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*It is important
to judge a church
by its
confessions*



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Judging a Church by its Public Confession

Here we have an important principle: judge a church by its confessions, not by the statements of some individual

When it comes to the Canons of Dort, most Reformed readers will be familiar with the basic setup where each chapter consists of articles that explain the faith, followed by a section called "rejection of errors." What is not well known, however, is the way the five chapters are followed by a "Conclusion."

What is striking in this conclusion is the way it indicates that the Reformed churches had become a victim of bad press through misinformation. There is a list of seven false accusations having to do with the doctrine of election. For example, the first accusation is that the "doctrine . . . concerning predestination . . . by its very character and tendency turns the hearts of man away from all godliness and religion." The sixth accusation is, "In the same manner in which election is the source and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and ungodliness."

In response to these accusations, we read, "Therefore, this Synod of Dort adjures, in the Name of the Lord, all who piously call upon our Saviour Jesus Christ not to judge the faith of the Reformed churches from the slander gathered from here and there. Neither are they to judge from personal statements of some ancient or modern teachers, often quoted in bad faith, or taken out of context and explained contrary to their meaning. But one ought to judge the faith of the Reformed churches from the public confessions of these churches themselves and from the present explanation of the orthodox doctrine, confirmed by the unanimous consent of the members of the entire Synod, one and all."

Note the exhortation to "judge the faith of the Reformed churches from the public confessions of

these churches. . . ." This exhortation was necessary because of slanderous statements going around. It was also necessary because "personal statements" were "often quoted in bad faith or taken out of context and explained contrary to their meaning" and used to paint the Reformed churches in a very negative light.

Here we have an important principle: judge a church by its confessions, not by the statements of some individual. We hear this same message in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, which deals with the marks of the true and false church. Before it lists the marks, it states,

We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully from the Word of God what is the true church, for all sects which are in the world today claim for themselves the name of church. We are not speaking here of the hypocrites, who are mixed in the church along with the good and yet are not part of the church, although they are outwardly in it. We are speaking of *the body and the communion* (italics added) of the true church which must be distinguished from all sects that call themselves the church.

As important it is to judge a church by its confessions, it is also important to judge whether a church lives up to its confessions. A church may have solid confessions but these may function as no more than historical documents. It is not hard to determine this by looking that the general state of the church, especially as it shows up in the issues that come to the broader assemblies and the decisions of those assemblies.

The principle of "Judge a Church by its Confessions" of course cuts two ways. If as Reformed churches we wish to be judged that way, we should

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also judge others that way. This is not something to be brushed off lightly. We are not immune to stereotyping. Further, we are not immune to using the statements of certain individuals and painting a whole group by those statements. We are not even immune to taking statements out of context. We are as prone to this in ecclesiastical relations as we are prone to do this in our personal relations.

At the same time, this principle serves as a sober reminder that we must be careful because what we say may be used to cast a negative light on the gospel and the church. Again we can learn from the conclusion of the Canons. The immediate context has to do with teaching concerning the doctrine of election, but the exhortation rings true in general, namely to "refrain from all those expressions which exceed the prescribed limits of the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures and which may provide shameless sophists with a good opportunity to scoff at the doctrine of the Reformed churches, or even to slander it." This exhortation was first for the ministers of the gospel, but it is just as true for the members of the congregation. There is a need to express ourselves carefully lest people scoff at the Reformed faith. We can add to this that there is a need to live carefully, lest we undermine the gospel by godless living. To think back to the first accusation, this would only confirm people in that opinion.

There is a need to express ourselves carefully lest people scoff at the Reformed faith

This principle, in effect, is linked to the ninth commandment where the Lord tells us not to bear false witness against our neighbour. The Catechism elaborates on this by saying that we must "twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor condemn or join in condemning anyone rashly and unheard" (LD 43).

The Reformed churches have endured much suffering because of false accusations concerning its doctrine. At the same time, as we plead, "Judge us by our confessions," we should treat others the same way. In this way we will not only be able to easily distinguish the true church from the false church but we will also avoid condemning others rashly and unheard and hurting the cause of Christ.



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A Stricken Shepherd and a Scattered Flock



MATTHEW 13:52

"I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

Matthew 26:31

In our mind we can see the Lord and his disciples, coming down the steps from the Upper Room where they had celebrated the Passover. Arriving at the bottom, they walk eastward through the streets of Jerusalem. It had been a very emotional evening.

The Lord had told the disciples that one of them would betray Him, which made each of them consider whether he was the one who'd do such an awful thing. The Lord had also spoken of his body which would be broken and his blood which would be poured out. These things had made them sad, afraid, and confused. But finally, when the Lord had led them in the singing of a hymn, things had almost returned to normal.

Imagine the disciples, now a bit relieved, following their Master through the dark streets of the city. Soon they leave Jerusalem through the Sheep Gate, the towering walls of the city rapidly fading into the darkness behind them as they walk the short distance to the Mount of Olives.

It is during this walk that the Lord begins to speak again to his disciples. Now He drops, as it were, another bombshell among them: "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (v. 31).

Peter probably spoke for them all when he protested in verse 33, "Even if all fall away on account of

you, I never will." Here is Jesus, and following Him is what is left of the church He had gathered. So many had fallen away already on account of his words. "This is a hard teaching," they had said, "Who can accept it?" Many had turned back and no longer walked with Him. Now the Lord prophesies that even these disciples, they who'd confessed that He had the words of eternal life, would also fall away on account of Him. No way! They will never leave or forsake their Master!

However, the Scripture needs to be fulfilled and in the Scripture it was written that the shepherd would be stricken, and the sheep of his flock would be scattered. Sheep are confident as long as the shepherd is with them, but without the shepherd they do not know what to do and where to go. They will scatter.

We know from the rest of the story that when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, this is exactly what happened to the disciples. "Then all the disciples deserted Him and fled," we read in verse 56 of this same chapter. So it was written, and so it had to come to pass.

When finally the fullness of time comes to its climax in Jesus' hour of suffering, He is completely alone. The Old Testament church, captive to its traditions and a law it did not want fulfilled, utterly rejects Him. Also the small and frail New Testament church deserts Him in bewildered fear, in

slowness of heart to believe what the prophets had spoken.

There go the disciples: running in every direction, they scatter over the Mount of Olives, like sheep without a shepherd. They forever give evidence that without Jesus neither the church nor any of its individual members can amount to anything or do anything.

"I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But. . ." – and this is the glory of our Saviour, for the scattering of the sheep is not the end – "But after I have risen I will go ahead of you into Galilee" (v. 32).

Jesus will victoriously arise from defeating all things that threatened his followers and He will lead them to Galilee. He will lead them to the place where He had begun to teach them and where He had promised to make them "fishers of men." There in Galilee He will, from the ruins of that small, frail, and scattered church – which had returned to be fishers of fish – raise his glorious New Testament church. The members of this church confess that they can do nothing without Him, who never fell away on account of them.

Let us continually strive to be active members of this church of our Saviour. Let us cease all attempts to do anything without Christ, lest we too, scatter like sheep without a shepherd.





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Emergent: A Brief Introduction

This article is a revised version of a presentation made to a Fraser Valley CanRC ministerial in February 2009

Recently, I needed new glasses. So, I headed over to the local mall and was immediately confronted with a world of choices – choices that I can make as an empowered individual. It starts when you arrive. The mall has I-don't-know-how-many entrances and you can pick the one most convenient to you. If the parking lot is not too full, you can decide whether you're going to park near the doors or further away and get some exercise. Upon entering the mall, I consulted the mall directory and found that I could get my new glasses from at least three different stores. So I walked past each one, evaluated what I saw, and chose the one with the sale on. Walking in, I was greeted by a friendly sales person who introduced me to the hundreds of choices that I could make for the frames of my new glasses. Thankfully, I had my two oldest daughters with me and they were able to navigate those choices for me. Then I had to choose which package I would prefer for the glasses, did I want scratch resistant? Non-glare? If I went with the bare minimum, I could have my glasses in an hour; but if I wanted all the bells and whistles, the

glasses would have to go to the lab in Toronto and it would be ten days. And there were all kinds of options in between. Just in the simple act of buying glasses at the mall, there were thousands of options that I, the individual buyer, could make. We could extend this to all kinds of other scenarios in our daily lives.

The mall and our consumer-oriented society which provides us with thousands of choices is paradigmatic for our culture. I no longer have to exist within the narrow confines of being the grandson of Dutch immigrants. I can beg, borrow, and steal from whatever is out there and all of it can be appropriated as part of my identity. So, sure, I still like croquetten and stampot, but let me also have my Scottish haggis, my Vietnamese pho', my Indian tikka masala, and even my Australian vegemite. Eclecticism is the new normal for many people born after 1970 and even for many born before.

Hand in hand with that eclecticism is narcissism. We blog, we Facebook, we Twitter, and whatever else we do, and we assume that everyone is interested in me and what I'm doing at this exact moment and how I feel and how I think. Maybe not everybody who does those things thinks that way, but that's the presupposition behind a lot of it. The world revolves around me. It's all about me.

These cultural phenomena have come to be embraced in large segments of Christianity as well, also in our own churches. But they come to fullest expression in what we call the *emergent church movement*. A precise definition of this movement is difficult. It's very diverse and those who identify with it resist the very notion of precise definitions. There is no one statement of faith that emergent leaders have crafted and signed, although Brian McLaren's *A Generous Orthodoxy* is considered by many to be an emergent manifesto.

Nevertheless, we can identify some key commonalities in those who identify themselves as emergent. There are common themes, protests, and shared ideas that we find with people like Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Leonard Sweet, Tony Jones, Phyllis Tickle, and others. Let me briefly identify seven of those commonalities:

Protest

The emergent movement is in the first place a protest movement. Most of its leaders have come out of fundamentalist upbringings and they're reacting against that. In a superficial way, they identify fundamentalism with modernist philosophy developed during and after the Enlightenment. So, there is also a protest against modernism

and its associated evil: linear, propositional thinking. For emergents, much of what is wrong with Christianity can be traced back to the embrace of systematic formulations of the faith, whether in ecclesiastical confessions or in systematic theologies. While some emergents affirm the Apostles Creed and Nicene Creed, others (such as Tony Jones) find statements of faith to be “seriously alarming” because they set boundaries. Emergents would prefer to emphasize story and narrative over the formulation of dogmatic truths and propositions. For this reason, they describe their own movement as being a “conversation” or a “journey,” but never as a “theology.” Finally, they also protest the idea of the Christian faith as doctrine – they prefer to describe it as a life, they want to be known as “Jesus followers,” rather than Christians. They place the emphasis on ethics – it’s more important what we do as Christians, rather than what we believe. As a side note here, in this regard the emergents have not progressed beyond Charles Finney whose *Systematic Theology* is really a book of ethics. With his emphasis on the new measures, Charles Finney was as modernist as they come. With their focus on ethics, the emergents could almost be described as his latter-day heirs. But that as an aside. . . .

Post-modern epistemology

How we know what we know, or theory of knowledge (epistemology) is at the philosophical heart of the emergent movement. I once had a conversation with a young brother who had fallen under the influence of emergent thinking. For him, doubt was a virtue and uncertainty a sure sign of humility. To be convinced of truth and to believe that there is public, objective truth was a sort of hubris that could not be tolerated. The emergent movement adopts a post-modern epistemology where foundationalism (the idea that the

Bible gives us a foundation for knowledge) is rejected and skepticism is the end result. One can only talk about certainty and truth in subjective terms. In emergent circles, this epistemology is applied not only to theology, but also to biblical hermeneutics. Almost everything becomes subjective and personal – there are very few propositional truths in the Bible that apply to everybody in a universal way, some would say there are none – everything is up for grabs.

Mysticism

Leaders of the emergent movement are also proponents of contemplative spirituality or mysticism. Their favourite authors are people like Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, Brennan Manning, and Thomas Merton. Turning away from the objective Word of God, they turn inward to subjective, mystical experiences. This explains why many emergent church groups are into “smells and bells,” using labyrinths, breath prayers, and so on.

Missional

“Missional” is a buzz-word these days. Many churches advertise themselves as being missional, focused on missions. The emergent movement is also big on being missional. At first glance, this looks like a great idea. Who wouldn’t want to be enthusiastic about missions? But for emergent Christians, the concept of “mission” is something far more nebulous than what many Reformed people will understand by that word. For starters, many emergent leaders are weak on the gospel. Brian McLaren, for instance, doesn’t want to discuss what he calls “the hell question.” He doesn’t want to discuss the question of what happens to those who don’t believe in Jesus Christ. For him, it’s more important that Christians go out and “join Jesus in expressing God’s love for the whole

world, to follow Jesus in his mission of saving love for the world” (*A Generous Orthodoxy*, 125). He is more interested in good news that transforms the world in the here and now – an over-realized eschatology, or to use Martin Luther’s categories, a theology of glory. McLaren is not alone in this. Briefly, “missional” in the emergent church movement has more to do with liberation theology than it does with what the Bible teaches about mission.

Eclectic

I don’t have to say much on this point because the subtitle to Brian McLaren’s *A Generous Orthodoxy* says it all: “Why I am a missional, evangelical, post/protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, charismatic/contemplative [notice how mystical has to come back in ‘contemplative’], fundamentalist/calvinist, anabaptist/anglican, methodist, catholic, green, incarnational, depressed-yet-hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian.” Like a shopper at the mall, McLaren (and again, he’s not unique in this) goes to the religious buffet, he makes a choice here and a choice there, takes a little bit of this and a little bit of that and doesn’t really care if the little bit of this actually contradicts the little bit of that. You see, the law of non-contradiction is part of Western linear thinking and if you’ve scrapped that, anything goes.

Narcissistic

A Generous Orthodoxy is a painful read. Brian McLaren is obsessively absorbed with himself and his thoughts and his experiences. The supreme judge of what is right and wrong is no longer the Word of God, but the supreme self. That ties back into the influence of post-modernism. D.A. Carson (and he’s not the first one) points out that post-modernism is actually a misnomer. It’s better to call it late

modernism, because at the end of the day it's not really all that different, especially in its basic presuppositions. In his book, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, Carson writes, "Postmodernism remains the bastard child of modernism and shares its fundamental weakness: it begins with the 'I,' the finite self. In this sense, post-modernism, like the modernism that spawned it, is methodologically atheistic – or more generously put, it takes no account of God at the beginning of its deliberations" (122). Carson is dead on and his words are worth noting. Beginning with the finite self is symptomatic of pretended autonomy, rebellion against God, failing to allow God's Word to have the first word, let alone the last word.

Poor handling of history and theology

Finally, emergent leaders are notoriously poor in their handling of history. They have certain traditions, especially contemplative ones, that receive sympathetic and careful treatment. But when it comes to traditions that are seen as problematic, there is a lot of sloppiness. Even when someone like Brian McLaren is trying to demonstrate how he has appreciation for Calvinism, he still makes mistakes with basic historical facts. For instance, he states that Calvin became a pastor at eighteen years old and wrote the *Institutes* when he was twenty-five, a book McLaren characterizes (or better: caricatures) as being a "lean and pure intellectual system." Rob Bell wrote in *Velvet Elvis* that "we got the Bible from the church voting on what the Bible even is. . . ." Carson and other critics have been relentless in pointing out the sloppy way that emergent writers not only deal with history and questions of historical theology, but also with theology itself. Shallowness, reductionism, anachronisms, the

creation of false antitheses – all of these undermine the credibility of emergent leaders.

Analysis and influence

The influence of these writers is, quite frankly, troubling. Emergent books are not being sold in isolated corners; instead these are the big sellers in many Christian bookstores. Emergent leaders are also effective in using technology – they not only use blogs, and on-line forums, but also videos on YouTube (think here of Rob Bell and his Nooma video series). Emergent thinking has made significant inroads into Christian post-secondary institutions.

We need to be aware of this movement. Not only because of what it is doing in the broader Christian context, but because of what it's doing already in our churches and in our immediate context. As an example, take the recent runaway best-seller *The Shack*. In many ways, *The Shack* is an emergent parable and it's been especially popular with the emergent crowd. Its writer, Paul Young, doesn't belong to any church, and just does spiritual things his own way. Church is optional – classic emergent thinking. There were and are many people in our churches who read *The Shack* and recognized it as heretical and could tell you why. But there were others who read it and just didn't like it and couldn't really nail down what the problems were. But then there are also others who read it and thought it was great, life-changing even. That is a serious problem, even if it is just a few.

It's also a problem that some of our young people are reading emergent stuff and listening to emergent speakers and being influenced in this direction. We need to be aware that this movement is putting some pressure on our people. Especially when you're growing up in a narcissistic culture which encourages

eclecticism, the pressure can be strong, even overwhelming to take that kind of approach to spiritual matters. Capitulation will result in not only the eclipse of the authority of our Reformed confessions, and not only the undermining of Word and Sacrament ministry, but most significantly of all the erosion of the very foundations of our faith in the Word of God. We can't afford to take things for granted. For instance, we can't afford to take our Reformed, biblical epistemology for granted. This is something that we may need to emphasize more in our preaching and teaching – the fact that we can have certainty in our knowledge of many important things because we have revelation from God and we are created in the image of God. We don't need to have a philosophy class from the pulpit, but certainly we can certainly draw this out in a simple way when we're preaching on Lord's Day 6 or Lord's Day 7, dealing with how we know and how we find certainty in spiritual matters. Of course, other venues can also be used for this, for instance, the adult education class.

My observation is that the emergent movement is becoming the new normal in much of North American Christianity. Mega-churches are on the decline. Evangelicalism is nearly theologically bankrupt and the emergent movement is ready to slide in and take its place, just as liberalism overtook pietism in a previous century. Despite the allegedly postmodern veneer, emergent is ultimately regurgitated, gussied-up liberalism, the liberalism that H. Richard Niebuhr famously described as being a "God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross." Of course, there is nothing new under the sun, but to address these trends and their impact on our people, we need to be aware of what's taking place around us.



G.H. Visscher



Another Year. . .

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Staffing

As we move to the end of another academic year and pause to reflect to some degree, there is no doubt that the largest issue that faced the Theological College community was one that related to the teaching staff. To fill the void caused by the indefinite sick leave granted to Dr. N.H. Gootjes, Dr. J.W. Maris taught dogmatics from September to December 2008. While this was an unusual move on the part of the Board given the fact that Dr. J.W. Maris was not a member of a sister church, it was at the same time a great success. Dr. Maris' calm demeanour, extensive teaching experience, and tremendous knowledge of the field combined to make him an instructor whom the students truly enjoyed and appreciated. Not only theologically but also in every other way, he was one of us. He and his wife even became very familiar with and involved in our church life while they lived for those months in the Burlington-Waterdown manse. We thank Dr. and Mrs. Maris for their dedication with respect to the training of our students and hence for their contribution to the life of the college community and the federation of churches. We have learned once again that the ties of

faith and the Spirit are greater than the ties of paper and ink (BC, Art 27).

Since Dr. Gootjes continues on indefinite sick leave and we could not be sure that he would be able to teach in the next academic year, the Board decided to appoint a temporary instructor in the person of Rev. J. Van Vliet to the chair of dogmatics with the understanding that he would be recommended to the next General Synod as the next professor of dogmatics. Granted, this is unusual procedure, but the provision for this approach has been made in the official College documents, and unusual circumstances sometimes necessitate unusual procedures. As this is being written, Rev. J. Van Vliet is completing his three month temporary teaching period here at the seminary, he will be returning to Surrey for a couple of months, after which he will be relocating to the Hamilton area in July 2009. We thank him and his family for being willing to do all this for the significant cause of the preparation of young ministers of the Word. We also want to thank the Maranatha church at Surrey. We know that it was not easy for them to sacrifice their minister. Again, however, this flock was willing to sacrifice its shepherd for



Dr. J.W. Maris

the greater goal of multiplying shepherds. We trust the Lord will provide another shepherd for them.

There is also another vacancy on the horizon, namely, in the Old Testament department. As instructed by the last general synod, the Board has examined very carefully the procedure whereby professors are to be appointed from now on. In the almost forty year history of the College, the procedure has been the same: the Senate (faculty) makes a recommendation to the Board, which then makes a recommendation for appointment

to the general synod. Through a subcommittee of the Board, a new procedure has been adopted by the Board. When a vacancy has been declared, a search committee made of four Governors and the Principal is appointed. Since the College is a college run by the churches for the churches, the procedure involves asking the churches for suggestions. At the same time, input from the Senate is also sought. This committee then considers and possibly interviews the possible candidates and makes a recommendation to the Board, which will then make a recommendation to the synod. Upon synod approval, the Board makes the appointment. One other change in this regard is that the name(s) will be made known to synod delegates before the actual synod; the delegates will receive, in confidence, the names two weeks before the convening of general synod. As Dr. Van Dam plans to retire after the next general synod (September 2011), this new procedure is being followed for the first time with respect to his replacement. Churches have received a letter



from the Search Committee about this matter and the churches have been letting the Committee know about their preferences.

John Calvin

The fact that July 10, 2009 will be the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin is being celebrated all around the world (see www.calvin500.org). This event is not going by unnoted by our seminary either. To remember this Reformer who has meant so much in the life of the Reformed churches, the Theological College sponsored three special lectures delivered by men who have made the writing of John Calvin a special focus in their study. On Friday, November 14, Dr. J.W. Maris delivered a public lecture on "The Spirituality of Faith: The Meaning of Faith in John Calvin's Theology." On Friday, February 27, Rev. J. Van Vliet delivered a public lecture entitled "Calvin and la querelle des femmes: Reformed answers to gender questions in the 16th century." Rev. Van Vliet is in the final stages of a Th. D. dissertation on Calvin's understanding of the image of God through the Theological University of Apeldoorn, The Netherlands. And on Friday, March 27, Mr. Jeffrey Wendell Temple delivered a lecture entitled "In the Company of Pastors: Calvin and the Office of the Minister." Brother Temple, a member of our London church, is working on a doctoral dissertation on this topic through the University of Western Ontario. An mp3 version of his lecture is available on our website (http://www.theologicalcollege.ca/news/temple_lecture.html).

A pipe organ

For a number of years now, we have been collecting for the Organ Fund at the annual College Evening. Our dream was that one



Mr. J.W. Temple

day we might enhance the singing of our chapel sessions with the sounds of an organ, perhaps even a pipe organ. Recently, in response to some inquiries made of local organ builders, we came across a pipe organ located in a stately home known as Woodhill on the escarpment in the Waterdown area. It was in a home owned in the 1800s by Adam Ferguson (after whom the town of Fergus is named). The core of the console is a 1924 Casavant, which was formerly used in Ryerson United Church in Hamilton. On top of the Casavant is a unit organ built by Dubay Organs Limited, which has seven ranks and 475 pipes. The organ was dismantled, moved, and restored by Bruce R. Cross Pipe Organ Maintenance. You can also find pictures of the organ on this page of our website (<http://www.theologicalcollege.ca/galleries>). We are thoroughly enjoying the sounds of this new acquisition. If you would like to as well, why not join us for one of our chapels? During the school year (September to May), chapels are held every Monday at 9:00 a.m. and every Friday at 12:20 p.m. Here you would also hear one of students or faculty deliver a brief address of a

devotional nature. You would be more than welcome to join us.

By the way, while you are on the College website, do listen to our ten minute video clip summary of the 2008 College Evening. And plan to attend our next one, on September 11, 2009, where three students will, D.V. have degrees conferred and our forty year history will be celebrated.

Bachelor of Theology

The Theological College has always been a place that holds very highly the value of the study of the biblical languages. Should we not do the utmost to understand the Word? While our commitment remains the same, through some of our international contacts, we have become increasingly aware that elsewhere in the world there are

people who are of necessity preaching the Word (and doing so faithfully) without such knowledge. While their ministry would, no doubt, be enhanced by studying with us, the requirement to study the languages for one or two years before coming is what has often prevented them. Thus, we have introduced a new three year program, in which students would not need a knowledge of the biblical languages but would learn to hone all other skills involved in preaching and ministry. This is, of course, not sufficient for entrance into ministry in our churches, but it may be helpful for others in our churches and elsewhere. Once again, more information can be found on our website. May the Lord bless also this effort to serve his people.

Jars of clay

The Apostle Paul was not excluding himself and his own weakness when he wrote to the Corinthians about "treasures in jars of clay" (2 Cor 4:7). Every other servant of Christ needs to make a similar confession of frailty and brokenness. That reality recently came home to us when Dr. Jack De Jong had to be admitted to a nursing home. How swiftly our brother has gone from being one who so ably helped others to one who needs so much help from others, from being one who spoke eloquently to one who can no longer converse. We commend him, his wife, and children to God's care. May He be with us all, students and teachers, former and present, as we daily rely upon his grace.



Book Review

Reviewed by J.L. van Popta

Romans 4 and the New Perspective on Paul: Faith Embraces the Promise. Gerhard H. Visscher. New York: Peter Lang, 2009

Additional Information: Hard Cover, sewn binding, 265 pages. 2 appendices, bibliography and index C\$94.75

My good friend and colleague Dr. Gerhard H. (Jerry) Visscher has published an important book entitled *Romans 4 and the New Perspective on Paul: Faith Embraces the Promise*. (Dr. Visscher is the New Testament Professor at the Canadian Reformed Seminary in Hamilton.)

This book has been published in the influential series "Studies in Biblical Literature" as Volume 122.

The editor of the series writes in a general preface: "This series seeks to make available to scholars and institutions scholarship of a high order which will make a significant contribution to the ongoing biblical discourse." This book definitely makes a significant contribution to the discussion on the so-called "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP).

In 1977 E.P. Saunders published a book, *Paul and Palestinian*

Judaism, in which he challenged the accepted interpretation of Paul concerning the doctrine of justification by faith. He maintained that Martin Luther and John Calvin read Paul's letters (especially to the Romans and to the Galatians) through their own historical context of conflict with the medieval Roman Church. Sanders argued, however, that when Paul was speaking of "works of the law" he did not mean that the Jews tried to justify themselves by keeping the law, but that Israel identified itself by keeping the law. Sanders argued (Visscher tells us) that the Jews of Paul's day taught that "entrance into the covenant community ('getting in') is not through a system of weighing merits against demerits with respect to a person's work, but through God's gracious act of election; remaining in the covenant ('staying in') depends on the divine provision of atonement for sin and on subsequent human obedience (p. 8)." More recently scholars like James D.G. Dunn and N.T. (Tom) Wright popularized this new understanding.

Dr. Visscher surveys five scholars favouring the NPP. Then he surveys five opposing the NPP. Visscher works especially with a 1988 statement of Stephen Westerholm (of McMaster University, and Dr. Visscher's doctoral supervisor). Westerholm writes "that Paul supports his rejection of the 'works of the law' in Romans 3:20, 28 by showing that Abraham was justified by faith, not works (4:1 5) is positively fatal to Dunn's proposal (pg. 3)."

Working out this thesis of Westerholm's, Visscher then extensively investigates the

context of Romans 4 and follows that with a careful exegetical analysis of Romans 4, whereby he shows that the NPP cannot be maintained without substantial revision. Visscher concludes that though the NPP scholars have helped us to better understand some aspects of Palestinian Judaism, Sanders and his subsequent followers have not correctly understood Paul's insistence against Judaism that humans contribute nothing to their salvation (p. 233).

This book also includes two helpful appendices. For those who are "in the know" about N. T. Wright, Visscher's essay, "Works of the Law: Boundary Markers?" is a great help to understanding this phrase and its place in NPP. A second essay "The Law a Barrier to Gentiles?" briefly examines and refutes Wright's view.

Anybody who is remotely connected to the discussion in our churches about the NPP and is interested in understanding what exactly the proponents of the NPP are promoting needs to read this book. The concise and thoughtful analysis of the NPP scholars and their opponents is worth the cost of the book itself. The careful analysis of Romans 4 is a masterful work of Reformed exegesis.

One of the proponents of the NPP surveyed in the book, Terence Donaldson, writes (on the back cover!), "In this thorough and perceptive investigation, Gerhard H. Visscher draws attention to the weaknesses in various New Perspective readings of [Romans 4:4] and thus adds his voice to those that call for a new appreciation of old perspectives."

This book is supported by a comprehensive bibliography of nearly 250 books that can serve as a survey of Pauline studies generally and NPP specifically. It is rounded out by a very brief index of main ideas and authors.

Dr. Visscher is to be commended for this important and helpful book whereby he makes a significant contribution to the scholarly discussion taking place in the theological academies of the world. But this book is doubly important in that it makes the discussion accessible to pastors, preachers, elders, and to the informed member in the pew.

This book is beautifully bound in hard cover, with a sewn binding and lies open on the desk beside me as I write this review, with no weights or other books holding the book open. It has a good hard cover and supple binding and the paper meets standards for permanence and durability for book longevity. The downside is the price. At amazon.ca it can be had for 94.75! You have to pay for quality! Perhaps churches could buy this for their libraries and so many people could benefit from its availability. Though there are many Greek references to the New Testament text, for the most, Visscher gives English translations of the terms he is using.

Congratulations to you Jerry also on finally graduating from McMaster with your PhD. May the Lord bless this work in the studies and pulpits of many Reformed pastors and churches around the world. May your students benefit greatly from your studies so that they too can proclaim the gospel and urge upon God's people that "Faith Embraces the Promise!"



Works of Faith in Appalachia



The winding drive back down into the valley won't get any easier this late at night, but Jack Patterson doesn't seem too concerned. This is his home. He grew up in these hills, he tells us, following the tracks of legends like Daniel Boone. So he keeps playing his guitar and telling us stories about the good folk of Kentucky and the hardships of working in the coal mines – stories about his own life. Jack slicks back his gray hair and concentrates on the music, making little effort to “work the crowd.” But he offers real conversation and grins genuinely at our comments. And he says that he'd happily head back into the mines and take the lowest paying position if he was given the chance.

This is Harlan County, Kentucky. This little corner of Appalachia can claim less than half the population that it had in the 40s. Coal is still being mined, but it doesn't drive the economy like it used to. And of the money that is being made from Kentucky's mineral resources, very little reaches the hands of the poor. That much hasn't changed. The median household

income in this county hovers a little under \$19,000, almost a third of the American national average. With the poverty, other problems have crept in. Kentucky has a higher percentage of adults who smoke cigarettes than any other state.

And it is one of the worst states for childhood obesity rates, tooth decay, and prescription drug abuse.

But to the hardy people who live in these hills and hollows, these issues are just part of life. They know there's a dark side to living in this beautiful area. And they know that there won't be quick solutions, but they aren't going to abandon their roots either. So they make do. A shy, fragile lady invites us in from the rain to share lunch. Water leaks through her trailer roof onto the floor, but she just smiles from her chair and pets her cat. Hiking





Roof work



along a ridge named Pine Mountain, I ask a little local girl if she lives in the town of Harlan. She pauses, then tells me about the nice house in town that her family used to live in, before they had to pack their things and leave. But she keeps smiling and skipping along beside us. These people may not have a lot to give, but they have contentment to show and encouragement to offer.

This past March, Faithworks rallied over thirty high school students and leaders from southern Ontario to volunteer with the Mennonite Central Committee's SWAP program. It was a week to work and to give, but also to learn and receive. Our four energetic crews spent a week repairing low-income housing and befriending the people of Harlan. We painted porches, cleaned up garbage, installed siding and insulation, and built new roofs. We grew closer together as a group and we grew closer to God. And we "sowed seeds."

I don't think we can claim that our week in Harlan County solved long-term problems. More repairs will be needed, our fresh paint will eventually wear off, and the garbage and clutter will again pile up. But we sowed seeds of love, joy, and hope. Our hosts in Harlan County and their neighbours, the employees at Pizza Hut and Dairy Queen, even the skeptical border guards – they all watched us carefully. They saw us working together, singing together, and praying together – and it did make an impact on them.

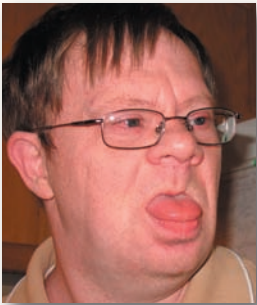
On the last night, after a time of worship, one of the local homeowners stood up in front of our group. Fighting her rising emotion, she told us that when our van of volunteers first pulled up to her house, and she knew that she'd have a new roof over her home, she saw God. The Faithworks teams are known at SWAP for being high-energy, but when this visibly touched lady gave her thanks, there was only a happy silence in the room. *She had seen God in us.* This is why we had come.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms



Tom VanderZwaag

This month Tom VanderZwaag will be celebrating his fifty-sixth birthday. Where can we find him you may ask? Tom is now residing at Anchor Home in Beamsville, where he goes for many a walk through the various hallways there.

Tom was the third child born to the VanderZwaag family, with five more siblings younger than him. He has had some medical concerns over the years, yet, the doctors were able to help him and for this, his family is grateful. Tom is someone who is very content, enjoying the simple aspects of life. He loves to go for a car ride and feels the longer the ride, the better. He especially appreciates it if it is a trip through northern Ontario. Some of Tom's daily activities include helping clear off the table after meals and making up his own bed. The staff at Anchor gives Tom some of the simpler tasks to do, of which he can be a big help. However, if the staff happens to drop some cutlery on the ground and Tom sees it, he will burst into laughter. The sound of Tom's laughter is beautiful and it is extremely contagious. He certainly contributes to the atmosphere in his home. Anchor home has been a good place to live for Tom, he is blessed to be able to live in a Christian and loving environment. Feel free to drop by when you are in the area, or send Tom a card to offer your congratulations for his birthday.

Birthdays in July

We also give sincere congratulations to all the others who are celebrating a birthday in July. May our heavenly Father give you his many blessings, as you may cherish each day anew.

4 JAMES BUIKEMA will be 48

c/o R. Feenstra
278 St. Catherine Street
P.O. Box 662, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

14 SARAH VANDERGUGTEN will be 14

23 Jane Street, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

20 CHARLIE BEINTEMA will be 34

29 Wilson Avenue, Chatham, ON N7L 1K8

28 JIM WANDERS will be 48

2142 Deerwood Drive, Burlington, ON N7L 2A9

29 TOM VANDERZWAAG will be 56

Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2



In an effort to become better acquainted with our special brothers and sisters who are connected with the Ray of Sunshine, we are updating our contact list. You may have noticed in the previous *Clarion* that we are shifting our Ray of Sunshine focus and sharing a little bit more about our brothers and sisters.

Parents and/or caregivers please send us your up to date contact information (phone, address and e-mail) so we have an opportunity to communicate.

If you have somebody to add to our birthday list or contact information needs to be changed,
please let us know:

548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

Phone: (905) 563-0380

Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



What's New???

Rev. E. Kampen is minister
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Church at Orangeville,
Ontario
eric.kampen@canrc.org

When it comes to church polity, the two extremes are hierarchy, with its top-down approach, and congregationalism, where each congregation acts almost as a law unto itself. Reformed church polity aims to avoid both extremes. While it recognizes that the Lord Jesus Christ has given authority to elders in local churches, there is also a keen awareness of mutual accountability as churches. After all, the church is catholic. This impresses on us that communion of saints is not something exercised only among believers locally but should be exercised also in a broader setting. One of the ways of exercising the communion of saints in a broader way is by federating as churches. In a federation there is the opportunity for assisting each other as well as holding each other accountable.

As part of this assisting each other and holding each other

accountable, the churches have adopted a provision in the Church Order concerning appeals. In our present Church Order it is Article 31, which reads,

If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to the major assembly; and whatever may be agreed upon by majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proven to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.

While we have this sound principle, the practice is filled with difficulties. Those who feel they have been wronged by their council or consistory do not always know when and how they should appeal. Elders who have gone to classis where an appeal was on the agenda at times will have struggled to understand exactly

what is being asked. All too often, everyone in the process is dissatisfied. Rev. DeGelder addressed this issue in a speech delivered at the College Convocation in 2007 entitled, "Grant me justice."¹

Recently, Classis Northern Ontario of March 27, 2009 adopted a set of guidelines for dealing with appeals. The *Press Release* of that classis stated, "The aim of these guidelines is to avoid lack of clarity both in terms of expression and documentation which at times makes it difficult for a Classis to deal with an appeal."²

As it will be of interest to the churches, and it is something new in the federation, what follows is a copy of these Guidelines. In order that the guidelines can stand out as a separate document, I sign off till next time.

Guidelines for Classis Northern Ontario for Dealing with Appeals

1. Right of Appeal

" If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to the major assembly; and whatever may be agreed upon by majority vote shall

- be considered settled and binding, unless it is proven to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order" (Art 31 CO).
- ### 2. Submitting an Appeal
- When a member of one of the churches appeals to Classis according to Art. 31 CO, he must submit this appeal to the convening church of the next Classis at least eight weeks before the convening of Classis.

- The convening church shall place the appeal on the agenda.
- The convening church shall give a copy of the appeal to the Committee for Appeals appointed by Classis.
- An appeal has to contain at least the following elements
 - A rendition of the decision(s) of the consistory/council that has given rise to the appeal.

- ii. The objection(s) raised by the appellant and the response of the consistory/council to these objections.
 - iii. An explanation of the objections of the appellant, with grounds and (if applicable) with evidence.
 - iv. A clear statement of what the appellant requests Classis to do.
- e. If the appeal does not meet these requirements, the appellant will have the opportunity to revise his appeal before a deadline set by the Committee.
3. The Committee
- a. The Committee for Appeals consists of three members, appointed by Classis. The Classis which appoints this Committee shall also appoint three alternate members. The Committee will be appointed at the September Classis and will have to be members in good standing in the churches of Classis. Each church can nominate a brother deemed suitable for this task. A brother may serve up to a maximum of four consecutive years. Classis will appoint one of the members as the convener.
 - b. If one or more of the members has dealt with the matter being appealed or is related to the appellant, the alternate shall take his place.
4. Task of the Committee
- a. The Committee will make a recommendation to Classis regarding admissibility. An appeal is inadmissible if
 - i. The matter is not finished in the minor assembly (CO 30)
 - ii. The appellant has not notified his consistory of his appeal to Classis.
 - iii. It has been submitted less than eight weeks before the convening of Classis, unless there are good reasons as to why this requirement could not be met. Classis will judge these reasons.
 - iv. The appellant is no longer a member of a Canadian Reformed Church or one of its sister churches, unless the appeal deals with the reason why the appellant is no longer a member and the judgement of Classis is important for his reconciliation to the congregation.
 - b. The task of the Committee is to ensure that all relevant materials are available for Classis. Appellant and consistory shall provide the Committee with materials necessary for Classis to come to a proper judgement. The Committee may discuss orally the material of the appeal with the appellant and the consistory/council. This is not done to make a judgement, but to ensure Classis has all the relevant information for dealing with the appeal. In communicating with the Committee, both consistory/ council and appellants have the right to ask the assistance of a third party. The Committee shall give to both parties and to Classis a written report of their oral discussions.
 - c. The Committee will inform both parties of the documents that will be presented to Classis.
 - d. If the Committee is not able to complete its work in time before the next Classis, it will notify Classis via the convening church. Classis will then set a date in which it will reconvene to deal with the appeal.
5. Classis
- a. Classis must judge the recommendation of the Committee regarding admissibility.
 - b. When Classis discusses the appeal two Committee members shall be present to give further information if so requested by Classis.
 - c. Classis must make its decision based on the information presented by the Committee. Delegates from the Church involved in the appeal should normally refrain from addressing the issue. During Classis no new information shall be introduced.
 - d. The decision of Classis must contain the following elements:
 - i. A rendition of the decision(s) or action(s) of the consistory/council that has given rise to the appeal.
 - ii. A summary of the objection by the appellant.
 - iii. A summary of the answer of the consistory to these objections.
 - iv. Precisely formulated considerations on which the decision of Classis rests.
 - v. A clear judgement on the appeal.
 - vi. If necessary a possible application of the decision for the parties involved.
 - vii. If applicable further suggestions as to how restoration of justice and peace can be obtained.

Adopted by Classis Northern Ontario,
held on March 27, 2009



Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Deformation never comes all of a sudden in all its ugliness. Things deteriorate little by little. Something is done contrary to what has been agreed upon, but "well, it is not too bad," so it is being let go on. Then comes the next little thing, and "it is not too bad," so it is tolerated. And so on.

In our Church Order we have promised that "In the worship services the Psalms will be sung in the rhyming adopted by General Synod" (Art 55). There are congregations where proposed revised rhymings are sung in the worship services. This is nothing else than a breaking of a solemnly given promise, unfaithfulness to the promise to abide by what has been agreed upon. "Only a little thing"? No, *basically* just as serious as if a consistory with the deacons should suspend and depose an office-bearer without the agreement of a neighbouring consistory with the deacons. Only repentance and return is the proper course here.

I know that in defence of this aberration the practice from the early years has been quoted. This is a fallacy, for then there was no such provision in our Church Order and neither general synods nor committees nor consistories violated any promise made.

A second point. As I heard, there are schools where the revised rhymings are being used instead of the ecclesiastically adopted ones. I always thought that the schools should follow the churches and not the other way around. Otherwise there comes a split between the church and the school. Years ago, while the church used the RSV, of at least one school I learned that they switched over to the NIV. That was wrong. Our parents should watch carefully and see their responsibility also in this respect. Deformation can also find its beginning in the schools and spread from there. It is not always so as one brother in the days of the Secession said, "The schools are just as corrupt as the churches, and should we, who refuse to go to the churches, send our children there?" The reverse is also a distinct possibility.

Churches, beware!

W. W. J. VanOene



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



Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order, held March 24-26, 2009 at the First United Reformed Church in Chino, CA

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema, and Mr. Harry Van Gorp representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Jonah 1, and prayer.

The minutes of the November 11-12, 2008 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.

The respective 2007 general synods of the two federations had adopted the recommendation to present to the churches the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) and the four-column comparison report for discussion and evaluation. Further, that the Committee be authorized to hold regional conferences to present and discuss various provisions of the PJCO. Thus far the Committee received thirty-two letters from Canadian Reformed churches and thirteen letters from United Reformed churches. In addition to the regional conferences in Central and Western Canada in 2008, conferences were held in Iowa, Illinois and Michigan (March 11-13,

2009) and California (March 23 and 24, 2009).

The PJCO committee has received numerous communications from churches which have raised questions or registered concerns over a perceived development of hierarchy in the PJCO. At the heart of these concerns lies the desire to defend the authority of the consistory against encroachment upon that authority by a classis or a synod.

The following statements on the nature of broader assemblies are understood by the committee to underlie the Reformed church polity of the church order of Dort, and are thus reflected in the PJCO according to the committee's mandate to follow the principles of Dort.

PJCO committee statement on the authority of broader assemblies

1. The authority that Christ gives to His church rests with the consistory (PJCO 22, cf. Foundational Statement 6). Therefore when broader assemblies are convened they do not take over or replace the authority of the consistories.
2. The churches give broader assemblies the jurisdiction (i.e., the mandate to make decisions) only to deliberate and to make decisions on all matters lawfully placed before them (PJCO 21.d.). The Church Order, as agreed to by all the churches (PJCO 58), stipulates what matters are lawfully placed before the broader assemblies.
3. Members of broader assemblies are those who have been delegated by narrower assemblies (PJCO 21.c.). Once a

broader assembly is constituted, the delegated brothers become members of that assembly. Therefore, each member of a broader assembly serves the good of all the churches with respect to the matters lawfully placed before that assembly, rather than represent the interests of his sending body.

4. Broader assemblies are deliberative in nature (PJCO 21 a). Whereas a consistory may give input and direction concerning overtures on the agenda to the men it delegates, it may not bind their votes. Rather, it should write a letter to the assembly concerning its conviction. Binding votes would negate the need for deliberative reflection on the issues, and consistories could then simply send in their votes by written ballot. The size of broader assemblies should not impede careful reflection and deliberation, by being either too large as to make broad participation in such deliberation by its members unwieldy and impossible, or too small as to lack in depth and breadth of wisdom.
5. By common consent the churches agree to abide by the decisions of a broader assembly because a matter to be decided upon at the broader assembly has been lawfully placed before it by way of a consistory's request or an appeal.
6. The decisions of a broader assembly must be considered settled and binding, and must therefore be implemented, unless found to be in conflict with Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, or the Church Order (PJCO 21 e).

Most of the available time was used by the committee to deal with many of the letters received from the churches and the comments and feedback from the conferences. While each member of the combined committee had been given copies of all correspondence, the CanRC brothers had prepared proposals for dealing with the input from the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the URCNA brothers had prepared proposals for dealing with the input from the United Reformed Churches. These proposals were discussed in detail by the combined committee and, where deemed necessary, changes were made to the PJCO. It is not possible in this press release to provide all the details of these discussions and decisions. However, the following are some of the main points.

In order to clarify the language and to be more specific in its wording, minor changes were made to articles PJCO 2, PJCO 10, PJCO 21.d, PJCO 24, PJCO 25.c, PJCO 26, PJCO 29, PJCO 30, PJCO 31, PJCO 36, and PJCO 43.

More substantial changes were incorporated as follows:

PJCO 3 – To included with the duties of the minister the following phrase: “visiting the members in their homes,” and to change “catechizing the youth” to “catechizing and instructing the youth in the doctrines of Scripture.”

PJCO 4.α – The committee agreed that the last sentence regarding theological students needed clarifying. It now reads “The consistory with the deacons of his church shall help him ensure that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis.”

PJCO 7 – Regarding an ordained Minister without a Congregation Entering the Federation it was further stipulated that he may be declared eligible for call only after becoming a member of a congregation in the federation, only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision determined by his consistory, and only after sustaining an examination conducted according to the regulations adopted by the federation in the applicable examination regulations. Appropriate changes were made in the respective examination regulations to clarify that such a man should be installed, and not ordained.

PJCO 11 – The committee agreed that it is more appropriate to require classis involvement only when the temporary release of a minister is of a time period greater than one year.

PJCO 14 – In this article as well as many others the term council is used. This may have led to confusion since council is not one of the four recognized assemblies in the church order. The PJCO attempted to clarify this in Art. 22. It is at times argued that Article 30 of the Belgic Confession speaks of the work of council as governing. However, a careful reading of Article 30 indicates that the church is governed by the polity taught by Christ, whereas it is only the elders together with the minister who are commissioned to rule in Christ’s church. The three distinct offices and tasks are clearly defined. In this discussion it is important to begin with the concept of office. The office of elder and the office of deacon are distinct and each office has its own duties (cf. Articles 17

and 19 respectively). The duty of oversight and ruling belongs to the task of the elders. They shall ensure that their fellow-elders, the minister(s), and the deacons faithfully discharge their offices. The office of the deacon is not one of governing the church. Just because the deacons are involved when office-bearers are admitted to office that does not mean that they should be involved in discipline, e.g. Art. 54. Suspension and deposition are matters of discipline, which belongs to the office of elder. This does not make the office of deacon any less of an office. Deacons have their own tasks and need to serve the church in that capacity.

When PJCO 23 speaks about churches in which there are small numbers of elders, they may perform their duties with the advice of the deacons. The deacons do then not become elders. Similarly, when the number of deacons is small, they may perform their duties with the advice of the elders. The elders do then not become deacons, they only offer advice. The deacons continue to be responsible for their tasks, as do the elders for theirs.

In view of the above, the committee agreed to change the wording in the PJCO to “consistory with the deacons” where currently the word “council” is used.

PJCO 17 – The phrase “promote confessionally Reformed schooling at all levels” was found to be somewhat ambiguous. It has been changed to: “and promote schooling at all levels that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity.”

PJCO 21.g – The section dealing with the task of the clerk and record keeping was incorporated in section f.

PJCO 50 – The Discipline of a Member was also the topic in many of the letters and discussions at the conferences.

The meaning of the words “mature non-communicant member,” the “privileges of the church,” and the concept of the excommunication of a non-communicant member were not clear. It was decided to have one article about discipline with two sections: one for communicant members and the second for non-communicant members. To change the opening sentence in the first section to start with: “Any member, whose sin is properly made known to the consistory,” and to adopt the following wording for the subsection Silent Discipline: “A member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from participating in the sacraments, and is thereby not a member in good standing. Such suspension shall not be made public by the consistory.”

The discipline of a non-communicant is now dealt with in a separate section with the following wording:

A non-communicant member who is delinquent either in doctrine or life, who after repeated and loving admonitions of the consistory does not repent, shall be excluded from the church of Christ. The sinner’s impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the offense and the failure to heed repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may pray for this member. In the first

public announcement the name of the sinner shall ordinarily not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.

The consistory shall obtain the concurring advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member’s name shall be mentioned to the congregation and a date set for the excommunication, excluding him from the Church of Jesus Christ. The intervals between the two announcements and the excommunication shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

The public discipline shall be done with the use of the synodically approved liturgical form.

PJCO 54 – To further guard against hierarchy the words “No broader assembly may suspend or depose an office-bearer” was added to the third paragraph of the article, The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer.

PJCO 56 – In connection with this article the committee was persuaded to change the heading to read: “The Reception and Departure of Members,” and to delete both section c and d from this article. A reference to members “withdrawing” may tend to legitimize such action, while in fact it is a sinful act.

The Appendices will be referred to by name in the relevant PJCO articles, e.g. Examination Regulation, and Form for. . . , and together with the Introduction they will be included in every printing of the PJCO.

In Appendix 2 the words “A medical certificate of good health” was changed to: “a medical report of health.”

Br. Witten was asked to develop a proposal for credential forms for delegates to each of the three broader assemblies for the next meeting of the committee. These, when finalized, will then also be included in the appendices.

Some time was spent at the end of the last day on the function and importance of Regional Synod in the spectrum of broader assemblies. While this concept is new to the UNRNA, it has been part of CanRC ecclesiastical life from the beginning. They function in particular in speeding up the appeal process. Would the federation suffer without the benefit of regional synods? It is decided to revisit this matter at a future meeting.

It is clear that much work has been accomplished and significant changes were made in response to the feedback received from the churches. It must be remembered that these changes are not the final product and could be subject to further change as the committee deals with the remainder of the correspondence at the next combined meeting. This meeting has been scheduled for July 27-30, 2009 D.V., in the Grand Rapids, MI area.

Following prayer of praise and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for the work that could be accomplished in brotherly harmony, Dr. Kloosterman closed the meeting.

This press release, as well as copies of previous releases can be found at the following web site: <http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco>

For the committee
Gerard J. Nordeman

