

Clarion

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WE MUST DAILY BE RAISED
TO A NEW LIFE



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Resurrection Joy

*Christ's resurrection was needed
for our justification*

Every Lord's Day we have the opportunity and privilege to celebrate the resurrection of our Saviour. The first day of the week is the day Christ rose from the dead (Matt 28:1)! The resurrection was a decisive factor when the Holy Spirit guided the early Christians to transition from honouring the Sabbath on the seventh day to worshipping the Lord on the first day of the week. The resurrection made it the day of the Lord, that is, the day that belonged to the Lord and was therefore to be used for holy worship. The resurrection also made it a festive day! It was a day of great joy for at least three interrelated reasons: because of the resurrection we as believers can share in Christ's righteousness, can experience a resurrection to new life, and can anticipate our own bodily resurrection.

"Raised to life for our justification"

These words from Romans 4:25 highlight an important fruit of Christ's resurrection. The complete verse reads: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom 4:25). There are especially two things to notice so that our joy in the resurrection may be full. First, consider how the passive is used in the passage just quoted: "was delivered" and "was raised." Although the Son of God came willingly to save us (Heb 10:9), the Father delivered Christ up to death to pay for our sins (John 3:16; Rom 8:32). For that matter the Spirit was also engaged. He enabled Christ (Matt 3:16). In other words, the triune God was involved in Christ's coming, and the same can be said of his resurrection. The Father raised the Son (Acts 5:30; Gal 1:1), but the Son himself rose from the dead (John 10:17-18) and the Spirit was involved as well (Rom 8:11). The work of Christ in his death and resurrection can never be iso-

lated from the work of the Father and the Spirit. God in three persons active for our salvation!

Second, although Christ's death satisfied God's wrath and judgment for sin (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2), Christ's resurrection was needed for our justification. The resurrection showed that the Father had accepted Christ's death on the cross as satisfying his justice for sins committed. As we read in 1 Corinthians 15:7, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." Furthermore, only as resurrected Lord could our Saviour continue to apply the fruit of his sacrifice. As risen Lord, Christ ascended into heaven, entered the Most Holy Place "by his own blood" (Heb 9:12), and there he continues his work on our behalf, interceding with the Father as our only high priest (Rom 8:34; Heb 4:14).

Much reason for resurrection joy! We are right with God. Our sins have been forgiven and Christ's resurrection is proof of that! We have a living Saviour, a real human like one of us, who intercedes for us at the Father's right hand, knowing exactly what we need. But the resurrection event has even more significance. Because of his resurrection, Christ also raises us up to a new life.

A resurrection to new life

As believers we can never regard Christ's resurrection as spectators. After all, we may share in his death and also in his resurrection (Rom 6:1-11)! As believers and therefore as those having the Spirit, we are "in Christ" and share his anointing so that the apostle and every true Christian can say: "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). He has raised us up to a new life so that we are a new creation. As God's Word tells us: "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17).

All of this has enormous consequences. Christ's resurrection is an event in the past, but it must daily impact our lives for we were united with him in his resurrection (Rom 6:4-5). That means that we must daily be raised to a new life. Daily we need to say "no" to sin and our sinful selves and affirm our bond to Christ and experience the new life in him. It must be evident that Christ has made us a new creation, even though we are still living in the body of the old creation. We must, as the Apostle Paul put it, "know Christ and the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:10).

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

For our Easter issue of *Clarion*, Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's editorial focuses on Christ's resurrection and what a privilege it is for us as believers to begin each week celebrating it. Dr. Van Dam writes that "because of the resurrection we as believers can share in Christ's righteousness, can experience a resurrection to new life, and can anticipate our own bodily resurrection." What a blessing!

On the topic of Easter and the resurrection of our Saviour, we also bring you a Treasures New and Old meditation and a Canticle.

Issue 7 contains a new Clippings on Politics and Religion, this time a review of the opposition to Trinity Western University's Law School. There is a report from Down Under about the arrival of Rev. Dirk Poppe in Southern River. Readers will also find the Education Matters column, a letter to the editor, and a Mission News insert.

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That sets off a struggle in life for we daily need to assert our identity as a new creation and experience Christ's life working in us. The Apostle enjoins us that if we have been raised with Christ "set your hearts on the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1). Our life as believers, energized by the Spirit of the risen Christ, has a completely different focus from those who do not believe. As those who share in Christ we may know that "our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil 3:20-21). That prospect gives a joy that cannot be extinguished by the momentary trials of our present life.

Our own bodily resurrection

"We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor 4:16-18).

As the reality of Christ's resurrection impacts our life, our current earthly existence is put in the correct biblical perspective. The life with Christ which begins here is a life that can never be interrupted. Our Saviour said: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 10:25-26). Nothing can separate the believer from Christ. On dying in the body, he or she is with Christ (Phil 1:23-24).

The benefits of Christ's resurrection however go much further than being with Christ in glory as the body is placed in the grave. We are not meant to be with Christ without the body and only as soul. For when Christ makes us a new creation, he will finish the work he started. That will include a new body. He comes to make all things new, including our body! Our flesh will be raised incorruptible, a new creation. Or, if we are still living, we will be changed in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor

15:51-53). Our being a new creation today is but a small beginning of the new life to come. The price for sin has been paid and the new creation will come. New bodies on a new earth!

That will surely happen, for Christ's resurrection is the first of many resurrections! When Scripture speaks of the resurrection of Christ, then it calls Christ "the first fruits" of those who are to be made alive (1 Cor 15:23). More will therefore follow. More graves will be broken open. First fruits – that speaks of sowing and harvest. By a true faith we know that a funeral of a believer is a sowing of the body as a seed, for the day of harvest – the day of resurrection!

We must daily be raised to a new life

And so when there is a funeral, we sow the bodies of our beloved, whom the Lord calls to himself. We sow the body in quiet triumph. We do not cremate or burn it. A practice like cremation does not testify of the hope that is in us. We do not seek the destruction of the body, but we sow it for the day of harvest, the day of resurrection (1 Cor 15:42-44)! And therefore at a Christian funeral, it is even possible to sing jubilant praises to God because of the reality of his promises. They are a sure guarantee of our own blessed resurrection!

What reason for joy and worship, every Lord's Day again! What a privilege to begin each week with celebrating the day of his resurrection! It puts all of life in focus. Christ has taken the curse of death away. He established peace with God and now nothing can undo his work of the new creation. The small, but real beginning as a new creation which believers may now have, will find fulfilment in the new world in new bodies someday, with no more tears or sorrows (Rev 21:4). There we can serve him in the body on the new earth to enjoy his favour forever! As a well-known hymn puts it: "Christ has risen! Hallelujah! He is our victorious head!"



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An Easter Confession: "My Lord and My God!"

"Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God.' "

(John 20:28)

On the night of the last supper Thomas refused to accept Christ's words about his resurrection. Our Saviour had comforted his disciples, "In my Father's house are many rooms. . . I am going there to prepare a place for you. . . I will come back and take you to be with me." Thomas had replied, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Do you see his problem? If death is the end for Christ, how will he know where Christ is going? Even though Christ told him on more than one occasion that he would arise from the grave, Thomas would not make the resurrection part of Christ's redemptive work. In his mind, the grave would be a bottomless pit out of which Christ would never climb. That's why he says on the Sunday following Easter, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger where the nails were. . . I will not believe it."

A week later, Christ appeared in their midst again. He addressed Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. . . Stop doubting and believe." To that gracious and loving command Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God." Thomas' words are not blurted in surprise and disbelief. His confession is a cry of faith. He had eight days to mull over the witness of the other apostles, along

with Christ's past teaching. He knows what he's saying and why he says it.

"My Lord:" that isn't a new title for Christ. Before his death the disciples had called him "Lord." Thomas himself had addressed Christ that way; he'd said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going." Now that old name acquires a greater meaning in light of the resurrection. "My Lord," says Thomas. He is acknowledging, "You have dominion over my life. You chose me and you bought me with your precious blood. Even this confession of mine is all your doing because no one can say that Jesus is 'Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

Before seeing the Lord, Thomas had struggled with this confession because he saw his Master laid in the tomb. If death was victorious, how could Jesus be both Lord and God? If there is no resurrection, then he cannot be God, for with God nothing is impossible.

And if he is not God, then he can no longer be Lord. But now in full assurance Thomas adds to his confession, "You are *my God*. In you I see the power of the living God. Now I understand what you meant when you said, 'If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.' You do not need to show me the Father because I see that the Father dwells in you and you in the Father."

"You are my Lord. You say to one, 'Go' and he goes. You say to another, 'Come' and he comes. Speak Lord, for your servant is listening. You are my God. In your victory over death I can clearly see that you are the Son of God. As my God you demand my undivided trust. As my God you are able to forgive my sins. As my God I must praise and glorify your great name."

That Easter affirmation is the simplest yet highest expression about the truth of the gospel and the certainty of the resurrection. Christ's appearance to Thomas and his confession affects each one of us personally. Upon that event our belief stands or falls. By drawing that confession from Thomas, Christ is displaying his concern for the church. How? The teaching of the apostles was to become the foundation of the church, and all its members had to proclaim not only the death of Christ but also his resurrection. We see through the eyes of the apostles, we hear with their ears, we feel with their hands, that Christ who was dead is now alive. Thomas' confession was recorded for our sake. Those words are a mighty revelation that the Head of the church will gather us, his members, in the unity of the true faith.

Thomas saw the living Lord and only then did he believe. For him, *seeing* was believing. And he was blessed, but Christ responds to him,

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Blessed are those today who profess about Christ, "My Lord and My God" based on the confession of Thomas, preserved in the Scriptures. Without having seen Christ, we love him. Without having touched him, we trust him. For us, *hearing* is believing. Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. By the grace of God the resurrected Christ

is proclaimed to us in the gathering of God's people every Sunday again.

How much richer we are than Thomas! We can say "My Lord and My God" without having to put our finger in the scars of his hands. But we do not boast in ourselves, since it is the Spirit of the exalted Christ who works this confession in our hearts through the Word. If he is our Lord, let us obey his will. If he is our God, let us hallow his name. What our eyes

have not seen, our ears have heard. Be assured that in hearing you are blessed, because if you hear (and believe) Christ now, you will see him later. You have his promise that you will see him coming on the clouds in glory. On that day the power of his resurrection will be visible to all. For the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. C

CLIPPINGS ON POLITICS AND RELIGION

The Opposition to Trinity Western University's Law School



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It is amazing and alarming, although not really surprising, how anti-Christian activists try every which way to stop a Christian university from starting its own law school. At bottom, it is considered intolerable for a school to promote and defend a biblical understanding of marriage. In the eyes of secularists, that should not be allowed.

Janet Buckingham, Associate Professor of Political Studies and History and Director of the Laurentian Leadership Centre in Ottawa, has helpfully summarized the conflict and put it in focus. Her article, "What's all the fuss

about Trinity Western University?" published in *The Cardus Daily* on February 10, 2014 (<http://www.cardus.ca/blog/>) is worth reading. What follows is a shortened version. She begins by noting that a new campaign against the accreditation of Trinity Western University's (TWU's) law school has started. TWU had prayerfully laid the ground work for this law school and done wide consultations.

Finally, in June 2012, we submitted our proposal to the BC Minister of Advanced Education and to the Federation of Law Societies of Canada. Because it is a

professional program, we require government approval and that of the professional association.

A great deal of controversy arose over the proposal.

It's all because the university has a community covenant. Some people hate the very idea of constraints on behaviour. But faculty, staff, and students agree to abide by its guidelines. Aside from encouraging a variety of positive behaviours such as love, joy, peace, wellness, and respect for others, we all agree to keep sexual intimacy for marriage. As in many evangelical Christian communities, marriage is defined as being between a man and a woman.

Trinity Western has faced opposition to approval of its professional programs in the past. In the mid-1990s, the university brought a legal challenge to a negative decision on its education program. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in our favour in 2001. It was that ruling that led us to believe that we would be accredited when it came to a law school. Surely lawyers would recognize the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada!

Both the BC Minister of Advanced Education and the Federation of Law Societies of Canada granted approval to the proposal in December 2013. After heated media debate, the Federation had set up a Special Advisory Committee just to deal with Trinity Western's Community Covenant. The special committee concluded that there is "no public interest reason to exclude future graduates of the program from law society bar admission programs."

But that was not sufficient for those who stand opposed to Trinity Western. Those opposed have been writing letters and lobbying at provincial law societies. Many of these law societies had delegated their responsibility to accredit new law schools to the Federation, but they are being urged to take that responsibility back.

This means that Trinity Western is now facing several different processes across the country. The Nova Scotia Barristers' Society is holding a public hearing and inviting written submissions. The Law Society of British Columbia has invited public submissions. Ontario will have some process yet to be determined.

Law faculties across the country are passing resolutions denouncing Trinity Western.

...

Ultimately, however, the fuss is over the Community Covenant and its definition of marriage. The question is whether there is one imposed definition of marriage or whether we have marriage pluralism in Canada.

CALLS EXTENDED

Called by the Free Reformed Church of Launceston, Tasmania:

Rev. P. Aasman

Missionary of the Ancaster CanRC serving Streetlight Christian Church of Hamilton.

CALLS ACCEPTED

Accepted the call to the Fergus North CanRC:

Rev. M. Jagt

of Taber, Alberta

CALLS DECLINED

Declined the call to the Bethel CanRC of Toronto, ON:

Rev. R. Schouten

of Aldergrove, BC

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CHURCH NEWS

The Civil Marriage Act redefined marriage in 2005 for civil purposes. It specifically states "nothing in this Act affects the guarantee of freedom of conscience and religion and, in particular, the freedom of members of religious groups to hold and declare their religious beliefs" and "it is not against the public interest to hold and publicly express diverse views on marriage." That seems clear enough.

But it is not clear enough for law deans, law professors, and lawyers. They want one definition imposed on everyone. Never mind that marriage has been a religious practice for 2000 years. The state redefined marriage and everyone, including churches, must fall into line.

This rides roughshod over freedom of religion and equality on the basis of religion as guaranteed in the Charter. It also ignores the painstaking care the Federation took to consider all the issues.

Let's hope reason rules the day and lawyers and law professors respect what the law says.





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Christ Will Come in Glorious Splendour

1. Christ will come in glo - rious splen - dour with the trum - pet's ju - bi - lee.
2. Christ is faith - ful to his prom - ise, he will al - ways keep his word.
3. No more weep - ing, no more cry - ing, on - ly joy and full de - light.

At his call we shall a - wak - en, and our Sav - iour we will see.
Have no doubt a - bout your Sa - viour for he is your God and Lord.
No more death or an - y sad - ness as we live in glo - ry bright.

Though our souls were safe - ly with him - with our Lord in Par - a - dise -
Christ will re - cre - ate the heav - ens and a new earth for his Bride.
Bless - ed - ness be - yond all meas - ure as no heart has e'er con - ceived!

he has prom - ised full per - fec - tion, that our bo - dies, too, would rise.
We will dwell there with our Bride - groom, ev - er more with him a - bide.
We will praise our God for - ev - er, from all mis - e - ry re - lieved.

Text: George van Popta, ©2013
Tune: Johann Schop, 1600-1665
Harm.: from Cantata 147, J.S. Bach

JESU JOY
8787 D



The Lord Opens a Door

Arrival

The month of January 2014 saw the FRC of Southern River in Western Australia buzzing with excitement, anticipation, and activity. The manse received a mini-makeover in preparation for the arrival of our new minister, Rev Dirk Poppe, his wife Amanda, and their six children – Benjamin, Angelica, Caleb, David, Timothy, and Matthew.

On Friday, January 17 2014, the Poppes arrived safely on Australian shores at the Perth International Airport. A contingent of church members, decked out in Australian colours, as well as relatives of Mrs. Poppe, were waiting expectantly. The children were seated opposite the arrival doors waving their flags enthusiastically, hoping for the first glimpse of the Poppe family. A beautiful welcome banner made for the event even attracted admiring glances of other arriving passengers!

Suddenly, a cheer went up amongst the congregated crowd, as the Poppe family made their way through the arrival gates. Soon all the hugs and handshakes were exchanged and cordial introductions were made, and the overwhelming task of trying to remember everyone's name began. The Poppe family and their luggage was eventually bundled into a waiting vehicle, and the Poppes soon arrived at the manse in Southern River.

Welcome afternoon

On February 8, 2014, a welcome afternoon was held, and members arrived to a church decked out in Australian colours, complete with Australian flags, balloons, beautiful floral arrangements, and mysterious facial silhouettes on the windows.

The afternoon was opened by the chairman of consistory, Mr J. van Dongen, before he handed over to the emcee, Mr. "Squeak" Van Duyn. It didn't take long for him to set the tone for an enjoyable afternoon. He offered advice for good sermons: must have a good beginning, a great ending, and the two as close together as possible. The agenda for the afternoon was clearly set out; there



Rev. Poppe admires the welcome banner at Perth International Airport

were songs, games, a quiz, and a few speeches. However, one item, simply labelled "consistory item," aroused the emcee's curiosity. After inquiring, the emcee was dryly informed by consistory that "consistory never lets the congregation know what's going on ... so why start now?"

Amidst the laughter at this point, Mr. D. Pot was given the opportunity to speak a few words. He reflected on communication with the Poppe family from 1999 (fifteen years ago), in which Rev. and Mrs. Poppe had mentioned that "if the Lord opened up the door for us to live in Australia, we would joyfully walk right through it." He marvelled with us at the fact that the Lord had indeed guided them to Australia, in his time. He then presented the Poppe family with a church photo-book of all the members; it came with supplementary advice on great WA holiday destinations, favourite meals, and favourite bible texts.

A delegate from Classis North, Rev. E. Rupke, gave a short "tale of two cities" which thematically focused on the motto of the cities of Coaldale and Perth. The Poppes have made a "wise choice" (motto of Coaldale) in accepting the call and they will "flourish and prosper" (motto of Perth) in Southern River, WA. As congregation we hope and pray that this may indeed be the case.

Next was the “consistory item!” To the tune of “Do you hear the people sing?” (Les Misérables) and with deep male voices, the men sang of their woe and strife in being a vacant consistory. They moaned of the FRC Melville “leaving them in the lurch” by taking their minister, and that they were “up to their eye balls” with “sheep problems.” Where would they ever find a minister who was prepared to “stick his head into the lion’s den”? Could this minister solve the “organ versus piano debacle”? Before long, however, the men were no longer singing the songs of angry men, but changed their tune (not literally), and were singing the song of happy men; it was the “music of a consistory that would not be vacant again!”

The women of the congregation then took to the stage and sang a welcome song to Mrs. Poppe, outlining the study clubs she is welcome to attend and ending with a reflection on our sincere desire to serve God through Bible study.

The older youth then tested Rev. and Mrs. Poppe’s agility with a welcome-to-your-new-manse pantry game, where they filled their hampers with typical Australian items – vegemite, a cricket set, weetbix, Tim Tams, and many more.

Benjamin and Angelica’s knowledge of Australian vocabulary was then tested with a short quiz that, at times, prompted enthusiastic audience participation. Who are the “Poms,” how do you spell “mum,” what colour are gherkins, what are West Australians nicknamed,



The Poppe family: Angelica, David, Mrs. Poppe, Rev. Poppe, Timothy, Caleb, Benjamin, and Matthew

and what metal are soft-drink cans made of? Benjamin was chivalrous enough to let Angelica win.

The afternoon was an enjoyable one, a time where we could express in prayer, word, and song our thanks to the Lord for providing a pastor in the form of Rev. Poppe. The quick and safe arrival of the Poppe family from Canada bears witness to the fact that we are indeed blessed.

Rev. Poppe gave us a glimpse of some of the challenges they face by describing Mrs. Poppe’s recent driving experiences: countless times getting in the wrong door, having to operate the gear stick with your left hand, hoping drivers understand window-wiper “language” as a substitute for simple indicator left or indicator right and staying on the correct (not right) side of the road!

Conclusion

On the January 31, 2014, Rev Poppe could undergo the Colloquium at classis held at the FRC Mount Nasura. Rev. Poppe passed this colloquium and is permitted to be installed as a minister of the Word in the bond of churches. At this stage Rev. Poppe still waits for visa approval, after which the installation can proceed.

We are very thankful to our Lord God, who has safely guided the Poppe family to our shores, and has indeed opened the door for the Poppe family to walk through. May the Lord bless Rev. Poppe’s ministry in Southern River. **C**



Rev. Poppe addresses the congregation of Southern River



Constitutional Integrity

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Under the “fundamental freedoms of peaceful assembly and association” in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, we are free, among others, to have a birthday party, start a golf and country club, maintain a school society, establish professional organizations, and organize Bible study leagues. For good reasons, some associations are registered with the government and have a protective legal status, while others do not. However, for the protection of their long-term integrity and credibility, they often also confirm their moral commitment to foundational beliefs and purposes. Notwithstanding the need for the protection of the long-term vision expressed in the charter documents, it is well for organizations to reconsider from time to time whether an adjustment in the constitution may be called for. In this article, I will address aspects of retaining the internal moral integrity and credibility of our organizations as expressed in their constitutions.

Each association exists for a purpose, such as benefits for members or others, but also includes certain expectations implying obligations and restrictions. The benefits are often linked to the synergy of doing things together; the obligations and restrictions are at least in part designed to protect the association’s integrity and sustained effectiveness. Fundamental stipulations regarding such things as beliefs, membership, purpose, governance, conflict resolution, and even dissolution, are often laid down in an organization’s constitution. This is far more than a guideline for operations: It thoughtfully defines the organization’s core values. The founders of our schools, for instance, spent countless hours mulling over and defining the characteristics fundamental to such schools as would match the high calling of educating covenant children in line with baptismal vows. Knowing that things could go off the tracks, they designed documents that remain monuments to their intentions and core values, and worthy of ongoing defence today.

Membership and purpose

Many organizations restrict membership to protect their integrity. The *Sabah Golf and Country Club*, for instance, requires a minimum age of eighteen and a school principal’s permission for students to sign up; it also has set procedures for constitutional amendments. Other organizations may be more circumspect about who may join—and at least as cautious about constitutional change. Among these are the *Canadian Reformed Teachers Association* (CRTA) and your local *Canadian Reformed School Society*. Their founders deliberately limited membership to members of the Canadian or American Reformed Churches (CanRC) – not apart from lessons learned of the Alliance of Reformed Schools (GSV) in “the old country” after 1944. Where this has been interpreted to include URC members, it was in recognition of the “Phase II” relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship and not really a departure from the original intent.

As a joint communion of saints venture for a common and well defined purpose, it was essential that the members in the schools and the CRTA would be and remain of one mind. Since the objective was to have covenant children instructed in the fear of the Lord, to the best of the parents’ ability and in line with vows made at baptism, both the schools’ and the CRTA’s founders alluded to vows made at public profession of faith. After all, this was what all adult church members had in common and were committed to: Believing the doctrine of salvation taught in *this Christian church*, accepting the promises of the covenant and seeking one’s life in Jesus Christ, loving God and desiring to serve him and to crucify the old nature, committing to the Lord’s service, and, finally, submitting to the admonition and discipline of the church. People with this outlook and with this commitment to God would not be perfect, but, with a humble mindset of submission and repentance if wrong,

they would best possess what was required for educating covenant children. While there were many believers out and about, targeting the members of *this* church, which was intent on remaining a true one, in line with the Three forms of Unity, was the most clear-cut way of defining the members' prerequisites for the stated purpose. The GSV was different: It had been established in 1906 and included a range of churches that called themselves Reformed. Even though they had much in common (such as the Three Forms of Unity), there were fundamental issues on which they diverged.

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For many, it was unthinkable that teachers and parents should disagree on these issues. Going beyond the CanRC boundary might lead to an education with a Christian flavour (perhaps as envisioned by Egerton Ryerson in nineteenth century Ontario), but likely lose being distinctly Reformed and fail to meet the bar set by the baptismal vows. For instance, the schools' founders wanted no room for confusing the children's status before God (by suggesting that it *remains to be seen* whether they belong to the covenant – as taught by A.Kuyper); or making it the school's aim that they *become* God's children – as described in Peshkin's *God's Choice*; or for turning the schools into institutions of evangelism – as decried in Meulink and DeWolff's c.1950 *Dutch Commentary on the Church Order*. They wanted no compromising of the trustworthiness of Scripture, for instance by sidelining (parts of) the creeds and confessions. A summary "Statement of Faith," common among organizations like MAF and Wycliffe, even if based on the Apostles' Creed (as has been suggested for Reformed schools in The Netherlands in the last year or two) would necessarily be too broad and vague, and never accomplish such assurance of com-

mitment to the doctrine taught in *this* Christian church. A broadly defined membership would likely lead to compromising on aspects of the Church History curriculum, for instance. Certainly teachers should be selected with care, and committed church membership was one (not the only) valid and straightforward criterion by which to evaluate this. The CRTA, though started much later, acknowledged and confirmed this by maintaining this same membership criterion.

While there existed an informal narrow CanRC interpretation of the antithesis at one time ("unless you are CanRC you are doomed as a member of a false church"), this interpretation was formally and finally rejected at the Dutch Synod Spakenburg-Noord, 1987, with the Rev. Hoorn controversy. To my knowledge, the CanRC never challenged that decision, even though similar sentiments did exist on this side of the Atlantic. When our school societies began to read and adapt their founding documents to include members of local churches with which the CanRC maintain *ecclesiastical fellowship*, such as the URC, they remained in line with the intent of the restriction: It had to be a church committed to remaining true as per Article 29 (Belgic Confession) – just like that was always assumed and understood with regards to, for instance, the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. For interested parties from outside this tightly defined membership category, many school constitutions still made some provisions.

It is important to note the formal and well-defined term "ecclesiastical fellowship," or "sister churches." Anything outside that phrase would need to be vetted for its adherence to the intended high bar for membership. It would be problematic to generally admit members from churches "recognized by the CanRC through *ecclesiastical relationship*," as the undefined vagueness of the phrase would undermine the intent: It does not specify what such churches are recognized for, and would thwart the school's integrity. Some loosely defined ecclesiastical relationship with a local Baptist or Lutheran or Methodist church might actually make its members qualify. It was well for the founding fathers to define membership very precisely to ascertain the schools' and the teachers' fit with the holy vows made before God.

Basis and amendments

Another common protective element is the *basis* on which organizations operate, often formulated for our schools, with some variation, as the Holy Word of God, as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity and taught in the CanRC. This clearly exposes the expectations to those committed to, for instance, the Lutheran Augsburg Confession of 1530, or the Anabaptist Dordrecht Confession of Faith of 1632, or the “I believe everything you say” creed. When a local school principal of Pentecostal persuasion sought to enroll his children in our school (distance was one issue), I identified certain Reformed doctrinal positions that we would unabashedly present in our Bible or Church History classes, even if his children would be there. He called me a few days later, acknowledging that it would not be a good fit.

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The fundamental significance of the precisely defined creedal basis and restricted membership was always underlined by an article that prohibited their alteration or their amendment. In some cases the wording would permit updating the language, but not the intent; in some cases any change was rejected. Legally, with some gold and red tape, it might not be problematic to defend a change to the membership restriction as quoted above, but as it would diminish the principle weight of this article and undermine the integrity of the organization, it would not be morally wise: It could imply messing with the meaning of a holy vow (see LD 37).

Constitutions are carefully formulated to remain valid for decades. The way they are implemented, however, allows and should allow for changes and adjustments, through features like by-laws, regulations, poli-

cies, protocols, handbooks, and guidelines. Separating the core principles and organizational foundations on the one hand, from the way they are executed on the other, can leave the integrity of the constitution unaffected, even while allowing for development in dynamic times. Generally, the closer an article is to the core values of the organization, the harder it should be to change: Articles about basis, purpose, membership, staff, and amendments fall in that category. Other articles may more easily be changed, for instance by a seventy-five percent or sixty-seven percent vote, often as long as certain conditions about announcements, meetings, and quorums are met. With a lesser majority required, like fifty-one to sixty-seven percent, a by-law may enact a nuance of interpretation of a constitutional article. For instance, it may adjust the means by which an organization’s constitutional goal is pursued, possibly in ways never conceived by the founders. Similarly, as the organization grows, it is likely to develop policies and protocols which may even be changed at the discretion of the executive – wisely with subsequent or concurrent membership input scrutiny. For unalterable constitutional articles, however, it is imperative that they are defined with utmost care.

Executive and membership

A good organization needs constitutional stipulations for an executive. Minimally, and possibly in a by-law, it often takes care to delineate the manner of nomination and election, terms, respective powers and roles, and individual or collective duties to report and give account. The association’s members of necessity give powers to the executive and entrust it with responsibilities for the day-to-day operation of the organization, but rightly expect an accounting of how it has fulfilled that task. An active membership will be keen on how the executive does this, and will not be afraid to raise bold questions. A good executive, likewise, knows that it must serve the association in accomplishing its purpose, rather than just exercise power, and it will make a sincere and well-founded effort to lead the organization toward its stated purpose within the bounds of the adopted constitution and by-laws. It is well for an executive to be transparent, to answer questions, to consider suggestions, and to defend its course of action.

As executive members often are people with leadership aspirations or abilities, one area they should be aware of is the powers and dangers inherent in group dynamics. Strong-willed or vocal people may become dominant, and such dominance may hinder or even imperil the proper and effective execution of the organization's task. (Having elected officials with a limited term helps, but provides no foolproof prevention.) Group-think may render members so fixed on a certain perspective, that (for better or worse) it becomes virtually impossible to go against. As constitutions and by-laws may not contain stipulations for disciplining overbearing executive members or preventing group-think, it is incumbent on all executive members to keep each other in check. (Apart from a well-designed constitution, remedies lie in the executive's duty to give account, and for the membership to elect executive members endowed with godly wisdom, humility, and a spirit of service.)

For the sake of the education of covenant children, and for the integrity of our organizations, let us not allow demise to happen, but rather pray and strive for revival if needed

No well-written constitution will leave fundamental expectations open to executive interpretation. It must allow the executive room to manoeuvre, but it is asking for trouble if it allows the executive to choose at whim and will whether to have a vote for a new member or to just appoint one, whether to follow protocol or act otherwise, whether to report something or not, or whether or not to change articles in the constitution without following a clear and agreed-upon procedure. A constitution which allows the executive to push things through, without an open process of consultation and deliberation, and which does not clarify the executive's responsibilities to give account, should be challenged. Many constitutions address this by allowing a small number of members to force a membership meeting; all would allow for members to write letters of concern.

A committed and active membership is essential for a healthy organization. A membership that does not re-

spond to reasonable requests for help from the executive needs a boost and an opportunity for renewed enthusiasm, vision, and motivation. If the membership is too apathetic to respond to questionable actions of the executive, the organization is in danger of demise. If no one is readily willing to serve in office and if only cajoled people end up forming the executive, whether they are capable or not, if the membership takes a "whatever" attitude and does not actively and meaningfully interact with suggestions or proposals from the executive, red flags must go up for the very survival of the organization. For the sake of the education of covenant children, and for the integrity of our organizations, let us not allow demise to happen, but rather pray and strive for revival if needed.

Conclusion

I have laid out some fundamentals of constitutional integrity. Our society still has freedom of association for purposes we choose – and we should use it well. Birthday parties and golf clubs serve their own possibly good purposes, and both benefit from planning and organization; but for our CanRC schools and other organizations, the bar of thoughtful expectations should be much higher. Within their carefully crafted and well-vetted constitutions, some articles are more fundamental and in need of dedicated protection than others. Those that may be and perhaps should be open to challenge and change in dynamic times have traditionally been placed in by-laws and a range of policies and protocols. In all cases, the organizations are run by sinful human beings who need agreed-upon restrictions (both for their memberships and executives) to keep them from running amok. If there is a school-related organization that suffers of an ill-conceived constitution, it is my prayer, for the sake of the education of covenant children, that it would revisit its basic documents and fix them after due consideration of and consultation about its *raisons d'être*.

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



Decently and in Good Order – An Alternative Approach

In the January 17, 2014 edition of *Clarion* (Vol 63, No 1), Br. Harry Harsevoort, in an article entitled “Decently and in Good Order,” identifies what he perceives to be six issues with the decisions of Synod Carman 2013 regarding women’s voting, and concludes that Synod’s decisions were not supported by the observations and considerations.

A different approach – one that may lead to a different conclusion – would be to start at the committee recommendations and then work backwards – to see if indeed these recommendations are supported.

Synod 2013 was faced with the challenge of dealing with no less than fourteen appeals against the decision of Synod Burlington 2010. The committee studied these appeals as well as the decisions of Synod Burlington and of prior Synods, and presented three recommendations.

The first recommendation was that Synod decide “That Synod 2010 erred on church political grounds in its decision to leave women’s voting in the freedom of the churches.” This recommendation can be traced back to Consideration 3.2, where the committee looked at decisions made by past Synods. To determine whether this recommendation is valid we need to go all the way back to 1980, where Synod Smithville considered a proposal “to leave the matter of Women’s Voting Rights in the freedom of the churches” (*Acts of Synod Smithville 1980, Art 80*). One of the grounds provided to support this proposal was that Article 22 of the Church Order (our current Article 3) “leaves room to the local Churches to act according to local regulations, in accordance with what has been agreed upon by the Churches *re*: the matter of voting in Article 22, Church Order.” This proposal was defeated. With this decision, Synod Smithville decided that the church order does not leave the matter of women’s voting rights to each local church, but rather, that it is a matter for the churches in common. That decision was never appealed, and subsequent Synods have consistently taken the same approach and have treated the matter of women’s voting rights as belonging to the churches in common. Since no church appealed the decision of Synod 1980, it is reasonable to conclude that the churches accepted that decision as settled and binding (as per Article 31 CO).

In Article 33 of our church order, the churches have agreed that matters once decided upon may not be proposed again, unless they are substantiated by new grounds. Synod Burlington did not interact with the decision of Synod Smithville, and offered no new grounds when it effectively overturned the decision made. Synod Burlington’s decision was in conflict with Article 33, and therefore the first recommendation is fully supported.

The second recommendation was that Synod decided “that Synod Burlington erred in stating that the exegetical sections brought forward in both the majority and minority reports are ‘hardly relevant or decisive for the matter of women’s voting.’” This recommendation can be traced back to Consideration 3.4, where the committee concluded that “There may not be a specific text in the Bible that prescribes or denies sisters’ participation in voting for office bearers, but there is enough in both the Majority and Minority Reports (and in the letters from the churches) to show that Scripture speaks to the matter.” This was also the conclusion of Synod Smithville 1980 – that “Voting is either in harmony with Scripture or not” (*Acts of Synod Smithville 1980, Art 83*).

Synod Burlington considered that there is little or no connection between Scripture and our voting procedures. However, no proof was offered to support this consideration, except that the assemblies of the churches have been unable to bring the matter of women’s voting to closure. Synod Carman said that God’s Word and the principles derived from it (regarding the headship of men and the position of women in the congregation) *are* relevant. While the churches may not have a clear understanding of what the Bible says about women’s voting, and while there may not be agreement when it comes to what the Bible says, that is a far cry from saying that the Bible has little or nothing at all to say at all on the matter. As churches, we believe that the Bible represents the final rule of our faith *and our life*, and that it serves as the basis for all authority in our churches. As Br. Harsevoort pointed out, stating something does not in itself make it so – it must be proven.




Synod Burlington simply stated that the biblical evidence is not relevant, without explaining *why* it is not relevant. The second recommendation is therefore also supported by the considerations.

The final recommendation was that Synod decide “That the churches should return to the voting practice as it officially was before 2010, namely male communicant members only voting.” It is undeniable that prior to the decision of Burlington 2010, it was the male communicant members who voted. Churches which implemented women’s voting after 2010 did so based on a decision that was in conflict with the church order and which did not do justice to God’s Holy Word. The third recommendation therefore proceeds from the first two.

The task of Synod is to decide whether or not to accept the recommendations with which it is presented. In this instance, the first two recommendations are fully supported by the considerations. The third recommenda-

tion is simply the logical result of the first two. Synod decided to adopt these recommendations, and regardless of whether one is in favour of women’s voting or not, it should be clear that Synod Carman made a proper decision – one that was supported by the considerations, and one which gave proper due to both the Scriptures and to the church order.

As Synod Carman also considered, the issue of women’s voting has and will continue to cause much division in the churches. The decision of Burlington 2010 did nothing to lessen this division. Our prayer is therefore that the churches, when dealing with this issue, will seek to work on “building a consensus among the churches,” to the glory of God and to the strengthening of the federation with which he has blessed us.

Lyndon Kok
Calgary, AB 

You Asked

A New Clarion Feature

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An answer you’ve been looking for?

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**Please direct questions via email to Rev. W. denHollander at
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