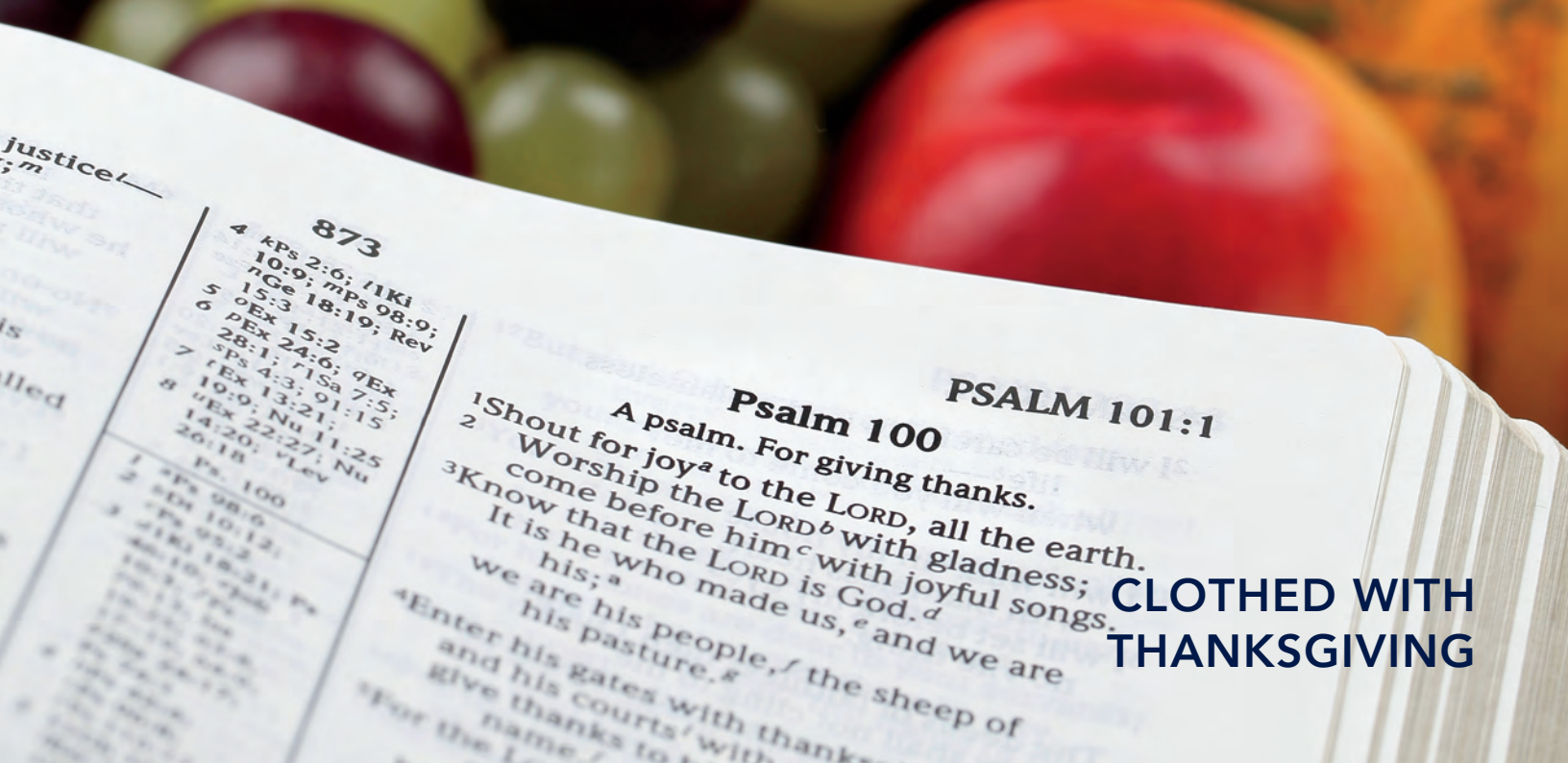


Clarion

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⁴ KPs 2:6; ¹1Ki 10:9; ^mPs 98:9; ⁿGe 15:3; ¹⁸18:19; Rev 15:2
⁵ Ex 15:2
⁶ Ex 24:6; ⁹Ex 28:1; ^r1Sa 7:5; ^sPs 4:3; ⁹¹91:15
⁷ Ex 13:21; ¹⁹19:9; Nu 11:25
⁸ Ex 22:27; Nu 14:20; ^vLev 26:18

Ps. 100

Psalm 100

PSALM 101:1

¹Shout for joy^a to the LORD, all the earth.
²Worship the LORD^b with gladness; come before him^c with joyful songs.
³Know that the LORD is God.^d It is he who made us,^e and we are his;^a we are his people,^f the sheep of his pasture.^g
⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts^h with praise; give thanks to the LORD,ⁱ and praise his name.^j
⁵For the LORD is good,^k his mercy is everlasting,^l and his faithfulness reaches to all generations.^m

**CLOTHED WITH
THANKSGIVING**



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Thanksgiving Clothing

*Could it not be a real danger that we lack
 the gratitude and appreciation that our forebears
 had for the many blessings we enjoy today?*

There is no mistaking the fact that our civic culture has become coarser. Our society has lost something of the refinement that characterized life about forty to fifty years ago. In those days it would, for example, have been unthinkable to buy “new” jeans that had been battered, ripped, faded, and beaten but demanded a premium price from some leading designer. Yet such clothing is now sold and the extra work taken to make the garment look old and worn is simply added to the price of the jeans. Indeed, they can be very expensive. This is a somewhat extreme example of how many in our culture go out of their way to dress like a hobo. But generally speaking, the trend is unmistakably dressing down.

Cultural shift

Why is that? What is behind this phenomenon that people often do not want to be dressed up in fine clothes but prefer at the most business casual? To answer this question one must beware of the larger cultural context. For example, in the 1960s when I went to high school, young men wore dress pants and young ladies were attired in smart skirts and dresses. Everyone wanted to look their best. Peer pressure was to dress up and not down. You put even better clothes on when going on a class trip. Indeed, in those days people often dressed up in suit and tie when boarding an airplane! Now you see people there in attire more suited for the beach. The list of examples can go on and on. The point is that there has been an unmistakable cultural shift in the way people generally dress.

Now it is true that if one were to receive an invitation to join the Queen at Buckingham Palace for afternoon tea then most people would probably dress up. The decision to dress up for such an occasion may provide a clue in understanding the cultural shift that has taken place.

Privilege and gratitude

To be invited to have tea with the queen is quite a privilege. So, “of course” you dress up for it! To go back to the previous examples, a blog writer perceptively wrote that “Air travel used to be a privilege. People dressed up for it out of a sense of respect and gratitude, because not everyone got to do something like that. Today, most people take flights at least occasionally. It’s not a big deal anymore. We don’t feel particularly grateful to be able to do it. And thus, we don’t dress up. . . . I don’t think that the social principle that you should dress up for what’s important to you has changed since the 1950s; I think there’s simply not that much that’s important to us anymore.”¹ And instead of gratitude for what previous generations considered an honour or privilege, there is now often the attitude that it’s my right. I have it coming.

The tremendous material prosperity of the Western world since World War II has meant that several generations have grown up without any real material hardships or wants. Educational opportunities are galore. A societal safety net for unexpected sickness and unemployment is in place. Travel and communication has never been easier. What our ancestors did not have, we can easily take for granted and even consider it a right. Could it not be a real danger that we lack the gratitude and appreciation that our forebears had for the many blessings we enjoy today? A lack of thankfulness can be the reason, as insightfully mentioned in the blog quoted earlier, that there is a widespread blasé attitude in our civic culture to all sorts of things. That attitude also impacts our approach to how we clothe ourselves. Something of a sense of privilege in so many areas of life has been lost. And as the blog mentions, “If we hope to reclaim what has been lost, we must first reclaim a sense of gratitude” for what we have.

Of course this does not mean that those who always dress down are not grateful. That is not the point. But the matter worth pondering is whether we as Christians could be unduly influenced by the apathetic attitude of current worldly culture to the many privileges that are ours. One can think, for example, especially of our privilege to worship on the Lord's Day and how we dress for it.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

With Thanksgiving approaching, Dr. Cornelis Van Dam discusses in his editorial gratitude and how it affects the way we dress. We also have an article from Dr. Van Dam under the Clippings on Politics and Religion column.

Prof. Albert H. Oosterhoff's series on End-of-Life Decisions continues in this issue. We also begin a series of articles by Rev. Eric Kampen on the history of contact between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Issue 20 contains an article on Taber's farewell to Rev. Jagt. We have our Thanksgiving Treasures New and Old meditation from Rev. Reuben Bredenhof. Readers may also find the Education Matters column, the You Asked column, and a letter to the editor.

Wishing our readers a happy and blessed Thanksgiving!

Laura Veenendaal

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Thanksgiving clothing

There is no question about the trend. Sunday best is under pressure and Sunday casual is in. As one columnist put it: “Casual Friday has now morphed into Sloppy Sabbath.”² I have no interest in suggesting a dress code for church. The point we need to ponder is whether we are being negatively influenced by the current blasé attitude to the many blessings we can enjoy today. Could it be that the trend to less refined dress to church has something to do with a lack of appreciation and gratitude for what happens when we participate in worship? Are we still sufficiently aware of the tremendous privilege we have in being able to approach holy God as those inclined to sin but redeemed of grace alone in Christ? It has struck me in visiting places like Sudan and the townships of South Africa how impeccably dressed the poor people are for worship. Their clothing is very simple but it is sparkling clean, modest, and worn with joyous smiles. It is their Sunday best! They wear the best they have for they are approaching the King of kings! Could we, like the culture around us, be losing our sense of awe of God and the thanksgiving we owe to him? What kind of a message is sloppy Sunday dress sending to God?

*When you have that kind of identity,
clothes are important!*

The Lord’s Day is *the* day of thanksgiving and worship where God is at the centre. The trend to seeker-friendly services focuses on “customer satisfaction.” Come as you are, be comfortable above all, and take along your coffee if you like. But one goes to church not to be catered to and to be made comfortable, but to worship and bow before God, Creator of heaven and earth, the Almighty Holy One, who demands respect, awe and worship of his creation. The trend to more and more casual wear is not a matter of more formal clothes being unaffordable. The West is prosperous. It is not a financial but a spiritual issue. As our civic culture loses its Christian moorings it also loses its respect for God. As Christians we need to resist such insidious cultural influences. For surely

indifference and a blasé attitude to one’s dress when appearing before God in worship is unacceptable.

Scripture teaches us that God does care about what we wear when we worship him. When Israel had to prepare themselves for God’s coming down to meet them at Mount Sinai, then God gave instructions also about their clothes. They had to be washed and clean (Exod 19:10-11). Furthermore, as priests in God’s service (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6) we can by analogy think of how important Old Testament priestly dress was for God as they were engaged in worship. These simple priestly garments had to be made “for glory and beauty” (Exod 28:40). Even when an apparently menial task was performed in the course of worship like removing the ashes from the altar, God specified the clothing to be worn (Lev 6:10). So the clothes one wears are important when worshipping God.

Indeed, is the church not the bride, adorned for her husband, Jesus Christ? When you have that kind of identity, clothes are important! Already in Old Testament times the church could jubilate: “I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isa 61:10). This echoes in the announcement in Revelation that the marriage supper of the lamb has come “‘and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)” (Rev 19:8)

As we go to church and enter into the Most Holy Place in worship (Heb 10:19-25; cf. 12:22-24), should we not be dressed in our best in anticipation of that great day!? Who would think of dressing down? After all, what a privilege and reason for gratitude to be Bride of Christ, worshipping in anticipation of the coming of the Bridegroom!

¹ Jennifer Wulwiler at <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/jennifer-fulwiler/why-dont-we-dress-up-anymore/>.

² John Blake, “Stop Dressing so Tacky for Church” April 19, 2014 at <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2014/04/19/stop-dressing-so-tacky-for-church/>.





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Most Valuable Thanker?

"Just as you received Christ as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

(Colossians 2:6-7)

Have you ever won a prize for excelling at something? Top salesman of the year? Best in your category at a music competition? Goalie with the lowest GAA? We think that those who excel have a reason for pride, and deserve some recognition. You can make a name for yourself by being really good at something.

Which makes the image in our text unusual. The Spirit exhorts us to "overflow with thankfulness," or literally, to "excel in thanksgiving." That's a surprising combination. Those who excel stand out for attention, and they win prizes. But thanksgiving goes hand-in-hand not with praise, but humility. They never give out awards for gratitude, like Most Valuable Thanker, or Top Appreciator. No, if you're thankful, you're in a position of being obligated to others for their generosity. Your thoughts are drawn away from yourself, because you've *received* something, and you know you didn't earn it. Our thanksgiving is always derived and secondary. It's always less than what was given.

Maybe you've experienced how small gratitude can seem. Someone gives you a valuable gift, monetary or otherwise. Someone makes a great sacrifice for your cause. Or maybe someone even saves your life, pulls you from a car wreck. At certain times our words of thanksgiving can seem so small, so inadequate! In human terms, gratitude always puts us in the lower place. And that's exactly our position before God: weak, helpless, dependent.

He's given us everything in Christ – he's saved our life through him.

So the Spirit says, "Excel in thanksgiving!" God says, "If you're going to be good at something, be good at this. Shine in gratitude. Stand out with your worship." It doesn't matter that you've received everything, and that you're utterly dependent on God. Just be really good at giving him the glory. Make it your life's work! If there's anything you should be known for, let it be thanksgiving. If you have received Christ – who abounds in every way – then abound with thanksgiving. The preeminent Christ should receive preeminent praise.

That's a challenge for us. It's a challenge, because we all still fight the tendencies of the sinful nature, those tendencies to be critical, or discontent, or complaining, or jealous. So often we're full of anxiety and care. We fear the future, we doubt God's promises, we don't trust his Word. You can be sure that even on a day devoted to thanksgiving, we'll find some reason to grumble: "The turkey's too dry." "I wish there was more dessert." Much more seriously, you might look at your life and say, "I've prayed so often about this, but God hasn't heard me. The LORD has let me down. Because he's not blessed me in the ways I was hoping, I'm not even sure what my life is for right now." It's hard to excel in thanksgiving when you feel empty.

But then we go back to thanksgiving's foundation. As Paul says,

"We have received Christ Jesus as Lord." If there's anything for which we ought to be thankful, it's our new life in Christ. We could mention many other blessings – and we should – but not before Christ. Not at the expense of Christ. Don't obsess over the wrapping paper and the shiny bows. Take all that away, and admire the real gift. Speak of God's glory, tell of his mercy, rejoice in his grace in the Saviour. Be satisfied in him.

"Be overflowing with thankfulness." That is, if you're thankful, you should say it. Show it. Pray it. Sing it. Later in Colossians, Paul exhorts us: "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (4:2). He links watchfulness to thankfulness, because each day we need to notice God's goodness, to see his mercies which are always new.

God knows perfectly well that we can't bring anything to repay all his goodness toward us. All our gifts and a lifetime of worship and constant praise would never be enough. Everything we have has come from him – he's the overflowing fountain of all good. But if we see that truth clearly, then it's also clear that we're left with just one task. It's why we're here: to abound with thanksgiving. So get really good at it. Shine in your praise. Excel in your gratitude. Let it continue, all year, and for the rest of your life. Since you have received Christ, continue to live in him, and overflow with thanksgiving!



The History of Contact Between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1)



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From beginning of contact to formal recognition

Introduction

The Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) have been in ecclesiastical fellowship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) since 2001. Such a relationship is established between two churches for mutual support and accountability. It was established after nearly four decades of extensive communication between committees appointed by the broadest assemblies of these churches. The decades leading up to the decision generated much debate within the Canadian Reformed Churches, a debate that has not abated altogether, as is readily evident from the Acts of general synods of the CanRC.

As, by this point, this history spans more than fifty years, with information buried in the Acts of numerous general synods, there is benefit in reviewing this history of contact in a series of three articles. This first article will begin by briefly describing the history of the OPC, before following the CanRC synod trail from the early 1960s to the year 1977, when the CanRC formally acknowledged the OPC as a true church and entered into a temporary relationship called ecclesiastical contact. A second article will describe the history from 1977 until 2001, when full ecclesiastical fellowship was established. A third article will deal with the period from 2001 up to the present.

History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has its roots in the Reformation of the sixteenth century as it developed in Scotland. Men such as John Knox, influenced by the teaching of John Calvin and others, worked for the reform of the doctrine and practice of the church. The emphasis on the role of the elder in the government of the church led to these churches being called Presbyterian, based on the Greek word for elder, presbyter. These churches ended up adopting the Westminster Standards (The Westminster Confession and the Smaller and Larger Catechisms), which were written during the Westminster Assembly held from 1643-1649. Many immigrants from the British Isles, especially Scotland, who settled in North America, held to the Westminster Standards and established Presbyterian Churches.

In the early 1900s, the main Presbyterian church in the northern United States came under the influence of liberal theology. The label “liberal theology” refers to views that deny that the Scriptures are fully the inspired Word of God. Liberal theology reduces Scripture to mere human writings. Efforts to bring about a return by setting up a new seminary (Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia) and independent mission boards, which would oversee the sending out of men committed to the authority of Scripture, led to the deposition of those involved

in these efforts. One of the main figures was J. Gresham Machen. In June of 1936, a small group of ministers, elders, and church members constituted what soon became known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. From this small beginning, the OPC has grown to a current membership of just over 30,000 members in about 325 churches and mission works.¹

Beginning of contact

The Acts of the synod of the CanRC held in 1962 indicate that contact with the OPC was initiated by the CanRC. This is evident in the way the matter of contact with the OPC came to the attention of this synod via a proposal from the regional synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Ontario. It requested the appointment of deputies, with the mandate to introduce the CanRC to the OPC as churches that want to live in all things according to the Word of God, and to ask the OPC if they could recognize the CanRC as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, such deputies, if appointed, would also have to discuss a number of differences between the confessions and church polity of the CanRC and OPC, testing them by the Word of God. A final concern that would have to be discussed was relationships with other churches.

The 1962 Synod was “of the opinion that taking up of contact with The Orthodox Presbyterian Church. . . can only be considered as the responsibility of synod when the synod is convinced that in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church we are dealing with a communion, which has returned to the true service of the LORD.” It considered “that the minor assemblies have not put such proof on the table of synod which would make it clear to synod that in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church it has such a communion.” Therefore, it decided that it was “not able to accede to the request of Regional Synod 1961.”²

In light of subsequent developments, it is important to highlight the synod’s approach to relationships with other churches. It took the approach that before a church can enter into discussion with another church, it must be convinced that it is a church that has returned to the true service of God. A church does not enter into discussion with another church to find out *if* it is a true church, but *because* it is already recognized as a true church. Because there was not enough information, setting up a committee was considered premature.

That the churches in Ontario were serious about pursuing contact with the OPC is evident in an extensive

report and proposal to the next synod held in Edmonton in 1965. This synod was in agreement with the previous synod when it stated, “correspondence with Churches abroad should not be entered till upon a careful and serious investigation it has become apparent that these Churches not only officially embrace the Reformed confession but also maintain them.” The synod considered “that with respect to the OPC such a careful and serious investigation is warranted because it was clear from the Report that the OPC as a Presbyterian Church was a fruit of the Calvinistic Reformation, has confessions and a church government which are Calvinistic in character, and in this century decidedly chose for Orthodoxy against Modernism.” Careful and serious investigation was necessary because the report indicated there are differences in confession and church government, as well as in the matter of correspondence with other churches.

This synod decided to appoint deputies for contact with the OPC. Most remarkable is the first part of the mandate, which instructed the deputies, “To inform the Orthodox Presbyterian Church through her deputies about our confession and church polity, and to ask her whether on the ground of this confession and church polity she can accept the Canadian Reformed Churches as true Churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.” By posing this question, the synod implicitly acknowledged the OPC was a true church, and they requested the OPC to acknowledge the same about the CanRC. This set the context for the mandate to discuss differences in confession and church polity, differences in the manner of inter-church relationships, and the issue of third party relationships. These discussions were to be done within the framework of mutual recognition of each other as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wavering on contact

The next general synod was held in 1968. The report to the synod indicated that the deputies had taken up contact with brothers in the OPC and asked whether the OPC could accept the CanRC as true churches of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It reads in the report, “The question whether the OPC can accept our churches as true churches on the basis of her standards and church-government was not discussed as it was no question for the committee but its point of departure.” This shows that the OPC had the same starting point as the CanRC, in that they would only enter into discussion with another church when they were already convinced it was a true church. The report

indicates that, through discussion, six differences had been identified that merited further discussion.

The decision of the 1968 synod, however, indicated a wavering on the part of the CanRC. The synod gratefully acknowledged “the fact that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church can accept the Canadian Reformed Churches as true churches on the basis of their doctrinal standards and church government.” This synod’s view of the OPC, however, was not as positive. It was willing “to express its gratitude that it is evident that in many respects the good fight of faith is being fought in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.” Then, however, it instructed the deputies, “to examine the divergencies in confession, church polity and principles of church correspondence which exist between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; to compare these divergencies with the Word of God, to evaluate them as to the question whether they are of such a nature that they would prevent the Canadian Reformed Churches from recognizing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ and from entering into correspondence with this church.” It also mandated the Deputies to investigate if the OPC lived up to its confessions and maintained discipline. This was a seismic shift, for now it was questioned whether the OPC was a true church, which had been assumed before and served as a starting point for discussion.

Mixed signals

The deputies appointed by the 1968 synod prepared an extensive report on the differences in doctrine and church polity between the CanRC and the OPC, and submitted it to the synod held in 1971. They concluded that these differences were not of such a nature that they should prevent the CanRC from recognizing the OPC as a true church and entering into a formal relationship with the OPC. The major obstacle to such a relationship with the OPC was that the OPC had a relationship with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, whose actions in 1944 had led to the formation of the Liberated Reformed Churches.

While the 1971 synod did not state outright that the OPC was a true church, it did acknowledge the OPC “is a group of Churches that commit themselves to the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God, and that wish to maintain the Creeds, based on this Word of God.” It also acknowledged “that the OPC desires to regulate and order the government of the church in accordance with the scriptural confession, namely that “all its decisions

should be founded upon the revealed will of God.’ The obstacle to closer fellowship was their relationship with the (Synodical) Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. Synod did consider the differences significant enough to remain “the subject of further and frank discussion.”

The actual decision of this Synod, however, gave mixed signals. Synod decided to forward a letter directly to the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church informing this Assembly of the observations, considerations and conclusions that called into question the OPC’s Reformed character. In that same letter, it requested the OPC brotherly and urgently,

1. To regulate, order, and maintain church government wholly in accordance with the Scriptures;
2. To also terminate their relationship with churches that maintain correspondence with the (Synodical) Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands, as well as membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod;
3. To consider to adopt the rules for correspondence of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

This decision implies that the OPC was deficient in the way it governed itself and in its rules for fellowship with other churches. The decision also shows how, over the years, the discussion changed from mutual discussion to the CanRC coming across in an imperial manner, demanding unilateral change on the part of the OPC. The sense of a meeting of equals before the LORD was fading to the background.

*These discussions were to be done
within the framework of mutual
recognition of each other as true churches
of our Lord Jesus Christ*

The Acts of the next synod, held in 1974, suggest that the relationship had reached a stalemate. The Committee had sent a letter as instructed, relating the differences in confession and church polity, and the rules for Correspondence used by the CanRC. There was no response to the differences beyond stating that they were “serious enough to remain the subject of further and frank discussion.” There was no desire by the OPC to adopt the rules for Correspondence of the CanRC, as they were perceived to open the door “for the domination of one group over the other.”

That the relationship had reached a stalemate is apparent in the 1974 synod's instruction to "continue the discussion. . . on existing divergencies." The mandate to continue discussion indicates that the intent was not merely to come to a better understanding but to bring about a change in the OPC. The resolution of the divergencies was being raised to the same level of hindrance as the OPC's relationship with other churches, such as the Synodical Reformed Churches in The Netherlands.

Time to decide

While the CanRC had initiated the contact with the OPC, at no point had a CanRC synod ever stated in unequivocal terms that it recognized in the OPC the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The most a synod would say is that the OPC came across as desiring to regulate itself according to the Word of God. It is not surprising, therefore, that at some point there would come a challenge from the OPC, which had made it clear that it saw the CanRC as a true church. That challenge came in a response from the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) of the OPC. It is beneficial to quote the concluding paragraphs. It reads:

We do not presume to have answered all of your questions concerning the OPC, or to have provided you with answers that are satisfactory in every respect. We would affirm of ourselves as well as the Canadian Reformed Churches that "the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error." We do not ask you to approve of, or compromise with what you find to be contrary to the Word of God, but to continue to exhort us to be what our Lord would have us be. Our errors and failures may be such as to prevent you from entering into a relation of correspondence with us as you have conceived of this relation traditionally. Yet we would ask whether you are really prepared to say of us, on the other hand, in terms of our witness over nearly forty years and our current testimony in our nation and in the world: that we ascribe more power and authority to ourselves and to our ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit ourselves to the yoke of Christ; that we do not administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but add to them and take from them; that we rely more upon men than upon Christ; and that we persecute those who live holily according to the

CALL ACCEPTED

Accepted the call to the Free Reformed Church of Launceston, Tasmania:

Rev. W. Bredenhof

of Hamilton (Providence), Ontario

ORDINATION EXAMINATION SUSTAINED

Examined by Classis Central Ontario of September 12, 2014 and granted permission to be ordained to the ministry of the Word and sacraments:

Candidate Gerrit Brintjes

CHURCH NEWS

Word of God. Our experience with you in previous discussion leads us to believe that while you are not altogether convinced that we are identical in doctrine and polity, you are much less convinced that we are nothing more than a sect of the false church. The question therefore becomes: How can we visibly be the one true church that we together are under these circumstances? The answer we suggest is a fraternal relationship . . .

In considering this matter, the synod held in 1977 looked back on twelve years of contact. It noted statements from synods since 1965, which pointed to the OPC as being a faithful church, and the fact that the OPC could accept the CanRC as true churches. Furthermore, it noted that the divergences had been discussed, but they had not been found to be an impediment to recognize the OPC as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The synod also considered that "after 12 years of contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by means of appointed Committees the Canadian Reformed Churches must be considered able and willing to give a clear answer to the question of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations whether or not the OPC shows the marks of the true Church as confessed in Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession."

The 1977 synod also dealt with the suggestion to enter into a fraternal relationship. It saw benefit in establishing some sort of formal relationship. There was some ambiguity, however, as to what the OPC meant with a "fraternal relationship." Further, the OPC, not being used to the CanRC rules, were not quite ready to make an arrangement under those rules. Nevertheless, some sort of relationship should be established which would serve as a basis for further discussion, with the hope and intent that eventually full correspondence expressing the unity of faith might be established.

Synod 1977 decided "With thankfulness to recognize the OPC as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession." It also

decided to offer to the OPC a temporary relationship called ecclesiastical contact with the following rules:

- a. to invite delegates to each other's General Assemblies or General Synods and to accord such delegates privileges of the floor in the Assembly, but no vote.
- b. to exchange Minutes and Acts of each other's General Assemblies and General Synods as well as communications on major issues of mutual concern, and to solicit comments on these documents;
- c. to be diligent by means of continued discussion to use the contact for the purpose of reaching full correspondence.

As part of the mandate of the Committee, they were also instructed to continue to discuss the divergences and the matter of third party relationships.

In light of the history, it is evident that the formal recognition of the OPC as a true church was long overdue. Since 1962, the understanding had been there that you do not enter into discussion unless you are convinced you are dealing with a faithful church. Only upon sufficient proof had a committee been appointed by the synod held in 1965. There had been repeated grateful acknowledgments of the fact that the OPC was striving to be faithful. There was also the matter that the question had been put to the OPC already since 1965: Do you recognize us to be true? Furthermore, in the examination and evaluation of differences on confession and polity, the conclusion had been that these should not prevent recognition of the OPC as a true church, nor from seeking correspondence.

As for the relationship called "ecclesiastical contact," it should be noted that it was set up as a forward looking relationship. It was considered temporary. The intent was not to use this relationship to put the OPC to scrutiny as to whether it was a true church, but to use it as a stepping-stone to full correspondence. This stepping-stone

was necessary until there would come a clear common understanding and agreement of what ecclesiastical relations involves. As it stood, ecclesiastical contact reflected very closely the OPC practice of fraternal relations. To the OPC, fraternal relations simply allowed a visible expression of unity among churches of different history and background, yet one in the Reformed faith as a stepping stone to eventual organic unity.³

*The sense of a meeting of equals
before the LORD
was fading to the background*

The decision also shows that the divergences were not ignored, but would remain a point for future discussion. This discussion would take place within the framework of mutual recognition. It is striking that, while the OPC's relationship with third parties was to remain a point of discussion and evaluation, this was not considered a condition for full fellowship.

The decision of Synod 1977 was long overdue. Regrettably, it was not the beginning of a positive moving forward, but the beginning of a stalemate of nearly a quarter of a century. In that time, the word "premature" would resound repeatedly, and many voices could be heard questioning the integrity of the OPC. That will be dealt with in the next installment.

¹ See *What is the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?* @ http://www.opc.org/books/eBooks/What_Is_OPC.pdf

² Acts Synod Hamilton, Article 82. The original decision was in Dutch. Author's translation.

³ See Acts 1977, page 99.



Correction

In the article, "Genevans for Pianists," Boudewijn Zwart is not the grandson of Jan Boudewijn but the grandson of Jan Zwart.

End-of-Life Decisions

(Part 3)



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In the previous two articles I described the nature and kinds of end-of-life decisions, as well as the medical and legal aspects of such decisions. In this article I shall review a number of recent court cases to give an impression of how the courts wrestle with these issues. I shall also draw a number of conclusions from the cases and the legislation.

A brief review of recent cases

Most of the cases involve elderly persons. They may suffer from Alzheimer's disease, be in a coma, or have to cope with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) or various other debilitating conditions. Shakespeare describes the last stages of life well in his play, *As You Like It*. In his soliloquy, "All the world's a stage," Jacques portrays the last two stages of life as follows:

The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well-saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange, eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.¹

I shall review some of the circumstances that patients may face by reference to four recent cases. There are many more cases, but I have selected these because they are recent and because they give a picture of the kinds of circumstances in which end-of-life decisions are desirable. Most of these cases have been reported widely in the press.

The first case is *Cuthbertson v. Rasouli* (2013). Mr. Rasouli and his family were recent immigrants from Iran and were devout Shia Muslims. Rasouli was admitted to Sunnybrook Hospital for surgery to remove a benign

brain tumour. Following the surgery, he contracted bacterial meningitis, which caused severe brain damage, respiratory distress, and a reduced level of consciousness. His physicians first applied mechanical ventilation (MV) and then performed a tracheostomy.² Soon the medical team concluded that Rasouli had irreversibly lost consciousness, would receive no medical benefit from continued MV, and was in a persistent vegetative state (PVS). The latter diagnosis was subsequently changed to a minimally conscious state (MCS).³ Dr. Cuthbertson and the rest of the medical team met with Rasouli's wife, Ms. Salasel, who was his substitute decision maker (SDM). They advised her that they wished to withdraw the MV permanently because it was futile, to start "high quality palliative care," and to remove Rasouli from the intensive care unit. Ms. Salasel refused her consent. She believed that the proposed treatment plan contravened Rasouli's religious beliefs that life is sacred and that a person must be kept alive until all signs of life are gone. The physicians believed that they did not need her consent. She obtained an interim injunction to prevent the physicians from implementing the proposed treatment plan. The matter was then brought before the court. Both levels of the Ontario courts, as well as the Supreme Court of Canada, upheld Ms. Salasel's argument. They concluded that the plan of treatment proposed by the physicians, which amounted to a withdrawal of treatment, was indeed treatment. Thus, under the *Health Care Consent Act* (HCCA), the physicians were required to obtain the SDM's consent. And, if she withholds consent, they must apply to the Consent and Capacity Board (CCB) for its decision whether the SDM failed to act in the patient's best interests. A decision was then made to move Rasouli out of Sunnybrook into a health care centre. After the court's decision, Rasouli was moved out of Sunnybrook into a health care centre, where he continues to receive the same treatment.

While I believe the Supreme Court of Canada reached the right decision in *Rasouli*, the decision must be regarded in the proper perspective. The court did *not* hold that physicians must continue treatments that they believe are not in the best interests of the patient, only that they must obtain consent or have a refusal of consent reviewed by the CCB. Nor can patients and SDMs compel physicians to continue a specific course of treatment simply because of the wishes of the patient or of the SDMs. In other words, the court did *not* decide that there is a “right” to treatment at the end-of-life; nor did it hold that “sanctity of life” is a goal in and of itself. By the same token, patients and SDMs cannot compel physicians to offer or administer treatment when physicians deem the requested treatment to be futile.

The second case is *Scardon v. Hawryluck* (2004). Mrs. Holland was hospitalized. She was eighty-one years old and suffered from Alzheimer’s disease. She was unable to communicate verbally, but was not in a vegetative state. Mrs. Holland suffered from bed sores, which were a source of infection. She developed aspiration pneumonia, which required suctioning of her lungs, and was placed on a ventilator. She had a tracheotomy and was fed by a tube into her stomach. Her physician believed that the use of a ventilator took a terrible toll on the patient and that additional discomfort was caused by the intravenous tubing required to administer medications, including antibiotics. The physician proposed to Mrs. Holland’s daughters, whom she had appointed her SDMs under her power of attorney for personal care (PAPC), that Mrs. Holland not be readmitted to the intensive care unit in future and not be resuscitated if her heart failed, but that she would be cared for in the medical ward and kept comfortable with painkillers and sedatives. The SDMs refused their consent, believing that the proposed plan of treatment conflicted with their mother’s Roman Catholic beliefs. The physician applied to the CCB for a hearing. The Board held that the SDMs had failed to act in their mother’s best interests and ordered them to consent to the proposed plan of treatment. The daughters appealed the decision to the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. The court agreed with the CCB that Mrs. Holland had not expressed a prior capable wish regarding treatment. However, the court held that the Board failed to consider the patient’s personal beliefs, values, and wishes. Thus, the Board failed to consider the patient’s best interests. Accordingly, the court set aside the Board’s decision. Thus, the daughters were successful in their argument.

The third case is *Golubchuk v. Salvation Army Grace General Hospital* (2008), a case that received a lot of press nationally and internationally. Mr. Golubchuk was an elderly, observant Orthodox Jew who, in accordance with his faith, believed in the sanctity of life. He had a fall, suffered a brain injury, and developed pneumonia. Accordingly, he was placed in the ICU of Winnipeg Grace Hospital. There he was hooked up to a ventilator with a tube that was inserted surgically into his throat and was fed through a tube that was surgically inserted into his stomach. He was unable to speak, suffered from high blood pressure and a cardiac condition, and his kidneys were failing, but he was not brain dead, nor in vegetative state and could thus feel pain and discomfort. However, he was unconscious and did not respond to stimuli, so the physicians believed that he was dying and recommended to the family that the ventilator and life supports should be withdrawn. The family refused their consent based on their religious beliefs. They obtained an injunction preventing the physicians from withdrawing life support. In consequence, three of the ICU physicians stated that they could no longer in conscience care for Mr. Golubchuk and one of them resigned his position. Mr. Golubchuk died before the court could consider the substantive aspects of the case.

The fourth case is *Bentley v. Maplewood Seniors Care Society* (2014). Mrs. Bentley was an elderly woman who suffered from the final stages of Alzheimer’s disease. She was not in a vegetative state and was not unconscious. She entered into Maplewood home for long-term care. Mrs. Bentley had expressed her wishes orally to her husband and children and told them that she did not wish to live in a state of mental incapacity suffering from the symptoms of the disease. She also made two written statements of wishes in which she said that if two independent physicians were of opinion that there was no reasonable prospect of recovery from the illness that rendered her incapable of rational existence, she should be allowed to die and not be kept alive by artificial means that served merely to prolong her existence. However, she accepted basic care and palliative measures to keep her free of pain and distress. She also asked to be euthanized if her mental deterioration was such that she was no longer able to recognize members of her family. The home fed Mrs. Bentley manually and its evidence was that Mrs. Bentley would accept nourishment in that manner at times and reject it at other times. Her husband and her litigation guardian brought an application for a declaration that Mrs. Bentley not be given nourishment or fluids. Based on

the evidence, the court found that Mrs. Bentley still had capacity to accept or reject food and drink. Accordingly, the court dismissed the application. In the course of the judgment the court held that the provision of oral nutrition and hydration is not health care within the meaning of the BC legislation, but is a form of personal or basic care and this form of care does not fall within the purview of the legislation. Further, it held that Mrs. Bentley's written wishes did not constitute valid advance directives under the legislation. Thus, the husband and the litigation guardian lost their application.

Conclusions from the cases and the legislation

With such a cloud of witnesses before us, what can we learn from the foregoing discussion and these cases? I believe the following are the important points:

1. Save in emergent situations, such as an accident, or Emergency Room treatments, a physician may not treat a patient until valid consent has been obtained from the patient or the patient's SDM. Such treatment would constitute assault.
2. A capable patient or the patient's SDM may refuse treatment.
3. A patient or the patient's SDM does not have the right to demand specific treatment, such as an MRI, and a physician may deny such a request if the physician is of opinion that the requested treatment is not medically indicated.
4. A physician cannot be compelled to continue any treatment he believes is not in the best interests of the patient, but before discontinuing it she must obtain the consent of the patient or the SDM, or have the refusal to give consent reviewed by the CCB or equivalent review tribunal or the court.
5. "Sanctity of life" and the patient's religious beliefs are not goals in themselves, but should be taken into consideration in deciding whether to provide or discontinue treatment.
6. Physicians (and also patients and SDMs) often refer to certain treatments as futile, that is, as having no medical benefit. However, "futility" is a laden concept and can easily be employed to support one's own ethical and professional values and lead to a biased decision to withdraw life support.
7. So also a term such as "persistent vegetative state" can be used to support desired end-of-life decisions. In some of the cases new evidence showed that there had been improvement in the patient's condition.
8. The circumstances of each patient differ and while physicians are trained to give diagnoses based on the evidence and their experience, sometimes their conclusions are proved wrong. I mean no disrespect to the medical profession in points 6, 7, and 8.
9. There is also the issue whether the cost of hospital care is a factor when physicians propose withdrawal of treatment. In other words, the question is whether cost is the elephant in the room when end-of-life cases arise. I was assured by counsel for both parties in *Rasouli*, that it was not a factor in that case. However, with increasingly tight hospital budgets and limited resources, this may become an issue in the future.
10. Some of the cases also raise constitutional issues. The argument is then made that failure to withdraw life support infringes the patient's right to life, liberty and security of the person, and her equality rights contrary, respectively, to ss. 7 and 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. So far the courts have sidestepped that issue, save in the context of arguments that favour euthanasia. These constitutional issues will undoubtedly be considered by the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Carter* case,⁴ since they were some of the main grounds relied on at trial in the British Columbia Supreme Court.
11. The legislation has provided the means to seek review of proposed plans of treatment made by physicians and of the refusal of SDM's to consent to them. Thus, the legislation provides important safeguards to protect all parties.
12. It is important to be as specific as possible in describing one's beliefs and values and one's wishes for personal care in a PAPC.

In the fourth article I shall discuss the use of a power of attorney for personal care and of advance directives.

¹ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene 7, lines 157-66.

² A tracheostomy is a surgically created opening in the neck and into the trachea. A tube is then usually inserted through the opening to allow breathing when the trachea is obstructed and also to suction secretions from the lungs. The surgical procedure to create the opening is called a tracheotomy.

³ This changed diagnosis accorded with the views of the family that Rasouli did respond to some extent to being touched and spoken to by them.

⁴ *Carter v. Canada (Attorney General)* – the Gloria Taylor case, referred to in §1 Introduction, in the first article in this series. **C**



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Islam – a Religion of Peace?

In spite of the beheading of Western journalists by the Islamic State (IS), Western politicians keep repeating the mantra that Islam is a religion of peace. On September 10, 2014, President Barack Obama denied that IS is Islamic for they kill innocents and three days later U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron maintained that “Islam is a religion of peace.” Really?

In a helpful September 17, 2014 article, “Islam and the Killing of Innocents,” Denis MacEoin who holds a Ph.D. in Persian/Islamic Studies from Cambridge, gives some perspective on this topic. What follows are excerpts from his article as posted on the website of the Gatestone Institute, a non-partisan, international policy council and think tank, dedicated to educating the public about what the mainstream media fails to report.

Islam does not mean “peace.” Islam means “submission.” Its root, *salam*, means peace, but not in the Western sense of the word. It means the peace that will prevail in the world once mankind converts to Islam, although which branch of Islam is apparently still in dispute.

What is curious is that no-one, so far as I know, has placed much or any emphasis on the earliest history of Islam. By any measure, this early history sadly demonstrates that Islam has never been a religion of peace and that modern jihadists, especially Salafis, take their inspiration directly from the actions of the first three generations of the faith, the Salaf (forefathers), the companions of the prophet, their children and their grandchildren. What is, or should be, worrisome, is that these figures serve as constructive role models for Muslims today.

The Qur’an is replete with injunctions to fight jihad; modern radicals themselves say they take their inspiration from it. There are estimates of some 164 jihad verses in the Qur’an. And those do not include innumerable passages commanding or describing holy war in the Hadith, or the

prophet’s biography. A few examples (translations by the author) include:

“Let those who sell this world’s life for the hereafter fight in the way of God. For whoever fights in the way of God, whether he is killed or lives victorious, We shall grant him a mighty reward.” 4:74

“I will cast fear into the hearts of the unbelievers. Therefore behead them and cut off all their fingertips.” 8:12

“Slay the unbelievers wherever you come upon them, take them captives and besiege them, and waylay them by setting ambushes.” 9:5

Regrettably it is impossible to re-interpret the Qur’an in a “moderate” manner. The most famous modern *tafsir*, or interpretation, of the holy book is a multi-volume work entitled, *In the Shade of the Qur’an*. It was written by Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), the Muslim Brotherhood ideologue often regarded as the father of modern radicalism. His interpretation leads the reader again and again into political territory, where jihad is at the root of action.

The Qur’an contains many peaceful and tolerant verses, and these could well be used to create a genuine reformation – something several genuine reformers have tried to do. But there is a catch. All these moderate verses were written in the early phase of Muhammad’s career, when he lived in Mecca and had apparently decided to allure people. When he moved to Medina in 622, everything changed. He was soon a religious, political and military leader. During the next ten years, as his religious overtures were sometimes not welcomed, the peaceful verses gave way to the jihad verses and the intolerant diatribes against Jews, Christians and pagans. Almost all books of *tafsir* take for granted that the later verses abrogate the early ones. This means that the verses preaching

love for all are no longer applicable, except with regard to one's fellow Muslims. The verses that teach jihad, submission and related doctrines still form the basis for the approach of many Muslims to non-believers.

One problem is that no one can change the Qur'an in any way. If the book contains the direct word of God, then the removal of even a tiny diacritical mark or a dot above or beneath a letter would be blasphemy of the most extreme kind. . . .

The besetting sin of modern Western politicians, church leaders, and multiculturalists is their ready acceptance of ignorance and their promotion of their own ignorance to the rank of expertise. Islam is one of the most important topics

in human history, but how many schoolchildren are given details such as the ones mentioned above in their history classes? How many textbooks paint an honest picture of how Islam began and how it continued as a background to how it continues today? . . .

So long as the Qur'an is on the shelves of every mosque and Islamic bookstore, young men and women in their *thawbs* and *hijabs* can find in it the perfect justification for their continuing endeavours in the path of jihad and the killing of innocents.

Being forewarned is being forearmed. Let us take note of the true nature of Islam that is faithful to its roots, history, and writings. C





Why Study for an English Exam?

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The following is a rant. If you're unfamiliar with this genre, please write a letter to the editor.

What amuses me about high-school English is its pretense of seriousness. By the time I get to teach students in university, they've read (or watched the films of) a great deal of serious literature. For a book to be serious it generally has to have three ingredients: it should be extremely depressing (think any John Steinbeck novel), it should picture a dystopia of some sort (think *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451*, "The Lottery," etc.), and it should have an abundance of "themes." The job of the student is simply to find the serious themes amid the description of human failure. For instance, the themes of *The Lord of the Flies* are bullying, human nature, and good versus evil. The themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird* are race, justice, and man versus man. The themes of *V for Vendetta* (graphic novels are the latest rage) are anarchy, vengeance, and, of course, man versus man. Notice that themes usually come in threes, because that's how many paragraphs you need for an essay.

Reading books and writing essays is thus like following a formula. Once the themes are identified in a Prezi presentation or listed in a thesis, the job is done, never mind that the depth of analysis is often mediocre. In what science course, for example, would anyone use "man versus nature" as a detailed scientific explanation? What would you say if your Math teacher forced you to provide exactly three (preferably unrelated) steps to every solution? What if the only lesson in Social Studies was that human society invariably leads to corruption and limits individual rights (*Animal Farm*, *Brave New World*)?

On the other hand, it is striking that the subject with the greatest affinity to English is Religious Studies. It is so easy to focus on the depressing reality of sin (*The Pearl*) or the artificiality of social interaction (*The Great Gatsby*, or, in public schools, *Catcher in the Rye*). One can

be dogmatic about destiny and fate (*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Flowers for Algernon*). And thanks to writers like Mitch Albom, it is now possible to have conversations about spirituality, or sentimentality if you prefer.

Of course, picking out themes is not for everyone – it's a bit like birdwatching or trainspotting that way. That's why educators have added a healthy dose of creativity to English classes, with students producing poems, short stories, and title pages in great numbers. But notice the paradox here: while essay writing and literary analysis have become formulaic, standardized, and predictable, creative work is meant to be deeply personal, subjective, and (here comes the magic word) *unique*. The lesson in short: people are all different, but books all have the same lesson (never mind that people write books). If you're into the history of ideas, you might observe that this is essentially a tension between Romanticism (with its focus on individual genius) and Utilitarianism (everything must be useful, must have social utility).

This, by the way, is also why so much poetry (both in elementary and high-school) consists of subjective observations of nature placed into a cookie-cutter poetic form. Take a Haiku – all you have to know is the syllable count over three lines (5 – 7 – 5) and you're off to the races (or the frog pond in this case). We have rules and creativity – surely we must be doing something right? Yet how many times can you write a Haiku before you get sick of it? Would you want to relearn 1+1=2 in every single grade? And have you ever noticed that a Cinquain is just a longer Haiku, and even more boring? It's merely an exercise in finding adjectives and synonyms. It's barely even poetry. Yet we're fooling ourselves that we're allowing children to be simultaneously creative and learning valuable rules (like counting syllables).

As an aside, it must be one of the greatest ironies of education that hardly any published children's poets write haiku, acrostic poems, or alliterative poems. Go and read Shel Silverstein, Dr. Seuss, or Jack Prelutsky – their poems are not Romantic descriptions of nature, nor do they use pre-packaged poetic forms. Instead, they use a basic rhyme scheme to tell hilarious stories. Here are the first few lines of Shel Silverstein's "Ticklish Tom":

Did you hear 'bout Ticklish Tom?
He got tickled by his mom.
Wiggled and giggled and fell on the floor,
Laughed and rolled right out the door.

Now wouldn't you want to find out what happens to Ticklish Tom? Or would you rather write a shape poem, somewhat like this:

Tree,
Branches,
Christmas Time,
Presents underneath,
Trunk.

Perhaps this might be funnier if we replaced "Trunk" with "Grab / Them," but such parody is not encouraged by curriculum writers.

Purpose

Asides aside, what all of this amounts to is great confusion about the purpose of English education. Why are we so serious about teaching dark and depressing literature, even though we hardly pay any attention to where a comma goes, or how to avoid a comma splice? Most of my first-year university students are great at theme-spotting (though what to do with the themes baffles them), but cannot find a simple subject. My students tell me that Shakespeare must be a genius (again, that's the Romantic strain of unique creative expression), but they have no idea what he's talking about because their teachers didn't interpret specific lines and words (certainly not sexual innuendo) and talked only in generalities.

And the end result? Many students hate English. They've been told that English literature offers profound insights, but all they've been offered for tools is short-cuts (cookie-cutter themes, three-paragraph essays, simplistic thesis statements, watching films, inadequate writing instruction, creative assignments, online resources, etc.). Despite all the pretense of seriousness, the final result is a lack of rigor, to the point where no one really needs to study for an English provincial exam. What would be

the point? You're only being tested on your general communication skills anyway. And as everyone knows, literary interpretation is subjective. Presumably the teacher just sucked all of those themes out of his thumb. In this way, the attempt to make English respectable has generally failed. Students believe that any further study of the subject would be a waste of time, especially since you can't get a job with it.

It is so easy to focus on the depressing reality of sin or the artificiality of social interaction

It's curious how different elementary school is in this regard. Young children typically love Language Arts despite the fact that they get much more writing instruction on the sentence level. In fact, young children revel in language itself. They explore sound and rhythm, narrative and meaning. They generally don't feel the compulsion to be super serious about the subject matter (there's a much higher tolerance of nonsense), nor do they feel the need to discard the literary form (the outward shell) for the hidden message or theme (the kernel).

A change

So why is this? And what can we do to change it? These are not easy questions to answer, and I cannot do them full justice here. But let me give you a few initial thoughts. First of all, the status of English is a historical problem that has its roots in the nineteenth century.¹ At the risk of over-simplification, the Romantics reacted to the problem of industrialization by taking literature out of the public domain. They made the subjective engagement with nature a purer and more spiritual expression of self than anything offered by the greedy, acquisitive culture of market capitalism. Literature, and especially poetry, became both a protest and an escape. The weakness of this approach was that literature became marginalized from public discourse. You see this, incidentally, in so much adult poetry written these days. Few people read it because it has little social relevance. It concerns itself with detailing the most minute observations and emotions.

Later in the nineteenth-century, the pendulum swung the other way. Charles Dickens, for instance is a great social writer, offering profound sympathy for the poor. In France, Émile Zola (a precursor to Steinbeck) went a step further, using his novels to critique an industrial

society that crushes people's lives. As we enter into the modernist phase, this miserable picture of humanity became even more pronounced. Ibsen, Kafka, Beckett – all of these writers express an incredible angst about the purpose of life in a cold and drab world. And increasingly there is a new element – the thought that there is no God. Whereas the Romantics typically made nature divine, their descendants felt no such comfort.

“More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry [or literature in general] to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us”

What then was the purpose of literature? Was it a Romantic escape into nature or a depressing critique of the evils of modern life? With the increasing importance of academic study from the late nineteenth-century onward, a third path opened up. The study of literature might have some merit if it could be treated as one of the highest achievements of culture and civilization. We see this idea in the prophetic words of Matthew Arnold, who wrote in 1879, “More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry [or literature in general] to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.” As Arnold foresaw, the study of literature had to become serious. It had to be systematic and rigorous. For literature (or entertainment generally) would one day replace religion as the supreme source of meaning and consolation.²

And this is why we're stuck with English instruction that is expected to solve every social and personal problem. It's meant to explain all aspects of life to us, to inspire us, and to give us purpose. Yet at the same time it expresses a fear that life is meaningless, fated, and depressing; and it teaches that any expression is personal and subjective. It offers a public forum for discussion, yet teaches few practical communication skills (since all expression is unique and natural). It searches for universal lessons, yet pays hardly any attention to the lessons provided by historical context. Is it any surprise, then, that no one quite knows what English instruction is for, or why anyone would go on to study it in university?

I don't have the time and space to tell you in detail how to fix the problem, so, I will leave you instead with a challenge. Make that two challenges. The first challenge is to find a Christian rationale for the study of language and literature. You could begin with John 1:1 (“In the beginning was the Word”) or with the use of language in Creation (“And God said...”). You could also talk about the literary aspects of the Bible (e.g., the poetry of the Psalms). To quote Leland Ryken, “the Bible contributes to aesthetic theory by its example, not simply by its doctrine. The most emphatic thing we can say along these lines is that the Bible does not distrust the imagination and artistic form as a means of expressing the truth.”³ It is a shame that for many Christians the fear of allegory and fiction has led to a cramped literalism that pays no attention whatsoever to literary style.

The second challenge is specifically for teachers and parents: it is to have a meaningful conversation with students about the purpose of English. If Reformed education is to be rigorous and exceptional, why not talk about these issues? Why not be self-conscious and develop a worldview that has room for creative expression, not as something you do in a spare moment, but as something integral to who you are. If the study of literature has essentially become a reflection on the values of our culture (as well as their historical roots) it would be most ironic if we lost the opportunity to instill in students a desire to make their faith relevant to the world in which they live. What can be more exciting than that?

¹ The literary critic who has perhaps done most to explain the historical narrative that follows is Terry Eagleton. His latest works (e.g., *Culture and the Death of God*) make for fascinating reading, in part because he himself espouses a curious mix of Marxist and Christian ideas.

² This picture is further complicated by postmodernity, with its critique of a coherent humanism. Indeed, Postmodernism introduces an element of cultural relativism into the study of literature, and turns English courses into a species of anthropology, or what is called “cultural studies.”

³ Leland Ryken, “In the Beginning, God Created,” in *The Christian Imagination: Essays on Literature and the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 55-67, 56.



Taber Bids Farewell to the Jagts

On Friday, June 13, the congregation in Taber gathered to give thanks and remember God's faithfulness as we bade farewell to the Jagts – Rev. Marc, Jodi, Ben, Evan, and Mikaiiah.

The evening began with a time of fellowship while we enjoyed a piece of delicious cake, coffee, and punch.

The Master of Ceremonies for the program was Br. James Bareman. He welcomed everyone and invited us to join our voices in song with the beautiful words of Hymn 66. He then called on elder Marion Bareman to open the evening. After reading Psalm 145 and leading in prayer, Br. Bareman spoke on behalf of Council. He mentioned the bittersweet nature of our gathering and noted that it was already six and a half years ago when we gathered as congregation to welcome the Jagt family. During this time, God showed his faithfulness in many ways through the service of Rev. Jagt in the congregation. The family had developed many friendships and been active in congregational life as well as in the community. We all came to know of Rev. Jagt's fondness for playing golf, hockey, wood-working, and reading. During his time here, Rev. Jagt faithfully admonished, convicted, and taught the congregation through his preaching, teaching, and visiting. Brother Bareman reminded us that while we as congregation may feel sorrow that Rev. Jagt is departing, we must always accept God's leading above our own desires. We may continue to trust that our Heavenly Father will continue to guide and equip us through the Word and also rejoice in the bond of faith that we share with the congregation in Fergus North, knowing that with them we share the "inheritance that will not spoil or fade."

Br. Gerald VanSeters spoke words of farewell and appreciation on behalf of the congregation in Coaldale. He also wished Rev. Jagt farewell on behalf of Classis Alberta, thanking him for his work in the classis, and wished him the Lord's richest blessing in his ministry in Fergus north.

Br. Stuart Boeve thanked the Rev. Jagt and Jodi on behalf of the board of Coaldale Christian School for their involvement in the instruction of the covenant youth attending CCS.

The program continued with several presentations by groups from the congregation. Knowing that Rev. Jagt is a great fan of eBay (having purchased items such as holy water, shekels, and anointing oil), the Young People's group introduced us to a new website they had developed: www.tipsbay.ca. Unique items up for auction on this site were from local businesses operated by or employing young members of the congregation. We also enjoyed a game organized by the youth group in which Rev. Jagt and Jodi competed to identify members of the youth group through poems written about themselves but read by another. The Youth also presented the Jagts with several Jenga games consisting of blocks which had been personalized by members of the congregation. The four members of the "Seniors Club" also spoke. Our oldest member, Sr. Catherine Bareman, read a rhymed version of Psalm 121. Br. John and Sr. Dorothy Tams each remarked on the growth they had observed in the congregation during Rev. Jagt's ministry and expressed thankfulness for the good relationships the Lord enabled him to develop with members of all ages. Br. Tams opined that he was certain the Jagts would miss the sunshine, the wind, and Taber corn! Sr. Ida Wielenga wished the Jagts strength, courage, and the Lord's blessing during the time of transition when the minister is still officially the minister Taber, but knowing the new congregation needs him and eagerly awaits his arrival. She also spoke of the reunion we will enjoy at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

The Jagts received several parting gifts from the congregation, including a painting of a prairie sky at sunset completed by Sr. Alice Bareman, a book of pictures from Alberta, as well as a memory box of pictures

and memorabilia including a bumper sticker reading “My heart is in Taber.”

Sr. Jagt presented a slideshow with numerous pictures of activities and congregational gatherings taken during their time here.

In Rev. Jagt’s farewell remarks, he remembered first impressions of southern Alberta such as seeing pivot circles from the airplane and the abundance of pick-up trucks on the roads. He expressed appreciation for the way the congregation has opened their hearts and lives to him and his family. He also recalled Rev. Kalkman exhorting us to pray for our pastor in the installation

service some six years ago, and he knew from his experience that we have done so. Rev. Jagt pointed out that while the Lord has blessed many members in this area with prosperity, we are all immensely wealthy in spiritual things and exhorted us not to take this for granted. The Lord will continue to give us everything we need as congregation if we continue to look to him.

Rev. Jagt then led us in prayer followed by the singing of Psalm 134. There was a further time of fellowship and refreshments following.

“Praise be to him, the LORD Most High.” Psalm 134:3 (*Book of Praise*).





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Q

In light of Ephesians 2:1-15, Romans 6:8-11, and Colossians 2:13, I would like to ask this question: Why does the Form for the Baptism of Infants (in the prayer before baptism) state that “this life is no more than a constant death”?

In my view, these texts make it clear that if we have been made alive in Christ, it is impossible for our life on this earth to be “nothing but a constant death.” I would go so far as to say that if someone feels that their life is “nothing but a constant death,” then such person should ask, “Have I indeed been made alive in Christ?” There will be things in this life that give us many powerful reminders that death still has some power on this earth. But death has been defeated! So how can we say that “this life is no more than a constant death”?

A

First of all, the texts adduced speak about our life that we have in Christ, by faith. It’s the new life which the Holy Spirit works by his Word, renewing our heart and mind, making us share in Christ and all his benefits. Spiritually speaking, we could also

speak in this context about a constant death; namely, daily we have to die with Christ, crucify our old nature, and rise to newness of life through our union with him.

The words included in the prayer before baptism, however, do *not* pertain to this spiritual dying and our sharing in Christ’s life and resurrection. They allude to the fact that in this life we are reminded of the reality of “death” *constantly*: in nature (the seasons), in our relationships (dying of loved ones, friends, acquaintances, etc.), in the world (war, famine, disasters, and the like). Also in our own body there is the steady decline, our physical wear and tear, which starts already as soon as a baby’s body starts to develop, work, and function, as a physician once told me.

The Apostle Paul speaks about it in those beautiful and encouraging words in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Paul

places this life and the life to come on a weigh scale as it were, saying, “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” Life is like a candle, small and with few burning hours for some and big with many burning hours for others; yet, every candle burns up slowly, consuming itself in the process. Hence, this life is no more than a constant death.

Our Form for the Baptism of Infants includes this thought in order that in our prayer for the child to be baptized the attention is directed at the life to come as the true life, so that it may leave this life comforted in the Lord who bought it with his precious blood and adopted it as his child!

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

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander
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Re: *Wisdom Re: Adding Hymns*

The guest editorial of August 15, 2014 suggests to continue looking for more hymns to be added to the *Book of Praise*. Prof. Dr. Arjan de Visser feels that other well-known and well-loved hymns should be added to show “catholicity,” desire of unity with URCNA/OPC and attractiveness to new-comers.

The *Book of Praise* contains songs for Reformed public worship. These songs might and even should be reflected also at “home and school.” The *BoP* should, however, not be or become a general, Christian song book for “home and school” that is then carried over into public worship services. Such happened in The Netherlands and started with “*Het Liedboek voor de Kerken*” (1973, with almost 500 hymns). These hymns became popular in our schools and at family gatherings in the eighties and nineties. Consequently, it resulted in our sister churches adding increasingly more hymns in the worship services and eventually adopting over seven hundred songs for Reformed public worship that could appease almost anyone’s personal sentiment. Apparently, this had become the goal. History has shown that such increase spells the demise of using Psalms.

Since 2001, the synod committee (SCBP) considered over (quote) “500 hymns from various sources, many of which were suggested by the churches” (*Acts 2007*, p.156). Over a period of twelve years, they concluded to recommend a mere twenty-eight hymns and only nineteen were adopted (2013). Already more than fifty years ago, in the report to Synod 1958, the SCBP had concluded that, without any acceptable hymnal in English (except a few songs from one collection), our churches had no other choice than to compose our own, responsible song book for worship services, that included all God inspired songs in Scripture from Old and New Testament. This they viewed as the beginning of “Calvin’s ideal” in the English language. We now have 235 songs for public worship.

What struck me in the editorial and to my astonishment, was the *absence* of any consideration with respect to what kind of offerings *God requires* in our public worship today. Is picking and choosing whatever we prefer the yard-stick of the day, rather than what our covenant God demands? Were the hymns, mentioned in the article, never considered earlier or rejected for no good rea-

sons? I wonder, what actually *motivates* the desire to expand a songbook for the public worship services. Are 235 songs insufficient to serve and honour our Lord? Is the number too small to choose from for the ten songs required every week in our worship services? Perhaps we like to just have more “personal favourites” and so please our private sentiments? What else can the real motivation be? Ecumenicity in conduct without doctrine?



Universality or catholicity of the church is not dependent on singing well-known songs. Believers are “joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith” (BC, Art 27). New-comers can be instantly at ease, because they share the *faith*. Just visit the Chinese or a Brazilian church once. Personally experiencing that unity via singing familiar songs may be quite pleasing, but it cannot be a *requirement*. Guests and strangers can be expected to need adaptation to the “culture” of a church. Not feeling at ease in an unfamiliar situation is normal. The additional nineteen hymns improved, in my opinion, little or nothing. If familiarity of songs for guests becomes a goal to further add to the number of hymns, the demise of using the divinely inspired content of the 150 Psalms on Genevan tunes is guaranteed, automatically and consequently.

Dennis Teitsma
Winnipeg, MB

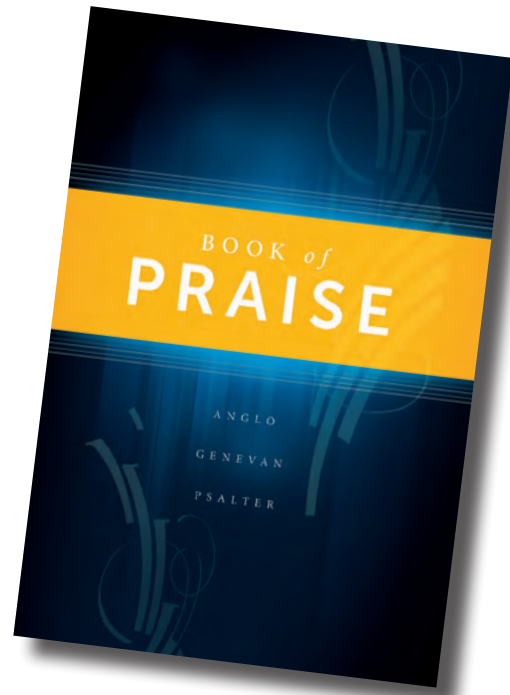
Response

Let me offer a few comments in response to Br. Teitsma’s letter. His main concern is that adding hymns will lead to the demise of using Psalms. He claims that history has shown that this will happen “guaranteed, automatically and consequently.” It sounds powerful but as a general claim it is not true. Adding hymns is not by definition a sign of deformation. Of course, there are historical examples of churches where deviation from the biblical truth has gone hand in hand with an in-

crease in hymn singing and the demise of Psalm singing. But introducing new hymns can also be a sign of reformation! There are many examples of church fathers and Reformers who wrote new hymns even while they continued to respect the Psalms highly (Ambrose, Bernard of Clairvaux, Luther). In our own time we have witnessed the formation of the URCNA as a movement rooted in a strong desire to be faithful to the Lord. We see our brothers working hard at updating and improving *both the Psalms and the hymns*. We live in a time that many churches in North-America are rediscovering the Psalms while they continue to appreciate the value of good hymns.


Let me remind Br. Teitsma that the Synod of Carman-West (2013) explicitly recognized that there may be a time in the future that more hymns need to be added to the *Book of Praise*. Synod never said it would be *wrong* to add hymns. Synod said it would be *unwise* to do so at the present time. My article was meant to provide reflection and suggest a way forward in this matter. If Br. Teitsma feels that my approach is not *wise*, I can live with that. But it sounds like Br. Teitsma feels that *principles* are at stake. If so, he has a problem not just with me but also with Synod.

Br. Teitsma is wondering what reasons people might have to add more hymns to the *Book of Praise*, and he cannot think of a single good one. He suspects, therefore, that people just want to please their “personal sentiments.” I would ask Br. Teitsma to consider the possibility that his brothers and sisters might be motivated by a genuine desire to praise God for his great acts of salvation in Jesus Christ. Br. Teitsma may have heard Canadian Reformed folks sing “In Christ Alone” at weddings or funerals. Would people really choose this hymn just because they want to please their own sentiments? How about assuming that they sing the hymn to praise God and to find comfort in singing about the incarnation, suffering, resurrection, and return of Jesus Christ?



Br. Teitsma wonders why it is that the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* considered more than 500 hymns but that in the end only twenty-eight were deemed suitable. That is a very good question. I do not know the answer either but it seems to me that a good number of solid hymns have been overlooked in the process.

Br. Teitsma made more comments that deserve a response but I hope I have addressed his main concerns. In summary, I agree with Br. Teitsma that nothing surpasses the book of Psalms. It is the inspired songbook of the church. Nevertheless, the church also needs to sing good Christian hymns. It is too bad that our discussions about hymns are often driven by fears (that we will lose the Psalms if we add more hymns or, conversely, that we will lose our youth if we don't). May our discussions be led by a common desire to enrich the church's ministry of praise.

Dr. Arjan de Visser 

*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.*