

Denying Yourself
for a Field

PAGE 462

End-of-Life Decisions

PAGE 463

You Asked

PAGE 481

Clarion

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CLINGING TO MOUNT GERIZIM



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Be My Witnesses. . . in Samaria!

Last fall I attended the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Baltimore, Maryland. I wasn't lonely: some ten thousand Bible scholars from all over the world descended on the Baltimore Convention Center and surrounding venues to take in presentations by experts on hundreds of different subjects related to the Bible. A very cool experience. I listened to thirty-six speakers in four days. Needless to say, the presentations have become a bit of a blur, but there are a few that stand out in my mind. One of these was on the Samaritan Bible. The Samaritans accepted only the five books of Moses, so their version is called the Samaritan Pentateuch. The Samaritan Pentateuch is interesting because it's very old and in many passages it is different from the Hebrew Bible used by the Jewish community (the so-called Masoretic text).

The Samaritan Pentateuch

What made this presentation particularly fascinating was the speaker himself. His name was Benyamim Tsedaka, and he's actually a real live Samaritan. There are a couple of small Samaritan communities that still survive in Palestine today.¹ Mr. Tsedaka is an elder in one of those communities, and he spends much of his time raising global awareness of the Samaritans, their heritage, and their contribution to biblical studies. He has made the first English translation of the Samaritan Pentateuch, published by Eerdmans just last year.² It's a Study Bible that includes all kinds of notes to show how the Samaritans interpret their Scriptures.

For his Baltimore presentation, Tsedaka focused on one particular passage that's quite different in the Samaritan Pentateuch than in our Bibles. The passage is Exodus 4:24-26, about Zipporah circumcising her son while she and Moses were on their way to Egypt. This is a dif-

ficult passage to understand, and Tsedaka tried to show how the Samaritan version solves some of the difficulties. One difficulty is found in verse 24: "At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him" (NIV).³ This seems odd, since the LORD had just gone to great lengths to persuade Moses to go back to Egypt to lead the people out. Why would God kill the very man that he had just sent for this purpose? Tsedaka explained that the Hebrew verb "to kill" is pronounced differently in Samaritan so that it means "to stun." God only meant to stun him, and why? Well, because Moses had taken his family along. The LORD had only told Moses to go back to his people, and Zipporah was not even an Israelite; she did not belong. Moses' mission involved complete commitment to God and to his people. Moses seemed to be compromising that commitment by taking his wife with him, so God encountered him to stop him in his tracks.

How did Zipporah react? That brings us to a second difficulty. Verse 25 says that "Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it" (NIV).⁴ That too is strange. For one thing we know from elsewhere that Moses had two sons, but here the passage only mentions one and does not specify which one. Further, why would Zipporah touch Moses' feet with the foreskin, and why did she call Moses a bridegroom of blood? What does this episode have to do with their marriage relationship? Tsedaka explained that the Samaritan version does not say that she cut the foreskin of *her son* (*benah* in Hebrew), but that she cut the foreskin of *her heart* (*binnah* in Samaritan Hebrew). That is to say, Zipporah wanted to prove that she was indeed willing to commit herself to God and his people, that she really did belong, so to demonstrate her devotion she started to cut her own chest with the flint. In the Samaritan version she

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 18 begins with a guest editorial from Dr. John Smith. He recently attended a conference on Biblical Literature and shares with us one of the lectures that stood out for him.

We begin a series by Prof. Albert Oosterhoff on end-of-life decisions. This four-part series will discuss the issues that arise in end-of-life situations.

Earlier this year our magazine published a three-part series on women and voting. Additionally, there has been much discussion in the form of letters to the editor and Further Discussion articles. This issue concludes the discussion with one more letter and a final reply from Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher.

Issue 18 reports on the welcome of Rev. R.J. den Hollander to Grassie, Ontario and Project Eagle's Nest (Emmanuel Christian High School). We also have an article from David Pol from his time in Indonesia. This issue also includes the following columns: Treasures New and Old, Education Matters, and You Asked.

Laura Veenendaal

- 458 EDITORIAL**
Be My Witnesses. . . in Samaria!
- 462 TREASURES NEW & OLD**
Denying Yourself for a Field
- 463 End-of-Life Decisions (1)**
- 466 LETTER TO THE EDITOR**
- 467 Grassie Church Welcomes Rev. R.J. den Hollander**
- 469 Project Eagle's Nest: Building on our Heritage**
- 471 On the Far Side of the World**
- 474 EDUCATION MATTERS**
- 477 FURTHER DISCUSSION**
- 481 YOU ASKED**

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Benyamim Tsedaka

did not throw the *foreskin* at Moses' feet, but she threw *herself* at his feet, so that the blood from the cut she was making dripped on him, and hence her words, "You are a bridegroom of blood to me." In other words, she had to pay with her own blood in order to remain married to him.

The passage ends in verse 26 with the rather cryptic words, "So the LORD let him alone," or more literally, "He let him go." This is usually taken to mean that God let Moses go, allowing

him to journey on to Egypt. The Samaritan Pentateuch, however, says that "he let *her* go." That is to say, Moses let Zipporah go, back to her father's house. According to Tsedaka's explanation, Moses was disgusted by Zipporah's actions. Her self-mutilation looked like paganism to him. He did not want to accept her gesture of devotion, so he sent her back home and carried on without her, as God had wanted him to do in the first place.

The advantage of this interpretation is that it explains how Zipporah ended up back at her father's house. After all, we don't hear about her again until Exodus 18:2, which says that Moses had indeed sent her away and that Jethro brought her back to Moses together with their two sons. The Samaritan Bible fills in the gap so that it all fits nicely together. A bit too nicely, though, I think: it seems to me that the Samaritan version is probably not original but is motivated precisely by the difficulties in the passage itself. I suspect that the Samaritans revised the Hebrew text to explain the difficulties away. Nevertheless it gives us a fascinating window into the exegetical tradition preserved by the Samaritan community, and this tradition is now becoming more widely available to the Western world thanks to Tsedaka's English translation.

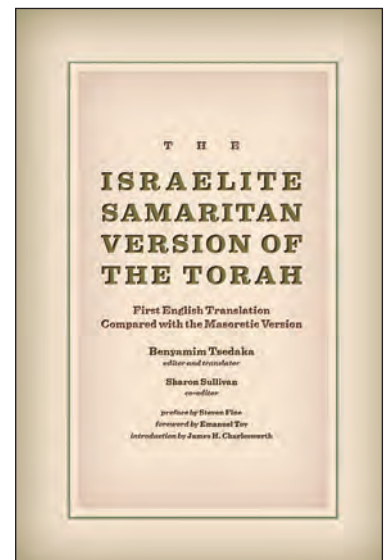
Samaritans in the New Testament

At the end of the session I managed to have a short conversation with Benyamim Tsedaka. In his speech he had mentioned that the New Testament gospels portray the Samaritans in quite a positive way, so I asked him for his perspective on a question that's been bugging me for a while. It's about the story in Luke 17 where the Lord

Jesus healed ten lepers by telling them to go and show themselves to the priests, and as they went they were healed but only one of them came back, and he turned out to be a Samaritan. I asked Tsedaka, "When Jesus sent the ten lepers to the priests, which priest would this Samaritan have gone to? He could not very well have gone to Jerusalem, could he? After all, Jews had no dealings with Samaritans." Tsedaka said, "No, the Samaritan would not have been accepted there; perhaps he could have gone to Mount Gerizim, but that temple was in ruins." So then I asked him, "Is that maybe why the Samaritan came back to Jesus, because he had no one else to go to?" Well, Tsedaka did not want to go there. He simply said that the Samaritan came back to greet Jesus. So I still don't have an answer for my question.

But then Tsedaka told me something else, about John 4, where the Lord Jesus was speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well. As you recall, the woman touched on a very controversial issue, namely the question of where God was to be worshiped – in Jerusalem (as the Jews believed) or on Mount Gerizim (as the Samaritans thought). Jesus gave a two-part answer. In verse 23 he said that this controversy would soon go away: "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem." But Tsedaka wanted to talk to me about the other part of Jesus' answer, in verse 22: "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews." Tsedaka said, "This passage is usually taken quite negatively, as if Jesus were taking the side of the Jews against the Samaritans. But it should really be taken the other way around. Jesus was telling the Samaritan woman, 'You have to go to the Jews because *they* do not know.'"

Thinking back on it, I find this comment really sad. First of all, it contradicts what the Lord Jesus actually said. Tsedaka was turning Jesus' words upside down, turning Christ into someone who favours the Samaritans over the Jews, reframing the Lord



Jesus into someone less offensive and more palatable to him. Secondly, it reflects how much the Samaritans today still cling to Mount Gerizim. It is even enshrined in their version of the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20, right after the tenth commandment, the Samaritan Pentateuch has these words: “And when the Lord your God will bring you to the land of the Canaanites which you are going to inherit, you shall set up great stones for yourself and lime them with lime, and you shall write on them the words of this law, and when you have passed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones which I command you this day on Mount Gerizim.” So the Samaritans have added God’s choice of Mount Gerizim to their Decalogue, giving these words the highest possible prestige.

Still today, one of the two Samaritan communities in Palestine is located at Mount Gerizim. It’s amazing that these communities have survived through the centuries, and I admire the work that Benyamim Tsedaka is doing as an ambassador for these people, raising public awareness of their traditions. At the same time, it seems to me that this work is a stumbling block for him. He likes a Jesus who loves the Samaritans, but he does not want a Jesus who calls people to worship the Father in spirit and truth. The Samaritan identity is so tightly bound to Mount Gerizim that it is inconceivable to leave Mount Gerizim for Christ. It’s no wonder that the Lord Jesus explicitly told his disciples to go to Samaria, and indeed Peter and John did so, as recorded in Acts 8.

The gospel

It turns out that all these centuries later, the Samaritans still need the gospel. And Christ himself has shown by example *how* to bring the gospel to Samaritans, reaching out to them and lifting them up when the Jews were all too eager to shun them and tread them underfoot. When you read John 4 from a missional perspective, you see how winsome the Lord Jesus was, how carefully he framed his words, guiding the woman from *curiosity* (What kind of man would speak to a Samaritan woman?), to *wonder* (What kind of man could know her life story?), to *faith* (“Could this be the Christ?”). As a Jewish man incarnate, Jesus could break down a wall of hostility and win the trust of a Samaritan woman, uncovering her life of sin, and revealing himself as the Saviour she needed, all the while risking the scorn of his Jewish compatriots. We cannot learn any better how to become missionaries to Samaritans than by following in the footsteps of Christ himself.

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of London, Ontario

CHURCH NEWS

¹ Much has been written about these communities and their Scriptures. For some recent books, see Robert T. Anderson and Terry Giles, *The Samaritan Pentateuch: An Introduction to Its Origin, History, and Significance for Biblical Studies* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012); Gary N. Knoppers *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

² Benyamim Tsedaka, *The Israelite Samaritan Version of the Torah: First English Translation Compared with the Masoretic Version* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

³ As the NIV’s footnote points out, the Hebrew says that the Lord met “him,” which in the context may refer either to Moses or to his son.

⁴ Again, a footnote in the NIV indicates an alternate way to read the Hebrew, namely that she “drew near Moses’ feet with it.”

Mountains in Samaria, Israel





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Denying Yourself for a Field

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

(Matthew 13:44)

The day had gotten off to a rough start. Rabbi Jesus had healed a man troubled by a demon. What a show! All the people wondered if Jesus was the promised Son of David. The Pharisees, appalled by the thought, claimed Jesus was using satanic power. The Lord pointed out how that would be foolish and irrational.

However, the Pharisees would not let up. “Let this fellow prove himself,” they thought. So they asked for a sign. Rabbi Jesus indicated the sign would come: like Jonah he would spend time out of sight (not in a fish but in the heart of the earth!) and then reappear. He also prophesied that the sign would not lead to repentance but to condemnation.

That same day Jesus went out to the lakeshore in Capernaum. The crowds drew close again. Were they hoping for another spectacular act? The Lord Jesus got into a boat. From a distance he taught the crowds, encrypting his message in parables. Those who had Bible knowledge and faith would understand. Those who did not, but came merely for the sensation, would leave disappointed.

The Son of David, the Messiah of God, was not as spectacular as people had thought he would be. To make this point, the Christ told the parable recorded in Matthew 13:44. It is a parable about the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom that is ruled directly by God. This kingdom is treasure for it brings

the *shalom* of God, much greater than the *Pax Romana*. It is about a world in which God dwells with man. It will be a kingdom with open gates for all enemies are gone. Sin will be no more. Suffering will be no more. Death will be no more. It is true treasure.

That God’s kingdom is treasure was an accepted truth. The Pharisees believed it. The crowds believed it. The disciples believed it. The “treasure” is not the point of the parable. It’s what Rabbi Jesus said next. The treasure of God’s kingdom is “hidden in a field.” That is a startling piece of information.

The field is special on account of the treasure in it. However, because the treasure is hidden, the field looks like any other field. One would have to find the treasure to appreciate the value of the field. The Teacher told how it happened to a man. Whether the man was working in the field or just walking by is immaterial. The important point is that in the ordinary field he found an extraordinary treasure.

Now the law back then was that treasure found in a field belongs to the owner of the field. Hence the man goes away, sells all he has to buy the field and so own the treasure. Here is the point of the parable. The man buys the field to own the treasure. He buys the ordinary to own the special. He denies himself for a field that to others is not special – they don’t realize that there’s treasure hidden in it.

The crowds wanted miracles: “Cast out another demon, Jesus!” The Pharisees wanted a sign: “Fellow, prove yourself!” Rabbi Jesus sat down and . . . told stories. So normal, so ordinary. Who would have thought this “field” hid “treasure?” Who would have thought this carpenter’s son from Nazareth would be the Messiah of God?

Nathanael would not believe it at first. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Yet a little later we hear this upright Jew exclaim: “You are the Son of God!” A Jew would never say that of a human being; Jesus was condemned to death for claiming it. But Nathanael is one of those who found treasure in the field.

In the history of redemption the treasure of God’s kingdom has always been hidden: in Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the nation Israel, the tribe of Judah, the house of David, in the womb of Mary. Christ himself was, for all appearances, normal. After Christ, it is still this way: many of those followers of Jesus were uneducated fishermen, simple men who stood at the start of the church. Today the field is the church, your local congregation, a group of ordinary people.

To own the treasure you need to own the field. To have the kingdom you need to have Christ. To be saved you need the church. How self-denying are you when it comes to the field containing the kingdom?



End-of-Life Decisions

(Part 1)



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Introduction

I was privileged to deliver a paper recently to the annual Trusts and Estates conference of B'nai Brith (a Jewish service organization). The focus of the conference was end-of-life decisions. I believe that this is also a topic about which we, as Reformed Christians, should be informed and so I intend to discuss the issues that arise in end-of-life situations in a series of four articles. In the course of the articles, I shall mention a variety of medical conditions in which one may find oneself at life's end.

I should caution the readers that these articles do not constitute legal advice and certainly not medical advice. You will need to seek specific help from your physician, your lawyer, and others for that purpose.

The title of these articles may seem strange or even wrong to some readers. We believe that God gives life and that he takes our lives in his time. How then can we make decisions about the end of our lives? I believe, however, that we can and ought to make some decisions about end-of-life care, that such decisions do not constitute the impermissible taking of life, and that they are legitimate for Christians.

I emphasize that these articles are *not* about euthanasia, that is, about the impermissible taking of life. It is, of course, true that a person's request to his physician to end his life is also an end-of-life decision. However, I shall leave it out of consideration in these articles and restrict my discussion primarily to the provision and withdrawal of medical care short of suicide or euthanasia. Perhaps euthanasia can be the subject of a future article.

Euthanasia is a topic that is again current in Canada. It was raised in the Carter case in British Columbia in 2012.¹ The decision of the Supreme Court of British Columbia, which allowed physician-assisted suicide, was reversed by the British Columbia Court of Appeal in 2013. The Supreme Court of Canada is scheduled to hear the further

appeal in the case in October 2014 and will likely deliver its judgment later this fall. In its decision it will revisit its 1993 decision in *Rodriguez v. Canada (Attorney General)*, in which the court denied Ms. Rodriguez' application to be euthanized. Moreover, on June 5, 2014 the National Assembly of Quebec enacted Bill 52, *An Act respecting end-of-life care*, which provides for physician-assisted death. The Bill received almost eighty percent support. Further, in March 2014 Stephen Fletcher MP (Conservative) introduced private members' bills in Parliament to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada, and at their convention this Spring, Liberal party members adopted a resolution to decriminalize medically-assisted termination of life.

On the other hand, in late May 2014 the House of Commons passed a motion brought by Charlie Angus MP (NDP) that called for a national palliative care strategy and the provision of "high-quality home-based and hospice palliative care." In addition, on June 11, 2014, in its report, "End-of-Life Care: A National Dialogue," the Canadian Medical Association endorsed the adoption of a national palliative care strategy to ensure that people have access to high-quality, dignified end-of-life care.

Other kinds of end-of-life decisions

End-of-life decisions encompass a variety of actions with which many readers will be familiar, including decisions about a person's property. For example, most readers will, I hope, have made a will in which they direct the orderly administration and distribution of their estates. They may also have entered into trusts which provide for family members after they die, have placed money into joint accounts for the benefit of family members, or have purchased life insurance or contributed to pensions which will benefit their family. Many readers will also have executed a continuing power of attorney for property that

appoints an attorney, typically a close family member, to make property decisions for them when they no longer have the mental capacity to do so themselves. Most of these devices become effective while the person is alive and some, such as joint accounts, may involve gifts to the other party while the maker is still alive, or on the maker's death, or both. However, most will confer benefits after the death of the maker. The continuing power of attorney for property is an exception. It is effective only during the maker's life and ends on her death. A will is another exception. A will becomes effective only on the testator's death.²

All such devices are perfectly normal and desirable. God created us as rational beings able to plan for what should happen to our property when we are no longer able to manage it and after we die. And it is right that we take advantage of these devices for we ought to provide for our families also when we can no longer do so. Further, these devices are intended to provide for an orderly distribution of our assets and to prevent (as much as possible) disputes about inheritances.

Health care decisions

The phrase "end-of-life decisions" can also refer to decisions made by persons themselves or by family members about their care once they cannot or can no longer care for themselves. These may include decisions about the care of an elderly parent or spouse, or of a mentally or physically challenged family member. Rightly, we try to care for them in our homes so long as possible. But the time may come that this is no longer possible. The person requires specialized care, a type of care that the family can no longer provide at home. Mom needs nursing care. Dad's Alzheimer's disease has progressed to a stage that he needs institutional care. Or a challenged child would be better cared for in a group home, such as an Anchor home. So a difficult, often a wrenching and emotionally-laden decision has to be made. Feelings of guilt are often a factor in the decision. They need not be. If the decision is made prayerfully and with input from the person involved when that is possible, and if it is indeed in the best interests of the person, such decisions are the right ones to make.

End-of-life decisions about the person

The focus of these articles is not about property matters, or about health care generally, but about decisions

that may have to be made when a person is on life support or in a coma and the medical team informs the family that there is no hope, or no realistic hope that the patient will recover.

There are medical, ethical, and legal aspects to end-of-life decisions. I shall describe them in these articles, but shall try to keep the jargon to a minimum. However, some of it is rather technical, for which I apologize. But the description is necessary for a sound understanding of the topic.

Let us acknowledge that death is part of our fallen human existence and refer to it by its true name

But first, a word about the process of dying and death itself. Many readers will have observed the dying and the death of a loved one. It can be a wrenching experience, whether it happens in the home, a nursing home, a hospice, or a hospital. As a person approaches death, the body's systems begin to fail and shut down. The person may be suffering from painful bedsores and, as death is near, the skin, especially in the extremities becomes mottled. Also the person may no longer be able to communicate verbally, or at all, and may fall into a coma. It is indeed a blessing when a person then dies "naturally," *i.e.*, unencumbered by breathing and feeding tubes, or intravenous tubes for the administration of palliative drugs. But often, especially if the person is hospitalized, they are hooked up to all kinds of devices that are necessary to treat them.

This does not mean that treatment in hospital is undesirable. It is often necessary. But hospitals are meant for acute care. They are essential when a person has suffered serious trauma, such as a serious heart attack, or a stroke. Hospitals are also necessary for the treatment of persons with debilitating diseases such as cancer. But they are not good places to die. And if a person has expressed the wish to die a "natural" death, it is much better, if that is possible, to transfer her to a hospice for the final stage of her life.

While intensive hospital care is indicated in acute cases, generally end-of-life and palliative care can be provided at much less cost in hospices or, when that is possible, in the home. Hospices can and do provide com-

passionate care for persons in the final stages of life. Thus, I fully agree with the motion made by Charlie Angus, referred to in the Introduction, that calls for the provision of home-based and hospice palliative care and the provision of support for caregivers. I believe that this is a wise proposal and that much more revenue should be spent to provide for the establishment and staffing of hospices.

Death and dying are foreign to us. They are not “natural.” That is because they are alien to God’s creation order. He did not create us to die. But by the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in which we are included, suffering and death came into the world and we, each of us, will need to face death, our last enemy (1 Cor 15:26). However, as Christians, we know that death is not the end. As our Catechism teaches us, Christ has conquered death and so we no longer need to fear the second death. Thus, John Donne concluded his well-known poem, *Death be not proud*, “Death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.” It is true that we must still die, for our death is our entrance into eternal life. As soon as a believer dies, Christ takes his soul to himself into his eternal home. And there, with all the saints who have gone before us, we await his second coming when he will reunite our mortal remains with our soul and give us a new glorified body (HC, Q/A 42, 45, 57). Is it any wonder that a Christian, when he approaches the end of his life, longs to be with Christ? (cf. Phil 1:23)

What decisions may we make for a loved one who is institutionalized and whose medical condition has worsened?

Because death is indeed the end of our earthly life, I believe that we should avoid euphemisms such as “she passed away” and the inelegant, “he passed.” As Christians we should not try to hide the ugliness of death by such expressions. Let us instead acknowledge that death is part of our fallen human existence and refer to it by its true name.

More generally, suffering is part of our fallen state and is thus also unnatural. The Bible speaks often of suffering.³ And we believe that the Lord allows suffering and uses it to strengthen our faith. And so we accept it from his hand. But God has also given us the means to

alleviate suffering and we may make grateful use of those means. Those include not just applying an adhesive bandage for a minor injury, or taking painkillers for a headache or a sore back. They also include palliative drugs that can be administered when pain becomes intolerable, for example, in cases of cancer or chronic diseases.

While it is very hard for us to have to say goodbye to a loved one, it is a wonderful thing when Christians, even in the last stages of their lives, can testify to the glorious hope they have in Christ. My own father suffered from senile dementia during the latter stages of his life and spent the last couple of weeks of his life in hospital. He could no longer speak and he no longer knew his children. But when his children sang the psalms of Zion (in Dutch) to him, he would sing with us in his lovely bass voice, to the delight of the nursing staff. Those psalms, which he learnt as a child, he had not forgotten.

Sadly, many of our compatriots do not share this faith and die without hope. And so they see the suffering of their loved ones as futile. It is therefore understandable that they often want to ameliorate or end that suffering.

That brings us to the question: What decisions may we make for a loved one who is institutionalized and whose medical condition has worsened? She may be in a long-term coma, may be brain-dead, or exist in a vegetative state, being kept alive by a breathing tube and a feeding tube. She may develop aspiration pneumonia,⁴ which requires painful suctioning of the lungs, or bed sores that may cause secondary infection. May we decide that the patient should not be resuscitated if he suffers a debilitating heart attack? May we direct the medical staff to use a colloquial but infelicitous term, to “pull the plug”?⁵ These are questions that I shall explore in these articles.

For a clear understanding of the topic, a few definitions may be helpful:⁶

A *persistent vegetative state* may be caused by a traumatic or non-traumatic brain injury. It involves a complete unawareness of self and of the environment. The patient’s higher brain functions have ceased, but the brain stem allows breathing to continue and the heart to continue beating. The patient does not respond to stimuli, has no language comprehension, cannot speak, and is incontinent. Recovery is rare.

Brain death occurs when a critically ill patient dies sometime before or after being placed on life support, for example, after a heart attack or a stroke.

A *coma* means that a person is alive and recovery is possible. It is similar to a deep sleep except that no external stimuli can prompt the brain to become awake.

In the next article I shall discuss the medical aspects and the legal framework that govern end-of-life decisions.

(Endnotes)

¹ *Carter v. Canada (Attorney General)* – the Gloria Taylor case.

² See Heb 9:17. It is apparent from this text that a will became permissible for Christians in New Testament times. This device was undoubtedly copied from Roman society in which wills were common. It is referred to, for example, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act III, Scene 2, in which Antony reads Julius Caesar's will.

In patriarchal times and under Mosaic law a will could not be used. But the sons inherited an equal share of their father's estate as though the father died intestate, except that the first-born received a double share (Deut 21:15-17). Only if there were no sons would daughters inherit (Num 27: 36 and Josh 17:6, regarding the daughters of Zelophehad). Nonetheless, it is apparent that a father could deny the first-born his inheritance. For example, Jacob gives a double portion of the inheritance to Joseph (Gen 48) and disinherited Reuben (1 Chron 5:1) These dispositions were not made by

will, but by the father during his lifetime. Further, Esau despised the right of a first-born (Gen 25:31-34; 27:36; and see Heb 12:16). The principle that a will cannot be used is still the rule in Rabbinic law and is adhered to by many orthodox Jews.

It is interesting to note that, for feudal reasons, at common law a person could not dispose of real property by will until 1540. Further, until the 1800s, when a person died intestate, *i.e.*, without a will, his real property descended to his eldest son to the exclusion of other sons and daughters pursuant to the primogeniture rule (the right of the firstborn [son]). But if there were no sons, the daughters inherited equally. Personal property was distributed more fairly at common law. Intestacy rules today provide for a more equitable distribution of real and personal property among family members.

³ See, *e.g.*, Job 2:13; Rom 5:3; 2 Thess 1:5; Jas 5:10; 1 Pet 5:9, 10. Most of these texts speak of suffering for the faith. But others speak of physical suffering.

⁴ A condition that often arises when a patient inhales food and liquids through the trachea (windpipe) into her lungs.

⁵ I think we should not use this term. If nothing else, it is disrespectful of the patient.

⁶ Definitions such as these (which I have summarized) are readily available online. So is much other information about medical conditions and medical ethics.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Thank you for publishing Dr. G.H. Visscher's clear and thorough exposition on the matter of women fully participating in the election of office bearers. I would like to make one more point, however.

The 2010 General Synod in Burlington decided that women's participation in the election of office bearers was matter of local regulation. Our Church Order in Article 31 states, "Whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order."

The 2013 Synod in Carman failed to prove that the 2010 decision of Burlington was in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order. Therefore, the 2013 decision need not be considered settled and binding at all. To do so is "lording it over the churches." To insist that churches now must prove the 2013 decision "to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order" is disingenuous.

John van Popta



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.



Grassie Church Welcomes Rev. R.J. den Hollander and Family

Installation sermon, Sunday, June 1

Choosing 2 Corinthians 4:7 as the sermon text, Rev. W. den Hollander leads us in the installation service. Just as treasures were once stored in jars of clay for safe-keeping, so these jars of clay can also serve as an image for who we are and how we too can store the treasure of the gospel: the knowledge of the glory of God. He has entrusted the gospel to us as jars of clay and we – as minister, elders, deacons, and also as congregation – are called to keep, preserve, and show this treasure to whomever God puts on our path. Like the Apostle Paul we too are weak, brittle, and sinful beings. However, upon further examination into Paul’s ministry we are encouraged that although Paul was not a strong and powerful man and although his preaching was not sensational, it was with assurance that God chose Paul (Acts 9:15). Paul was a chosen instrument through whom God wanted to manifest his own power and glory, and so we too must seek and desire one thing: mainly to be useful and fruitful instruments in Jesus Christ.

Just as ministers are also instruments of God in keeping the treasure, so Rev. R.J. den Hollander has been entrusted to guide this church. Indeed, God has entrusted the gospel to us, both individually and collectively, that we might use it fruitfully. Most importantly, Rev. W. den Hollander reminds us that ultimately it is not really about the communion of saints or about our new minister, but it is about Jesus Christ and the knowledge that God has entrusted the gospel to us as “jars of clay.” We are encouraged to pray: “Lord: Mould me and form me, for you know the way I should be and the treasure you have placed within me.”



Presentation to Rev. R.J. den Hollander

Following a two-year vacancy at Covenant Church, Br. Mark VanAniel officially welcomed Rev. R.J. den Hollander on behalf of Council and Covenant Church. And after Rev. den Hollander signed the paperwork, Br. VanAniel, tongue in cheek, alluded to the “ten year contract” fine print on the bottom! Rev. R.J. denHollander was also welcomed by Br. Jonker of Smithville who presented the Devotional “Unseen Footprints” by Rev. P. Feenstra. Apparently having his work “cut out for him,” Br. Chuck Slaa presented Rev. den Hollander with a complete set of Niagara church keys, colour-coded no less. Br. Van Zanten from Springcreek Church as well as Br. VanderMeulen from Adoration URC each offered a welcome and a blessing over Rev. den Hollander’s new ministry here at Covenant, and that together we might grow in love and service.



Grassie Women's Homemakers Orchestra

Inaugural sermon on Pentecost Sunday, Sunday, June 8

After reading from 1 Corinthians 2, Rev. R. J. den Hollander points out that today is a “doubly” special Sunday. It is special of course because Covenant Church is together now as pastor and congregation on this Inaugural Sunday, but it is also more importantly the day of Pentecost.

Although some people may like to think they can read into other peoples’ minds, it is true that only the Spirit within us truly knows our thoughts, secrets, and hidden things. Rev. den Hollander creates an analogy that we also cannot fully understand the depth and thoughts of God; instead, we need the power of the Holy Spirit to fully understand the secret and hidden wisdom of God. And just as the disciples on Pentecost so we too have received the Spirit who is sent so graciously to us from God. The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit and so we receive the power of the Spirit as both individual believer (1 Cor 6:19) and as church (1 Cor 3:16) – what a comforting and marvelous thing!

Rev. den Hollander encourages us to strive to go from reading and studying the Bible to knowing its contents to acting and obeying on the Word. Our understanding should have an impact on us both when we read the Bible and when we live according to it. Indeed in Christ crucified we find the very heart of the gospel – God offered his Son as a living sacrifice to save us from the wrath and curse of God. In Christ crucified we have the comfort that God will so graciously give us all things.

Rev. den Hollander encourages us to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts when we hear the message of God and that our hearts may be filled with that which God has freely given us. The Lord certainly continues to provide by giving pastors and teachers who

speak the message of the Spirit – and through all of this we have every reason to join together in thanksgiving and praise to God our Father in Heaven!

Welcome evening for Rev. Rolf and Liz den Hollander and boys

On Saturday, June 14, Covenant Church enjoyed a time of fantastic food and fun fellowship as we welcomed Rev. Rolf, Liz, Jakob, and Micah to Grassie! Br. Peter Feenstra officially opened our Welcome Evening with reading and prayer, after which the congregation sang from Hymn 44:1, 2, and 3. The JCS classes from Kindergarten to Grade 4 presented the den Hollanders with a fun selection of songs. A stringed mini-concert from Liam and Reuben Feenstra and Kristen DeBoer was enjoyed. The Grassie women challenged the den Hollanders with a game of “Welcome Wheel.” With Liz avoiding much more “lose a turn” and “bankrupt” spins than Rev. Rolf, she came out as victor and solved the puzzle as “Jack in the Pulpit Exchange.” The Grassie men sang Psalm 25 (which coincidentally was Rev. den Hollander’s sermon text the following morning!), as well as including the church in singing *Great is Thy Faithfulness*. The Young Peoples’ Society presented the different societies and study groups in our church. Rebecca Vis and Laurisa Ravensbergen presented a beautiful vocal duet. The Grassie Homemakers’ Orchestra surprised us all with their creative orchestra of various “around the house” instruments like watering can trumpets, plunger clarinets, and even an ironing board piano! Council presented Rev. Rolf and Liz with a new BBQ as well as a beautiful variety of plants and flowers for their new garden. In closing, we sang together Psalm 150:1, 2, and 3. C



Singing from the JCS students

Project Eagle's Nest: Building on our Heritage



Christian schools are one of the greatest blessings that we as Reformed Christians can enjoy. Parents who send their children to a Christian school can be confident that they are being well-prepared not just academically but, more importantly, spiritually for a life of service to God's glory. For the past twenty-five years, the Lord has blessed the growing church communities in Elora, Fergus, Grand Valley, Guelph, Listowel, Orangeville, and Owen Sound with a Reformed high school in Emmanuel Christian High School (ECHS). As the only Reformed high school in the area, students travel distances of sometimes more than 100 km to ECHS for sound Reformed education.

Since ECHS began, it has shared a building with Maranatha Christian School (MCS), the Canadian Reformed elementary school in Fergus. When the school building was built over twenty-five years ago, the rooms were spacious and the halls were wide. But twenty-five years have passed, and the Lord has blessed the local church communities with much growth. Classes are packed to capacity and there is almost as much square footage in portables as there is in classrooms within the building! With each class change the ECHS hallways become jammed with over 175 growing, lively teenaged students, jockeying for a gap in the crowd. Lockers line every available wall space and every closet, nook, and cranny is being used. The demand for the computer lab, library, and gym brings constant tension due to the high demand for these facilities. It has also been difficult for the staff to work effectively since they too share what little office space there is. The Lord has given ECHS staff and students much patience to daily cope with these crowded conditions, but the time had come to do something.

In September 2012 the ECHS board identified an opportunity to purchase the property at 680 Tower Street, the historic home of the Fergus public high school from 1928 until 2004. The board felt this property would be well-suited for the needs of ECHS, and so negotiations with the property owner began and continued until the ECHS membership gave final approval to purchase on April 16, 2014.

Staff, students, and the church community are looking forward to moving into the newly renovated building. Henk Nobel, principal of ECHS, is excited about the fresh new learning environment. "It can, surely, only be a good thing if staff and students have room to breathe deeply, use the expanded facilities and dedicate themselves to offering the best educational package that ECHS can offer to their students," says Nobel. "It is widely accepted that better environments motivate people to work better. What a wonderful place for staff to dedicate themselves to presenting to students a scriptural worldview in all areas of the curriculum, to the praise of his glory!"

The building project has been coined "Project Eagle's Nest: Building on our Heritage." The eagle has long been considered a symbol of wisdom, courage, and strength. Eagles fly high in the sky, soaring above everything else. These are all traits that ECHS hopes to instill in their students, encouraging them to dare to soar to new heights. "Heritage" is defined as something that gives evidence of the past, something so important that it is absolutely essential to preserve it for future generations. As a community of Reformed believers we consider passing on their Christian heritage so important that it is worth the time, effort, and financial cost involved to ensure that their children have a place to learn from a faith-based perspective.



“To us, this is not a luxury, but a calling,” says Clarence VanRaalte, whose granddaughter currently attends ECHS and who has many grandchildren who will be future students of the school. “Being reminded of what God speaks to us in Psalm 78: 5-7 about ‘telling the next generation,’ we are very thankful that the covenant-based education of our grandchildren in grades 9-12 will be able to continue in the new facilities.”

The building on Tower Street is located on a slight rise overlooking the highway. The stunning stone historic building is a key landmark in the community. “We can be a light on the hill, quite literally as the new school building is on top of the hill in Fergus,” says Randy Sipes, who currently attends ECHS.

The Capital Campaign for Project Eagle’s Nest has an ambitious but achievable goal: raise \$4,764,000 before the doors open at 680 Tower Street in September 2016. This goal is ambitious because \$4,764,000 is a lot of money, especially because independent schools in Ontario don’t receive government funding. This goal is achievable because our covenant God and Father proves faithful time and time again. We trust that all things will be provided so that ECHS will be able to spread its wings in its new environment in 2016, and continue to grow as a vibrant and faithful Christian high school.

For more information about Project Eagle’s Nest please visit www.projectnest.ca or follow us on Facebook at Project Eagle’s Nest.



On the Far Side of the World

Bit by bit the memories start to fade. Having eased my way back into the organized chaos of western life and fallen back into the rhythm of work and sleep, my memories of the time I spent on the far side of the world are slowly beginning to fade. What was initially crisp reality has begun to blur and all that is left are the contacts that I made, the pictures I took, and above all, the lessons I learned.

I am not simply writing of a mission tour, travelling to a foreign country to build something, nor am I writing about a vacation. Rather, I am writing about a relatively new initiative put forward by the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. This is a new part of the program, called the mission internship.

Much like our summer long preaching internship, the students are sent out and paired up with an experienced minister or missionary, but with the added twist of having to get involved in mission work. It is a part of the program which has been around for a few years, but this is the first time a larger portion of the students have gone further afield. In previous years, students didn't go beyond the western hemisphere, but that is changing. Students not only went to mission projects in the Niagara Peninsula and Prince George, BC, but also the United States, Brazil, Papua New Guinea, and, in my case, Indonesia.

"Why Indonesia?" you might ask. For me, this was a personal decision. Since I was one of the students who didn't have a family to support, I was encouraged to go to a foreign mission field. Not only did I see some need in Indonesia, but I also had some contacts through my Dad in the form of former students of his, namely, Rev. Edwer Dethan on Timor, Rev. Pila Njuka on Sumba, and Rev. Yonson Dethan on Java. Each of these three men were former students of my father and also studied in Hamilton at our Seminary. But that was not the only reason. I myself was born in Indonesia during my father's time there, so essentially I was also able to go back to

my roots. With the help of some extremely generous financial support (this program is not yet supported financially by the churches), I was able to make this decision a reality.

The Lord richly blessed my time in Indonesia. I was able to teach many people, students, and congregation members alike. Due to the nature of the three islands, I was able to get quite a varied taste of mission work, in a poor setting, in a relatively wealthy setting, through forested regions and in areas that were mostly grasslands, among those living in cities and those in the interior who were cut off from civilization when the rains washed out the roads. And all the while I was able to share the good news of the gospel. It was only one hectic month, but the amount that the Lord let me partake in the work going on in these various regions was staggering.

While I was there, I kept a record of my thoughts and experiences for the benefit of family and friends. Here are a few small excerpts from my trip.

Wednesday, 11/06/2014

What an extended weekend it's been! I've spent the last number of days travelling up and down mountains on the back seat of a motorbike, stopping by small cities and tiny rural villages. It's been amazing!

The mission post that we visited was tucked away in the mountains in a very poor community called Billa. From Kupang to Billa is about four hours by motorbike. I'm thankful we went by motorbike, because by Jeep the trip would have been much, much longer.

The main point of my journey to this village was to teach a catechism lesson and to do some house to house evangelism. We started off the day with a breakfast of rice and vegetables, a bath in the river a few kilometres from where we were staying, and then headed off to church.



The congregation of Billa

Church started at 9:00 Indonesian time, so when we entered the church at 9:30, it was apparently no surprise to see no one there yet. However, they began trickling in when they heard the minister had arrived. There we had a regular service: sang, read the law, sang, listened to Yanto (one of the two evangelists who accompanied me) preach a sermon in Indonesian and Timorese, sang, and finished. After a fifteen minute break we returned for the catechism lesson I gave on Lord's Day 12. Since it wasn't a regular service I didn't need preaching consent to deliver the lesson. I hadn't expected it to be necessary for my fifteen minute catechism lesson to be translated into two languages, so I cringed a little after it turned out to be an hour long. However, it was apparently very much appreciated (even though they had no questions for question period) and they wished me the Lord's blessings in my continued studies. Monday evening we left the mountains and headed for a small city in the foothills called Soe, to spend some time with Viktor's family.

Monday, 23/06/2014

Well, that didn't quite go as planned ... I had expected two young men for this evening. They had approached me after church yesterday to see if I would be willing to teach them more on having a closer walk with God. Since they had a deep appreciation for what I had taught from the catechism, I decided to teach them this subject with the aid of the Heidelberg Catechism's reflection on the purpose of prayer. Because of various other things happening, I unfortunately ended up coming late with only about fifteen minutes to work with. Sure enough,

they were waiting for me ... all eleven of them! Overnight the group of two young men had grown to about eleven students! They were all patiently sitting on my front step waiting for me, guys and girls. The eagerness to learn, the thirst for the gospel that they expressed and the passion which they showed struck a deep chord with me.

(After I left, these students scattered across Indonesia for the summer, bearing with them the good news of the gospel - some of them taking it to places where it hadn't been properly preached for years!)

Tuesday, 24/06/2014

I had a discussion with Rev. Yonson today. Among other things, he talked about missions. Theoretically, every Canadian Reformed church should be able support at least a minister and one missionary. If this were to happen, there would be fifty missionaries available. Now consider the mission field in Indonesia for a moment: about 245 million people, most of whom do not know the good news of the gospel. This is huge. We're talking a population almost fifty-one times the size of the country of Singapore, or seven times the size of Canada. And the biggest problem here is education. So if every missionary was to educate a few young men, who in turn went out as missionaries and teachers in order to spread the gospel, growth would be explosive in Indonesia. Couple that with the fact that a lower level of education is needed to yet be highly effective, not much knowledge by Canadian Reformed standards is needed to make a big impact. It was an interesting concept to ponder.



Dinner with the Seminary students on Sumba



Conclusion

These excerpts are only a small taste of my total experience in Indonesia. I deluged my family with pages and pages of updates, far too many to be included in an article. I didn't include the class that eagerly questioned me for forty-five minutes after a forty-five minute lesson, the burdens that are felt by the churches there, the incursions by well-funded Muslim missionaries into Christian regions, the joys felt by the missionaries through the conversion of a single person or the training of an eager group of young students who will later scatter across the country, bearing the good news of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ with them. However, hopefully this gives you a taste of what God is accomplishing in Indonesia. He is moving powerfully there and we are only feeling the early rumblings. Once the schools already established start to reach their full potential and the Reformation starts to properly impact the myriads of lost who call themselves Christians there, then the change that has already begun will start sweeping the nation in earnest.

The experiences I was able to have and the lessons I learned also opened my eyes to the mission field at home. Much of the time we feel intimidated by the idea of showing Christ to our neighbours and we often feel that our lives are not up to par. The fear that our neighbours may find some hypocrisy in our lives, or may not want to learn, or may ask questions that we cannot answer, freezes us in place and prevents us from reaching out. However, I was led by one of the missionaries to this passage: "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ

not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have." For those in some situations in Indonesia, suffering could mean death. For us here, it means being embarrassed at worst. I have also been taught that evangelism can be fun! After all, who doesn't enjoy making friends? If our end goal is conversion, then it's a hopeless task, because it is the Holy Spirit who does the converting, not us. But if our end goal is to become a friend to our neighbour and show them the love of Christ, to have that love shining through in every aspect of our life and to strive to be holy and pleasing to God, then we have an attainable goal. Working to change our lives and our mindset is difficult, but we have been promised we will succeed if we work and pray. We have this as an attainable goal because we have a great Saviour and a Spirit who works this change in the depths of our hearts. And it is through seeing change in our lives, that we can lead others to seek the source of that change: the message of the gospel and the power of God!

Seeing the power of God at work and for one month being able to play a small part in it as an instrument chosen by him, I feel richly blessed. The privilege that I was given to see what was happening, to experience life on the mission field and to connect with brothers and sisters in Christ on the other side of the globe was a very special experience. I pray that he continues to bless the work there and I also pray that he will work in you, the reader, and me so that we can feel the courage to reach out to those around us and show his love to the world!





Bible at Home, Church & School: Familiarity Breeds . . . ?

A. Ben Harsevoort
Principal of
Heritage Christian School
in Jordan, Ontario

Sophie gets up at 6:45, and after a shower and time to fix her hair she stumbles down to breakfast. Mom has prepared hot oatmeal to fortify her for her school day. She eats it, and then reads the Bible and prays. She then takes the lengthy and noisy bus ride to school and in her classroom with her class she begins her school day with appropriate devotions, prayer, and Bible reading. The Bible is again taken out of her desk for Bible class, lunch devotions, and closing devotions at the end of the school day. After an equally noisy ride home Sophie joins her family for supper, talks about her day, and participates in their regular devotions of prayer and Bible reading. The passage is a little shorter this evening because its catechism night and the family is running a little late. A quick ride over to the church and catechism class begins with prayer and Bible reading. Sophie recites her catechism perfectly. She returns home, and after she has diligently done her homework, she is ready to retire for the evening. Her mother gently reminds her to do her personal devotions before bed – prayer and Bible reading.

It is a good and proper and quite normal thing that Sophie frequently uses her Bible. Surely that's the aim of every Christian household, school, and church. But how do we keep the use of Scripture fresh and inviting? How do we avoid the rote reactions that frequently accompany repeated practices?

I hope in this article to comment about use of Scripture in the home, church, and school. I hope to be able to arrive at some useful distinctions that will encourage and develop appropriate attitudes, responses, and commitments to the Word of God.

Use of the Bible in Christian schools

Let's first examine the use of Bible in the Christian school. The teaching of Bible is fundamental to any Christian day school. The Word of God provides the

cornerstone of our commitment. It gives us the perspective from which to direct our lives in the field of nurture and education. God's Word is truly "a lamp unto our feet."

God's Word is used in a variety of ways in our Christian schools. It is studied for content and knowledge; it is used for devotions and meditations; it also serves as the spiritual and philosophical guide for our school societies in all of their functions. While it is clear that the Word of God is central to the very concept of Christian education, it may be valuable to make some distinctions as to the Bible's specific use and application in the Christian day school setting. Immediately three contrasts can, and should, be made clear.

1. We can distinguish the teaching of Bible as a subject from the broad, general way in which the Bible functions as the foundational basis for the world and life view that directs the school's entire curriculum.
2. We can also distinguish the teaching of Bible in the Christian day school from the teaching of Bible in the church.
3. We can distinguish Bible teaching from the use of Bible devotional reading.

While these distinctions need not be seen as absolute, failure to deal with them at all creates problems.

Failure to make the first distinction could lead us into a type of intellectualism of the Scriptures, reducing the Bible's role to that of providing the key ideas that shape our world and life view. The Bible would simply be seen as a collection of wisdoms that direct our thinking. Instead, the Bible needs to be presented to the children as a complete story – the story of God's relationship to his people. The Bible is not a philosophical treatise of wisdom literature but a down-to-earth, warm, living, account of real people, in real situations, responding to a covenanting God who is not only *there*, but who is *there for us*.

The distinction between the church's teaching of Bible and the school's teaching of Bible is to be found principally in the distinction between the respective tasks of the church and the school. As John Bolt, former Professor of Theology at Redeemer College, puts it in his philosophy statement in the introduction to the revised Bible program from Christian Schools International:

The church's task is to proclaim the good news of salvation to the whole world, calling men, women and children to faith in Christ, worship and service. The school's task is to promote and equip students for Christian socio-cultural obedience. Thus a school, as such, does not do evangelism or conduct profession of faith classes; the church does. Similarly the church does not teach algebra or economics; the school does. . . . This means that while both the school and the church (in its educational ministry) teach the Bible, the focus and emphasis of each in its use of Scripture is different. In a phrase, the goal of the Christian community as a whole is that its sons and daughters come to Biblically informed commitment. The primary focus of the church is on realizing informed *commitment*; that of the school realizing *informed* commitment.

The third distinction is also an important one. The use of Scripture for devotions and meditation should not be an academic affair. Students should not be graded for it. Yet devotions are necessary in a Christian school in order to develop the spirituality intrinsic to biblical, Christian education and nurture.

How should the Bible be taught?

How then should Bible be taught as a subject in the Christian day school? Are there useful analogies in the teaching of other subjects?

For many of us the subject that might spring to mind would be history. Many will have heard of the phrase depicting the Bible as "His Story." Indeed there is a historical context to the teaching of Bible. The Bible is the history of the Kingdom of God and portrays the history of God's saving work for and through his covenant people. But, to treat the Bible as history does not do justice to the study of the poetical narrative of the psalms and the wisdom literature, to the personal letter quality

of some of Paul's works, to the teaching element of the parables, etc. Indeed even some of the more obviously historical books such as Genesis, Ruth, and Esther would be quite misunderstood if they were approached simply as history. Clearly the Bible exceeds the dimensions of a history course or narrative.

Perhaps the most helpful way to view the teaching of Bible in Christian schools is to treat it as a story – as literature. It is, after all, a book – inspired (God-breathed), sacred, authoritative, to be sure – but nevertheless a book. Literature. As Henry VanderGoot says in *Interpreting the Bible in Theology and the Church*:

As canon Scripture bears the greatest similarity to the narrative texts of literature. In Scripture there is a storyline, a range of scenes and acts through which, as ordered in a sequence, a thread has been woven. There is a motion from beginning to end. Moreover, there is in the overall story falling and rising action and the interaction of characters and circumstances through which identities are revealed. There is, in short, an unfolding drama about God's relationship to the world (p 69).

Viewing the Bible and teaching the Bible as literature is, to be sure, also not without its dangers. Literary analysis can become as detached an academic study as the historical approach can. Just think of the acclaimed book, *The Great Code*, in which the famous University of Toronto academic, Northrop Frye, looks at the Holy Scripture as a work of literature and completely misses the life-giving Truth.

Imagine trying to appreciate Shakespeare by reading only the most famous passages from his various plays without ever reading through one in its entirety

The key is not to teach the Bible as literature, but to teach the subject of Bible as one would teach reading or literature. Teach the Bible as a story that involves and engages the hearer/reader as all good stories do. In the early years and grades this will involve much being read to. As the child progresses and matures in his/her skills

more sophisticated literary analysis takes place both in literature and Bible class. This approach would enable us to see the Bible much more as a whole story rather than as a collection of proof texts or dogmatic propositions. When Christ explained the Kingdom of God to his hearers he did not issue a series of theological statements; he told stories/parables. Similarly, we must focus more and more on the literary nature of Scripture.

Devotional use of the Bible

In the home and the school, especially in the context of devotions, we may need to examine our practice of reading a few verses here and there. Are we losing the scope of the whole story by chopping it up into a few well-known and well-loved passages? Imagine trying to appreciate Shakespeare by reading only the most famous passages from his various plays without ever reading through one in its entirety. While you might gain an appreciation for his use of language here and there you would never gain an understanding of the relevance and of the social comment being made, of the overall plot,

*Read it as a story of our God,
of our mandate, of our history,
of our salvation, of our past, of our present,
of our future!*

character development, setting, etc. Does our devotional use of Bible in the home and community focus on the whole story? Do our children get involved as they would if you were reading a novel to them? Imagine how interested they would be in a novel if we only read one paragraph from the novel per day, followed by a page of explanation about the novel, by some expert.

Obviously I'm not suggesting that we read through the entire Scriptures at one sitting. We don't do that with Tolkien or C.S. Lewis either. I am suggesting that we regard the Scriptures much more as a narrative – as a whole – as a story of an almighty God and of his relationship to his people. I'm suggesting that we read it as a story of *our* God, of *our* mandate, of *our* history, of *our* salvation, of *our* past, of *our* present, of *our* future!

The wonderful thing about this story is that we are part and parcel of it! It is the story of our responses, both positive and negative. It is the story that was first passed on from generation to generation in story form – orally. Fathers told it to their children as they walked by the way (Deut 6). Psalms adjured faithful fathers to tell their children about the faithfulness of the Lord (Ps 78). It's a tradition we need to continue.

Conclusion

The Book needs to become an intrinsic part of our family and community life, told naturally, as a father or mother tells to a child. It is to become a favourite story. And with each segment the child will come face to face with a covenanting God who loves him and who has saved him through Jesus Christ.

Conventional wisdom is that familiarity breeds contempt. But the beauty of familiarity with the Bible, for Sophie, and for all of us, is that familiarity breeds. . . faith!





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Once again: May the Ladies Vote?

While I seem to have unleashed some rather negative press in response to my recent series on this topic, I am thankful for the exchange. What is not shown here, of course, is the large number of positive responses that I received personally, both oral and written. With respect to those who have disagreed on the pages of *Clarion*, space will not allow me to answer every comment and every sentence. Instead I will attempt to respond to what I consider to be the more substantial lines of argumentation. If readers are left at the end of this article with the feeling that I have not answered some of what has appeared, I would urge them to read once again the three articles that were published earlier.

The order of the church

First of all, there is an article by my dear brother and brother-in-law suggesting that voting is an act in which the male members are governing. In response to that, I would like to refer to what Articles 30 to 32 of the Belgic Confession say, namely, that Jesus Christ is the only head of the church and that he rules the church through the officebearers. While it is true that Article 31 refers to “a lawful election of the church,” to consider to this election as governing is to make the articles of our confession contradict themselves. There are two extremes that the confessions want to avoid: hierarchy, in which the church is run by one person, and democracy (or congregationalism), in which the church is run by everybody.

The confession says: a Reformed church is run by Jesus Christ through the officebearers. Now, to be sure, to do that, the officebearers are free to consult with anyone before making their decisions. They can ask the administration committee, the treasurer, or the caretaker, about input before making some decisions. Or they can seek input from the whole congregation before making a decision – and that’s what they usually do before appointing officebearers. I say “usually” because their authority is such that in a Reformed church it’s even possible for them to simply appoint elders and deacons without calling for an election (CO, Art 3).

A different example: if the council decides to ask the administration committee whether the parking lot should be paved or receive a fresh load of gravel and commits itself to doing whatever the administration committee recommends, does that mean that now the administration committee “governs”? Of course not. It’s just providing the input that council asked for so that the council can make its decision.

So if Br. Kampen wants to maintain that voting is governing and if a general synod wants to maintain that the congregation makes “decisions” in that way, I believe the confessions have an issue. All the congregation is asked to do is provide the input that the council feels it needs to make its decision. Principles from politics, school societies, and business are irrelevant because the church is run in a unique way from out of its heavenly headquarters.

Br. Kampen also says that “consistories do not typically have a (regular) formal meeting sometime after the election.” I beg to differ. Councils must and do follow up the election by asking whether the persons thus elected can be appointed. That decision can take one minute or it can take hours. It can even be informal when matters are clear, but it is an act wherein the council affirms that nothing untoward has arisen in the meantime about the elected brothers and there is nothing stopping them from doing what they said they would do from the outset, namely, appoint any of the brothers whom the congregation preferred. Most recently, I heard of a council that, at such a moment, was informed that the one elected brother would most definitely decline the appointment because of the health of his wife; the consistory then decided to appoint the next brother without asking for a new vote by the congregation. Those kinds of things happen more often, I am sure, and are quite appropriate given the consistory’s authority.

The words of Synod Smithville 1980 are to the point: “If voting can indeed be considered comparable to governing, we have in essence a Fifth Assembly in the Church, namely the meeting of the eligible voters which ‘in a sense’ governs

the Church or at least is involved in the governing process of the Church. This ‘form’ of democratic rule is basically strange to the stipulations of Article 22, Church Order. It must be noted that participation in an election does not necessarily mean partaking in the government itself.”¹ And I would add: such a form of “democratic rule” is really quite contrary to Articles 30–32 of the Belgic Confession. Simply put, if voting is governing, even male members who are not officebearers should not be voting because the only people Christ uses to govern the church are those he calls to serve in office.

Br. G. Nordeman suggests here that a consistory listening to the congregation’s vote is quite like a consistory agreeing to abide by the decision of a broader assembly. I’d rather say with Smithville 1980 that these two are most certainly different because the one is a legitimate assembly of the church and the other is not. Nor is the reference to Church Order Article 5 helpful, as all the classis is simply attempting to ascertain is that the called minister is not being foisted upon the congregation against its will. Congregations cannot call ministers or elect officebearers independently of councils; a council makes those decisions.

Let me reiterate for a moment what I wrote in the first article: “At bottom, I believe that we need to be more aware of the fact that *every step in the voting process is part of a decision process that is initiated, governed, and completed by the consistory.*” Three of the brothers suggest that I am creating false dilemmas but none specify what those dilemmas are. In my view, the Reformed position I have put forth is precisely the one which avoids the two undesirable poles (dilemmas?) of hierarchy and congregationalism: *every bit of the process is governed by the officebearers who receive as much input from the congregation as they desire.* It’s very arbitrary, in my judgement, to say then that the female members can be involved in some aspects of this process but *must* be excluded from one at all costs. Why not object then to women raising objections – after all, her one voice has more potential consequence than her one vote!

As to Br. Kampen’s insistence that Synod Carman was right when it suggested that hereafter churches should approach classes and regional synods before coming again to a general synod with this matter that supposedly belongs to the churches in common, his reference to Article 62 of Synod Burlington 2010 refutes rather than supports his view. That article, after discussing two approaches to Article 30, actually adds to the Guidelines of General Synod: “For all matters of the churches in common, individual churches may address proposals or other significant submissions directly to general synod. . . .”

Did Carman strike out that addition to the guidelines? Or just ignore it? My objection stands.

Br. Janssen raises the often raised concern that if a woman votes, she might cancel out the vote of her husband. Rather odd, though, that no one ever seems to use this as an objection to young men voting; after all they might cancel out the vote of their father to whom they are to be subject. But what does it mean for a son to be subject to his father, or for a woman to be subject to her husband? That they can never have an opinion, make a decision, or cast a vote that the father or husband does not agree with? Where is the scriptural support for such a view of headship or fatherhood? Brother Janssen also oversimplifies the role of men and women when he refers to women as “keepers of the home” and men as “keepers of the church.” Is the head of the home not the real keeper of the home? And are there not moments when the input of both parties is required in the life of the home as well as the life of the church?

The Scriptures

The series of articles that I wrote ended with a challenge for anyone to prove from Scripture that it is wrong for women to vote in the church context. The only ones who answered that on the pages of *Clarion* are the Rev. J. Ludwig and Br. Gerard Nordeman who dispute my exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11 and maintain that there is such a thing as a “general headship of man.” Admittedly, I based much of what I wrote there on material that I had presented at the CRTS conference with our colleagues from Kampen. Before the end of the year, the complete text of this and the other papers should appear in print. To summarize, the passages about women in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 have long been in dispute and difficult to interpret. And more often it happens that the meaning of a difficult text becomes clearer to us when we gain some of the background information which the first readers would have had available. The difficulty is that we either don’t know enough about the original context or wrongly project aspects of our own culture on the ancient one. Thus, I have often said to students that the two most significant keys to understanding a passage are context and background.

A case in point is 1 Corinthians 15:29 – what does Paul mean when he talks about “baptism for the dead”? We’ll probably never know until we get more background information from somewhere. This is not liberal methodology; contrary to what Br. Nordeman writes, done rightly, it is a faithful Reformed hermeneutical approach. Well, in the talk about 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2, I referenced the

work of Bruce W. Winter and others who since 2000 have shown from plenty of Greco-Roman evidence that the veil Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 11 is the wedding veil. A married woman was expected to distinguish herself from immodest, adulterous women, even prostitutes, by being veiled, especially in worship. This is actually why Paul also says in 11:6 that a woman who will not be veiled in worship should have her head shaved, like the prostitutes. If she's going to act like a woman who is not faithful in marriage, she should also look like one! The fact that married women are in view is also apparent in 1 Corinthians 14:35 where Paul says that such women should "ask their own husbands at home."

In my view, the exegesis that maintains that the women Paul speaks about are married women makes the best sense of these texts. Paul's point is not that women must wear a head-covering but that wives throughout the generations must be respectful of their husbands and wearing such a veil is a significant way women showed such respect in that culture. It is infelicitous of Rev. Ludwig to simply say that there is not enough evidence when Winter and others provide a mountain of evidence; and it is wrong to dismiss material that has surfaced since 2000 by quoting a 1995 book which says it's not there. It is, and we do well to explore this mine further if we want to really understand better what the Apostle Paul is saying about women.

Br. Nordeman is afraid that if we listen to ancient historians every generation will need to re-evaluate our understanding of Scripture. And I wonder: what's the problem with that? Isn't that why we have a seminary and teach every new generation how to not just parrot the words of the previous one but learn afresh the meaning of Scripture? While we surely don't want to have to re-evaluate everything in every successive generation, should we not be open to new understanding of passages of Scripture, especially the more difficult ones?

As to the phrase in 1 Corinthians 11:3 "the man is the head of the woman," Rev. Ludwig is correct when he refers to my slip-up with respect to the placement of the definite article – it is before the word "man," as I did write correctly in the very next sentence. My point still stands, however: "genus, class, or kind is not the issue at all." I refer my colleagues to the grammar textbook that I referenced in the original article – a delightful resource that was not available to either of us or to Prof. Selles in our earlier seminary days.

As to what Rev. Ludwig says in his sections a and b, let me assert that of course the word "man" has to be trans-

lated as such rather than as husbands because Paul is asserting that the head of every male Christian human being is Christ, but a translation such as the ESV that he cites can still translate "woman" as "wife" if it so chooses because here Paul is not talking about the relation between the woman and Christ but the relation between the woman and her husband. Therefore what he says in point c does not hold either, and d does not disprove my point. Contrary to what my brother asserts, even without pronouns, and even if you choose never to translate the word as "wife," given what we know today, the passage is best understood when the woman who is to be subject to the man is understood as the man's wife.

Thus, I also reject the notion that 1 Corinthians 11:3 is teaching some "general comprehensive headship of man" that applies to all women and all society. To assert such things we surely need more clear teaching of Scripture beyond this complex reasoning of my brother. Simply quoting a liberal commentator does not prove the point either. Besides, what would this look like? If I am the head of other women besides my wife, someone better tell me who they are so that I can exercise my authority over them. And if the widows and singles are subject to men, we better identify who exactly such males are so these sisters can be subject to them. A young woman needs to be subject to her father, no doubt, just like a young man. And a woman must be subject to her officebearers and all other authorities in her life, just as every Christian man must. And a married woman commits to being subject to her husband as head, and her husband commits to being her head as Christ is head over his church. Granted, women have different roles in the church but that is not all due to the fact that every woman has a head somewhere. To assert that a single woman somewhere has a head to which she must be subject, and that men have women who are to be subject to them as heads outside the marriage relationship, brother, you need a whole lot more scriptural evidence to support such a view. Even what you are presenting does not hold up. The myth that is busted is the myth of the "comprehensive headship of man."

There was also one colleague who wrote to me personally and prefers to remain anonymous. He wrote: "I agree with you that voting is advising and not governing, that there is no general headship of any man over any woman, and that the church assemblies are deliberative bodies which should not merely count the number of churches for or against a matter." But then he also wrote:

My hurdle, however, is what I might call the "the pattern of Scripture." The minority report at Synod

Burlington 2010, which argued against women voting, mentioned various OT texts which show (or seem to show) that the men in Israel put forward others when people had to be chosen for a certain task or position (section 3.1.1). My question is: Should this pattern still be instructive for us, say, in the matter of voting for office-bearers?

Another hurdle I have is how the event of Pentecost should be brought into the matter of women voting. In the majority report which served at Synod Burlington 2010, which argued in favour of women voting, Pentecost figured prominently (section 2.2.3 and section 2.2.5), as did Gal 3:28 (section 2.2.3 and section 2.2.5). My question is: Is it correct to bring Pentecost into the matter of women voting when Scripture itself doesn't make an explicit connection?

In response to the first question, I would suggest that while the OT is certainly more male-directed, the only way this can be viewed as normative in the NT is if this pattern is repeated in the NT and shown to be prescriptive. But as illustrated in the texts that were discussed in the previous series, we have difficulty finding anything in the NT that closely resembles our act of voting and therefore also difficulty finding anything that is prescriptive for us on this point. The NT shows congregational involvement but not necessarily male only involvement. In that respect, regarding the second question, the majority report is on track when it shows that a shift happens in this regard, as alluded to in Acts 2 and Galatians 3:28, even if the connection on the point of voting is only implicit.

Conclusion

Let me reiterate in light of the letters from Marvin Vreugdenhil and Roelf Kars Janssen that I am not interested in pushing the feminist agenda. In a forthcoming volume, I will show from 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 why women should not be officebearers. But what concerns me, and concerns me deeply as a man who has pledged more than once to be faithful to Scriptures, confession, and the church order, is that Synod Carman has made a decision which claims to be faithful to all three but is based on argumentation that in my judgement has no scriptural support and is contrary to both our confessions and our church order.

If Synod Carman had denied women the right to vote on the basis of solid scriptural and Reformed argumentation, I would never have picked up the pen. But Synod did not do it because it cannot be done. And nothing of what has been written in response to what I wrote has convinced me otherwise.

I have also written about the matter because some people urged me to do so, thinking that the NT professor might make a contribution on a subject that has not been resolved even after a forty year discussion.

As a federation, we are sometimes called to judge whether other federations are faithful to Scripture. But when we, without proper scriptural support, decide to exclude fifty percent of our adults from giving input to councils, what is guiding us? If it's not Scripture, it must be some tradition or culture of our own making. We just might be guilty of that which we accuse others.

Besides, if we are consequent about a view that says that the Bible forbids women to vote, we must be prepared to expel from our federational relationships all other federations who allow such a grievous error. Are we prepared to do that?

Br. Nordeman has complained that leaving the matter of women voting in the freedom of the churches will only serve more polarization of the churches. My fear is exactly the opposite; forbidding it will lead to more tension and polarization. If one church wishes to allow women to vote, why should they be prevented from doing so because other churches prefer not to – especially when such churches have not provided solid grounds for forbidding it? The URCNA has long left it in the freedom of their churches; where's the polarization? Synod Burlington 2010 chose the wiser course.

At bottom, perhaps the concern is historical. Seventy years ago we separated from a federation because a synod wanted to bind us to mere human opinion. We used to call that "synodical." Churches that remember and appreciate that history will readily and gladly recognize that if it's not against Scripture, confession, or church order, a synod only has one option: leave it to the real decision makers in the church – the ministers, elders, and deacons through whom Christ governs his church.

¹ *Synod Smithville 1980* (Art 83, Cons 3, p 57). Cf Van Oene: "The assertion that taking part in elections is an act of governing is definitely incorrect. The consistory gives the congregation the opportunity to advise the consistory by means of an election, but ultimately the consistory is not bound by this advice, although it must have very good and compelling reasons to deviate from it. It is the congregation that elects; it is the consistory with the deacons that appoints and calls. Advising is still not the same as governing" *With Common Consent*, p 16, 19.





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Q

Is it correct to say that we were created to do God's will?
Does walking on water give an application of this idea?

A

When God created us "good and in his image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness," (LD 3; Eph 4:24) he indeed did so that we might obey him and serve according to his will.

We can conclude this, for instance, from the fact that he gave man the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Also after man's fall into sin God maintains this command, "for God so created man that he was able to do it" (LD 4). Hence, also in his work of recreation he restores us in his image, as Paul indicates in Ephesians 4:24, and doing so by renewing us in the image of Christ through his Holy Spirit. It was Christ's food and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father.

In the second part the question refers to the event described in Matthew 14:22-36, particularly verse 29. At the beginning of this account we are reminded of Christ's practice of praying to his heavenly Father. As at other occasions, this too was for the purpose of coming to know the will of his Father in Heaven, in order that he might do his will (cf. his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane). At the same time, these occasions depict as well the intimate interaction of the Son with the Father! Indeed, we see the Son in his divine power and majesty manifesting himself as the Son of God to whom the Father would give all power and authority in heaven and on earth, as well as showing us the second Adam to whom the Father subjects all things! When the disciples see him coming, they hear him say, "It is I," or "I AM," the LORD and Redeemer of his people, true God who treads on the waves of the sea (Job 9:8). He also shows himself the Saviour of his people who will govern over all things, and who has promised that those who believe in him will share in this when their kingship is restored on the new earth.

It's of this latter manifestation that we receive a glimpse in Peter's walking on water. Christ the Saviour walks on water and thereby prophecies of his victory over all powers of sin and evil (also those that affected nature: the elements, the storm!). Peter, who has seen Christ in his royal power when he healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out the demons, and who was able to share in these powers (Matt 10, Luke 10), also at this occasion wants to share in his power and asks Jesus to command Peter to come to him. This is what the Lord Jesus does: He commands Peter, saying "Come," and Peter, obediently and in faith, came and walked on the water! A sure sign that Christ's coming to save his people and restore them to their Paradise position will be fulfilled! As long as Peter believed, he was able to walk on water indeed! By faith he obeyed his will! Indeed, this is an application of God's purpose in creating us to do his will.

Having said that, however, we should realize that we will never be in such a position as Peter was in! We should not think, either, that we are called and restored here and now already to show our true faith and "walk on water" as well. We may learn from this event though that in the renewal of our life by faith in Christ, we may share in the powers of Christ's kingship by which, as true Christians, we rule our life by his Word and Spirit, overcome sin and evil in our life, and live in obedience to God's will again. Yet, since the holiest have only a small beginning of the new obedience, it should make us seek our Saviour in faith and prayer, for without him "we cannot walk on water," figuratively and spiritually speaking!

*Is there something you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for?*

Ask us a question!

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