

Clarion

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WHO ARE YOU?



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M . . . F . . . or . . . Q? Who Are You? Emo?

*Emo emphasizes that you make your identity
and feelings known*

Recently I wrote an article on the topic of homosexuality and related matters. *You can find it in this edition of Clarion.* I used the expression *homosexual* brothers and sisters. That designation evoked some concerns because the Bible does not use the word “homosexual.” A letter writer preferred the term “same-sex attraction.”

Using the word homosexual might lead some to think that homosexuality is a recognized existing category. This was the concern. I appreciate that. Well, it is an existing category all right, and those who fall into it do not really care much about the exact designation, except perhaps that they feel that the moniker “same-sex attraction” is a more pleasant and less condemnatory designation. It is one of the devil’s mind games.

Meanwhile I need to point out that there is already a change underway in contemporary modes and words. Today the cutting edge is not whether one is a homosexual, but whether one is “Q” or questioning. It is a matter of gender identification. When one is “Q” he can shift between both genders. Being homosexual/lesbian one day or week and switching to bisexual the next day or week is considered “cool” by many. This week I am a boy, and next week I am a girl.

That is why I put in the title of this editorial the letters M, F, and Q. Are you male, female, or questioning? Whatever you fill in can change easily. You can be M one day and F the next. No worries, whatever suits you is what you are.

Meanwhile, the matter of gender has become rather *fluid*. You can easily switch from being a boy to being a girl, depending on your mood or company. There is a special name for this kind of cross-over style and it is *Emotion*, *Emo* for short. Being emotional means being flexible and adaptable, and this is what is advocated today.

Emo

There is a very distinct Emo style that some teenagers apply. Before we get to the clothing, I want to make some notes regarding Emo music. Perhaps Emo is to many (mature) listeners simply a continuation of the older punk-rock music that started in the 1980s. But it’s not.

As music style it is still rock. The music is perhaps more melodic than rock, and the lyrics are considered to be less violent than punk or rap. Some of the Emo music has retained the hard rock style and is called by many “emo-core,” as in hard-core. But I don’t really want to identify all forms of Emo music. In some form or another Emo is true to its punk-rock roots, even though it has become “milder” over the years.

Some of the early Emo bands are (1990s): Jawbreaker and Sunny Day Real Estate. Others worth mentioning (off the top of my head, 2000s) are Jimmy Eat World, Dashboard Confessional, Boys like Girls, Love Drunk, The Wild Honey Pie, and Sisyphus.

As mentioned, in Emo rock the *words* have gained in meaning. Old fashioned rock and roll was relatively simple, on average, and the words were mostly nonsensical. Emo emphasizes that you make your identity and feelings known. Of course only as far as you want to. The music and the song have become a vehicle for ever-changing self-expression. It’s like going to a confessional.

Perhaps it is best that you acquaint yourself with this form of music by listening to some of the popular Emo bands. I do not advocate blindly ruffling through your teens CD collection and confronting each teenager (or younger) with a “What is this?!?” accusation. Some parents only come so far that they use records and CDs as Frisbees. That’s nasty.

Do not turn question marks into exclamation marks. Don't speak unless you have first listened. Show interest and ask pertinent questions. What does this music mean to you? Why do you like this music?

It is a good approach to ask your kids to *bring you* their best loved CDs. They will gladly let you listen and will want to talk about the music. Emo is sometimes hauntingly beautiful and does convey honest and raw emotion. Do some research; your children are worth it.

Clothing

It is never easy to find the right clothes for your older children. Teenagers can be fickle. Fortunately for our household budget, second-hand or pre-owned is in. Value Village supplies a lot of clothes for Emo youth. At one time Emo clothing was the punk rock style

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

The current issue of *Clarion* brings you two articles from Rev. Klaas Stam. The first, his editorial, is about the Emo style. He writes that "the matter of gender has become rather *fluid*. . . this kind of [Emo] cross-over style. . . means being flexible and adaptable, and this is what is advocated today." Rev. Stam has also written an article on homosexuality. In addition, we have a book review by Dr. Wes Bredenhof on *Is God Anti-Gay? And other questions about homosexuality, the Bible and same-sex attraction*.

On these pages you will find a report on the farewell to the den Hollander family from Winnipeg, MB. There is a Treasures New and Old meditation, as well as the You Asked column, a letter to the editor, and a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

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favoured by Goths; the alternative clothing used by some hard-core bands. Some used expansive make-up, like KISS. The band KISS is gross. Emphasis was on dark make-up with thick black eye-liner. But one cannot look black and grim all the time and the style began to receive some embellishments.

Clothing was still alternative. Chains and metal piercing items became popular. Teens who kissed could get hooked. Guys would wear the same piercings as gals. Strips of other dark color, like purple, were blended in with black. The attitude was still negative and society was scorned. The “slim” look was accentuated with tight jeans and cut-offs. No big breasts, because we are getting close to *Twiggy* again. Remember her? Emo style is always changing but stays true to the basics of simplicity. The latest Emo style is called “the scene,” and it can change quickly. It fits well in our individualistic and “don’t-tie-me-down” culture.

With the settling in of Emo, other ways of self-expression were also phased in. *Do you ever wonder about the obvious increase of the use of tattoos?* It seems like a veritable epidemic. Also through your tattoo (and where it is!) you can express yourself and give form to your Emo. Your body becomes a canvas where your values are made legible. It’s not strange for a guy to ask a gal if he may see her tattoo.

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of Emo is the hairstyle, long in the front and short at the back. The bangs are often brushed over one eye or even two eyes, secret agent style. It’s a safe way to camouflage what is behind the lashes. Vibrant colors are added as streaks to the bangs: purple, white, and orange. It is not uncommon to have a totally different color or highlights from one week into the next. Emo means that diversity and artistry are good. Don’t hide your feelings but express them as you wish.

Gender identity

I started with the question of gender identity. Emo tends to blur the lines between male and female. It is already enough of a struggle to express your male or female identity properly and in a holy fashion. Bisexuality is the new in-thing. Popular movies show forth the inevitability of falling in love with someone of the same sex. In *Brokeback Mountain* two rough and tumble cowboys engaged in homosexuality once every year. If cowboys do it, why not city slickers?

Actually the new in-thing is called *emosexuality*. Homosexuality is already passé. It means that you can have sexual relations with any one you want, male or female, at whatever time, and do so simply because your fellow Emo really understands you and accepts you as you are. It is an intense but passing attraction. Sometimes it does not pass.

We must be aware of what is going on in our society and with our children. Same-sex attraction is widely propagated as if this is a normal and fleeting thing. It is not. God created us male and female for a reason. Letting any form of homosexuality (even bisexual attractions) exist is truly against God’s purpose and precept.

There is some good stuff on the internet on this topic. You might want to read *The Aquila Report* (from Reformed Theological Seminary). Perhaps you know of other sites that can be shared with our readers.

Sexuality is an important part of our lives. The time of our youth is an exciting life-changing phase, which is already difficult enough in itself. Remember your Creator. There is a lot of peer pressure being exercised. *Heterosexual* persons already in their early teens are being prompted to be more sexually active and *diverse*. The lines are constantly being blurred. Television, football, and basketball stars are “coming out.” The Premier of Ontario is openly gay with a lasting relationship. No one dares to speak out against Pride Day observances. Prominent citizens are required to walk along in the parade or be considered homophobic.

Our society “likes” free expression, but some areas are not so free, unless you want to risk being called a bigot redneck.

Whoever has same-sex attraction must be made aware that this is not God’s plan for our lives. We were created male and female, as heterosexual persons so that we might be faithful to each other, obedient to God, and fill the earth. It is easy for young men and women to become promiscuous, and stay so until later in life. It is easier still to be Emo instead of Homo. This is a difficult time for our young people. In the past it was difficult, too. But society was overall more conservative. Now the brakes are off. Let us pray unceasingly for the youth in God’s church. Pray also for married couples that they will not destroy their love and marriage. Because the times are hard.

So, what are you? M, F, or Q? This question needs to be asked and discussed in families and in schools. It is easier to answer the question than to put the right answer into practice. We must be clear as to our *God-given identity*. When temptations get the better of us, we must repent and start anew. Fortunately the Lord Jesus Christ gives us hope.

I want to close with a reference to another Internet site: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/thoughtlife/2014/04/should-christians-use-the-term-gay-christian/>. We need stability in accepting and using our gender in a way that pleases God and builds life. Sometimes this means great sacrifice and extreme cross-bearing. I say this not flip-pantly but sincerely. We *all* have to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ.





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God Made It Crooked

"Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?" (Ecclesiastes 7:13)

Solomon sounds irreverent to our ears, accusing God of having made things crooked! Doesn't that fly in the face of Scripture's insistence that God is good? Is it fitting for any creature to say of the Creator that his work is "perverted," as the word is translated elsewhere?

God didn't create this world as a broken place. The Holy Spirit tells us God's own evaluation of everything he made: "It was very good." But God built into the world the possibility of death. I say that because of God's instruction to Adam; he could help himself to every tree except that one, and God said, "When you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17).

In the weeks that followed, Adam and Eve rebelled against God. How should God respond? Perhaps he could ignore it, and leave man in Paradise in continued bliss. Perhaps God could destroy the world in an instant decree of de-creation, and start again. Perhaps God could send his Son immediately into this fallen world to atone for sin, destroy Satan, and restore Paradise.

In divine righteousness God opted for none of the above. Instead he ordained a world of enmity, where life would be characterized by pain, unwholesome desires, thorns, sweat, and dust. It was a world exiled from God's grace.

The result? Adam and Eve knew the grief of burying a son. Lamech's wives cringed under the arrogance of the brute that was their husband. The many on earth in Noah's days perished in the flood. Abram was childless till old age. Isaac saw his son swindle him.

Joseph was hauled across the desert with a noose around his neck. Even when God delivered his people from bondage and came to dwell among them, grumbling and bitterness continued. In the Promised Land – surely, that was Paradise restored! – God's hand of judgment pressed upon the people because of their idolatry. In Solomon's own day, when the people ate and drank and were happy, "each man under his own vine and fig tree" (1 Kgs 4:25), there were still the tears of funerals, the pains of marriage tensions, the anguish of wayward children – even the selfishness of two women fighting over a living child. Life was so crooked, so broken – as God had ordained it to be in response to the fall!

Who can fix it? The people of Israel had the wisest king who ever lived. Surely, Solomon could fix it! He couldn't. Despite all his wisdom, his own heart turned from the Lord. Could the code of Hammurabi set straight what was crooked? Or the wisdom of Aristotle? Or the power of Alexander the Great? Or the peace of the Romans? Can science or philosophy or education? The list of human initiatives is endless, and all has been tried. But none of it ultimately helps to straighten what's crooked in this broken life – because God has made it crooked, and who can withstand his work? Day by day it's his heavy hand that presses upon human life in righteous response to our rebellion in the beginning – and who can squeeze out from under that divine hand so we no longer feel its crushing weight? Fighting God is such

a senseless waste of effort. We share the hopelessness Solomon's audience felt at his words: if even Solomon can't make straight what God has made crooked, we're forever doomed to this life of injustice, crookedness, and tears.

Who can make straight what God made crooked? That's something God himself can do! It's what he promised in the same breath when he spoke of enmity, that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. The pain, brokenness, and crookedness of life would ultimately become a means that holy God would use to have his Son unjustly nailed to the cross so atonement might be made for sin and the crooked set straight!

"All things work together for good," Paul tells the Romans; the "all things" includes the crookedness, brokenness, and injustice we're so used to, and that we decry. "Today," said Jesus as he groaned under the heavy hand of God's justice, "you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). And it was so, for the crooked criminal was made straight!

What Christ achieved is in principle ours. Already tears can be turned to laughter, the comfortless can be comforted, the victims of injustice receive relief. Already the hurt is out of the remaining crookedness. In faith we eagerly await the day when there shall be no more tears at all, no more grief, injustice, nothing crooked any longer! How glorious the gospel: Injustice shall not have the last word, because God himself straightens what he made crooked. **C**



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“And That is What Some of You Were. . .” (1 Corinthians 6:11)

Sometimes we read articles or letters that in very clear terms condemn homosexuality and homosexuals. The homosexual lifestyle of men and women is called an “abomination.” That is true. In Leviticus 18:22 we read, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an “abomination” (NKJV). These are relations that the Lord strictly forbids: incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and anything like it. The Bible is very clear in these matters. Homosexuality is a perversion.

Whenever I read such articles I agree with them wholeheartedly. As I wrote, God’s Word is clear. But sometimes I find that there is little understanding for the serious plight of many homosexuals. Most have hidden their homosexuality for countless years, sometimes from childhood on, and have deeply condemned themselves for having these perverse inclinations. It is not without reason that homosexuals call the public presentation of their sexuality a “coming out” (of the closet). What they mean is that they have fought it and hidden it for so long but are finally no longer able to do so. They fought and went under. They experience intense grief and have low self-esteem. Others become very defensive of their life style and regard all “straight” people to be hypocrites. Some commit suicide and others consider it. They know that they cause family and friends much grief, but they cannot change themselves. Contacts with some relatives become very strained, if not impossible.

Severe spiritual struggle

There is the acronym LGTB, which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Trans-sexual, and Bi-sexual persons. Sometimes a “Q” is added for “Questioning,” but that goes beyond our scope. There are many variations on a theme, but one thing is clear: homosexuals who come from a Christian

background have had a deep spiritual struggle; they cannot change their nature and have failed whenever they tried. These persons do not have internal peace with God, and neither can they function in their church community. So, many have already left the church.

Many of them have also denounced their faith. Let’s be consistent, they say, the Bible forbids this and the church must uphold Scripture, so they leave. Some develop mental illness and drug addiction, others become very angry with God, and very few are approachable. To be sure, I never met a homosexual of Christian background who is militant and hardly anyone of them would participate in a Gay Pride Parade. But one gay person once said to me: I do not belong in the church which cannot accept me, nor do I belong in the world which makes a caricature of me.

What is the result? Older homosexuals who have come through their wild teenage years seek a steady relationship. At least then they have someone to live with as they grow older. *Because no one wants to be alone.* Loneliness is a great factor in the life of many homosexuals. Rejected by family, disciplined by the church, and spiritually tattered, they are afraid, sometimes also physically run down.

The homosexual world is hard. It really is no fun. Fear of illness and being HIV-positive are not uncommon. Perhaps this is part of the reason why older homosexuals seek an official durable relationship, like marriage. In many ways life is lonely, but no one wants to be alone.

In Amsterdam there has formed a nucleus of gay persons, male and female, who have often the same church background, and they stay in touch with each other, to help and protect each other, but they have nothing to do with God and the church. Their lifestyle is materialistic and they reject that what they do is an abomination. Sometimes they will admit that their perversion is

an abomination, but often there is deep-rooted defiance, “I never asked to be this way, but this is who I am.” “God made me this way, so he’d better take me as I am.” As the song goes: “We’re here for a short time, not a long time, *so have a good time*, the sun don’t shine every day.” Truth is: God never made anyone a homosexual.

Indeed, God did not make anyone sinful, but that is another matter. Also, heterosexuals can and do derail, sometimes seriously. Sexual weakness is not something to be taken lightly or condemned quickly. We all need to live from grace. The homosexual needs Christ just as badly as heterosexuals do.

How can we help homosexuals?

It is not my intention to embroil you in a sob-story. Nor do I want you to feel “sorry” for LGTBs. Being sorry doesn’t cut it. We need to find a biblical way to approach these brothers and sisters before they are swept away. Condemnation alone does not cut it, either. For the Bible says more.

In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul is dealing with the fact that some members of the churches in Corinth were having all kinds of disputes. People fight, unfortunately also in the church. The Apostle reminds the Corinthians that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God. He adds, “Do not be deceived.” It is easy to think that *you* are yourself above all base feelings. It is very human to think that we are right and everyone else is wrong, and that we are good while everyone else is bad. Don’t be deceived.

No one wants to be alone

Then follows a listing of sins (or sinners) that is deeply serious: “Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.” Please note that the *homosexual* is specifically mentioned, not at the beginning or the end of the listing, but right in the middle.

It may be that two kinds of homosexuals are meant here: the male prostitutes who were at the heathen temples and young boys who were used as sexual objects. Note, however, that homosexuals are not the *only* ones listed here. There are also greedy people, drunkards (the old name for alcoholics), or slanderers, or swindlers (the old name for defrauders) who will not inherit the kingdom of

God. The setting of many of these sins is around the pagan temples (hence the *male* prostitutes), so that adultery is often connected with idolatry (verse 9). It is in this context that the word “abomination” is used.

Sometimes homosexuals by weakness fall into sin. But be careful when applying the words “abomination” and “perversion.” Let us humble ourselves, for sexual perversion in some form is not far from any of us. We have all fallen into sin, and the nature of us all is corrupt, more than we might be willing to admit.

God did not make anyone sinful

In Reformed circles, Dr. J. Douma bears the distinction of having been the first theologian to concern himself with a systematic biblical approach to homosexuality. I’ll spare you the footnotes, but Douma made a *distinction* between homophilia and homosexuality. Homophilia means to have a strong leaning towards the same sex. Douma did not see homophilia itself as a sin but part of the sinful nature which we all have, manifested in all kinds of perversion. But homosexuality goes one decisive step further: it is the actual engaging in a homosexual relationship.

Not everyone was helped by Douma’s courageous distinction. One homosexual told me that the inclination is as sinful as the participation. True, in a sense. You sin with your mind and in your fantasy, and that is just as bad as the actual deed. Did the Lord Jesus not warn us that even looking lustfully is already a committing of sexual sin (Matthew 5:27-30)?

We all have sinful inclinations, but not everyone (constantly) gives in to them. It is proper to distinguish between thoughts and deeds. Douma sought to convince homophile persons not to give in to their sexual desires. There is the way of crucifying the flesh, of abstinence, of growing in sanctification. I know that many homosexuals do not want to go this way, but with Douma I really see no other option. They must be saved by Christ, at the foot of the cross. This means also a resolute breaking with a homosexual lifestyle.

Douma’s distinction has important merit. We all have sinful inclinations when it comes to sexuality. Giving yourself to these inclinations is no better than what a homosexual does. Who has never had perverse thoughts? What about adultery or sexual abuse? Is that nonexistent when it comes to our people? Are young and older people, male and female, in our churches and schools immune for pornography and far from what is called “sexting”? How

many couples have sexual relations before they are married, sometimes with multiple partners? Let us all put our hand into our own bosom.

It is not so hard to label LGBTBs as terrible people. It is hard to humble yourself, to seek out these sinners, and try to help them. Gay members of the church do not need our condemnation or pity, but as brothers and sisters in the Lord, they do need our support and encouragement.

You were washed, sanctified, justified

But there is something else that is mentioned in this passage. Paul writes: “And that is what some of you *were*.” Past tense. “But you were *washed*, you were *sanctified*, you were *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Also past tense. Actually the verb tense denotes an action that happened in the past but still continues today. Do not think that sanctification is a quick and easy process. Paul directs the repentant sinner to Christ. Sanctification takes a life-time, and is never an easy path.

When Paul is writing about the discipline over sinners he writes about *Jesus Christ!* He did not come to save the just but to bring sinners to new life. Paul writes about the Spirit of our God. There is hope. For me, for you, for our kids, grandkids, and for our relatives. There is hope in Christ, also for the *homosexual*. We have to keep addressing them with this hope. This is what I miss in some “abomination” articles. A homosexual covenant child is still a son or daughter of Abraham.

Gay members of the church do not need our condemnation or pity, but as brothers and sisters in the Lord, they do need our support and encouragement

If you know a LGBT, tell him or her not to despair. There is hope. Cry with them and pray for them for forgiveness of sins and renewal of life. The Apostle Paul indicates that it is possible to overcome sinful sexual inclination. You were *washed*. That probably refers to holy baptism in which the cleansing of sin by the blood of Christ is promised to believers and their children. Every homosexual believer should be comforted by the fact that he/she is baptized, and belongs to Jesus Christ. Therefore also homosexuals, just as adulterers and the like, must constantly be directed to Christ. There is hope, even when you do not see it.

With respect to all my sins, I must cling only to Christ's promises. There is nothing more damaging to the

Christian life than a sense of desperation: God can never forgive me! He does and he will. I sense this desperation sometimes in the life of gay brothers and sisters. Their lives are not so “gay” (an old word for “happy”), after all.

Then follow the words “you were *sanctified*.” How can we say that a homosexual is “sanctified” (holy) when he/she still engages in sinful relations? I want to get back to that later in another context. But surely you know that being sanctified does not mean having achieved perfection or a state of sinlessness. We have been sanctified also *in Christ* by the Holy Spirit.

There is nothing more damaging to the Christian life than a desperate sense that God can never forgive

I also read, “You were *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” Being justified is being declared to be without *the guilt of sin*. We can put past sins and lifestyles behind us in Christ and by his Spirit. These sins do not weigh us down any more. This is true not just for homosexuals but for *all* who have in any way committed sexual sins.

Washed, sanctified, and justified *in Christ*: these are the words with which we need to approach homosexual brothers and sisters. These promises are for them and for me also. This gives me hope in my struggles to be pure and holy. This may give hope to all who suffer from sexual immorality and similar perversions.

The gospel

Not long ago a well-known anti-gay organization (church?) called EXODUS, a thirty-seven-year-old ministry to “heal” homosexuals was shut down. This group had for many years used a “gay conversion therapy” and claimed to have *healed* many homosexual people. But later evidence did not support the claim of healing, and the leaders of EXODUS apologized to the general public for having misled and hurt people.

I was not a fan of this fancy EXODUS stuff. I think it undercut the real problem. Still, I was not happy with the failure of the EXODUS movement. Like most people, I am hard to please. But why rejoice when a movement that has a positive goal fails. Especially if you have nothing else to offer.

I am happy, however, that Exodus has ceased a work that was more humbug than healing. The real problem is: it is not easy to break with sin and a sinful inclination. There are many sinful inclinations that remain with us

through our lives. We have a battle on our hands. Check out Romans 7: Homosexuality is one of those struggles, perhaps life-long, that some have to fight every day. In that fight, we need the help of fellow believers.

It is easy to confront a deviant sinner with a Bible text. A homosexual knows all the texts and has sweated over them. It is easy to chase homosexuals away. It takes more courage and wisdom to call them in and tell them of God's love in Christ.

Thank God, one day we leave the sinful nature behind either by resurrection or by transformation. But we shall be delivered from this body of death. It leads Paul to a word of praise: "Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Rom 7:21-25). This is the joyful perspective of all Christians: one day I will receive new life *and sin no more*. That will be the greatest day in our lives.

It is not easy to be a homosexual. The homosexual world is filled with pain and darkness. Some feel deeply rejected by God and the church. But the heterosexual world is not a cake-walk either. So much immoral stuff is cast our way, and who can escape it fully? "I am a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." Let us stand beside our homosexual brothers and sisters and encourage them that there is a way to progress in the struggle against immorality. One day at a time. One millimeter in every step. There is a place for them in the church, where we *together* may grow in obedience and humility. The LGTB world also badly needs the gospel.

ACCEPTED

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Rev. D. Vandeburgt

of Burlington-Rehoboth, Ontario

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Declined the call to Coaldale, AB CanRC:

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Candidate Tyler Vandergaag

CHURCH NEWS

We need to be in it for the long haul. It's easy to promise something one day, and then not show up the next day. Do we have the patience to cultivate a responsible bond with those who have come to live in sin? Patience is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

It is our calling to have the gospel delivered also to homosexuals, lesbians, promiscuous people etc. If we wish to be a missional church, fine, but let us never forget then that our mission begins with those who are already placed on our path. We also need to consider what the current trend of immorality means for evangelism. Because you will find all these sinners living down the road on the streets of the big city. C



Farewell to the den Hollanders, from Winnipeg Grace

When a young minister is called by the Holy Spirit to move on from his first pastorate, the feelings of both the pastor and his family and of that first congregation cannot be anything but mixed. What made the situation even more difficult was that the city, Winnipeg, also formed the scene of part of the childhood of the minister, Reverend Rolf den Hollander, when his father was the pastor there. One of the speakers at the farewell evening even told him in his speech that he wanted Reverend den Hollander and his family “to miss us . . . terribly,” and Reverend den Hollander assured the congregation that he would be back. . . for his holidays.

Farewell service

However, the farewell day was not primarily focused on the sorrow of leave-taking, but on thankfulness for God’s faithfulness in bringing growth to both a “rookie” minister and his first congregation. Rev. den Hollander’s final sermon text was 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, on the theme, “We thank God that because he is faithful, he will complete what he has begun in Christ.” He stressed that God “*has enriched us*” (in the past), for just as Paul did for the Corinthians, Reverend den Hollander could thank God on the congregation’s behalf that he has given us an abundance of spiritual treasures “in Christ” (a phrase that occurs ten times in ten verses in this chapter). Our pastor also assured us that (in the present) God “*withholds no spiritual gift,*” as can be seen from the fact that God has, in the past five-and-a-half years, strengthened both minister and congregation under the blessing of his Word. God also “*keeps us strong*” (for the future) through his gifts, as we look forward to the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In the end, Rev. den Hollander reminded us not to rely on a minister (no matter how beloved), but to trust in Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.



Farewell evening

That theme of gratitude for God’s faithfulness carried through the farewell evening, from the opening Bible reading, comments, and prayer by the master of ceremonies, Mr. Robert Leach; through the opening song accompanied by the talents with organ and flute of Richard and Liz Buist and their daughter Marjorie; to the songs of confidence of the children, who especially praised God for his faithfulness with Psalm 116:1, under the direction of Mrs. Francine Kottelenberg, and with the piano accompaniment of Mrs. Lorien Kamminga. A game of Jeopardy Trivia showed just how well Rev. Rolf and Mrs. Liz den Hollander had gotten to know the congregation, with the departing couple and two other families “buzzing in” as various animals (sometimes the wrong ones) when they thought they knew various facts about, and faces in, our congregation and the surrounding area.

The pastoral speeches of Rev. Joe Poppe (on behalf of Classis Manitoba); Rev. A.J. Pol (on behalf of Carman West); Rev. Anjema (on behalf of Providence United

Reformed Church); Rev. Van Reitschoten (as a friend of the den Hollander family); Rev. R.J. Kampen (by email from Denver); and Rev. Klaas and Mrs. Helene Jonker (by video from Australia) shared two main messages: fear that they might be too long-winded (one even mentioned having three points) and gratitude for the contact they had with both the minister and his wife. Rev. Anjema opened the gift-giving for the evening by passing on a book, *The Work of the Pastor* that he had found useful in his own ministry.

Other gifts demonstrated less obvious ways in which Rev. and Mrs. den Hollander have related to the congregation: crutches from congregation members who had shared Rev. den Hollander's need for them at various times, as well as the Bible edition of the game *Apples to Apples* and cookies from the catechism students who expressed their appreciation of some of the lighter moments of catechism classes and the baked treats shared at those times. Some gifts had already been given earlier by the Young Peoples society that alluded to Rev. den Hollander's athletic competition in the congregation.

Both gifts and performances from this point on stressed the memories and mutual goodwill in the minds and hearts of minister and congregation, including the choir's rendition of a musical version of the blessing in Numbers 6:24-26. The morning Women's Society group at which Mrs. den Hollander was a regular attender performed a poem about a typical meeting. Mr. Casey Van Seters and Mr. Bob Leach introduced the following gifts: pictures of Manitoba and Winnipeg skylines; a Kitchen-Aid mixer for Mrs. den Hollander; booster cables instructions for Rev. den Hollander in case he ever faces another challenging automotive battery situation; orange jerseys to cheer on Holland's soccer team; and finally a Memory



Book from the members of the congregation, introduced by a song composed by Mrs. Liz Buist and sung by the congregation.

The closing of the formal part of the evening (before snacks, coffee, and juice and parting hugs and handshakes) began with the congregational singing of Hymn 7:1-4, accompanied by brothers James Teitsma on organ and Neil Teitsma on piano. This was followed by elder Frank Baker closing with prayer, after expressing his appreciation for the organizing committee's work to bring the evening together, and for our pastor's work as chairman of council. Just before the formal end of the evening, Rev. den Hollander thanked God for his work in the congregation and in the lives of Rev. and Mrs. den Hollander through the congregation, and assured us all that though a pastor and his family were leaving, God will always be with us. He also thanked God for the faithful love and support of his wife, and for the power of his Word. In the strength and assurance given by that word, we may indeed look back in gratitude for, and forward in confidence to, God's continuing faithfulness. C





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Q

Is there a biblical reason for or against the donation of organs?

A

Over the past decades the practice of organ donations has become rather common and widespread. Transplants of a variety of organs are as accepted a medical procedure almost as blood transfusions. Not too many people object to blood transfusions (the Jehovah's Witnesses do), while the more complex and complicated operations of organ transplants and their subsequent rejection risks still make many people wonder about the question of right and wrong of this procedure. A kidney transplant in which the donor is a healthy member of the family, however, appears less problematic than the transplant of an organ donated by someone upon his or her passing away (even though risks of rejection remain a reality then too). In the latter case the transplant must take place as soon as possible after the death of the donor; a "good organ" for a transplant must be an organ that is still as much "alive" as possible. Modern medical abilities and technology have changed the criteria for the moment at which someone's death can be determined (e.g. when the heart stops or when brain death is established). These and other aspects related to the question regarding the acceptance of organ transplants, however, do not ultimately determine the answer to the question presented here.

The donation of an organ is done in service and/or love for the neighbour. The Scriptures speak very favourably about someone giving his life for the neighbour (John 15:13; Rom 5:7), about laying down his life for a friend, a brother (1 John 3:16). Such an act of love could be done as follower of Christ, who did the same for us. If this is how the Bible speaks about *giving one's life*, it cannot be wrong to give *a part of our body* for the well-being of

a neighbour. Especially when the risks are small for the donor (e.g. kidney transplants), such an act of love is a responsible gift to the neighbour. In the case, however, in which the donor has died there are no risks for the donor at all, but the life of the recipient could be saved or his health greatly improved! Also, after one or more organs have been removed, the body of the deceased can still be buried. More people who have lost a limb or lung in the course of life are buried without. The act of love toward a neighbour, then, reflects a mercy similar to the mercy God shows to us (Luke 6:36; 10:25), by which we do good to any and all people the way God shows his benevolence to the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt 5:45).

In order for medical professionals to know that you give permission for one or more of your organs to be removed before the body is released for burial, you should carry in your wallet or purse a so-called "codicil" (a will of sorts; a small tablet or *codex*, literally). It's a carefully worded statement, dated and signed, designating specifically what organs you wish to donate after your death. Often in connection with the registration of a driver's license, for instance, such a codicil is composed, articulating when and what you wish to donate at the time when certain death has been confirmed. In this regard we should realize that certain organs, which are highly personal, such as our brains, our pro-creational organs for instance, should be excluded. It could be necessary as well that with regard to certain organs we wish to make our donation subject to the approval of our power of attorney. A decision to donate one or more organs for transplants may be recommended as an act of love, mercy, and benevolence toward the neighbour!

Q It is understood that the purpose of uniting churches into a federation is to help and watch each other in governing themselves “according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things according to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head” (BC, Art. 29). Churches agreed or consented via a Church Order to do everything “in a fitting and orderly way” and so assure the pure proclamation of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the proper exercise of discipline under Christ, who gathers, defends, and preserves the church. Uniting into a federation is therefore believed to be mutually beneficial.

- a. When churches in a federation are allowed to ignore decisions of broader assemblies, is this damaging the federation or even a breach of the bond of churches?
- b. When a synod has been presented with an issue but is not able to arrive at a definitive conclusion, should it abstain from making a decision, and/or let another synod deal with it?
- c. Is it wise to leave decisions to the freedom of individual churches? Do such decisions not breed individualism, independentism, or congregationalism as shown in the past (CRC) and do they not dilute a federation or turn it into just an alliance of churches?

A *Ad a)* In a bond of churches which together established a federation (a *foedus*, i.e. a covenant between these churches) voluntarily, the churches bind themselves faithfully to keep the promises given and agreed upon. They include the promises and obligations contained in this covenant in the conditions for federating laid down in the Church Order. One of the main pillars under this Church Order is found in Article 31, in which the churches agree to accept the decisions reached at the broader assemblies as binding upon the churches (unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order, in which case the decision can be appealed to the major assembly). Hence, the statement in this question that “churches in a federation are allowed to ignore decisions of broader assemblies,” is in conflict with the main principles of a Church Order which articulates the obligations of the churches in the federation. If a church violates such an agreement, it should be called to return to its promises and obligations lest their violation should lead to their exclusion from the federation.

Ad b) It has happened rather often that a synod was asked to deal with an issue on which it was unable to come to a substantive and conclusive position or decision (e.g. women’s voting rights, Westminster Standards, Bible translations). In such an event the synod does well to appoint a committee of members in the federation who may be expected to have some specialized knowledge or abilities to investigate, discuss, and advice on that particular issue, in order to report to the next synod its findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Ad c) Indeed, as a rule decisions of broader assemblies must be considered settled and binding (Art. 31, CO). I am not aware of any decision made by any of our synods that were left to the freedom of individual churches. To be sure, the decision of GS Burlington 2010 regarding women’s voting cannot be included in this category, since that decision was not a matter of “leaving it in the freedom of the churches” but of considering it a matter of “local regulations for the election of office bearers” (which regulations can differ from church to church in other ways as well).

I do recall, however, that in the history of the GKN (Liberated) in The Netherlands the matter of the baptism of adopted children was decided that way. The reason for this was that after much study by many a study committee, which came to different conclusions, the matter was put to rest finally by the decision to leave the practice of the baptism of adopted children to the freedom of the local churches. This may be necessary to maintain the peace and unity among the federation; and possible also, observing that ultimately the churches forming this federation are autonomous and in such an inconclusive matter should be free to decide on its own practice. Given the extremely rare occurrence of such a decision, the fear for independentism

etc. expressed in the question does not seem realistic but highly unlikely! It's a decision that's made by the churches together in a general synod that come to such a conclusion regarding a peculiar matter! In such a case especially, the exception underlines the rule!

*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. den Hollander
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RE: “Connected Preaching” and Theological Education, by G.H. Visscher

Clarion Vol. 63 No. 3, February 14, 2014

Dear Editor,

While a lot of the observations made in the article regarding connectedness in today’s culture are undoubtedly true, and worthy of consideration, I was troubled by a number of things. For the sake of brevity as a letter to the editor, I will respond only to what I feel are the most consequent concerns.

I recognize the reality of the so-called “Generation C” and while I do agree that consideration must be given to that reality in the preaching, I am troubled by the emphasis made on the need for preachers to “work extra hard so that people will let him in.”

To be sure, the preacher’s skills are important, but they certainly are not the most important. We must be more concerned with the faithfulness of the message and his ability to make it understandable. These are the gifts that we must look for in preachers and teach them to develop.

The description of “disconnected preaching” is awful! This description creates a “straw man” to attack. The example of the “disconnected preacher” and his sermon is so negative as to make it unrecognisable to reality. Dr. Visscher knocks this straw man down as being unable to work fruitfully. Is there so little confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit that one should attribute so much of the success of the sermon to the man who delivers it? Do we not acknowledge that the preaching of the gospel is the primary means of grace? Are we responsible for the vessel which God chooses to make his Word known and the manner in which it is received? Scripture is clear about this; faithful preaching *will* produce results. And not just with the “mature in the faith, theologically astute, and biblically knowledgeable.” This result will produce faith or hardening in the heart of the hearer. This is worked out in the confessions of the church. (e.g. Canons of Dort, I Art. 3 & 4, III/IV Art. 11 & 17). This is why we bring our young children to church. With the line of reasoning being presented, we would be better to send them to Sunday school instead! A disturbing trend is already developing in which programmes are being introduced in the church nurseries.

We confess that the preaching is the work of the Holy Spirit and we also confess that the Spirit will soften the hearts of whom he wills and harden the hearts of whom he wills. There seemed to be little acknowledgement of that. Is it not a matter for prayer that another distraction that the devil has put in the way of listening and hearing the Word not be allowed



to prevail? It’s not a matter of the preacher having “to convince them that the message really matters to them.”

The thrust of the injunction given to Timothy is changed about Scripture being useful and God breathed is turned backwards. Every Word that God gave is useful. Dr. Visscher says he doesn’t deny it but in the next breath, he does just that by saying that the whole, but not every part, is “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Dr. Visscher wrote that it was men like Schaeffer and Wright who had convinced him that God’s Word had relevance for the world. They may have had an impact for him, but we must not downplay the nourishment received week in and week out in the church where one should be attending each Sunday. The regular preaching was sadly relegated to just a bunch of information. The sermons were described as “just a matter of lecturing the people about how things were a thousand years ago.” Maybe the problem was with the attitude of the listener at that point in time? If so, then, indeed you had missed the boat.

I think that in embracing what Dan Allender said about enabling controlling manipulative men to become professionals, the fact that our seminary is more than an institute of learning is forgotten. Are we intellectualizing the training too much, also in our desire to be accepted as an accredited college? It is a tool *from* the churches *by* the churches *for* the churches which is unlike those outside of our federation.

If this burden is placed on our theological students and ministers it can only lead to abysmal (I use this word intentionally) failure.

*George Helder
Hamilton, ON*

Response

Let me begin by thanking Brother Helder for his letter and the opportunity it presents for me to respond.


The main thrust of the letter has to do with the intersection of the human and the divine in the preaching moment, in which the preacher does his best as an instrument of the Holy Spirit. Brother Helder seems to fear that I have put too much emphasis on the human element and not enough on the divine. In response to that I would suggest that while we certainly teach and encourage preachers to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit throughout their work of sermon preparation and sermon delivery, we and they are obviously not in control of the degree to which the Spirit will work in that preaching. Nevertheless, the Spirit uses means – also weak, fallible, frail men, as acknowledged in CD III/IV, 17, which Brother Helder also cites. I think of these delightful words “grace is conferred through admonitions, and the more readily we do our duty, the more this favour of God, who works in us, usually manifests itself in its lustre, and so his work best proceeds. To God alone, both for the means and for their saving fruit and efficacy, all glory is due throughout eternity.” The majority of seminary education then is about improving that weak human vessel so that it is, as I wrote, “The best instrument whereby the Holy Spirit turns hearts.” Simply put, if God did not use means, we would have no need of preachers and hence no need of seminary education nor of excellence in such education. Because God uses means, we want to have the best preaching possible, insofar as it depends on us, by being the best fragile human vehicle. Yes, “faithful preaching *will* produce results” – but it needs to have the attention of the ears and the brain of the hearer and so effect his/her will and heart. It’s possible to preach in such a way that no one will hear or understand it – do you still expect the Spirit to bring about results then? If we do, we need neither preachers nor seminaries. We cannot expect that young people will travel to the local bookstores and purchase literature that will convince them that Christianity is relevant; that assurance should come to everyone of them through the preached Word.

I deny however that I have created some kind of “straw man.” I intentionally stated that I was using exaggeration in order to make the point. Nor am I attempting to critique some of my colleagues. In my estimation, every sermon (mine included) has a degree of connected and disconnectedness, and we need to be as connected as possible in order to retain today’s audiences. Every sermon will contain some moments when info and data needs to be transferred in order to give the message substance; one needs however to be convinced in “the connected moments” that some of this is necessary in order to endure along with the preacher.

Actually when it comes to this “straw man” I am afraid that it is Brother Helder who is guilty of using this fallacious line of reasoning. He creates such a straw man when he extends my thoughts into an area that I have not gone, namely, Sunday school. Robert Gula suggests that “straw men” are created when “you either imply or state that he said something that in fact he never said or that his words meant something that in fact he never intended them to mean” (*Nonsense: How to Overcome it*, NY: Stein and Day, 1979, p. 164).

I also fail to understand how I have “turned backwards” Paul’s injunction to Timothy. My concern is that people have read only part of 2 Timothy 3:16, namely, the part that speaks about Scripture being “God-breathed,” as important as that is. Paul himself however states that this God-breathed Scripture has a purpose – it’s “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” My intent was simply to point out the delightful purpose of preaching – not just feeding some brains, but equipping God’s saints for godly behaviour. Nothing backwards here – just drawing Paul’s own lines. And Paul does not say, by the way, that “every Scripture” is useful (no translation renders it that way); there are words in Chronicles or in Habbakuk that won’t make much difference in our lives. It’s not clear to me what my brother’s complaint is here.

A more careful and sympathetic reading of my original article will lead our brother to see that we are in more agreement than he thinks.

Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher 

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



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***Is God anti-gay?
And other questions
about homosexuality,
the Bible and same-sex
attraction. Sam Allberry,
Epsom, UK: the Good
Book Company, 2013***

***Additional Information:
Paperback, 93 pages,
\$8.98***



What if I were to tell you that I struggle with same-sex attraction? Would you write me off or treat me differently? As it turns out, my battles with sin are in other areas; however, there *are* those among us who do wrestle with homosexual desires. The author of this book, Sam Allberry, is candid about his own such struggles. His honesty is part of what makes this book one of the best on the topic. Momentarily, I'll tell you what else makes this little book the best.

But let me first tell a little more about the author. Sam Allberry is an associate pastor at St. Mary's Church in Maidenhead, England. Within the Anglican Church, there are still conservative, Bible-believing, Calvinistic remnants, and Allberry is one of them. I recently attended the Together for the Gospel pastors' conference in Louisville, Kentucky. Allberry was one of the panellists for a discussion on homosexuality. He impressed me not only with his pastoral wisdom and compassion, but also his desire to be faithful to Scripture.

That leads me in to the other part of what makes this book so excellent. You might think that a book on homosexuality by someone who struggles with same-sex attraction would fudge at points or rationalize certain behaviours. Allberry does nothing of the sort. He has the highest view of Scripture. He regards it as the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. Following from that, he is absolutely clear on what Scripture teaches about homosexuality. At the same time, he treats the subject through the lens of gospel hope in Jesus Christ. This is helpful reading to stir up compassion in those of us who

don't deal with same-sex desires. Most importantly, it also functions as encouragement for those who do deal with those desires.

I'm not going to give a full report of how Allberry works things out in this book. I will, however, share some of the questions that he asks and answers:

- Is God anti-gay?
- Surely a same-sex partnership is OK if it's committed and faithful?
- But Jesus never mentions homosexuality, so how can it be wrong?
- Aren't we just picking and choosing which Old Testament laws apply?
- Can't Christians just agree to differ on this?
- What should I do if a Christian comes out to me?

I can assure you that all these questions are answered in a biblically faithful manner. Along the way, more questions are answered too – for instance, can same-sex desires disappear? It's not a long book, only ninety-three pages, but a whole lot of value is packed into it. Let me end this review with a brief quote from chapter 3:

Struggling with homosexual desires is just that – a struggle. But many Christians I know can testify to how God has brought good things out of their experiences. Some have said that the Lord has made them more compassionate and sensitive than they might otherwise have been. Others speak of ministry opportunities it has given them, and of how they have been able to support and encourage others they know who are trying to deal with same-sex attraction. Some have had opportunities to share their faith with parts of the gay community that would be unreachable by conventional church witness. But perhaps above all they can say how these struggles, with all the disorder and insecurity that can come with them, have led to a deeper appreciation of how unfathomably good God is. (58-59)

Highly recommended for pastors, elders, and everyone! **C**

Press Release of Classis Ontario-West May 21 and 22, 2014 in Hamilton, ON

On behalf of the convening church (Hamilton-Cornerstone) Rev. B. DeJong called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone, and led in opening devotions. The delegates of the convening church reported that all the credentials were in order. Classis was declared constituted. The appointed officers, as suggested by the previous classis, took their place: Rev. K. Kok, (chairman), Rev. J. Ludwig (vice chairman), and Rev. R. Vermeulen (clerk).

The convening church was thanked for its work in preparing for Classis. The chairman mentioned the following items of memorabilia: the vacancy of Kerwood; Rev. R. Vermeulen declined the calls to Edmonton Immanuel and Burlington Ebenezer, and Rev. P. Aasman declined the call to Launceston, Tasmania.

The agenda was adopted. Five students, Johan Brintjes, Rick Vanderhorst, Steve VanLeeuwen, Gerard Veurink, and Randall Visscher presented themselves in order to receive permission to speak in an edifying word in the churches. After having submitted the required documents, the students were examined in alphabetical order. Their sermon proposals and the examinations in doctrine and creeds were judged sufficient to grant these five brothers permission to speak an edifying word within the churches for the period of one year.

Three students, Gerrit Brintjes, Jeff Poort, and Tyler Vandergaag presented themselves for the purpose of being declared eligible for call. The required documents were in good order. After delivering their sermon proposals and being examined in OT and NT exegesis and doctrine and creeds, Classis decided to declare these three brothers eligible for call in the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. After each of the eight examinations the assembly thanked the Lord in prayer and opportunity was given to congratulate the students.

Two reports were presented:

1. Classis received with gratitude a report of the church visitors to Providence Canadian Reformed Church.
2. From the church at Kerwood regarding the inspection of the archives of Classis in London.

The following appointments were made:

1. Church for auditing the books of the treasurer: Hamilton.
2. Church for taking care of the classical archives: London.
3. Church for inspecting the classical archives: Kerwood.
4. Church visitors: Rev. K. Kok and Rev. J. Ludwig (alt. Rev. B. DeJong).
5. Committee of Examiners: Rev. K. Kok and Rev. J. Ludwig.
6. Church for administering the Fund for Needy Churches: Ancaster.
7. Church as contact for ecumenical relations: Kerwood.
8. The convening church of the next classis: Hamilton-Providence.
9. Suggested officers for the next classis: Chairman: Rev. J. Ludwig; Vice Chairman: Rev. R. Vermeulen; Clerk: Rev. R. Bredenhof.
10. Date and place of the next classis: Sept. 17, 2014 in Hamilton-Providence.

The fraternal delegate, Rev. W. Van Hal, a retired minister in the URCNA, on behalf of CERCU and the Classis of South-Western Ontario, addressed the assembly with words of greeting and encouragement.

The chairman asked all the churches the three questions set out in Article 44 and the churches responded appropriately. The church at Chatham asked advice regarding an organization called "Neighbour link" which puts volunteers from various churches in touch with people in need. Advice was given. Hamilton-Cornerstone requested concurring advice in a case of discipline. Advice was given. Cornerstone also informed Classis of a grassroots initiative to institute a new church in the East Hamilton area. The church at Kerwood requested pulpit supply once per month for the summer and fall of 2014. This request was granted.

Personal question period was held. Censure according to Article 34 was deemed unnecessary. The Acts were adopted and the press release approved.

Rev. K. Kok led in closing prayer.

*For Classis Ontario-West,
Rev. J. Ludwig (vice chairman, e.t.)*

