

# Clarion

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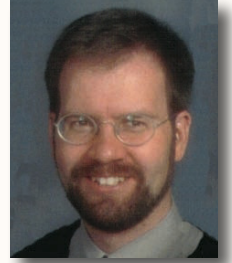
## *General Synod Burlington 2010*

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in Short





Dr. Jason Van Vliet is professor of Dogmatics at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario  
[jason.vanvliet@canrc.org](mailto:jason.vanvliet@canrc.org)

# New Confessions: Do we need them?

*Can a teenager who texts from a cell phone really relate to a catechism written with a quill?*

Recently, Dr. R.C. Janssen, minister of the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church, published the dissertation which he wrote for his doctoral degree. It's called *By This Our Subscription: Confessional Subscription in the Dutch Reformed Tradition Since 1816*.<sup>1</sup> Rev. C. Bouwman has already reviewed this book on the pages of this magazine (Vol 58, No 21). I will not repeat what he has said. Indeed, I can concur with two of Bouwman's conclusions. First, Dr. Janssen has made a very detailed and thorough study of confessional subscription and we ought to be thankful for that. Second, the author is not afraid to ask some important questions. One of them is this: how can our confessions, written centuries ago, still be relevant today? It is particularly this question that I wish to pursue further.

## The problem and the proposal

"The biggest problem then," Janssen writes, "is that confessional documents have become outdated" (361). By way of example, he mentions that the Catechism's treatment of the sacraments is too detailed, the Canons of Dort are too elaborate for the average church member, and there is not enough in the confessions about marriage, covenant, and women in office (379). Presumably, these deficiencies could be addressed by updating the language and content of various articles or Lord's Days that seem to be out-of-date. If the confessions were a house, then this would be like replacing the old light fixtures, or perhaps even the windows, with more modern ones. According to Janssen, this is possible but not preferable. He would rather disassemble the house – meticulously saving all the good timbers and tiles – and rebuild a completely new

one. In his own words, "I believe churches today would be best off rewriting their confessional heritage" (368).

In concrete terms, how would this look? He suggests that "the body of confessional substance be poured into various moulds": a defining, a declarative, and a doxological confession (361, 370). Three new confessions: to be sure, it's an ambitious proposal!

## The process

In order to write these new confessions, Janssen proposes a process that contains fifteen steps (372), but it comes down to the following. There would be a standing synodical committee called "Confessing." So, just like we now have a standing committee for the *Book of Praise*, we would have another standing committee for our new confessions. This synodical committee would work on the text of these new confessions. When a new article is ready, and general synod provisionally approves it, the draft would be sent to the classes (Classis Pacific West, Classis Niagara, etc). Each classis could write to the standing committee submitting their suggestions for improvements. The article may bounce back and forth between the standing committee, general synod, and classes a number of times. However, when seventy-five percent of the classes and general synod are satisfied with the article, it goes out for a trial period among the churches. Then, so long as no major objections are brought forward, the next general synod will adopt the new article. Presumably, a number of articles could go through this process at the same time, otherwise it would take a very long time before any new confession would be complete.



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Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal  
Coeditors: R. Aasman, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

**ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:**

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2  
E-Mail: veenendaal@shaw.ca

**ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:**

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Now, you may be wondering: why does the general synod send its proposal first to the classes, and then only later on to the local churches? Usually, when synodical committees have reports they end up on the table of our local consistories. However, Janssen prioritizes the role of classes because, as he writes, "I believe more prominence should be given to the role of the classis than is customary today" (420). In fact, he would even go so far as to say that "a broader assembly is able to discipline those guilty of confessional unfaithfulness and rescue the local church" (299). This is tied in with his preferred approach to church government which is called "connectionalism" (298-300). This is contrasted with "autonomism" in which the authority to discipline rests only with the local consistory, not the broader assemblies. We'll come back to connectionalism a little later.

**At first glance**

Initially common sense seems to confirm what Janssen is proposing, ambitious though it may be. Let's go back to that house for a moment. You can replace the old, yellow swag lamps, and the drafty, single-pane windows, and the worn, shag carpets, and the leaky, lead plumbing, and the. . . . However, there comes a time when you may say: "It's just not worth replacing and renovating anymore. Time to build new!" So, if it's true that there comes a time when an old house cannot be salvaged and it's time for a new one, then why wouldn't the same be true for confessions? After all, some of these confessions date back to the 1500s and the Nicene Creed even goes back to the 300s. A lot of chronological water has flowed under the ecclesiastical bridge since then! Can a teenager who texts from a cell phone really relate to a catechism written with a quill?

**On second thought**

Back when I was a theological student, some of us used to lead a Bible study at a rehab centre for alcoholics in downtown Hamilton. One young man



at those Bible studies was particularly keen. After a number of discussions with him, I showed him the Heidelberg Catechism. Scanning it with curiosity, he asked if he could borrow it. "Sure," I said. The next time we saw each other, he came right up to me. "How come you were holding out on me? Why didn't you give me this treasure chest earlier?!" he demanded. "Which treasure chest?" I asked. "This catechism!" he exclaimed. As it turned out, he had read the catechism, cover to cover, and found it so edifying that he was actually offended that I didn't lend him a copy any sooner. To be sure, he didn't understand every sentence in every Lord's Day. So we had more to discuss. Nevertheless, this man – who never grew up in a Christian home, dropped out of high school, lived on the streets of Hamilton and became addicted to alcohol – he connected with the Catechism in such a deep and personal way that he dubbed it: "the treasure chest." So, are the confessions really so outdated?

## Abiding confessions

Why did this young man from Hamilton connect so well with a catechism published in Heidelberg in 1563? Well, in the Catechism, he found a thorough, yet succinct, explanation of "all that is promised us in the gospel" (LD 7). In other words, precisely because the catechism guided him into the treasures of the gospel, it became a spiritual treasure chest for him. Moreover, since the gospel is the "living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet 1:23), it is not surprising that the confessions which summarize this gospel also have a certain enduring, or abiding, quality to them.

### Do we need new confessions?

At this point it is helpful to dig into a little bit of Latin. Scripture has been called *norma normans*. Back in ancient Rome, where they spoke Latin, a carpenter used a *norma* when he built a house. Today builders call it a "framing square." Before the 2x4 walls are nailed into place the builder uses his square to set the angle at precisely ninety degrees. Likewise, Scripture is that spiritual square which determines the straightness or crookedness of every teaching. So, loosely translated, *norma normans* means the square that sets things straight.

Taking this a step farther, once a builder sets all the walls in a room straight with his square (*norma*), those walls became *norma normata*. That is to say, the room itself is now square because it's been squared by the

framer's square. So, if you had two other loose boards which were nailed together, but you felt that they were not at right angles, you could set them in the corner of that room and test them by the squared room. Our confessions are like that square room, *norma normata*, and thus they can be used to teach and test sound doctrine.

These terms, *norma normans* and *norma normata*, have a long history in Reformed circles, and Dr. Janssen is well aware of this. However, he suggests a change. He writes, "one may even go so far as to say that the true standard for the confession, the *norma normans*, is not Scripture, but the faith of the confessor. And the *norma normans* for the faith of the confessor is Scripture" (362). So, Scripture is still the ultimate norm but, in his own words, "between Scripture and confession stands the faith of the confessor" (362). This confessor is both Christians individually and the church communally.

However, there is a problem with this arrangement. Our faith does not stand so firm and forever as the Word of the Lord does (Isa 40:8). Our faith can be "little" (Matt 6:30) or "lacking" (1 Thess 3:10); it needs to "grow" (2 Thess 1:3) and "progress" (Phil 1:25). The gift of faith is wonderful, but it is still too imperfect to qualify as *norma normans*, a square that sets things straight. For this reason we should keep a direct connection from Scripture to the confessions. The faith of the church does not stand as an intermediate norm between them. Rather the church has built straight and square confessions (*norma normata*) using the square of holy Scriptures (*norma normans*). Of course, since the authors of our confessions are fallible, it is possible that as they were writing a confession, they did not set something precisely straight. Therefore, if we measure our confessions with Scripture and find something that is off square by a degree or two, then it is incumbent on us to work towards correcting that confession. However, our Profession of Faith Form says it correctly. It is not the faith of the confessor, but it is "the doctrine of the Word of God" which is "summarized in the confessions."

## The proper procedure

If the confessions would need to be re-squared, how would that be done? In short, a local church would have to follow due process and have the matter put on the agenda of a general synod. That general synod would likely appoint a committee to study the matter. Then, as you often read in the acts of general synods, this committee would be charged "to report to the churches

# Church News

Accepted the call to Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church of Tintern, Ontario:

**Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer**

of Carman East, Manitoba

Called by the St. Albert Canadian Reformed Church of St. Albert, Alberta:

**Candidate Tony Roukema**

Called by the Vernon Canadian Reformed Church, British Columbia:

**Candidate Arend Witten**

Called by the Eben-Ezer Canadian Reformed Church of Chatham, Ontario:

**Candidate Arend Witten**

## **Worship location change**

Starting August 1, 2010, and for the duration of construction of the new auditorium, Grand Valley worship services will be held in the gym of Dufferin Area Christian School, 394016 Dufferin County Road 12, Laurel, Ontario.

six months prior to the next general synod." I emphasize "to the churches" because there is a principle here that we ought to hold dear. Shifting more authoritative weight to classis, as Janssen suggests, even to the point of giving broader assemblies the jurisdiction to discipline office bearers in doctrinal matters, is not in accord with our Church Order (Arts. 66 and 71).

In addition, our own history teaches us that this sort of connectionalism does more damage than good. Janssen suggests that if a broader assembly were invested with the power to discipline, it could "rescue a local church" (299). However, it can also tear apart a local church, as was the case on September 25, 1944, when Classis Groningen in The Netherlands suspended three ministers and fifty-one elders. This classical decision resulted in a rupture, not a rescue, of the local church in the city of Groningen.<sup>2</sup> Without slipping into a spirit of independentism, local autonomy is something we need to promote not demote.

## **The role of the preacher**

In conclusion, let's return to the opening question: do we need new confessions? Our own history teaches us that new confessions can be written. Ever since the 1560s, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism have served the Reformed churches well. However, some decades later, in 1618-19, the churches reached a consensus that there was a definite need to deal in greater detail with doctrines such as election and regeneration. So, they built an addition to our confessional house: the Canons of Dort. As they built, they used the same trustworthy *norma normans*, holy Scripture, to make sure that new room was also straight and square.

Consequently, it is conceivable that, at some point in the future, the churches would reach another consensus that on a certain point of doctrine it is necessary to add yet another room to our confessional house. It is questionable, though, whether much would be gained by dismantling our present confessions and pouring their substance into new moulds. The pertinent question is: would the re-pouring ever stop? To write three new confessions, following Janssen's proposed procedure, would be a long-term project. Realistically, it would take a decade, if not decades. Yet, by the time the new confessions were finally finalized, new issues would undoubtedly come to the fore, at which time the re-pouring would have to begin all over again. It's hard to live inside a house that is constantly being re-poured and rebuilt. Households, also households of faith,

flourish in an atmosphere of consistent stability, not constant mutability.

Therefore, what we really need, more than confessional re-pours, are dedicated preachers and teachers who apply the truths of Scripture, as we profess them in our confessions, to the hearts and lives of God's household. And let them do this in a most vibrant and relevant way! True, the confessions refer to "the damnable error of the Epicureans" (BC 13) and the resurgence of Pelagian teachings among the Remonstrants (C of D RE 1.4). The teenager who texts from his cell phone, as well as his grandfather who drives a big, old Buick, may not instantly understand the relevance of those sentences. But both of them can learn. And their pastor is able and obliged to teach them, from the pulpit and in the catechism room.

Conscientious, relevant preachers will be a greater blessing to the household of faith than constantly re-pouring the confessions.

<sup>1</sup> Available online at [http://dspace.library.uu.nl:8080/bitstream/1874/34069/1/Dissertatie\\_R.C.Janssen.pdf](http://dspace.library.uu.nl:8080/bitstream/1874/34069/1/Dissertatie_R.C.Janssen.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> These events are detailed by Rev. D. van Dijk in Chapter 10 of his book, *My Path to Liberation*. Trans. Th. Plantinga. (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 2004). See especially pp 322-326.





Rev. Cornelis Kleyn is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Kerwood, Ontario  
[kleync@gmail.com](mailto:kleync@gmail.com)



MATTHEW 13:52

## A King Beyond Description

*“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.”*

Isaiah 6:1

Isaiah the prophet is about to start his prophetic ministry among the people of Judah in the last days of King Uzziah (cf. 2 Chron 26). The mission that Isaiah will receive from God is very difficult. Isaiah has to tell the people that “they will be ever hearing, but never understanding” (Isa 6:9). Isaiah will preach until he is blue in the face, but there will be no or very little positive results from his work.

And so in order to prepare Isaiah for such a challenging task, our majestic God gives Isaiah a vision. But this is no ordinary vision; Isaiah gets a small glimpse of his God, the great King of Kings. Isaiah needs to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the majesty and holiness of his Sender.

Isaiah sees our God in a common kingly posture: sitting. And He is sitting on a throne that is “high and exalted.” In the Ancient Near East, the mightier a king, the higher was his throne. And now Isaiah sees a King seated so high, that he says the same thing in two different words: “high and exalted.” By repeating this truth, Isaiah emphasizes just how mighty this King is.

But Isaiah goes on to talk about this throne being in a temple. And the temple that Isaiah sees here is no doubt the heavenly throne

room of God, of which the temple in Jerusalem was only a small picture. Throughout the book of Revelation and elsewhere in Scripture, the throne room of God is also compared to a temple with a lamp stand, pillars, and altars.

Now the prophet Isaiah certainly knew what the earthly temple in Jerusalem looked like. That was the place where God was present with his people Israel in a special way. And when Isaiah sees God in his throne room, this throne room is compared to the temple that he knows and understands. Isaiah uses that which he knows and understands to describe something that he does not know and understand.

But we must note in particular what Isaiah sees of God. He says that he sees the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, but then he does not go on to describe at all what God looks like. In fact, all that he describes is the train or the end piece of God’s robe. How strange is that? Here Isaiah is confronted with the Mighty King of Kings, and he only tells us a little about the tail end of his clothes. Can you imagine someone going to see Queen Elizabeth II and then describing nothing of her, apart from the heels on her shoes or the plume on her hat?

And yet it is incredible what Isaiah tells us about this train of God’s robe, this end piece of his garment. For this little bit of his garment alone already fills the whole temple, the whole throne room of God! But where is God then? Why does Isaiah say that this end piece of God’s garment fills the throne room? Isaiah simply wants to express the truth that God is too big for description. Words cannot express the greatness of our God. The Lord is too immense; He is too great to be described by any mere human.

This is a beautiful truth for us to keep in mind as we do our daily task. We cannot be ready to serve God unless we stand in awe of Him. We cannot be prepared to take up our work in God’s Kingdom unless we understand a little of the greatness and majesty of God. And what a powerful picture Isaiah gives for us here!

We have a great and majestic God. We serve a God who cannot be described in human terms. And yet this God was willing to come to earth and save us. He was willing to associate with us and rescue us from alienation and separation from Himself. Let us think of this loving, majestic Father each day as we seek to serve Him and as we grow in our devotion to the King of Kings. **C**





Dr. James Visscher is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia  
[jvisscher@telus.net](mailto:jvisscher@telus.net)

# Being a Church Kid: Positives and Negatives (Part 2 of 2)

*This article was originally a speech for the May Long Weekend organized by the Fraser Valley Young Peoples' League of the Canadian Reformed Churches in BC, held on Sunday, May 17, 2009.*

If there are many blessings and positives in being a church kid, there are also some negatives and dangers here.

## False assurance

The first danger that needs to be mentioned can be called false assurance. What is meant by that? Well, it has to do with assuming that just because you are baptized, go to church, know the Bible, are part of a Christian family, attend a Christian school or are home schooled, that therefore, and because of these things, you are saved and eternally secure. Quite simply, some church kids conclude that since they are church kids they are saved. All of the things just mentioned are viewed as tickets to heaven.

Now, if that is your view you are in deep trouble and in dangerous trouble too. If any of you are trusting in these things to save you then you have not understood the basic thrust of the gospel. For what does the gospel say? It says that salvation is through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone. Salvation, in other words, is not a matter of doing or being, it is a matter of believing. I love the words of Paul in Ephesians 2:8 and 9. They are clear, direct, and emphatic. They state, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." You and I are saved through faith in Christ alone.

Now what is that? What is faith? It is a matter of your heart. Paul says in Romans 10:10 that "it is with your heart that you believe and are justified. . . ." The Heidelberg Catechism says "this faith the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the gospel" (A. 21).

So how is it with your heart? Do you love Jesus Christ from the heart? Do you love Him before and

above all else? Is He truly and deeply your Saviour and your Lord? Do you live with Him, out of Him, and to Him every day? Is that you aim, your desire, your goal, your life?

Or are there other things that compete with this love or that push this love into the background? I know young people who love their girlfriends and boyfriends more. I know some who love their hockey and their soccer and their cars more. I know some who love their fun, their entertainment, their holidays more. Is this also the case with you? Are you caught up in a world of competing loves and loyalties? Are you like that rich young man who was so close to the kingdom of God but who in the end just could not let go of his riches and put Christ first and foremost?

If any of this is the case with you, then you need to do a serious re-think of your life. You will not see the kingdom of God in all of its glory unless your heart is committed to Jesus Christ. That counts for you, that counts for me, that counts for everyone. Christ has to be our first love. If He is not, we are building the house of our life on sand.

## Pride

The second danger that threatens you as church kids is close to false assurance and it is called pride. Here the concern is not so much on what we all do as people as it is on how and what we think of ourselves as people. Specifically, it has to do with our attitude towards ourselves or our perspective of ourselves.

To make this practical, let me ask you this, "How do you see yourself? Do you think of yourself as capable, moral, perceptive, and respectable? Do you think that you are a cut above the people that you meet whether in the church or in the world? Do you think that the silly, stupid, dumb things that happen to them will never happen to you? Do you judge them harshly and dismiss them coldly as 'rejects'?"

If so, congratulations! Congratulations, for you have just joined the school of the Pharisees! They too saw

themselves as morally superior people, as invincible people, as solid citizens. They were so full of themselves.

Yet at the same time they were empty of something else. What was lacking? In one word, it's called "grace!" What is grace? It is the unmerited, unearned, undeserved favour of God. Remember that text that I love and quoted earlier – Ephesians 2:8, 9? How are we saved? It is "through faith" in Christ and it is "by grace." And what is grace in addition to astonishing divine favour? It is "a gift of God."

You know whenever I deal with someone who has made a real mess of their life, and I deal with such people all too often, I always utter a little refrain to myself to keep me anchored. The refrain is this – "there but for the grace of God go I." For you see there is the distinct possibility that if I had been abused as a child I would be behaving in the same way. Perhaps if I had had parents who never loved me and always put me down, I would have acted out like this too. Perhaps if I had a husband who beat me or a wife who mocked me, I would have done similar things.

Learn, in other words, to see your life as grace and learn to live a life of grace. Naturally, I realize that there are some who call themselves Christians and who insist that their sins are behind them. They have risen so high that they are above sinning. Well, that may be them, but that is not me, and I suspect, it is not you either. We all need God's grace to sustain us. We all need to celebrate the fact that our God is a God of grace (Psalm 84) and that we are a people who may live by grace. "There go I but for the grace of God" – remember that saying. It will keep you balanced. It will keep you humble. It will keep you thankful.

## Compromise

But then if as church kids you need to resist false assurance and pride, you also need to resist a third thing and its called compromise. And it has to do especially with respect to the world.

Last year I spent some time in Europe on church business and I must say that what I saw there deeply disappointed and saddened me. I saw churches that had once been valiant for the truth wavering and withering. I met people who once were active church members but who had cut the ties and no longer bothered to worship. I saw decline and decay on a widespread scale and proceeding at a very fast rate.

What accounts for this? No doubt many factors play a role but one that seems to run like a dirty thread through all of them is this business of compromising with the world. It begins slowly, almost imperceptibly. We begin our working career by seeing it as part of our Christian calling but then promotions come along, friendships are formed, power is exercised, wealth accumulates, and before you know it the world's

agenda has become your agenda. Or else, you watch all of the latest offerings from the world of fashion on your televisions and in your magazines and slowly your guard comes down and you begin to dress as the world dresses and to think that what the world calls "cute" really is cute. Or you hear about how your colleagues at work discuss their relationships filled with new girlfriends and boyfriends, with tangled romances, with falling in and out of love, and your views on marriage, faithfulness, commitment, and purity begin to change.

Now, that is the adult world, but is your world really any different? The temptations for you too are everywhere. Why not another drink? Why not go and see this movie – just close your eyes to the sexual immorality and close your ears to the swearing? Why not dump this boyfriend or girlfriend for a sexier model? Why not turn life into an endless series of parties?

## You are what you . . .

There is a saying and it goes like this: "you are what you eat." I suspect that there is a lot of truth in it, but not just in it. We can add to it. "You are or become who your friends are." "You become what your entertainment portrays." "You become as you dress." "You become who you worship."

So as church kids it's important that you examine your influences, or the inputs into your life, and that you do this on a regular basis. Ask yourself some basic questions such as, "Is my lifestyle still the lifestyle of the kingdom of God or is it going the way of the world?"

And remember, this is important. Indeed, this is eternally important. The Apostle John does not write for nothing, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15-17). So your cravings, lusts, and boasts come from the world. And if they come from the world, they will rot, decay, disintegrate, pass away. All of those people who live for the here and now, for their fun and thrills, for their lusts and pleasures, for themselves and their desires will live a short life. They may last forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, even eighty or ninety years but what is that when compared to eternity?

So, church kids, if you want to live and last, you need to treat the world with care, with discernment, with caution. To help you do that memorize these wise words, "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things" and put them "into practice" (Phil 4:8, 9).







Rev. Theo Lodder is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Cloverdale, British Columbia  
[thlodder@telus.net](mailto:thlodder@telus.net)

## The Revision of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter:

# An Interview with Dr. William Helder

Have you ever wondered what is involved in putting the biblical text of the Psalms to music? What better person to ask than a brother among us who has been involved in this work through four decades and a number of editions of the *Book of Praise*?

Dr. William Helder agreed to answer a list of questions to provide church members with some insight into what is involved. My prayer is that the publication of this interview will serve as a tribute of deep gratitude to our poetically gifted brother and also as a means of renewing our appreciation for the great privilege we have, with God's children of every age, to make music to the Lord using language that is at the same time biblical and familiar.



### Interview with Dr. Helder

1. Tell us something of what is involved in the work of revising the Anglo-Genevan Psalter.

It is generally agreed that the current *Book of Praise* has served our churches well, but when outside of our community more and more people found out about the existence of a complete English-language

Genevan Psalter and kept asking for permission to use our Psalms, I was motivated to start improving at least the versifications that I had contributed, whatever the outcome of such an effort might be.

Synod 2007 subsequently authorized the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* to commission me to edit all the Psalms and revise or replace them as necessary. To quote from the committee's report to Synod 2010, the aim of the revision was "to bring the Psalms we have into closer harmony

with the actual text of the biblical Book of Psalms and to present them in the most stylistically beautiful and pleasing form possible."

The task assigned to me turned out to be part of a far-reaching and intensive process in which almost every word was reviewed. The revised texts that I submitted from time to time were scrutinized by the committee and posted on the Internet. Via the committee, I soon received long lists of suggestions and critical comments from numerous consistories. After a final round of review by the committee, the latest changes were incorporated in the report to Synod 2010. In this version various minor errors, mostly typographical, must yet be corrected.

All in all, the newly revised Psalms of the *Book of Praise* have been scrutinized, edited, corrected, adjusted, and refined in a painstaking federation-wide process that is surely without precedent.

2. How involved were you in previous editions of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter?

From 1970 to 1995 I was a member of the committee responsible for the publication of the *Book of Praise* and was therefore involved in the preparation of the 1972 and 1984 editions, particularly the latter. I contributed a number of versifications to both editions, but I did not do so as committee member. Wearing a different hat, I submitted various rhymings as requested.

3. What are some of the more challenging aspects of this work?

The challenges vary greatly from Psalm to Psalm, but there is always the challenge of conveying the sense of the original in language that is clear and concrete and at the same time meets the demands of the literary form. Because the Genevan Psalter is so richly varied in its rhyme schemes, metrical patterns,

and stanza forms, it sometimes takes a while to get things right. Often the simplest solutions are the hardest to achieve.

Many questions keep confronting the versifier: What level of language use should be the aim? When Bible translations differ, which one is to be preferred? What criteria should be applied to the use of rhyme? By paying attention to the sounds of vowels or the combinations of consonants, how can the text be made as singable as possible? How free or paraphrastic is a versified Psalm allowed to be? How or when should a passage be compressed or expanded to fit a given stanza length? And so on.

4. *What would you describe as the most rewarding aspect of this work?*

What is most rewarding is to sense that a new or revised versification expresses with vividness, clarity, fluency, and precision what the Psalmist is really saying.

5. *How much time does it take to revise a typical Psalm?*

I wouldn't know how to answer this question. All I can say is that the work of revision kept me busier and more preoccupied than I had expected. Some texts were fine-tuned again and again over a considerable time span.

6. *How much use did you make of versifications by other poets?*

Whenever a passage presented a special challenge, it sometimes proved beneficial to consult other Psalters, including non-Genevan ones. But usually it was more helpful to keep digging into the scriptural text itself.

7. *What sorts of responses to your work did you find the most encouraging/discouraging?*

Several members of congregations that are currently singing the revised Psalms told me how much they missed the new versions when they attended church services elsewhere. This was gratifying to hear. In fact, the overall positive response to my work has taken me somewhat by surprise.

I have not received any negative criticism personally; however, I am aware that not everyone is equally convinced of the need for revision. This is a little discouraging.

8. *What tools have you found the most useful in your work?*

Most useful was the wide range of Bible translations available to me—dozens of them, not only in English. I gained a great deal from comparing their choices of

particular words and expressions. Another valuable resource was an edition of the Book of Psalms in the original Hebrew with an interlinear word-for-word English translation. And let me not forget the computer. If it had not been for word-processing and e-mail, the revision could not have been completed in time.

9. *Tell us something about how the English language has evolved over the period of your life that you've been busy with the Anglo-Genevan Psalter.*

This is a big topic. Let me focus on a one development that could not be ignored in revising the language of our *Book of Praise*. I am referring to the use of the pronoun "thou" and related forms, including the matching verb endings. Moving away from King James English, the Revised Standard Version (completed in 1952) dropped the second-person singular pronoun but made one exception; "thou" was retained when referring to God. Other new translations followed this example: the NEB (completed in 1961), the New Berkeley Version (1969), and the NASB (1971). An important change in the history of religious language occurred when the more recently published Bible translations went a step further. In the NIV (1978), the NKJV (1979), the NRSV (1989), and the ESV (2001) the pronoun "thou" has vanished altogether.

The language of the 1984 *Book of Praise* still reflects that of the RSV – which is no surprise, considering that in our circles it long served as the accepted translation. When most of our current versifications were produced, their authors were still expected to express themselves in a style that even then did not correspond to their normal use of English. My 1972 version of Psalm 119 is a case in point. I was therefore very pleased that I was at last given the chance to replace artificially archaic diction.

While I am not among those who want to tinker with the classics and update the language of all traditional hymns, I think it would be strange and troubling if in the rhymed Psalms, central as they are in our public worship, we were to preserve an antiquated style that is foreign even to our Bible translations.

10. *What are you going to do with all the spare time you will now have?*

That won't be a problem. For one thing, I hope that I will at last have the opportunity to resume work on a few projects connected with the study of language and literature. A topic of particular interest to me is the influence of biblical typology on Old English poetry.

## Psalm Revision Samples

Below are some samples comparing the old rhyming (left column) and the new rhyming (right column) with the Biblical text of the NIV (center column).

Old Rhyming

Biblical Text

New Rhyming

### Psalm 59, stanza 8

But I will sing, my haters scorning,  
Thy steadfast mercies in the morning.  
A fortress has Thou been to me.  
My Refuge, to Thy rock I flee  
Whene'er my haters' anger blazes.  
My Strength, to Thee I will sing  
praises,  
For Thou hast heard me from above,  
The God who shows me steadfast  
love.

16. But I will sing of your strength,  
in the morning I will sing of your  
love  
for you are my fortress,  
my refuge in times of trouble.  
17. O my Strength, I sing praises to  
you;  
you, O God, are my fortress, my  
loving God.

You will at daybreak hear me  
singing,  
to You, O God, my praises bringing,  
for I will glory in Your might  
and in Your steadfast love delight.  
You are my strength, my rock and  
tower,  
my refuge in the darkest hour.  
Your praise I sing and shout abroad,  
O mighty Fortress, loving God!

### Psalm 75, stanza 1

Thee, O God, yes, Thee we praise,  
And we give Thee thanks, O LORD,  
For the proud get their reward  
And the wicked Thou shalt raze,  
But we laud Thy mercy's fount,  
And Thy wonders we recount.

1. We give thanks to you, O God,  
we give thanks, for your Name is  
near;  
men tell of your wonderful deeds.

We, O God, will sing Your praise  
and our thankfulness proclaim.  
Near us is Your holy name;  
just and glorious are Your ways.  
People praise You everywhere  
and Your wondrous works declare.

### Psalm 97, stanza 2

Consuming flames deploy  
Before Him, to destroy  
His foemen round about Him  
Who vainly seek to flout Him.  
His lightning bolts, when hurled,  
Enlighten all the world;  
Earth sees and quakes with fear  
To see His wrath appear  
And thunderous clouds unfurled.

3. Fire goes before him  
and consumes his foes on every  
side.  
4. His lightning lights up the world;  
the earth sees and trembles.  
5. The mountains melt like wax before  
the LORD,  
before the Lord of all the earth.

Fire that consumes His foes  
fiercely before Him goes.  
His thunderbolts are frightening:  
The world's lit up with lightning.  
Earth trembles at the sight.  
The mountains, great in height,  
like wax all melt away  
in terror and dismay  
when God reveals His might.

The hills, as wax by fire,  
All melt before His ire,  
When God on His creation  
Pours flaming indignation.



## Psalm 104, stanza 7

All look to Thee, a countless  
multitude,  
That in due time Thou mayest give  
them food.  
Now filled with the good things that  
Thou providest,  
They are dismayed when Thou Thy  
countenance hidest.  
When Thou dost take away their  
breath, they die;  
They are created when Thou, from on  
high  
Thy Spirit sending, them with life  
enduest.  
The face of all the earth Thou, LORD,  
renewest.

27.They all look to you  
to give them their food at the  
proper time.  
28.When you give it to them,  
they gather it up;  
when you open your hand,  
they are satisfied with good things.  
29.When you hide your face,  
they are terrified;  
when you take away their breath,  
they die and return to the dust.  
30.When you send your Spirit,  
they are created,  
and you renew the face of the  
earth.

All creatures, LORD, look to Your  
open hand  
to give them food, for they on You  
depend.  
They gather up its plenty when You  
beckon;  
avert Your face, and they are panic-  
stricken,  
for when You take away their breath,  
they die.  
They are created when You from on  
high  
give them their life: it is Your Spirit's  
doing;  
the face of all the earth You keep  
renewing.

### 11. What is your curriculum vitae?

After teaching English in public secondary schools for a number of years, I pursued graduate studies at McMaster University, specializing in Old and Middle English literature. In 1975 I joined the staff of Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton, where I still work as part-time librarian and teacher of Latin. Along the way I have done some teaching at the post-secondary level as well, including a university course in the history of the English language.

### 12. What have you learned about the Psalms through your work, and describe how your appreciation for them has grown.

Working with the Psalms has long been a profoundly spiritual exercise for me. More and more I have come to value the way they address the whole range of our experience here on earth. As I once read somewhere, the Psalms are human in a way that few hymns dare to be.

### 13. Share with us any other highlights or thoughts about revising the Psalms, psalm singing in general, or anything else.

I would like to express my appreciation for the constructive comments and words of encouragement that have come my way throughout the several decades of my involvement with the *Book of Praise*. I am especially grateful to my wife, Anne, for her unflagging support, her cheerful patience with me, and her always perceptive advice.

One thing about the *Book of Praise* may yet be worth emphasizing. Contrary to what some people seem to assume, our Genevan Psalter is not the product of sectarian narrow-mindedness. The committee that

produced the first provisional edition, the partial collection that appeared back in 1961, expressed the hope that outside of our own circles the completion of an English-language Genevan Psalter would ultimately promote a return to the Reformational heritage and "contribute to the unity of all who are proud to be called sons of the Reformation, *issus de Calvin*." Let us honour the pioneers of the first hour as men of vision imbued with the spirit of true ecumenicity.

It is remarkably fitting that the hard-working members of the current Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* were able to complete their mandate in A.D. 2009, the very year in which the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin was commemorated throughout the world.

## General Synod Burlington 2010

Although the official Acts were not yet available at the time of writing, the unofficial press release indicates that General Synod 2010 has instructed the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* to publish the revised rhymings in a provisional edition of the complete *Book of Praise*. Any changes, improvements, or corrections that this committee deems necessary as yet, also taking into consideration those raised by the churches at Synod 2010, are to be incorporated in the final version of the *Book of Praise* which the committee is mandated to present to General Synod 2013.

May God bless the diligent labours of Dr. Helder, the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*, and all the others who have been investing their time and gifts in this revision.



# The Story of Synod in Short – Press Release of Synod Burlington May 11-26, 2010

On Monday evening May 10, 2010, brothers and sisters from across southern Ontario came together for a special prayer service prior to the convening of General Synod Burlington 2010. Rev. Douwe Agema, who had been chairman of Synod Smithers 2007, led in prayer and preaching. The sermon text was taken from Nehemiah chapter 1 with supporting readings taken from the Psalm 90 and Ephesians 3:14-21. Rev. Agema highlighted how Nehemiah began his work as a servant of the Lord, deeply aware of the need to rely on the Lord. Nehemiah's prayer reflects his dependence on God's covenant of love. Such dependence on God demands humility. Nehemiah was completely aware of his own inadequacy and confessed his own sins and the sins of God's people. His prayer addresses God in the confidence that the work that lay ahead of him could only be accomplished in the strength of the Lord.

All those in the audience were encouraged by the message and were convinced that if the delegates of Synod would keep this message in their line of vision throughout the days and weeks of Synod, the Lord would surely bless the outcome.

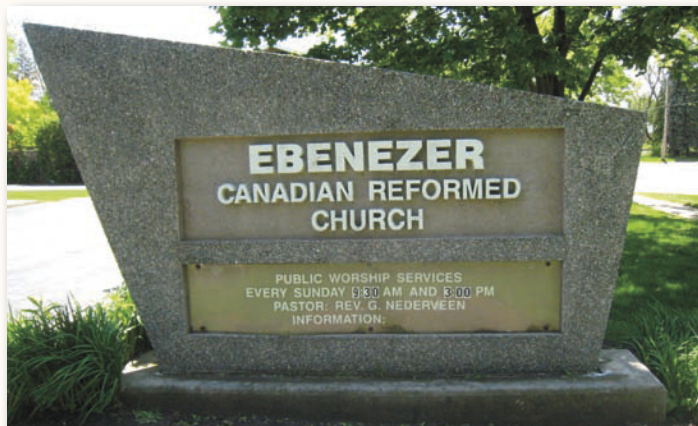
## Preparation and opening

In the months and weeks and days prior to the convening of General Synod, it became increasingly obvious how much work had been done to get everything ready for Synod. The convening church took the brunt of the work! Binders of incoming mail were organized by a team of men headed by Brother Gerard Nordeman and passed on to the delegates for their reading pleasure. The material that arrived at the doorstep of the convening church was categorized into sections that corresponded with the reports of the synodically-appointed committees. A special section was set aside for appeals.

Besides getting material ready for the delegates, the convening church worked hard to look after the physical needs of all present. Menus for daily meals were prepared by a team of women from the Burlington-Ebenezer church.

On the morning of May 11 the delegates arrived with laptops and large binders in hand! At 9:00 a.m. the delegates were seated and officially welcomed by the convening church of Burlington-Ebenezer. On behalf of that church, Rev. Nederveen opened Synod. He gave a brief meditation on Psalm 93 in which he encouraged the delegates to do their work under the sovereign kingship of the Lord. The credentials were checked and it was determined that the primary delegates were present. The following brothers were chosen to serve as officers of Synod: Rev. Richard Aasman as chairman; Rev. Peter Feenstra as vice-chairman; Rev. Andrew Pol as first clerk; and Rev. Douwe Agema as second clerk.

To facilitate the work, the officers of Synod divided the items of the agenda into five advisory committees. Each committee wasted no time and set out to do the work the churches in the federation had delegated them to do. Good work was done in the committee rooms,



allowing the agenda items to pass quickly through plenary session. This did not always make it easy for the audience, who may have expected to hear extensive debates on the floor, but instead heard us speaking about the wording of "consideration 3.2" or about "recommendation 4.1.3."

The details of each decision Synod made regarding reports, overtures, submissions from the churches, and appeals from individuals and churches are found in the Acts. These Acts are already available online in an "unofficial" format and will be made available to the churches once they have been edited. With regard to the printing of the Acts, Synod decided that they should be published digitally on the federational website and that printed copies be made available upon request of the churches.

The following is a summary of some of the main decisions that were made by Synod Burlington 2010.

### **Theological seminary**

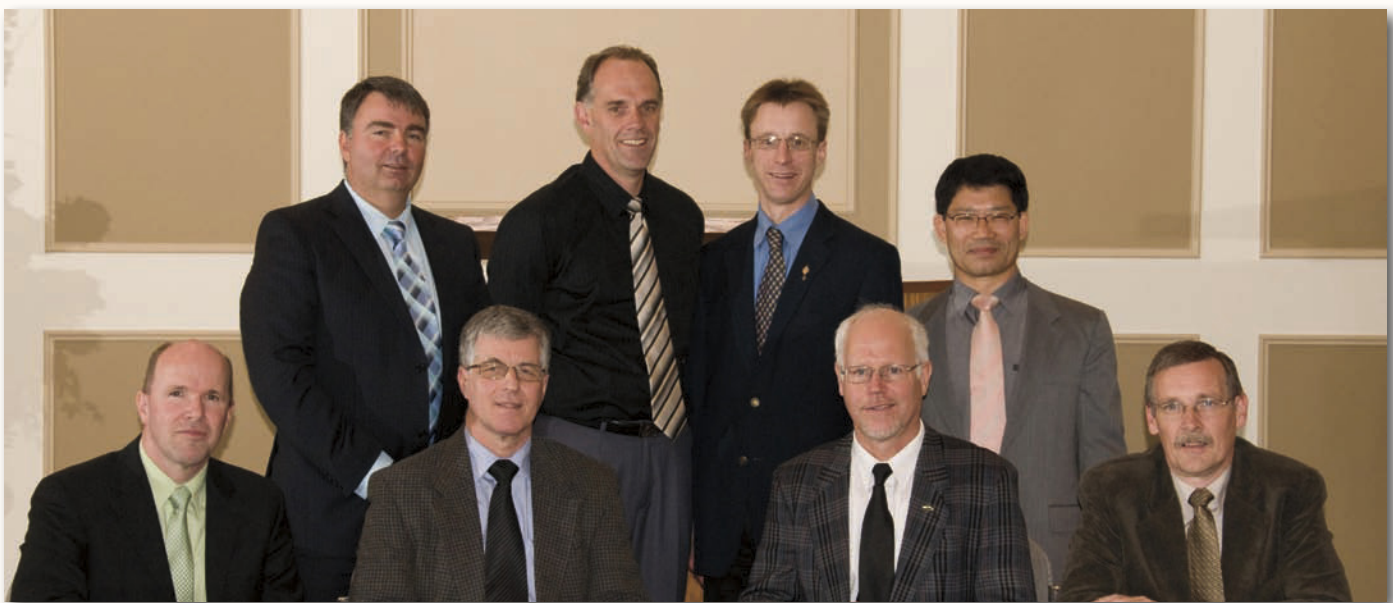
On the evening of the first day of Synod a major decision was already made. Synod directed the Board of Governors to appoint Dr. Jason VanVliet as professor of Dogmatology and Dr. Jannes Smith as professor of Old Testament. With thankfulness to the Lord both of these men saw their way clear to accept their respective appointments.

The faculty and senate of the Theological College, together with their wives, joined the members of Synod for dinner and the evening session on May 16. In plenary session Dr. Jason VanVliet, as the newly appointed professor of Dogmatology, addressed

Synod. He spoke about his commitment to teach at the seminary in subservience to Scripture and the confessions of the church. Dr. C. VanDam, as the retiring professor of Old Testament, addressed Synod as well and was publicly thanked for the many years of faithful service at the College. Rev. VanDam will receive a high quality reproduction of a Rembrandt painting (Belshazzar's feast).

Throughout the days of Synod it was evident that our churches have a deep love for the work done at the Theological College and treasure this institution as a place where men are trained to preach the Word. A number of decisions were made with regard to the Theological College, pastoral training, and future developments.

On the recommendation of the Board of Governors Synod decided to change the name of the seminary from "The Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches" to "The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary." Synod noted with gratitude that the now mandatory Pastoral Training Program continues to be very beneficial for the students and for the churches and that the appointment of a committee to look after the funding of this program is working well. Synod instructed the Board of Governors to continue the "Review and Accreditation process" as mandated by Synod Smithers since it will be a valuable exercise that will benefit the well-being of the churches in the future. This process has already provided convincing arguments to work towards the appointment of a fifth professor, rather than rearranging the workload among the four current professors.



*Officers of Synod with fraternal delegates*



Synod noted as well that the process implemented after a vacancy was declared in the department of Old Testament shows that the Board has significantly improved the transparency of the appointment procedure for faculty members. Synod recommended that the Board of Governors inform the churches of the adopted policy, ask for their input, and submit this to the next general synod for its review.

### **Needy students fund**

Synod decided to appoint a church in proximity to the Theological College (the church at Grassie) as Committee for Needy Students of Theology to look after extending financial aid to those students of theology who are in need of it. This church was given the mandate: to advise each classis in the federation of its existence and synodical mandate and to seek their cooperation in setting up and maintaining one general fund.

### **Ecclesiastical fellowship**

With thankfulness to the Lord ecclesiastical fellowship was maintained with all churches with whom such a relationship had been established at a previous occasion. In a number of different ways Synod reaffirmed and strengthened the bond with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Synod solicited the help of these churches in third party relationships, particularly our relationships with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, the Reformed Churches in Indonesia, and the Presbyterian Churches in Korea.

With regard to the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA), Synod again highlighted the financial needs of these churches. A mechanism has been put into place to collect monies in Canada for this cause. Synod decided to recommend the FRCSA to the churches as worthy of continued financial assistance, to help them support the needy churches in the federation, and to assist them with their extensive mission work and relief efforts among the disadvantaged and sick in South Africa.

Some years ago the Free Church of Scotland experienced internal difficulties that resulted in the formation of the Free Church Continuing (FCC). Contrary to the recommendation of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA), Synod Smithers 2007 decided not to maintain a relationship of fellowship with the FCC. The Free Church Continuing contested this decision because, as they pointed out in their correspondence with the CRCA, it was made on the basis of misinformation. On the recommendation of the CRCA, Synod Burlington rescinded the decision of Synod Smithers 2007 and re-instated a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCC. This allows

the CRCA to deal with both the Free Church of Scotland and the Free Church Continuing in a fair and just manner. Synod also mandated the CRCA to encourage the FCS and the FCC to work earnestly at reconciliation and reunion.

Furthermore, Synod decided to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (RCI). In their report to Synod the CRCA stressed the importance of ecclesiastical relations with faithful federations in Indonesia given the current involvement of the church of Smithville in mission work on the island of Timor. The churches being established through this mission work need to align themselves with an existing, faithful Reformed church federation.

Synod decided not to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). The main reason Synod came to this conclusion was the RPCNA's practice of ordaining women deacons. Synod stated in its considerations:

- The churches are legitimately concerned that the ordination of women as deacons contradicts the teaching of Scripture that deacons ought to be men (1 Tim 3:8-12).
- The official RPCNA position is that women deacons do not govern or exercise authority over men; in practice, however, it would seem that they do. If this is the case, this would conflict with Scripture (see 1 Tim 2:12 and 1 Cor 14:34 and cf. Article 30, Belgic Confession).
- It would be inconsistent and confusing for the Canadian Reformed Churches to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with a federation of churches which ordain women as deacons while Synod 2007 cautioned the Reformed Churches of New Zealand about their relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia due to their practice of ordaining women as deacons.

### **Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (RCN)**

With regard to our relationship with our sister churches in The Netherlands (RCN) Synod decided to express our prayerful concern for our brothers and sisters in the Lord that they be committed to the Reformed faith. Synod appointed a temporary sub-committee to investigate further the situation in our sister churches in The Netherlands. This Committee will also seek contact with the GKH (the churches that left the RCN). The committee consists of Rev. J. de Gelder, Rev. J. Moesker, Br. G. J. Nordeman, and Dr. C. Van Dam. Among other things, this committee was mandated to express our grave concerns that:

- Synod Zwolle of the RCN did not demand that Dr. Harinck, a professor associated with the

Theological University in Kampen, retract his controversial remarks;

- the Theological University did not exercise greater care in the case of the appointment of Dr. Paas as lecturer

Synod considered these matters to be of such a serious nature that the RCN be urged to deal with these matters as yet. Furthermore, the Committee was mandated:

- to express and discuss our grave concerns about a change in how biblical hermeneutics are functioning in the RCN;
- to pay special attention to the upcoming report on the role of women in the church.

### **Fraternal delegates**

Throughout the days of Synod foreign delegates came and went. These churches updated us on recent developments within their churches and passed on their greetings and well-wishes to our churches. Three churches passed on their greetings by letter, namely, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the Free Church of Scotland and the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. Synod received greetings and was addressed by a number of fraternal delegates.

The following men addressed Synod on behalf of their churches.

- Rev. Bernard Westerveld – l'Église Réformée du Québec
- Br. Wayne Pleiter – Free Reformed Churches of Australia
- Rev. Dirk Boersema – Free Reformed Churches of South Africa
- Rev. John Bouwers – United Reformed Churches of North America
- Rev. Jack Sawyer – Orthodox Presbyterian Church
- Rev. Jonathan Merica – Reformed Church of the United States
- Rev. Dr. Kyon Ho Kwon – Presbyterian Church of Korea

Rev. DongSup Song addressed Synod as an observer from the Reformed Churches in Korea.

### **No different approach or rearranging of the committees**

In its report to Synod, the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad drew attention to the fact that in our relations with other churches we only have a relationship known as "Ecclesiastical Fellowship." The CRCA proposed establishing four kinds of relationships: Contact Churches (churches being considered for ecclesiastical fellowship), Fellowship

Churches (churches in ecclesiastical fellowship with us), Associate Churches (churches that are fellow members with us in the ICRC and NAPARC), and Churches Raising Concern (churches currently in ecclesiastical fellowship with us but who give reason for serious concern).

Synod did not adopt the proposal for two reasons. First of all, no response from the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA) had been forwarded to the churches. Since the proposal of the CRCA involves the CCCNA it would have been inadvisable for Synod to make a decision on this matter. Secondly, the churches in general were not keen on the new structure of four kinds of relations; others disagreed with some of the categories. Synod saw no need for the category "Churches Raising Concern" because churches raising concern are covered by the Rule 1 of Ecclesiastical Fellowship: "The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations."

### **The CRCA and the CCCNA remain the same**

For many years all of the relations with other churches whom we recognized as sister churches were channelled through the CRCA. In 1998 Synod Fergus decided that a re-structuring was necessary and appointed a Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA) which is now known as the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA). The result is that there are two committees maintaining contacts with other churches: the only distinction is geographical. In its report to Synod the CRCA suggested some re-structuring would take place. Sometimes the work of these two committees overlaps and causes confusion. Synod, however, decided not to take over the suggestion of the CRCA since there was not broad support from the churches for the proposal of the CRCA. Synod, echoing the sentiment of the churches, considered the present two committees have a good handle on their mandates and the churches with which they are dealing.

### **North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)**

In 2008 the Canadian Reformed Churches became members of NAPARC. At the annual meetings of this Council, Reformed and Presbyterian churches meet. This is an opportunity for the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America to formally meet with their counterparts from the ERQ, OPC, and RCUS. Synod mandated the CCCNA to continue representing



*Committee at work*

the Canadian Reformed Churches at NAPARC. Moreover, the committee is to investigate the status and the implications of two statements, namely the Golden Comity Agreement and the NAPARC Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations. This mandate comes in response to questions raised by several churches. The CCCNA will need to determine whether or not these agreements interfere with the independence of the CanRC in regard to establishing relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations.

### **United Reformed Churches of North America**

Synod spent considerable time on our contact with the United Reformed Churches of North America.

It was decided to continue ecclesiastical fellowship with the URCNA under the adopted rules and to declare that as Canadian Reformed Churches we are still committed to the goal of federative unity and to ask the URCNA whether they are still committed to this goal, too. A letter signed by all the members of Synod will be sent to General Synod London.

After the URCNA Synod 2007, held in Schereville, concerns were expressed by our churches about the status of the so-called "Nine Points of Schereville." Synod Schererville adopted a nine point statement and presented it to the URCNA churches as "pastoral advice." Seeing that the expression "pastoral advice" was not explained Synod Burlington-Ebenezer therefore decided to request Synod London of the URCNA to clarify the status of the Nine Points of Schererville as a whole and to give a further explanation of Point 6 in particular.

### *Face-to-face*

Synod supported a proposal to have a face-to-face meeting between the members of Synod and delegates from the United Reformed Churches. Synod set aside approximately one hour on Wednesday evening, May 19, 2010 for the delegates from the United Reformed Churches to answer questions submitted to them by the churches. The members of Synod were given opportunity to ask supplementary questions. This evening drew Synod's largest crowd and this dialogue was appreciated by those in attendance.

All the subcommittees were reappointed and we will wait and see whether Synod London of the URCNA will do the same.

### *Theological education*

When, the Lord willing, we come to federative unity with the United Reformed Churches do we need to have a federationally governed seminary? This has been a thorny issue that has caused considerable debate. In their report to Synod the theological education committee stated, "As a fully independent model is not acceptable to the CanRC and a fully federational model is not acceptable to the URCNA, the only real viable choice of governance for theological education in a united federation would be a model where the united federation would operate with a model of two independent seminaries endorsed and approved by the general synod of a united church (i.e., Mid-America and Westminster California), with one federationally governed seminary (the Theological College in Hamilton) by way of a regional synod of Canada, or



if deemed appropriate, by the general synods of the united federation meeting from time to time.”

Synod Burlington-Ebenezer did not support this direction. Synod decided not to accept the regional synod model of theological education as proposed by the joint committee. The theological education committee was re-appointed and given the mandate to re-examine and discuss with our brothers in the URCNA the possibilities of operating at least one theological seminary by and for the churches, to ensure that such a seminary is accountable to and properly governed by the churches. The Committee was also instructed to encourage the brothers of the URCNA to examine and interact with the biblical, historical, and practical reasons for operating one institution for the training for the ministry as described in Appendix 1 of the report of the Joint Committee, summarized in Lord's Day 38 (Question and Answer 103) and regulated in Article 19 CO of the CanRC.

### *Common songbook*

During the past three years, the activities of the Committee for a Common Songbook were deeply affected by a change in direction and mandate given by Synod Schererville 2007. Synod Schererville 2007 affirmed an earlier decision to publish a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal. Synod Burlington-Ebenezer noted that the decision by the URCNA Synod with regard to the songbook resulted in a changed mandate which has made progress impossible to date. Nevertheless, Synod considered that it would be beneficial to continue the Committee to work on further improvements as needed to the *Book of Praise*, positioning it in whole or in part for possible future integration into a common songbook. It would be advantageous to find ways to remain in contact with the URCNA Committee as well as to explore possible avenues of cooperation. Seeing the decision to develop a common Songbook has not been revised or rescinded, this should remain a stated objective within the context of a new federation. At the same time it needs to be realized that such an endeavour requires a considerable amount of time, manpower, and resources and thus will not be quickly completed either before or after merger is realized. Synod decided to state that the Canadian Reformed Churches remain committed to having a common songbook in a united federation.

### *Liturgical forms*

According to the Acts of Synod Smithers the recommendation was made “to appoint a Liturgical

Forms and Confessions Committee with the mandate to meet with their counterparts in the URCNA to come with a unified text for creeds, confessions, and liturgical forms and prayers, for the proposed prose section for the Common Songbook.” The Committee never met with URCNA Committee but communicated by means of letters. In a letter dated October 27, 2008 the URCNA Committee noted that they were mandated to prepare liturgical forms and confessions for a URCNA songbook. They went on to state, “Therefore we do not see our mandate as entailing the production of a ‘unified text’ for all future liturgical forms as does yours.” In its report to Synod, the Committee notes that if it is to function there needs to be clarity from the URCNA whether they are prepared to work towards unified liturgical texts for a joint songbook. In response to this report Synod Burlington-Ebenezer expressed disappointment that the Committee was not able to make any progress. Synod decided, however, to retain the committee and to give them as part of their mandate: to review and compare the creeds, confessions, forms, and prayers of the CanRC and URCNA with a view to merger, and to make itself available to the URCNA as needed.

### *Joint church order*

Echoing the sentiments of the churches, Synod expressed great appreciation for the work done by the Joint Church Order Committee. Synod did recommend, however, a re-wording of several articles where the churches expressed major concerns. The final decision of Synod was: to adopt *provisionally* the proposed joint church order as the Church Order for a united federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches. Synod also underlined the fact that currently the Canadian Reformed Churches are governed by the Church Order adopted at General Synod 1983, and it will remain so until such time as a future General Synod decides that agreement has been reached on merger. Then, and only then, will the text of the Joint Church Order be finalized and implemented.

Synod mandated the Church Order Committee to give a final evaluation of the letters from the churches, to finalize those matters deemed to be yet unfinished and to adopt the changes recommended by Synod.

### *Bible translation*

In its report to Synod, the Committee for Bible Translations made the churches aware of the fact that a new version of the NIV is to be published in 2011.



*Mr. G. Nordeman: man behind the scenes from Burlington Ebenezer*

Since current information about the upcoming new version of the NIV gives little indication of the nature of the changes being contemplated Synod mandated the Committee for Bible Translations:

- To thoroughly evaluate the updated NIV translation when it is released in 2011 and to produce and send a report to the churches within nine months of the release date.
- To investigate the feasibility of obtaining access to the printing rights of the 1984 edition of the NIV.
- To investigate further whether the ESV or the NKJV or the NASB could become the recommended translation for the churches.
- To investigate the possibility and feasibility of publishing an ecclesiastically-produced and owned Bible translation with the cooperation of English-speaking churches which are members of NAPARC and/or ICRC.

### **Book of Praise**

Though quite a number of churches expressed the desire to see a finalized publication of the *Book of Praise* after Synod 2010, at least ten churches urged Synod to give the churches more time to test the revised Psalter and hymns as well as the additional hymns being proposed from the augment. A number of these churches suggested that a provisional edition of the *Book of Praise* be printed for the purpose of testing in the churches, and for final revision and for adoption by synod 2013. Synod decided to pass on to the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* (SCBP) the letters of the churches with proposed changes to the Psalter and to the hymn section they have proposed and to empower the SCBP to incorporate any changes they

deem to be improvements to their proposed *Book of Praise*. Synod instructed the SCBP:

To publish a provisional edition of the complete *Book of Praise*, including the changes adopted by this synod, with a renumbered hymn section for use in the churches per Article 55 CO. This provisional edition has been sufficiently prepared for the purpose of evaluation and will be amended by the SCBP and presented to synod 2013 for final approval and printing. Nineteen hymns from the Augment will be included in the provisional edition (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28).

### **Women's voting**

One of the issues that lived on the hearts and minds of the brothers at Synod, and surely of the churches, was the matter of women's voting. As Synod drew to a close the advisory committee presented both a majority and minority proposal. The bottom line of the majority proposal was: to maintain the current practice of male communicant member voting. It was decided that Synod would vote on this proposal by secret ballot. As the voting took place and the outcome was tallied a hush came over the assembly. The majority proposal was defeated. Synod then turned its attention to the minority proposal and made the following decision:

- To affirm that based on 1 Timothy 2:11–15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33–35, and as stipulated in Art.3 CO only male communicant members can be called to the special offices of minister, elder and deacon.
- That any arrangement for the election of office bearers that goes beyond what has been agreed upon by the churches in Art.3 CO is a matter of the local regulations, adopted for that purpose by the consistory with the deacons.

### **Future synods and guidelines**

Synod adopted several changes to the synodical guidelines which will affect how the churches will submit material to Synod. Synod added the following:

- For all matters of the churches in common, individual churches may address proposals or other significant submissions directly to general synod with the requirement that all such submissions are sent also to each church in the federation no later than six months prior to general synod.
- Since matters on the agenda of general synod involve the churches in common, it would be appropriate for regional synods to distribute copies of adopted overtures to all the churches in the federation no later than five months prior to the convening of a general synod.

The clerk of a synod spends a great deal of his time and energy on preparing the Acts and that can hinder him from participating in a meaningful way in committee work and in plenary session. Synod, therefore, adopted the following addition to the guidelines, "The convening church shall arrange to have people present during Synod to assist the clerks in preparing the Acts and to do other paper work."

## Conclusion

For many days the brothers at Synod could do their work in good harmony and therefore it was not a surprise when the chairman concluded that censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order was not necessary.

Synod Burlington 2010 is now behind us. Not every decision may be met with the approval of all. The work was done by men who were painfully aware of their own weaknesses and shortcomings. We began and concluded each day with devotions, asking God to bless our work. Many times at Synod the brothers reminded each other that we were not there to get our own way, or to please people but in service of our King, Jesus Christ. Every decision that was made will ultimately come under the scrutiny and judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ. Soli Deo Gloria!

*On behalf of Synod 2010,  
Rev. Peter Feenstra* 

## Press Release

### Knight to head Canadian Christian Business Federation

HAMILTON – Keith Knight has been appointed the new executive director of the Canadian Christian Business Federation (CCBF), an organization formed in 1983 by a group of Christian business leaders in southern Ontario. He succeeds Hans Vander Stoep, who retired on June 30 after leading the organization for twenty-three years.

Mr. Knight's appointment was confirmed by CCBF's board of directors at a meeting on May 18. "We are delighted with Keith's appointment," said Jerry Gerritsen, the board chair. "He brings energy and vision to the organization, as well as his expertise in marketing and communication."

Mr. Knight has been involved in communication for forty years, working as editor in both the secular and Christian daily and weekly newspapers. He was editor and publisher of the former *Calvinist Contact* from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. He served as communication director of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for nine years and has served on numerous national and international boards, including nine years on the board of the World Association for Christian Communication.

He is currently the stated clerk of Classis Huron of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and a communication consultant, working with Christian organizations and denominations to help them develop



strategic plans. "The CCBF has considerable potential," he says. "The vision that launched the organization in 1983 is as relevant today as it was back then. Several business owners within the Canadian Reformed Churches have been members for years. It's all about integrating faith and

work, where Christian business leaders meet to study scripture and apply it to their daily working lives."

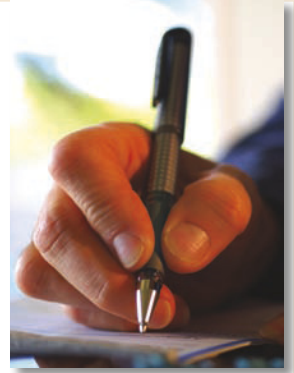
"Even though it calls itself a Canadian federation, its membership and growth has been confined to southern Ontario." Mr. Knight says he intends to change that. He envisions growing the organization across the Prairies and British Columbia. "There are thousands of Christian business owners across the country who would benefit greatly from being part of a local support group as well as a national network."

Mr. Knight says he envisions partnerships with the business departments of Christian colleges across the country to create apprenticeships and other mentoring opportunities between business students and Christian business leaders. "There is a need to build a strong connection between principles of Christian business ethics in the classroom and the day to day business environment," he says. "There is also a need to equip business leaders with the kinds of tools needed to remain firmly rooted in Christian business principles."

CCBF's national office will move to Guelph, Ontario.







## Letter to the Editor

It was with interest that I started reading *Applying Law* (Vol 59, No 12, June 4/10). However, the diverse approaches to law application then compared civil laws to articles of ecclesiastical polity. Is it helpful, fair, or even justifiable to do so? Laws are imposed from above, while articles of agreement in the Church Order are entered upon by willing partners. Laws call for enforcers, lawyers, and judges. The church has only one Authority, one Lawyer, and one Judge. Calling the articles of the Church Order “laws” may again lead to professorial roles at synods and hierarchy. Law violations result in punishment, fines, or imprisonment. Breaches of an agreement, however, nullify the agreement or it means in effect withdrawal or exclusion.

Civil laws in a democratic society aim to maintain good order, freedom, and equity among citizens. They are prescriptive and reflect society’s own morals and ethics. The Church Order among Reformed churches aims to have everything done “in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor 14:40) and so build up “the body of Christ. . . in the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph 4:12). They are descriptive and reflect Christ’s governance of peace, harmony, and unity in obedience to God (BC Art 32).

Therefore, could regulations, rules, or agreements of the Church Order be interpreted or applied as laws and from three points of view? History shows the disasters that followed when governance on behalf of Christ turned “legal” (1820s, 1880s, 1930s, and 1980s). As in civil law there will indeed be no end to a desire and need for “fine tuning” by repeatedly amending or adding rules and regulations.

One example mentioned in the article to illustrate consequent complications (“Yes, it becomes this complicated”) is the subject of admission to the Lord’s Supper. Local office bearers are responsible to guard the table, by admitting “only those who have made profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Members of sister churches shall be admitted on the ground of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct” (CO Art 61). The second sentence is not exclusive. In accordance with the first line, it always has been a given that the office bearers, on behalf of Christ, can admit anyone they deem fit, eligible or sound in doctrine and conduct of life. When the written testimony or a positive attestation

is, however, regarded as insufficient and, therefore, requiring a personal interview as well, such an act is not a different approach, but an indication of mistrusting sister church office bearers, of disrespecting the unity of a federation, and of displaying independentism. When the church is in decline or in the process of deformation, doubt might arise. Nevertheless, lack of trust should never be a reason not to fully accept an attestation from Christ’s fellow workers. There are other ways to deal with acts of deformation. In unity of faith, the churches are indeed “governed by Christ,” but is that shown in word and deed by applying the approaches to civil law also to church regulations that are to build up the body of Christ in the knowledge of the Son?

Together with others in a covenantal or federational unity, each independent church has voluntarily consented, agreed, or promised to be bound by general, common, and Scripture-based rules that show unity of faith and ascertain that the truth of God’s Word is maintained in doctrine and in conduct. In a nutshell, that is the Church Order.

Dennis Teitsma  
Winnipeg, MB

## Response

I thank Br. Teitsma for his response and the opportunity from the editor to react.

Br. Teitsma challenges my article on a very fundamental point: should our Church Order be read as law?

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, “law” is to be defined as “the whole system of rules that everyone in a country or society must obey.” A bond of churches can be seen as a society. Further, the Church Order is a set of prescriptive statements which require obedience. For example, church visitors are required to ascertain during visitation “whether the adopted order is being observed and maintained in every respect” (CO Art 44).

I believe there is room to approach the Church Order as law.

I wonder whether there may be something else at play here too. When I speak of law, I do so in the Dutch sense of "recht." The study of law is referred to in The Netherlands as the "rechtenstudie." The idea of law in the sense of "wet" (individual laws) is not so much in view. If law is to be defined as Br. Teitsma does, the term has been ill-chosen by me. For that reason I'll avoid it in what follows.

Br. Teitsma challenges the idea that the Church Order can be seen as law by arguing that the only authority in the church is Christ. He writes, "Laws are imposed from above, while articles of agreement in the Church Order are entered upon by willing partners." If I understand it correctly, a type of disconnect is being argued between the authority of Christ and the Church Order.

However, the articles of our Church Order have been agreed to by councils of churches composed of office bearers, who speak with the authority of Christ (cf. BC Art 30-31). The fact that Article 31 (CO) prescribes that churches follow up on all that has been decided, unless it is proved to be in conflict with God's Word or the Church Order, indicates that there is a measure of authority to the Church Order. The Church Order is a set of agreed upon rules that fall within the compass of Word of God, ensure that all things are done decently and in good order, and avoid binding the consciences of men.

Br. Teitsma warns against professionalization of the order in our church. There is indeed that danger.

I myself am of the opinion that the Church Order should be simple and decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies should say no more (and no less) than intended. However, there is also the danger of agreements not being clear. Lack of precision suits individualism, results in divergent practices, and leads to confusion. The manner in which the fifty-odd Canadian Reformed Churches have dealt with the decision of Synod Smithers on the revised psalms prove my point.

The three approaches to law are a fact of life in North American societies. These approaches also exist in our churches. I believe we need to recognize that. Much energy can be saved by seeking to articulate the approaches in our agreements as much as possible. If we have an article of agreement say for what reason something is being adopted, precisely what is being adopted, and to what end it is being adopted, those taking the three approaches would not differ in how the agreement is to function. On the other hand, we should also recognize that we live in an imperfect world. Striving for perfection creates a tension in our existence, which in turn will lead to continual fine-tuning of our commonly adopted order. It also makes us long for the return of the only Head of the Church, her Bridegroom.

*In Christ,  
Karlo Janssen*

*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.*

