

Clarion

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WILL THERE BE ENOUGH ELDERS?



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Twenty-four

*There's a greater time commitment,
 a lot more reading to do, and many, many
 decisions to make*

About a year from now, the Lord willing, General Synod Dunnville will convene. At that assembly we expect there to be twenty-four men representing the churches, twelve ministers and twelve elders, equally chosen from both “halves” of our federation. When it comes to choosing these delegates, our Church Order assigns that task to the churches via regional synods (east and west). We expect that to take place this November (2015).

Now, everyone will agree that it is important for the health and well-being of our federation that brothers are chosen who are suitable for this task. Men are needed who both know the material and can contribute wisely to the discussion and ultimately to the decisions. Generally, it's not been difficult to find enough ministers to stand for this task but, of late, I am concerned that our pool of elders is shrinking.

Elder alternates

First, a little history may be in order. Prior to Synod Smithers 2007, the number of delegates to a general synod was sixteen: eight ministers and eight elders. The practice was for each regional synod to delegate four ministers and four elders along with four alternates for each as well. Alternates are always chosen (and their order is even specified, as in first, second, and so on) in case one of the first delegated brothers is not able to serve. Four alternates were in place to cover the rare possibility that all four *primi* delegates were unable to serve. It was a prudent practice.

When things changed in the lead-up to Synod Smithers, each regional synod chose for the first time twelve delegates (six of each office). In choosing alternates, Regional Synod West 2006 opted to choose only four for each office while Regional Synod East 2006 decided to choose six alternates for each office. The regulations

of neither regional synod stipulate how many alternates must be chosen, so it seems as if one synod did as was the previous custom while the other synod appeared to realize that four alternates might not be enough. It could happen that the original six might all, for some valid reason, be unable to serve.

To me, that stands to reason and I hope our churches meeting in the regional synods this fall will give this matter some attention. Sports teams talk about their “depth chart,” referring to how many capable players they have at their disposal. Even if the back-up players don't play much or at all, teams like to have sufficient “depth” in case of sudden injury or illness so that good replacements are always available. It's wise policy. In the past our churches have chosen a one-to-one ratio of alternates both for ministers and elders and it would be wise if we returned to that policy: Twenty-four good men from either office, twelve of each up to bat, twelve in the dug-out.

Enough elders?

Choosing ministers is usually much simpler and easier for a regional synod, for all ministers in active service (within that region) are, as a rule, automatically considered eligible to serve. They are also reasonably well-known within the area they serve and so choosing six ministers to serve and six to be on stand-by (out of approximately twenty-two within each regional synod) should not be a problem.

But what about the elders? Will there be enough elders to choose from in order to come up with six *primi* delegates plus six alternates? Are there twenty-four capable elders ready to serve in this capacity? You might think that with more than 460 elders serving across our federation, this should be no problem – and yet it already has been a problem.

As mentioned earlier, Regional Synod East 2006 chose six alternate elders. Regional Synod East 2009 followed the same pattern but Regional Synod East 2012 only chose three alternate elders! When I inquired about this discrepancy, I was told that there were no other names submitted by the churches! That was it! Not only could six alternates not be found, but even the long-standing arrangement of having four back-ups could not be arrived at – and that, surely, is not a good development!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Our issue begins with an editorial by Rev. Peter Holtvluwer. "Twenty-four" looks ahead to the next general synod and discusses the difficulties in delegating twenty-four men.

"Raising God's Children in Light of the 'Nicodemus Factor,'" originally a speech given by Rev. John VanWoudenberg, is featured in this issue of *Clarion*. We also have part three of Dr. Wes Bredenhof's "Outward Looking Church."

Various other columns fill the pages of Issue 8. Clippings on Politics and Religion, Treasures New and Old, Ray of Sunshine and Further Discussion. There are also two book reviews, a letter to the editor, a press release, and a Mission News insert.

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Consistory responsibility

What is happening? Is this a one-off discrepancy? One can always hope but I think our problem goes deeper. Regional synods historically have not received a flood of elder nominees – more like a trickle. I see two parts to this issue. First, the main source for the pool of nominees comes from each local consistory. Each is called upon to submit names to regional synod, but many local consistories do not give this sufficient attention. Since it only comes up once every three years, it's not a matter regularly thought about and it can easily get missed on a consistory's agenda. At times, the convening church for regional synod has dropped the ball in not asking the local churches to submit names of brothers eligible to serve at the coming general synod. The result is that opportunities to contribute nominees have slipped by local consistories. This is an unfortunate "clerical" oversight.

But it goes further. The other aspect is that around the table in many consistory rooms there's a sort of silent understanding that service at regional or general synod is not mandatory or expected and no one should feel obliged. There is often an operating premise that the normal thing is for all the elders not to be considered eligible, that it is exceptional for someone to be free, willing, and able to serve. Service at these assemblies for elders regularly has a negative connotation, something to be avoided. Keeping quiet and keeping your name off the list are accepted "default" positions. Too many consistories are content to submit no names for possible service at regional or general synod. This mindset needs to change.

New default position

Consistories as a whole and elders individually need to take seriously that being part of a federation comes with a range of responsibilities. When a man is elected to serve as elder, one part of that office is also the distinct opportunity (or possibility at least) to serve at the broader assemblies – classis, regional synod, and general synod. We generally have a good understanding of what the elder's task is within the local church and each elder as a rule is willing to step up to the plate and shoulder his responsibilities within the congregation. Excellent! But this should also be the mindset when it comes to serving at the broader assemblies!

The default position should be: I expect to serve at classis and/or synod, if called upon. I would be hon-

oured to serve the churches in that way. And consistories should foster this among themselves. For example, when it comes time to submit names to regional synod for brothers eligible to serve at general synod, the list should begin with all the names of all the elders of a local consistory. Names should only come off the list when a brother presents sound reasons for not being able to serve, acceptable to the whole consistory. Instead of volunteering to be put on the list, one should explain why he cannot remain on the list. Within consistories, we need to develop a new normal, a new default position that serving at the broader assemblies is part of the package.

Requirements to serve

I think many elders shy away from such service because they are not certain about the requirements or their own abilities to meet them. For any broader assembly, there are three things to keep in mind: time, reading with discernment, and discussing/deciding matters. For classis and regional synod, the time commitment is generally one day or less, something most men can manage within their work schedules. The reading material is often an appeal (against a consistory or classis decision) or a proposal from a local church regarding something in broader church life, not overly burdensome. At classis (but not at any synod) sometimes advice is sought for a discipline matter. I would say, generally speaking, any elder who is capable of serving in the local church has the capabilities to contribute well and wisely at classis or regional synod.

With general synod it is different but really only in degree. There's a greater time commitment, a lot more reading to do, and many, many decisions to make. The time needed to serve at the assembly itself is between two and three weeks. Ouch. I know, that's a big deal and this may be one of the biggest hurdles to having more men stand for nomination.

Loss of wages

Aside from being apart from your family (which is a considerable sacrifice; here a wife can be very encouraging for her husband), I understand that most elders are not retired and depend on daily work to bring home a wage. How fair is it to ask a brother to take two or three weeks of his vacation time to dedicate it to synod? That wouldn't be right. In fact, he'll need that vacation time once he arrives home from synod!

In this respect, our regional synods could do better to encourage the participation of working elders by providing a more realistic “loss of wages” compensation. Regional Synod West 2009 and again in 2012 provided for \$200 per day to a maximum of \$1000/week. In 2009, this was not too bad. Regional Synod East 2012, however, only provided \$100/day. Which working man can provide for his family out of \$100/day? If we expect our men to take a leave of absence from work for two or three weeks, then we should pay them a fair replacement wage and in today’s dollars that should not be less than \$250 per day.

Reading, reading

Aside from the large time-away factor, the next biggest thing is the lengthy period of preparation needed, especially for an elder’s first time. Beginning in January (of a general synod year), reports and agenda materials will start landing in your Inbox and you’ll need to be busy reading on many nights to keep up. While there is a great deal of reading, it is not in itself overly difficult. If you spread it out over weeks and months, by the time synod arrives in May, you’ll be in good shape.

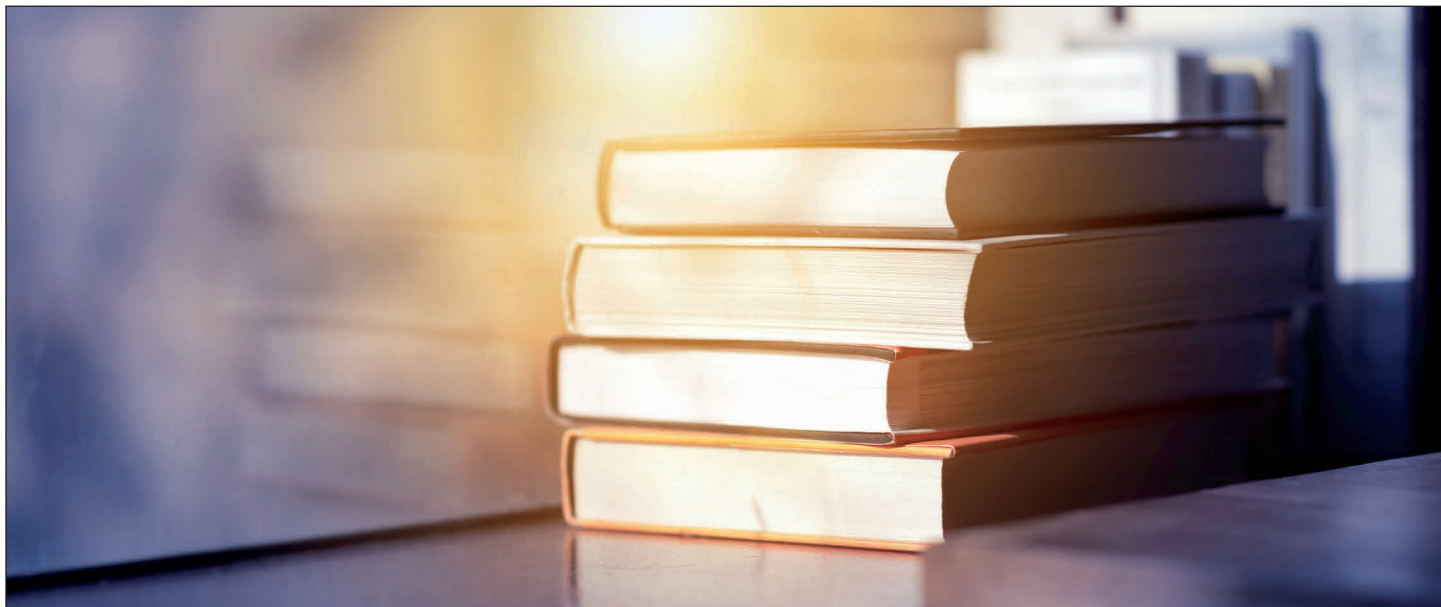
Decisions, decisions

At general synod itself, any delegate can expect an intense time of deliberation, both in the plenary session

of the whole synod as well as within the individual committee each is a member of (the twenty-four delegates usually get divided into five sub-committees to do the actual work of formulating decisions). There is an unrelenting pendulum swing between the crafting of proposals in committee and the ongoing discussion/decision making at the plenary session. After a day or two, you’ll fall into the rhythm. And you’ll quickly learn to flip from topic to topic and run from meeting to meeting!

I don’t mind saying it’s exhausting work; but it’s good work. Any elder who can manage (with his work and family) to be away three weeks (understanding he will be properly compensated), who can digest a great deal of reading over several months, and who is able to carefully think through the matters on the agenda and contribute thoughtful input to the discussion is well-qualified to serve at general synod. Let’s not forget, above all else, that the Lord who calls you to service will also equip you for this task, daunting as it may be. In his strength, you can do it. Brothers, let your name stand if at all feasible.

I hope that this November each regional synod will have an abundance of names from which to choose a full slate of twenty-four elder delegates and alternates to General Synod Dunnville, 2016. C





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The Everlasting Arms of God

“The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

(Deut 33:27a)

The picture of God’s everlasting arms brings both a sense of God’s power and his tenderness. The Scriptures, especially the books of Moses, reveal the outstretched arm of God. We are shown his power because the outstretched arm of God is an arm of judgment. In Exodus 6:6 God says, “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.” The Lord reveals the awesome power of his arm by the ten plagues and by the drowning of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. At the same time the Lord reveals the tender mercy of his arm as he redeems his people. In this way, the Bible first reveals to us the outstretched arm of God.

But in Deuteronomy 33 we read about the everlasting arms of God. That God’s arms were extended to redeem his people is clear from the Exodus, but what about the future? Would God’s arms continue to save? Moses blesses God’s people, tribe by tribe, for one last time before he dies.

Israel listens while at the border of the Promised Land; uncertain because of strength of the Canaanite enemies; uncertain because of the future.

It wouldn’t be surprising if Moses’ arms were extended for the whole time he was blessing Israel and getting heavier as he blessed them. It would have been similar to the time (in Exodus 17) when Moses was on the hill while Israel fought the Amalekites. As long as the arms of Moses were held up Israel was winning, but Moses’ arms would grow tired and he would need some help to hold up his arms.

Here, in the last words of Moses, the Lord reveals that his arms are everlasting. The surrounding verses emphasize the almighty power of God’s arm is present. “There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens. . . through the skies in his majesty.” In addition, these words emphasize the tender mercy of God’s arm is also present.

“He rides through the heavens to your help. The eternal God is your dwelling place.” Both are there: God’s arm of power and tenderness.

To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? The gospel of John makes it clear that those who know Jesus Christ know the everlasting arms of God. In Jesus Christ we find both the almighty power of God and his tender, protecting mercy. In John 12 our Lord Jesus confronts rigid unbelief with his almighty power of judgment. At the same time, our Lord Jesus was performing many signs of healing and salvation for his people.

In Jesus Christ the everlasting arms of the Lord have been revealed. He is like the shepherd who gathers the lambs in his arms (Isaiah 40) because he is compassionate and gracious. At the same time our Lord is like a shepherd whose arms powerfully destroy the lion and the bear. In this way, all Christ’s sheep are kept safe forever in him. C

For Further Study

1. The Scriptures use different imagery for us to know God. How does the *hand* of God differ from the *arm* of God?
2. What comfort is there that God’s mighty arm works against his enemies? How does his wrath lead to everlasting peace?
3. Why do we rejoice in God’s everlasting arms?
4. Deuteronomy 33 says “Underneath are the everlasting arms of God.” Why is *underneath* important?

Raising God's Children in Light of the "Nicodemus Factor"



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This article was originally a speech given at the Ontario Women's League Day held in October, 2014

Nicodemus and baptism

The focus of this speech comes from John 3, on being born again, particularly how this works in the lives of those who are born and raised in a Christian family. We begin by looking at Nicodemus and the baptism form.

The baptism form starts as follows:

The doctrine of holy baptism is summarized as follows: First, we are our children are conceived and born in sin and are therefore by nature children of wrath (Eph 2:3), so that we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are born again (John 3:3, 5). This is what the immersion in or sprinkling with water teaches us. It signifies the impurity of our souls, so that we may detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek our cleansing and salvation outside of ourselves.

We can notice several things here. First, the baptism form reaches to John 3 as basis for its remarks. Second, it highlights that each of us needs rebirth in order to enter the kingdom of God! I've heard some suggest that such is not the case for our children, since they already have this by virtue of the fact that they are covenant children. On this matter, however, the baptism form is very clear: they are by nature children of wrath and they cannot enter the kingdom of God unless they are born again! Why? Because they are truly dirty! When we present our children for baptism we publically confess that our children are filthy, right down to their core and that they need a completely new start! It's very easy for us to become oblivious to this reality. The baptism form also reaches for John 3 to highlight just how desperately needy we

and our children are! It highlights what the appropriate response should be: we should detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek our cleansing and salvation outside of ourselves.

However, we should not conclude that since we are so totally depraved that, therefore, we and our children simply can't do anything about it unless the Holy Spirit works in us. It is undeniably true that without the working of the Holy Spirit we cannot even want to reach out to God and ask him for help and rescue (cf. John 15:5; Rom 8:7). But none the less we are responsible! Ultimately our faith comes from God, but it remains our responsibility to believe. We must hold to both at the same time. To refuse to believe will ultimately mean condemnation (John 3:18).

Jesus and Nicodemus

Next we look at the setting of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. It is easy to characterize Nicodemus as a bit of a chicken. Did he not come to Jesus "by night," out of fear of ridicule from the other Pharisees and fellow members on the Jewish Sanhedrin? John records how matters unfolded at Jesus' burial: "After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight" (John 18:38-39). John here highlights that Nicodemus came to Jesus "by night" right after highlighting that Joseph "was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews." Does that not show that both Joseph and Nicodemus were also "fellow chickens"?

A number of other factors, however, suggest otherwise. In the first place, in John 7 the chief priests and the Pharisees together sent temple guards to arrest Jesus. At this point they were very angry and irate about what Jesus has said and how the people were following him. They even called the people following him “accursed” (John 7:49). In such a hostile context Nicodemus responded by asking them, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” (John 7:51) The question did not go over well: “They replied, ‘Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee’” (v. 52).

Secondly, it’s remarkable how Nicodemus, when conversing with our Lord, handles himself. When Jesus remarks, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (John 3:10), Nicodemus appears to take it.

Thirdly, that burial account mentioned earlier actually highlights that Nicodemus had the bravery to bury the body of our Lord. Could it be then that Nicodemus came “by night” simply because this would have been a better time for quiet uninterrupted conversation? It may then be more appropriate to say he was an admirable man. Some of the Pharisees had a real zeal for the true religion. As such they were often at odds with the Jewish leaders. Nicodemus was also a member of the Jewish ruling council. He was therefore a lawyer and an expert in God’s law.

By now you might ask why come to such a defense of Nicodemus? Simply because, although the Lord takes Nicodemus to task, he also takes us to task. It is very easy for us to look down upon Nicodemus, thereby failing at the same time to see how our Lord also takes us to task for the very same reason. He does this in such matters as how we tend to view our children, what we often forget to see as our own greatest need in our task of raising our children, what we tend to forget to see as our children’s greatest need as they grow up, how we therefore easily tend to raise our children from day to day with a basic matter failing to come through.

We must be born again!

As we dive into the conversation we need to keep in mind just who our Saviour is. Our Lord knew exactly what Nicodemus was thinking, and where his blind spots were. John introduces the conversation with these words, “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the

signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man” (John 2:23-25). Nicodemus acknowledges Jesus as “a teacher come from God.” Before he can even ask his first question, however, our Lord takes over: “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God’” (John 3:3). To understand what Jesus is doing here we have to keep in mind that “the kingdom of God” was something that John the Baptist had announced as having arrived – and that Jesus too had been preaching. Many people had embraced it, but the Pharisees had their questions. They were really wondering about what John (and now Jesus) was doing!

Nicodemus responds: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” But Christ holds his ground! He clarifies, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” He is saying that Nicodemus needs to realize a number of things. In order to enter that kingdom that John is speaking about and that Jesus is bringing, you need nothing less than rebirth! You need birth “from above!” You need washing with the Spirit! You need all this, and at the same time you can never do any of these things in your own power.

In order to participate in this kingdom and even to recognize its arrival on the scene, you need the special life giving and eye opening work that only the Holy Spirit can do. Without the work of the Spirit, you will miss the boat – even though you are a member of God’s people and even though within that people you are a learned Pharisee. Should Nicodemus have been surprised to hear this? Not really! As our Lord himself says to Nicodemus, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?” (v. 10)

Through Isaiah the LORD complained, “Go to this people, and say, ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.’ For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them” (Acts 28:26-27). Precisely because of that deep and pernicious problem God promised to one day “pour out his Spirit.” In light of all the forsaking of God, the straying away from him, and the blindness,

that was what was needed! Without the special renewing work of the Holy Spirit, people will never truly see and recognize the special saving work of God in this world – not even when he sends the forerunner or the great Messiah himself!

Spiritual discernment is necessary

We can also think of what Paul says later on writes in his first letter to the Corinthians: “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). The “things of the Spirit” (e.g. Scripture!) can only be “spiritually discerned.” It is because we are fallen human beings that we need the working of the Spirit! We need that in order to recognize the saving work of God in this world and in our lives.

This is the case even though we are covenant people, even though we have Scripture in hand, and even though we are familiar with the contents of the Christian faith. Without the Spirit we will miss the obvious in Scripture. Indeed, ultimately we will miss the boat. That is how spiritually weak we are! That is how desperately we need the special working of the Spirit in our hearts and minds all the time!

That Nicodemus did not see this most basic problem of human blindness was a huge problem! Our Lord continues, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). Christ stresses the “must.” As every single person in the wilderness who wanted to be saved simply had to look up at that snake, so it is today too. *That* is the great necessity!

Over time Israel failed to see what all the sacrifices called for and testified as the greatest need. Rather they created a Messiah of their own expectations, one who would save them from their earthly enemies and re-establish the earthly kingdom. Not only did Nicodemus, and many others, get a skewed view of what kind of Messiah was really needed, but they also ended up with a skewed view of God! This comes out as Jesus continues with what have become the most famous verses of the Bible: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (v. 16).

Yet notice how our Lord finds it necessary to add verse 17, “For God *did not* send his Son into the world

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to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” He knew what Nicodemus was thinking. God did not send the Messiah to finally execute his wrath against the oppressors of Israel. In spite of mankind’s rebellion, he has sent the Messiah – to save – to be just like that snake in the desert that Moses put up on a pole. He sent the Messiah so that people can look to him and cry out to him in faith in order to be saved.

Growing in grace

This makes this passage so very relevant for us too! We today are among God’s covenant people. We, too, are among those who want to examine matters in light of the Word of God – just like the Pharisees. We all have fallen human natures, and thus naturally have the same deep tendency to miss the obvious, and to go on our own apart from the Spirit and to fall into the same way of operating. So what pitfalls or blind spots, does Nicodemus highlight for us today to see – specifically in ourselves?

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son! Do we truly reflect our Father’s disposition in this regard? Do we truly reflect the Son who pressed on in love for his people and in love for this world – even when they nailed him to the cross? Do we reflect the Son who, instead of lashing out in anger, prayed the Father, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing?” Is this evident in how we react to recent ISIS fanatics? How about in how we speak about those caught up in anti-family lobby groups? Or how we handle people who have personally hurt us? Do we pray for them? Do we plead our God for them – just as Christ prayed for those nailing him to the cross? If not, why not? We can know the truths about God, about his disposition, about his kingdom, about the way he operates. We can reflect our Father in his approach to this world and in his disposition towards this world. But we can do so only if the Spirit specially and graciously opens our eyes and works in our hearts!

Instead of distancing ourselves from Nicodemus, let's stand at his side and listen! If we try to handle Scripture, function in God's kingdom, or function as part of his church on our own, apart from the Spirit working in us, we will end up getting so many basic matters wrong, especially over time! There is warning for us here: "Take heed that you don't try to see or understand or approach matters in God's kingdom without ever and again crying out for his Spirit to open your eyes and give you understanding!"

Putting principle into practice

We can think here of the work of office-bearers and the approach they tend to take in their work. Most of you are aware that many men tend to be "fix it" kind of people: Tell me what the problem is – and I will then put a plan together and implement it – and we will take care of that problem. Many men are very good at that! Many are great problem solvers at work – and there is nothing wrong with that in itself. But how would such an approach, consistently applied, work pastorally in the congregation? If that marks their approach and their dominant mode of operating, what will be the result? They will end up trying to solve problems "apart from the Spirit." What is so important for office-bearers to realize and remember? That living faith in God is of highest importance – and at the same time that they themselves cannot give this faith! They cannot give anyone repentance! Strong arming or forcing someone to change his or her heart won't work. What should be their goal in their pastoral work? To bring people to prayer! To get them to petition the Lord for the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives – as the Lord promised to give them in their baptism.

What is an "obvious reality" that we should not be oblivious to as we raise our children? I would begin answering that by saying that we first of all don't fail to recall how substandard we are! Truly recalling that, will, in the language of the baptism form, prompt us to start off down the road of parenthood by "detesting ourselves"

and "humbling ourselves before God. Yes, our children need to come to terms with how substandard they are, but so do we as we raise our children! No matter who we are, how well we have been raised, what training and skills we have, or how naturally gifted we are, not one of us is up to the task of properly raising our children. That is something we should never become oblivious to. Neither should this become merely a "theoretical truth" in our minds. Why not? Because "pride goes before the fall" – and such falling can be very dangerous as we fall smack on top of our own kids!

Pray for the working of the Holy Spirit

This is not meant to discourage, or to prompt anyone to give up before even getting started. Rather, again in the language of our baptism form, "so that we may seek our cleansing and salvation outside of ourselves." Applying this to the task at hand, so that we may seek what we need to raise our children outside of ourselves. In other words, so that we pray for the working of the Holy Spirit first of all. Realizing how substandard we are we should pray that he will work in the hearts and lives of our children, that he will open their eyes to see and their hearts to accept. Realizing how substandard both we and our children are, we will realize that we cannot force our children to believe. Daily prayer for them is so important! Prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us. God will give his grace *and the Holy Spirit* only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask him for these gifts and thank him for them. The work of the Holy Spirit is the most important gift! Truly, this gift is even more important than breast milk or baby formula! We must, every day, cling to the promises of God as we raise our children, if we are diligent to raise them in the fear of the Lord. We must never look at faith as being automatic, but rather, faithfully bring our children before the Lord in prayer, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith.



Outward Looking Church: Current Craze or Christ's Commission? (3)



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Revised from a presentation for the Spring Office Bearers Conference held March 22, 2014 in Burlington, Ontario

Let's now look at some of the content of the Belgic Confession and how it bears on the question at hand.

Article 27 expresses the Reformed doctrine regarding the catholicity of the church. Catholicity has several facets. We speak of temporal catholicity – this refers to the fact that the church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end. We speak of cultural or social catholicity – this refers to the fact that the church is found among every tribe, tongue, and nation. Closely connected with cultural catholicity is geographical catholicity. The church exists all over the world. The two last facets of catholicity are mentioned in the concluding paragraph of Article 27: “Moreover, this holy church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. Yet, it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.”

This is an important statement because it acknowledges that there is broadness in God's plan of salvation. The church is made up of diverse peoples living all over the globe. In his good pleasure, God has gathered these people into his church. From this, we can discern the truth that it is God's will *to gather* people from all nations into his church. He has done it in the past, is doing it in the present, and there is every indication from Scripture that he desires to continue doing it in the future. The fact of catholicity reveals God's intention that this church be a global church. Being a global church necessarily implies outward looking missionary activity.

Of the articles that speak of the doctrine of the church, Article 29 is probably the most well-known amongst us.

This article speaks of the marks of the true and false church. First among the marks of a true church is the pure preaching of the gospel. One might think that this too implies missionary activity. Certainly the gospel must be preached in established churches, but it should be a given that the gospel would also be preached to the lost at home and overseas.

However, as they say, there is a fly in the ointment. The difficulty arises from many modern editions of the Belgic Confession. Compare, for instance, the edition used by the United Reformed Churches of North America with the edition adopted by the Canadian Reformed Churches:

URCNA: “If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein. . . .”

CanRC: “It practises the pure preaching of the gospel. . . .”

The key difference is the word “therein.” That word also appears in the edition adopted by the Reformed Church in the United States, the Free Reformed Churches of North America and several others. It used to appear in the edition used by the Christian Reformed Church of North America, but no longer does, having been removed in 1985.

There are at least two problems with the word “therein” in Article 29. The first problem is that the word did not appear in the original Belgic Confession of 1561. It also never appears in any subsequent French, Dutch, or Latin editions. “Therein” seems to appear out of thin air in the English edition adopted by the Reformed Dutch Church in the United States of America (now known as the Reformed Church of America) in 1792.¹ It has remained with most English versions ever since.

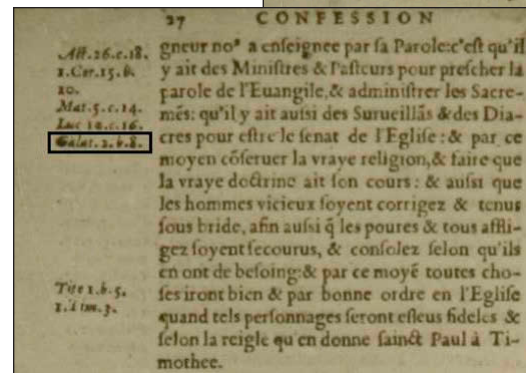
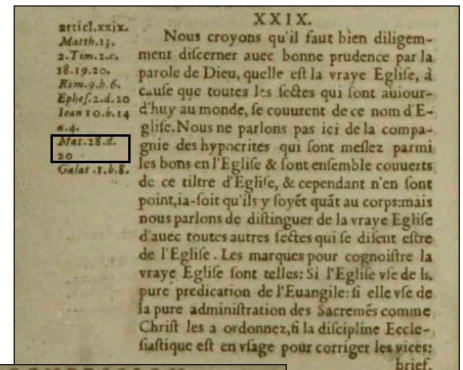
The second issue is far more important: is it biblical to restrict this mark to what goes on in the church? Here

is a place where the original 1561 Belgic Confession can help us. As one of the proof-texts for this statement in the original confession, we find Matthew 28:18–20, the so-called Great Commission.² In this passage, Jesus sends his disciples out to preach, teach, and disciple “all nations.” The original intent of the Belgic Confession was to include the missionary calling of the church under the first mark.³ A church that does not faithfully proclaim the gospel both inside and outside its membership has a credibility problem when it comes to being a true church. Therefore, the word “therein” should be excised from all English editions of Article 29. The way in which the Belgic Confession shapes outward looking churches is certainly enhanced if we remain with the original text.

Last of all, there’s an important statement in Article 30 regarding the government of the church. Through the divinely-ordained offices of the churches, it is God’s intent that “the true religion may be preserved and the true doctrine everywhere propagated.” Here again, we encounter a problem with the text of the Belgic Confession. Not all editions agree on the exact wording here. The text I just quoted is what most editions follow and it is essentially a translation of a highly-respected Latin edition commissioned by the Synod of Dort in 1618–19. However, the Synod of Dort only adopted authoritative French and Dutch editions. These have a different wording that is reflected in our Canadian Reformed edition, “By these means they preserve the true religion; they see to it that the true doctrine takes its course. . . .” Notice that there appears to be no mention of the true doctrine being propagated everywhere. Instead, “the true doctrine takes its course.” How do we resolve this?

Once again it’s helpful to look back to the very first editions of the confession. From the proof-texts used, we can get a sense of what de Brès and the Reformed churches intended with this statement. The text used with this statement is Galatians 2:8, “For he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles.”⁴ Peter was entrusted with ministry to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. Both had their own calling in their own place. Both office bearers were called to propagate the true doctrine and between the apostles, this true doctrine was being propagated everywhere, inside and out. From this it appears that the Latin commissioned by the Synod of Dort is a slightly different, but still faithful rendering of what the Confession originally intended to say. The true doctrine taking its course is meant to be the same thing as the true doctrine being propagated everywhere.

1561 Belgic Confession with proof-text referring to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20



1561 Belgic Confession – Article 30 included a proof-text reference for Galatians 2:8

So our confession ties the outward, missionary calling of the church to the offices of the church. It is the responsibility of the office bearers of the church to ensure that the true doctrine of the gospel is proclaimed everywhere – all over the world. Therefore, mission must be an agenda item for Reformed consistories. They must send out, support, and oversee the work of mission in our own country and elsewhere. The Belgic Confession assigns this responsibility to the church’s leaders here in Article 30. In this and more ways, the Belgic Confession drives Reformed churches to be outward looking.

Given what I’ve said so far, I think we can rule out the “current craze” possibility. Being outward looking churches is embedded in our confessional heritage. But is it biblical? Can we also go the next step and say that being outward looking is Christ’s commission? That’s what we’ll look at in the next installment.

¹ *The Constitution of the Reformed Dutch Church in the United States of America* (New York: William Durell, 1793), 28.

² Guy de Brès, *Confession de foy, faicte d'un commun accord par les fideles qui conversent ès pays bas* (Rouen: Abel Clemence, 1561), 24. From the very beginning, the Belgic Confession included proof-texts to indicate the biblical basis of its teachings. For some recent discussion of the history and role of these proof-texts, see Nicolaas Gootjes, *Teaching and Preaching the Word: Studies in Dogmatics and Homiletics* (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 2010), 298–300.

³ Cf. Calvin Van Reken, “The Mission of a Local Church.” *Calvin Theological Journal* 32:2 (November 1997): 359.

⁴ Guy de Brès, *Confession de foy* (Rouen: Abel Clemence, 1561), 27. **C**



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America's Misguided Cultural Imperialism

Nigeria's struggle against Boko Haram is well-known and the media regularly cover the atrocities committed by this Islamic terrorist organization. It is trying to establish an Islamic State in Nigeria and neighbouring countries. In the process these Muslims have killed thousands of civilians, mostly Christians. In January of this year they slaughtered at least 2,000 civilians in one town, Baga, in just four days. These terrorists rape, murder, kidnap, and displace thousands of people in the north of Nigeria. The kidnapping of 276 girls in Chibok, a mostly Christian village, made headlines worldwide but the terror goes on and on. Nigeria itself is incapable of stopping it.

It gets worse. President Obama has apparently made it clear to Nigeria that America will not help Nigeria to fight Boko Haram unless Nigerians adopt Obama's views on homosexual rights. According to Bishop Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo, Nigeria, as reported on February 17 on the Aleteia website, "The United States has made clear it will not help Nigeria fight the Boko Haram terror group unless the country modify its laws regarding homosexuality, family planning and birthcontrol. It's very clear that a cultural imperialism exists. In fact, I think that Africa is suffering greatly from a cultural imperialism that threatens to erode our cultural values." He went on to say, quite rightly, that "I think, to say the least, it is criminal."

The bishop also underlined the hypocrisy of Obama saying that he is committed to human freedom and then refusing Nigeria the freedom to draft and maintain laws that reflect biblical morals on abortion, gay marriage, and homosexual practice. Only if Nigeria legalizes abortion and allows the killing of children not yet born, will the current American administration help prevent the killing of Christians in Nigeria by Muslim terrorists.

This is not the first time that this charge has been made against Obama. Back in August, 2014, World Net Daily reported that Steve Stockman, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, had said that the Obama was not helping Nigeria because it objected to Nigerian policy. That policy, as leaked anonymously, was "Nigeria's determination to affirm traditional marriage and reject same-sex unions along with nondiscrimination statutes that endorse homosexuality."

If this is all true, and there seems to be no reason to doubt it given current American inaction to the slaughter that continues in Nigeria in spite of Nigeria's plea for help, it is a very sad commentary of what America has come to. What used to be a world beacon of peace, hope, and basic Christian values, has become an aggressive exporter of unbiblical morals and pornographic filth. While Scripture teaches that government should protect life, the Obama administration is not only aggressively promoting the abortion agenda within America, it is also exporting it to the rest of the world, especially the developing world, with a vengeance. Access to abortion is a consideration for foreign aid. The same goes for so-called homosexual rights. It has become a key component of American foreign policy in Africa where the vast majority of that continent's nations are against granting homosexuals special rights.

America was once a great nation and functioned as a beacon of hope and decency. That country has been given much. But much will also be required of it. May the Lord have mercy on this nation and raise godly leaders. That country (and also our own!) need our prayers. **C**

Brief Response to Dr. Van Raalte

I am thankful for the response received on my editorial on the covenant of works. 'T is a rather lengthy submission, and I will try to be brief in my response.

But I must touch on the salient points. As I understand it from Dr. Van Raalte's reply, there are three main problems/errors in my criticism of the "covenant of works" in Paradise.

1. To characterize the covenant made with Adam and Eve before the fall as "a covenant" of love" is rather *minimalistic*. The word *love* will not cover it, for there must at least be "faith, hope, and love." Let's just say that there must be *works* of some sort. So we need to find *laws* that require works.
2. A covenant is more than just a relationship: actually it sets the *terms* under which this relationship exists. Mea culpa, but using the word "terms" (which are conditions) one can again see the element of *works* peeking around the corner.
3. When God gave Adam the command to tend the Garden of Eden and to guard it, Dr. Van Raalte indicates, the element of *works* comes to the fore, especially when there is an added sanction: the day you eat of it, you will surely die. These are *works* which needed to be done if the covenant was to continue. The command and the sanction before the fall can only be understood within a "covenant of works" scenario. Here lies the *core* of Dr. Van Raalte's submission. Adam was being tested to see if he would fulfill his mission and bring about the destruction of the work of the devil. It is not sure from Dr. Van Raalte's submission *how long* this time of testing would exist. Would it be a one-time victory? Where is the textual evidence that is supported by brisk exegesis?

The covenant of works, to be sure, is not mentioned in the Three Forms of Unity. It is mentioned specifically in the Westminster Standards. I would therefore conclude that I do have some reformed authors taking in a position like mine. Dr. Van Raalte does suggest that there are few (or none) who share my position, but he adds that it's not a matter of

numbers but of *exegesis*. The word "exegesis" means how one explains Scripture. My sentiments exactly. I'd like to see some exegesis that supports a covenant of works before the fall.

Unfortunately Dr. Van Raalte does not offer any exegesis of the texts in Genesis 1-3, or other parts of Scripture but falls back on dogmatical distinctions.

The question that remains is: would Adam have *merited* eternal life by keeping the covenant of works in paradise? Dr. Van Raalte is hesitant to give a clear and unflinching "yes" to this question. Merit does not really fit in our grove. It is not merit in the usual sense as if we can earn something by it, but still it lies in the realm of (meritorious) works. What is it now: works or grace? Can we have it both ways?

When the Lord God created Adam and Eve he created them in his own image. They were made to have covenantal fellowship with him and with each other. We see in the summary of God's commandments (you shall love he LORD with all your heart soul and mind), and its further summary (you shall love your neighbour as yourself) that God did not have such a bond with any other creature. Adam and Eve were made to govern the earth, and to be representatives of God in his creation. They received his gifts, also the gift of life.

They had to acknowledge that God alone was sovereign: he alone is the lawgiver. This is the crucial point in the Genesis account. It is on this point that the serpent dropped his masquerade. He said: you will not die, but you will be like God! When Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden fruit, they rejected the love of God, entered into a state of death, and could only be saved out of grace by faith in Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, the term "covenant of works" is not found in Genesis, but is a scholastic and dogmatic term that has no basis in exegesis.

I did find it a bit of a cheap shot that in the end I was lumped together with Karl Barth and his cronies. That was not really necessary or pertinent. But that is very minor; I am an irenic person whose bark is worse than his bite. A covenant of love, eh? A minimalist position? "Love always

triumphs because it is the fruit of faith and hope.” “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten so that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

A wonderful passage in this respect is found in Jeremiah 31:3, “The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: *I have loved you with an everlasting love, I have drawn you with loving-kindness. . .*” Yes, I know, this text speaks about the return of the exiles. They are assured that God’s love is unending and everlasting. But the basis for this return is God’s covenant, and the motivating factor in this covenant

is the LORD’s everlasting love. In the same chapter we read, “The time is coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” This new covenant differs from the Sinai covenant in that it is totally and radically new, *now fulfilled in Jesus Christ*. This is the ultimate triumph of God’s love now perfectly reciprocated by his redeemed people.

Perhaps we will receive some exegesis of this and similar passages. Matthew Henry would be a good start. Klaas has now come to the end.

Klaas Stam **C**

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Sarah Vandergugten’s recent series of articles entitles Good News for Women was well written (presented) and well researched. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the five part expose. For the most part I am in complete agreement with Sister Vandergugten that we, as well as our western civilization, have radically changed from Old Testament and even New Testament times, even since the cessation of World War II and the years of immigration to Canada. Indeed, the role of women as has changed as well, as Sister Vandergugten ably pointed out.

Having said that however, we acknowledge that our gracious God has not changed throughout the centuries. He still requires us to live and worship in the manner he requires, as revealed in Scripture. When he stipulates that marriage means one man and one woman for the very beginning of the world, that still holds true today. When he tells mankind that life is not to be taken by another even at the beginning of civilization, that still holds true today. When he requires that believers gather together to sing praises, give alms, and hear the proclamation of the Word, that still holds true today.

So when Sister Vandergugten points out that other sister churches have different practices than ours, such as women counselling and teaching others within their church, or taking on a much more active role in the “almost” governing activities of their church, it doesn’t necessarily follow that the Canadian Reformed federation need adopt new practices. By not doing so, as well, does

not mean that the churches are “banning” anything or anyone. The analysis of the wisdom of such practices and the benefits reaped from them is purely subjective.

Therefore the suggestion that because society has changed, women’s roles have changed, the world has changed, the church and her practices needs to change accordingly, is wrong and misleading. That is the pitfall our mother church in The Netherlands has allegedly fallen into. It is the wide road that leads to deformation, and that road quickly slides into unfaithfulness.

Therefore, by the grace of God, we need to faithfully work diligently towards keeping all of God’s commands and directives. And if that means that “women keep silent in the churches” (1 Cor 14:34) or “submit to the authority of the leaders” (Heb 13:17), then so be it. These directives are given that peace may reign among fellow believers, not as a negative outlook on the place of women in the church. This is an illustration of submission to Christ as the head of the church. To be observed in love, for the benefit of all.

Let us then lead our fellow sisters to be daughters of Abraham, with hearts of faith, not daughters of Eve, who desired her husband’s place. Let that be a constant in our lives, from birth to death. And let us then, continue to teach the next generations what it means to be faithful to God’s Word, no matter how we or the world around us changes.

Thea Heyink, Binbrook, ON **C**



"If then you have been raised with Christ seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Colossians 3:1-4

May birthdays

Christ has ascended up on high! He is seated at the right hand of God. What a great truth that we can celebrate and remember together. Knowing that Christ is seated at our Father's right hand also makes our celebrations so much richer and deeper. Congratulations to all who enjoy a very special day in the month of May! I hope that you have a wonderful time commemorating your birthday with family and friends. May the Lord continue to provide you with his care a keeping through your family and caregivers.

Hymn 40:1, 4

*The Lord ascended up on high,
the Lord has triumphed gloriously,
in power and might excelling.
The grave and hell were captive led
when he when up, our glorious Head,
to his eternal dwelling.*

*From heaven he send his Spirit down
who gives rich gifts to us his own,
gifts from his treasure taken.
Protecting us from Satan's lure,
Christ keeps us by his power secure;
we'll never be forsaken.*

1 CLARENCE ZWIEP will be 61

653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

4 DEBBIE VEENSTRA will be 41

4238 2nd Concession Road
Sherkston, ON L0S 1R0

10 ROB DE HAAN will be 50

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

21 EDDIE VAN ROOTSELAAR will be 22

1488 Highway 3E, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W7

30 BERNIE DE VOS will be 40

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



A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

If there are any address or other changes that I need to be aware of please let me know as soon as possible.

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Clarity and Rapprochement?

Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today,
edited by Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher

Lucerna CRTS Publications. Eugene, OR:
Wipf & Stock, 2014

Additional Information: 280 pages; Paperback

This book consists of addresses given by members and colleagues of the faculties of the Theological University of Kampen (TUK), The Netherlands, and the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). The Fourth Annual Conference of the CRTS was held on January 14-16, 2014, at the CRTS in Hamilton, Ontario.

The discussion focussed on ten important issues relating to biblical hermeneutics (the theory about reading the Bible properly, according to its nature and content).

- The relation between general and special revelation, and how the Bible sets the parameters for understanding all of God's revelation.
- The significance of an ecclesiastical reading of the Bible as a means for travelling the historical distance between the ancient text and the modern reader.
- The nature and function of the church's dogmas or doctrines, arising as they do within a particular historical-cultural context.
- The (in)validity of distinguishing between a text's "truth claim" and its "truth value."
- The hermeneutic appropriate to historical narrative, in terms of literary devices and their usefulness in understanding various levels of meaning in historical narrative.
- The role of women in the church, in light of the 2013 Report for the Synod of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in The Netherlands, accompanied by a response analyzing the isolating effects of a direct application of Scripture's prohibitions in today's cultural context.

- The Bible and homosexual practice, in terms of a third way between modernist orthodox certainty and postmodern relativism.
 - The negative influences on interpreting the Bible that arise from modern foundationalism, and the superior hermeneutical starting point of "participation in Christ" and the importance for the proper function of Bible interpretation of vital Christian communities where faith, hope, and love are nourished.
 - The postmodern emphasis on the reader as the focal point in biblical interpretation.
 - The definition and application of the principle of accommodation in divine revelation, where Scripture itself must provide the guidelines and limitation for our use of this principle as we read and interpret the Bible.
- Anyone interested in ecclesiastical and theological developments within Reformed Protestantism generally, and in The Netherlands particularly, will want to participate (vicariously through this volume) in the discussion.

This review is not the place for elucidating and responding to the various proposals set forth in these addresses. I will simply isolate two concerns, and identify a healthy emphasis that supplies encouragement.

Among the concerning proposals are those that offer what appears to be a simplistic description and rejection of foundationalism. This is a rather important, though philosophically dense, subject involving intellectual certitude in our postmodern context. I think Dr. Van Raalte and Dr. Strange are correct in suggesting that our Dutch brothers have not adequately distinguished between pre-modern foundationalism (employed by Calvin, Beza, and post-Reformation scholastics) and modern foundationalism (essentially redefined and re-directed by the Enlightenment). The former is rooted in an appropriate application of reason to interpreting Scripture. The latter has provoked in our day a kind of perspectivalism in postmodern thought that yields intellectual relativism.

This inadequate distinguishing leads to some false dilemmas, such as applying to modern challenges either Scripture's motifs (themes) or Scripture's injunctions; and between viewing truth as either propositional or personal. As Van Raalte shows, a rather full-scale rejection of foundationalism extends to the very *principia* or foundational principles of theology itself. Dr. Strange offered a functional alternative in recommending the "covenantal apologetics" being developed by, among others, Dr. Scott Oliphint of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

A second proposal that should evoke concern involves the Dutch defense of women's ordination. There is here an inescapable sense of *déjà vu*, as we hear once again arguments (so obviously reminiscent of conversations in the 1970s and 80s between the GKN-synodical churches and the CRCs) asserting that today's culture should function in some way as a control on the *application* of a text. We agree that today's culture does (and should) function in relation to a text's *application*, although not in such a way as to contradict the text's *meaning*. This statement by Dr. van Houwelingen captures the core of my concern: "Paul, with his proscriptions in the first century AD, was still able to make links with a non-Christian environment. In the twenty-first century, however, we with these same proscriptions create, or strengthen, an isolation from society that might unnecessarily hinder the progress of the proclamation of the Gospel" (161). Although Dr. van Houwelingen makes many fine observations about the relevance, for interpreting the Bible, of cultural considerations (both ancient and modern), his view does not at all make clear that, and how, his approach cannot be used to vitiate and neutralize other (hitherto certain) biblical prescriptions and proscriptions (regarding, for example, homosexual conduct).

Of course, Dr. van Houwelingen dislikes that criticism, as shown in his penultimate reply: "The slippery slope argument [viz., if this hermeneutical method is applied to women's ordination, why not to homosexual conduct?] has never been very convincing. And fear is a bad counsellor, although I can fully understand my colleague's worry about the relevance of Scripture. That is also my concern" (164). This comment imparts a fetid aroma to the discussion. As someone has wisely observed,

"We can't just dismiss slippery slope arguments as illogical or paranoid, though we can't uncritically accept them, either" (see Eugene Volokh, "The Mechanisms of the Slippery Slope," *Harvard Law Review*, <http://www2.law.ucla.edu/volokh/slippery.pdf>). Throughout the years, those defending the meaning of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 – a meaning obvious also to Dr. van Houwelingen – have at least attempted to provide cogent arguments about women wearing head coverings (1 Cor 11:2-16), and women serving as prime ministers, and the modern import of the Acts 15 prescriptions. By contrast, the request to explain how their hermeneutic applied to women's ordination should not be employed to justify homosexual conduct has usually been met with what approximates an intellectual sneer: the slippery slope argument is unconvincing. Well, after January 2014, we're still waiting for an answer.

One encouraging emphasis, among many, highlights the role of the church community as essential for biblical interpretation. A number of contributors from both sides of the Atlantic recognize that Bible interpretation is not a solo activity. It requires the authentic participation of the Bible reader within an ecclesial community and its tradition.

This emphasis is the focus of the helpful exchange between Drs. C. Venema and R. Dean Anderson ("Interpreting the Bible in and with the Church: An Evaluation of 'Post-Liberal' or 'Post-Critical' Hermeneutics," 24-61), and is capably illustrated in the essay of Dr. J. Smith ("The Structure of Jeremiah: Confessional Integrity and Quality Control," 127-141). The latter piece is a clear and persuasive example of interpreting the Bible with the help of so-called rhetorical criticism applied with a conscious commitment to confessional integrity.

Who should read these essays? Anyone who wants to remain responsibly informed about developments within Reformed biblical studies generally, and Reformed hermeneutics in particular. And anyone who wishes to continue praying for and practicing genuine biblical ecumenicity among Reformed and Presbyterian churches. We are grateful for the effort and expense that have made this volume possible, and hope that its contents may serve to bring clarity and rapprochement, both intellectual and ecclesiastical.





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God Did Say! Challenging the Wisdom of this Age
 by **Wes Bredenhof**

There is a cookbook in one of our kitchen cupboards called “More with Less.” Maybe you have a copy of it in one of your cupboards as well. As I read through Dr. Bredenhof’s new book, *God Did Say*, I was reminded of the title of that culinary guide. His book has less pages than many books on the market. The total tally is just over one hundred pages. However, he manages to cover more territory than most paperbacks twice the size. Where else do you find such a thin volume that covers such diverse topics as the inerrancy of Scripture, pluralism, evolution, spiritual doubts, the origin of evil, and ethics? Yet that is exactly what Bredenhof accomplishes. It is a “more with less” recipe that serves up a tasty and edifying meal of spiritual nourishment.

The author manages this feat by re-working seven sermons into a book. This approach has at least two advan-

tages. In the first place, by their very nature, sermons need to accomplish a lot in a short time. Effective preachers have the ability to get straight to the heart of the matter in short order. Bredenhof obviously preaches in this manner. Secondly, sermons are addressed to congregations that are made up of many different people. The audience includes both young children and seasoned saints. Among the listeners are those with university degrees but also those who never had the opportunity to graduate from high school. If the preacher is going to reach them all, he needs to speak deep truths in common language. And, for the most part, the author of *God Did Say* connects well with people of various ages and levels of education.

Passage	Wisdom of this age	Wisdom of God’s Word
2 Tim 3:16-17	Bible is just another book about religion	Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God
John 16:13	We all have our own personal, subjective truth	The Holy Spirit gives us public, objective truth
Gen 2:7	The creatures of this earth are the products of biological evolution over billions of years and Adam had hominid ancestors	God directly created all the creatures, including Adam and Eve, who had no ancestors
Gen 3:1	Everything, even God, ought to be questioned	Armed with the Word of God we can defend against doubt and the diabolic twisting of God’s truth
Gen 3:6-7	Evil is real, but can be explained by psychological, sociological or biological factors	Sin finds its origin in our first parents, Adam and Eve, and it is a spiritual problem
John 14:5-7	All religions have part of the truth and each is a legitimate path to God	There is only one way to have fellowship with God and that is through Jesus Christ
Matt 5:17-20	People can create their own code of ethics and thus become a law unto themselves (autonomy)	Scripture gives the public, objective standard of truth, also for ethics

So, what is this book about? Bredenhof is convinced that the devil, the world, and the sinful nature – our three sworn enemies – have conspired together in order to challenge some key beliefs that lie at the very foundation of our Christian faith. The world has its self-made wisdom which is diametrically opposed to the wisdom of God (1 Cor 2:6-7). This book lines up those two wisdoms, side-by-side, and systematically demonstrates that the wisdom of God is the only true wisdom that leads to a genuinely blessed life. The table below gives you a more detailed overview of the topics covered.


As he goes about demolishing “arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor 10:5), Dr. Bredenhof does not mince words. Here is one example to give you a flavour of his style of writing:

At the same time, this part of our text (Gen 2:7) runs flat against the idea that Adam was descended from generations of hominids who had lived and died on the earth in the millions of years before him. God breathed in Adam’s nostrils the breath of life. Adam came to life, not in the uterus of some mythical hominid mother, but through a direct and special creative act of God (pp 42-43).

Obviously, there is no mistaking where the author stands on this issue. Moreover, the strength of this language flows from his conviction that when God says something, then we need to accept that, in faith, on face value. God *did* say; therefore, we *must* believe (Rom 10:17).

On a more critical note, there are times when Bredenhof may well speak in a way that leaves at least some of his audience behind. Technical terms such as “first principles” (pp. 23, 36) would be more effective if they were accompanied by a definition in the language of the common man. Also, a fleeting, largely unexplained reference to the “heresy of Gnosticism” (p. 58) lies there begging for further clarification.

There are also occasions on which this preacher purposefully leaves his congregation hanging, or perhaps better, pondering. For example, at certain point he remarks, “Now we could get into all kinds of particulars of how that works out in our lives, but I would have to cover so much to leave no wiggle room for anyone and their particular struggles. I trust you get the idea” (p. 72). Bredenhof’s “trust” may well be misplaced. It’s true we don’t need everything spoon-fed to us. It’s also true that we all need guidance from our under-shepherds and a few, concrete, well-chosen examples go a long way toward making the point razor sharp. Then people will be able to extrapolate from those helpful examples into their own particular struggles.

However, these critical remarks should not take away from the value of this “more with less” book. Bredenhof deals with foundational issues in a biblical way. And that is certainly valuable for, as the psalmist says, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps 11:3). Better to fortify the foundations today than to mourn over the ruins tomorrow. 

PRESS RELEASE

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario, March 6, 2015

On behalf of the convening Church at Flamborough, Elder E. Schouten welcomed all present and opened by asking for the singing of Psalm 19:1, the reading of Isaiah 52:1-12 followed by prayer. The delegates of Burlington-Rehoboth examined the credentials and reported that all churches were properly presented.

Classis was constituted and the following officers were appointed: Rev. J. Van Popta as chairman, Elder E. Schouten as vice-chairman, and Rev. G. Bruintjes as clerk. The chairman remembered various items of memorabilia in the churches of the classical region Central Ontario.

The agenda was adopted after a minor change.

The form of subscription for use at classis meetings was read by the chairman and Rev. Bruintjes readily put his signature to this.

Classis dealt with a proposal from Burlington-Reho-both regarding electronic transmission of documents related to classical meetings. After an amendment regarding confidentiality the proposal was accepted.

The churches were questioned as per Art. 44 C.O. and could report that the ministry of the office bearers is being continued, the decision of major assemblies are being honoured, and there are no matters in which the consistories require the help of Classis.

The church at Toronto was appointed as the convening church for the next classis to be convened, D.V., on June 12, 2015 or alternately, September 18, 2015.

The Acts of Classis and the Press Release were reviewed and approved after which the chairman asked that we sing Hymn 52:1 and closed the meeting with prayer.

E. Schouten,
vice-chairman at that time **C**

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them for whatever time He in his infinite wisdom sees fit
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