

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
Volume 63, No. 4 • February 28, 2014



DID ADAM AND EVE KNOW ABOUT
THE POSSIBILITY OF DEATH?



Klaas Stam
Minister emeritus of the
Canadian Reformed Church at
Hamilton, Ontario
cstam@sourcecable.net

The Origin of Death

Man and woman were not created to die

Sometimes it is said that death has been in God's creation for millions of years. This needs to be said because evolutionism logically demands it. Some state that there is also scientific evidence that death has existed for millions of years. Look at fossils, bones, and related stuff. In the course of time as the species develop, there are those who will adapt and *live* on and there are those who will become futile and *die* off. Therefore death has existed in this world for millions of years and is something common to all species.

Actually, within this scheme death is not really "a last enemy" but it is a close friend. Death enables us to progress and become stronger and better, as lesser beings which could hold us back are cast off. Survival of the fittest means conversely the extinction of the weakest. Some would even say that death is a *natural* phenomenon: it fits in the natural flow of things. We come into existence, we exist for a time, and then we cease to exist.

I read somewhere a statement that theories suggesting that Adam and Eve were created mortal do not necessarily contradict Scripture and confession (BC, Art. 14). How true! The crux lies in the word "necessarily." A suggestion that Adam and Eve were created mortal can be a very innocent statement. A lot always depends on the context and the purpose of a quote. I'd like to take that statement in a broader scriptural sense.

Was Adam created mortal?

Those of us who believe the testimony of the Bible understand that man and woman were *not* created to die. If Adam and Eve had not taken from the forbidden tree, they would have lived forever. Death would not have entered the world.

Yes, there was the forbidden tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But there was also another tree, called the tree of *life*. From this tree Adam and Eve could freely eat, until they sinned. Then they were subject to death and everything that leads to death. And God promptly turfed them out of the Garden.

If the word "immortal" means *unable* to die, it does not fit in the creation account. Then Adam was not created immortal. If the word "immortal" means "not *made* to die," it does fit. God did not want Adam and Eve to die. As a matter of fact, God in his love even warned Adam and Eve about the possibility of death. For God had said clearly about the tree of knowledge of good and evil that on the day they ate from it, they would surely die. Eve said this pointedly to the snake. The Bible tells us that God does not want the death of a sinner, but that he repents and lives.

Adam and Eve knew about the possibility of death, but death would become reality only if they broke God's covenant of life. I have written at length about this matter and related matters in a book titled *The Covenant of Love* (Premier Publishing, Winnipeg, Second Printing, 2001). I do not have to repeat what was written there. You might consider investing in the book.

Death is the wages of sin

It is important to note and remember daily that death is "the wages of sin." It is not only the *final* enemy but also the *constant* enemy. It can strike at any moment. It can take one person or thousands of people. It can involve a slow process or be immediate. Death is the wages of sin, but so is everything that encumbers life and leads to death. Sin brought with it the curse of God over all creation and all creatures.

Sometimes we read angry protests of people who are deeply upset about the many natural calamities that we face in this life. People easily blame God for all of creation's woes and all of society's ills. And people force themselves to forget that *they* are the cause of all misery and the perpetrators of all evil. Another calamity, but no one repents. It's God's fault.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

How should we view death, immortality, time, and creation? How are these concepts connected? This is the topic of Rev. Klaas Stam's editorial. Also on the topic of creation: Dr. Cornelis Van Dam reviews two beautiful DVDs: *Flight: The Genius of Birds* and *Metamorphosis: the Beauty and Design of Butterflies*.

In his article "Males and Females in the Church," Dr. Karlo Janssen reviews and comments on the report that has been prepared for the 2014 synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands.

Also having to do with our relationships with other Reformed churches: Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer begins a series in this issue aimed at giving our readers insight into North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) and its function.

Issue 4 reports on Coaldale's farewell to Rev. Dirk Poppe and his family. We also have for you Treasures New and Old, the Clippings on Politics and Religion column, and a book review.

Laura Veenendaal

- 86 EDITORIAL**
The Origin of Death
- 89 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
Who is a God like the God of Forgiveness?
- 90 Males and Females in the Church**
- 95 What is NAPARC? (1)**
- 98 CLIPPINGS ON POLITICS AND RELIGION**
- 99 Coaldale Bids Farewell to the Poppe Family**
- 101 DVD REVIEW**
- 102 BOOK REVIEW**

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvlüwer, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert AB T8N 5J5
E-Mail: veenendaal@telus.net

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS



CLARION
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg MB Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

Subscriptions clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

Advertisements clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

Website www.clarionmagazine.ca

2014 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

			Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada			\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds			\$69.00	\$ 92.00
International			\$98.00	\$154.00

*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra.

GST/HST no. 890967359RT

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

2013 ADVERTISING RATES


Advertisements: \$19.50 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch. We reserve the right to refuse ads.

PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

We acknowledge the financial support of the  Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Au contraire, mon ami. The Lord did not abandon his creation and creatures to death. He pledged the coming of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ who would restore all things. This promise is given already in the Garden of Eden. Life would be greatly burdened but God's children could look forward to a Saviour who would redeem his people from their sins and grant to all believers *eternal* life. The end would be better than the beginning: in the new Paradise mortal man and woman would be rendered *immortal*.

If we look at death in any other way than as "the wages of sin" we totally misunderstand it. We deny the origin of death, we downplay its terror, and offend him who conquered it. We cut the centre out of God's justice and the heart out of his mercy. The saving work of Christ becomes unnecessary and obsolete (Rom 6:23).

Is death also millions of years old?

I have stated before that to be a credible evolutionist one needs emphasize the element of *time* (as we think we know time). The earth needs to be very old, millions of years old, in fact. The same is true about *death*. Death has occurred millions of years ago already, and was a normal aspect of living. Just as there were *pre-Adamites*, so there must have been *pre-Abelites*, people killed well before Cain socked it to Abel. Someone might conclude that creatures have been dying for millions of years. Strange, that the term "pre-Abelites" was not coined earlier. Or perhaps I am missing something.

The Lord did not abandon his creation and creatures to death

I'd like you to consider what this kind of thinking implies for the biblical account of Cain and Abel. It probably did not happen in the obvious way the Bible describes it. Could be a remnant of mythical pre-history. Supercalifragelisticexpialagoshis. But the Scripture makes clear that the murder of Abel was a real event that had great implications for Adams's descendants. A new era has started, and two opposing lines of generations develop. The one of Cain is the seed of the serpent, and the other of Abel is the seed of the woman. The contours of the great antithesis of the ages became visible.

No Garden? No trees? No Adam and Eve? No Cain and Abel? And yet the Bible in the New Testament speaks

of "the blood of Abel" (Heb 12:24). Consider also Luke 11:50 and 51, "Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed from the beginning of the world, from the *blood of Abel*, to the blood of *Zechariah*, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you this this generation will be held responsible for it all." In the history of redemption there is no statute of limitations.

Abel was not just someone who was killed at an early stage of his life. Such deaths occur all too often. *No, Abel was the first martyr.* Abel was a prophet, created after God's image, and therefore his blood cried out to God. His death was an unprecedented dying that had grave consequences. It exposed a great rift in the family of God. Before this no one had died.

The heart of the gospel

Stating that man was created mortal is not necessarily against Scripture and confession. Fine. Is it then also true that man was created to live forever? Is this not the very heart of the gospel? Christ was born as mortal human being. He came to die for us, to give us life eternal.

I am reminded of Paul's second letter to Timothy in which he exhorts Timothy not to be ashamed of testifying about the Lord in whom we have grace. "This grace was given to us in Christ before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, *who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality through the gospel*" (2 Tim 1:9, 10).

Did you notice the expression "before the beginning of time"? Before the beginning of time God intended his children to receive immortality, and it was given us in Christ Jesus. Go back to the *beginning*. Actually, go back even farther, *before* the beginning. Immortality was always at the heart of God's plan for his children in Christ.

In both passages which I quoted there is the expression "the beginning." The beginning means the *beginning* of time. Christ came in the *fullness* of time. And he will return in the *perfection* of time. You see, time is not an endless frame without a beginning and with no end. There is creation, redemption, and recreation. All within biblical parameters. May God grant us his blessing as time moves on into another year, en route to the perfection and immortality that has been promise and guaranteed in Jesus Christ.





Ryan Kampen
Minister of the Emmanuel
American Reformed Church at
Denver, Colorado
rjkampen@gmail.com

Who is a God like the God of Forgiveness?

"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy." (Micah 7:18)

Sometimes words are just not enough. God's creation – it leaves you speechless. Your spouse's strength of character – it bears no comparison. Your child's laughter – it tests your vocabulary. Sometimes words can't say enough.

The prophet Micah understood that concept as well. His prophecy alternates between visions of doom and hope. In chapter 7 he starts with a very bleak picture: "What misery is mine! ... The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains" (vv. 1, 2). The prophet sees both Israel and Judah in need of reformation. Both kingdoms were living in affluence, which produced selfish materialism. Morals floundered, and corruption abounded. Exile was awaiting. Yet Micah does not despair, but can end his prophecy with such great hope. He sees that God will graciously forgive his people and restore her fortunes, and this puts Micah over the moon. All he can really say is, "Who is a God like you?"

What a beautiful question! This exclamation is a play on the meaning of Micah's own name: "Who is like Yahweh?" Micah's question is one that other nations – Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians – also asked as a way of praising their gods. Yet Micah by no means implies that there are other gods. The one and only God is incomparable because of his forgiving character!

"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin?" Another way of reading this is, "Who is a God like you, who carries away sin?" We come across that phrase

in Leviticus 16, concerning the Day of Atonement. Aaron the high priest was to lay his hands on the head of the live goat, confess all the iniquities of Israel over it, and thereby transfer those iniquities to the goat. Leviticus 16:22 says, "The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place." Through the high priest the Lord transferred the burden of Israel's guilt to another, and that substitute carried away all Israel's sin and guilt.

And that's what Micah is getting at. God "pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance." In mercy Yahweh preserved for himself a remnant, and he forgives that remnant! This applies to us today as the church of Christ. We are his possession by grace. We don't deserve forgiveness and salvation. But it has been promised to God's family, God's inheritance, in Christ! And it is given only to those who, like Micah, are deeply sorrowful over their sins, and cry out for forgiveness.


Micah's song of praise continues: "You do not stay angry forever." The remnant would experience the judgment and punishment of the Lord. But, marvel upon marvel, the Lord does not hold onto his anger. So the people of God could look away from their time of judgment and toward the Lord. They could rejoice that this was just temporary. "You do not stay angry forever, but you delight to show mercy."

This is all very remarkable. Micah is saying that the Lord acts this way – he carries away our sins, forgives

our rebellion, shows his mercy – because that's just who he is. It leaves us scratching our head and asking, "Why is he that way?" The only answer we get is, "It is my delight to do it this way!" Our God, by his very nature, is so very ready to forgive sinners. That leaves us dumbstruck at the forgiving character of our God.

We see God's forgiving character especially in his Son. The words Micah uses in verse 18 are also used for the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Verses 10-12, "Yet it was the Lord's will [pleasure!] to crush him and cause him to suffer. . . . Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore [carried away] the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

The LORD God does not wink at sin. He offered the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. He came to take our sin outside the city, to the cross of Golgotha. He shared in our sins. That is just who Christ is. It moves us to say, "Who is a God like you?"

Do you see his incredible mercy for sinners? See that your God is ever ready to forgive. Only when you see all this can you cherish a holy fear of our awesome God, only then can you worship him truly, in speechlessness. This is the God whom we adore. Cherish his forgiveness for repentant sinners! 

Males and Females in the Church



Karlo Janssen
Minister of the
Canadian Reformed Church at
Abbotsford, B.C.
rcjanssen@shaw.ca

By the time you read this the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (RCN) will have begun meeting in synod. One matter the synod will be considering, for the fourth synod in a row, is the roles females can fill in the church. Most pressing is the question concerning women in office: is this possible and if so, how might this be practised.

Synod Harderwijk 2011 appointed a committee of seven to study the matter. An authorized translation of their report can be found at www.synode.gkv.nl under “English materials.” Though there is just one report, there are actually two positions. Six members believe there is room for women to serve in office, the seventh advocates maintaining past convictions and practice on this point.

Surprise

Personally I am surprised by the overwhelming support there seems to be for the conviction that the view that women can serve in office should be tolerated and practised in the churches. I am surprised, for in May 1999 it was decided not to continue a peremptory exam as Classis had become convinced, on the basis of the sermon proposal, that the candidate was in favour of women serving in office. I am very puzzled how it is possible that in the space of just fifteen years it is possible for a church federation to go from “disallowing someone from continuing an ecclesiastical exam for advocating women serving in office” to “a report co-signed by two teachers at the Theological University that allows for women to serve in office.”

This article will not try to sort out “how it could have happened.” Rather, this article seeks to review the report and, at times comment or interact with it. Do realize, this review is not exhaustive. Much more could be said. That, however, would create an article many times the length of the report itself.

The report as translated consists of seven chapters and two appendices. I will review the report chapter by chapter (those are the numbers in subheadings). The substance of appendix 1 was a topic during a public evening at the recent CRTS conference. I understand those speeches are soon to be published and thus leave it for what it is. Appendix 2 is what might be considered the “minority report” and will receive attention.

1. Introduction

The report begins with the history to this report and the mandate as given by Synod 2011. The committee notes: “Th[e] problem can be characterised as theological: how do we read the Bible? At the same time, this theological problem is partly engendered by social and cultural shifts, and by changes in the way church members think and live.”

That there is a shift in social and cultural context is indeed clear. An empirical survey commissioned by Synod 2005 has proven that a sizeable minority of church members are open to the idea of women serving in office; some would restrict it to just deacons, others would expand it to include elders and ministers. That does indeed suggest a change in the way church members think and live. Thus there is an issue that requires consideration: should the churches continue to be counter-culture or is there room to fall in line with culture.

For the RCN the issue is all the more pressing as the two bonds of churches that they associate with most in The Netherlands, the Christelijk Gereformeerden (CRCN) and the Nederlands Gereformeerden (NRC), have already adopted positions on the matter. In 1998 the CRCN rejected women in office while in 2004 the NRC allowed women in office. Will the RCN side with the CRCN or the NRC? RCN Synods 2005, 2008, and 2011 maintained that

the NRC's decision to allow women to serve in office is a serious stumbling block, seeing the RCN side with the CRCN. Should the RCN adopt the majority recommendations of this report, it will be siding with the NRC.

The main issue the RCN had with the NRC was their failure to interact with all of Scripture. This report certainly does reference the difficult texts in Scripture. However, with respect to women in office it does not come to the conclusions traditionally drawn. The conclusions are different because this report advocates a different way of applying the Bible. It discusses not only "what does the Bible say?" but also "what is the significance of what the Bible says?"

2. The Bible: texts and lines

The report discusses six passages specifically (Genesis 1-4; 1 Corinthians 11:3-16; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-14; Galatians 3:28; and Ephesians 5:21-33) and in passing references others. While the discussions are brief, there is an earnest attempt to understand what the texts are saying.

In Reformed circles we've always maintained the principle of freedom of exegesis. This means: as long as an exegesis, an explanation of a Scripture, is justifiable it can be tolerated. The crucial word here is "justifiable." I find that the report does not always sufficiently prove the legitimacy of its understanding of a Scripture.

For example, the report states: "To begin with, the first chapters of Genesis describe the relationship between man and woman before the Fall as a relationship of equals." The report challenges the notion that the term "helper" found in Genesis 2:16 suggests the woman is subject to the man, for that same word helper is used of God in relation to man elsewhere in Scripture. (The report fails to list any texts but this is true: e.g. our vatum, Psalm 124:8.) My concern is: this is all we read. The report negates a possible counter-argument, but offers no positive proof for the suggested exegesis. This is a problem as in 1 Timothy 2:12 Paul appeals to the order in which man and woman were created to indicate that in a sense man and woman are not equal in Paradise. And what of the fact that the male was the one who named the female just as man had previously named the animals and God had previously named inanimate creation and man?

This failure to adequately argue an exegesis is, in my opinion, indicative of the poor quality of the report. On the score of exegesis I find this report a far cry from the

report submitted a decade ago on the fourth commandment. A report to synod, especially on a sensitive issue such as that of women in office, should do its utmost to be comprehensive and complete.

3. Hermeneutical considerations

It may seem odd that the report first addresses exegesis and then addresses hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is about how a text is to be read. It thus logically precedes exegesis: you need to know how to read a text before you do it. However, the hermeneutics the report discusses is more about understanding the significance of a text. One might say: hermeneutics is not about what a text says but what a text means.

The matter is both a complex one and a deep one. The report could quite easily be misunderstood here. For example, the report notes, quoting the report of another committee appointed by an RCN synod: "The application of Biblical prescriptions in our own time must be 'credible.'" The report then hurries on to explain this. "Credible" does not mean, "acceptable to society as a whole." Rather, being "credible" means that church practice must be in sync with the prescriptions of the Bible. A person who is frequently drunk is not credible when he discourages drinking. Likewise, a church that has women serve in all sorts of capacities is not credible when women are not permitted to serve in office. The report suggests that when the church's credibility is at stake the church should seriously reflect on whether the application of a Scripture in the new context is in fact correct.

Hence the report comes to the question: "What does God want to say to us?" That seems a telling question. Is it right to ask what God *wants* to say to us? Are we able to discern the desires of God (cf. Romans 11:33-36)? Is not what God "wants" to say to us identical to what God "does" say to us (cf. Deuteronomy 29:29) and what the Spirit of God will have us hear (1 Corinthians 2:12)?

The report responds to this question by referencing discussions on expressions "obey" and "be subject to" in Dutch Reformed circles in the past. The modern emancipation movement has helped the church, so the report notes, to correct misunderstandings and thus misapplications. For example, where wives are concerned, "to obey her husband" is now "to follow her husband's leading."¹

Again, the report realizes the possibility of being misunderstood. Will our culture now lord it over Scripture? The report unequivocally says "no." However, the

report does note one should honestly confront questions that are posed and not avoid them. As Paul presents rules in a certain context, we ought to read those rules in that context and then determine what is contextually determined and what is lasting.

Important is what the report says next: “For us as 21st century readers of the Bible, it is not only Paul’s instructions themselves that are directive, but also the manner in which Paul dealt with his own context, and his focus on following Christ.” In other words, we have to pay attention not only to the content of Paul’s instruction but also the way in which he comes to his instruction. Paul’s “manner” is as authoritative for us as Paul’s “commands.”

This raises the question: if there is tension between following Paul’s instruction and Paul’s manner, which does one choose? For example: as today there is tension between the result of following Paul’s instruction “women shall not teach” and Paul’s manner “do nothing to hinder the progress of the gospel,” should we allow women to serve in office or not?

4. Meaning for today

Given the foregoing there is a need, says the report, to “revisit Paul’s most important texts.” Knowing what the text says is not sufficient. The report has argued there is a need to discern within the text what might be contextually determined. What the reporters find striking is that Paul’s instructions were in line with prevailing social norms. Is this telling us that we too should, as much as possible, seek to be in line with prevailing social norms?

The report suggests “not necessarily” when it notes “God’s Word does not simply and uncritically take over the culture in which it arose.” The gospel is sometimes counter-culture! However, it is not always. Those reporting conclude: “It is. . . in line with Scripture when we, in our situation, attempt to do the same: where beneficial, we align with our culture; where necessary we confront it.”

The question then becomes: how are we to determine whether we, given a Scripture and a cultural context, are to align with or confront our culture? I am not sure what the answer to that question might be. The report points out how “Paul employs a whole palette of directions and arguments” to give his instructions without indicating which carries most weight. All his arguments must be taken into account, the report notes, and as we do so “our obligation to follow Christ sets the tone and direction.” This, to me, sounds vague and imprecise.

To explain this approach, the report describes how Scripture sometimes values and sometimes relativizes the family relationship created by God. This relativization, the report claims, can be found already in Deuteronomy 13:7-12, it is found in Matthew 10:35, and in Galatians 3:28. Where the institution of the family is a hindrance to serving the Lord, one must deny the family. Yet Scripture also values the family as a created structure: Genesis 2:24, Matthew 9:4-7, and Ephesians 5:21-33.

This excursion on the family is used by the report to illustrate that the thrust of Scripture is “the work and progress of [God’s] Kingdom.” The report then says: “In the same way, cultural patterns in regard to male-female relationships can be fully used and employed as the stream-bed in which the Kingdom of God finds its way.” The church, so the report explains, will align itself with culture if the cultural pattern is in line with the Kingdom; it will confront the culture if the cultural pattern hinders the Kingdom.

The report continues: The gospel must be proclaimed. It was Mary of Magdalene who first proclaimed the risen Christ. The apostles were commanded to proclaim the Kingdom. As the gospel is proclaimed, a “deacon” called Phoebe is involved. “Without great commotion, much changes for the disciples of Christ, in order that the Gospel might make progress.” We, today, the report suggests, should do the same, and thus: “In our contemporary Western context, men and women may participate on an equal level.”

One wonders, is that still in line with how God created things? The report acknowledges that, in general, Reformed ethics makes much use of “creation ordinances.” Creation ordinances are institutions of God established in creation that have lasting value. The pattern of six days labour and one day rest would be such an ordinance. The relationship between males and females is another. The report, though, notes: “This term [creation order] would do injustice to the broad diversity within Scripture if we were to try to use it to fix for all time all kinds of human relationships. It is itself an element of God’s creation order that people, in a believing response to the word of God, endeavour to give shape to the ways of living that God has provided.”

Taking stock

There are two more chapters in the report, but at this point it is time to take stock and evaluate.

As I see it the report is positing a tension between what I will term “creation ordinances” and “kingdom

ordinances.” A creation ordinance is “male and female he created them” (Gen 1:26). A kingdom ordinance is “in Christ there is neither male nor female” (Gal 3:28). Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit marks the watershed between the two. We have moved, so I understand the report to suggest, from the era in which “creation ordinances” are emphasized to the era in which “kingdom ordinances” are emphasized. As the church travels onward to the coming of the Kingdom in all its fullness, she increasingly conforms to the Kingdom. That may possibly happen at the expense of creation ordinances.

We are accustomed to this kind of thinking where the Mosaic ordinances are concerned; just see Belgic Confession Article 25. I am not convinced, though, that it is legitimate to extend this redemptive historical hermeneutic to cover also God’s created order. The NT epistles (e.g. Hebrews) are quite clear on what the fulfilment of the Mosaic order implies. However, all the instances of changes to the created order (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15) apply to a future that is yet coming. We continue to live in a fallen world, governed by God’s initial creation ordinances and by the curse under which creation groans. Whatever our future may be (1 John 3:2!), we are called to abide by the instruction God has given “as long as the earth endures” (Genesis 8:23).

Realize that I am presenting what I understand the report to advocate and many in the RCN to hold and practice. I might not be getting it quite right. The report is dense, and this review seeking to be brief, even denser. Further, the matter is more complex than just “creation ordinance” versus “kingdom ordinance.” There is also the matter of the way in which one thinks. There’s the confrontation between modernism and post-modernism, between empiricism and idealism or skepticism, and no doubt more. The foregoing is enough, however, to indicate that we do observe a shift in thought and understanding, indeed, a shift in the way of thought and understanding.

5. Our understanding of “the office”

The report points out that in practice women do things that office bearers also do. It raises the question, what distinguishes those serving in office and how is this distinction justified?

The report notes that serving in office depends on being called by God to the task of representing Christ. After noting the service of women such as Phoebe (as deacon)

and Deborah (as judge), the report concludes: “It is therefore conceivable that a ‘high’ view of the office can go together with the possibility that, depending on the context, women also may represent Christ in an office.”

The report further notes the trend of feminization in both church and society, which it defines as “the growing influence of women. . . marginalizing the contribution of men.” Such a cultural context is not allowed to prescribe the practices of the church. The report concludes here that there is actually little clarity on what is and what is not permissible. It ends this chapter with three reasons for further reflection on the concept “office.” These are: (1) much “office” work is done by those not office bearers already; (2) relatively speaking smaller church councils govern a larger body of workers; (3) the new church order emphasizes the distinction between the elders and the deacons.

*We continue to live in a fallen world,
governed by God’s
initial creation ordinances and
by the curse under which creation groans*

Because consideration of such matters goes beyond the mandate given, the report simply ends here with the recommendation that more reflection on the concept “office” take place.

What I find lacking in the report is references to ideas traditionally connected to the concept of office: the distinction between the office of all believers (cf. Lord’s Day 12) and that of the special offices in the church (cf. Belgic Confession 30). The report fails to discuss adequately the relationship between office and authority.

6. Dealing with differences

The report is realistic: not all will agree with what it notes. What does this mean for the practice of church life? The report first notes that the spectrum of different opinions is broad. I find it odd that the report goes beyond the reach of sister-churches and the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) to make its point. Is it relevant what a church that denies its Reformed heritage has done?

One particular detail hurts. The report notes: “Among the traditional migrant churches there is a strong inclination to hold to the Dutch culture of the previous century, also when it comes to the way that the Bible is read and

applied; hence, there are very strong misgivings among them on this point concerning developments within the Netherlands itself.” The report correctly notes that, for the RCN, the discussion is ongoing. It has failed to realize, though, that for others the discussion has already been. Holland may not have seen any significant church schism over the issue of women in office; North America has. Those reporting should have indicated how many fellow-ICRC members have taken a stance on women in office, including the CanRC (Synod 2010, article 176:4.2). The report also fails to make mention of the importance to the CanRC of the United Reformed Churches, who came into being over the very issue of women in office.

The report notes how the nineteenth century taught that letting convictional differences co-exist leads to unity while the twentieth century taught that emphasizing convictional differences will lead to splintering. The report also appeals to the fact that Reformed churches do not condemn each other for “differences on subordinate points regarding the manner of confession, liturgy, church order and practice.” The report appeals to the letter to the Ephesians to point out how diversity and unity go together. Of course, there are boundaries to tolerance but, says the report, “this question [on the boundaries of tolerance]. . . is still fully in discussion within our churches, and a definitive answer has not yet been reached.” I find that an odd statement. It is true, a discussion is taking place. However, like ourselves, the RCN also practice confessional subscription.

The report acknowledges that some are convinced that having women serve in office is sin. The problem is not just differences of opinion, there are also different measures with regard to the certainty with which an opinion is held. In regard to the latter point the report urges a word of caution. Both our creatureliness and our sinfulness limit our understanding. The report warns that we should not be too sure of ourselves.

7. Where to from here?

In a brief concluding chapter the report notes first of all that “in the light of Scripture, the position that women may be office bearers is a legitimate one.” In view of divergent views in the RCN, it is noted that this does not mean women ought to serve everywhere as office bearers.

Even if the first six chapters of this report were convincing (to me, they are not, but I’m just assuming), these conclusions are unwise. One need only look at the CRCNA to see what such recommendations will lead to. Not only did the CRCNA lose a sizeable portion of its membership, it also found itself rejected by churches with whom it previously enjoyed cordial relations. For the

Dutch adopting this recommendation could well mean a church schism and being rejected by its sister churches and expelled from the ICRC.

Appendix 2: the “minority report”

One of the committee members submitted a statement explaining why he did not sign the report. One of his major concerns regarding the report is the significance it gives to the notion of culture. He also believes the report fails to give sufficient account of why it is okay for the church to deviate from the mainstream conviction in the Christian church past and present. His concern is that “the report hardly confronts itself with an interpretation that until quite recently was broadly accepted concerning the instruction of Scripture in this matter.” “The report also does not provide convincing arguments that the questions whether women may serve in a ruling office in the church can be left free.”

Though the statement does not qualify as a full minority report, it does point out six matters the report should have addressed. The points listed are, in brief: (1) state clearly why differences of conviction exist; (2) affirm traditional Reformed hermeneutics; (3) present an overview of the core tasks of elders and deacons and why this limits the office to men; (4) describe how men and women might function scripturally in our time; (5) explain why and how men and women can do various things in the church without encroaching on the terrain of office; (6) acknowledge that these matters also have implications for the role of men and women in creation, in society.

In conclusion

The report is dense and stands at the end of decades of thought in Holland that we, in North America, have not been in tune with. Given my own experience in both North America and The Netherlands, both as a post-graduate seminary student and as a minister of the Word, I believe the difference at bottom is the way in which we think. I do not doubt the sincerity of the individual committee members. I do not doubt their love for God or their desire to be loyal to his Word. I recognize that I may not “see it all” and that I can learn from them – I have learned from them while I was there.

However, one shall know a tree by its fruit. What we are seeing is not the kind of fruit the church has produced in the past. That, to me, is telling. May the Lord grant the brothers assembled on behalf of the RCN wisdom. May God’s truth be spoken in love. May all bow before the Word of God, sufficient and authoritative.

¹ See J. Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, pages 182-183.



Peter H. Holtvluwer
 Minister of the Spring Creek
 Canadian Reformed Church
 at Tintern, Ontario
 holtvluwer@bell.net

What is NAPARC?

(Part 1)

Author's Note – In the interest of clarity, I'd like to be up-front that while I sit on our synod-appointed Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA), which has the mandate to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches at NAPARC, what follows is my own view-point and not an official committee press release. As a member of the CCCNA, I have attended NAPARC a number of times and, as it happens, currently serve as the chairman of NAPARC. It's out of this experience and reflection on our federation's interaction with this organization that I offer this article. It is the first of a planned series aimed at giving our readership insight into NAPARC and its function.

Almost every time I mention NAPARC to someone, I am met with a blank stare or a puzzled look. Even though as a federation of churches we have been attending meetings of NAPARC since 2001 as observers and since 2008 as members, it seems that many among us know little about it. And for those that do know something about NAPARC, sometimes incorrect assumptions are made. For example, some assume that all member churches are automatically sister churches with one another. For these reasons, it is good and necessary to give this organization our attention and clear the air so that we may rightly understand, appreciate, and properly make use of this thing called NAPARC.

The Council's acronym

Well, what is NAPARC? Let me begin with the acronym which is normally pronounced, "*Nay-Park*." NAPARC stands for the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. It is a body of churches in North America which meets annually for a very limited and particular purpose. The member churches have all committed themselves to the Reformed faith as expressed in the historic creeds of the Reformation, namely the Three Forms of Unity and/or the Westminster Standards. Member churches are also committed in their church government to rule by elders, normally referred to as Presbyterian church polity.

The Council held its first meeting in 1975 with five member churches. Presently the Council consists of twelve member churches with a thirteenth applicant being considered. Meetings are held annually and are hosted by member churches on a rotating basis. In November 2014 the Canadian Reformed Churches are slated to be the hosting body and so it is doubly valuable for us to become better acquainted with this council.

Advisory, not governing

NAPARC is indeed a council. That in itself may raise eyebrows among us for we normally use the word "council" to refer to the meeting of the office bearers of our local church. Council for us is the consistory together with the deacons and is a decision-making body. A church council in our federation is a *governing* body (cf. Belgic Confession, Article 30) whose decisions have authority over the congregation. Is NAPARC this sort of council?

No. The term "council" can also describe a purely *advisory* body. Individual persons or parties (e.g. churches) may voluntarily agree to meet together for some sort of mutually-beneficial purpose. This kind of council may have its own internal constitution and rules. Such a council may meet on a regular basis to consider and discuss matters of common interest to the members. However, it does not make decisions for any of the individual members. It only offers suggestions or advice but exercises no authority over any member's affairs. NAPARC is this sort of council – strictly advisory. This is clear from Article 4 of NAPARC's Constitution which states: "It is understood that all actions and decisions taken *are advisory in character* and in no way curtail or restrict the autonomy of the member bodies."¹

This is an important point which is not always understood among us: member churches are not bound in their own dealings by NAPARC decisions. Member churches remain *self-governing bodies* and thus also remain responsible to do their own work and make their own decisions regarding, for example, ecclesiastical relationships.

Discussion group

Think of NAPARC as a discussion group for the churches. In the same way that you might join a Christian book club to share ideas and gain insights, Reformed churches join NAPARC to share with and learn from one another. All sorts of opinions or collective decisions may be put forward at your book club but none of them carry authority for you – you have to decide for yourself. This is the same at NAPARC.

Your Christian book club might have a leader and a loose structure with criteria for membership. It may have very general criteria for membership (e.g. the person simply has to say he is a Christian) or more particular standards (e.g. the person needs to be a member of a Bible-believing church) or strict standards (e.g., the person must be a communicant member in good standing in a faithful Reformed church). Whatever the book club decides about admitting a certain applicant is fine for the purposes of the book club, but that decision carries no authority for your personal relationship with the individual.

When you are in the meetings, you discuss matters under the assumption that all present are Christians. Outside the meeting, in your personal relationships, things are different. Just because your book club admitted him as a Christian, that doesn't mean you are obligated to view him as a Christian outside the meeting, no questions asked. The club makes its decisions and you make yours.

For example, if a (younger) book club member wanted to date your daughter, you'd have lots of questions to ask, wouldn't you?! Before you would allow that, you would want to verify for yourself that the young man is indeed committed to the Christian faith as a living member of a faithful Reformed church. Naturally, because he is a member of your Christian book club, you will begin such a discussion with the good hope that he is indeed a true believer and a living church member. His book club membership will be a hopeful sign but it's not yet proof positive of him being a committed Reformed believer and church member. You need to inquire further and learn more about his beliefs and lifestyle. Quite simply, you reserve the right to make that conclusion for yourself.

It's the same at NAPARC. NAPARC is a discussion group which has set particular standards for entry into the group. Those standards (adherence to the Reformed confessions) are good. It's a great starting point for a discussion on topics of mutual interest, concern, and benefit, but outside of that discussion group, member churches have to decide for themselves whether they can recognize each other as true and faithful churches and enter into sister-church relations.²

For that reason, it's premature for our members to request attestations to a NAPARC church or for our churches to receive members from another NAPARC church without any further ado. We're not that far yet.³ Information needs to be gathered and shared, questions need to be asked and answered, so that each church federation can see for itself what lives in the other and make its own assessment. Membership in NAPARC will certainly bring good hope and encouragement that each church will be found to be true and faithful, but each church reserves the right to make that conclusion for itself.

Permission denied?

Consider it from another angle: NAPARC may also refuse membership to certain churches for its own reasons. Perhaps the church cannot meet or cannot prove certain entry requirements as stated in the Constitution and so it is not accepted. Perhaps the required two-thirds majority vote of major assemblies could not be realized or at least not within the time set by NAPARC. The applicant church may be refused. That is the good right of any voluntary, advisory council or even any organization. Said church, then, may not be admitted to NAPARC but this does not in itself mean it is not a true church. Nor does its lack of acceptance into NAPARC disqualify it from being a sister church for any existing member church. Bi-lateral relations are unaffected by NAPARC decisions. Member churches retain both the authority and the responsibility to make that determination for themselves.

Self-testimony

This distinction is all the more important when we realize that churches are admitted to NAPARC largely on their own self-testimony. No sponsorship or recommendation by existing member churches is required.⁴ The applicant church presents its confessions and church government paperwork and gives an oral presentation about itself and why it wishes to be part of NAPARC. So long as they are not known to be deviant from the Reformed faith, they can be admitted to the discussion group. This is enough for the Council, according to the standards of its Constitution.

The Council regards each member church as true unless proven otherwise. For a discussion group, this is fine. You have to start somewhere and the basis for NAPARC is a good place to begin. However, most member churches, CanRC included, will want more face-to-face discussion, more investigation, and more proof-positive of that claim before arriving at that conclusion in its formal relations with those church bodies. This is the good and necessary right of each church federation.

No checks and balances

We need to understand that NAPARC is also not set up to be an overseeing body with any kind of investigative task to ensure ongoing faithfulness. This is different in our church assemblies. Within our federation, we have checks and balances to ensure the proper government and faithful running of the churches. Church visitors come annually to every congregation to inquire about this very thing. The concurring advice of regional synod deputies is required at classis when certain weighty decisions are made. A consistory may proceed with church discipline only if classis grants its concurring advice. If decisions against Scripture or the Church Order are made by a local consistory, members may appeal to classis, regional synod, or even general synod as necessary. None of these sorts of overseeing mechanisms exist at NAPARC. NAPARC *admits* members on their own self-testimony and *maintains* their membership largely on the same basis. Nobody is charged to validate that self-testimony.

It's only when a fellow member church happens to encounter a concern and feels it necessary to bring it up at NAPARC that such a thing will happen. This is not a requirement but something optional, as was done in the case of the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA). As is well-known, in 1990, the CRCNA general synod decided to open the offices of elder and minister to the sisters of the churches, contrary to what Scripture teaches. Did the CRCNA report on this major development to NAPARC and trigger a discussion on this major development? NAPARC minutes are silent on this. However, according to the minutes of NAPARC's 1990 meeting, it was the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), a sister church of the CRCNA at that time, which, of its own accord, brought the matter to NAPARC's attention as a point of concern.⁵

NAPARC did follow-up with the CRCNA and, when there was no repentance, eventually suspended (1998) and later terminated their membership (2002). We certainly can commend NAPARC for taking this stand. It makes for a discussion group clearly committed to the Reformed faith. But the point is: neither the OPC nor any member was obligated by NAPARC's Constitution or By-laws to raise such a concern. If the OPC had not raised the issue, would NAPARC have addressed the CRCNA? Only if another member had raised the issue. Again, such an arrangement may be acceptable for a discussion group but is not sufficient for churches to go by for their own relationships. This is just another reason to keep separate the responsibility and decisions of NAPARC from the responsibility and decisions of its member churches.

Great opportunity

Let's not lose sight of the fact, however, that NAPARC provides a great opportunity for moving forward the process of getting to know other Reformed churches better! These careful and necessary distinctions about what NAPARC membership means and what it doesn't mean should not take away the fact that when NAPARC meets, a dozen churches in the same continent who lay claim to the same faith and express the desire to live accordingly are meeting around one table to get to know one another further! There's no other meeting in North America like it!

Discussions with neighbouring Reformed churches need to start somewhere and NAPARC provides a solid, confessional basis for those talks. NAPARC is a good vehicle to meet and greet fellow confessors, people not ashamed to call themselves Christian and Reformed. And from there the discussions toward fellowship and unity may, under God's blessing, develop and mature to God's glory.

We're rare birds in North America, you know – truly Reformed folk, that is. All those dozen Reformed churches in NAPARC make up less than 750,000 people on a continent that contains more than 450 million. Together, we're hardly a drop in the bucket. Not only does our Saviour desire us to be one (and so we are obligated to be unified), but in truth, in this hostile world, we *need* one another. I'm thankful for a discussion group like NAPARC to help bring us closer together.

So what does NAPARC discuss? What does it do? Next time I hope to provide some answers.

¹ Constitution of NAPARC as found on NAPARC's official website: www.naparc.org. Emphasis here is added.

² Minutes of NAPARC's third meeting held in 1977 clearly point this out with this adopted statement: "That we mutually recognize that the decision to enter into or withdraw from Ecclesiastical Fellowship with another Reformed church shall be decided by each church on an individual basis." All NAPARC minutes are available at the NAPARC website.

³ I refer to the NAPARC churches with which our federation does not already have a sister-church relationship. Of the other eleven member churches, we presently have sister-church relations (or: ecclesiastical fellowship) with four of them.

⁴ There is a proposal being considered by the member churches which calls for the sponsorship of two member churches. The dozen existing member churches were not required to be officially sponsored.

⁵ Minutes of NAPARC's 16th Meeting held in 1990, section VIIb.



Cornelis Van Dam
Professor emeritus of Old Testament
at the Canadian Reformed
Theological Seminary
in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

The Persecution of Christians and the United States

It is well-known that Christians face horrendous oppression in many countries. In an incisive critique of American policy, Raymond Ibrahim, a Middle East and Islamic specialist, made some telling observations of what has been happening in the Middle East especially with respect to the fate of Christians living there. In his article “The U.S. and Christian Persecution” which appeared on January 18, 2014 in National Review online he asserts that “the U.S. is the chief facilitator of persecution of Christians around the world today.” What follows are extended quotes from the electronic article which also backs up the claims made with appropriate references.

According to the recently released 2014 World Watch List which ranks the 50 nations where Christians are most persecuted, Syria is the third worst nation in the world in which to be Christian, Iraq is fourth, Afghanistan fifth, and Libya 13th. . . .

Aside from being so closely and harshly ranked, these four nations have something else in common: heavy U.S. involvement. Three – Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya – were “liberated” thanks to U.S. forces, while in the fourth, Syria, the U.S. is actively sponsoring “freedom fighters” against the regime, many of whom would be better labeled “terrorists.” . . .

While most Americans are shielded from the true nature of the war by the U.S. media’s reluctance to report on it, Arabic media, websites, and activists daily report and document atrocity after atrocity – beheadings and bombed churches, abducted nuns, Christians slaughtered for refusing to convert to Islam, and countless abducted for ransom or rape – at the hands of those whom the U.S. supports. . . . “The largest massacre of Christians in Syria,” to quote a top religious leader, was left wholly unreported by any major U.S. news network. . . .

Far from taking any action or providing leadership – or simply ceasing to support the terrorists responsible – the Obama administration recently tried to go to war with Syria on behalf of the “freedom fighters” – amazingly, in the name of “human rights.” . . . What’s worse, even the most uninformed mainstream-media-watching American today knows that the so-called “Arab Spring,” which was hailed to justify U.S. support for “rebels” of all stripes – in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood (which months ago destroyed some 80 churches); in Libya, al-Qaeda, which

has turned Benghazi into a terror zone; and now the “freedom fighters” in Syria – is not what it was touted to be.

In other words, at this point, whenever the U.S. intervenes in an Islamic nation, Islamists come to power. This is well demonstrated by the other three nations to which the U.S. brought “democracy” and where Christian minorities suffer “extreme persecution”:

Afghanistan: The supposedly “moderate” Karzai government installed by the U.S. upholds many of the draconian laws enforced by the Taliban – including the apostasy law, fiercely persecuting those who seek to convert to Christianity – and, in 2011, under U.S. auspices, it destroyed Afghanistan’s last Christian church.

Iraq: After the U.S. toppled Saddam Hussein, Christian minorities were savagely attacked and slaughtered, and dozens of their churches were bombed. Christians have been terrorized into near-extinction, with well over half of them fleeing Iraq.

Libya: Ever since U.S.-backed, al-Qaeda-linked terrorists overthrew Qaddafi, Christians – including Americans – have indeed suffered extreme persecution. Churches have been bombed; Christians have been tortured and killed (including for refusing to convert); and nuns have been threatened. . . .

Where the U.S. works to oust secular autocrats, the quality of life for Christians and other minorities takes a major nosedive. Under Saddam, Qaddafi, and Assad, Christians and their churches were largely protected. . . .

Those who care little for the fate of Christians or other minorities in the Islamic world would do well to remember a simple truism: Wherever anti-Christian elements come to power, anti-American forces come to power. The two are synonymous. . . .

In all those Muslim nations that the U.S. has interfered in – Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Egypt (till the Egyptians revolted, to the chastisement of the U.S.), and now Syria – the increase of religious intolerance is a reflection of the empowerment of forces hostile to Western civilization.



Coaldale Bids Farewell to the Poppe Family

Eight and a half years ago the congregation in Coaldale gathered to welcome the Poppe family to their community and Rev. Poppe to the pulpit. As it says in Ecclesiastes 3, “There is a time for everything;” the time came on December 13, 2013 for the congregation to bid farewell to this wonderful clan just before they headed Down Under. The Poppes have been held dear and close to our hearts and so apprehension was a little high and pockets were full of tissues as we prepared to have a highly emotional evening. And though the emotion was there, it wasn’t all tears. It was easy to see that the Poppes and the congregation were at peace with the paths God laid out for them. We had an enjoyable evening filled with memories and much joy and thankfulness.

Farewell evening

Following the welcome by our emcee Mark Slomp, there were several speeches from representatives of neighbouring churches. Rev. Kalkman offered his thanks to Rev. Poppe on behalf of the Calgary congregation, mentioning that Rev. Poppe had been present to preach in Calgary over forty times since he arrived in Coaldale. He also offered encouragement to the congregation. A letter was then read from the Trinity URC in Lethbridge, who mentioned how thankful they were to work with Rev. Poppe. They also graciously offered to fill in preaching during the upcoming vacancy. Rev. Jagt, the Taber representative, then approached the podium with a smile on his face, focussing on God’s goodness and provision. He also cautioned that this family of tall Poppes will have to watch out for the phrase “Tall Poppy” as in Australia it can be a reference to someone who has airs or who thinks of themselves more highly than they ought. Br. Gerald VanSeters concluded the speeches on behalf of the Coaldale council and presented Rev. Poppe with a watch.

The rest of the evening was packed with a bit of everything, from songs to stories and impersonations.



Master of ceremonies for the evening – Mark Slomp

Backdrop



One group offered a brief education on Australian dialogue and common phrases, complete with the Canadian perspective. Another group dazzled us with their poetry, using the first letter of each of the Poppe family member’s names to describe that member. Then, Mr. Jake VanSeters, the most senior male member of the congregation offered a few words on behalf of the seniors. He thanked God for the provision of a Shepherd and thanked the reverend for all of his work and especially the visits, which were cherished by all the seniors. He mentioned that saying “goodbye” is not a negative thing as the origin of the word really means God be with you, and that “farewell” means you are wished well, that “*adieu*” means you are commended to God’s care, and that “*au revoir*” means ‘til we meet again.

The Youth Group re-enacted a “typical” catechism class as led by Rev. Poppe and presented him with a portrait. This was followed by Paul Schoen who explained a prank he pulled on the pastor, who then schemed up various ways to get him back ... but never did (maybe one day?). He presented Rev. Poppe with a commemorative sign.

The next speakers were some “special guests” who professed to have learned a secret about the Poppe family. Using photo evidence, the guests made their case that the Rev. and Mrs. had an underground life in Mexico, training their children to work at their resort. Thus, the family was to be banished to Australia, where they would fit in well with the warm weather and history of criminals.

Next, four Chinese members of the Cross Cultural Bible Study (CCBS) provided us with a touching testament of the grace God has given through the work of Rev. Poppe. They thanked him for the Catechism instruction, sermons, and Bible study material. They also spoke in appreciation of Ben Poppe’s involvement with the CCBS.

The Poppes will not be leaving the country empty-handed. They were presented with a beautiful scrapbook: a book of family portraits of the congregation accompanied with a few words and texts. Mrs. Poppe was



Rev. and Mrs. Poppe giving their thanks to the congregation

also presented with two charms for a bracelet along with a scrapbook from the Women’s Bible Study group.

A wonderful slideshow presentation was prepared with special memories from the past eight years since the Poppe family arrived in Coaldale. Did you know that during his work here Rev. Poppe administered 110 baptisms?

The evening wound down with two songs performed by the choir. For the children they sung The 12 Days of Christmas – Canadian style, complete with moose antlers and the Stanley Cup. The choir then performed a more serious song based on the blessing in Numbers 6:24-26: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

Finally, Rev. and Mrs. Poppe had the opportunity to say a few words expressing much gratitude and trust in the Lord and thanking the congregation for the love they experienced in Coaldale.

Rev. and Mrs, Ben, Angelica, Caleb, David, Timothy, and Matthew, with much thankfulness in our hearts we say farewell, goodbye, *adieu*, and *au revoir*. We wish you the Lord’s blessings as you begin your work and embark on new adventures in Southern River.



Members of the Chinese Cultural Bible Study

Reviewed by
Cornelis Van Dam
Professor emeritus of
Old Testament at the
Canadian Reformed Theological
Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

Of Birds and Butterflies

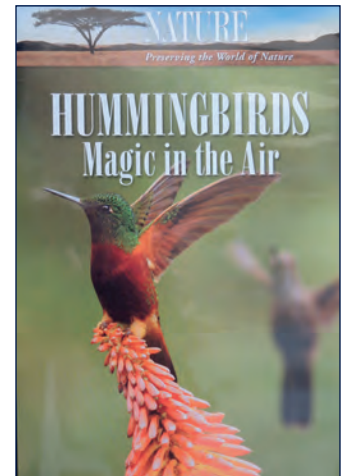
***Flight: The Genius of Birds* (DVD, 2013; 63 minutes) and *Metamorphosis: the Beauty and Design of Butterflies* (DVD, 2011; 64 minutes plus bonus features)**

Produced by Illustra Media and available at <http://illustramedia.com/> for about \$16.00 each plus shipping

These two beautiful DVDs deserve to be seen both for their amazing photography as well as their much needed message.

The DVD *Flight* explores the wonders of God's creation of birds and their superb design. God is not mentioned by name, but the point of the film is abundantly clear. Only an intelligent Designer could have put together the unique features needed for birds to fly. This DVD introduces the marvels of the feather and how it was designed for the soaring eagle or for the aerial acrobatics of the hummingbird. The mysteries of how the arctic tern can migrate from the Arctic to the Antarctic or how a flock of hundreds of thousands starlings can communicate and stay together while evading predators at breakneck speeds are explored. The more one sees of this DVD, the more one is in awe of what God has made. Darwinian evolution and scientific materialism are not able to explain the origin of the intricate and superb designs required for flight. More than matter, energy, and chance are needed to cause such creatures to come into existence.

The DVD *Metamorphosis* has a similar message. It explores the miraculous transformation of a tiny egg to a caterpillar and then to a butterfly. To suggest that chance evolution brought this incredible transformation about defies both logic and credibility. Here we see something of the divine Designer who starts from a beautifully structured pinhead of an egg which develops into an attractive caterpillar. This caterpillar mysteriously changes into a chrysalis. Inside this hard protective shell, a miraculous transformation takes place involving the partial destruction of the caterpillar. While there is some continuity of tissue, most of the original cells disappear



and are turned into new structures that have no analog with the caterpillar. It is unbelievable to watch, with the help of magnetic resonance imaging, cells being digested and broken down. The cells which are no longer needed disappear and their components are recycled and used to build the butterfly. After two weeks a completely new organism that bears no likeness to the caterpillar emerges – a beautiful butterfly with compound eyes and spindly legs and the ability to fly!

This DVD also investigates the wonders of monarch migration from Canada to Mexico. Monarchs born in the summer usually die within two months. But, those hatched later need to migrate in the fall and so they were designed to live for up to nine months! After overwintering in Mexico, they lay their eggs in southern Texas and a new generation completes the migration back to Canada and the northern United States. Eventually their offspring makes the migration again, coming to precisely the same area in Mexico as their ancestors.

These films leave you in awe of the Creator. “How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures!” (Ps 104:24).

These DVDs are highly recommended for personal viewing and also for schools.

C

Arjan de Visser
Professor of Diaconology at the
Canadian Reformed Theological
Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
ajdevisser@crtcs.ca

Washed and Waiting

Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Zondervan Carr, 2010

Additional information: 160 pages; available in soft cover (price about \$ 12.00) and kindle (about \$ 10.00)

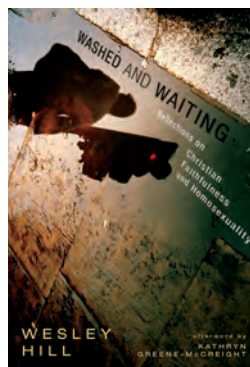
This is one of the best books I've read on Christian faithfulness and homosexuality. What makes this book special is that it was written by a man who is a celibate gay Christian himself. Wesley Hill is a Christian believer who struggles with same-sex tendencies but who also believes that the Lord requires him to refrain from entering into a homosexual relationship. For this reason he does not describe himself as a "single" Christian (as if there was some hope that he might marry one day) but as a "celibate" Christian (meaning that he will probably never marry).

Hill's book is very personal. He describes the struggle which he experienced as he grew up and discovered that he felt attracted to persons of the same sex. He describes how he often felt terribly lonely, even within a loving Christian community. Yet, the Lord also provided mentors and friends who supported him and provided him with important insights at critical times in his life.

Hill never wavered in his belief that the church has been right in saying that God's Word forbids homosexual relationships. He describes himself as someone who is "washed and waiting." Those who put their faith in Christ have been *washed* and sanctified in Christ (1 Cor 6:9-11) as they *wait* eagerly for their adoption as sons and for the coming of Christ's kingdom in its fullness (Rom 8:23-25). This implies the acceptance of a great deal of brokenness in the current life. Homosexual Christians who battle constant loneliness are called to a costly obedience while they "groan inwardly" for the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23).

At the same time, the book offers real encouragement for gay Christians who want to remain faithful to God's will. It will never be an easy life, but Hill describes how gay celibate Christians can find a fulfilling life in the Lord and how they can foster meaningful friendships within the body of Christ.

In the Introduction Hill explains that he has written this book "mainly for those gay Christians who are already convinced that their discipleship to Jesus necessarily com-



mits them to the demanding, costly obedience of choosing not to nurture their homosexual desires, whether through private fantasies or physical relationships with other gay or lesbian people" (p. 16). It seems to me that Hill does a wonderful job of ministering to this category of readers.

This book is also an important read for pastors, elders, relatives, friends, and all those who want to support gay Christians in a biblically responsible way. Hill describes how he eventually found a new paradigm to find meaningful human relationships: The craving for a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex should be transformed into becoming a desire to experience nonsexual relationships with men and women in the body of Christ. In other words, the church becomes the place where a gay Christian should be able to experience meaningful and spiritual fellowship and friendship. Hill testifies that this is hard. "Perhaps one of the main challenges of living faithfully before God as gay Christian is to believe, really believe, that God in Christ can make up for our sacrifice of homosexual partnerships not simply with his own desire and yearning for us but with his desire and yearning mediated to us through the human faces and arms of those who are our fellow believers" (p. 112).

If Hill's approach is the right approach, and I think it is, the Christian congregation should make it possible for gay celibate Christians to experience that there is real fellowship and friendship to be found in the body of Christ. It happens too often that gay Christians are avoided or even looked down upon by fellow believers. As a result, gay Christians often find themselves living on the fringes of the Christian church. Reading this book by Wesley Hill can help the body of Christ become a better place for those among us who seek to live faithful Christian lives as they struggle with same-sex attraction.

For pastors and elders who do not have the time to read the book (although it's only 140 pages of text), I recommend reading the interview with Wesley Hill in *Preaching Today*, September 2, 2013, which is available online.

¹ <http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/2013/september/preaching-to-washed-and-waiting.html>.