

2014

## A Tribute to Harro Van Brummelen

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### Recommended Citation

Badley, Ken and Shortt, John, "A Tribute to Harro Van Brummelen" (2014). *Faculty Publications - College of Education*. 93.

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*Ken Badley (with John Shortt)*

## **A Tribute to Harro Van Brummelen**

*January 7, 1942–January 15, 2014*

In the fall of 1981, I agreed to teach a short course on education at Regent College in Vancouver the following January. Harro Van Brummelen's name appeared on the list of recommended guests that the previous instructor of the course had passed along to me. At that time, Harro was serving as director of the British Columbia Society for Christian Schools (CSI), and we arranged by telephone that he would speak to the class about Christian day school education.

When, some months later, Harro appeared on the Regent campus to speak, we realized that we were both enrolled in the same January-semester doctoral course at the University of British Columbia. As it turned out, all five students were connected in some way to Christian education, and the rather secular professor did not know what he had got into. Thus began a three-decade-long friendship and collegial relationship. Like many of Harro's friends and colleagues, I suspect I got more than I gave, and to this day I thank God for the gift that Harro was to me, to education, to the church, and to the world.

For several years in the 1990s, Harro served on the Education Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, a group whose mandate was to support parents and educators in all kinds of schools. Harro carried deep in his DNA a commitment to Christian day schools, but he also believed deeply that parents and teachers connected to state schools needed support, and he unflinchingly gave his energy to help such parents and teachers work for the good of all children. Harro's own convictions found their roots deep in the Christian Reformed educational tradition, implying that he naturally affiliated with schools connected to Christian

Schools International (CSI). In fact, Harro studied these schools' history for his doctoral dissertation. But Harro willingly served all Christian schools, including those connected to the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), transcending what some have, at times, viewed as a boundary well worth defending.

His service to Christian educators reached well beyond North America. Ray Le Clair, regional director of ACSI's Former Soviet Union and Baltic States Region, reports that Harro was one of the biggest influences on his thinking about Christian education over the last couple decades. Harro advised Ray (and ACSI) on the aims, approaches, and mechanics of setting up a residential summer program for Christian teachers from all over the former Soviet sphere. Both in the 1990s and since the new millennium, Harro taught several courses for teachers in Russia and Ukraine, and has spoken at several conferences. *Walking with God in the Classroom* was translated into Russian in those early days of ACSI work in this region. *Walking* is now in its second Russian edition and, I'm told, remains the main book used by Christian educators there for an overview of Christian education. Recently a director of a Christian school showed Ray her very dog-eared copy of the book and said that she still uses it all the time. On a light note, Harro used long sentences, rendering translation somewhat of a challenge. By 2005 or 2006 Harro had mastered the translatable—shorter—sentence, making life easier for his translators. Harro also served in Western Europe and the UK, presenting keynote speeches at an early EurECA conference, at a Christian Schools Trust conference in the UK, and at ACSI events in central Europe.

For many years Harro led the teacher education program at Trinity Western University (TWU) in Langley, British Columbia, near Vancouver. These years were not without drama. From the first years of its program, Trinity Western's education graduates were required to follow their TWU program with a year's study in a public university so that they might be prepared properly for service in public classrooms, a policy that Trinity Western appealed in the courts. Because the case bore so directly on the rights of religious believers, as laid out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the TWU case eventually made its way to the Supreme Court of Canada. That court decided that faith-based universities were in fact capable of preparing teachers who would function well in a diverse society. Harro led the education program through these challenging years,

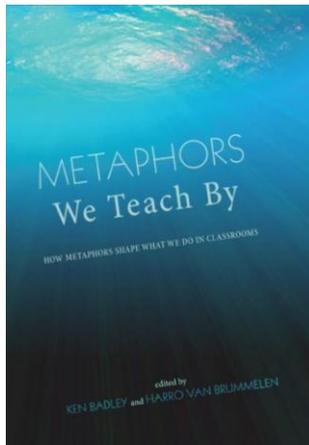
illustrating that he could stand by his firm convictions. But he also had a winsome manner; the British Columbia association of deans of education selected him as their chair for some years.

Most readers of this journal know Harro's books. Many have assigned one or another of these titles as a course text or in professional reading groups. When I reviewed the second edition of *Walking with God in the Classroom* for this journal, Harro told me that he had revised it mainly because so many state-school teachers had found it helpful (including those in Eastern Europe). Not having directed it toward state-school teachers originally, he was both surprised and pleased that it had found this audience, and so, to serve them better, he revised it. In an education course I teach annually at Tyndale University College in Toronto, I have used *Steppingstones to Curriculum* for some years. Year by year, students tell me that it is the clearest and most practical of the books I require them to read in the course. Clear, practical. These were Harro's concerns when we edited *Metaphors We Teach By* a few years ago. He had no interest in making his résumé longer; he wanted to equip teachers, as he often put it, "to think and teach like Christians."

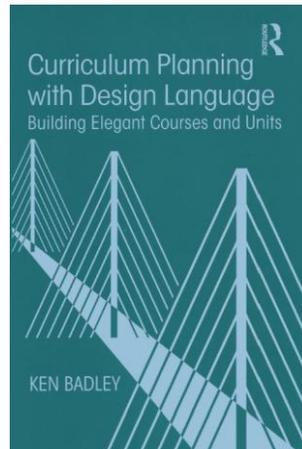
Harro loved to create venues for conversation. In 1993 I proposed that the Institute for Christian Studies and Ontario Bible College (both of Toronto), Canadian Theological Seminary (then in Regina, Saskatchewan) and Trinity Western University sponsor "With Heart and Mind," a conference on Christian higher education in Canada, Harro suggested not one, but four, conferences. Such was the vision that gave energy to this person whom John Shortt has referred to as a "giant in the world of Christian education."

Thousands of educators have knowingly allowed Harro to shape their thinking. By implication, Harro has shaped hundreds of thousands of students, albeit without their knowledge. Harro worked hard, thought clearly, wrote prolifically, and gave much. We all remain in his debt. All who knew Harro will miss his smile and his wisdom. Those closest to him include his wife, Wilma; three children; ten grandchildren; and two sisters.

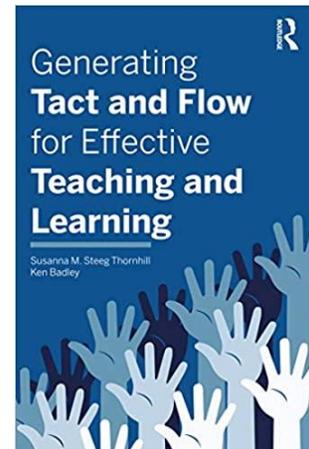
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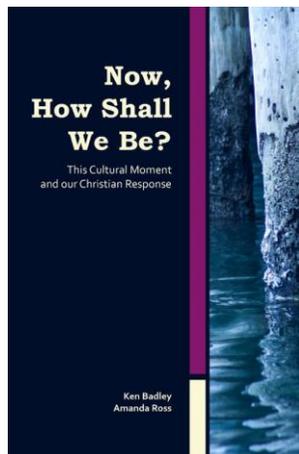
2011



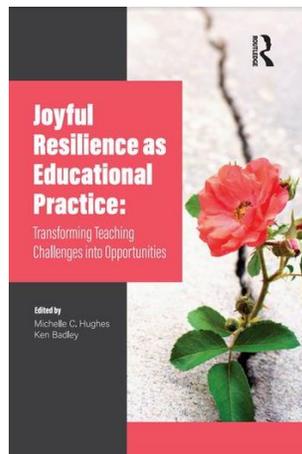
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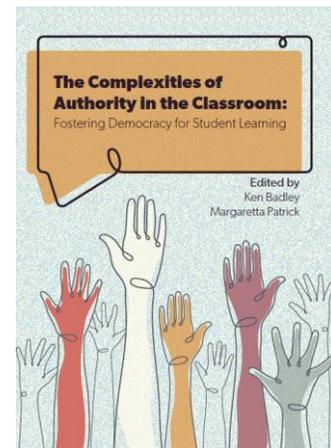
2020



2020

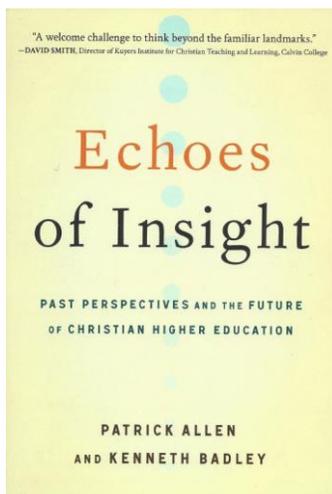


2021

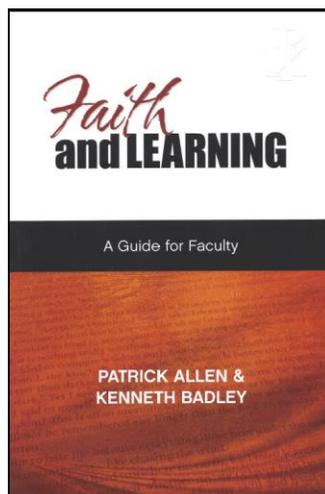


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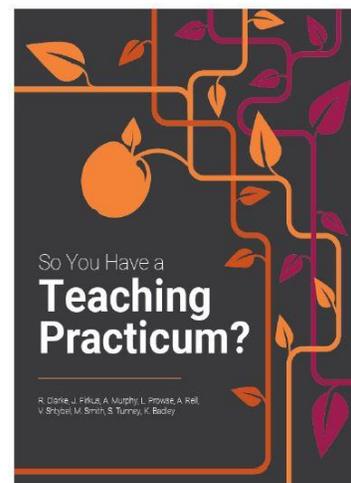


2014



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