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Clarion

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**EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED WORSHIP
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?**



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Evangelical and Reformed Worship: What's the Difference?

*There is a beautiful interplay
between the Lord and his congregation
during the worship service*

As evangelical services continue to attract young and even older members from Reformed congregations in which they were raised, it is well to ask, but what are the key differences between evangelical and Reformed worship? This article considers some characteristics of Reformed worship and continues a discussion started in the September 11, 2015 issue of *Clarion*.

Covenantal worship

Biblical worship is best understood as a covenantal interaction between God and his people. A typical morning service, with possible variations, begins with the congregation presenting themselves before the Lord and confessing "Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Ps 124:8). As Israel of old presented themselves before the Lord as covenant people (cf. Josh 24:1) so we can do today. God then responds through his servant, the officiating minister or elder, with words such as: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:3). Through this greeting, God relates to us his desire that we experience his grace and peace as that will be given in the proclamation of the gospel. The congregation can respond with "Amen" in word or song. The congregation's response continues with the singing of an appropriate psalm or hymn after which God speaks through the preacher his Ten Words of the Covenant (Exod 20:2-17). These expose our sins and show us the norms for a life of thankfulness to God. This reading is followed by an appropriate song. A prayer

confessing sin and asking for forgiveness and renewal, as well as blessing on the worship service follows. Next comes the reading of Scripture, where God again speaks and the congregation responds with song. Then comes the reading of the text and the ministry of the Word, the sermon. The congregation answers the proclaimed Word with a song after which a prayer of thanksgiving and for the needs of Christendom follow. An offertory of gratitude is taken, the congregation sings, and the service is closed with a final benediction. God sends his people away with his blessing. "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14). The congregation can respond with its "Amen." And so there is a beautiful interplay between the Lord and his congregation during the worship service.

Because worship in church is covenantal and there are only two parties involved, God and his people, there is no justification for special sermons for children, or special choirs or soloists.¹ Furthermore, since a church service is about worshipping God, the emphasis and focal point is on the Word read and preached. Through the Word preached, God himself ministers to his people. After all, the Word preached is an important way for God to impart his grace to us. Through the proclamation of the gospel, the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts (Rom 10:17; 1 Pet 1:23), instructs us in his ways, and encourages us for our daily living (2 Tim 4:2).

Evangelical worship

Although it is not always easy or appropriate to generalize, for there are always exceptions, one gets the impression that a typical evangelical liturgy is quite unlike such a covenantal interaction and reveals a different theology. While the stress in a Reformed worship service is on the vertical relationship with God who is worshipped and who ministers to us, evangelical worship often puts the stress on the horizontal dimension of worship. Critical to a successful evangelical service is a sense of warm personal fellowship

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Issue 24 contains a report on the fiftieth anniversary of CRWRF, a Treasures New and Old meditation, and a Clippings on Politics and Religion article. There is a letter to the editor, a press release, and a question for the You Asked column.

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with others as well as the feeling that you are involved and contributing something to the service. Of course in Reformed worship the horizontal dimension is not absent, but the emphasis is on the vertical. We meet God. He and his Word are the focus. In an evangelical service, the participation and emotions of a worshipper tend to be more front and centre. There is also much borrowing from current culture, for instance, in terms of lively music and drama. For example, the order of a seeker friendly worship service in the famous Willow Creek Community Church started with band music and a soloist. Then there was a congregational song and a dramatic skit followed by comments on the skit. Once again singers and a band got into action. Then a message was presented and the service ended with music.²

***We must never allow our thinking
of what makes a church service
“attractive” to be led into this
consumerist mentality***

One can see from this order of worship that the focus was on music and entertainment. Now one can have different ideas about what kind of music is most suited for the worship service. The point here is that the music should not so dominate that the church service becomes an entertainment hour with a short practical message. A church wishing to reach out is very much tempted to cater to the expectations of the unchurched or marginal members of another church. Such people can be expected to visit a worship service as consumers with expectations that need to be met. They typically wonder, “What’s in it for me? Is it relevant to my feelings and needs? Will it enable me to achieve my goals in life?” We must never allow our thinking of what makes a church service “attractive” to be led into this consumerist mentality. Going to church on Sunday is all about worshipping holy God and receiving his blessing. It is not about making people feel good or meeting worldly expectations.

Since God is at the centre of worship, the pulpit and his Word read and proclaimed is of paramount importance. Small wonder that the reading of the covenant constitution, the Ten Commandments, forms an integral

part of the morning worship service. Evangelical worship services typically do not have the reading of the law. Something very important is hereby omitted from the church service.

The Ten Words of the Covenant

The central significance of the Ten Commandments for God’s people is evident from the way Scripture speaks of them. They are called “the words of the covenant” (Exod 34:28) and even simply identified as “his [God’s] covenant” (Deut 4:13). These are the only laws which God declared directly to the people from Mount Sinai, personally inscribed on tablets of stone, and commanded that they be kept in the ark (Exod 20:1-17; 31:18; Deut 10:5). They form the basis of all the Old Testament legislation and “supersede whatever has been made obsolete in the Mosaic laws with the coming of Christ.”³ It is therefore fitting that they be read in church. With the opening words: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,” the congregation meets the One who also saved them and claimed them for himself through the great Exodus and deliverance which Christ, our Passover lamb, has accomplished on the cross (Luke 9:31; 1 Cor 5:7). At the same time the Ten Commandments expose the sin and shortcomings of the congregation as the mirror of the law is held in front of them and they humbly confess and acknowledge their guilt and thank the Lord for Christ’s blood, the blood of the covenant that atones and takes away sins (Matt 26:28). And so the reading of the law emphasizes the congregation’s identity as a people saved by God’s grace, their inability to keep the law perfectly, and their need for the forgiveness of all their sins.

Because of the special place of the Ten Commandments as the words of the covenant, they should be read every Lord’s Day and not be replaced by New Testament passages. Even though we live in New Testament times, it is inappropriate to read to the congregation “arbitrary paraphrases instead of the text of the Ten Commandments. In the Ten Commandments we are dealing with a covenant that God Himself has written. Out of respect for Him, it is appropriate to refrain from our own variations and insights. Do not trap the Lord in our reason, but respectfully proclaim what He still says to His people!”⁴ Indeed, it is important for each generation anew to be

reminded week by week of those awesome words from the Sinai. They remind us of God's deliverance and make us aware of our guilt before God and the need to seek his forgiveness. The law also provides a roadmap to live a life of gratitude before him.

A consequence of evangelical services not reading the law

Our godless secular society does not want to hear of sin and repentance. Accordingly, seeker-friendly evangelical churches tend to avoid topics like sin that can turn off nominal or non-Christians. One who has researched the issue noted that sin is rarely discussed and very few penitential songs are sung in evangelical worship. "Mindful that seekers come to church in American no-fault culture in which tolerance is a big virtue and intolerance a big vice, worship finders in evangelical churches often want nothing in the service that sounds judgmental." For that reason "lots of evangelical churches these days are unrelievedly cheerful."⁵ Such services of course clash with life's reality in which all worshippers experience sin and its consequences on a daily basis. But more importantly, omitting or downplaying the issue of sin is an affront to holy God.

Sin is a huge issue for God. He is a jealous God who punishes sinners (Exod 20:5; 34:14). Sin must be atoned and paid for. Since we are not able to handle that or satisfy God's just wrath, God sent his Son in a love for this world that we can never fully appreciate or comprehend. But God's redeeming love is something for which we must always be humbly grateful and in reverent awe before his just majesty. Sin can never be taken lightly or ignored.

Downplaying sin can give a dangerous unwarranted self-confidence in the presence of God who is holy, holy, holy. The knowledge of sin is a central reality in our relationship to God and therefore also in our worship service. And so the demands of biblical worship stand in sharp contrast to the expectations and desires of an unbelieving world. Biblical worship is deeply counter-cultural.

Here too it is good to remember that worship is all about God and what he wants. God "alone is the one whom we are to please in our worship. Worship, then, is not chiefly about evangelism, nor is it a concert, lecture, or counselling session. All of these activities may be legitimate and worthwhile for Christians. But none of them constitutes public worship."⁶

Evangelical and Reformed worship are indeed quite different.

¹ See on this point, D.G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (2002) 101.

² Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, "North America" in G. Wainwright and K.B. Westerfield, eds., *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (2009), 629. This service took place on June 10, 1995. A similar liturgy can be found in Kevin DeYoung, "Is the New Evangelical Liturgy Really an Improvement?" (August 1, 2013) on the Gospel Coalition website: <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/>.

³ A.N. Hendriks, "The Ten Commandments in Our Church Service" *Diakonia* 21 (2007) 33.

⁴ Hendriks, "The Ten Commandments," 34-35.

⁵ Cornelius Plantinga as quoted in Napp Nazworth, "Evangelical Worship is Too Cheerful, Neglects Sin, Theologian Says" *Christian Post* March 28, 2014. Online: <http://www.christianpost.com/news/evangelical-worship-is-too-cheerful-neglects-sin-theologian-says-116945/>

⁶ Hart and Muether, *With Reverence and Awe*, 133.



Postscript: It has come to my attention that some readers thought that I had on a certain congregation in mind with my previous editorial ("Should We Accommodate to a More Evangelical Style of Worship?"). Be assured that this was not the case. I'm not even familiar with the congregation in question. My editorials on evangelicalism are responding to what I see as an undesirable attraction to evangelicalism among some of our church members who are drifting to evangelical churches and the temptation this attraction can be for our "own" churches to try to accommodate their expectations by adjusting our services into a more evangelical direction. In other words, the article had a pre-emptive purpose.



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Dwelling in the Shelter of our God

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

(Psalm 91:1-2)

As we approach the changing of the year, our thoughts turn to God's care over us and I would invite you turn your thoughts toward Psalm 91, which speaks to us about dwelling in the shelter of our God. We are encouraged here to make the LORD Almighty, God Most High, our shelter, our resting place, our refuge, and our fortress.

Please notice the four names used for our Lord God in the verses 1 and 2: Most High, the Almighty, LORD, and God. This is poetry, and in poetry one will use different names to describe the same person or thing. So we should not read too much into this, and yet it is good to note a few things about these four names for God.

First God is referred to as "the Most High." This name for God is first revealed in connection with Melchizedek, king and priest of Salem about whom we read in Genesis 14. Melchizedek worshipped God

Most High, in Hebrew "*El-Elyon*." In Genesis 14:19 Melchizedek called God, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. This name for God emphasizes that God created all things, the heavens and the earth, even the whole universe.

Then the Psalm calls God "the Almighty." The Hebrew word is *Shaddai*. This name, *El-Shaddai* (God Almighty) is the name God used to reveal himself to Abraham. In Genesis 17:1 the LORD appeared to Abraham and said, "I am God Almighty – *El Shaddai*." He revealed himself to Isaac and Jacob by this name as well. It refers to God's invincible power and majesty by which he elects those upon whom he chooses to set his love.

Next the name LORD, *YHWH*, is used. This was the unpronounceable and glorious name by which God revealed himself to Moses and Israel in Egypt. It means "the One who is," or, "The self-existent One." By it God revealed himself as the God who es-

tablishes a covenant of love with the people of his choice.

Then, finally, in verse 2, the name "God" is used. In Hebrew it is *El* or *Elohim*. God is the majestic, absolute, infinite Lord over creation and history.

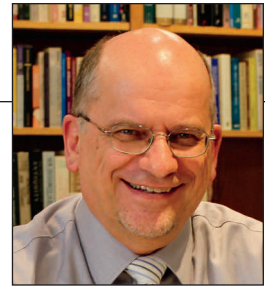
Dear reader, whoever dwells in the shelter and shadow of this Almighty Creator, covenant-keeping, Most High God is in a very safe spot. Whoever places his trust in him, and makes him his refuge and fortress, is in a very secure place. You will be safe, no matter the danger.

Make him your fortress. Proving, once again, that one is never too old to learn, recently I learned that the word "comfort" is related to the word "fortress," from the Latin *fortis* (think "fortitude" or "force"). We could reformulate Question and Answer 1 of our catechism as, "Who is your only fortress in life and in death?" Your only fortress is this God. Dwell in his shelter and rest in his shadow. C

For Further Study

1. What are some other names by which God reveals himself?
2. Does Jesus appropriate for himself any of the names that the Lord God uses for himself in the Old Testament?
3. Where else in our catechism is our Lord God described as our comfort/fortress?

N.T. Wright on Justification



Gerhard H. Visscher
New Testament Professor and Principal
of the Canadian Reformed Theological
Seminary. He promoted under the noted
Pauline scholar, Stephen Westerholm, with
a dissertation called *Romans 4 and the
New Perspective on Paul: Faith Embraces
the Promise*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

This article originally appeared in Lux Mundi in June 2015.

If the New Testament Scriptures are seeing some renewed interest today - as I believe they are - it is probably to a large extent because of the writings of such men as Tom Wright. Along with James Dunn and E. P. Sanders, Nicholas Thomas "Tom" Wright has been a leading figure on the New Perspective on Paul and has written on much of the NT from a new and fresh perspective that captures the interest of many readers today. He has served as an Anglican Bishop for many years, and is now Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland.

Today it is not uncommon to notice also members of Reformed churches reading Tom Wright's books and that is understandable for indeed there are some things about the writings of N.T. Wright that also resonate with me as a Reformed New Testament scholar.

Some of the things that I really appreciate about Wright are:

- the degree to which he understands our present culture and engages it from out of the light of the gospel;
- the manner in which he has challenged those who take a more liberal view in the historical Jesus debates;
- the manner in which he understands the first century in which biblical events happened, and the analysis he presents of that culture;
- his understanding of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in a Pauline and Kuyperian fashion;
- his suggestion that Paul is often pitting the Lordship of Jesus Christ overagainst the lordship of Roman rulers;
- his writings also about the resurrection and the new earth, where the Lordship of Jesus Christ continues forever.

On these points and more, Reformed people should see Wright as someone who stands side by side with us, fighting the same battle for our one Lord.

Wright on being right with God

At the same time, however, there is especially one area in which I think he is misdirected, namely, with respect to his view of justification by faith. On the one hand, it sounds attractive to us as Wright refers to the "righteousness of God" as a reference to God's faithfulness to his covenant promises with respect to all the evil that Israel experiences in this world. As a judge, God's righteousness has to do especially with his impartiality and how he will right all the wrongs in the end. God has already provided the solution and revealed his righteousness through his faithfulness to this covenant purpose in the revelation of Jesus as Israel's Messiah, and more of this will be seen in the grand narrative of history as God "puts the world to rights," as Wright often says.

The twist to this attractive picture comes in on a number of points, however.

First, within this context of God's righteousness, the obedience of Christ does not function in the usual, classically Reformed way. Says Wright, "It makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom. . . . To imagine the defendant somehow receiving the judge's righteousness is simply a category mistake."¹

Second, Wright and others suggest that if we stop reading Paul through the lens of the Reformation and just read Paul on his own, we will realize that Paul's concern with respect to Israel's righteousness was not that it was

a righteousness based on works they had performed but that it was a righteousness that Israel kept to her own as her national possession and as it failed to be the light to the nations that it was always meant to be. Paul's concern then was not Israel's *legalism* but her *exclusivism*. As Wright says at one point,

If we ask how it is that Israel has missed her vocation, Paul's answer is that she is guilty not of "legalism" or "works-righteousness" but of what I call "national righteousness," the belief that fleshly Jewish descent guarantees membership of God's true covenant people. This charge is worked out in Romans 2:170-29, 9:30-10:13, Galatians, and Philippians 3. . . . Within this "national righteousness," the law functions not as a legalist's ladder but as a charter of national privilege, so that, for the Jew, possession of the law is three parts of salvation: and circumcision functions not as a ritualist's outward show but as a badge of national privilege. Over against this abuse of Israel's undoubted privileged status, Paul establishes, in his theology and his missionary work, the true children of Abraham, the world-wide community of faith. Faith, unlike the Torah, is available to all.²

Third, along these lines, whenever Paul talks about "works" in a negative manner, he is not speaking about meritorious works and the like but he is speaking about "works of the law" as boundary markers. They are references not to a supposed personal righteousness but to a national righteousness. Paul is not fighting a *legalism* in which people attempt to pull themselves up by the bootstraps of their own works but *exclusivism* – the exclusivism which boasts in circumcision, Sabbath laws, food laws as "boundary markers."

Fourth, according to Wright then, justification actually needs to be relocated in our dogmatics textbooks and our minds as having to do with *ecclesiology* rather than soteriology. It's not about "how do we get saved?" but about who's in and who's out with respect to belonging to the people of God. As Wright says: "Justification. . . then, is not a matter of *how someone enters the community of the true people of God*, but of *how you tell who belongs to that community*."³ "Justification in the first century was not about how someone might establish a relationship with God. It was about God's eschatological definition, both future and present, of who was, in fact, a member of his people."⁴ He offers us this definition of justification: "'Justification' is the declaration which God at once makes, that all who share this faith belong to Christ,

to his sin-forgiven family, the one family of believing Jews and believing Gentiles together, and are assured of final glorification."⁵ As a result, justification actually becomes a great ecumenical doctrine because in this way faith becomes the single "boundary marker" in the Christian church and the only "badge of membership" that mattered to Paul and should matter to us.

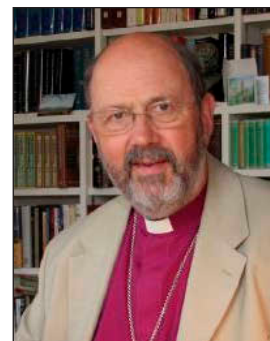
Justification has to do with community, with the church. "Paul's Gospel created a community; his doctrine of justification sustained it."⁶ More than that, justification is "the great *ecumenical* doctrine" because it, after all, is what tells you who is in; it is "the doctrine that rebukes all our petty and often culture-bound church groups and which declares that all who believe in Jesus Christ belong together in one family. . . at the same table."⁷ Whereas Paul's opponents want to raise boundaries like circumcision, sabbath, and food laws, Paul, according to Wright, takes the position that the only "boundary marker" or "badge of membership" that matters is faith.⁸

To conclude our review, then, it should be noted that whereas the casual reader may read parts of Wright's enormous corpus and think it agrees with a Reformed approach to Scripture, the Reformed person who reads more broadly and carefully will detect that Wright presents us with an understanding of Paul has extensive consequences both in our understanding of soteriology and ecclesiology.

Is Wright right?

The degree to which Wright should be considered correct on the above reconstruction of Paul's writing, depends on whether or not one accepts at least two of his premises.

The first is the premise that Paul was not dealing with the question of merit in the face of Jewish opposition in the same way as Martin Luther was confronting erroneous approaches to merit from Roman Catholic opposition. Wright and others in the New Perspective have suggested that Judaism understood the doctrine of grace quite well and were in that respect very close to being Reformed in their approach on this point. Especially, E.P. Sanders argued along those lines. In the last decade or so, many have disagreed. In the two volume work, *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, one will find many essays disputing this premise. Stephen Westerholm⁹ has moreover shown



N.T. Wright

very conclusively that the Judaism of Paul's day was really quite similar to the semi-Pelagianism that brought about the Reformation, as remarks about grace and merit were often placed side by side without being considered opposed to each other. Certainly, in Judaism one does not have any notion that any and all human contributions are excluded as a basis for election or salvation – something on which both Paul and the Reformers agreed! In other words, the backgrounds of both Paul and the Reformers was quite alike after all. Where the New Perspective has been a healthy corrective, perhaps, is in reminding us that the question “how do I get to heaven?” was not necessarily the question every Jew was asking in the New Testament and the answer was not always found in legalism.

The other premise that undergirds Wright's work has also come under attack. Many scholars have argued that Paul's use of the term “works” and “works of the law” does not always have to do with “boundary markers” such as circumcision, sabbath, and food laws. Rather these terms are references to the broader requirements of the law and the holy and moral actions they call for; within that broader reference they may sometimes have in mind the things that separate Jews from Gentiles, but most of the time they simply do refer to the fact what is a natural (and not just Jewish!) inclination, namely, the inclination to think one can merit the favor of God through our own efforts. Here too, there has been a gain from the New Perspective discussions in that we are reminded in NT studies that the Jew-Gentile question was probably the number one problem that the early Christian church was preoccupied with in its early stages. But that does not need to deny that in that same period, Paul needed to defend and promote the principle of salvation by grace and by grace alone.

If one wishes to have one clear text that proves that the New Perspective's approach to Paul is not the clear teaching of Paul, the reader is invited to consider Romans 4 and ask the question, “What does this passage possibly mean if one follows this approach?” In my *Romans 4 and the New Perspective on Paul*,¹⁰ I survey both readings, the scholarly discussion on this, and draw the conclusion that while our traditional Reformed reading can use some “tweaking,” it is certainly more faithful to the Scriptures.

I believe that the majority of scholars in the Reformed and evangelical world have been telling Wright in the last decade that his doctrine of justification is quite misdirected. Has he listened? Sometimes one thinks so. In

his most recent and most extensive work *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, he writes at one point:

The justification of the ungodly, by the fresh act of divine grace, is not only the divine means of forgiving sinners. It is also, for the same reason and as part of the same act, the divine means of creating the single Abraham-family. Indeed, it is *because* of the forensic verdict that the covenantal declaration can take place: the one God “justifies the ungodly,” bringing them into the one family.¹¹

Here at least Wright appears to recognize both positions, but unfortunately, these kind of comments are few and far between and really do not go far enough with respect to the retraction that is really needed. He remains quite insistent that his reading of Paul is the correct one.

To be sure, justification is *related* to the doctrine of the covenant, to the doctrine of adoption into God's family, as it is to eschatology. In my judgment, however, Wright's view on this point is both confused and confusing. Confused with respect to the writings to Paul and the truth of Scripture, and confusing to those who would read Paul. When the person in the pew needs to read Wright in order to understand Paul, something is amiss. And whenever so many of God's people remind a scholar that he is quite alone in his interpretation, we need to listen carefully for we do all our work – also exegetically – “with all the saints” (Eph 3:18).

It is my conviction that Lord's Day 23 of the Heidelberg Catechism is still a better and more wonderful reflection of the truth of Scripture and the principles of grace needed by all. Sadly, the view of N.T. Wright on this point is in conflict with this Lord's Day and the historic Reformed view.

¹ *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98.

² “The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith” *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978) 65, cf. 71.

³ *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 119.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ “The Shape of Justification (2001)”, *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul*. 1978-2013 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013) 221.

⁶ *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 158.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 158-9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁹ *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The 'Lutheran' Paul and his Critics*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 341-51.

¹⁰ See note 1.

¹¹ *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013) 961.

Your Sister in South Africa

A Visit to Synod 2014 of the FRCSA

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The following report was prepared by the delegated deputies for the synod-appointed Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad (CCCA) at the time of their visit, back in 2014.

While we were welcoming spring in Canada, fall was in full swing in South Africa, with its pleasantly warm days and cold nights. That's where Dr. de Visser and I met, from opposite ends of Canada, as deputies of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches for the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA). Warmly welcomed as foreign delegates, we were invited to participate in all the proceedings of synod. Since Dr. de Visser has lived and served in South Africa previously, there was already a familiar and comfortable connection.

Synod

The synod covered a variety of topics which are typically dealt with at Reformed synods: church relations, mission, liturgical forms and prayers, hymns, Bible translation, theological education, and a number of other matters of common interest.

Among the most striking features of this synod from our perspective was how all decisions were reached by

consensus. Equally striking during this assembly was the challenge facing this small federation of churches in remaining sustainable while at the same time remaining committed to mission and church planting.

While the FRCSA have varying levels of relations with other Reformed churches, both in South Africa and around the world, the one that received the most attention and discussion was the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands (GKNv). The main concern was trends in Scripture interpretation, especially in connection with male and female roles in the church. While opinions differed on the best approach, the South African synod agreed to take a similar approach as Synod Carman 2013, namely, to send a letter of loving concern and admonition to our Dutch sister churches, and also to send two delegates to their synod that was presently being convened in Ede.

Within South Africa, the churches that are closest to the FRCSA in doctrine and worship are the Reformed Churches of South Africa. There is some cooperation in primary education with these churches and increasing local contact. Observers from these churches were present for a couple days, and there was respectful and hopeful dialogue with them.

Mission and sustainability also received a fair bit of discussion. Since the FRCSA is quite a small federation, the challenges on both fronts are significant. The mission church plants depend heavily on the established churches, especially for human resources and the training of ministers. Almost all of the financial support for mission, furthermore, comes from The Netherlands. Additionally, there are a few needy churches in the FRCSA, which also depend quite heavily on foreign support. According to the reports and conversations at synod, the FRCSA is doing everything possible to reduce its dependence on foreign support. For example, in 2010 sixty-seven percent of the funds for needy churches came from abroad. By 2017, the





*Preaching Library
near Pretoria*

hope is that only forty-five percent will be collected from abroad. In fact, the FRCSA has asked the churches in Canada and Australia to scale back their contributions in an effort to become more independently sustainable.

Some of the other matters that were covered were liturgical forms and prayers, liturgical music, and Afrikaans Bible translation. The FRCSA is in the process of expanding their songbook to include more hymns, and is also closely following the discussions of the RCSA regarding the revision of the psalm rhymings. Some of the ministers and members of the FRCSA are also quite involved in the work that is being done on an updated translation of the Bible in Afrikaans. In the churches where the indigenous, tribal languages are used in worship, attention is regularly given to finding and developing the best possible resources for Bible reading, singing, and liturgical forms and prayers.

Other visits

When you make such a trip to the other side of the world, you want to make the most of it. Dr. de Visser and I did what we could to make the best use of the opportunities that we had. Dr. de Visser preached in Soshanguve, where he once served as missionary and pastor, as well



Students from Reformed Primary School in Cape Town

as in some of the other congregations. He also spoke at an office-bearer's training conference. Both of us visited Mukhanyo Seminary, where Dr. de Visser once taught, and where many of the FRCSA students of theology are trained. As member of the board of Word and Deed, Dr. de Visser also took the opportunity to visit Malawi for a board meeting and other associated business.

We both met with FRCSA minister Rev. Jopie VanderLinden of the Preaching Library, a ministry that was initiated when he had to be released from his work as a regular minister on account of serious, chronic illness. I was able to bring along some valuable resources from Canada for the Preaching Library and was invited to give a few talks on liturgy to some of the theological students for whom Rev. VanderLinden is mentor.

While most of the FRCSA congregations are within driving distance of Johannesburg and Pretoria, there are also churches in Cape Town and the Cape Flats on the southern tip of South Africa. I was able to visit those



Rev. Jopie VanderLinden outside the Preaching Library

churches after Synod, where I was also invited and warmly welcomed to lead a combined English-speaking service for the churches of Belhar, Wesbank, and Leiden, at Belhar. There was also opportunity for me to do presentations introducing the Canadian and American Reformed Churches after the worship services in Belhar and in Bellville, and even at the primary school in Cape Town.

Conclusion

Overall, the visit was a good experience. We were billeted, fed, and transported by our South African brothers and sisters with extraordinary kindness and generosity. We are convinced that the FRCSA genuinely values our relationship with them and that they were deeply appreciative of our visit. It was a delight for us to represent the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, and also to experience the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with them. **C**



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The Islamic State Caliphate

The Islamic State (IS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), sprang up seemingly overnight. Within a year and a half from the proclamation of its existence in June 2014 this terrorist nation with a population of over eight million now covers territory comparable to that of Great Britain. What are the goals of the Islamic State? What is it after? There is considerable confusion about its identity. President Obama has repeatedly asserted that the Islamic State is not Islamic and does dishonour to Islam. Is that true? The evidence would indicate that the President's view is not in accord with the facts.

The very name, Islamic State, attests to the close relationship of this political endeavour to Islam. Indeed, the Islamic State is a self-declared caliphate under a caliph who is considered a successor of Muhammad as temporal and spiritual head of Islam. In other words, the Islamic world should take its direction from what the Caliph Ibrahim of the Islamic State says. So the Islamic State is not just Islamic in name, but it is very Islamic in everything it does. It sees itself as setting the tone for the Islamic world. Everything it does and says derives from the words and example of Muhammad himself. Just because other, more moderate, Muslims reject the Islamic State does not make it un-Islamic. Its rank and file constantly quote the Quran and consider themselves good Muslims.

Another politically correct mantra is that Islam is a religion of peace. To those in the know this assertion is preposterous. Islam was born in a cauldron of fighting and war and the Islamic State is true to the violent history and traditions of Islam. As Graeme Wood has noted in his article "What ISIS Really Wants" in the *Atlantic Monthly* (March 2015): slavery, crucifixion, and behead-

ings are not something that jihadists are cherry-picking from the medieval tradition. No, Islamic State fighters are smack in the middle of the medieval tradition and are bringing it wholesale into the present day.

The Islamic State as a caliphate has seen it as their duty to emulate Muhammad and revive the ancient traditions. Following Muhammad's example, the Quran, and Islamic traditions, the Islamic State has crucified, beheaded, and stoned whomever they considered enemies of Islam, including children (Surah 5:33; 8:12; 11:82). They have captured women as sex slaves (Surah 33:50). Some translations of the Quran try to tone down the intent of the text by giving euphemistic translations, but the obvious reality for all those watching the Islamic State is that this caliphate appeals to the Quran and Muhammad for their violent practices.

With the establishment of the Islamic State and a caliphate, it is now the duty, according to fundamentalist Islam, for all Muslims to come to the Islamic State and support it. For this reason the Islamic State has become a Mecca for idealistic young Muslims and jihadists from the West. They are often lured to the Islamic State by social media. By going there and supporting the fight, they are proving themselves to be good Muslims. And, if the Islamic State has its way, the fight will be ongoing for the goal of the Islamic State is to make the entire world subject to Allah. For that reason a spokesman for the Islamic State said: "Our goal is to establish an Islamic state that doesn't recognize borders." Indeed, there is never to be peace and no final borders for the Islamic State until all are subject to Islam. With that agenda there is no hope that the Muslims of the Islamic State as well as those who sympathize with them worldwide will lay down their weapons and seek peace any time soon. We need to be vigilant.



Loaves of Bread Multiplied

The Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund's (CRWRF) fiftieth anniversary event on September 12 was a journey to many of the forty-four countries where God has allowed the Fund to contribute as a consequence of donations provided by Canadian Reformed Churches and individuals. Guests were given a passport and directed to the foot path that wove its way by the various country stations. The first stop was Korea. As people looked at artifacts and sampled the delicious pa cheon (green onion pancakes) they learned that CRWRF started in 1965 by providing funds to care for orphans and neglected children as the country recovered from the Korean war. Through the Korean Presbyterian Church, money was provided to two orphanages and a community health care unit.

Supporting the care and development of children has remained a large focus for CRWRF. Annette Smeding, the long-time sponsorship coordinator introduced people to life in the Achego and Tumaini Homes in Kenya where CRWRF has supported orphaned children in partnership with Stichting Red en Kind and the African Inland Church for thirty-five years. Orphan care projects were highlighted at the Malawi and Mozambique station where people munched on roasted corn as they watched a short DVD.

Early on, the CRWRF board expanded its support to include community development as the future of children depends on the wellbeing of their families and communities. People got a glimpse into some of the projects supported over the years as they sampled goulash at the Romania station and looked at pictures taken on site visits with Linda and James Baarste in Guatemala and Nicaragua. Attie Sandink introduced people to the family life programs currently being supported in Mali. In a country that is predominately Muslim and fewer than forty percent of adults are literate, it is important to support Christian families. At the South Africa station people ate baboti as



they learned about support provided by CRWRF's partners to individuals suffering from AIDS and those orphaned as their parents have died.

The work done through Service and Learning Together (SALT) trips organized by Faithworks was also highlighted at various stops. Since 1996, hundreds of young people have journeyed to the Appalachia area of Kentucky to volunteer with SWAP to help poor people with home repairs. Ewout Degelder shared how for many it was their first experience with real poverty and an opportunity to witness to their faith. The Mexico and Brazil stations also



presented Faithworks partnerships. In Brazil, Faithworks has been working with Hamilton's board of Mission Aid to support the Reformed Church in Brazil at Maceio.

When people had finished "travelling the world with CRWRF" they chose a necklace, bracelet, or other gift made by volunteers involved with the Khothatsong and Zisize Home Based Care projects in South Africa after which they were invited to enjoy Korean, Swahili, Spanish, and English songs of praise, performed by a small choir of girls from Grace Christian School in Burlington under the direction of Joanne Hordyk as they waited for the formal program. Under their direction, the audience even got to participate by singing Jesus Loves Me in Korean!



The formal program included two DVDs showing the history of CRWRF and Faithworks. We opened with the reading of Galatians 6:6-10, "As we have opportunity, let us do good for all people. . ." (NIV). This passage was one that motivated Mr. VanderBoom and others in Burlington to establish CRWRF. They started with door collections in which families contributed twenty-five cents, the price of a loaf of bread at that time. Although twenty-five cents today seems a small amount, at the time this was a generous gesture of Christian sharing as many in the church had little themselves, recently immigrated during the previous ten years. They believed that God would provide and multiply the little



that was given to impact many. As CRWRF celebrates fifty years of innumerable blessings; financial contributions, dedicated volunteers, reliable partners, and successful projects we can see that God certainly did multiply those loaves of bread; we should be motivated to continue forward in faith. In a world in which there is increasing calamity and Christians are the most persecuted religious group, there continues to be a role for CRWRF. If your neighbour was hungry, would you share a meal with him?



Dear Editor,

Is it really telling the whole truth to say that “we are nothing” or was the conclusion to Ryan deJonge’s recent article “*I am Nothing*” cut short by mistake? The effect is devastating.

The article ends with “I am nothing. You are nothing. Jesus Christ is everything.”

To leave God’s people with the conclusion that our identity remains total depravity is to deny the work Christ did for us and leave us in a place of despair. It robs us of the power by which we can overcome sin in our life; the power by which we can start to live freely and fully (John 10:10) for God’s glory.

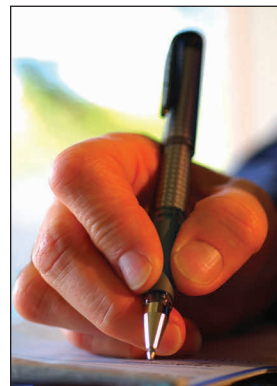
We are not to live up to our old nature anymore. We are instructed to keep in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:25) that was poured out on us. And the spirit we have been given is not one of fear and timidity but one of power and love and self-control (2 Tim 1:7). We are further commanded to encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thess 5:11). To leave each other with “we are nothing” accomplishes neither.

One of the most glorious tasks we’ve been called to as believers is to spread this gospel message, to remind each other of the new identity we have been given in Christ. The Lord knows how our consciences accuse us (LD 23). The antidote to the accusations leveled against us by our sworn enemies the devil, the world, and our own flesh is not the message “we are nothing.” The antidote is the message which says that we who were walking dead men are now alive “in Christ” (Col 2:13, Eph 2:5), a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), the message that can only be found in God’s revealed Word.

We were nothing. But we are “nothing” no longer. Christ brought about our adoption as “sons of God.” Co-heirs to life eternal. We are now the very body of Christ our head. Chosen. Holy. Set apart. A royal priesthood. God’s special possession. The People of God. (1 Peter 2:9,10) When we accept this new identity through faith with a believing heart we start to experience real change in our lives and only then do we start to reflect who we belong to.

DeJonge’s article should’ve read: “*I was* nothing. You *were* nothing. But Jesus Christ is everything and *in Him* we are now in fact quite something” (Rom 8:14-17).

Sincerely,
Your Brother In Christ,
Jason Bouwman



Response

Br. Jason claims that I “leave God’s people with the conclusion that our identity remains total depravity [and thereby] deny the work Christ did for us and leave us in a place of despair.” I sincerely hope my short meditation did not have that effect for anyone who read it. If the reader would understand I was employing hyperbole à la the quote from Toscanini to highlight the supremacy of the Word, they would realize I was not speaking about our identity in Christ. On the matter of our identity in Christ, I agree with what the concerned brother has written.

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*





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Q

Someone in the Dutch sister churches told me that the ordination of a deaconess is imminent.

1 Timothy 3 is quite clear that a deacon must be a man, the husband of but one wife.

In the New Testament there is mention of women who served as deaconess. This seems contradictory.

Could you explain this?

A

The matter of women deacons in the church has a long history. It has produced much discussion here on the American continent, it also has been and is again a point of intense discussion in Europe, including our sister churches in The Netherlands. The per-

tinent point in the above question is related to the role and function of the women in the church, particularly of the deaconesses in the early church, and whether their position was on par with the place and position of the deacon office bearers. Paul's epistles leave no doubt about the fact that the women had important functions in the early church, yet it is clear as well that their place and position did not have the official status the deacons had, as revealed in Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3, for instance.

When we read the term "deaconess" as just the feminine equivalent to "deacon," we could be inclined to infer from this that their title denotes a "woman in office." After all, the *only* time we use the name "deacon" is with reference to those *men* in that special office in the church. The questioner seems to do so by observing a seeming contradiction in the Bible. Then we should be aware first of all that the word "deacon" is a broad term for *anyone who serves*, not just those men who are in a formal office in the church. It is from the context of Philippians 1 and 1 Timothy 3 for instance that we can deduce that there were *certain* deacons who served in an official capacity as office bearers in the church. Serving per se is one of the characteristics of any true believer

who employs his gifts and talents in the church; we're all called to be *deacons* or *deaconesses* (Luke 22:26).

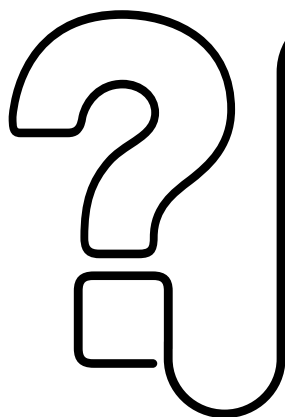
In Romans 16, for instance, we read about a woman, Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, and the impression is given, according to some, that she possessed an important function in the early church. Her position of service, however, does not constitute a place of leadership or authority but of humility and assistance. The term Paul uses is employed in diverse ways, and in the early church it did not denote *only* a specific office. The same term is used indeed in Philippians 1:1 and in 1 Timothy 3:8, 12, referring to members of the congregation who, together with the elders, possessed an officially ordained function within the congregation; while the term as used in Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:11 refers simply to ministering (women) servants of the church. Perhaps, due to the social and economic circumstances of the believers in the early church, a group of serving women was organized whom they called "deaconesses," but just like Phoebe in the church at Cenchreae they were *helpers*, assistants, women who served at tables, cared for the sick, poor, strangers, in the churches.

This would then also jibe with the place and position Paul ascribes to the women in 1 Timothy 2:11, 12, and 1 Corinthians 11:3, 14:34. There the apostle again addresses the place and position of the women in the church as a place in submissiveness to Jesus Christ, without holding a teaching position or place of authority, but nevertheless a place of importance as servants, deaconesses, in the household of God. In this place they may employ their

gifts and talents fully for the well-being and up building of the other members (including the ability to prophesy, Acts 21:9, 1 Cor 11:5, i.e. study and discuss the Scriptures in settings different from the worship services). They are redeemed by Christ to serve him in the role and position God has given them in the creation order (1 Tim 2:15), serving him in a variety of tasks and responsibilities (and in this sense equal to the men, Gal 3:28), yet without a position of an office in the church.

Modern hermeneutics, however, seeks to adjust, adapt, the position of the women in the Greek and Roman culture

to the place and position they have in today's culture, in order to pave the way for ordination of women in the offices in the church (implying that the Bible is time-bound!). This, in fact, undermines the authority and infallibility of Scripture; it also doesn't do justice to the work of the Holy Spirit who renews and restores those who are in Christ so that, as a new creation, they continue in the condition in which they were called (e.g. the slaves remained slaves, 1 Cor 7:21f), serving the Lord freely and cheerfully in the roles and tasks in which they may serve him in a life of obedience and submission to the Lord!



**Is there something you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for?**

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander

denhollanderw@gmail.com

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0

PRESS RELEASE

Press Release Regional Synod West Convened in the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford, BC November 2, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.

1. On behalf of the Grace Canadian Reformed Church in Winnipeg, Br. Wayne Versteeg opened Regional Synod, requesting that the delegates sing Psalm 146:1 and 3. He then read Psalm 146 and led in prayer.
2. Br. Versteeg reported that the credentials were found to be in order. All the primary delegates were present.
3. Regional Synod West was declared constituted.
4. The following executive officers were appointed: Rev. R. A. Schouten as Chairman, Dr. A. J. Pol as Vice-Chairman, and Rev. W. Wielenga as clerk. Rev.

Schouten thanked the convening church for their preparations and the church of Abbotsford for hosting the meeting.

5. Adoption of the Agenda. The agenda was adopted and it was noted that some letters were received with names of nominees for delegation to General Synod.
6. Correspondence was received from the churches at Abbotsford and Surrey in regard to an overture from Classis Manitoba regarding theological students. These were brought into the discussion of the proposal itself.
7. The proposal from Classis Manitoba, which consisted of two parts, was deemed admissible. The first part of the proposal argued that a student of theol-

ogy should remain under the financial care of his home church. An amendment was adopted to clarify that the student's home church is the church that submitted a special attestation to the Theological Seminary, recommending the person for study at the Theological Seminary. The financial care envisioned would involve consultation between the home church and the existing Committee for Needy Students of Theology. The home church would be responsible for submitting the student's budget to the Committee for Needy Students of Theology, providing explanations for any exceptional circumstances that require support different from a typical budget. The Committee for Needy Students of Theology will retain responsibility for assessing the churches and collecting funds from them, and for forwarding the actual support to needy theological students. This was adopted.

The second part of the proposal from Classis Manitoba was that a student should be examined by his home Classis to be given consent to speak an edifying word, or to be declared eligible for call. The main reason for this was to spread the responsibility of examining students more evenly upon different Classes. This second part of the proposal was also adopted after a few amendments.

8. The following reports were received with gratitude:

- a) Report from Regional Synod Treasurer, (J. Moedt)
- b) Report from Church for Auditing the books of the Treasurer (Taber)
- c) Report from the church for inspecting the archives (Edmonton-Immanuel)
- d) Deputies Reports:
 - i. 2013 Oct 2 - re: retirement of Rev. W. B. Slomp
 - ii. 2013 Oct 16 - re: peremptory examination of Candidate B. Schoof
 - iii. 2013 Dec 12 - re: peremptory examination of Candidate C. Vanderlinde
 - iv. 2015 Feb 23 - re: peremptory examination of Candidate T. Vandergaag
 - v. 2015 Mar 11 - re: retirement of Rev. J. P. Kalkman (Calgary)
 - vi. 2015 Oct 5 - re: dismissal ad Church Order Article 11 of Rev R. J. Kampen
 - vii. 2015 Oct 10 - re: peremptory examination of Candidate H.J. Vanderhorst.

9. The following appointments / reappointments were made:

- a) Br. J. Moedt was reappointed as Regional Synod Treasurer

b) Church for Auditing the books of the Treasurer: Taber

c) Deputies ad Art. 48 C.O.

Classis Manitoba: Dr. A. J. Pol; alternates: Revs. J. Poppe and Rev. S. Vandeveld (in that order)

Classis Alberta: Rev. R. Aasman; alternates: Rev. T. Roukema, C. Vanderlinde (in that order)

Classis Pacific East: Rev. W. M. Wielenga; alternates: Revs. R. Schouten and K. Janssen (in that order)

Classis Pacific West: Rev. A. Souman; alternates: Revs. J. G. Slaa and T. Lodder (in that order)

When concurring advice is needed, the Classes will ask for Deputies as follows:

Manitoba – Alberta and Pacific West

Alberta– Manitoba and Pacific East

Pacific East– Pacific West and Alberta

Pacific West – Pacific East and Manitoba

d) Church for taking care of the archives: Edmonton Providence

e) Church for inspecting the archives: Edmonton Immanuel

f) General Synod 2016

i. The following brothers were chosen as delegates to General Synod

Elders: K. Dykstra, H. Leyenhorst, B. Meerstra, J. Roukema, W. van Beek, J. van Spronsen Alternates: A. VanLeeuwen, H. Ludwig, L. Wierenga (in that order)

Ministers: R. Aasman, K. Janssen, R. de Jonge, J. Poppe, R. A. Schouten, W. M. Wielenga Alternates: C. van Dam, A. Souman, J. G. Slaa (in that order)

ii. The remuneration for loss of wages for delegates to General Synod was set at a maximum of \$200 per day. The travel rate was set at 48 cents per kilometer.

iii. Rev. J. G. Slaa was nominated for a position on the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary.

10. The Next Regional Synod is scheduled to be convened by the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church on November 7, 2016, at 7:30 p.m.

11. Question Period was held.

12. Opportunity for censure ad Art. 34 C.O. was not made use of.

13. The executive officers were entrusted with finalizing the adoption of the Acts and the Press Release.

14. Rev. Schouten closed the meeting with prayer.

Dr. A.J. Pol, Vice-Chairman at that time 