



Clarion

**What
are we
reading?**

INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS

CHURCH SNAPSHOT

CLARION KIDS



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Are We On the Same Page?

Reading material stimulates reflection and conversation

It would seem that, as Canadian Reformed people, it can be said that we are on the same page; that is, we are working on a common basis, sharing many underlying assumptions, and having many similar practices. After all, we are a confessional church. Our common understanding of the Scriptures is clearly expressed in the Three Forms of Unity. We are confident that we can visit any other congregation in the federation and we will have a predictable form of worship, be able to sing from the same *Book of Praise*, and hear sound Reformed sermons. To be sure, there will be some variations that might throw us off somewhat, as one church may have the minister read the creed, another have the congregation recite it or sing it, and congregations will have some variations in the Bible translation they use and who says the amens, but the core elements are the same.

How is it, however, when it comes to what we read for personal edification when we get home on Sunday or throughout the week? How is it when it comes to the material we use for group Bible study or books dealing with a variety of topics? There is an abundance of material available, both in print and online. I will limit myself to print material. In terms of magazines, beside the *Clarion* magazine, there is *Reformed Perspective*. There are many study guides on Bible books published by the *Interleague Publication Board*, as well as via publishers like *Premier* or self-publishing efforts. There is also an increasing body of literature by Canadian Reformed ministers on a wide variety of topics. Can it be said that we are on the same page as Canadian Reformed people when it comes to what we read? While I am not privy to the circulation numbers of *Reformed Perspective*, I do know those of *Clarion*. I would dare say that when it comes to reading Reformed magazines, we are not on the same page.

Further, I fear that this lack of being on the same page is noticeable especially across the generations. Grandparents are not reading the same things as their children and grandchildren.

Why it is important

Why is it important to be on the same page when it comes to what we read? To be sure, the sermons, as God's appointed means of grace, form the backbone of our spiritual food and reach all the members of the congregation. However, there is need for further edification and instruction about the issues of the day and the many challenges we encounter as we seek to live as God's children in this world. It is important that our reading material is consistent with what we hear on Sundays. One can well understand that if someone supplements the spiritual food received on Sunday with reading material that comes from many different backgrounds, perhaps infused with subtle Arminian theology or written from a baptistic slant, there is going to come a disconnect in one's spiritual development and, before you know it, they show withdrawal symptoms.

Another reason as to why reading from the same page is important is that we put ourselves in a position to have meaningful discussions about the issues of the day when we visit family and friends in our own congregation, as well as in other congregations. It is possible to discuss highlights of recent sermons, but if we belong to different congregations, we hear different sermons. Knowing that others read the same material as we do, however, makes it possible to visit relatives across the country and have a common starting point for a conversation. Reading material stimulates reflection and conversation.

Protests

It is not hard to imagine the objections that may arise to the suggestion that we should be on the same page, and then, especially, on the same Reformed page. For example, is there not much good material produced by those who don't belong to the Canadian Reformed Churches? Shouldn't we try to be more broadminded and read what they have to say? It might even be thought, if not expressed, that many of the Canadian Reformed authors don't hold a candle to the many others in terms of quality. Further, coming back to the generational aspect, surely, you don't expect the younger generation to read the same material their grandparents do.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

In his editorial Eric Kampen asks, What do we read? Are we reading the same things as others in our federation? How does what we choose to read affect our outlooks and discussions?

Perhaps flowing from that discussion, Rev. Kampen's daughter, Emily Nijenhuis, has begun a new column for our magazine: *Clarion Kids!* It is our hope that the simple lessons and activities this column provides for our youngest readers may lead them down a life long journey of reading our magazine.

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam begins the first of two articles on multiculturalism as well as his column, Clippings on Politics and Religion.

In federational news we bring readers an article on the ordination of Rev. Rick Vanderhorst and a Church Snapshot of Carman West. There is also the Education Matters column, a letter to the editor and a Good Friday meditation.

Laura Veenendaal

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I readily admit there is much worthwhile material available. The point is not to discourage anyone from reading widely, although this must be done with proper discernment. A basic starting point would be the check up on the author's theological orientation before consuming what he has written. None is without bias, but it is important to know the author's bias before you start. It is demanded of ministers in the Reformed churches that they are biased to the Reformed faith. We insist on it when it comes to the pulpit. It would be contradictory to throw this out the window when we crack open a book or pick up a magazine.

In all this diversity of reading, however, one should not neglect what is written by those with whom we share a close bond of faith. Wide reading, while neglecting the material produced especially for the community of which one is a member, makes one prone to become disconnected from that community. After a while, one will not even feel on the same page with the members of the community. It is even possible that there will grow a sense of disdain for those who do not read as widely and an inability to communicate because one is not on the same page.

Getting more on the same page

Now I recognize that this editorial most likely will not reach the eyes of those I would like to reach. Those who are faithful readers of *Clarion* will already be on the same page. So, what is the purpose of writing this editorial? After all, up to this point, it is like preaching to the converted.

The purpose is, dear reader, to get you thinking about what you can do to get more fellow church members on the same page. I recognize that this may begin to come across as a not so subtle subscription drive for *Clarion*. There is no need to deny the hope that it will lead to more subscribers. The concern, however, is not just this magazine, which functions as the unofficial Canadian Reformed magazine, but also other Reformed literature, such as *Reformed Perspective*. These are only humble tools. One may not always find every article the most stimulating. At times one may strongly disagree. The reality is, however, that these are the two tools available for our communal conversation as Canadian Reformed community. Of course, there are blogs and websites that may appeal to the younger generation. The benefit of actual magazines, however, is that what is written tends to have gone through a few filters before it is published. Further, it comes from a variety of voices rather than just one blogger's perspective. Through these magazines, one is able to be instructed with respect to a variety of topics and be in tune with the various issues that live in the midst of the churches.

The challenge, therefore, is that those who do read, who are on the same page, make an effort to get more on the same page with them. In some cases, it will mean trying to get non-readers to read. This will require some prodding and encouragement. With respect to young brothers, it can be put in terms of ongoing instruction because one day they may be called to one of the offices in the church or to serve in some church committee. Nonreaders must be drawn in so that they can broaden their horizons and to immunize them so that they will not be blown off their feet by every wind of doctrine. In other cases, it will mean trying to get those who read widely, but not the Reformed press, not to forget the immediate horizons of the church community in which the Lord has placed them. It may serve as a balance and corrective to the many winds of doctrine to which they expose themselves and show that the Reformed faith is solidly rooted in and faithful to Scripture. What has been said so far about Reformed magazines can also be said for Bible study material, as well as books written with the Reformed community in mind.

Let's get practical

Now it is one thing to encourage others to get on the same page, but there are also practical ways to help others get started. For example, many magazines have an option on their website for gift subscriptions. The Reformed magazines may not have reached that level of sophistication and the financial resources to offer deep discounts for gift subscriptions. In the end, one should not need financial incentives to give gift subscriptions. There is a spiritual incentive. Perhaps next time a birthday rolls around and the question is, "What shall I give my adult son or daughter?" why not give a gift subscription to *Clarion*? Yes, it is forty-nine dollars (plus tax), but they get twenty-five issues per year! That's only a little more than a Tim Hortons coffee per issue. Then next time you visit your children, you can sit down for a coffee and say, "What did you think about the article by Rev. So and So, in the last *Clarion*?" Indeed, if every subscriber gave one gift subscription, it would double circulation in one year. *Clarion* can't guarantee a price drop should that happen, but there is operational efficiency in numbers. Therefore, think of the spiritual benefit of families, congregations, indeed, as churches in the federation being on the same page. It will serve as stimulus for conversation and, perhaps, reduce the withdrawal symptoms plaguing the churches.





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The Defendant Who Undresses the Judge

John 19:1-11

At first glance, the story of Jesus' suffering and death reads like a tragedy. This was certainly the interpretation of the women who followed Jesus on his way to Calvary. Seeing him depleted from carrying his cross, haggard and emaciated, bleeding from the scourging, they wept for him, as you would for a boy who is bullied at school or for a man whose business goes belly up.

Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate seems no less tragic. In the face of mockery and ridicule for his apparently mistaken claims of kingship, Jesus stands as a powerless defendant, passively resigning his fate to a judge with the backing of imperial Rome.

With the eyes of humble faith, however, one discovers a dramatic twist to this story not readily apparent. What at the surface seems to be a Roman trial involving a man named Jesus is more profoundly a cosmic trial involving the Son of God. Far from being a powerless defendant in this trial, Jesus here is the true judge.

What is most striking about Pontius Pilate are his multiple pronouncements of Jesus' innocence. Hardly a neutral witness to Jesus' innocence, Pilate has just scourged him with a leather strap with sharp pieces of bone, exposing Jesus' flesh. More-

over, his soldiers have pressed into Jesus' scalp a mock crown of thorns, cloaked him with a mock purple robe, and sworn mock allegiance to him: "Hail, king of the Jews!"

Pilate can't find fault with Jesus, but this doesn't inhibit him from handing him over to the Jews to be crucified, something for which they knew they lacked authorization. In desperation, the Jews concede their real reason for wanting Jesus dead: "He has made himself the Son of God." It was a claim, the text tells us, that struck fear in Pilate's heart.

So in this courtroom drama we have on the one hand the emaciated defendant, scourged and bleeding, and on the other, the bully judge, with the backing of imperial Rome. Which one is afraid? Beneath his bully persona, Pilate is judged to be a fearful coward.

Pilate, however, will not be unmasked so easily. When Jesus rebuffs his interrogation, the baffled judge puffs out his chest (v.10): "Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" It finally provokes Jesus to undress him further: "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." Beneath the bully persona and delusions of grandeur exists not simply a fearful

coward, but a fearful coward with no power of his own!

Powerful Judge Pilate, it turns out, is merely a pawn on God's chessboard, and he can do nothing to alter the script for Jesus' death, the script for our salvation. This script was written with God's ink, and Jesus isn't about to rewrite it. Far from being a passive defendant, Jesus knowingly and willingly accepts the verdict in Pilate's kangaroo court.

Throughout his entire gospel, John has presented Jesus as one on trial. The very first witness to be summoned in this trial was John the Baptist, who testified, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Not long after his crucifixion, when the soldiers chose not to break Jesus' legs, the gospel writer testifies that this occurred to fulfill what Scripture said of the Passover lamb (v. 36): "Not one of his bones will be broken."

Is the dramatic twist discernible to you? The seemingly helpless defendant unmasks in the powerful judge the bully persona and the delusions of grandeur and willingly embraces his Father's script to die as the Passover Lamb for us, carrying our sins and carrying them away. It's the dramatic twist we recognize as grace, amazing grace!



Inter-Religious Relations and the Challenge of Multiculturalism (Part 1 of 2)



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Global mobility and the emergence of multicultural societies present enormous challenges, especially when it comes to inter-religious relations.¹ These challenges are considerable when one realizes that faithful adherents of one's religion will not restrict their beliefs to the privacy of their homes but will want these convictions to impact all of life, including the public square. Indeed, both Christianity and Islam, for example, have historically shaped their respective cultures in many ways, including the laws and customs of the land. But when these cultures come together in one society, as is occurring all over the Western world, how do we handle this situation? Are there biblical principles that can help show us the best way forward?

Since this is a huge topic, we need to be selective. Let us first consider the underlying presuppositions of multiculturalism. Next, we need to consider any biblical evidence relevant to the issues that have been raised as well as the principles that are involved. Finally, we will attempt to apply these principles to our current context, consider some practical implications for inter-religious relations and how to move forward.

Presuppositions of multiculturalism

One could define a multicultural society as “one in which the state attempts to respect, accommodate, and promote cultural pluralism and one in which a deep degree of lingua-cultural, ethno-cultural, and religio-cultural diversity is seen as being compatible with political unity.”²

This definition illustrates that there are at least three important presuppositions that have given shape to the modern notion of multiculturalism. Let us briefly consider each one critically.

First, current notions of multiculturalism assume that all cultures are somehow morally equivalent and

compatible and that the mixing of completely different cultures presents no threat to the unity of the host nation. There is, however, a problem with this optimistic outlook for it denies the reality and nature of the different religious presuppositions driving the different cultures. If all cultures are compatible and morally equal, then we should be prepared to welcome cultural norms in our society as diverse as the Hindu caste system, sex-selection feticide, Sharia or Qur'an-based law and the all-covering Muslim burqa as a normal dress for women outside their home. Cultures are not only different, but the indisputable reality is that their values and religious beliefs are often not compatible. This observation brings us to a second presupposition.

Multiculturalism assumes that diverse cultures can always coexist peacefully. Peaceful coexistence is certainly possible in some cases. For example, Chinese communities in major American and Canadian cities have no difficulty living in peace within the cultural context of their host country. But such harmony is not always the case. This is particularly obvious where Islamic and Western cultures meet. This clash of values is well-known and hardly needs supporting examples. In some European cities there are “no-go” zones for non-Muslims with the result that virtual mini-Islamic states are being created within European democracies. These “no-go” areas are the result of years of multicultural policies that have fostered the creation of Muslim parallel societies.

A third presupposition of multiculturalism that often plays a role is that in order to respect someone one must also esteem his or her native culture. But to so identify the culture with the individual is not always logical. Persons of a different culture whom we respect may reject their native culture because it has wronged or abused them. For example, in a notorious Canadian honor killing

DECLINED

Declined the call to the Free Reformed Church of Byford, Australia:

Rev. R. Vermeulen

of the Trinity CanRC in Glanbrook, ON.

CHURCH NEWS

of three Shafia sisters in 2009, these young women wanted to escape the strictures of their culture but could not successfully do so, in part because of the perceived need by social workers to respect their culture. Furthermore, blending the identity of people with their culture or race can easily encourage non-Caucasian individuals to claim that they have been victimized or oppressed because of their racial or cultural identity.

When a country feels it needs to protect and honour every culture within it, the danger of a divided society is very real. Each cultural group can end up living in isolation from the other and the nation becomes fragmented. But what is a nation? To have clarity on multiculturalism we need to have a clear understanding of what constitutes a nation.

What is a nation?

What does Scripture say about nationhood? Within the present context, five points can be mentioned. First, God ordained the existence of nations. It was his idea to have nations scattered across the globe (Gen 11:1-9). When the Apostle Paul spoke in the meeting of the Areopagus in Athens, he stated that from one man God “made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth” (Acts 17:26). Nationhood is therefore something that a people can take pride in and defend. In other words, the current pressures to more and more world government through entities like the United Nations, or the perceived need for more regional government such as through the European Union, should not occur at the expense of one’s identity as a nation. Being a nation is according to God’s design.

Second, there is a geographical dimension to nationhood. In his providence, God assigned territory to each nation. He “gave nations their inheritance” and “set up boundaries for the peoples” (Deut 32:8). He determined “the exact places where they should live” (Acts 17:26).

Third, there is an ethnic aspect. Although ancient Israel was comprised of twelve tribes with their own identities, they shared a common ancestor and had an ethnic unity (cf. Gen 10). Although there were regional disparities in Israel (cf. Judg 12:6), they all shared the same basic language. Also today we cannot overlook the cohesion which a common language gives.

Fourth, a nation’s identity is shaped to a large extent by a common past, a meta-narrative that all can identify with. Israel’s shared experience as a people delivered from Egyptian bondage and in covenant with God gave them a common faith, history, law code, institutions, and a united identity as a people. Also today, a collective memory of the past and a common heritage functions as a cohesive in the present and gives shared values for the future.

Fifth, God ordained nations “so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him” (Acts 17:27). These words suggest that a nation needs God and once he is acknowledged, God will bless it. It is therefore important that a nation with a Christian past not neglect what has been entrusted to it but makes full use of this heritage. Not to do so would be to its hurt. Needless to say, it is not the task of government to enforce Christianity or any other religion. However the state does have the duty as God’s servant to uphold justice and righteousness according to biblical norms, currently best exemplified in the historic Judeo-Christian tradition of the West.³

On the basis of the above, one could conclude that a nation should have a homogeneous population. Should a country therefore close its doors to immigrants and refugees from other cultures and religions? No, for there is no divine demand that a nation be completely homogeneous and Scripture teaches compassion and love for one’s neighbour. Furthermore, the coexistence of different cultural traditions within a single political unit is not a new phenomenon. The Old Testament bears testimony to that reality and also gives direction in dealing with it.

Multicultural Israel

When Israel was delivered from Egypt, “many other people went up with them” (Exod 12:38). The Hebrew term for “other people” (*‘ēreb*) indicates they did not share a common racial origin with Israel. It is a word used elsewhere to describe foreigners (Jer 25:20; Neh 13:3). Given the historical circumstances at the time of the Exodus, it is likely that Egypt had thousands of slaves and labourers from other nations, both Semitic and non-Semitic. Probably black Africans from Cush were among them (cf. Num 12:1). Many of these people joined Israel on their exodus from Egypt. Thus, at the defining moment of Israel’s being set free from oppression to be a free nation

under God, Israel as a political entity was not ethnically homogeneous but had multi-cultural aspects to it.

This plurality of backgrounds continued through Israel's long history. Doeg the Edomite served as Saul's head shepherd (1 Sam 21:7). David's army included people like Uriah, the Hittite (2 Sam 11), Zelek, the Ammonite (2 Sam 23:37), and Ittai, the Gittite. Ittai was a Philistine from Gath who had six hundred Philistines under his command. During Absalom's rebellion he was in charge of a third of David's forces (2 Sam 15:18-22; 18:2). David's army also included a Cushite (2 Sam 18:21). Kerethites, who were probably from Crete, and Pelethites, whose origin is uncertain, served in David's and Solomon's body guard (2 Sam 8:18; 1 Kgs 1:38). Resident aliens (*gērîm*), including Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, numbered 153,600 during the time of Solomon. He made use of their labour in building the temple (1 Chron 22:2; 2 Chron 2:16-17; 8:7-8). Such a large number of resident aliens would have been a significant part of Israel's population (cf. 2 Sam 24:9, 15).

Israel's strategic geographical position was a factor in maintaining a diverse mosaic of racial backgrounds in society. Canaan was at the centre of the crossroads of commerce and travel between Egypt to the south and the nations to the north. The porous nature of ancient national boundaries ensured that a variety of peoples would remain a part of the Israelite population.

For our purpose, we need to consider how Israel was to deal with the resident alien (*gēr*) and the foreigner (*nokrî*).

Resident aliens

The LORD gave extensive direction in his law for dealing with resident aliens. Underlying all the laws and regulations was the command of love. "The alien (*gēr*) living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens (*gērîm*) in Egypt. I am the LORD your God" (Lev 19:34; similarly Deut 10:19). This generosity of love, treating the alien as a native-born, needs to be appreciated within the overall context of Israelite society which not only had resident aliens, but also true foreigners (*nokrîm*). These happened to be in Israel but had no real attachment to that nation. God's law treated the resident aliens differently from these foreigners. It is important to understand who these

resident aliens and foreigners were, consider the key legislation affecting them, and appreciate why the LORD did not treat these groups in the same manner.

The resident aliens had left their homeland because of political, economic, or other reasons and settled in another country, seeking its protection and being given a special status there. In this sense Abraham was a resident alien in Hebron (Gen 23:4), the entire people of Israel were so in Egypt (Exod 23:9), and Elimelech with his family had that status in Moab (Ruth 1:1). The position of such resident aliens would be roughly comparable to our immigrants today. When such people left their homeland and joined Israelite society, they intended to establish themselves there. As circumstances would have it, they usually placed themselves in a relationship of dependency to their Israelite hosts. As such they were vulnerable and associated with the poor, the widows, the orphans and the hired man. God, however, gave these people a legal status by giving them rights, as well as obligations.

Multiculturalism assumes that diverse cultures can always coexist peacefully

No one was ever to take advantage of these resident aliens, but to help them (Exod 23:9). Although they were not allowed to own land because Canaan was Israel's inheritance (Gen 12:7; Deut 31:7; cf. Ezek 47:22), they nevertheless were to enjoy its benefits. They had the right to glean (Lev 19:10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-21), to partake of the festivities of the offering of the first fruits (Deut 26:11), and every three years they could participate in enjoying the tithe of the produce of the land (Deut 14:29; 26:12-13). Furthermore, they could share in the festivities (and food) during the annual Feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles (Deut 16:11, 14; cf. 12:7) and every Sabbath year they could freely eat what the land produced (Lev 25:6). God "loves the alien, giving him food and clothing" (Deut 10:18). The Babylonian exile was in part divine punishment for not protecting and treating the aliens fairly (Jer 7:6-7; Ezek 22:29-31; Zech 7:10-14).

Israelites were not to oppress them by, for example, withholding wages (Deut 24:14-15) or denying justice (Exod 23:6-9). They had the same judicial protection of the law as a native-born Israelite and were to be given a

fair hearing (Deut 1:16; 24:17). An alien who accidentally killed someone could, like a native-born Israelite, flee to a city of refuge (Num 35:15). Both native-born Israelites and resident aliens were also subject to the same penalties of the law (Exod 12:19; Lev 20:2; 24:16, 22; Num 15:29-30).

The resident aliens by being part of Israelite society were also subject to prohibitive religious laws that the covenant nation had to submit to and in this way they had to acknowledge the God of Israel. They were thus in the audience to hear the reading of the law at Mount Sinai (Deut 31:11-13), were included in the covenant renewal ceremony in Moab prior to entering the Promised Land (Deut 29:10-11), and attended the covenant renewal at Mount Ebal (Josh 8:35). Like the Israelites, also resident aliens were not to blaspheme the Name of the LORD (Lev 24:16) nor to sacrifice a child to Molech (Lev 20:2). They were not to eat blood (Lev 17:10), to engage in illicit sexual relations (Lev 18:6-30), to have leaven in their homes during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod 12:19), and to work on the Sabbath day (Exod 20:10) or on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29). Violations of these laws constituted sins of commission and they polluted the land (Lev 18:27-28; 20:3; Num 35:33-34). The resident aliens had to refrain from any public violation of Israel's religion.

They were, however, not bound by the performative commandments, that is, those positive commandments that enjoined Israel in the true worship of God. For example, he was allowed to offer sacrifices to God as long as this was done in the prescribed manner (Lev 17:8-9; 22:17-25; Num 15:14-16), but he was not under compulsion to do so. If a resident alien did not bring these sacrifices, he did not pollute the land.

God encouraged resident aliens to integrate into Israel by welcoming them to the nation's defining meal, the Passover. It was central to their identity as a nation, yet the resident aliens could join as full participants, if they committed themselves to the LORD and the males underwent circumcision (Exod 12:48-49; Num 9:14). In this way they would be integrated into Israel (cf. Gen 17:10-14). It is significant that the possibility of being part of the people of the covenant was given right at the beginning of Israel's existence as an independent nation in their exodus from Egypt. There was an openness to outsiders from the outset.

There is some evidence to suggest that resident aliens who loved the LORD and so in all likelihood had become full members of the covenant community of Israel, nevertheless retained their ethnic identity. For example, Uriah is still identified as the Hittite even though he clearly honoured God (2 Sam 11:11; cf. 1 Sam 21:5).

Foreigners

A true foreigner (*nokrî, ben-nēkār*) had no real vested interest in the land or people of Israel but he was there on a temporary basis, for example, as a mercenary (2 Sam 15:19). Since foreigners were truly outsiders and worshipped other gods and had different customs, Scripture regards them somewhat more negatively. Whereas one had to "love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" (Deut 10:19), the attitude to foreigners was more restrained. "Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien in his country" (Deut 23:7-8).

The law also dealt differently and less generously with the foreigners. This was especially noticeable in economic matters. If an animal had died of its own, the native Israelite was not to eat it. He could give it to a resident alien, but was allowed to sell it to a foreigner (Deut 14:21). When it came to loaning money, every seven years outstanding debts owed by a native Israelite had to be released or deferred. This law of deferral probably applied to the resident alien as well (cf. Lev 25:1-7). However, this privilege did not apply to a foreigner (Deut 15:2-3) whose occupation would probably not have been directly dependent on the land. Also, a native-born Israelite could borrow money without interest, but that was not the case with a foreigner. He could be charged interest on loans (Deut 23:30).

Whereas a resident alien could partake of the Passover on meeting certain conditions, this was not possible for a foreigner. He was forbidden to partake and no allowance was made for his participation (Exod 12:43). Sometimes specific nations were singled out. Moabites or Edomites were not allowed to enter the assembly of the LORD, the covenant people of God gathered in worship, because of their past hostility to Israel. However, third generation children from Egyptian and Edomite parents could enter this assembly (Deut 23:3-8).

The principles involved

With respect to inter-religious relations and the challenge of multiculturalism, the following biblical principles can be distilled from Israel's laws.

First, Israel as host nation had to show love and concern for immigrants. God demanded that his people love the resident aliens or immigrants in its midst. The patriarchs, Israel's ancestors, had been resident aliens in Canaan (Gen 23:4) and God's command to love the alien was often accompanied with the reminder that Israel herself had that status in Egypt (Exod 22:21; 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19). The seriousness of the command to love the stranger is underlined with the threat of divine judgment for disobedience (Jer 7:6; Zec 7:10; Mal 3:10).

Underlying all the laws and regulations was the command of love

Second, resident aliens had to acknowledge the God of Israel by submitting to his prohibitions. There was no compulsion to worship God alone, to be circumcised, and to be bound to performative commandments, but the resident aliens were to honour the prohibitive religious laws lest the land become unclean and face God's anger (Lev 18:27-28). Religious identity was more important than ethnic identity. Foreign religious influences were to be feared, rather than foreigners as such. Religion was critical in shaping Israel's distinctiveness as a nation.

Third, the resident aliens were encouraged to integrate into Israelite society. There was an openness to outsiders in Israel right from their beginning as a nation. The most complete integration involved accepting Israel's God as their own and submitting to circumcision and the other demands of the covenant. Even then, there are hints and suggestions in Scripture that a resident alien never lost his ethnic label.

Fourth, since Israel's laws encouraged integration, it is not surprising that not all outsiders were treated alike. Important distinctions were made. The resident alien was

treated more favourably than the foreigner and the resident alien who wished to integrate had more advantages than those that did not want to do so. Commitment to the host nation of Israel and identification with its values were rewarded. In this way the biblical approach to race relations and immigration had a double-edge. "It is positive in its attitude towards immigrants who are willing to assimilate and it is tolerant of non-hostile foreigners who are not willing to assimilate. But this open and welcoming approach is not achieved at the expense of national or religious identity."⁴

Fifth, there were limits to the integration of the resident alien. For example, if they became rich (cf. Lev 25:47) and purchased property, they could not own the land permanently but had to give up whatever land they may have purchased in the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:28). The one exception was city property (Lev 25:29-30). Full and complete integration could only come with subsequent generations of those who were willing to be part of Israel and who intermarried with the native Israelites. The example of Ruth comes to mind. Her permanent integration into Israel by marriage resulted in sharing in the inheritance of the land and even becoming an ancestor of King David (Ruth 2:10; 4:13-22; cf. Deut 17:15).

Next time: applying these biblical principles.

¹ These articles are an abbreviated and popularized version of a paper presented at the Norwegian Summer Academy for Biblical Studies at their 2015 International Meeting in Kristiansand. The theme of the conference was Inter-religious relations: Biblical Perspectives. The proceedings will be published, D.V., by Sheffield Phoenix Press.

² Chris Durante, "Religious Liberty in a Multicultural Society," *Journal of Church and State* 54 (2012): p. 324.

³ See further on the task of government Cornelis Van Dam, *God and Government. Biblical Principles for Today: An Introduction and Resource* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), pp. 27-77.

⁴ J.P. Burnside, *The Status and Welfare of Immigrants: The Place of the Foreigner in Biblical Law and Its Relevance to Contemporary Society* (Cambridge: The Jubilee Centre, 2001), p. 81.





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Alberta's New Gender Guidelines

If the current provincial NDP government has its way – and that is likely, given its majority in the provincial legislature – then any Alberta student would have the right to use the girls' washrooms and change rooms. It would not matter if the person is a biological male. If he felt more like a girl than a boy and therefore identified himself as a female, he would be able to use the girls' facilities. The same would hold true for girls who identified themselves as boys. For those who want privacy there would need to be at least one non-gendered, single-stall washroom. These and similar guidelines are all detailed in an official eighteen-page government publication entitled "Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions."

Other guidelines include a student's right to choose pronouns that align with their gender identity. "Some individuals may not feel included in the use of the pronouns 'he' or 'she' and may prefer alternate pronouns, such as 'ze,' 'zir,' 'hir,' 'they' or 'them.'" Gender differences must be erased at all possible levels. Boys can opt to wear skirts and gender-segregated activities should be minimized in sports events or educational activities.

If you think this is all rather over the top, you are not alone. Calgary lawyer, John Carpay, president of the Justice Centre of Constitutional Freedoms, has rightly pointed out in the *Calgary Herald* (Jan 16, 2016) the absurdness of the idea that the biological and psychological differences between male and female are irrelevant. Every single school in the province, whether public, private, Roman Catholic, or whatever kind is expected to implement this ideology. But as Carpay noted "allowing boys to use the girls' washrooms and change rooms does not create a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment in Alberta's schools." Indeed, "these new mandatory guidelines violate students' privacy rights, undermine parental rights in education, and prevent schools from making their own choices" about how best to deal with the issue.

Now one has to sympathize with those struggling with their sexual identity. However, children and young adults can be treated for gender identity disorder, also known as dysphoria, so that their gender identity matches the biological reality. Debra Soh noted in the *Wall Street Journal* (Jan 4, 2016) that Dr. Kenneth Zucker, a Toronto psychologist, has treated gender-dysphoric children with a high percentage of success. Probably because his approach was not politically correct, his clinic was closed last spring. However, one's sex is determined genetically. It is telling that Paul McHugh, psychiatrist-in-chief at the prestigious Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore wrote: "I have witnessed a great deal of damage from sexreassignment. The children transformed from their male constitution into female roles suffered prolonged distress and misery as they sensed their natural attitudes. Their parents usually lived with guilt over their decisions – second-guessing themselves and somewhat ashamed of the fabrication, both surgical and social, they had imposed on their sons" (*First Things*, November 2004, p. 38). That hospital has stopped doing sex-change operations.

Most importantly, the Alberta government's guidelines for the schools run counter to biblical principles of modesty, sexual purity, and the rights of Christian parents to educate their children in a manner consistent with their faith and morals. The Lord assigns each their sexual identity. Now gender confusion as such is nothing new in a fallen and defective world in which we live. Long ago, God already gave direction in this area of life. "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this" (Deut 22:5). Those who feel their sexual identity does not match their body have a problem that needs to be compassionately addressed so they can come to terms with their biology. Government dictating to schools how to address the issue in their way is neither helpful nor legitimate. Such intrusion should be resisted with every means possible.



Ordination of Rev. Vanderhorst in Winnipeg's Grace Canadian Reformed Church

The year 2015 ended on a positive note for the congregation of Grace Canadian Reformed Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba with the blessing of a new minister. After eighteen months of vacancy, members were overjoyed when new seminary graduate, Rick Vanderhorst, and his wife Hannah, accepted the call to our church.

Ordination

The ordination took place the morning of November 1, 2015 with Dr. A.J. Pol, the candidate's father-in-law, officiating. "Today you will receive a new minister," said Dr. Pol at the beginning of his sermon. "What do you expect of him? Will the expectations be realistic or not? That is an important question.

"People can develop personal preferences for the preaching style or ministerial approach of one minister as compared to another," said Dr. Pol, pointing out that while this isn't surprising, it can result in personal styles becoming more important than the scriptural message.

The end result can be "polarization" where people can "lose sight of what really binds them together."

"This is what happened in Corinth," continued Dr. Pol, before proceeding with the sermon on 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 with the message about how the gospel teaches us to rely on God's power instead of human wisdom.

The sermon ended with a reminder for Candidate Vanderhorst and the congregation. "Your new minister and you, as a congregation, need to continue to focus on Jesus Christ and him crucified. Through him we have fellowship with God and with each other. Show this by how we live and how we interact with one another."

Following the sermon was the laying on of hands by Dr. Pol (Carmen West Canadian Reformed Church), Rev. Van Rietschoten (Minister Emeritus, Eben-Ezer Canadian Reformed Church, Chatham, Ontario), Rev. Anjema (Providence United Reformed Church, Winnipeg), and Rev. Poppe (Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church, Winnipeg).

Inaugural sermon

That afternoon Rev. Vanderhorst began his inaugural sermon on 1 Corinthians 3:6, describing how his hobby of gardening has become a full time job with the difference of instead of nurturing vegetables to grow, he is now a spiritual gardener.

"Gardening has now become my full time occupation," said Rev. Vanderhorst. "I say this because that is the metaphor the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, uses in our text. Paul describes his work and the work of Apollos as that of workers in God's field. And I have now today, by God's grace, joined the ranks of God's fellow workers labouring in God's field.





“As I begin the work of ministry among you, as I begin the work of a gardener among you, I ask you to keep the focus that Paul outlines here in this message. My task here is not to gain a following for myself, but to keep your focus on our triune God and on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.”

Welcome evening

Since Rev. Vanderhorst's family was still in the city, Grace church decided to hold the official welcome evening for our new minister the same night as the ordination, allowing his family to also see the celebrations live.



It was a fun evening for all, with presentations, skits, singing, and stories from our congregation's various societies and groups, each introduced by MC Henry Moesker, an elder of Grace church.

While there were too many activities in the joyous evening to include in this article, there's one quirky presentation uniquely Winnipeg that needs to be mentioned or explained, depending on one's perspective. It deals with the two plastic pink flamingos presented to Rev. and Hannah Vanderhorst.

The birds have been long connected with the Transcona area of Winnipeg, which is where Grace church is located. Rumour has it that the connection between flamingos and Transcona started in the 1950s, when one of the area's affluent families returned from vacationing in Florida and put two concrete flamingos with metal legs on their front yard. Before long there was an invasion of pink flamingos. And now, with their new plastic flamingos, the Vanderhorst family can fit right in with Transcona residents.

The evening concluded with prayer and a selfie taken by MC Moesker as he stood behind the pulpit. During our church's vacancy, he and the other elders had been taking turns reading sermons. As Moesker mentioned gleefully while taking the selfie, he won't be up there as much anymore now that we have our new minister. **C**



Canadian Reformed Church at Carman West

Through the windows of our church building, situated on the north-west corner of the town of Carman between residential streets and open prairie, we see God's majesty and blessing in splendid sunsets, changing seasons, and changing weather.

We continue to appreciate our building which includes a large, 500 capacity auditorium, a foyer that doubles as a meeting or reception room, a commercial kitchen, a large entrance hall, and catechism, consistory, and nursery rooms. Geothermal heating and cooling keeps us comfortable during hot summers and cold winters. The especially designed auditorium has marvellous acoustics which we have really enjoyed during various musical events, including a performance of Handel's Messiah by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and the University of Manitoba's music faculty and choir, organ recitals, and pan flute concerts.

As you enter the church, you will see overhead, a carved eagle with the text, "I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself (Exodus 19:4)," reminding us that we are not there through any merit of our own, but receive the grace to be called to the worship service. You will be greeted by members of the congregation and, per-



*Anne Hillmer at the
Johannes organ*

haps, engaged in a few minutes of conversation. In the foyer, you will also see a set of seven large quilts depicting creation. Text boards with each quilt show the particular text of Psalm 104 used in the creation of this artwork. At the entrance to the sanctuary, ushers greet everyone with a smile and ensure that each person has a liturgy sheet and a Bible and *Book of Praise*. When the sun is shining on the stained glass windows, rays of red, yellow, and blue fall across some of the pews, even the hair of some members (purple or blue are the coolest) and on the plants at the front, giving a most attractive colour display. The organist will be playing a variety of music prior to the service. After the service, members will gather in the foyer to chat. We do try to include guests, but have to admit that this still needs improvement. Once a month, we have a coffee social. We enjoy monthly pulpit exchanges with URC and within classis.

The unusual seldom happens here, so when a minister's cell phone rang during the service, it did make our ears prick up.

Our congregation numbers 462 members, of whom 261 are confessing members and 201 baptized members.



Interior of Auditorium

Almost all of the children attend Dufferin Christian School. Cornerstone Christian Care Society provides a residence for one of our members.

Church life can be busy. There are Bible study societies, a men's evening, a women's evening and a women's morning group, a St. Claude group, a college group, a young people's, and for younger church members, FYSH, Faithful Youth Serving Him, which provides monthly Bible study, activities, and refreshments. The men's society and various members on the e-mail list are privileged to have Rev. VanRietschoten develop a study guide for Genesis for them. Besides these, choir meets weekly, a women's quilt group meets biweekly as does a Mom's Drop In. Senior Circle meets for lunch and games once a month.

Activities promoted by our evangelization committee include a monthly service at the Boyne Lodge and at a senior centre in St. Claude, and a Vacation Bible School in both towns. Via the ministerial association in Carman, we take our turn providing for the needy and delivering Meals on Wheels from the local hospital kitchen. Members volunteer in other organizations such as Fire Fighters and Ambulance – a page and rapid exit from the

service is not unusual. Others take part in various boards and groups in the town.

In the congregation, "Helping Hands" provides in home aid as needed.

Studying our church photo book would still not tell you how diverse we are – our occupations range from stay-at-home moms to training pilots, making machinery, teaching, grain farming, dairying, beef operations, accounting, construction, nursing, insurance, real estate – and others. Anyone can fit in!



Creation Quilts as they hang in our meeting room/foyer



Located on the North-west edge of the town

Clarion Kids

Creation

Genesis 1

God created the world and everything in it in 6 days. Then he rested on the 7th day. That is why we go to church on Sunday and don't do any work. Here is what God made on each day:

Day 1: Light and dark

Day 2: Sky and water

Day 3: Land and seas

Day 4: Sun, moon, and stars

Day 5: Fish and birds

Day 6: Animals, man, and woman

God saw that his work was good, and he still takes care of his creation, including you!

God created every creature on the earth. Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this bright toucan!



N I L D Y E B S B G
O O A I L T G L I Z
U R I P G I W A R Y
K E O T C H U M D K
Q E P A A T T I S S
P T S E R E V N D J
D Q Z X B K R A U X
M X G S I S O C L Z
E A R T H S M R M H
V C S D R R U S Y X

Find these words !

Animals	Light	Six	Birds
People	Sky	Creation	
Rest	Earth	Dark	

Matching:

Draw lines to show what God created on each day of the week!

Day 5 Animals & people

Day 2 Light & dark

Day 6 Fish & birds

Day 1 Sky & water

Day 4 Land & seas

Day 3 Sun, moon & stars



Holding up the Mirror (Part 1 of 2)

A review of the CRTA West Conference: October 7-9, 2015

Ed Balch
Teacher at Dufferin
Christian School in
Carman, Manitoba

Mission statements – working?

As a teacher, administrator, or parent, how aware are you of your school's mandate or mission? For some, the mandate can be found in the school, teacher, or parent handbooks, while other schools post their mandates at a major entry way to their school. Such mandates often serve as a backdrop, or *modus operandi* for the running of the school. As one reflects upon the words written, it may be apparent that some school mandates have extremely lofty expectations. In general, graduates are *expected* to emerge from their years of academic learning able to perform well in academic institutions, various social situations, and in sundry occupations as Christians in the midst of a dark world. These mandates echo what is found in Scripture. In his letter to the Church at Philippi, the Apostle Paul encourages the followers of Christ to remember Christ's humility, and as such, to be lights in an otherwise sinful world. Such a Christian mandate is likewise the desire of parents and teachers. There is no greater reward than to see the Father's work in the lives of the students and children when they take up their task in service to the King of kings. To take up their "task" means that graduates are expected to work and interact with Christian ethics in the culture in which they live; and as such, influence others within a missional context. Ultimately, many school mandates encourage their graduates to live out their faith in the midst of a culture that, in many cases, has rejected Christ.

This goal that Christian Schools have been working for begs the question: How did we do? How are we doing? Are our graduates fulfilling their school's mandates? Are they (and we) influencing our culture and winning our neighbours for Christ?

Cardus study

Mr. Ray Pennings, co-founder and Executive Vice President of Cardus, presented to the staff, administration, and guests of the Canadian Reformed Teachers Association (CRTA) West a quantitative analysis of graduates from Christians schools across both Canada and the United States. Before examining the results of the general landscape, Pennings wanted to illustrate the work that Cardus performs. Cardus is a think-tank organization that engages in Christian social thought. When Cardus was first formed, their initial operations were not based on matters of education. But after some years of working within the public and private spheres, the Cardus organization was asked to investigate educational matters with the particular focus on how Christian school graduates were doing over their public school counterparts. The study examined general outcomes of Christian school vs. public school graduates to the end that one could examine the impact Christian education had on the lifestyles of Christian school graduates.

Prior to revealing the details of the results of the survey centred on Canadian Reformed Schools, Pennings outlined a number of difficulties with the context of the survey. In the first place, generalities in results examined members who were involved in church life and had attended a Christian school. Further, the very nature of the survey examined the Christian schools of yesterday. Such information only provides a snapshot of graduates within the context of time and may not necessarily reflect the operations of Christian schools in the present. This being said, Pennings spoke of the fact that Christian operational procedures of many Christian schools have not really changed since the graduation of many of the participants of the survey. Thus, the information of the survey would and could be relevant in examining the

current trends in Christian school graduates and in the quality of Christian education each student received.

In spite of the potential flaws in the survey, the information gleaned from this survey would still provide keen insights into considering the alignment between individuals and outcomes of Christian education versus academic achievement of the graduates, the cultural engagement of graduates and the spiritual formation of the graduates. In addition, it is beneficial for schools and parental societies to measure whether the schools are attaining their target goals as outlined in many school mandates. It is a way in which one can examine the degree of success in fulfilling a school's mandate.

Analyzing the data

To begin the process of examining the data, Penning outlined the sources of the data. Besides the aforementioned graduates, many principals were asked to answer a number of questions centred on the formation of priorities of Christian schools and what should graduates of schools look like. The results indicated that there were four formational priorities. These four included priorities of family life, active political and social life, attaining of a university education, and the volunteering practices of graduates. From these four priorities emerged four indicators of success: development of character, understanding based on the development of a strong Christian worldview, strong relationship with God, and understanding of religious traditions. These indicators would serve as a backdrop to the development of the survey. The information would serve as a means of understanding how the schools were assisting the graduates in the formation of Christian character and how the school's curricula prepared graduates for life and society.

Results from Christian schools in US

The results in the United States outlined a number of interesting details on the development of Christian character post senior high school. Some general results were as follows:

- Strong sense of purpose: Most graduates understood their place within the kingdom of the LORD God and understood elements of the cultural mandate.
- Strong family relationship: Most graduates recognized the value and importance of the family unit.



Many married at a younger age and there were less cases of divorce and many families had more than the national average of children/household.

- Strong spiritual discipline: Most graduates had strong church attendance as well as strong habits of personal devotions.
- Strong interest in church leadership: Many graduates recognized the need for strong church leadership and an overwhelming number of church leaders were graduates of Christian schools.
- Strong missional and volunteering skills: Many graduates were involved in and supportive of mission trips as well as volunteering and giving generously. In fact, eighty-five percent of the giving nationally came from twenty-nine percent of the population. Of that twenty-nine percent, twenty-five percent were from Christians. This is contrary to graduates from the Canadian Reformed schools. Whereas U.S. graduates give externally, Canadian Reformed graduates are more likely to give to the churches, schools, pro-life organizations, and Reformed political action groups, but are not as likely to give to other charities.

Results from Christian schools in Canada

The results of the Canadian data also outlined a number of interesting details on the development of Christian character post senior high school. The Canadian data was done comparatively to other educational institutions. Penning began by speaking of the diverse funding patterns within the provinces of Canada and detailed how funding or lack of funding may or may not proportionately compare to the character development when examining the aforementioned indicators. Some results were as follows:

In separate publically-funded Catholic schools, graduates were:

- Not different in many ways from the public school system (re: lifestyles etc.)
- Weak in faith
- Not involved as much in politics and culture.

In independent Catholic schools, graduates were:

- Least active politically
- Slightly more academic than their publically funded counterparts
- Slightly stronger in faith than their publically funded counterparts.

In independent non-religious schools, graduates were (had):

- Strong academic achievers
- Strong political involvement.

In independent Christian schools, graduates were (had):

- Strong work ethic - job was seen as very important (mostly living in rural communities)
- Care deeply for family and children
- Academically middling
- Wearing their faith on their sleeve.

In home-school settings, graduates were (had):

- Academically middling, not as strong academically as other graduates
- Strong sense of family commitments and strong sense of church
- Strong ability to interact within the workplace; strong social integration
- Strong skill set within the workplace
- Highest proportion of PhDs and Masters Degrees than other graduates.

In Canadian Reformed schools, graduates were (had):
(Compared to other Christian school graduates, research was compiled on Canadian Reformed graduates)

- Higher levels of post-secondary education, but produce the least number of PhDs and Masters Degrees
- Able to sustain the highest net income and the highest percentage of self-employed workers
- Strong personal and family commitments
- Able to show a high percentage of voting, high political involvement, yet were the least likely to read newspapers
- Able to talk about faith, but only with those who are part of the same faith
- Very low in social integration
- Late adopters of technology
- Found thinking “outside the box” creatively very challenging; there is a struggle with accepting outside the box thinking

- Generally, we are rule followers, although we do produce a great number of entrepreneurs and we do not do well on creativity.

General reflections

So what do these results indicate? In the first place, we can see the blessed hand of our Heavenly Father in the running of Christian schools. We can identify that graduates generally understand their place in society, and we can see that students are able to function effectively in political spheres. In addition, the results generally indicate that past graduates understand the value of hard work and the importance of family commitments.

In many ways Christians fear interacting with a cultural world that has rejected Christ

While these important elements are necessary, the life of a Christian is also to talk about faith and to express the joy of having a relationship with Christ, not only within the confines of the church, school and family institutions, but also to our broader world. In fact, Christians are called to express their faith so that they may “win their neighbours for Christ” (LD 42). Do our neighbours only refer to our church family or can this term be applied to a broader Canadian audience? When a young man asked the LORD Jesus the same question (“who is my neighbour?”) Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Thus, our neighbour is not restricted to the household of faith, but also applies to the broader society. But to be willing to express faith in a society that does not know Christ or a society that ardently rejects his dominion can prove quite challenging, not only for graduates, but also adults. Pennings identifies that in many ways Christians fear interacting with a cultural world that has rejected Christ. Where does this fear come from? Should we, as Christians engage in culture? In a subsequent article I hope to present Ray Pennings’ presentation on the role of Christians and culture.



Disrespecting Our Sisters or Our Own Brother?

Dear Editors,

When reading through Rev. Visscher's Year in Review 2015 one is struck again with the numerous blessings our Lord continues to bestow on us as individual churches and as a united federation.

My appreciation for the reporter's fine reviews year after year only flagged when reaching the section on "Synod Dunnville 2016 in view." Here the writer did more than just report on news, adding pointed commentary, which in my view was too subjective and should have been edited out.

For starters, in reviewing the report of the CCCNA he inserts the word "demanding;" the more appropriate word would be for Synod not to keep on "mandating," more in line with its calling.

Next, he concludes that the repeated mandates to discuss the same matters are the result of one or two churches not being satisfied. This I find totally preposterous! To suggest that the various brothers at our tri-annual synods are collectively, time and again, persuaded to follow the direction of a few churches, does not grant these brothers much credit for knowing what we confess, what lives in the churches, or having a mind of their own. The very fact that our Review writer was present at the majority of these federative gatherings should convince us that this can't be so, that decisions are made with much study and deliberation, though not necessarily unanimously.

If I may suggest so, perhaps the reason for the repeated mandates is that Rev. Visscher's take on them may still not be the majority view in the CanRC?

The third concern I have is with his guess that if future synods continue doing this sort of thing (giving mandates that are in line with previous decisions to pursue outstanding issues when appropriate) then a committee might balk and resign. Really? I find that this type of comment gives a negative impression of our broader assemblies, treating them as an "at arm's length" body rather than them being "us," a meeting of the church-

es via our elected representatives whose character, experience, and views are generally known. I would hope a committee would take note of any negative reaction in fulfilling a mandate (as did the CCCNA in the report Rev. Visscher notes), perhaps make suggestions giving good grounds, and leave it for a synod to come with recommendations, renewed or new.

This brings me to the reason for the heading, picked up from a *Clarion* co-editor's informative articles over the course of 2014/2015 on our contact history with our North American sister churches, for some of Rev. Kampen's (a member of the CCCNA) conclusions were repeated by Rev. Visscher.

I find that Rev. Kampen is less than charitable with his conclusions, that over the years the brothers at our synods do not appear to treat our sister churches as equals, do not consider others to be better than themselves, but rather seem to exercise dominion over them in the way decisions are formulated.


That's a pretty broad sweep!

As Rev. Kampen correctly notes, we have been guilty of taxing the patience of our sister churches in prolonging the road to unity, we have been inconsistent, we've committed errors, and have needed to publicly apologize for it.

Yet a judgement on the character of brothers, many of whom have gone on to be with our Lord, who were committed to the truth of God's Word and to his church, is hurtful, also for their descendants.

In their striving to do justice to our sisters I wish the two brothers had been more fair to ourselves.

Ben Meerstra

Vernon, BC 



*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.*