

Clarion

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IS FEET WASHING A LITURGICAL MATTER?



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"A Song of Approach"

*Is there a special way by which to "approach"
the Lord God?*

Being handicapped in moving about I have become even more of a homebody. At home things are (relatively) safe. You are on familiar territory. If you are physically limited you need to determine the right approach before you venture out.

Visiting another congregation a while back, I noticed that in the liturgy sheet there was expressly mentioned a "song of approach." I had never really noticed this before, but because the right approach piques my interest, I followed this with great anticipation.

The right approach can be a matter of physical factors or spiritual specialties, or both. I'll get back to that in a moment. Let us first consider the physical realm. Is there a special way by which to "approach" the Lord God? I am at this point still concerned with physical matters. Don't shrug this off as if physical matters are unimportant. It is a known fact that many people in their manner of worship are tightly bound to certain physical rules.

Buddhists and Muslims, to mention only a few billions of people, would not think of entering a temple or a mosque with their shoes still on. I am not sure if everyone also is supposed to take off their socks. With some people the problem is not only in their shoes but even more so in their socks. A joyous song of approach could easily be snuffed out in a tortured lament.

Moses and Mohammed

But where does an injunction against shoes come from? Since Buddhists are by and large vegetarians, you don't really expect them to wear *leather shoes*. The shoe in fashion in eastern countries was mostly a sandal. This has consequences, as we will see.

Sandals were often made of strands of rope and pieces of leaves or rubber. In ancient Egypt sandals were made

out of papyrus. To be sure, Roman legionnaires and other people of *haute couture* wore soft-leather sandals that covered the whole foot and were laced up along the ankles. But the average Klaas could not afford such luxuries.

I could not find any specific command in Buddhism not to wear shoes during worship. Amazingly, the Muslims' holy book, the Quran does not contain such an injunction either. It appears to be more of a general tradition than a specific liturgical command. The Muslim practice seems to have been occasioned by what happened to Moses at the burning bush.

Mohammed has misinterpreted Moses, as he was wont to do. You all know the passage in Exodus 3 where Moses investigates a burning bush. As Moses draws near to the bush, he hears a voice saying, "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (3:5). Note again that Moses is described as wearing *sandals*. Compare with Acts 7:33. Holy ground, take off your sandals.

These passages, however, do not contain a prescription for worship, but are a description of a very significant moment in Israel's history. It does teach us about the holiness of God and leads us to the Lord's words, "No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). But whoever is sanctified in Christ does not need to follow the ritual of taking off their shoes. *That is the key point in approaching God.* I could not find anything about a "song of approach."

Mohammed gives evidence that he generally knew some things from the Bible, but he selects and chooses which sections he will pass on as God's Word. What is passed on by Mohammed and his followers is largely contaminated and was taken up in the *Hadith*, the expansive Muslim tradition. It is better to stick with Moses to find and keep what is really meant.

Washing each other's feet

Perhaps you are now ready to dismiss the whole business of sandals and shoes. Whoa, not so fast! There is another portion of Scripture where feet and sandals play an important role. During the preparation for Christ's last Passover, he began to wash his disciples' feet. He took off their sandals and cleansed the feet of his loved ones. Such was the custom: a host would usually have a slave wash his guests' feet. Sandals did not offer much protection.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

The issue in your hands begins with an editorial from Rev. Klaas Stam about approaching God in worship and how we start our worship services. Have we added too many things and is simple better?

At this time of year we use our pages to introduce the federation to the men graduating from CRTS. In 2014 there will be three: Mr. Gerrit Brintjes, Mr. Jeff Poort, and Mr. Tyler Vandergaag.

Two of our newest columns appear again in Issue 9: Clippings on Politics and Religion from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam and You Asked from Rev. William den Hollander. There is also a Treasures New and Old meditation, the Education Matters column, a letter to the editor, a press release, and a Mission News insert.

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
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The feet would be dirty because the guests had walked on dusty and muddy roads. Here the Master himself did the washing, a most unusual occurrence.

Much has changed since the Lord's time on earth. We now have stylish leather shoes, hip boots, or fashionable running shoes. Our feet do not commonly bite the dust. We also have paved roads and cemented sidewalks so that we do not get our feet wet even though there are potholes that we must be careful to avoid. Literally washing our guests' feet would not be understood today as in those days. Our guests might even be offended if we suggested that our butler would wash their feet.

Are we loading the "start" of the service with too many items?

At that point Christ said, "I have given you an example." The washing of the feet is an example, something that should still be followed also by us today. What does the example mean still today? It means that we humbly serve others, going beyond what is considered the call of duty. Our Lord performed this work just before the last Passover, indicating that nothing was too much for him in saving his disciples.

But this washing is not a liturgical matter. Some have tried to make it mandatory before the Lord's Supper. It didn't work. Some have tried to defend liturgical dancing by pointing to David who danced before the ark. It doesn't work, either. Our joy is centred on Jesus Christ, David's Son and Lord who is seated at God's right hand in heaven.

A spiritual matter

So the matter of the proper approach is *spiritual*, an expression of faith. I think, for example, of what we read in Hebrew 4:16, "Let us then *approach* the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need." See also Hebrews 10:22. It takes confidence to approach the Almighty God, and we have this confidence only in Christ and by faith.

There is today on earth no more "holy" place. So hang on to your Skechers. Remember that when we "approach" God, we draw near to Mount Zion, the *heavenly* Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb 10:22). There is no more need for feet-washing, but there is a need for *holiness*, for without it we cannot see the Lord. Sanctification is a life-changing process that is also a life-long process, worked by the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

I am not sure where this "song of approach" came from. Well-meant, no doubt, but I worry about ritualism. I noticed that the "song of approach" was actually sung before the service started, and somehow it did not seem to fit there. I also wondered who chose the song of the day. That is quite a responsibility for which an office bearer should be properly prepared.

It would have been more fitting, perhaps, to have this song of approach as the first song after the salutation. The song will then *as part of the liturgy* function as the communal approach of the believers to the Lord God. As it is, the song of approach may leave one hanging precariously in the air.


Enfin, let me close this matter with an innocent question. Are we loading the "start" of the service with too many items? First an elder comes out and up, everyone is heartily welcomed, various announcements are made, a Scripture passage is read as call to worship, the host family is mentioned, a song of approach is sung, a handshake is given, and finally the good pastor ascends the lofty and lonely heights of the pulpit. You know that I like innovations, and all these things are more or less important, but what ever happened to simplicity?

I am not even sure if the "call to worship" is really a step ahead. There was a time when on Sunday morning you could hear church bells everywhere. Muslim clerics still use the minaret for a call to prayer and worship. Can be really annoying.

Whatever happened to the Sursum Corda?

I thought that the "call to worship" as well as the "song of approach" came when the minister says, "Lift up your hearts unto the Lord." *Sursum corda* is what that is called liturgically (and unfortunately it is a Latin designation), and it was *the* call to worship. It means: hearts upward! I always liked that. But the *Sursum Corda* has become an under-rated item replaced by all kinds of liturgical gymnastics.

Is something like "a song of approach" really an improvement? Do we truly need it? Or is it part of a bigger plan? Somewhere along the lines of a more user-friendly event? More liturgies do not always lead to greater purity. More symbols do not mean more substance. Attractions can become distractions.

Discussions about liturgy are easily inflamed. In the Middle East disdain was expressed by throwing your (dirty) shoe at somebody. George W. Bush ducked just in time in Baghdad. Remember, Klaas is not as quick as George. 

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The Saviour's Resolve

***"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven,
Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."***

(Luke 9:51)

The unifying thread in the last part of Luke's gospel is Christ's final journey to the royal city, to Jerusalem. There he, the Son of David, will be arrested, tried, condemned, and crucified. Everything from now on is recorded in the context of Jesus' deliberate movement in the direction of Jerusalem, where his "departure" or "exodus" will take place. That's clear from 9:51, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."

These words give us a glimpse of the heart of Christ. It pictures his steadfast resolve to accomplish the purpose of his ministry. It's the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 50. "The Servant of the Lord," the coming Messiah, will redeem his people from their sin. He speaks about being exposed to the deepest humiliation and suffering: the hairs of his beard yanked out, insults hurled at him, spit on, and flogged. Yet there's majesty in the description, as though the servant were in full control of the situation. Instead of saying that men grabbed him and beat him, he declares that he willingly yielded himself, "I offered my back to those who beat me; my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting." The prophet makes clear how completely obedient the Messiah would be. Through all the shame he maintains a spirit

of meekness. He's determined to face the suffering that lies before him. No temptation will sidetrack him from his God-appointed course. Obedience to the Lord God is paramount. He says, "I have set my face like a flint," like a hard rock which cannot be broken. He won't be distracted by anything or anyone from obtaining the goal. Those words, "I have set my face like a flint" find their fulfilment in Luke 9:51, which reads literally, "He set his face to go to Jerusalem." This truth makes more real the sacrifice which our Saviour made, and shows the depth of his love for us.

What does it mean "to be taken up?" Luke is using a comprehensive word here. It's not limited to one step in Christ's exaltation, namely, his ascension. Luke has in mind much more: the consummation of Jesus' work in the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and sitting down at God's right hand. The Father's elevation of him upon the throne must be preceded by man's elevation of him upon the accursed tree. Yes, Christ's agonizing death is also in view! He spoke in a similar way to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

The two – cross and crown – aren't in conflict. Jesus showed his glory not in spite of his earthly humiliations, but in the way of those humiliations. That was most evident on Golgotha.

To the outward eye this was the ultimate degradation, a form of punishment and death reserved for the worst criminal. To the eye of faith, however, it was and is the supreme glory. The cross lifted him up, for through the cross he receives the crown. Only in this divinely prescribed way of suffering does he come to share in the glory he had with the Father before the world was made. The stone must first be rejected by the builders before it becomes the cornerstone.

Christ was fully aware of that necessity and was determined to endure it, as evident in the expression, "He set his face." This is a Hebrew idiom, about the resolve and willingness to accomplish a task. Nothing and no one will deter our Saviour. Neither his mother, his brothers, his disciples, the people he came to serve, his enemies bent upon his destruction, nor Satan with all his temptations, could stop him from going to Jerusalem.


He went there in order to make his crucifixion certain, to precipitate the collision that would result in his arrest. He was already a marked man by the authorities. He could've hid in the Galilean hills, out of reach, but he set his face to go to Jerusalem. Because he chose to die! From the beginning he knew that was the work for which he'd come. Christ is saying, as it were, "The cross is my path. On it I shall bring justice to the nations.

There in Jerusalem, the city which is always killing and stoning the prophets, I will do the very thing for which I left heaven and my Father.”

His death is not an incident of his life – it is the aim of it. He does not die and thereby seal his faithful life by a heroic death. No, when he dies he puts his shoulders under the weight of the sin of the whole human race, and stumbles away with that enormous load into the torment of hell, remov-

ing our sins as far as the east is from the west. The principle that governs his every thought, word, and deed is expressed so beautifully by Christ himself in John 10:18, “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” What he did, he came to do. He set out resolutely for Jerusalem because He wanted to fulfil the purpose of the Father, to reconcile all creation to him, to bring life and communion and peace to his

people. His hour of weakness was his hour of strength. They lifted him on a cross and it became his throne. In the moment when death seemed to conquer him, he was using it so he might abolish death.

Understand and believe that all Christ’s firmness of resolve and willing surrender to the death of the cross was for you. Through the power of his sacrifice and the grace of his Spirit, set your face to do his will. 

COLLEGE CORNER

Is Your Congregation Looking for a Minister?



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If your answer to the above question is “Yes, most certainly,” then we have some young men for you to consider. This year, the Lord willing, three men will graduate from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, and if all goes well at their preparatory classical exams, they will be eligible for call in June 2014. Over the last few years it’s become a tradition to introduce these men and their families in *Clarion*, and with this article we’d like to keep up that tradition. We trust you’ll enjoy reading a brief contribution from each of them, giving you a small impression of who they are and how our gracious God has been working in their lives.

For the rest, I can provide you with a brief update about the seminary. We presently have eighteen students enrolled, seventeen in the M.Div. program and one in the

B.Th. program. If you’re interested in a break-down of the numbers according to the years of study there are the three in fourth year who are about to graduate, then five in third year, eight (!) in the second year and two in the first year. We also have an auditor and a part-time student who participate in a one or two classes each week. Of particular interest this year is the fact that we have two students from the United Reformed Churches who have joined the student body. From my vantage point anyway, they seem to be fitting in very well and their contribution within seminary life is certainly appreciated.

I can also mention that our new professor, Dr. T. Van Raalte, is settling into his new responsibilities at the seminary. In addition to preparing for lectures and even an entirely new course in Apologetics, he is starting to

become involved in some of the committee work and administrative tasks that professors have as well. His passion for the subjects he teaches is appreciated by students and fellow faculty members alike.

The fact that this article is written by someone whose last name is Van Vliet instead of Visscher also gives you a clue that our principal, Dr. G.H. Visscher, is presently on sabbatical. In addition to working on a research project, he and his wife plan to visit the supporting churches in Australia, as well as spending some time with past graduates of CRTS who are now working on mission fields in PNG and Indonesia. May the Lord grant them travelling mercies. Dr. Visscher will resume his teaching and administrative duties later on this summer.

For the rest, everyone at CRTS is being blessed with good health. Some of the students have also received new covenant children from the Lord, and that is always a reason for much thankfulness. Thank-you to everyone for your prayerful support of the seminary. We appreciate it deeply! And now, without further ado, here are the biographical snippets from our graduating students.

Gerrit Brintjes

Human beings are needy beings. We need food, water, air to breath, and sleep. We need safe shelter, family, and friends. We need love and we need purpose.

In one sense, a biography is the story of fulfilled (and unfulfilled) needs.

We are Gerrit and Annie Brintjes and are the proud parents of one-year-old Peter. Gerrit was born in South Africa, and moved to Denver, Colorado in 1992. After completing high school, he went to Regis University and graduated in 2003 with a B.Sc. in Biology. He briefly toyed with the idea of fulfilling urgent physical needs by working as a Paramedic, but after a year realized he had a need for more education. He started a Master in Public Health program (MPH). During this time he worked first at Denver Health Systems as a Quality Analyst and later at Data Driven Enterprises (DDE) as a research consultant, ensuring needs were satisfactorily met at a systems level.

In his compartmentalized life, he was avoiding humanity's greatest need.

Several times throughout his life, he had felt the call to the ministry of reconciliation, but never gave it serious thought. He stowed the feeling away in a box dedicated to church life. One day, the box was opened up in the middle of a work week in the solitude of his office. Life cannot be



compartmentalized; in his office, he prayed. Not long after, Gerrit went to Liberty University to prepare for seminary.

Humanity's greatest need is the gospel. Humans need to recognize the true God as their Creator and Father; they must be reconciled to him through faith in the blood of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. In the strength of his Spirit, every human need is fully met, blossoming into a glorious Life of grace, goodness, and praise – according to God's purpose.

Annie Brintjes (Bower) was born in Somerset, Pennsylvania. After completing high school, she went to Geneva College and graduated with a B.S. in Psychology. She then sought to provide for children through social work before eventually embarking on a year-long "World Race" to answer humanity's need for the gospel of grace. Once back home, she realized the great need of international students created by cultural barriers. She completed a Master in Higher Education and worked first at Geneva College and then at Liberty University as an International Student Advisor.

Gerrit definitely needed a helper. Annie and Gerrit met at Liberty University and were married after Gerrit's first year at CRTS. At seminary and in Hamilton, they realized more and more their own needs as revealed in loneliness, inadequacies, insecurities, and sinful tendencies. While it was tempting (and at times easy) to see needs as a great hindrance, it was and continues to be a lesson of looking outside of ourselves.

God's grace in Jesus Christ is more than sufficient for every need.

God uses many individuals as conduits of his grace. Out of his glorious riches, he satisfies all their needs, so filling them that it overflows into the lives of others. It is our desire to see the glory of God's grace daily manifested as humanity's greatest needs are satisfied in him alone.



Jeff Poort

Hi, my name is Jeff Poort and I am married to Rachel, and we are the proud parents of Josiah.

I was born in 1988 to Herman and Gerry Poort, and grew up in the Niagara area, attending school at John Calvin in Smithville. At a young

age I took an interest in becoming a minister and tried my hand at writing my own sermons in Grade 4. I did not quite know what the job all entailed, but the interest never faded away as I moved through John Calvin and into Guido de Brès in Hamilton.

It was at Guido that I met Rachel who had grown up in Caledonia and gone to Timothy in Hamilton. She is the daughter of Stan and Shelley Vandembos and was in the same class as I was. Although good friends, it was not until our first year after high school that we began to see God bringing us together.

After Guido I went to nearby McMaster University to get my Bachelor's Degree in Classics. Rachel was on the same campus taking a two-year program to become an Occupational Therapy Assistant. After completing her studies she received a job working for Milestone Therapy Services, where she would work for the next three years.

For myself, I finished off my schooling at McMaster and carried on to the next big step: seminary. In December of the first year of seminary, Rachel and I were married and moved into our current home out in the countryside around Caledonia. Just over a year later we were blessed with another big change to our lives as God gave us Josiah. Rachel now spends her days at home with Josiah, and we are eagerly expecting a second child in June, the LORD willing!

The years at seminary have been filled with rapid growth and change to be sure. Going from single to being married with a child in a couple of years was definitely the largest part of that change. But at the same time, God was using the seminary to strengthen us and prepare us for the tasks ahead. The internship program especially provided all kinds of invaluable learning experiences. After second year I had the opportunity to go to New York City to Rev. Paul Murphy's church, as well as help Rev. Sam Perez do the groundwork for setting up a new church plant in Jersey City. Rachel and I also had the chance to spend a week up at Campfire as chaplains. This past summer Rachel and I went to the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church in BC for two months. There, with Rev. Schouten, I was able to see even more of what life in the ministry is like.

In all of these things we have seen God working and preparing us for whatever lies ahead. We know that our lives have always been in his hands, and as we look to the future we see this fact even more clearly. Our prayer is that he will continue to use us for his work and to his glory.



Tyler Vandergaag

In serving as a counselor at Campfire West and later Stepping Stones Bible Camp (Deroche, BC), the Lord produced in me a desire to serve in the area of pastoral ministry. In 2005, and in preparation for seminary, I studied for several years at Trinity Western University (Langley, BC). During this time my wife, Keri, and I became the proud parents of our son, Jayden.

In August of 2010, the three of us left behind our quiet rural home in Langley (not to mention many family and friends) in order for me to attend the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, ON. Over the past three and a half years we have been blessed with new friends and a church community, for which we are very thankful. Shortly after arriving in Hamilton we received our second child, Cali, and more recently we were blessed with our third child, Janelle. We thank the Lord for his goodness towards us as a family.

In the summer of 2012, we traveled to Recife, Brazil as part of the Pastoral Training Program at CRTS. Apart from learning about the very active and busy mission work in Brazil, I was privileged to teach an early Church History course and an English course at the John Calvin Institute. This past summer, we travelled to Neerlandia, Alberta. There I completed a three-month preaching internship under Rev. John Louwerse. The Lord has used these internships to increase our faith and love for him and his church. We will not easily forget these experiences!

Outside of the regular workload at seminary, I have managed to continue playing hockey throughout the winter. As a family, we have also been able to visit a few of the main tourist spots of Western Ontario, spend time camping with friends, and go swimming and skating with the kids.

After many years of studying we are excited about the next stage in our lives. And we are content to let the Lord lead us in the path that we should go – be that in the area of pastoral ministry or elsewhere. All praise belongs to him!



Reformed Churches in The Netherlands Speak Up Politically



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The synod of our Dutch sister churches (GKv) meeting in Ede, along with the synods of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken and the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken, issued a joint declaration on March 22, 2014, condemning a recent statement made by a Dutch politician. To my knowledge this is a first for our sister churches – their synod taking the time to officially condemn as churches something which one of the country's politicians said.

So who was this politician and what did he say that should move synods of Reformed churches to discuss it and make a decision about it? The politician was Geert Wilders, who is known for his provocative statements in warning the Dutch people of the Islamic threat to Dutch values and in general articulating the concern of many citizens that their country is heading in a wrong direction. Those who have objected to his speeches have not accused him of being factually incorrect. However, he was hardly polite or perhaps better put, not politically correct.

The most recent commotion centred on the fact that Wilders, founder and leader of the political party PVV (Party for Freedom), asked party faithful in The Hague whether they wanted fewer or more Moroccans in their city and country. “Fewer! Fewer!” the crowd shouted, with a smiling Wilders answering: “We’re going to organise that” (*The Guardian* March 20, 2014). It is surely despicable to pick on a minority group within one's country in this way, even if Moroccans as a group are responsible for much criminal activity.

Indeed, a report commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Interior noted that forty percent of Moroccan immigrants in The Netherlands between the ages of twelve and twenty-four have been arrested, fined, charged, or otherwise accused of committing a crime during the past five years. In Dutch neighbourhoods where the majority of residents are Moroccan immigrants, the youth crime rate reaches fifty percent. Moreover, juvenile delinquency among Moroccans is not limited to males; girls and young women are increasingly involved in criminal activities. Also, most of the Moroccan youth involved in criminal activities were born in Holland, indicating that the children of Moroccan immigrants are not integrating into Dutch society. (Google for further details,

the report produced by the Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, *Morokkaanse Nederlanders 2011*.) It was also a Dutch Moroccan who murdered Theo van Gogh in 2004.

Knowing this background does not justify Wilders' behaviour, but it does provide a context. Holland obviously has a problem with the criminal element within the Moroccan community. In response to Wilders' words, the Reformed synods issued this declaration: “Rejecting a part of the population is in conflict with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches us a completely different attitude. Jesus teaches us to love, also beyond our emotional comfort zone [gevoelsgrenzen]. We are therefore sympathetic over against the initiative of the Protestant Reformed Church of the Netherlands to let another sound be heard in a worship service” (<http://www.synode.gkv.nl/>). The declaration goes on to say that the GKv would not be participating in this worship service but they do ask the churches to pray on the next Sunday for a righteous society. They also want to stimulate members of the church to show biblical love in their walk and talk.

One can support the disapproval of Wilders' action in this declaration. But should an ecclesiastical body deal with such an issue at its major assembly? Did Wilders threaten the position and freedom of the churches to proclaim the gospel? Above all, is this an ecclesiastical matter? I fail to see how it could possibly be called that.

Churches should stick to their calling. There is more than enough work just doing that! Their calling is to ensure the proclamation of the pure gospel and to train its members to function as Christians in all of life for the glory of God. And that includes the political sphere. However, the church as an institution has as a rule no business making pronouncements about what some politician happened to say. This was not even a government bill or policy but some words of a politician at an emotional political gathering. Once you start making pronouncements on such speeches, where will you end up? What decides which political speech demands ecclesiastical condemnation or approval? Better not to go down that road.





Hans VanDooren

Is Reformed Christian Education Worth Doing?

Hans retired in July 2012 after forty years of service in Christian education, as principal and teacher at Emmanuel in Guelph from 1978 to 1987, and as principal at Guido de Bres Christian High School in Hamilton. Besides being still actively involved in reformed education in Canada, he is also a board member of Edu Deo. He and his wife Marion enjoy travelling and spoiling their eight grandchildren.

This is a legitimate question for all our school supporters to ask. During the last fifty years three generations of parents have spent countless hours and money with a lot of personal sacrifice to set up and operate our schools. In order to determine if our education is worth doing, we need to understand what our schools' desired outcomes and values are, and measure how well these outcomes are being developed in our students and graduates. Have our schools made a real difference with our students?

Our Reformed Christian schools are much more than producers of academic excellence and high literacy rates. If there was nothing more, there would be no incentive to spend so much money and effort in setting up our own schools. Our schools do have more to offer, and that is reflected in their comprehensive founding principles that lay out what the supporting communities value in the education of their children. In addition to quality academic education, these values emphasize the biblical and doctrinal basis for instruction and curriculum, the framework of our covenant relationship with God, the desire for Christian character and faith formation in line with the home and the church, development of Christian discernment, and active discipleship in the local and broader community. These values make our schools unique and valuable.

However, school-wide assessments of these desired school values are rarely done. Beyond quoting some comments from graduates or conducting limited surveys, we have not been able to measure how effectively our schools instill these values in our students. The public school system and their militant teacher unions have filled this vacuum by labeling independent Christian schools as being bigoted, cultural ghettos that produce graduates who contribute nothing to the common good.

2012 Cardus survey

We can be thankful that in October 2012 the Cardus Canadian Education Survey was released across the country. The complete Cardus Education survey is available at www.cardus.ca/research/education. Cardus is a Christian think tank that completed the first thorough research of private, faith-based, and publicly-funded schooling by surveying thousands of high school graduates. The main conclusion is that Christian school graduates support and reflect their schools' values, but also contribute to the broader community in which they live. The headline of an article in the September 26, 2012 *National Post* said it all. "Religious, private school graduates (are) active, engaged citizens." From the Cardus report: "...this study shows that the claim that religious and other independent schools do not prepare their students to contribute positively to Canada's multicultural society is unfounded."

Reformed Christian education does meet our schools' desired outcomes and is worth doing

The Cardus survey provided results that can reassure us that Christian schools in general have developed in their graduates a deep support of Christian values. These graduates have strong families that support a positive view of life and faith, and provide greater societal stability. The graduates display more concern for the welfare of all citizens, volunteer more of their time, are optimistic about the future, and donate to more causes in and outside their local communities than public school graduates. This high level of social engagement is more remarkable given the hostile anti-Christian environment in which they live. They are respectful of authority and have a strong commitment to vote. Christian school graduates integrate religion into their daily lives and attend church on a regular basis.

CALLED

Called by the Ebenezer CanRC of Burlington, ON and Immanuel CanRC of Edmonton, AB:

Rev. R. Vermeulen
of Glanbrook, ON

CHURCH NEWS

With any good measurement we need to applaud not only the good results but also look at the implications of where we fall short. Ray Pennings, Director of Research at Cardus, stated in his introduction of the survey, “Measurement is a good thing, even when the results aren’t everything we would wish for. If Christian education is worth doing it’s worth measuring; if it’s worth measuring, it’s worth improving.”

Reflection and improvement

The Cardus survey also pointed out areas for reflection and improvement. Christian school graduates do not have confidence in the sciences and tend to avoid those areas. The community norm of conformity over creativity may have contributed to a lower participation in the arts than the public school graduates. Christian schools try to balance faith values and academic excellence. The former is accomplished at a very high level. Academic excellence may suffer with fewer graduates going to post-secondary institutions than other non-religious private school graduates. Academic excellence may still be viewed with some suspicion. While Christian school graduates show interest in the world around them, this is not translated into action. Actual political engagement is minimal as is a desire to change government policies, with the exception of the abortion issue.

2013 survey results

The 2012 Cardus survey results were based on a professional sample of public, Catholic, and general evangelical Christian schools across Canada. Very few of our students were involved in this sample. In order to better understand how our own schools measure up in fulfilling their broader mandate, Cardus was asked to conduct their survey with the graduates of six Reformed Christian high schools across the country. Almost 300 former students who graduated between 1991 and 2009 completed the detailed on-line survey. The survey results were analyzed, and individual school results were sent to participating schools in June 2013.

The 2013 results are similar to the more general 2012 Cardus survey results. In addition, our graduates have a very strong work ethic, tend to be self-employed, and see their jobs as a calling. They are the “salt of the earth” in their commitment to strong families and communities. They are open in the faith and commitment to God, attend and are active in their local Reformed churches,

and support the integration of church, home, and school. They are very positive about their school experience and the role that their teachers had in shaping their lives as committed Christians, more so than other school system graduates. These results emphatically answer YES, Reformed Christian education does meet our schools’ desired outcomes and is worth doing.

***“If Christian education is worth doing
it’s worth measuring; if it’s worth
measuring, it’s worth improving.”***

Just as the 2012 survey pointed out some shortcomings, the 2013 survey also indicated some trends that give concern. There is a lack of trust in the sciences and minimal participation in the study of science. There appears to be a stifling of creative thinking and limited participation in the arts. Our graduates did feel they received a strong academic training in their schools, but they enrolled in post-secondary and post-graduate education in much smaller numbers than graduates from other school systems. Our graduates like to volunteer but rarely witness or help out beyond their church communities. Compared to graduates from other systems, our graduates own the highest percentage of expensive “toys” while our schools often face budget shortfalls.

Conclusion

The 2013 Cardus survey is an internationally recognized evaluation tool that supported our intuitive belief that Reformed Christian education is worth doing. Let’s be prayerfully optimistic that this survey will generate discussion in our schools to determine what we do well, and what we need to improve. This discussion should also determine if our schools can do it all in terms of delivering high levels of academic development, spiritual character formation, and cultural engagement. We need to work at maintaining, celebrating, and improving our unchanging biblical focus, while still properly preparing our graduates to be active witnesses in a rapidly changing world. This effort is required to convince our new generation of parents that our schools are the best alternative to assist them in “. . .telling the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord” (Ps 78:4). **C**



William den Hollander
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Q I recognize that we are responsible to God for our actions and yet whenever I do right it is God working in me. The struggle I have is in hearing preaching that tells us that we “should” be thankful, we “must” obey God’s commands, that I have a “responsibility” to serve him. All I hear then is that I have to work out my own salvation.

All the shoulds, musts, etc just make me feel guilty and responsible for something I need God to work in me. On the one hand I hear that faith is a “gift” of God and on the other I don’t have enough faith. How can I reconcile this to truly understand the greatness of God’s work and who He is, without believing that I must “do” something to earn my salvation?

A When reading this (complex) question, we might seek an answer in making references to our confessions (e.g. HC LD 23, 24, 32; BC Art 24; C.o.D III/IV 12-16 to mention a few). We could also find some texts that speak to the various aspects included in this question. Yet, to keep it as simple and clear as possible, I think that a closer look at Philippians 2: 12, 13 will bring into focus most if not all angles to this “problem” (namely, the problem of jibing God’s working for 100% and our responsibility for 100%).

In his epistle to the Philippians Paul starts out with the thankful observation that God began a good work in them. He refers to the miracle of working faith; he recalls God’s great love in giving them a rich share in his love in Jesus Christ and prays that this love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, resulting in discernment, purity, righteousness “that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.” Indeed, it’s a miracle always to see God’s love at work in the lives of his children! Yet,

as Paul indicates in chapter 2, it cannot be taken for granted that people *continue* in the faith and walk in it in their whole life. That’s what Paul addresses in the verses 12, 13: about *continuing* in God’s grace and work of salvation in a life of faith!

“Therefore, my dear friends, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Could that be correct? Can we call people to *do* something for their salvation? Should we not just stress what God is doing? When we consider our own lives and shortcomings, we hardly dare speak positively about ourselves. So what does Paul mean? Isn’t our salvation God’s work from beginning to end? Or is it a bit God’s work and a bit our own? How is it? Indeed, in many places Paul stresses that it’s God’s work, God’s grace, and God’s salvation through Christ. Do we have to add something to it to earn our salvation? No, we don’t! Compare it if you will with a couple that’s getting married, when we say: and now you’ll have to work on your marriage, work on your love; likewise, Paul is saying, you’ll have to work on your faith and salvation!

In other words, believers have to hold on to what they receive, be careful with it, and work with it well. That's a challenge that comes with faith: work out your salvation in your life. Faith unites you with Christ, so that "it's no longer I that liveth but Christ who liveth in me" (as the hymn goes). It's wonderful that you know God, his love, his goodness, and his grace, his faithfulness; now also show this love, and believe that God will help you in doing so in your everyday life, in our present world. God continues with you and you must continue with God (in "technical" terms: the *indicative* of your belonging to God becomes the *imperative* of you living with God; in Dutch, faith is "*een gave en een opgave*," a gift and a task). The word Paul uses is a word denoting activity, continued action; faith that's living is active and it comes to action in your life! Work out your own salvation; that's like a commercial for a fitness club: work on your condition, stay fit, and work on it continuously!

Sometimes in Catechism class I used the expression that there is no elevator to heaven or that the life

of faith is not like an escalator: you just step in or on it and there you go, to heaven. Rather, when someone asked the Lord Jesus, "Are there many who are saved," he answered, "*Strive* to enter!" Your faith will be challenged! God's work is challenged wherever you see him at work, and so in your life also there will be challenges to your commitment! Work out your salvation, therefore, with fear and trembling! Faith and salvation as a work of God are awesome, involving tremendous powers, and they are miraculous, requiring divine intervention; be deeply impressed by that and respect God for his work in you! How? By the preaching of his Word proclaiming to you what you *have* in Christ, *calling* you to work with that, use it, apply it, and in such a way bearing fruit, doing good works, "which God prepared beforehand for you to do them" (Eph 2:10)! Indeed, God works for 100% with his Word and Spirit and you work for 100% with what God gives you in Jesus Christ for the salvation of your life! "For, it is God who works in you to will *and* to act according to his good purpose."



Is there something you've been wanting to know?

An answer you've been looking for?

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander

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**"Correctly Handling the Word of Truth:
Reformed Hermeneutics Today
Fourth annual CRTS Conference" in Clarion
March 14, 2014, by Rev. Reuben Bredenhof**

Did *Clarion* sound the trumpet call?

The review starts with a brief explanation of the daunting word "Hermeneutics," the discipline of how we read and interpret Scripture, and that the CRTS conference was motivated by the essential concern of discerning God's truth, with regards to certain teachings in our sister churches (GKv) in The Netherlands. That the unease is justified is well documented by many past articles published in Reformed magazines like *Clarion*, *Christian Renewal*, and the like. The simple truth of God's Word continues to be challenged, often starting with the books of Moses, influenced by modern-day cultural delusions and scientific beliefs. As throughout history, so today, many of these attacks originate from within the churches, and are pioneered by "Reformed" scholars, teachers, and scientists, sowing doubt and confusion into the hearts and minds of many people. How soon history repeats itself! A telling example is in the recent history of the GKN in The Netherlands. The late Rev. Johan Tangelder describes this well in an article entitled, "Dismantling of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands-Series." See link: <http://www.reformedreflections.ca/dismantling-the-gkv/1-g-k-n-.html>.

Having attended the public meetings of the CRTS conference it struck me how often the GKv scholars used the words, "I believe" or "in my opinion," or "in our culture." One of the important rules of Hermeneutics, that we compare Scripture with Scripture, seemed to be ab-

sent in their presentations/rebuttals. It is present in the teaching of our Lord Jesus, and the apostles, who without fail said "Have you not read?" or "It is written," or "What does Scripture say?"

In John 5:46, Jesus warns the people against their unbelief and rebukes them with the words "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" How clear was the O.T. about the coming of Jesus? Colossians 2:2-4 talks about a mystery revealed in Christ. Do we only have to believe Moses when he spoke about Jesus, the Word (John 1:1), and do we not need to believe Moses about the recording of the history of creation and the wonders he has worked? If not, what do we tell our children as commanded by Moses in Deuteronomy 11:19-21, and how do we deal with Psalm 78:1-4?

The warning call was not sounded. For a clearer perspective on the conference may I suggest the reading of Rev. Joel Dykstra's article "Reflections on the CRTS Conference" in *Christian Renewal*, March 5, 2014? Rev. Dykstra is pastor of the URC in Wellandport, ON. Perhaps *Clarion* could feature this one-page article in a future issue.

Daan Vanderwal,
Dundas, ON



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

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario, March 21, 2014

On behalf of the convening church, Burlington Fellowship, Rev. J. L. van Popta calls the meeting to order. After reading Matthew 16: 24-28 and 27:32, Rev. J.L. van Popta leads in prayer. The delegates from Ebenezer church examine the credentials. All the churches are lawfully presented; three brothers attended by teleconference. Classis is constituted. Ebenezer is thanked for use of facilities for Classis. The following officers are appointed: Chairman – Rev. J.L. van Popta, Vice-chairman – Br. John Hordyk, Clerk – Rev. D.W. Vandeburgt.

Under memorabilia, the chairman noted the following:

- various vacancies in churches and their efforts to call new ministers were remembered
- the health concerns of Rev. and Mrs. Mulder in Evergreen Terrace, Dr. J. Dejong in Shalom Manor, Rev. D. Dejong in The Netherlands were remembered
- retired ministers were remembered in their various works of service in the churches
- Fellowship has moved forward with building plans.

The agenda is established.

Reports:

- letter received from brothers from Rehoboth who reviewed the books of the Committee for needy churches; books are in good order.

Question period according to Article 44 of Church Order:

- Ottawa will be appealing Article 110 of General Synod
- Rehoboth sought advice regarding a case of church discipline.

Appointments:

- convening church for next classis is Burlington – Waterdown, June 13, 2014
- suggested officers for next classis: Chairman – Rev. D.W. Vandeburgt, Vice-Chairman – delegate from Burlington Waterdown, clerk – Rev. G.Ph. vanPopta.

Personal question period is held.

The chairman notes that censure is not required and thanks the delegates for their brotherly cooperation.

The Acts are read and approved.

The press release is read and approved.

The chairman requests the brothers to sing Hymn 64:1, 2
Rev. D.W. Vandeburgt closed the meeting in prayer.

For Classis, J. Hordyk (vice-chairman)



Correction

With respect to the DVD review “Of Birds and Butterflies” (*Clarion* February 28, 2014), I mistakenly submitted an incorrect picture for the bird DVD.

It should have been the picture accompanying this correction (Flight, the Genius of Birds).

I regret any confusion this may have caused. The text of the review was correct.

C. Van Dam