

I will Extol the LORD

PAGE 637

The Reason for Our Hope

PAGE 638

*Ordination of
Rev. C. Vanderlinde*

PAGE 650

Clarion

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**ARE REFORMED CHURCHES
INTERESTED IN EVANGELISM?**



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Reaching Out (Part 4)

Is this the best that we can do?

One of the accusations that is often leveled at Reformed churches is that they are not really interested in evangelism or missions. Is that true? A close and careful look into the history of the church will soon dispel that notion. Indeed, many of the greatest evangelists/missionaries such as George Whitefield, William Carey, and John Paton were solidly Reformed in their theology. As well, many of the missionary societies of former centuries were filled with people who espoused it. Even today the evidence indicates that churches of Reformed conviction continue to be active in many ways when it comes to the work of outreach.

Nevertheless, the stigma remains. Why is that? Why will this accusation just not go away? In part it has to do with the stress on sound doctrine in many Reformed churches and the view out there that sound doctrine and fervent evangelism just do not go in hand in hand. It may also have to do with the slow and painful adjustment that immigrant churches often make when it comes to adjusting to a new land and language.

And then too there is the impression that one gets from our liturgical forms, church order, and current practices. What do I mean?

An incomplete form?

Well, let's look first of all at what our liturgical forms say about the office of minister of the Word. Turn, for example, to the "Form for the Ordination (or installation) of Ministers of the Word" at the back of the *Book of Praise* (p.618 ff., 2014 edition). What does it say about the duties of the minister? It lists four of them and they have to do with preaching, sacraments, prayer, and doctrinal (spiritual) supervision. After that it goes on to ask three questions about calling, belief, and office. Next comes the laying on of hands, various charges, and a closing prayer. In many respects, it is a fine form.

Only one might ask whether or not something is missing here? What do I mean? I mean the calling that the minister

has to be a witness to the gospel and the calling that he has to teach his church to be a witness too.

Now, of course, you may wonder about this. Is this really a biblical emphasis? Is this really for us today? Does witness really matter that much? I suppose the answer is in how you read your Bible. When I read mine, I read about witness everywhere. I read about an Abraham who is called to separate himself from the peoples but at the same time to be a witness to the peoples in order that one day he can be a blessing to all the peoples (Gen 12:3). I read about the nation of Israel as set apart from the nations in order to be a light to the nations (Ps 96:3). I read about God telling the exiles of Israel repeatedly "you are my witnesses" (Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8). I read about the Lord Jesus telling his followers that they are to be both "light" and "salt" (Matt 5:13-16). I read about the Lord directing his post Pentecost church with the words "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). I read about the Apostle Paul commending the church at Thessalonica for the fact that it is such a noisy church – "The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere" (1 Thess 1:8).

Taken together it leads me to wonder whether our form on ordination is not missing something. How about one more duty? One which says something like this: "Fifth, it is the duty of the minister of the Word to be a witness to the Lord and to the truth of the gospel everywhere. Furthermore, it is his calling as a servant of the Lord to model, remind, teach, and exhort the members of the congregation to act as witnesses to their Lord and to his grace in all of life."

An incomplete Church Order?

Furthermore, we also have a description of the office of the Minister of the Word in Article 16 of the Church Order. It is even more elaborate than the form of ordination in that it mentions as his duties: preaching, sacraments, prayer, in-

struction of children, home visitation, sick visitation, and oversight, together with the elders. Again, nothing is said here about witness. It is as if the minister's office is strictly limited to internal tasks and responsibilities. Is it thus any wonder that some churches become in-grown and myopic?

In short, let's have a really good discussion together in our churches about the office of the minister and about what it means to be a witnessing church in the world today.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

This year Dr. James Visscher has written a series of editorials about "Reaching Out." The editorial in this issue asks why our federation has a reputation for not being mission-minded and focuses on several aspects of our church forms and order.

Issue 24 brings readers the conclusion to Dr. Ted Van Raalte's Convocation speech on apologetics. We also have the second part of a series that Rev. Eric Kampen has written on the history of our contact with the OPC. Look for the conclusion in the final issue of 2014.

Readers will find the Interim Report from the Subcommittee for Relations With Churches in The Netherlands. There is also a report on the ordination of Rev. Vanderlinde in Barrhead church. In addition, Issue 24 contains regular columns Treasures New and Old and Education Matters, as well as a Letter to the Editor.

Laura Veenendaal

- 634 EDITORIAL**
Reaching Out (4)
- 637 TREASURES NEW & OLD**
I will Extol the LORD
- 638 The Reason for Our Hope:**
Christ in our Apologetics (2)
- 640 The History of Contact Between the CanRC**
and the OPC (2)
- 645 Interim Report from Subcommittee for Relations**
with Churches in The Netherlands
- 650 Ordination of Rev. C. Vanderlinde**
- 652 EDUCATION MATTERS**
- 654 LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

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Looking regionally

While we are having this discussion, we might also want to look beyond what is said about the local church and its minister to the regional church picture. Here I am thinking especially of what happens at the classical level. In a number of our sister churches this level represents a beehive of activity when it comes to witness. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the United Reformed Churches are both heavily committed at a classical and presbytery level to planting local churches. And they are having success.

Where are we as Canadian Reformed Churches? Not very far. At present there are really only four church plants in our federation. The one is in downtown Hamilton and is active among the poor and marginalized in that city. The other is in Prince George, BC, and is targeting all strata of society. A third is in the greater Vancouver area and has as its focus on people of Chinese extraction. A fourth is in the city of Burnaby, near Vancouver, and directs its efforts at the general population.

Yet none of these can in any way be called organized classical church plant efforts. Streetlight-Hamilton is a project of any number of committed volunteers from a number of local churches in the Burlington-Hamilton area. Prince George is largely organized and financed by the church at Smithers. The Chinese Reformed Church is an effort of the Cloverdale and Langley churches. Burnaby is mostly a project of the Willoughby Heights Church of Langley.

It all raises the question: Is this the best that we can do? Is it sufficient to leave this work to dedicated individuals or to a church or two?

From my perspective, the time has arrived for each classis to take a good hard look at itself and to step up to the church planting plate. Why can each classis not appoint a church planting committee, develop proper outreach strategies, designate a certain city or town in its domain as a future growth area, and allot the monies needed to call a minister or missionary?

At the same time each church plant should receive clear guidelines from the classical committee when it comes to aims, practices, and financial support. A well-known Presbyterian church federation gives financial support to its church plants for a period of seven years. If no real progress has been made towards self-sustainability during that period, funding is withdrawn and directed elsewhere. Is that a model to consider? Perhaps or perhaps not, but at the very least it should be discussed.

Looking nationally

In addition to looking locally and regionally, it is also time to look nationally. What am I referring to here? It has to do with our Church Order again, and this time with Article 51. Under the heading of the word “Mission” it reads as follows: “The churches shall endeavour to fulfil their missionary task. When churches cooperate in this matter, they shall, as much as possible, observe the division into classes and regional synods.” Here we have the one and only church political description of how the churches together in federation see their missionary task. Here we have what the churches promise to do together to fulfil their broader calling.

Now this description is revealing both for what it says and does not say. For one, it speaks about “missionary task.” Is that a reference to evangelism and foreign mission, or to the latter only? Many members – ask them – think it only refers to the latter. Also, this article calls on the churches to “endeavour to fulfil” making it sound more like an attempt than a calling or a duty. (Can a church still be considered a church if it ignores mission?) Finally, this article spends more words on manner (via classes and regional synods) then on mandate (missionary task). All in all, Article 51 of the Church Order leaves much to be desired and gives little in the way of stimulus and guidance when it comes to assisting the churches in their calling to witness to the world.

In light of this, would it not be beneficial for the churches to target Article 51 and to come up with better wording? Why not change the heading from “Mission” to “Reaching Out”? Why not include both mission and evangelism under the same heading? Why not keep it short and say something like: “The churches shall fulfill their calling to act as witnesses to the Lord both at home and abroad”?

I realize too that the Proposed Joint Church Order, a product of merger talks between the Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed, elaborates on Article 51 and devotes two new articles to this matter (see: Articles 44 and 45). For my part, I find these two articles far too wordy, as is much of the PJCO. Keeping it concise has always been a hallmark of the Church Order of Dort and I think that we should keep it that way.

In summary, it is time for the Canadian Reformed Churches as a whole to do some reflecting and re-structuring when it comes to our calling to spread the glorious gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.





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I will Extol the LORD

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.”

(Psalm 111:10)

Imagine that someone offered you anything you asked for. What would you do? What do you really want? I think a lot of people would ask to be rich or beautiful, to get an education and career of their dreams, to be a super athlete, rock star, or actor. But how many would ask to be wise? You may recall that this is what Solomon asked for in 1 Kings 3 when the LORD came to him in a dream: “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” Not many people are like Solomon.

What is wisdom? It’s not just knowing a lot of stuff. Wisdom means you take what you know and you use that to follow the best course of action possible. In other words, you do the right thing. People who are wise might not be rich or popular or have outstanding abilities. But they have a clear and wonderful goal in their life, and they accomplish it. And that goal is to love God and their neighbour. The climax to Psalm 111 is exactly that point: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

This is a “hallelujah” psalm. That’s how it starts in the original Hebrew, and it means: “Praise the LORD.” The psalmist is so thankful that he says, “I will extol the Lord with all my heart.” It quickly becomes apparent what excites him so much. He speaks about the “works” and “deeds” of the LORD his God. This is a reference to God’s mighty deeds of salvation in history. The psalmist writes in verse 9, “He provided redemption for

his people.” Literally that means God paid the ransom to liberate his people from slavery. This is when the LORD liberated Israel from certain death in Egypt, taking them through the wilderness, and leading them to the Promised Land where homes, cities, and vineyards were waiting for them.

But there is something very open-ended about God’s saving acts in history. We read the law every Sunday with these words, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” The Israelites understood this verse wasn’t just looking back at deliverance from Egypt, but looking forward to the Redeemer who would deliver them from Satan, sin and death. But that would come at a cost. The Redeemer would crush Satan, but with the striking of his heel. Redemption for God’s people would come with the payment of the Redeemer shedding his blood. Think of 1 Peter 1:18-19 which speaks about being redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” This is where Psalm 111 shines: What an awesome God we have, that he pays the ransom that sets us free from slavery to Satan, sin and death! And what is the ransom? It is the blood of God’s own Son.

This leads the psalmist to conclude in verse 10: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.” He is saying that

absolutely foundational to achieving wisdom is having this fear of the LORD. To fear the LORD means to hold God in deep respect and reverence. It means to study his Word with its precepts and commandments. It means to take God’s Word to heart and to live by it. That leads to wisdom – to a life that has meaning and purpose.

As I am writing this, Canada’s highest court is considering the case that will decide if Canada’s assisted suicide laws will stand. There are many who want to legalize mercy killing. That’s one thing. On the other end of the spectrum you can kill a baby in the womb without breaking a law. Many will praise you for it. Where is the wisdom in this? How is our country moving forward when you can kill the unborn, and quite possibly soon the elderly? But it is simple really. If there is no fear of God, no reflecting on his Word, no living in true love for God and neighbour, what can you expect?

We have an awesome, gracious God. He not only saved us, but he made a covenant with us that includes his Word to guide our lives. To love him and respect him is to grasp that Word with all our heart, and to live by that Word in true wisdom. Then our life would be clearly laid out before us and we would know the path to take. It will be a beautiful one. It will lead to a Paradise Restored. Praise the LORD!





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The Reason for Our Hope: Christ in Our Apologetics (2)

In the previous article, which was the first part of a speech on Christ in our apologetics, we focused on the meaning of 1 Peter 3:15, where the Apostle admonishes Christians always to be ready to give an accounting of the hope that is in them. We saw how he assumes that this is the sort of defense that would stand up in court and would thus be coherent, rational, and compelling. Further, the Apostle teaches us to be ready to offer such an accounting or justification in all kinds of circumstances. Our lives ought to evoke questions from others because we live in such a future-oriented way, without the fear of man. Christ himself really is our hope because he, in his perfect person, possesses the fullness which we desire and which we in faith believe will be ours. When I reflect on Peter's encouragement and consider what might be our task in doing and teaching apologetics, I came up with seven reflections. More would be possible, but these seven are the most critical.

First

The gospel is that Jesus Christ died to take the punishment due to us for our sins and then rose from the dead to live and rule forever. Every believer can testify to this. Apologetics commends and defends the history and truth of this gospel. Peter's admonition teaches us that we should also equip ourselves better to defend and commend this gospel by studying apologetics. Hence we now have a course in apologetics at CRTS.

Second

God himself has rooted the Christian faith in history. For all the major acts of salvation, from the exodus to

Pentecost, God has supplied witnesses whose testimony is recorded in Scripture (e.g., Luke 1:1-4; John 1:14; 21:24; 1 John 1:1-4). They did not make up cleverly-invented stories (2 Pet 1:16-18). You believe real things that really happened, done by a God who really exists and who is coming again.

Third

This historical rootedness leads us to the centrality of the resurrection, for of this event Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that more than 500 believers were assembled together and saw the Christ in person after his resurrection. When he adds that most of them are still living, he is challenging any doubters to go and ask the witnesses. The faith is verifiable. The events of our salvation really happened.

We could even say this: Given all the evidence, it is unreasonable of people not to believe in the resurrection. Their only choice, in rejecting the resurrection, is to accuse the entire church of the first century of a giant cover up. But then they have the problem of explaining why so many people would die for a lie.¹

Fourth

Given this historical rootedness and its role in convincing the first witnesses and earliest readers, we should not entirely discount the role of evidence and argument in our coming to faith today. True believers know from Scripture and experience that faith comes by hearing Christ proclaimed (Rom 10:14-15; 1 Pet 1:22-25). Faith is the gift of God (Eph 2:8). I emphatically affirm this. But the way in which God leads people to hearing Christ and

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thus to faith includes means. Those means could include an empirical investigation. It could make others more open to consider the gospel when they read references to Jesus in Roman authors like Suetonius and Tacitus, or in the Jewish writer Josephus. Likewise unbelievers who rely on false assumptions about the composition and canonization of the New Testament à la Dan Brown can be helped simply with the facts. Objections that touch people's lives such as the problem of evil can be discussed empathically and shown to be answerable within a Christian view of the world. All these discussions have a place in apologetics. God is active in the whole process of study, questions and answers, objections and rebuttals, tests of reason and logic. The Lord uses it all. Whatever is true is true because he made it so. We may acknowledge truth wherever it is found and then point to God as the deepest source and ultimate end of all truth. Herman Bavinck taught us this very well.

Such apologetic defenses even play a role in the lives of our teenagers who are learning the faith. They desire reasonable explanations and answers, and usually these can be supplied by mature believers. We call this internal apologetics – internal to the church.

Fifth

Apologetics includes both defense and offense. In Philippians 1:7 Paul writes about “defending and confirming the gospel.” Positively, the prophets and apostles were not ashamed of the gospel because “it is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16) but negatively they also used divine weapons to “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.” Overall, they sought to “make every thought obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5).

Sixth

When Peter exhorts us to give an explanation for the hope that is within us, he lays the foundation for what became known in the church as “faith seeking under-

standing.”² Peter considered our hope to be firmly in place because Christ rose and because we are believers in him. We have faith in Christ, who is our hope. By faith we hold onto our hope, our anchor (Heb 6:18). But that faith employs reason in its service. It seeks to connect the various points of faith, to deepen our knowledge of them, to defend the faith against attacks, etc. When an unbeliever agrees with one teaching but not another, we can use the agreed teaching to show how it entails agreement with the one that is denied.³

Seventh

Finally, here's the definition we used at CRTS, taken from James Beilby: “Apologetics is the task of defending and commending the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a Christlike, context sensitive, audience-specific manner.”⁴ This is CRTS's first foray into apologetics. It's in the spirit of Herman Bavinck more than Cornelius Van Til. We seek to heed – and help our students and the churches they will serve also heed – the apostolic admonition always to be ready to give an accounting for Christ, our hope.

By God's grace we have been blessed to train students for the ministry here at CRTS now for some forty-five years. The Lord has richly blessed us. We continue to seek his blessing as we prepare men who will train up the congregations of Christ to walk and talk in faith. May the Lord richly bless you as you pray and work to be faithful in being a living witness of Jesus Christ!

¹ This point is ably made by Tim Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 210–11.

² The church father Augustine and the early medieval theologian Anselm particularly advanced this tenet.

³ This point is superbly made by Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.1.8.

⁴ James K. Beilby, *Thinking about Christian Apologetics: What It Is and Why We Do It* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 31. **C**

The History of Contact Between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (2)



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From formal recognition to full ecclesiastical fellowship

Premature recognition

The first article describing the history of contact between the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) showed that it took more than fifteen years of interaction before a synod stated explicitly what had been implied at the start, namely, that the OPC is a true church. The synod held in 1980, received eight appeals expressing the concern that the decision was premature, since the divergences had not been resolved. Concern was also expressed about the continuation of various third party relationships, especially with the Christian Reformed Church. Objection was also raised to starting a relationship that the churches had not known before, namely, ecclesiastical contact, instead of the familiar “correspondence.”

The 1980 synod denied the appeals and maintained the relationship of ecclesiastical contact. At the same time, it kept the divergences very much in focus and reopened the debate. Rather than simply referring to the report submitted to the synod held in 1971, it mandated the Committee to provide a detailed evaluation of the divergences for the benefit of the churches, to show that they were not an impediment to recognizing the OPC as a true church. It also mandated the Committee to evaluate the reaction of the OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) to the divergences, and

to complete the discussion and evaluation with the OPC concerning third party relationships.

Decade long stalemate

The decade following Synod 1980 can best be described in terms of a stalemate in the relationship with the OPC. Part of the reason for the stalemate can be ascribed to the OPC being involved in an effort to join with other Presbyterian bodies early in the 1980s. The main reason for the stalemate, however, was disagreement within the CanRC. In the report presented to the synod held in 1983, the Committee indicated reluctance to prepare an evaluation of the divergences, since these had been evaluated before. They wrote, “That these explanations did not satisfy everyone is evident, but we should not endlessly pursue the matter. . . .” The synod held in 1983 also had to reckon with some new developments. A church had left the OPC and sought to join the CanRC, in part because it disagreed with the OPC’s manner of supervising the Lord’s Supper. This led some churches to request that synod terminate, or suspend the relationship with the OPC.

Synod did not grant the request to terminate the relationship or suspend it. It renewed the mandate to publish a detailed evaluation “showing proof that these divergencies do not form an impediment in recognizing the OPC as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The

Committee also had to complete the evaluation of third party relationships, as well as pay attention to the new developments.

The Committee report to the synod held in 1986 contained the long awaited "Evaluation of Divergencies." It ascribed the differences to differences in history and confessional development. It also was of the opinion that "although the Westminster Standards could benefit from a careful emendation with regard to the formulation of these points of doctrine in order to improve the Scriptural contents of these Reformed Confessions, we seriously doubt whether it will serve a useful purpose to continue this discussion of divergencies on a Committee level." Further, they expressed the opinion that "both Churches should honestly recognize these differences and be willing in a continued contact to enrich each other with the Scriptural knowledge and understanding of the doctrine of salvation." They asked the synod not to renew the mandate to continue the discussion on the divergences.

The new developments mentioned in 1983, namely, a church leaving the OPC and being admitted into the CanRC federation, also received further attention both in the report and via a submission from Classis Ontario South, held March 5, 1986.

This synod received the "Evaluation of Divergencies" as the detailed evaluation of the divergencies which the General Synod of 1977 neglected to give for its decision to recognize the OPC as a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ. This evaluation was considered to settle the question of providing proof that the divergences did not form an impediment to recognizing the OPC as a true church. At the same time, it mandated the committee to continue the contact with the OPC, taking into account the rules for ecclesiastical contact, which included continued discussion on issues of mutual concern. It hoped that through continued discussion, obstacles to full fellowship would be removed. It also indicated that the matter of third parties (Christian Reformed Church) continued to be an obstacle. It also gave instruction to speak to the CEIR about the points raised in the controversy that led a church to withdraw from the OPC.

The stalemate continued at the next synod, held in 1989. It felt the discussion of the divergences had not received enough attention and regretted the lack of progress toward uniformity. It was felt the committee had

not fulfilled its mandate in this respect. It also felt that not enough progress had been made on such matters that had been raised in connection with some churches withdrawing from the OPC and joining the CanRC.

The 1989 synod formulated what had been implied by the 1986 synod, namely, that the divergences were not an impediment to recognizing the OPC as a true church, but they were an impediment to full correspondence. This went beyond the decision of Synod 1977, where the impediments had been a lack of clarity as to what each side meant in terms of inter-church relations and third party relationships. In light of this, it can be said that Synod 1989 continued the stalemate. On the one hand, it felt that the evaluation of the divergences should be put to rest, while on the other hand, much emphasis was placed on continued discussion. This latter aspect continued to give the impression that unanimity had to be achieved on the differences. The relationship was still incomplete, though the OPC was considered a true church. The inability within the CanRC to put the question of the divergences to rest continued the stalemate.

Shifting focus of discussion

In its report to the 1992 synod, the committee noted that the acceptance of churches from the OPC had made their work difficult. The question was asked, "How can we continue to speak about and aim for a sister church relationship with the OPC while we accept churches into our federation which used to be part of the OPC?" They had discussed these matters with the CEIR of the OPC and wondered whether "the OPC [has] to change its position in order to allow us to continue, or should we be satisfied with the progress made?" The committee also asked the synod to clarify the status of the Evaluation of Divergences submitted to the 1971 synod and the 1986 synod.

In the submissions from the churches, one again hears the word "premature" with respect to the decision of 1977. Some churches spoke in terms of calling the OPC to faithfulness. Another church suggested that the seriousness of the divergences had become all the more apparent over the last fifteen years. Concern was also raised about the growing divergences in the Canadian and American Reformed Churches about the OPC issue. Another church expressed disagreement with the distinction between

impediments to recognizing a church as true and impediments to full correspondence. The underlying thought seemed to be that if a church is a true church, then there should be full correspondence.

The decisions of the synod held in 1992 indicate a shift in the understanding of divergences. Throughout the relationship with the OPC, divergences had referred to the differences in confessions and church polity as detailed in the 1971 and 1986 reports. This synod decided that “the divergencies evaluated in 1971 and 1986 have been sufficiently discussed to confirm that these are not impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC, but may be discussed within the framework of church unity.” It followed this, however, by mandating the committee “to continue the discussion of divergencies which are considered to be impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship. . . .” A little further on the committee was told to “to inform the OPC that the matters which still require resolution for the establishment of full Ecclesiastical fellowship are: the matter of confessional membership; the matter of supervision of the Lord’s Table.” These issues were linked to churches leaving the OPC and joining the CanRC. There was also the outstanding matter of the relationship of the OPC with the Christian Reformed Church.

The hindrance to fellowship with the OPC was due to internal tension within the CanRC

The shift in focus continued the stalemate. The acceptance of OPC churches into the CanRC did not help the situation, despite efforts to justify this action as legitimate since the relationship with the OPC was only temporary. At this synod, the thought was put forward that “recognition as true church implies sister church relations.” Synod rejected that thought on the ground that some things might still need to be worked out before one could live in full fellowship. This exposed ambiguity, as it suggested it is possible to say the OPC is a true church, but it is not possible to live as sister churches yet. It also suggested that, in this situation, churches might leave the OPC and seek to join the CanRC, without thereby indicating the OPC is false. This highlights that the hindrance to fellowship with the OPC was due to internal tension within the CanRC.

Moving forward

The committee report to the synod held in 1995 indicated the difficulty it had experienced because the previous synod had entered into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland and the Korean Presbyterian Church. Representatives of the OPC had indicated that they considered the CanRC to be working with a double standard, holding the OPC to a more rigorous and more exacting requirement before ecclesiastical fellowship could be established. The committee considered two possible directions. One was to continue the discussions regarding the divergences as a precondition for ecclesiastical fellowship. The other was to discuss the divergences within such a relationship. It suggested that an agreement be reached on the two topics that had come to the fore in connection with some churches leaving the OPC and joining the CanRC, namely, the fencing of the Lord’s Table and confessional membership. It also thought the work of the committee for contact with the OPC could be combined with the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad.

The internal tension in the CanRC was very evident at the 1995 synod. Nine churches interacted with the report and there were nineteen appeals. In the submissions from the churches with respect to the committee report, a number suggested that the OPC be offered full ecclesiastical fellowship on the ground that a true church should be treated as a sister church. Other churches suggested not proceeding any further in fear of possible division within the churches. Yet others suggested that the remaining divergences be resolved before full fellowship could be attained.

With respect to the appeals, some churches considered the three divergences to be of such a character that the OPC had to be called to repentance, and, if they did not repent, the contact needed to be broken off. A number of other churches and individuals called for a rescinding of the decision of 1977 on the ground that it was premature, since the divergences had never been satisfactorily shown to be no impediments. In some of these appeals, the impression was given that unity of faith required that the churches share the same confessional documents. This made fellowship with the OPC, and any other Presbyterian church, impossible as they had the Westminster Standards rather than the Three Forms of Unity, and these two were seen as incompatible.

Synod 1995 paid considerable attention to the question as to whether 1977 was premature. The synod considered that this request was based on the premise that unity of faith depends on identical confessional documents. This was seen as not keeping in mind the way the Lord deals with his church in history. Reference was made to how, historically, Reformed and Presbyterian churches have interacted. Further, the synod considered that the understanding of the unity of faith as being dependent on identical confessions actually contradicts the intent of the confessions. The confession should not be seen as a norm by which to judge the other confessions. Rather, the confessions point to the norm, which is Scripture.

. . . both Churches should honestly recognize these differences and be willing in a continued contact to enrich each other with the Scriptural knowledge and understanding of the doctrine of salvation. . .

The synod decided to continue the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The Committee had to work towards formalizing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship under the adopted rules. This part of the mandate included the instruction to come to an agreement on the matter of the fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership. Second, it had to communicate with the OPC the discomfort in the CanRC churches with respect to their continued relationship with the CRCNA (Christian Reformed Church of North America). Third, it had to communicate that there is a need to continue to discuss the differences in confession and church polity.

At this synod, the positions became very clear. Some expressed grave concerns about the scriptural faithfulness of the Westminster Standards. Synod maintained the historic line that the Westminster Standards are faithful confessions. In the submissions, a misunderstanding of the function of the confessions came out, namely, that the confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches are the norm by which to measure all other confessions. This view essentially restricted the church gathering work of the Lord to churches with roots in The

Netherlands. The 1995 synod refused this narrow line of thinking, continuing in the pattern of previous synods, which recognized the Westminster Standards as faithful Reformed confessions.

The decision of the 1995 synod moved the relationship forward by indicating the two remaining issues to be worked through in order to achieve ecclesiastical fellowship.

New barriers

As it turned out, the opposition within the CanRC to ecclesiastical fellowship would be strong enough to cause one more delay. This became apparent at the synod held in 1998. The committee could report to this synod that they had reached an agreement with the OPC about the matters of confessional membership and supervision of the Lord's Table. The CEIR had already reported on this matter to their General Assembly held in 1997, and anticipated that, with this agreement, the next CanRC synod "will act to establish a bond of Ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC." This hope was not realized. Some churches expressed the opinion that the committee had not done justice to their mandate. This synod also had six appeals taking issue with the decision of Synod 1995, essentially restating the old disputes about the divergences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards.

The 1998 synod, like previous synods, rejected the contrast between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. It indicated that behind this thinking was a flawed interpretation of CanRC history. In response to the concerns about the vagueness of the agreement on the fencing of the Lord's Table, the synod decided to modify it, adding a phrase. Should the next General Assembly of the OPC adopt this modified agreement the OPC would be invited to enter into Ecclesiastical fellowship with the CanRC. If, however, it would not adopt the above, the whole relationship was to be reconsidered.

After the synod had come to its decision, the Acts state, "The chairman notes this is a historical moment in the life of the Canadian Reformed Churches as a decision has been made which will hopefully serve the Orthodox Presbyterian Church well and will bring this matter to rest in the churches. He notes with gratitude the fact that this difficult decision could be made unanimously." As positive as the synod may have felt about its decision, in effect it put the OPC before an ultimatum, asking it

to accept an agreement worked out by committees, but which the synod had changed unilaterally.

At the same time, there was another issue working in the background. The Acts of the 1998 synod indicate they had to deal with a submission from the OPC Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic about the actions of one of the ministers that had left the OPC and joined the CanRC back in the 1980s. He had labelled ministers of the Presbytery “false shepherds.” The synod dealt with this by urging the various parties to seek reconciliation. This, along with the changed agreement, would come back to the 2001 general synod, finally putting the CanRC before an ultimatum to make a decision about the relationship with the OPC.

Ecclesiastical fellowship at last

The Committee report to the synod held in 2001 described the effort to present the amended agreement to the CEIR of the OPC. In their response, the CEIR indicated that this unilateral amendment undid the understanding reached in past joint discussions. When the Committee tried to follow up on the matter, it was informed that the 1999 General Assembly had put restrictions on the CEIR in their communication with the CanRC. The restriction was based on the decision of the 1998 synod with respect to the “false shepherd” issue. That synod had called for

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This is what the 2001 synod did*

both parties to be reconciled, but it had not clearly distanced itself from the accusations. This synod would help the process by declaring unambiguously that it rejected such statements. Only once this was done would it be possible to reopen discussion about the amended agreement.

In light of the stalemate, the committee called for a reconsideration of the relationship with the OPC. It pointed out that reconsideration could lead to different conclusions. One would be to break off all contact, and thereby

imply the CanRC no longer considered the OPC to be a true church of Christ. The committee felt this would be a bad decision. On the other hand, reconsideration “could also lead to some thorough self-examination with regard to the question how our actions and decisions as Canadian Reformed Churches may have alienated from us a true and faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The committee challenged the 1998 synod’s unilateral revision, called for clarification of the “false shepherds” issue, and a return to the wording of the original agreement.

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The 2001 synod stood at a crossroads in the relationship with the OPC. For nearly forty years, the eyes of the CanRC had been fixated on what the OPC had to do in order to make ecclesiastical fellowship possible. If it continued in this way, the effort to establish ecclesiastical fellowship would be over. The other option was to look inward rather than outward. This is what the 2001 synod did. It rejected unambiguously a general disqualification of office bearers in the OPC as false shepherds, and expressed regret that this matter had not been dealt with in a timely manner. It also decided to apologize to the OPC for inconsistencies and lack of clarity in some of the dealings with them throughout the many years of discussion. It also agreed to establish ecclesiastical fellowship under the adopted rules and the proposed agreement that had been presented to the synod of 1998.

It had taken nearly forty years since initial contact to come to this decision. After that long process, it would have been nice if it were possible to say that the two church federations lived happily ever after. That has not been the case. There were elements in the decision that undermined the relationship. This will be explored in the final article in this series. **C**

Rev. J. DeGelder
Rev. J. Moesker
G. J. Nordeman
Dr. C. VanDam

Interim Report from Subcommittee for Relations With Churches in The Netherlands

A. The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) Previous to Synod Ede 2014

As Subcommittee for Contact with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands Liberated (RCN), we anticipated the work of Synod Ede 2014 with much interest. Synod Carman 2013 of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) had expressed deep concern about developments in The Netherlands, and had therefore addressed a letter of admonition to Synod Ede.¹ The letter expressed grave concern specifically in the areas of what was being taught and published at the Theological University of Kampen (TUK), the work of the Deputies Men/Women in the Church, and the direction of Deputies for Church Unity with The Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC), churches which had placed themselves outside the federation of the RCN almost fifty years ago. The disquiet expressed in Synod Carman's letter in general focused on the matter of Bible interpretation or hermeneutics. We first followed some developments which took place previous to Synod Ede.

On January 20, 2012, the TUK hosted a conference on homosexuality, which included speakers from the broader Reformed community in The Netherlands. The proceedings of this conference were published later on 2012 in a book entitled (English translation), *Open and Vulnerable: Christian Debate about Homosexuality*. This volume was number 11 in the "Bezinningsreeks," an official series published by the TUK. We were able to review this book early in 2014. We concluded that the speakers at this conference were obviously not all in agreement, but noted two striking general features from the published speeches. There is very little exegesis or asking what Scripture says and there is much talk of the current culture and the

need for the church to accommodate as much as possible to homosexuals so they feel welcome in the church. It is of course a given that the church should welcome all who want to follow Christ, but the point here is that unfortunately biblical norms were not at the forefront, but human perceptions and feelings.

The Hamilton Hermeneutics Conference was held in January 2014, also previous to Synod Ede. At this conference a number of RCN academics expressed their views, and this only heightened our worries. How we read the Bible is crucial to its present normativity in relation to, for instance, the role of women in the church and to how we as Reformed Christians are to respond to homosexual relationships in today's increasingly secular culture. The conference has been sufficiently covered in *Clarion* and *Christian Renewal*. There is general agreement among the North American churches that there is an obvious trend in the RCN to accommodate biblical interpretation to modern geological, biological, archaeological, and sociological theories by means of a hermeneutic which deviates from the traditional Reformed method of handling the Word of truth.

We wondered what the Deputies Men and Women in the Church would recommend to Synod Ede for the RCN churches. Their report² was a huge disappointment to us. It urged the RCN to declare that in the light of its new direction of Bible interpretation there is no biblical reason why women cannot serve in all church offices. The introduction of this report put forward the issue as the deputies saw it: "How do we read the Bible? At the same time, this theological problem is partly engendered by social and cultural shifts, and by changes in the way church members think and live."³ The report ascertained that church members in the RCN experience a growing tension between

the opportunities available to women in society and the restrictions on the roles of women in church life. However, the Bible gives obvious directives about the relations between men and women in Genesis and the Apostle Paul states in certain passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 that women are not to speak or have authority in church. How are we to read those passages? The report asserted that due to the current socio-cultural developments surrounding the role of women, there is “real uncertainty” as to how the Pauline statements about the role of women in the church must be read.⁴ The report then reviewed those passages and re-interpreted them in such a way that instead of giving normative prescriptions concerning the role of women for all times, they were read as a requirement for the church to adjust women’s roles according to the prevailing culture. In other words, those passages about women not speaking or having authority over men in church were not normative for today. Instead, the purpose of those apostolic statements would be to ensure that the church does not create an unnecessary hindrance to people of the prevailing culture to follow Christ, thus impeding the progress of God’s Kingdom.⁵

This report, we believe, has put aside the Bible’s plain, normative speaking about the roles of men and women in the church in favour of a contrived and complex new hermeneutical technique which emphasized socio-cultural factors which result in interpreting what the Bible says in such a way that it says the opposite of what it simply and naturally says. There was one dissenting deputy, Brother D.A.C. Slump, whose criticisms of the report were appended to it. We found ourselves in full agreement with his arguments. He pointed out that too much weight was given to the cultural context while insufficient weight was given to the creation ordinance concerning the place of men and women. More importantly, this deputy also concluded that “the report does insufficient justice to the significance that the Word of God, including that spoken by the mouth of Paul, has for today.”⁶ This matched our most serious criticism, namely how the report treated the Word of God. We do not believe that humans are the ultimate authors of the Bible passages discussed, but those words were inspired by the Holy Spirit who used people in their circumstances to write down what he wanted them to say for the “regulation, foundation and confirmation” of the faith for the church of all times and places (Articles 3, 5, and 7 of the Belgic Confession). The report, however, seems to have lost its hold on this truth in its complex process of interpretation in cultural contexts. Even without being adopted by Synod, it was quite disconcerting that deputies (who include TUK academics) would proffer such an approach to the clear directives of the Bible.

Another report published by deputies before Synod Ede concerned the Revised Church Order of the RCN. Synod Amersfoort 2005 already appointed a committee with the mandate to revise the Church Order. After a number of proposals were reviewed by subsequent synods, Synod Ede 2014 is expected to finalize it. The proposal to Synod Ede was a major overhaul of the Church Order of Dort which has functioned in the Reformed churches for hundreds of years. The overall impression of the Subcommittee was positive. This revision of the Church Order continued to reflect the essential principles of the old Church Order of Dort. The basic principles of the headship of Christ and the authority of the local consistory under Christ appear to be maintained, and hence also the autonomy of the local church. This Church Order however, seemed to include more centralizing rules on the one hand with Synods facilitating changes, while on the other hand more flexibility with regulations which seemed to give room for local experiments. Though much has changed, the proposed Church Order continued to reflect the centuries-old principles of Reformed church polity. Synod 2014 could not fully finalize everything connected with this new church order, as the “Regulations” were not yet added to it. It remains to be seen how the new church order will be practically applied in these “Regulations.”

We were taken aback by how the concerns expressed in our subcommittee report to Synod Carman 2013 and Synod Carman’s decisions and letter of admonition concerning the RCN were typified in the Report of Deputies Relations with Churches Abroad (BBK) to Synod Ede 2014. The report stated that “many of these objections have been based on personal observations within our churches, and not on the documents on the basis of which the churches have agreed to be mutually accountable.”⁷ We had taken pains to base our extensive report to Synod Carman 2013 only on the official documents of the RCN Synods and the official publications of the TUK. In fact, when directly asked by the chairman of Synod Carman whether the facts of the subcommittee’s report were accurate, the fraternal delegates of the RCN indicated that they were, though they disagreed with the interaction with those facts.⁸ We can only conclude that the decisions and admonition of our churches were lumped in with those of other churches. Unfortunately this would imply that the CanRC concerns were not taken as seriously by the BBK as we had hoped.

Finally, Dr. K. van Bekkum responded in a letter to the criticism of the CanRC and others of certain assertions made in his 2010 doctoral thesis at the TUK entitled “From Conquest to Coexistence.” He stated that he had learned from the criticism, but he still felt misunderstood in that there has been little attention for the academic context of

his thesis. He also holds that he has been misrepresented, for instance in his statements about the sun standing still in Joshua 10, and too harshly criticized as a result. We were disappointed that as far as we can understand he still maintains his thesis statements which still sound very much like Scripture critical statements.

At Synod Ede 2014⁹

Synod Ede opened on January 31, 2014. Unlike our synods where delegates from sister churches are invited to attend and speak and also take part in discussions throughout the time synod convenes, the RCN organize a “Foreign Delegates Week” at which delegates of foreign sister churches and observers from other churches are invited to a few select sessions and invited to address Synod with words of greeting. Brother Gerard Nordeman attended the “Foreign Delegates Week” organized March 22-29, 2014. He has reported on his impressions in a previous issue of *Clarion*. In his address to Synod Ede he introduced the CanRC and expressed the concerns of the CanRC regarding the changes in the method of interpretation of the Bible in the RCN. He was not the only foreign delegate who expressed such concerns. Brother Nordeman seriously warned Synod Ede that if the report of the Deputies Men and Women in the Church was not rejected, the CanRC would not see their way to continue the relationship with the RCN.

As Subcommittee we were also invited to attend Synod Ede on May 16 and 17. On the 16th the letter of admonitions sent by various foreign churches would be discussed, and delegates from those churches were told on that day that they had only ten minutes to elaborate on their concerns. On the following day the plan was for Synod to discuss the Report of Deputies Men and Women in the Church, but there would be no opportunity for delegates to speak on it. Sadly, we felt that with these measures Synod Ede effectively reduced us simply to observer status.

On May 16, Rev. J. De Gelder expressed gratitude for the opportunity given to elaborate on the concerns of the CanRC. He emphasized that our apprehensions do not simply revolve around the matter of women in office, but involve the matter of how the Bible is being interpreted. There is no denying that the RCN are in the process of adopting a method of interpreting which is different than the method used over the past centuries, and our concern is that the meaning of Scripture is being accommodated to conform to the pressures of an ever-more secular and post-modern society. Dr. C. Van Dam emphasized that the RCN have been the bearers of a rich, Reformed inheritance of Bible interpretation and it would be unfortunate if that legacy would now be polluted by changeable un-biblical theories.

Synod declared the letters of admonition from various churches admissible and lumped them together in its response. Synod stated that the concerns of the sister churches are evidence of our involvement with the RCN in Christ, and that they wished to remain accountable to the binding to Scripture and confessions. However, they also remarked that it is without doubt that the RCN are no longer the same churches as they were forty years ago. It was also indicated that the differences of opinion among authors or in reports should not be enlarged to become objections to the RCN. The churches are only accountable for decisions which are taken at assemblies. Hence the request in our letter of admonition to indicate that the views expressed by Dr. S. Paas in his dissertation are not in harmony with the Word of God were ignored. As well, our concern about Dr. K. van Bekkum’s method of critical Bible interpretation in his TUK dissertation was not touched on at all. In summary, the actual content of the Synod Carman 2013 letter was not specifically referred to. We can only conclude that Synod Ede’s response did not show much real consideration for the deep disquiet expressed by our churches.

We note with dismay that the concern expressed in Synod Carman’s letter of admonition in regard to the matter of women in office in the RCN has not had much real impact on those developments. On May 17, the Report of Deputies Men and Women in the Church was tabled. We observed that the approach of the report was deemed too radically different and too complex by many of the synod delegates. In spite of that sentiment, however, it was also expressed by some delegates to Synod Ede that it is culturally inevitable that women will in future also hold office in the churches and what is still needed is an interpretation which is acceptable to the general membership of the RCN.

The discussion concerning the role of women in the church was continued on May 20 and finally concluded on June 5. Synod decided that it could not accept the argumentation of the Report of Deputies Men and Women in the Church. However, though the report was not accepted, the matter of whether women may serve in all church offices remained an open question. Synod saw two lines in Scripture: the line of equality between men and women and the line of differing tasks given to men and women. Those two lines need to be resolved. Synod decided to appoint Deputies Men and Women to do this by investigating (our translation):

1. How the offices can be structured so that in them women can be active for God’s kingdom; thereby taking into account those two lines in Scripture;
2. What the consequences are of such a structure, relative to the current forms and the church order; and

3. What the opinions are within sister churches concerning the implementation of the offices of minister, elder, and deacon; this with a view toward maintaining the catholicity of the church.

The appointed deputies were also instructed to inform the sister churches, both nationally and internationally, concerning the third decision and to request their advice.

Synod Ede also decided to appoint another committee Men and Women in the Church to investigate working toward integration of biblical education, the confessional norms, and the practice of the Reformed churches in connection with the roles and functions of women and men in their mutual relations, by (our translation):

1. Describing actively how and on what ground in Reformed churches men and women in various situations use their talents in the congregation;
2. Noting in connection to this strong points, best practices, but also difficulties and points of controversy, giving a first assessment of these matters, and communicate this to the churches;
3. Entering and remaining in conversation about these observations and considerations with especially the employees of the Theological University and the Praktijkcentrum;
4. Stimulating and supporting the conversation about the calling and right of women also to use their talents in the churches, with a view toward a practice that reflects the manifold message of the Scripture, with special attention to:
 - a. Scriptural and obedient reading of the Bible;
 - b. The influence of society on the thought and actions of Christians;
 - c. The special and complementary differences between man and woman.
5. And in all the aforementioned activity, specifically asking women about their various experiences and convictions.

This second committee was also given the task to investigate whether there are developments in the churches in this respect that converge sufficiently, so that it is responsible to make general decisions and to submit proposals to the next general synod. As well they are to communicate relevant proposals to sister churches, both national and international, through the Contact Committee. Unfortunately, all this appears to the Subcommittee as having decided on the conclusion before having come up with the biblical basis for that conclusion.

That this is the case is confirmed by the decision of Synod Ede concerning unity discussions with the NRC. Synod Carman's letter to Synod Ede noted that these dis-

cussions have become warmer over time mainly due to the RCN having moved in the direction of the NRC in regards to the method of Bible interpretation and to the looser subscription to the confessions accepted in those churches. However, Synod Ede proceeded further with the relationship with the NRC. Two of the decisions of Synod Ede concerning the contact with the NRC are as follows (our translation):

1. To declare that due to the agreement in discussions concerning hermeneutics the hindrance which existed because of the opening of the offices to women in the NRC has been removed;
 2. To continue the contact with the NRC and to proceed from talks to discussions with an eye to church unity.
- What these decisions clearly showed us is that the hermeneutic utilized by the NRC to open all church offices to women has in principle been already accepted as valid by Synod Ede. Thus, we could say, the matter of women in office has already entered the RCN via the "Trojan horse" of decisions concerning unity talks with the NRC.

We remain concerned that the misgivings expressed in the Synod Carman letter of admonition about the dissertations of Dr. Paas and Dr. van Bekkum have not brought any change or action. Instead Dr. Paas has been appointed by Synod Ede as professor of Missiology at the TUK and Dr. van Bekkum remains assistant professor of Old Testament there without either having retracted any of their Scripture critical statements.

Post Synod reflection

Synod Carman 2013 stated that we present our concerns to Synod Ede of the RCN 2014 "in humility and with the heartfelt desire that you would take heed to the matters we bring before you. Our rules for ecclesiastical fellowship state that 'the churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy,' and shall be 'watchful for deviations.' It is in this context of ecclesiastical accountability that we direct our exhortations to you." At this point we have to conclude with sadness that thus far our exhortations have not been accepted in the spirit in which they were directed. We can only say at this point that this does not bode well for the CanRC relationship with the RCN.

B. The Reformed Churches (Restored) (now RCNr)

The subcommittee had opportunity to meet with four Deputies BBK of the RCNr on May 15, 2014 in Hasselt, The Netherlands. A number of matters of concern by the

respective churches had our attention at that meeting. We were able to speak about these somewhat difficult issues in a brotherly way. We questioned the brothers if the RCN_r still considers the CanRC a church on the wrong path and one which Reformed believers need to be concerned about. In response the RCN_r brothers expressed disappointment that Synod Carman 2013 did not respond to their letter to that body. At the same time they were happy to note that there is more understanding now for the RCN_r and its struggles leading to the liberation from the RCN. However, if the CanRC maintains its declaration that the RCN_r is not far from being schismatic, they would find it difficult to see any use having to defend and explain the grounds for their liberation in 2003. We were able to explain that the opinion of the Synod is mainly based on the fact that RCN_r has a sister-church relationship with the Liberated Reformed Church in Abbotsford. This matter received considerable attention but we could not come to a common understanding. As long as this matter in particular remains, there is little hope of the CanRC coming closer to the RCN_r.

Since our last meeting with the brothers of the RCN_r several developments have taken place. Rev. E. Heres and his congregation at Dalfsen (approximately ninety members) have joined the bond of the RCN_r churches. There is also a program of Training for the Ministry. Rev. C. Koster is now Minister of the Word. Br. M. Dijkstra has just graduated and has sustained his preparatory examinations. Br. M. Sneep is continuing his theological studies. Currently the federation consists of twelve congregations with four ministers, one candidate, and one student. Efforts are continuing to reach out to others. In different places there are talks with the RCN_{vv}. Moreover, informative evenings are being organized for the concerned in the RCN.

C. The Reformed Churches Netherlands (now RCN_{vv})

The subcommittee also had an opportunity to meet with four Deputies BBK of the RCN_{vv} on May 14, 2014 in Ede. To help us become better acquainted with this federation these deputies presented us with a presentation in which they provide detailed information about the biblical and confessional foundation, composition, and history of their churches. It is available on the federation's website (<http://www.gereformeerdekerkennederland.nl>) in Dutch. From it we quote: "The *Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland* (GKN), without the insert 'in' and without further postal or informal addition, is the name of the denomination as decided on November 26, 2009. A federation of local Reformed churches who, from the Protestant Reformation,

through the secession of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1834, the Doleantie in 1886, the Union in 1892 and the Liberation in 1944, 2003 and subsequent years want to live in 2013, only according to the Holy Scripture." Because of its small size and resulting limitations in the church order, the federation was initially called a provisional federation (*voorlopig verband*). Due to an incorrect association of the word "provisional" with "temporary" this term is obsolete and is no longer used. (In order to be able to differentiate the various Reformed churches in The Netherlands we will continue to use the addition vv.)

Present on behalf of the RCN_{vv} were Rev. E. Hoogendoorn, Rev. L. Heres, Br. J. de Bruine, and Br. J. van Wijk. Rev. Heres had recently been ordained as the third minister in this small federation that currently consists of nine congregations. One congregation (Kampen, Rev. Hogendoorn) had separated itself from the RCN(lib), and two congregations came out of the RCN_r. The others were local developments of individual concerned members from within the RCN(lib). In general, the meeting was a positive experience. The brothers of the RCN_{vv} freely answered the questions presented to them and acknowledged that in the past not all things were necessarily done in a manner which is church politically correct. A new church publication, *De Weerklank*, had recently gotten off the ground. They expressed a commitment to work together with the RCN_r – should they be willing – in order to seek unity with them. At this time there still appear to be some obstacles that not infrequently are due to human nature. The brothers informed us that there have also been discussions with deputies of Reformed churches in Australia (FRCA) and South Africa (FRCSA). The RCN_{vv} have asked the VGKSA to continue this contact. The RCN_{vv} also requested the CanRC to be positive about maintaining a form of contact.

¹ *Acts of General Synod 2013 of the Canadian Reformed Churches*, Article 165, page 212.

² RCN Reports available in English at <http://www.gkv.nl/kerkplein/english-materials/>

³ Report of Deputies Men and Women in the Church for Synod Ede 2014, page 5

⁴ Report, page 8

⁵ Report, page 23

⁶ Report, page 41

⁷ Report of Deputies Relations with Churches Abroad, page 5.

⁸ *Acts of General Synod Carman 2013 of the Canadian Reformed Churches*, Article 148, 3.15, page 180.

⁹ Basic decisions of Synod Ede available at <http://www.gkv.nl/organisatie/generale-synode/besluiten-gs-2014/>.

Ordination of Rev. C. Vanderlinde in Barrhead Canadian Reformed Church

It was a stroke of genius to have Calvin, Jolene, and Elijah visit our congregation during the summer of 2013. Spending a week in the Barrhead area, preaching on Sunday, and visiting during the week, the Vanderlindes got to know the nice summer of Alberta: the warm (not humid) days, the cool nights, the mosquitos. The weather could not have been more different on February 9, when Mr. Vanderlinde became Rev. Vanderlinde. The one thing the two times shared was the sun; other than that it was a frigid day in February when the Barrhead congregation and many welcome visitors gathered together in the United Church building to witness the ordination of Barrhead's second minister in its thirty year history. The atmosphere inside the church building was different as well: it was warm, both in temperature and character, and there was excitement in the air. For the Barrhead congregation, this was the end result of over two years of vacancy, and a number of declined calls.

Ordination

It was a very interesting service, with lots of new things going on. It is not every day that we can witness the ordination of a new minister. The service was led by three ministers, Rev. Tiggelaar, the retired minister of Barrhead, Rev. Louwerse, who was the counsellor for the Barrhead consistory during our vacancy, and Rev. Slomp, minister in one of our neighbouring Edmonton congregations.

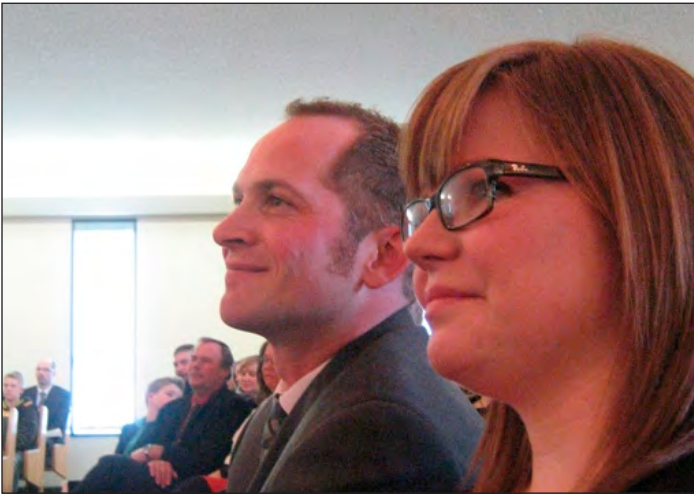
The ordination service was opened by Rev. Tiggelaar, and he also led the liturgy. It was a blessing to see our minister-emeritus involved in the ordination of our present minister, as the same gospel is preached from generation to generation. Rev. Louwerse proclaimed this gospel to all gathered from 2 Timothy 4:1-5, a fitting passage to encourage and exhort both a young pastor and a Christian congregation and their expectations

of one another. His theme was: In the presence of God and of Christ, this charge is given: preach the word. He showed to those gathered both the reason for preaching, and the season for preaching. He wisely counselled both Calvin and the congregation to have their priorities set properly in the word of God, and all else will follow.

Having been encouraged by the preaching, we were blessed then to witness the ordination itself, led by Rev. Tiggelaar. After the laying-on of hands, Rev. Slomp gave Rev. Vanderlinde his charge, and the congregation our charge with respect to our minister and the word.

The official service completed, there were representatives of neighbouring congregations who spoke words of congratulations. One especially notable visitor was Rev. Vanderlinde's father from Abbotsford, who came both as a representative of that congregation, and as a parent, and was able to take part in the laying-on of hands as well. It was a beautiful and moving time for the congregation of Barrhead.





The afternoon service was led by Barrhead's newly minted minister, who chose Isaiah 55 as his text, and preached that only the gospel of salvation by grace can satisfy our thirsty souls. In the first place, we must accept this salvation through Christ and in repentance, and secondly, we also access this salvation through Christ, who paid for our sins and enables us to repent. It is important, therefore, to cling to God's word, through which we know of this salvation and can access this salvation. Given the time between Rev. Vanderlinde's inaugural sermon and the writing of this article, I can say that his preaching is welcomed and enjoyed by the congregation.

Welcome

Later that week, with the formal beginning behind us, we gathered as congregation to welcome the Vanderlindes to our congregation. This was a fun evening of fun and food (good food, and lots of it), a time to celebrate as a congregation. The evening was full of different parts of the congregation singing, performing, or speaking. The Vanderlindes were treated to a history of the Barrhead congregation (informative to other newer members as well), and Calvin was given a few gifts: a map of the area with addresses labeled for visiting the congregation,

and a large, useful library full of books in DVD format – Logos Bible software. The youngest Vanderlinde was also treated to a hall full of people to play with and space to run around in – the Vanderlindes were not the only ones entertained that evening!

There would be too much to include if I wanted to write about all that happened or was spoken of during this joyful time for the Barrhead congregation. As it is, we have been blessed immensely, many times over. During our time of vacancy, we enjoyed hearing visiting ministers, but were also blessed by brothers in the congregation who read sermons provided by many ministers. We were blessed with good counsel by our neighbouring minister, Rev. Louwerse. And while many of our calls were declined, this was also a blessing as we were provided with encouragement by the ministers who came to visit. Now we are blessed to have, once again, a pastor and teacher provided to us by the Lord, who cares for his flocks, and provides not only his word, but also preachers to proclaim it. We welcome the Vanderlindes to the congregation, and pray that we can all be a blessing to each other, encouraging one another and building each other up.

C





CRTA West Convention – Connecting with the Community

Chris deBoer
Principal of
Dufferin Christian School, in
Carman, Manitoba

From the north of Alberta (Neerlandia) to its south (Coaldale) with two schools in between (Edmonton and Calgary); from Manitoba (Winnipeg and a representative from Carman), Christian teachers gathered in Caronport, Saskatchewan, for the annual Canadian Reformed Teachers Association West Convention. Caronport is a small community with Briercrest Bible College, Seminary, and High School serving as its main attractions. This campus and community served as a beautiful context for us to engage in our work as reflective practitioners. We were confronted with the question: How well does our Christian school connect with its communities?

The convention began with a “meet and greet” on Wednesday evening. Here old acquaintances were renewed and new ones formed. We then gathered to hear the first address by Mrs. Inge de Visser entitled, “The Spiritual Life of a Teacher.” In this presentation, de Visser began with the central calling to “Love the Lord and try to get to know him better.” She spoke of the community in our classroom, the importance of knowing our students, laying forth the glorious deeds of God before them, and serving as spiritual role-models for them. De Visser also highlighted the importance of knowing and loving the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes teachers can be found complaining about the local church situation and we need to remember how our attitudes can inadvertently be shared with and influence students. De Visser reminded us to be aware of the world around us, to keep abreast of current events, and to remember that we live in the last days before Christ’s returning. She encouraged us to teach our students to see God at work in this world through the curriculum and through current events. She then zeroed on the responsibility of the teacher to develop his own gifts in the sight of the Lord and to model this development to the students. We need to model what it means to be life-long learners and to desire to be better at our craft as teachers. Finally, she reminded us of the



Lord’s faithfulness and our blessing to call on him in humility and in confidence.

After an evening of enjoyable fellowship, a decent sleep, and a delectable breakfast, we were able to listen to Dr. Arjan de Visser speak specifically on the topic of the Christian school and the community. He noted how the idea of “missional” schools has been taken up again in conversation and cautioned us to ensure that we had a right understanding of what it means to be missional. He clearly identified the differences between mission schools and our covenant community schools. He did, however, encourage us to consider how we might respond when non-Reformed persons expresses an interest and a willingness to accept our schools’ unique purposes and practices together with a strong desire to see their children in our schools. Perhaps we are too careful and we miss opportunities to use our blessings to be an impact in the lives of some families. He mentioned some specific examples such as those who attend Street Light Ministries or perhaps some families that have expressed an interest in the local church. Just because they have not yet become members of the church does not have to necessarily exclude them from sharing in the blessing of the school.

The speakers are listening intently



After a discussion and lunch, we enjoyed two of six options for workshops. Inge de Visser led a discussion on “Reading the Unloved,” Brad van Raalte drilled out a basketball workshop, Marlene Hoetmer and Val Slaa gave some “Bits and Pieces for K-1 Teachers,” Ken Hoeksema encouraged teachers to use Geometer’s Sketchpad and Google Sketchup in the math classroom, Arenda Vanderveen guided us through a video presentation on the topic “It’s So Much Work to be Your Friend,” and Dr. de Visser led a workshop on “Christian songs in the Classroom.”

Thursday afternoon was spent doing some sight-seeing or paintballing. If you were a principal or administrator, it would have been wise to do the sight-seeing, apparently. The dinner on Thursday was a festive and enjoyable time of fellowship. Great conversations abounded around the tables. After the dinner and business meeting, the various schools shared how they interacted with the community. One school has started an ARPA club, many schools participate in sports leagues, food drives, and visits to the seniors’ home. Some schools were quite involved in projects that are led by other organizations as well. One principal mentioned a new initiative where senior high school students visit an English Language Learning school and engage in conversations with these language learners. There was much food for thought.

We enjoyed a nice evening on Thursday and were fairly well rested for Friday’s main address. Mrs. Inge de Visser spoke on “Prayer in the Classroom – Deliver us from deadly routines.” There was again much food for thought. Our classrooms are communities of covenant members, and so it should look, feel, and act differently than other communities. We were reminded of the important parts of prayer that could be summarized using the ACTS acronym:

- A – Adoration (Intentional, thoughtful, and varied words of praise and exultation to our God)
- C – Confession (Specific and humble recognition of sins and short-comings)
- T – Thanksgiving (Again, specific things for giving thanks – perhaps ask children for input)
- S – Supplication (Making varied requests to God, with confidence, ask children for input).

We were also encouraged to pray with students individually when prayer would be the appropriate and helpful response of a teacher in a given situation. Perhaps behaviour would be one context, but also when a child has to deal with a particular hardship. We were given many things to think about as spiritual leaders and role models in the classroom.

After saying farewell and thanks to the de Vissers, we participated in a sharing session with teachers of the same grade level or subject area. We then heard a few farewell words from Mr. Peter Veenendaal, who plans to retire after this year as principal of ICS in Winnipeg. We closed in song and prayer and then bade each other farewell with a subway lunch in hand.

The two and a half days were a real blessing for all participants. We thank the Lord for his protection on us all while travelling to and from Caronport, SK. We are already looking forward to next year’s convention where we will be challenged to consider what it means to Cultivate Culture.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers’ Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@ech.ca.



Teachers soak in knowledge and sustenance

Re: Reply by Prof. Dr. A. de Visser on Adding Hymns

Allow me a brief reaction to Dr. de Visser's reply published in *Clarion* (Vol 63, No 20). I am sorry that my letter to the editor was not clear. I do not oppose *adding* hymns per se. The 1542 edition already included a few. Let's stay on *that* track. Yes indeed, *principles* are involved and the main, stated concern was apparently skipped, namely, "Offerings *God requires* in our public worship today." Was the LORD not very detailed in prescribing Israel's public worship service? He also provided *divinely inspired* songs that included "good Christian hymns" and had them recorded in the Holy Scripture for our benefit. Why do we feel the need to present *man-inspired* songs in our worship service? I never doubted that the motivation for more songs might be a "genuine desire to praise God for his great acts of salvation in Jesus Christ." But does God require these for *public worship* or do we add them to please ourselves? Did our delegates not advise/warn our Dutch sister churches, based on historic experience rather than fear, to at least limit the proposed number of hymns? What has been added so far to our *Book of Praise* is no longer of the same genre as what was started during the Great Reformation and our initial years in Canada. It is certainly neither reflected in most tunes. Should scriptural songs, sung at weddings, funerals, or at home and in school, necessarily also be used in *public worship* or do we no longer acknowledge the difference? Such songs may be well intended and may show repentance, but must we add such *man-inspired* songs to our public worship service? I'm convinced that such additions are never a sign of *church reformation*. Indeed, let's join together in a desire to "back up to basics," to renew, reform, and so "enrich the church's ministry of praise" with what *God requires* and not with what *we* think might please him and ourselves.

Dennis Teitsma

Response

I thank Br. Teitsma for his reply and I appreciate the brotherly tone. I am glad to hear that Br. Teitsma is not opposed to adding hymns per se. I understand his position to be that in the formal worship service

we should sing only *divinely inspired* hymns, not *man-inspired* hymns. Let me offer a few comments in response.

To begin with, I really appreciate Br. Teitsma's concern that the church should guard its songbook against heretical influences. What we sing in church has an effect on what we believe. It is critical, therefore, that the content of the church's hymns should be biblical and in line with the church's creeds and confessions.

Second, the main question is whether the Lord allows or even expects the Christian church to make new songs. Br. Teitsma says "no," arguing that God was "very detailed in prescribing Israel's public worship service" and that he provided us with divinely inspired songs. This in itself, however, does not prove the point! At the very least, the difference between the old and the new covenant should be taken into consideration (the new covenant being more mature, with fewer prescriptions than the old). I feel much more at home with the majority of the Christian tradition which has taken the position that the command "Sing to the LORD a new song" (Ps 96:1) continues into the new covenant. The new covenant, which is superior to the old (Heb 8:6), requires that the ministry of the Lord Jesus should be proclaimed in new songs, just like the angels and the elders in heaven are doing (Rev 5:8-10).

Third, I understand Br. Teitsma's concern about "man-inspired" hymns but what seems to be missing is the consideration that in the new covenant the Holy Spirit has been given to guide the church in all truth (John 16:13). In this respect, it is important to remember that there is a distinction between inspiration and illumination. The *inspiration* of the Scriptures has come to an end but the *illumination* by the Holy Spirit continues. The church has always done things in worship that are "not inspired" per se, trusting that the Holy Spirit will be our guide. We allow our ministers and elders to formulate their own prayers when they lead worship. Are their prayers therefore "man-inspired"? Should we tell the brothers to rather use "divinely inspired prayers" (prayers that are found in the Bible)? That would be absurd. The same principle applies to hymns. When Mar-



tin Luther wrote the hymn A Mighty Fortress is Our God, he paraphrased Psalm 46 and applied it to the Lord Jesus (“Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he. . .”). Strictly speaking, Luther’s hymn is not an “inspired” hymn but does that mean it is merely a “man-inspired” hymn? Leave some room for the illumination of the Holy Spirit!

In conclusion, I thank Br. Teitsma for his response but I believe his position cannot be proven from the Scrip-

tures and is in fact much too restrictive. The Christian church is called to sing not just the Psalms and hymns that are found in the Bible but also new hymns that are biblical in content, edifying, beautiful, and God-glorifying. Yes, there is a certain risk involved. But the Lord has promised to guide us through his Word and Spirit.

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.*

