandia to share some of this work with our sister schools. Being able to work together and to share resources with one another really underlined the importance of our schools working together.

The three keynote speakers for the conference were Margaret Helder, who spoke on the intersection of faith and science, Conrad Van Dyke, who explored the beauty of nonsense, and André Schutten (ARPA), who took a closer look at Reformed educators as guardians of freedom and trainers of torchbearers. In a short article for our *Clarion* readers, I cannot do justice to summarizing all three speeches, so in this article I will focus only on André Schutten's address.

While most of the presentations and workshops were tailored specifically to teachers and to the work that they do, André Schutten's presentation was broader in scope as it dealt with the shifting political climate our school's now face. As I sit down to write this report, the Alberta School Board Association has passed a motion pushing for the defunding of all independent schools. This push comes on the heels of significant cuts to all independent

school budgets in Alberta last spring. Similar pushes to defund our schools and to limit what we can and cannot teach are evident all across our country. With this backdrop, André Schutten's speech was all the more timely.

His keynote address was entitled "Celebrating Reformed Educators: Guardians of Freedom and Trainers of Torchbearers" and what follows are excerpts from that speech.

Keynote address

Today we can celebrate many years and decades of solid, Biblical worldview training for our Reformed teachers through institutions like the Covenant Reformed Teacher's College and through regular conferences like this one. We can also celebrate the educators themselves: our teachers in the 38 different Reformed schools across Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and B.C. who are assisting parents in teaching children all subjects from a biblical perspective. You play a vital role as guardians of freedom and as trainers of torchbearers.

In speaking of freedom, libertarians and other classical liberals often make the mistake of celebrating freedom for freedom's sake. That is, they see freedom as the ultimate end in itself. And I suppose that freedom, properly understood, is a good end but it is not the ultimate end. When we talk about freedom, it is not only freedom *from*; we are also concerned about freedom *for*. We don't only want freedom from excessive regulation by, or interference from the State, we want the freedom so that we can do good for our neighbor, worship freely, etc. This is the paradox of liberty: excessive freedom outside the constraints of holy living makes one a slave to passion (greed, hatred, lust, envy, ambition, etc.) Without the gospel, liberty becomes anarchy. That's why the gospel in Exodus 20 ("I have set you free from bondage. . .") includes a guide to living freely: "You shall not. . ."

So freedom is important, but I'm not preaching anarchy here. Freedom, in the education context is freedom for parents to send their children to Reformed Christian schools. It also includes freedom for institutions like the CCRTC, or this conference here, to be able to educate men and women to be teachers who are well-grounded in the identity of Reformed education and understand what this means for daily teaching-learning practice.

Do we understand how incredibly valuable freedom is to Reformed education? We don't have to look far to find example of countries with less freedom than Canada. Extreme examples abound: North Korea raises an entire nation to worship its leader, indoctrinating every citizen from the moment of birth in a cultish worship of the State. Radical Islamic states like Iran crack down on Christians, arresting pastors and educators who dare to teach about Christ our Sovereign Lord. But even so-called "progressive" countries have little tolerance for the teaching of a Christian worldview: for example, in both Sweden and Germany it is illegal to home school or privately school your children. If parents do not send their children to the government-run schools, the parents are arrested and the children are seized by child welfare services (I am not making this up!).

So you see the value of freedom in matters of education. With the growth of excessive regulation, bureaucratic interference and centralized oversight, it becomes harder and harder for parents, and Reformed teachers as their proxies, to "raise a child in the way he should go." A lack of freedom in a country can rob a covenant child of thorough, Biblical, worldview training during their most formative years.

Trainers of Torchbearers

Reformed teachers not only provide a role as defenders of freedom by teaching covenant children about a God and Saviour other than the State, they are also trainers of torchbearers. A good way to figure out what a torchbearer looks like is to look at the definition of a Christian. The Heidelberg Catechism asks, *Why are you called a Christian?* And it answers: *Because I am a member of Christ by faith and thus share in His anointing, so that I may as prophet confess His name, as priest present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him, and as king fight with a free and good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and hereafter reign with Him eternally over all creatures.*

Every single one of us who takes on the name of Christian has this calling and mission: to confess, to sacrifice, to fight. Our Reformed educators take the time to force their pupils to pause and consider the question, "What does it mean that I am a prophet?" We tend to put ourselves in a box. We are a teenager, or a farmer, a stay at home mom, an accountant, or teacher. But are we also a prophet who has the guts to speak to the society around us? Are we acting as kings, who fight against the sin and devil *in this life*?

You are familiar with the phrase, "By their actions you will know them." Here is the irony of a State that seeks to limit the freedom of the Christian school in the name of tolerance: when you teach children to live as Christians, then the Christian academy is consistently pumping out better citizens. Graduates from Christian schools are more civically engaged, harder working, less criminally inclined, have stronger families, volunteer more hours, donate more dollars, cost the government less in welfare, healthcare and justice. And I don't say all this to pat myself or any of you on the back – NOT AT ALL. This is not our doing, but by the grace of God. By the work of His Holy Spirit, we are all the more willing and able to live for him. In fact by virtue of us being harder workers, we are able to give to those who have less (see H.C. Q&A 103, 111). By virtue of us being less likely to be incarcerated, we are more able to minister to those who are incarcerated (see Matt. 25:37-40).

This reality needs to be taught to our youth as well – not out of pride (and we must be very watchful of this), but to counter the dominant social narrative that says religion is a toxin in society. The gospel is a public good! As the Cardus education survey reveals, "The education that takes place in religious schools and homeschools is public education and is producing results that are in the public interest." We ought not to be ashamed of the good news and good direction available to all Canadians in the Bible.

Looking Forward

John Stott once said, "We should not ask, 'What is wrong with the world?', for that diagnosis has already been given. Rather, we should ask, 'What has happened to the salt and the light?' As Reformed believers, we don't sit around belly-aching about the condition of our province or country in fear and trembling of what might hap-

pen. We confidently move forward knowing what God has called us to do, living out that calling, knowing that He is faithful. The world is fallen. We know that, so get to work!

And so we come full circle. The title of my talk is *Celebrating Reformed Educators* – you, and the parents whom you represent, are worth celebrating. To be clear, I don't mean that praise ought to go to you, but we can celebrate what God has graciously provided in you and through you. The work you do, the worldview you teach, the community you serve, the freedom you defend, the God you adore – this is worthy of celebration. When you as a Reformed educator, teach a child in the way he should go, assisting that covenant child in lighting their lamp, instructing the student how to hold the torch high, you positively contribute to our society because those students, when living as brilliant, vibrant, engaged citizens in this world now, will demonstrate how to the culture around us that the Christian worldview is a public good, that it has a positive contribution to make to society. And your little torch-bearers will by God's grace point them

to the one true light, the light of Life. The more people come to know Him, the more freedom, true and lasting freedom, we all will have. And that's worth celebrating.

Conclusion

André's speech, along with the other presentations, served as a great reminder of how wonderful a task teacher's have. All the participants could head back to their respective schools with a renewed and reinvigorated appreciation for the task to which God has called them. The Lord willing, God will continue to bless our school's work as we continue raise up the next generation of torchbearers.

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@ech.ca.



"Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song." Psalm 95:1, 2

Lisa Alkema

Hi my name is Lisa Alkema and I live at Twin Oaks. My birthday is on March 14. My housemates are Ron Dewitt, Derrick Vanderhorst, and the manager here is Grace Towe. At this time I would like to welcome Derrick to Twin Oaks. He moved here in November from his parent's house. I work three days a week for Tim Horton's. I clean the tables and wash the dishes well. I'm there for three and half hours per shift. On Saturday January 18 we all went to Ripley's Aquarium in Toronto. We went with Derrick's parents and even got to ride on the Go train to Union Station. Seeing all the different fish and sharks was really neat.



Derrick, Ron and myself in a shark's mouth.

March birthdays

Birthdays are special times to pause and reflect on the blessings that God has given us. Let us give thanks and

praise to the Lord for these moments of festivity. I wish you the Lord's blessing for this year and ask that he continue to give you all that you need to live to his glory.

3 Trevor Hofsink will be 36

14407 McQueen Road, Edmonton, AB T5N 3L3

9 David Rawson will be 52

Apt 206, 1105 Jalna Blvd., London, ON N6E 2S9

10 James Boone will be 18

5404 LadBrooke Dr. S.W., Calgary, AB T3E 5X8

12 Gerry Eelhart will be 52

c/o Mrs. Grace Eelhart
#120 13425-57 Street, Emmanuel Home
Edmonton, AB T5A 2G1

14 Tineille VanRootselaar will be 18

1488 Highway 3 E, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W7

14 Lisa Alkema will be 33

3217 Twin Oaks Crescent, Burlington, ON L7M 3A8

15 Jim VanderHeiden will be 55

653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

Psalm 95:1

*Come, praise the Lord! Let us rejoice
And let us make a joyful noise
To him, the rock of our salvation.
Let us before his throne rejoice
And thank him with our joyful noise,
Our songs of praise and adoration.*

C

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:

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5080 Airport Road East, Mount Hope, ON L0R 1W0

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

With interest I read Dr. Smith's article "*Walton's World*." It contains some interesting information, but also gives rise to a number of questions. While I have not read the book reviewed by Dr. Smith, I have read the earlier one he mentioned, *The Lost World of Genesis One*. Perhaps some additional light can be thrown on Walton's ideas, although the limitations of a letter to the editor will severely restrict me. I will mention the main points.

Dr. Walton is convinced that where Genesis speaks of creation, Scripture refers to the assignment of functions, not to the creation of matter. On page 630 Dr. Smith very appropriately writes:

One might well ask, however, whether it is possible to conceive of the functions without the material. If the point is that the material received a function, then either the material already existed before creation but did not yet function, or did not yet exist. Walton sidesteps the issue rather neatly by arguing that to the ancients there was no existence without a function. As it turns out, however, there was something already there.

In the book I read Walton deals with the same subject. And indeed, something already was there. I quote:

An important caveat must be noted at this point. If we conclude that Genesis 1 is not an account of material origins, we are not thereby suggesting that God is not responsible for material origins. I firmly believe that God is fully responsible for material origins, and that, in fact, material origins do involve at some point creation out of nothing (p. 44).

This is confusing. If "creation" means the assignment of function, not the creation of matter, then it is not correct to state that "material origins do involve at some point *creation* out of nothing." What it should be called I do not know.

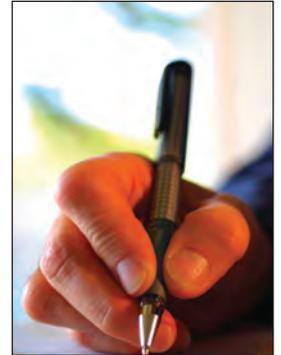
Dr. Smith mentions Walton's "eureka moment." This might or might not be the explanation for Walton's quest for the true meaning of Genesis. I must quote Dr. Smith again: "In one of his classes Walton asked his students, 'Why did God call the light "Day."'

Why not simply call it "Light." The answer he realized was that God did not create light in the sense that he called it into being, but in the sense that he created the function of time." Dr. Smith, quoting Walton again, writes: "To create does not mean to bring *matter* into existence but to initiate and organize the *functions* of the cosmos."

But when, in all simplicity, I read the Bible, and find there, in Young's literal translation: "Gen. 1:3 and God saith, 'Let light be;' and light is. And God seeth the light that it is good, and God separateth between the light and the darkness, and God calleth to the light 'Day,' and to the darkness He hath called 'Night,'" how can I conclude that God did not say "Let light be," immediately prior to calling the light "Day"?

In this earlier book we are informed that Walton was not influenced by his studies in ancient Near Eastern literature and culture or motivated by a desire to accommodate the modern scientific theory of origins. I quote: "Genesis is ancient cosmology. That is, it does not attempt to describe cosmology in modern terms or address modern questions." "If we were to say that God's revelation corresponds to 'true science' we adopt an idea contrary to the very nature of science. What is accepted true today, may not be accepted as true tomorrow" (p. 16, 17).

We do not say that God's revelation concerning creation corresponds to "true science," because there is no



way science can explain or understand creation. Whatever can be accepted as “true science” must agree with God’s revelation. As Walton himself says, scientific theories are not necessarily true science. “It was not the function orientation found in the ancient Near Eastern literature that changed my way of thinking about Genesis 1 – it was the text of Genesis 1.” I will refrain from quoting some of the references to ancient eastern literature and culture. Many are available. Why they are needed if they have not influenced Walton I do not know.

On page 96, writing about the fact that many students lose their faith due to conflicting theological and scientific tenets, he concludes: “The good news is that we do not have to make such a choice. The Bible does not call for a young earth. Biblical faith need not be abandoned if one concludes from scientific evidence that the earth is old.” “God has designed all there is and may have brought some of his designs into existence instantan-

ously, whereas others he may have chosen to bring into existence through long, complicated processes” (p. 131). Elsewhere Walton mentions fourteen billion years as a possible age for the universe.

Like all those who wish to adapt Genesis to modern scientific tenets, Walton fails to indicate how the story of Genesis can be reconciled with a universe evolving over the very long time required by those tenets.

Finally, how can a non-functioning universe exist? For instance, when God says: “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky,” and if, according to Walton, we must consider the teeming and flying as functions by which the animals are created, then where do those formerly non-functioning creatures and birds come from? They could no have evolved, matter, in his view, being non-functioning. To me, his concepts are unbiblical and unacceptable.

George Hart 

*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.*



You Asked

A New Clarion Feature

Is there something you’ve been wanting to know?

An answer you’ve been looking for?

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions via email to Rev. W. denHollander

denhollanderw@gmail.com