

# Clarion

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IS CHURCH WITHDRAWAL SUCH A BIG DEAL?



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# Withdrawal Symptoms

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*It is hard to fathom how one can simply wave  
goodbye and still be friends. We have a case of  
dealing with promise breakers*

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## **We can still be friends**

"The consistory announces with sadness that Br. So and So has withdrawn from the church." This, or similarly worded announcements, are heard all too frequently from the pulpit. As they are usually made after the sermon, they can come as an anticlimax, acting as spoiler to the proclamation of the gospel.

Sometimes a consistory receives a letter of withdrawal when the process of church discipline has progressed nearly to the point of the excommunication. In such cases, it comes across as a person saying, "You can't fire me, I quit." Once such a letter has been received, further announcements are not possible. At other times, consistories have a sense they are coming because there have been conversations with an elder in which the person indicates he or she is attending worship elsewhere. Still, many times these letters catch consistories by surprise. Elders may have noticed that someone's church attendance had become rather irregular. There may have been some unsuccessful attempts to set up a visit. Then, all of a sudden, there is a letter of withdrawal.

These letters can come from those who have been communicant members for a long time, as well as from those who made profession of faith less than a year before. Attempts to arrange a visit after the letter has been received are often rebuffed, as the person has no desire to enter into a discussion about the matter. The senders of the letter have decided to worship elsewhere and don't want to talk about it anymore. Their mind is made up. Usually the letter will indicate that the decision has been reached prayerfully.

In this editorial, my concern is especially the latter types of withdrawals, rather than those that abort the process of discipline. Those who have withdrawn give the impression that they would still like to be friends, just as before. Sometimes they may wish the church well. They just wish to worship in a place that they like better for themselves and their children. This thought is found not only among those who leave but also among those they have left behind. It all comes down to simply waving a friendly farewell to one another.

In dealing with these types of situations, I have heard many a time, "Is it really such a big deal?" I have also seen it all too often that little changes in terms of social interaction. For good measure, any criticism of withdrawals can be deflected by speaking about how happy the person now is, and how much they are growing in serving the Lord. This is usually said when someone has joined a group with a baptistic doctrinal orientation. This is seen as a minor point, not a matter of true or false church. The bottom line is that they just like it better and it seems to suit their personal style better. The thought might even be there, "How can it be wrong when they seem so happy?"

## **Not always wrong**

Now it must be stated that withdrawal is not always wrong. There will be times when it is actually necessary. In the situations where it is the right course of action, however, it can never be a friendly separation, after which one can still be friends just as before. We confess in Article 28 of the Belgic Confession, "It is the duty

of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who do not belong to the church and to join this assembly wherever God has established it.” The next article of the Belgic Confession spells out how we can distinguish the true church from the false church. Every catechism student will have learned the three marks by which the true church can be recognized, namely, the pure preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline for correcting

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Rev. Eric Kampen starts our issue with an editorial that points out we all know people – friends, family – who have withdrawn their church membership to start worshipping elsewhere. How serious is this and how should we proceed in our personal relationships with these former members?

From Rev. Klaas Stam, we have an article entitled, “Bible and Science: more than a book review.” This issue also brings readers the second in a series from the CRCA, this time about “Your sister in Korea.”

Issue 19 contains the Education Matters column, a letter to the editor, and a question for You Asked. In addition, we have a Treasures New and Old meditation from Rev. Joe Poppe that focuses on the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday.

*Laura Veenendaal*

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and punishing sins. When someone comes to the realization that the church community one belongs to is not living in accordance with the Word of God and calls to repentance have gone unheeded, withdrawing is not an option, but a command.

### **Serious issues**

It would be easy and nice if we could just wave a friendly goodbye and remain friends after the breakup. There are, however, a number of serious issues that need to be addressed. Those who have said their goodbyes may not want to hear it anymore, but, at the very least, those who have been abandoned should be clear on how to look at the situation. This can be seen as spiritual immunization, to keep us from catching withdrawal symptoms, as well as spiritual conditioning, to equip us in speaking with those who have left, or, those we have noticed showing withdrawal symptoms, giving indications of being in the process of packing their bags.

The first issue pertains to the third commandment, about taking our Lord's name in vain. The Catechism says that no sin is greater than taking God's name in vain. Of all the commandments, only the third commandment is addressed in two Lord's Days. The second, Lord's Day, 37, shows how this commandment has to do with taking an oath. This is relevant to the matter of withdrawing because the promises made at one's profession of faith have the force of an oath. It is professed before God and his congregation that one "wholeheartedly believes the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church." It is promised "to continue in this doctrine in life and death, rejecting all heresies and errors conflicting with God's Word." It is also promised "to submit willingly to the admonition and discipline of the church, if it should happen. . . that [one] become delinquent either in doctrine or conduct."

When one reflects on those promises, and how one who withdraws ends up going to a church with doctrines contrary to what has been confessed, and closes one's door and one's heart to the discipline of the church, it is hard to fathom how one can simply wave goodbye and still be friends. We have a case of dealing with promise breakers. Walking away from the church where one has made one's vows and treating it as an "oh well, no big deal," is akin to a husband walking away from his

wife because he likes another woman better, ignoring his marriage vows, and expecting his wife to still treat him as a friend. It is a matter of taking God's name in vain, and the LORD has made it clear that he will not hold a person who has done that guiltless. If one's promises made before God and his congregation can be broken so easily, one's word is never trustworthy again. It is hard to wish a promise breaker well.

The second issue pertains to the denial of the confession concerning the communion of saints. This is addressed in the fourth question for profession of faith, "Do you firmly resolve to commit your whole life to the Lord's service as a living member of his church?" This is an echo of what is confessed in Lord's Day 21:55, "That every member is duty bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of other members." We can also think of what is confessed in Article 28 of the Belgic Confession about maintaining the unity of the church and serving the edification of the brothers and sisters according to the talents which God has given them as members of the same body. The scriptural basis for this is found in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12, among other passages.

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### ***The Lord in his providence has placed us in a certain spiritual family and we have a spiritual obligation to use our talents and gifts for the benefits of others***

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Of course, one could argue that the person will continue to do all this, but simply with a different community of believers. The point is, however, that the Lord in his providence placed an individual in a particular church family. In that particular church family, the person learned the gospel and made the profession of faith vows. It is very similar to the way we are placed in our human families. We don't choose our family, but the Lord gives us our family. That is where we have our responsibilities towards our fellow family members. The Lord in his providence has placed us in a certain spiritual family and we have a spiritual obligation to use our talents and gifts for the benefits of others. When someone abandons the spiritual family where the Lord has placed them, they are saying, "I don't feel like loving you and serving you."

In the church, however, we don't pick who we shall love and serve. The Lord does that for us. To walk away, waving and saying, "I still love you," is hypocrisy.

### **Salvation issue?**

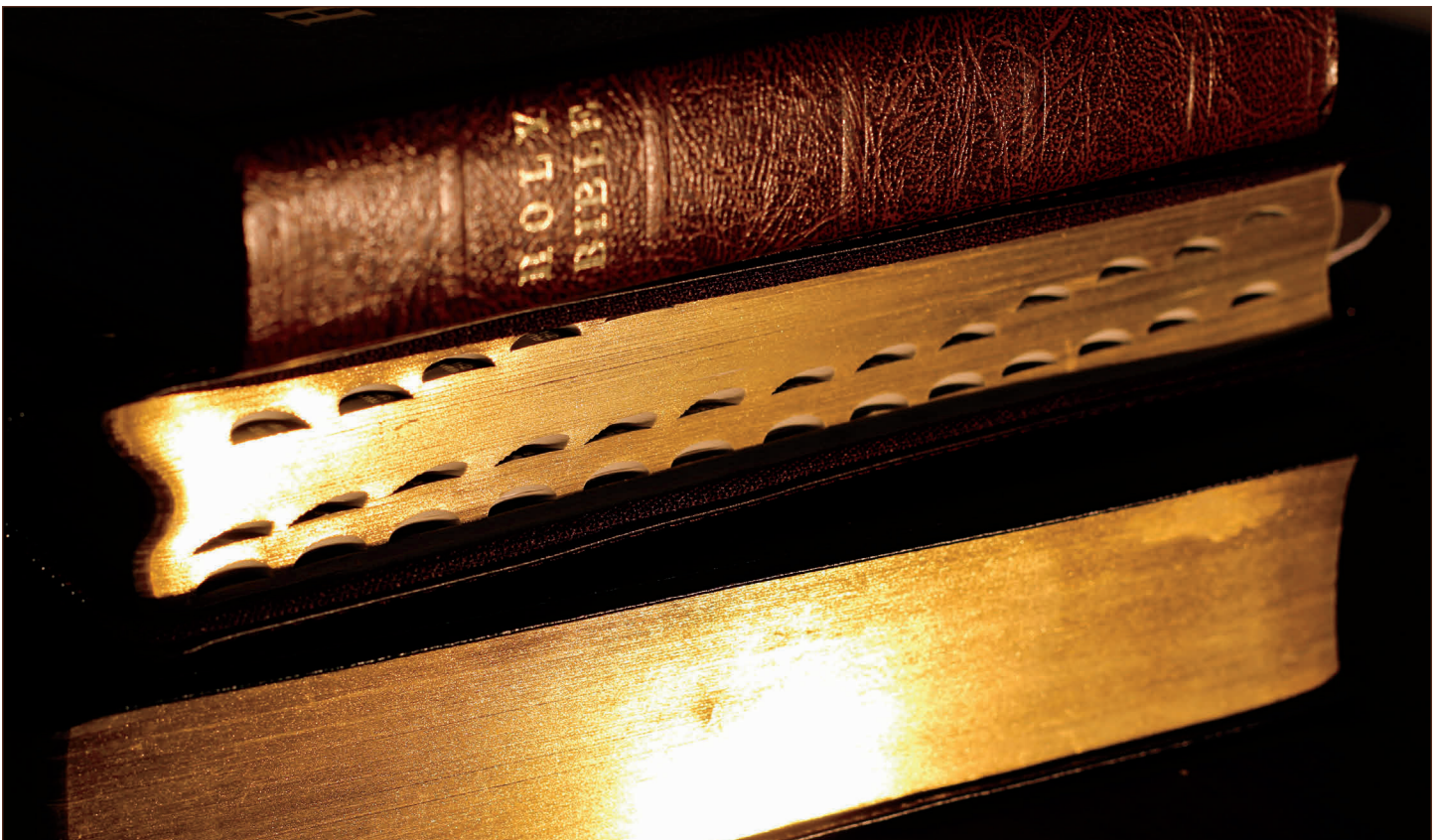
Inevitably, in these types of situations, someone will say, "But is this now really a salvation issue?" We have to be careful in pulling out this phrase, for it can easily be used to justify a multitude of sins. We do well to take our lead from the conclusion of Article 28 of the Belgic Confession. After stressing the duty to join the church and maintain the unity of the church, it concludes by saying, "All therefore who draw away from the church or fail to join it act contrary to the ordinance of God." We should note the careful wording. Someone's salvation is ultimately the Lord's judgment, but we are able to judge whether something amounts to obedience or disobedience. It is disobedient to break the unity of

the church by withdrawing from the church where God has established it.

### **Humbly submitting to God's will and providence**

What it all comes down to is that those who withdraw from the church where the Lord has placed them, saying they have no hard feelings and still want to be friends, are disobeying God's will and defying his providential care in their lives. God's will impresses upon us the seriousness of breaking our promises. Breaking our promises is taking God's name in vain. God in his providence has placed us in a particular church family, both to be served by its ministry and as place to serve our brothers and sisters. When we realize that, we know we can't just stand there and wave a friendly goodbye. Rather, as with any act of disobedience, we should turn our hand around to signal with urgency, "Come back!"

**C**





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# Give Praise to the LORD, the Cloud Rider

***"Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds – his name is the LORD – and rejoice before him."***

(Psalm 68:4)

In the world today there is a lot of concern about climate change. Many around us think that the weather patterns are changing. According to the experts, the world's temperatures are climbing. That is expected to bring more variations in weather to Canada's current farming areas. America will experience more hurricanes; Europe more heat waves. Ice at the North Pole is melting, and so ocean levels are expected to rise and low lying areas will experience more flooding. We do not always know what to think about such predictions, but at times they can cause anxiety and stress.

In that context, it is important for us to remember our God, and his faithfulness. In Psalm 68 David praises the LORD for his bounty in providing for his covenant people. He calls us to sing to God, to sing praise to his name, to extol him who rides on the clouds. The idea of God riding on the clouds comes forth more often in Scripture. For example, in Deuteronomy 33:26 Moses sings a song of praise to God, saying, "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun [another name for Israel], who rides on the heavens to help you, and on the clouds in his majesty."

It is very significant that the LORD is called the Cloud Rider. The Canaanite peoples considered Baal to be "the rider of the clouds." Baal was one of the fertility gods. The Canaanite nations saw him as the god of rain, thunder, and fertility. When they needed the seasonal rains for their crops to grow they called out to him to give them rain. When the rains fell, they worshipped him and offered sacrifices to him to thank him for his blessing. Thus we see that while in actual fact Baal was nothing more than a figment of people's imagination, his worshippers thought that he had power to give them life.

Because Israel had failed to wipe out the Canaanite nations, they became a snare for God's people (Deut 7:1f; Ps 106:35f). Israel learned to worship the Canaanite gods. They too came to see Baal as the rider of the clouds. Yet David confesses that it is the LORD who truly is the Cloud Rider. Israel should have known this. For when the LORD led his people out of Egypt he went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exod 13:21). By means of the cloud the LORD led his people through the desert all the way to the Promised Land (Num 9:17f).

When Israel dwelt in slavery in Egypt, it didn't really need to rely on God's goodness in sending rain. Egypt was fed from the fields surrounding the Nile River. It flooded annually, and the water left behind irrigated the fields. Yet in Canaan this was different.

God's people were totally dependant on the LORD for the early and late rains. Their livelihood depended on this. That is why in Psalm 104:3 the psalmist the LORD as a Great King, who rides through the skies on his royal chariot as he controls human affairs.

On October 12 we may celebrate Thanksgiving Day. Do we acknowledge the LORD as the Cloud Rider? Do we truly give thanks and praise his name for his rich provision in our daily lives? Do we appreciate that all the goodness we receive comes from his fatherly hand? In times of prosperity we can so easily be inclined to take credit for our own "success." In times of adversity, we can find it hard to be thankful for the gifts God does supply. Yet we need to learn to give thanks in all circumstances, recognizing God's love and faithfulness towards us.



## For Further Study

1. Was it proper for David to take a name attributed to Baal, and to praise the LORD as the Cloud Rider?
2. What comfort can we derive from the fact that also Jesus Christ is spoken about as one who rides on the clouds (see Matthew 24:30)?



# Bible and Science

## More than a book review



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A short while ago I received via the Royal Post the gift of a book from an old acquaintance of my youth. The acquaintance's name is Wiecher, and, like me, he is a quiet, background type of fellow. He blends gently into his surroundings. Therefore I really appreciate receiving this book, which is written by Henry Morris Ph.D. and is titled *Bible and Science* (Moody Press, 1986 ed., Revised and Updated).

I sense that my benefactor had followed my struggle in *Clarion* to defend the Bible, noted how I had been beaten up, and kindly sent this book to encourage me. I was moved to read that there were those who shared the same view as I had tried to express. I cannot say it better than Henry Morris. What I can do is pass on some of the finer points of Morris' book, which are highly scientific and yet written for common men like Wiecher and myself. Bible and science are not necessarily enemies, but each does have their own focus and method.

Morris is a very careful academic man: before he had this book published, he sent it first for perusal to a whole slew of Ph.D.s. So the book has been scrutinized by men who are each experts in their fields. I have never seen so many academics on one page; there is a first time for everything.

### Personal faith

Let me first pass on a preliminary statement in which Morris explains his background and personal faith. "The purpose of this book, very frankly and without apology is to win people to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God, and the Bible as the Word of God, and to help strengthen the faith of those who already believe" (Preface). Superb! Permit me another succulent quote, "My own conviction, of course, is that every word of the Bible is true, inspired of God, and absolutely free of error." He adds surprisingly, "One of the most amazing evidences of the divine inspiration of the Bible is its

*scientific accuracy.*" The Bible is scientifically accurate because God cannot be wrong.

The point of the book is to demonstrate that science and Bible are not at odds. With this in mind, Morris looks at various fields of science as astronomy, geophysics, biology, and hydrology. Morris defends the proposition that "the most universal principles of science" are also in the Bible. Morris explains that genuine creation or evolution is no longer taking place. Instead of everything still evolving upwards, the truth is that things are being degraded and are falling apart. "The physical universe is growing old, wearing out, and running down" (p. 19). And if there is an ending to this universe, it also means that there was a *beginning*. Whatever grows old must once have been young. What is wearing out must have first have been new. The universe is aging and heading inexorably toward ultimate physical death. This is the law of thermodynamics. Reminded me of some of the views expressed by Immanuel Velikovsky.

The Bible tells us that creation will receive "a future supernatural intervention of the Creator in his creation." This is what the Bible calls a *new* heaven and a *new* earth. If the Lord Jesus did not hold all things together and make a new heaven and earth, we'd all be doomed. But now in Christ we eagerly look ahead to the new creation. "New" means radically, incomparably, and totally new.

### Christological

What I really like about this book is that it is deeply *Christological*. God has created all things through Jesus Christ, and it is only through his work of redemption that a new heaven and earth will be realized. In evolutionism Christ is absent. And even in theistic evolution Christ receives only a sidebar annotation. Actually the term "theistic evolution" is a contradiction in terms (page 30). Where God's almighty power exists, there is no need for evolution.

In the Scriptures the Lord Jesus is never given equal billing with evolution or any other circumstance. Note how in the prologue to the gospel of John the Lord Jesus is not simply the Saviour of the world, but he is also the Creator of the world. "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3).

This glory of Jesus Christ became abundantly clear in his many miracles, culminating in the great miracles of the resurrection and ascension. If we would allow "lesser" miracles to be denied or to be uncertain, the greater miracles will fall under the same suspicion.

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### ***The Bible is scientifically accurate because God cannot be wrong***

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Morris refreshingly accepts "miracles" as they are described in Scripture. He deals with two major miracles, the whale of Jonah and the long day of Joshua. We need to accept the biblical account literally or we will have to accept that the Holy Spirit deliberately confused things. That cannot be true. Morris admits that there are many miracles noted in the Bible that are supported by *both* theological justification as well as historical evidence.

One of the most important matters which Morris raises is the fallacy of the theory of evolution. Evolution cannot be proven or tested, is unscientific, and "the work of creation was all accomplished and completed in the six days of the creation week. . . . The Scriptures could not be more definite on this point" (p. 36). Morris quotes some of the very Scripture passages that I have referred to in articles in *Clarion*.

Some current explainers promote the notion of "theism," in other words, that God was somehow involved in a process of millions of years. It is important, then, to be reminded of the fact that there is no written account of any history that is millions of years old. The oldest evidences of culture are perhaps 6,000 years old. To accept a time-period of millions of years is scientifically absurd and biblically impossible.

### **The influence of Jesus Christ**

Throughout the years of my ministry, I have often spoken to catechism students in this way: you have to start in the right place. The beginning determines the ending. If you deny sovereign grace you will ultimately wind up denying the total depravity of mankind. Or vice-versa. Deny creation and you will wind up with some form of evolutionism. You can say that you are a theist, because

you acknowledge the existence of God, but espousing evolutionism will mean that in the end God is out of the picture. It may be a slow train coming, but before you know it, the locomotive is in the station.

Either Jesus Christ is the beginning of creation (not the first creature but the eternal Creator, the Arche or life-giving source) or he is nothing. I need to quote some of Morris' words from a section on "the influence of Jesus Christ" (pp. 112 ff).

The influence of Christ on the world has been ennobling and uplifting to a degree surpassing that of all other teachers and philosophers in the world's history. And this is true while Jesus had little formal education, no obvious cultural talents, no financial position and no political stature. He never wrote a book, or led an army or held any position in government, industry or education. He taught a small, motley, unpromising group of followers His doctrines and made seemingly strange and impossible assertions and promises. Then, after only three- and- a-half-years of such teaching, He died like a common criminal, executed on a Roman cross. "Yet He dared to say: I am the Light of the World: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Either this is true, or it will be rejected by all as colossal deceit or even rank madness.

Morris feels that many today fear the earth's imminent destruction through nuclear warfare or other means. But we may look to heaven from where we ardently expect the coming in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Criticism?**

It is almost commonplace that a book-reviewer is also expected to present some critical notes or suggest improvements. Perhaps this is sometimes more self-serving than ad rem. Some sentences in Morris' book caused my eyebrows to lift a little. For example, the expression "the simple act of the will" (page 128) to accept Christ as Saviour is not always so simple. I will not digress into the Canons. But within the scope of this fine book, that expression can be left where it is. That is a theological matter which does not touch the essence of *Science and the Bible*. I see no need to criticise this book in its main message.

I do see the need to commend this book heartily to readers of *Clarion*. This book is very enriching, biblically powerful, and scientifically correct. It could be used also as a study guide at a study society. You may have to read it twice or thrice to grasp what is being stated. I wrote that it is not a difficult book, but that does not mean it is "easy."

Once again, kudos to Wiecher for his thoughtful gift. **C**



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# Your Sister in Korea

## Introduction

Some background to the situation in Korea will be beneficial to a better appreciation of what is reported here. Contact between the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and South Korean churches has existed for quite a number of years now, but it was in 1992 that Synod Lincoln decided to accept the request of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, now the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPCCK) to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF). Since then, contact and interaction has been more concrete, although the language and cultural differences continued to impose some limits to a fuller experience envisioned under the official relationship rules. In 2007, a number of KPCCK delegates visited the Smithers Synod. This synod also encouraged the CRCA to regularly send delegates to Korea to attend the KPCCK General Assemblies and to try to do this in conjunction with our sister churches. Since that date, the CanRC, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) have alternated in sending delegates to the General Assemblies of the KPCCK. Our Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) delegated members to attend in 2008, 2011, and again in 2014.

In the years since taking up EF with the KPCCK, various synods identified with two matters that were considered to be of significance to a continued relationship with the KPCCK. Synod Smithers 2007 specifically instructed the CRCA to discuss the matters of confessional membership and the fencing of the Lord's Supper. This was done in 2008 by sharing and discussing the Statement of Agreement that was reached with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the CanRC when EF was established between them. Subsequently, positive communication was received from the PCK on these matters.

The KPCCK is a church federation with just under 1,600 churches and about 400,000 members in South

Korea and is active in around 400 mission projects in several parts of the world. The KPCCK was established after the Second World War. In the nineteenth century, it was Presbyterian missionaries who brought Christianity to Korea. Christianity in South Korea therefore is found mainly in the Presbyterian churches, although since the recent visit of the pope to South Korea also the Roman Catholic Church is gaining more popularity.

During the Japanese Occupation, from 1910 to 1945, Christians were forced to participate in Shinto worship. Some leaders in the Presbyterian Church refused to do this and were imprisoned, but a large part of the Presbyterian Church went along with this. After the war, it was stated that the church should confess this sin and repent from it, but the leadership in the Presbyterian Church refused to see this as a sin. They saw this as a way to preserve the church during the occupation. This led to a split between those who did consider this to be a sin, and of whom several had suffered under the Japanese persecution, and the leadership of the Presbyterian Church. This led to the establishment of the Kosin churches. At the Theological Seminary of the KPCCK a museum was established in which much of this history is shown.

## Visit to the Korean Churches in September 2014

The most recent visit to South Korea was in September 2014, when Rev. A. Souman and Br. J. Vanderstoep, having been delegated by the CRCA, spent a week there. We left Vancouver on September 18, traveling via Tokyo's Narita airport, arriving in Seoul on the evening of Friday, September 19. Rev. Hae Shin Yoo met us at the Incheon airport. We spent Friday and Saturday nights at the home of Rev. Yoo. He is minister of the Gwanak Church (KPCCK) in the southern part of the city, and the younger brother to Prof. H. M. Yoo of the Korea Theological Seminary. On Saturday, Mrs. Yoo gave us a guided tour of Seoul.

On Sunday we attended the morning worship service, at which Rev. Souman preached the sermon, translated by Rev. Yoo. It is interesting to note here that Rev. Yoo is introducing the Heidelberg Catechism to his congregation as well as the Genevan tunes. Br. Vanderstoep was asked to address the congregation, bringing greetings on behalf of the brothers and sisters in Canada. Over coffee and a communal lunch, we were able to have animated exchanges with the members of the congregation and after that participated in a question and answer session with the congregation about our experiences as a Reformed church. The membership of this church, which was planted about five years ago, consists of approximately sixty-five members, including quite a few small children. A number of the members were fairly conversant in English.

About mid-afternoon we were picked up by a member of the Independent Reformed Church of Korea (IRCK) and taken to the home of Rev. Heon Soo Kim. He is a minister in the IRCK and currently is (the only) full time professor and the coordinator at the Theological Academy of the IRCK. The Riverside congregation, pastored by Rev. Byoung Kil Chung, has some 300 plus members. Rev. Chung led the service; Rev. Souman delivered the sermon, translated by Rev. Kim. After the service, Br.

Vanderstoep was again asked to bring greetings from the churches in Canada.

On Monday morning, after a very delicious breakfast, we traveled to the facilities of the Holy Covenant Church congregation in downtown Seoul. There we met with Revs. Kim (Academy), Chung (Riverside), and Kim (Holy Covenant Church). The meeting was a good opportunity to exchange information about our respective federations and about topics of common interest. The IRCK consists of four small churches.

We also had an opportunity to see the facilities of the SungYak press, operated by the Holy Covenant Church, on behalf of the IRCK. They have published an impressive number of books, a number of which have been translated from the English language, including a number by CanRC authors. While we do not have any formal relations with this federation, interactions such as these are useful in gaining a better understanding of the Reformed church situation in Korea. After a delightful Korean lunch, we were driven to the Seoul train station for a journey on the bullet train to Cheonan, about forty minutes south of Seoul. This is the location of the Korean Theological Seminary (KPCK). On our arrival, Mrs. Seona Yoo and her daughter Inna met us.

During our stay with Prof. Yoo and his wife, we had many opportunities to discuss matters pertaining to the Reformed churches. There was certainly a sense of oneness in the faith. On Tuesday afternoon, accompanied by Prof. and Mrs. Yoo, we attended the prayer service that precedes the General Assembly. The sermon, preached by the Moderator of the 2013 GA, was based on Matthew 16:16-19: "The church is our (the country's) foundation." Wednesday was the time set aside for addresses by foreign delegates. After an introduction by the Rev. Dr. Kwon (Chairman of the Fraternal Relations Committee [FRC]), Rev. Souman brought our greetings, which were responded to by Prof. Yoo, also a member of the FRC. The moderator of the GA hosted a lunch, attended by members of the FRC and a number of foreign delegates.



*The Gwanak congregation with Rev. Yoo front, centre*



*At the KPCCK General Assembly.  
The Canadian delegates with a number of Korean  
delegates. Dr. Kwon (FRC, chairman) is beside  
Rev. Souman and Prof Yoo beside him.*

In the afternoon we met with three members of the FRC (Dr. Kwon, Chairman; Rev. Byun, Secretary; Elder Kang, Treasurer). Ahead of time, we had shared with the FRC a brief list of topics that we wished to address with them. We had a good exchange of ideas and information, which should assist us in our contact with other Reformed churches in Korea and with our mutual relationships. After this meeting we had the opportunity to travel to Daejeon City, about an hour south of Cheonan, to visit the KPCCK Mission Training Institute. There we were shown the facilities and were able to get a good overview of the mandate and activities of the Institute. During our visit, we were asked if the CanRC might be able to assist the Institute by making known the opportunities for retired members and/or young people willing to help the Koreans by teaching English on the mission fields. The other request was for Bible study material to be used on the mission field. Further information can be obtained from one of the undersigned. After returning to the Seminary, we toured the Seminary library as well as the Kosin History Museum.

The next morning, Thursday, September 25 we were picked up by Rev. DongSup Song of the Reformed Church in Korea (RCK). The RCK is a small federation with four churches. We met with the four ministers of that federation. Also present at the meeting was Dr. S.G. Hur, former minister of the FRCA (1978-87). Our discussions

were meant to get a better idea of where this federation is at and how our relationship might be fostered. After lunch we accompanied Rev. Song to the city of Jeonju, where he is the minister of one of the RCK congregations. In the afternoon we visited a UNESCO site, depicting the traditional village in Jeonju. After dinner, we attended a study session with the congregation, at which church history was being studied. We were engaged in a question and answer session with the members, in which we had opportunity to say something about our churches and engage in the discussion of topics concerning the church and church activities. That night we stayed at the beautiful apartment of a member of the congregation, Dr. K.H. Soon. She makes this available for guests, while she stays elsewhere. In the morning, after a very tasty breakfast, we boarded a bus for a four-hour trip to the Incheon Airport for our return trip to Vancouver.

## Conclusion

In all of our visits, we were treated with great hospitality. We were very well looked after and were able to enjoy fellowship with brothers and sisters in the Lord. It was a privilege to be there and the interactions that we were allowed to experience should help us in our continued attempts at understanding better the reformed church situation in Korea and our ability to relate to it.

**C**



*In Jeonju with Rev. Song (beside Rev. Souman) and  
three members of the RCK congregation*





Keith Sikkema

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# Evaluation in Bible

*Last time, I related the story of Joshua 3-4, largely as presented at the launch of the completed CARE Bible project in February, 2015. I now focus on the question of evaluating a student's progress in Bible.*

After the delight of receiving children, there is hardly more grateful joy for parents than for witnessing the fruit of the Holy Spirit as they profess their faith and become living members of Christ. At baptism, parents are reminded that this covenant implies an expectation to instruct their children in the “doctrine of salvation as soon as they are able to understand, and to have them instructed therein to the utmost of their power.” Parents rejoice when their children take the covenant to heart, and commit themselves to walk in the ways of the LORD – and they grieve when they distance themselves from it. In the process of instructing them, the question arises whether their progress can or even should be evaluated.

## Catechetical instruction

As for the instruction in the doctrine of salvation, the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) distinguished three types of catechetical teaching: by the parents, by school teachers, and by the church. We often only take the latter to be catechetical, but the commitment called for in baptism does not single it out. When the LORD calls his covenant people to love him, and to put his words on their heart, he earnestly claims their entire being and involves the community from the bedroom to the neighbourhood and the city gates (cf. Deut 6:4-9, Ezek 16:20, Luke 10:27).

From Adam to us, parents clearly have the primary task to raise their children in this fear of the LORD (cf. Deut 6:7, Josh 3-4, Eph 6:4, Col 3:21). Our Form for Marriage affirms that *parents* shall nurture these children in the true knowledge and fear of the LORD. This nurturing includes telling the great deeds of the LORD and modeling and practicing the associated life: It has a core catechetical component.

Without ever abdicating their responsibility, parents share aspects of their task with others, such as schools. For the weight of their baptismal vows, it matters which school parents choose, and how seriously the school takes this. A well-chosen and well-focused school can tremendously benefit parents if they have unity of purpose to educate in the fear of the LORD – but, conversely, undermine these efforts without that unity. The fear of the LORD needs to be as integrally infused in educating the children at school as it is at home.

A third and independent sort of instruction happens in catechism class. In line with the promises made at baptism, parents ensure that their children know their assignments, so catechism time can be used effectively for instruction in the doctrines of the church regarding God's amazing plan of salvation. The aim is preparation for profession of faith – and faith has a definite doctrinal knowledge component.

Whether at home, in school, or at church, covenant children benefit immensely from this consistent and three-partite instruction regarding the message of salvation. Our schools recognize this as the unity of purpose between home, church, and school, and it is one of the fundamental markers of Reformed education. The tasks of nurturing, educating, and catechizing often connect and overlap: In nurturing, parents will also catechize and educate; in educating, teachers will at times nurture and catechize; and in catechizing, connections to nurture and education are inevitable. The common and ultimate goal is that our children may fear the LORD and walk in his ways.

## School aims

Bible study is an obvious subject in Reformed schools, and, as in other subjects, it is legitimate to ask what the aims of its curriculum should be, and how student progress may be assessed or evaluated. A Bible curriculum generally aims to “tell the students of the great

and mighty deeds of the LORD in order that they may increasingly know and love him with their whole heart, mind, soul, and strength.” Like our description of faith in Lord’s Day 7, this has a head- (“know”) and a heart-component (“love”) and leads, respectively, to cognitive and affective goals. The balance may be different between home, church, and school, but all look for an integration of knowledge, commitment, and application. We acknowledge that it is the Spirit who works faith in people’s hearts (cf. 1 Cor 3:5-9), but he uses people to “foster” or “nurture” the students’ awe of and love for their almighty covenant God with “the facts” of tangible ways in which he has shown them his love, keeps his promises, and displays his power – as in Joshua 3-5:1. Factual knowledge can be evaluated and assigned a mark, but, apart from its fruit (cf. Luke 6:43-45), we cannot assess the Spirit’s work in students’ hearts. There is no justification for giving a mark for the work of the Spirit, such as a seventy-seven percent for love and awe, and it should be perfectly clear to our children that a mark for Bible does not measure devotion to the LORD and the value of his or her faith.

Apart from effective aims, schools identify what students will know (knowledge and understanding) and be able to do (skill) as the result of a lesson. Affect is hard to measure, but knowledge and skills do have measurable features regarding a lesson’s effectiveness and a student’s achievements, which can be evaluated and represented as a mark or even as an incentive. In school, all important things get tested, as without checks learning becomes haphazard. Students will often ask “whether it is on the test,” so they know what to study. Just like parents check whether the bedroom was actually cleaned, checks in school let children know that it matters, and they are more likely to act on it. Like parents, teachers shall not exasperate their students (requiring what they cannot do), but shall impress them (teaching), and help them gain knowledge and discipline (evaluation) before they carry on independently (cf. Eph 6:4, Deut 6:7, Prov 19:2, 22:6). Evaluation, in Bible and elsewhere, identifies and enhances the level of success on stated objectives, and, by virtue of baptismal vows, parents want to know their children’s progress.

## An example

The parents’ responsibilities make them legitimately interested in knowing to what extent their children have achieved stated objectives. One schools’ cognitive Bible study objectives were derived from the CARE Conceptual Framework, and include that students will:

1. Know and understand what the Triune God has done and does for and with his people in the facts and events recorded in Scripture, so they may know God’s Name;
2. Take on and be equipped with the armour of God so that they may be able to stand firm (Eph 6);
3. Develop knowledge and an understanding of the significance of their baptism as a sign of the covenant (Form for Baptism);
4. Know and understand the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the reasons for it (Acts 4:12);
5. Know and understand the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in granting faith and the fruit of the Spirit;
6. Develop skills of understanding and interpreting the Scriptures;
7. Demonstrate knowledge of and skills with various resources to aid in Bible study.

Over time, all of these objectives will come into view, but a teacher makes choices for individual lessons, analyzing what is most relevant. Here are examples of relevant aspects in Joshua 3-4, which a teacher may expect students to know and/or understand. First, God is shown to be fulfilling his promises to Abraham (offspring, land, blessings for others), and executing judgment on the Canaanites and their religions (cf. Gen 12:2-3, 15:16, Deut 7:3-5, Acts 7:45). He prepares the way for Christ, and for Pentecost. Second, as fathers must explain the monuments’ meaning, they must know it themselves (Josh 4:6-7, 20-24). Third, the story illustrates how the LORD makes himself known and wants to be honoured: Instructions are very explicit and must be followed; God’s acts are amply clear, “so that all the people of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God.” Fourth, there are cultural, agricultural, and geographical aspects that have value for understanding other passages, including the origin, customs, and location of the nations that must be destroyed; seasons and harvest-time; and the location of various places and waterbodies. Teachers are trained to present this (and more!) as a story, which also allows for natural enrichment and inevitably

touches the heart. If well told, students will remember. When teachers identify specific cognitive objectives for a lesson, they can ensure that teaching and learning activities will contribute to consolidating relevant learning, review key learnings from a series of lessons, evaluate student progress in aspects of knowledge and skill, and report to parents who ought to be interested.

## Conclusion

Bible is a special subject in our schools, as it most explicitly connects to the catechetical task parents em-

brace at the baptism of their children. As they, through the work of the Holy Spirit, grow in the fear and knowledge of the LORD, there are affective elements of what students learn that do not lend themselves to evaluation. However, in the realm of what students come to know and are able to do, evaluation helps underline what is important. For these aspects, teachers can legitimately give a mark, which may never be interpreted as a mark for a student's faith and love for the LORD, but constitutes a relevant part of home-school communication in the context of their unified purpose.



# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Letter to the Editor

In response to Brother Harry Harsevoort *Misapplication of Article 30 C.O.* (July 17, pages 399-400), I write in defence of our current interpretation. Without asserting, necessarily, that it is the best practice, it is unambiguously prescribed by the Church Order. I make this assertion on the following basis:

- a. Brother Harsevoort presents his argument by having “a good look” at Articles 30, 31, and 37 of the Church Order. With respect to the third paragraph of Article 30 Brother Harsevoort suggests that this is “a good regulation;” but in his commentary he can only apply it to appeals. According to Brother Harsevoort, this regulation prohibits us from appealing a decision of a consistory directly to a regional or general synod. But Article 30 is not about appeals; instead appeals are dealt with in Article 31; and what Brother Harsevoort asserts to be the meaning of the third paragraph of Article 30 is stated explicitly in Article 31. This indicates that Brother Harsevoort has misread the third paragraph of Article 30.
- b. Our sister churches in The Netherlands added the third paragraph of Article 30 when they revised their Church Order in the 1970s; and the Canadian Reformed Churches adopted the same change in the 1980s. The (unpublished) report which the *Committee on the Church Order* presented to Synod Cloverdale 1983 simply asserted that “following our Netherlands sister churches, we consider it a very wise and edi-

fying provision.” It is unfortunate that the Canadian report does not explain what makes this provision wise or edifying.

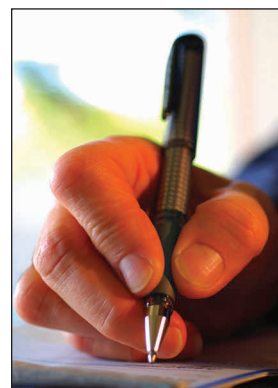
- c. The committee report does note, however, that both Articles 30 and 31 refer on some occasions to “a major (or minor) assembly” and on different occasions to “the major (or minor) assembly.” Thus:

Article 30, paragraph 2: “A major assembly shall deal with those matters only which could not be finished in *the* minor assembly or that belong to the churches in common.”

Article 30, paragraph 3: “A new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly may be put on the agenda only when *the* minor assembly has dealt with it.”

Article 31: “If anyone complains that he has been wronged by a decision of a minor assembly he shall have the right to appeal to *the* major ecclesiastical assembly.”

In each case, what the Church Order says about a major (or minor) assembly applies to all major (or minor) assemblies; and what the Church Order says about *the* major (or minor) assembly applies specifically to *the* assembly that is directly major (or minor) to it. So the meaning of Article 30,





paragraph 3 is that a new matter can only be put on the agenda of a general synod when *the* assembly minor to it – i.e. a regional synod – has dealt with it.

It is often said that a general synod is a meeting of the churches. In the context of this discussion, such a statement is not helpful. Instead, a classis is a meeting of churches and therefore the churches can put matters on the agenda of a classis; a regional synod is a meeting of the classes so that the classes can put matters on the agenda of a regional synod; and our general synods are meetings of the regional synods so that the regional syn-

ods make up the agenda of the general synod. According to our system as it was designed, five hundred years ago, individual churches have their say at general synod via the classes and regional synods.

If anybody wishes to read (my translation of) the Dutch report which outlines why the third paragraph of Article 30 was added in 1983, I am happy to forward it via e-mail.

Respectfully submitted,  
*Richard Eikelboom, Yarrow, BC*  
reikelboom@canrc.org

*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.*



## YOU ASKED



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**Q** Is our Seminary providing all the requirements for young men desiring to enter the ministry? Should candidates who have graduated from the Seminary be examined by different classes?

**A** Although the first question is rather broad, I may confidently say “yes” to this question. Since I have served a term of nine years as governor of the Seminary (1992-2001), I know how important and serious this matter of adequate training is and has been for the Board and staff (and the churches!). It is a question that receives continuous attention from all parties involved! In fact, as can be gleaned from the *Acts of General Synod Carman 2013* (Art. 80), over the past years a full and independent and comprehensive review has taken place that

considered all aspects related to the work of the College. As part of this process, the work and organization and operation of the Seminary has undergone a very thorough review and investigation by representatives of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and as a result of this process our Seminary was granted a seven year accreditation by this association, confirming that our Seminary “is providing all the requirements for young men desiring to enter the ministry.” General Synod also noted with gratitude that “the Pastoral Training Program continues to be beneficial for the students and the churches.” From personal experience and involvement, I can thankfully

and wholeheartedly endorse and confirm this consideration (especially when I compare my own training during the years 1980-1984, thorough and adequate though this training has been in those years already).

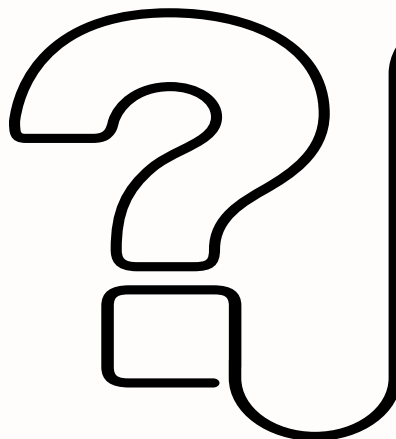
From the combination of the above questions I deduce that underlying them there may be a sentiment of uncertainty or uneasiness. Due to the fact that despite this good report and these great reviews there continue to be candidates who do not sustain the exams taken at classis, the question is raised whether there is some discrepancy or disconnect between the Seminary and the churches meeting in one classis or other. How come students that are trained so well still fail their classis exam (requested and conducted to receive licensure, eligibility for call, or admission to the ministry in a particular church – also called the exam to receive permission to speak an edifying word, the preparatory, or peremptory exam respectively)? Of course, the reasons for such failings can be many! Sometimes a student or candidate fails to sustain his exam due to a sermon that's judged insufficient, at other times it's due to an insufficient performance in one or more of the oral exams in subjects like Doctrine and Creeds, Old and/or New Testament; or in the disciplines examined in the (final) peremptory exam.

Evidently, as can be adduced from the above, such failing is not due to the training they received at our Seminary but may be because of a weak and insufficient sermon proposal or the student's lack of appropriation of the material accumulated over the course of the years in our Seminary. The examination by the classes involved, however, is completely independent of the fact that our Seminary trains students for the ministry and grants them a Master of Divinity Degree. The Seminary confers this degree upon the student's sufficient performance throughout the years at Seminary, passing the courses required for this degree, while the churches in the clas-

sis have the responsibility on behalf of the federation of churches to evaluate the student's competence for the ministry, his ability to prepare good scriptural and exegetically sound sermons, and his ability to work with the knowledge obtained in the various disciplines.

The second question seems to imply that these examinations are not taking place in different classes. In the present system, however, the final (peremptory) examination takes place in the classis of the church to which the candidate has accepted a call, which means that this exam is taking place in *any* of our eight classes. On the other hand, it is true that due to the fact that our churches presently have arranged to have the first two exams take place in the classis to which the church of which the student is a member belongs, many (or most) students have been examined by Classis Ontario West. In this regard I wish to state unequivocally that the members of Classis Ontario West have done a commendable job in serving the churches with their serious and competent engagement in these many exams! I have had the privilege of observing these exams and participating in them over the past three years, and I may publicly give much credit to the ministers in this classis especially! Besides, they have done this tremendous task with love and dedication to the churches!

Having said this, however, it would be good if our churches could review the present situation and come up with a proposal by which Classis Ontario West can be relieved somewhat of bearing the brunt of all these exams. May be a system could be developed in which the students go back to their classis of origin and be examined there after their four years of study. This should be done, though, not because of Classis Ontario West having done an inadequate job but rather to spread the load and have all the classes involved in this important portal and threshold into the ministry of the Word!



**Is there something  
you've been wanting to know?**

**An answer you've been looking for?**

**Ask us a question!**

**Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander  
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