

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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**In bondage to
secular culture?**

**FAITH IS THE ROOT
CLARION KIDS
YOU ASKED**

Our Sister Churches Open all Ecclesiastical Offices to Women

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There is a deeper, underlying problem

A decision that those familiar with the Dutch ecclesiastical landscape saw coming has now actually happened. Our Dutch sister churches (*Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt - GKv*) decided on June 15-16 at this year's synod to open all ecclesiastical offices to women. The synod took this decision in steps by first approving female ordination to the office of deacon (by a vote of 30 to 2), then elder (23 to 9), and finally minister of the Word (21 to 10 with one abstention). On Saturday, June 17, the synod also decided that as soon as a local consistory ratified the synodical decision, it could ordain women in these offices. If a consistory is not ready to do this, that is fine too. The synod has left it up to the local church to decide whether they wish to ordain women or when and how to do so. Synod wanted to show respect for the differences within the churches on this issue and that there should be room for these differences within the churches.

What are we to make of all this? It is important to realize that the problem is in the first place not the decision to allow for female ordination. That decision is a symptom of deeper, underlying problem. The Synod has embraced a new way of reading Scripture; a way which brings them into bondage, in this case into the bondage of the prevailing egalitarian culture of our day. There is a bitter irony here that such a going into bondage should take place in the 500th anniversary year of the great Reformation, which set the churches free from this type of captivity by asserting that Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) is the infallible rule for faith and the practices of the church.

Since this anniversary year of the Reformation commemorates especially the work of Martin Luther, it is appropriate that we pause and place this Dutch decision in

the light of one aspect of Luther's contribution on interpreting Scripture, namely his emphasis on *sola Scriptura*.

Luther on interpreting Scripture

One of Luther's most important contributions to the Reformation was his insistence on the absolute authority of God's Word, which is to be understood and submitted to in its plain meaning. That sounds familiar to us, but put in the context of Luther's time, it was revolutionary. By asserting the absolute authority and the clarity of Scripture, Luther took direct aim at the Roman Catholic teaching that only the pope and other ecclesiastical authorities could determine the meaning of the Bible. According to Rome, the Scriptures were obscure and needed the church to tell the people what they meant. Thus God's people were kept in bondage to the "expertise" and authority of the church, which taught them such "truths" as the sacrament of penance and the need for indulgences from the church in order to receive forgiveness. Luther challenged all of that and more. In his *The Bondage of the Will* he attacked the Pope for maintaining that the Bible was not clear and that Rome needed to tell the people what it meant. Luther went on to say that this is most pernicious, "For it has led ungodly men to set themselves above the Scriptures and to fabricate whatever they pleased, until the Scriptures have been completely trampled down and we have been believing and teaching nothing but the dreams of madmen."¹ He further asserted that "those who deny that the Scriptures are quite clear and plain leave us nothing but darkness."²

By defending the absolute authority of Scripture and its clarity, so that its obvious plain meaning could be accepted, Luther set many people free from the bondage of those who

had set themselves up as authorities above the plain teaching of Scripture. Luther however realized that for the people to be truly free from such pseudo-authority, the Bible had to be made available to the common people and translated into their language. All the members of the church had to be able to read the Bible for themselves and become familiar with it so that they could embrace its teachings and reject heresy. Is not the Word a lamp before one's feet which is to illuminate the path we walk on (Ps 119:105)? Reading Scripture also makes one sensitive to the issues of the day and gives a biblical perspective. As Luther put it: "All spirits are to be tested in the presence of the church at the bar of Scripture."³ No wonder, Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses against Rome's teachings on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg to expose the false teachings of the church in the light of Scripture. And what a blessing for the church that he translated the Bible into the language of the people.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

In light of the recent decisions at Synod Meppel (GKv) regarding women in ecclesiastical office, this issue brings our readers two articles: Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's editorial and an article from Dr. James Visscher posing a question that is asked a lot by our own federation: "Are We Only Twenty Years Behind?"

Issue 14 also contains instalments of many of our regular columns: Treasures New and Old, Clippings on Politics and Religion, Education Matters, You Asked, and *Clarion Kids*. We also have a book review and a press release.

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Implications for today

Luther set many in his generation free from the false teachings of Rome. The Word of God became the norm and had to be obeyed rather than the pronouncements of popes and councils which placed themselves above the Word. In this anniversary year of the Reformation, we do well to remember that we are not to be in bondage to any teaching that opposes the clear instruction of the Word of God. Today many look to authorities outside Scripture to address ethical and other issues on which Scripture is clear. Many look to science for objective truth on how the world began. But also the speculative theories of science on the origin of our planet need to be scrutinized in the light of God's normative and clear Word in its teaching about creation. God used Luther to set his people free in the past from those authorities which placed themselves above Scripture. Also today we should not be in bondage to any authority which sets itself up over and against the clear teaching of God's Word.

A potent force and authority that currently attacks and erodes the truth of Scripture is our godless egalitarian culture which acknowledges no norms except what humans desire for themselves and imagine their rights to be. This corrosive culture and the authority it wields in our society must not enslave us and lead us to denying the clear teachings of the Word of God, also when dealing with qualifications for the offices in the church. It appears that our Dutch brothers and sisters are slipping into the bondage of the powerful and seductive cultural spirits of our time and reinterpreting Scripture to make the qualifications for ecclesiastical office more agreeable to the current cultural norms.

The struggle in our Dutch sister churches

As indicated at the beginning of this article, the decision to admit female ordination is a symptom of an underlying problem. The plain sense of Scripture is no longer accepted, but Scripture is read through today's cultural glasses to make it say what is more agreeable to societal norms. In this way, the authority of Scripture is undermined or denied and is sometimes made to say and mean the opposite of what God's Word plainly states.

At the time of writing this article, the official texts of the decisions which admitted women to all the offices of the church have not yet been made available. This means that commentary on any possible biblical justification which the Synod may offer for this decision cannot be made at this point. It will have to wait until such material is available. However, the report that served the Synod on this issue

is not encouraging in the manner in which it interpreted Scripture. (See the editorial in *Clarion* Vol 66, No 3, February 10, 2017.) We also note that for two thousand years the Christian church in all its manifestations has never opened the office of elder and minister to the women in the church. There was a reason for that. It was because Scripture was and remains crystal clear on this point. There was and is no ambiguity. The ecclesiastical leadership was to be entrusted to men. The Apostle Paul stated, for example, that elder must be the husband of one wife and manage his household well (1 Tim 3:2-4; Titus 1:5-6).

However, you will not find any discussion on the apostolic instructions on the qualifications for the offices in the report submitted to synod in support of women in office. These passages are simply ignored. Synod has gone along with the main recommendations of the report. Its decision to allow female ordination in all ecclesiastical offices is, in effect, a declaration of this synod that the church authorities and experts and specialists of the our time have now finally been able to see what the common people today and the church as a whole over the millennia have not been able to see; namely, that the apostolic qualifications for the offices are culturally bound and no longer relevant for the church today. That sounds quite presumptuous and it is. But it is also very sad. With this new understanding of Scripture, fallible creatures have declared null and void parts of God's Word or made it say the opposite of what it plainly states. Unless people are familiar with Scripture and accept its clear requirements for the offices, too many churches will likely swallow this decision which was taken by about a two thirds majority vote. But by acquiescing to this decision they will be placing themselves in bondage to ecclesiastical authorities which set themselves above the plain teaching of the Word of God. This was the bondage from which the Reformation had once set God's people free. And it was also a bondage from which many churches set themselves free in the Liberation of 1944.

A second current example of the new way of interpreting Scripture and ecclesiastical leaders and experts setting themselves above the clear teaching of the Word of God is the non-discipline within our sister churches of those who live in homosexual relationships in spite of the fact that Scripture clearly condemns such relationships, for example, in Romans 1. According to Dr. Ad de Bruijne, professor of ethics and spirituality in Kampen, church discipline is hardly used against practicing homosexuals and at the most only about a third of practicing homosexuals are kept from the Lord's Table.⁴

This issue is also on the agenda of the current synod of our sister churches. In May, Synod discussed how churches should deal with homosexuals. This discussion was in response to a question from two churches in Hardenberg. They wanted to know if there was room in the congregation for a homosexual who loved the Lord uprightly and wanted to live in a relationship of love and faithfulness. Synod was not able to come to a final decision at that point and the matter will come back on their agenda. If the decision on female ordination is any indication, the prospects of clearly condemning homosexual sin and so helping the struggling gays in the congregation to embrace Christ in holiness is not that bright. The pressures to conform to the secular gay agenda is enormous. But the church must not place itself in bondage to the prevailing culture but listen to the plain teaching of Scripture as it has been understood over the millennia and so be in the freedom in which Christ has set us free.

Consequences

The decision to allow females to be ordained in all the ecclesiastical offices will have major consequences. Although it was said that churches could appeal this decision if they are not happy with it, such a comment is meaningless because Synod also decided that churches were free to implement the decision immediately. If Synod had decided to postpone implementation of its decision until after the next synod to allow for churches to appeal the decision, such an appeal would make sense. But once churches have already ordained women there will be no turning back. In other words, this decision is final and will not be overturned in the foreseeable future.

Another indication of the finality of this landmark action of Synod Meppel is that one immediate result of their decision was that Synod fast-tracked unity talks with the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK), the so-called former “buitenverbanders.” Our sister churches now hope to be one with the NGK by 2023, only six years from now. These churches already have women in office. Furthermore, at least two congregations, in Groningen and Utrecht, have also decided that homosexuals who are in a relationship of love and faithfulness can be admitted to ecclesiastical office. These are churches in bondage to the prevailing secular culture of our times.

Another consequence of Synod’s decision is that it will constitute an obstruction for a closer relationship with the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK), a sister church of the Free Reformed Churches in North America. This church decided in 1998 not to ordain women in ecclesiastical offices.

Without a doubt, the Dutch decision will also impact their relationship with the foreign sister churches in a negative way. It will be up to all these churches which warned the GKv not to admit women to the ecclesiastical offices what the exact consequences of this decision will be. It will certainly be on the agenda of our next synod to be held in Edmonton in 2019. It must have been on the agenda of the International Council of Reformed Churches which will probably have met in Jordan, Ontario, by the time this article is published.

We sorrow and need to be in earnest prayer for our Dutch sister churches and for those who object to being placed in bondage to the secular mind-set and culture of our time by so-called ecclesiastical experts and assemblies. They are placing themselves above the Word of God and making it say the opposite of what is clearly stated. The Reformation of 500 years ago, which we may celebrate this year, is to be a celebration of freedom from all that can lead to unbiblical bondage. Sadly, our Dutch sister churches have chosen this year to succumb to the ungodly egalitarian culture of our day and give up the freedom of understanding God’s Word in its plain and clear sense when it comes to the qualifications for the offices in the church. Needless to say, this synodical action also serves as a warning to us not to be seduced and captivated by the culture of our times. The church must resist whatever is sinful and unbiblical and not embrace it.

In closing, may the major consequence of this decision be that many free themselves from the unbiblical yoke that Synod Meppel has placed on them. May they be directed and inspired by God’s clear Word and be encouraged by his work in the sixteenth century Reformation. May they maintain the principle of *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone is the infallible rule for faith and the practices of the church.

¹ Luther, Martin, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, et al. (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1955-2016), 33:90.

² Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 33:94.

³ Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 33:91. “What is new in Luther is the notion of the absolute obedience to the Scriptures against any authorities; be they popes or councils.” Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 204.

⁴ Ad de Bruijne, “Vriendschap voor christen-homo’s,” in *Open en kwetsbaar: christelijk debat over homoseksualiteit*, ed. Ad de Bruijne, TU-Bezinningsreeks 11 (Barneveld: Vuurbaak, 2012), 57-58.



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Faith is the Root

***"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."
 Galatians 5:6b***

This meditation was originally published in this magazine in 2005.

As you drive down the highway on your family vacation you may have seen an orchard full of fruit trees. The fruit on these trees grows as a result of the nourishment from the soil that the root brings up through the trunk and into the branches. There is a visible order: if there were no root there would be no fruit. In Galatians 5, Paul also reveals an order: first the faith then the fruit of faith.

When Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians, Judaizers, who had influence in the church, were teaching that once people believed in Jesus Christ they still had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Now before we too quickly condemn this teaching we need to remember that circumcision was a *sacrament* that was instituted by God. When a person was circumcised it was a sign that he was a member of God's covenant. Paul even calls circumcision the seal of righteousness by faith (Rom 4:11) . . . hmmm, this makes us understand why the Jews had so much difficulty with letting it go. But the Judaizers had to understand that the problem in this transitional stage was not so much with the circumcision itself (Gal 5:6a), but with the way that circumcision was being connected with one's salvation. To use our imagery again, we would say the fruit tree

was turned upside down! The fruit was made the foundation, the root, the beginning of the line on the way to salvation! But what does Paul say? A circumcised person who believes is saved just as much as an uncircumcised person who believes. Salvation is not dependent on whether or not you get circumcised, use the sacraments, go to church, or read your Bible, but salvation comes only through *faith in Jesus Christ*.

It can happen in our lives that we get this mixed up. Sometimes we view the fruit of faith as the basis or the root of our salvation. Sometimes it can happen that we hear the preaching as a list of "do's" and "don'ts" that *you* must keep in order to be saved. It can be oppressive to us, for we are unable to keep the demands of God's law and we will fail. How we burden ourselves when we forget about Jesus Christ and strive to create fruit by our own strength! How weighed down we become when we forget the order. Paul writes, "The only thing that counts is faith!" You don't *have* to keep the law to be saved. . . but when you believe in Christ Jesus you will *want* to!

Believers need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ in the preaching. We need to learn about his perfect righteousness and his love for us. We need to be reminded that he has done everything for us in our place, and we

need to believe this. Then we will not be burdened to the point of sorrow by our own failing, but we will joyfully live out of Jesus Christ. When we forget the work of Jesus Christ we are like a tree without a root. Focus your attention, your desire, and your life on Jesus Christ. . . Jesus Christ alone, Jesus Christ victorious in your life. Jesus Christ has saved you from all the burden and requirement of the law. Jesus Christ has truly given his life to pay for all your sins so that with thankfulness, worked in your heart by the Holy Spirit, you embrace him by faith. When you believe in Jesus Christ, then you will see the fruit of such faith.

God reveals that faith expresses itself in love. Faith shows itself in love for God and love for your neighbour. And so we have come full circle. Again we are speaking about obedience to the law (love God and your neighbour). But now we are talking about it at the other end of the spectrum – obedience to the law is no longer at the bottom of the tree, or the tree would never survive. Rather, it is a fruit at the top of the tree – just like the fruit trees that you have seen beside the highway. Faith is the root that embraces Jesus Christ. Love is the fruit of the Christian who believes in Jesus Christ. For us, the only thing that counts is faith. And faith expresses itself in love.



Are We Only Twenty Years Behind?

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The recent decision of our Dutch sister churches to open all of the offices in the church has generated a lot of discussion, disappointment, and denunciation in our circles. At the same time, it has also led some to remark that we as Canadian Reformed Churches are only twenty years behind. Just wait until 2037 or thereabouts and you will see precisely the same sort of decision being made by us in Canada.

Are we?

But is that true? Are we simply getting all upset about something that will come our way in due time? Are we perhaps being hypocritical, as well as hypercritical, in our response to this decision in the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands?

Let me be so bold as to assert that this is simplistic and erroneous thinking. I do not think that our churches will be going down this path any time soon. Now, of course I do not have prophetic powers and the devil is still roaring and so I am not able to issue a guarantee. Still, there are any number of factors that lead me to this conclusion.

No ground swell

For one, there is no ground swell of support in our churches for opening the special offices of the church to women. I say “special offices” because I want to stress that everyone who is a member of the church is “in” office. What do I mean? I mean that we are all called to the office of prophet and prophetess, priest and priestess, king and queen. As living members of the church we all have a duty to confess the name of Christ, to live a sacrificial life of thankfulness for Christ, and to fight against evil with Christ. We all share in a three-fold office, but we do not all share in the office of pastor, elder, and deacon.

And this is something that is recognized by most of us. As a result there is no lobbying going on. There is no movement afoot. There are no voices telling us that we too need to get with the modern ecclesiastical agenda. There are no office bearers or churches in our midst campaigning for a new order of things.

Dutch no more

Another factor that comes into play here is the fact that what happens in Holland stays in Holland. What do I mean by that? I mean that the vast majority of our members no longer read Dutch, speak Dutch, or consider themselves Dutch. They see themselves as Canadians.

This is not to say that there is no connection whatsoever to the old country. They still recognize that their roots are there. They still have an attachment to Dutch things, be it to “dropjes,” to “botterkoek,” or to “soep met balletjes.” They still have a desire to visit the land of their ancestors and find it to be a really “cute” place.

But do they share the modern Dutch mindset in which there is this intense pressure and desire to conform to the world? That is something doubtful. Indeed, there is a growing awareness that being Christians or Reformed Christians in today’s Canada means going against the flow. In our churches we still have pulpits and not stages. Our children attend schools that are Christian and not public. Our homes are places where praying, Bible reading, and right speech are stressed and drunkenness, sexual immorality, and drug use are condemned. Our politics remain supportive of efforts to reverse abortion and euthanasia and resistant to the modern free-wheeling social agenda.

No doubt a large part of this has to do with the fact that many of us are the product of an immigrant culture. You enter a new land as a stranger. You are looked upon with suspicion by those who consider themselves “native Canadian.” You are different, and at first that hurts, but after a while it becomes part of your identity and you deal with it. Over time you adjust to the fact that Canada is a conglomeration of cultures, and everyone has his place and can be proud of it.

A new orientation

A third factor that needs to be considered here is the fact that our churches are part of a community of Presbyterian and Reformed churches that breathe a different her-

meneutical ethos. Big words, what does it mean? It means that as Canadian Reformed Churches we are a member of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) along with a good many other faithful churches. As such NAPARC churches are united in their view that the special offices of the church are not open to women.

In this connection I may refer you to the recent report that was dealt with at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (also a NAPARC church). It is called “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Women Serving in the Ministry of the Church to the Forty-Fifth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America.” It is a sixty-three page document filled with sound biblical exegesis, reliable historical data, and sensitive pastoral recommendations. Of course, here and there I have my quibbles, but the main tenor of the report is clear – ordination is out!

Seminary influence

A fourth factor worth weighing has to do with seminary influence. For some time already concern has been expressed about seminary appointments and ecclesiastical supervision at the Theological University in Kampen. Both when Dr. Stefan Paas and Dr. Koert van Bekkum were appointed there were serious questions asked about their doctoral dissertations and their faithfulness to Scripture. When Dr. George Harinck went public with his views on a number of ethical matters, there was controversy too. When objections were raised by members in the churches, as well as by sister churches abroad, it was felt by many that neither the board nor synod took them very seriously.

Whether or not they were correct in their assessment of the situation, there is little doubt that the seminary as a whole either showed no leadership on the issue of women in office or was in favour of the churches moving in such a direction.

When in January of 2014 the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary organized a conference on biblical hermeneutics, it went out of its way to invite quite a few men from the Theological University in Kampen (TUK) to participate. I was there, as were any number of our readers. Together we can affirm that we waited and waited for a clear sound to come from the brothers of the TUK about the illegitimacy of women in office. Alas, it did not come.

Yet at the same time it did come from the men at CRTS. Thankfully our seminary professors, our Board of Governors, as well as our synods are not wavering on this issue. Yes, and our general synods in the future need to see to it that they stay the course. I say “general synods” because they are ultimately responsible for what is being taught at CRTS.

Scholarly impact

A final factor that needs consideration is a more scholarly one. What I mean is that in North America we not only have some faithful churches, we also have a body of scholarship that rejects liberal theology and promotes biblical reliability. One illustration of that has to do with the writings of Dr. George W. Knight III and other scholars who have stressed that Paul’s prohibition of teaching and ruling is not based on local circumstance but is grounded in the creation order.

In addition, any number of influential study Bibles used in the English speaking world have not been afraid to adhere to the plain teaching of Scripture. Consider the following from the *ESV Study Bible*, “Since the role of pastor/elder/overseer is rooted in the task of teaching and exercising authority over the church, the verse (1 Tim 2:12) would also exclude women from serving in this office (cf. 1 Tim 3:2).”

Added to this mix of commentaries and study Bibles is also the presence of evangelical seminaries and organizations that take exception to women in office. One can think here of Westminster Seminary in California, Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Greenville, Mid-America Reformed Theological Seminary, Ligonier Ministries, and the list goes on and on.

One cannot help but think that if biblical scholarship in The Netherlands had paid less attention to liberalizing German influences and more to conservative North American ones, the outcome would have been different at the TUK in particular and in the GKN as a whole.

Where are we going?

Still, all of this is not meant to suggest that the future is uncertain. We know what is coming. Better yet, we know *who* is coming. One day our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will appear and he will deal with every sin and injustice, every lie and distortion, and every theological controversy and erring church as well. In light of that, we can live in hope.

Yet hope is only hope if it is grounded in the authority of the Word of God. When culture trumps Scripture, we are in serious trouble. For then the floodgates of the church will be open to the world and all manner of corruption will flood in.

Let us remember the New Testament church. At times it must have been sorely tempted to go the Roman way and to bow to the dictates of Roman culture. But no, it stood steadfast even in the face of bitter persecution. And the result? It transformed a continent and it is still transforming the world today.



Lovers of Death?

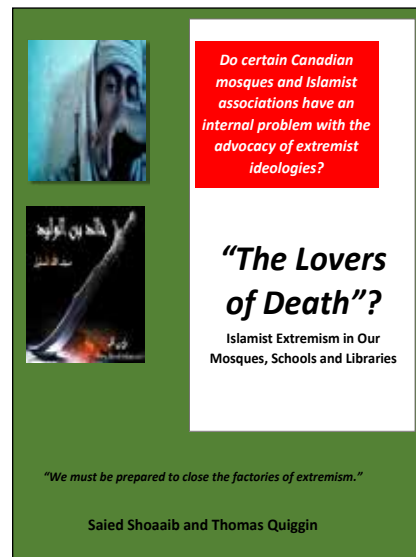
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Very few non-Muslim Canadians have any idea of what goes on in the mosques, schools, and Islamic centres of our country. It is therefore important to take note of a new sixty-nine page study, *"The Lovers of Death"?*, which sheds some light on what is happening in these institutions. The report has credibility. It was researched and written by two experts. Saied Shoaasib, "a devout Muslim," whose extensive research and writing on Islamic extremism has put his life and family at risk due to constant threats because of his writings against political Islam. The second author is Tom Quiggin, an authority on terrorism and recognized as such in both Ontario Superior (criminal) Court and the Federal Court of Canada. They left no stone unturned to present a fair report based on hard data. "By physically going into mosques and associations, the expert authors have been able to obtain clear evidence on the issues of extremism. Using the processes of open source intelligence, social media monitoring and analysis, they have also been able to amass a body of evidence to place this material in context. The results are clear." And they are not encouraging.

The executive summary of the report states that "Canada needs an open discussion on Islamist extremism" and asks: "Is it possible that Canadian politicians are deliberately lying to the population about the threat of Islamist extremism in Canada? Have the forces of political correctness and cultural relativism captured them so completely they are unable to speak?" A variety of Canadian politicians deny the existence of Islamic radicalization problems in Canada. Typically to ask a critical question about Islam is denounced as Islamophobia. But the report concluded that "from an intelligence analysis point of view, a series of 'Indications and Warnings' suggest the problem is both systemic and longstanding."

One indicator highlighted in the report is that "it is not the presence of extremist literature in the mosque libraries that is worrisome. The problem is that there was nothing but extremist literature in the mosque libraries." The voice of liberal and modern Muslims is not heard but "the voice of extremists is everywhere from the mosques and their libraries to the halls of government."



The report helpfully provides a wider context by noting that there is a global struggle for the soul of Islam. On the one hand are the Islamists who "believe in a politicized Islam which is Salafist, Jihadist and Takfirist. Their destination is a totalitarian caliphate firmly rooted in the past." On the other hand are the humanists or modernists who want "Islam to be a modern

religion based on its earlier beliefs in rationality, empiricism and a question for knowledge through the scientific process." However, the humanists are frequently ignored and "the Islamists are currently winning the struggle." This struggle also goes on in Canada and the United States. It is not confined to the Middle East, Europe, or Asia.

The most vocal and successful groups for a politicized Islam are "the front groups who work on behalf of the Muslim Brotherhood and JamaaheIslami." The Muslim Brotherhood is considered a terrorist organization by countries which know best what is going on: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. There is growing pressure for the United States to also designate it as a terrorist organization. The Muslim Brotherhood operates in Canada through front organizations such as "the Muslim Association of Canada, the National Council of Canadian Muslims (formerly known as CAIRCAN), Islamic Relief Canada and the International Relief Fund for the Afflicted and Needy – Canada (now listed as a terrorist funding entity)." Jamaahe-Islami has also been characterized as a terrorist organization even by the Muslim Canadian Congress, a liberal Muslim organization which distances itself from the Islamic fundamentalists.

So how do these organizations promote their ultimate goal of a totalitarian caliphate? The preaching in the mosque and the Islamic schools are key tools. These institutions are often generously supported by Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, to promote a fundamentalist Islam. The report, *The Lovers of Death?*, gives many Canadian examples and the list is quite sobering. Imams regularly preach a hatred of Judeo-Christians values and they have no loyalty to Canada.

Islamic schools also teach fundamentalist Islamic values. "The level of supervision by the Ministry of Education [of Ontario] is not clear." Even school boards, such as the Toronto District School Board sometimes cater to Islamic demands by discriminating against girls on the basis of their gender. Even public libraries contain Islamic books inciting hatred and violence and these are paid by the taxpayer. Ottawa is an example of this. The report notes that "the existence of these books – to the exclusion of others in public libraries – gives them legitimacy and credibility. Those who read them may come to believe this is the true Islam and this is supported by government."

A major conclusion of the report is that "many Muslim youth in Canada are influenced by a steady stream of extremist messages brought to them by mosques, schools, Islamic (or Islamist) associations and the Internet. It is not a surprise that Canada has produced a steady stream of suicide bombers, ISIS propagandists, martyrs and jihadist fighters. Many youth may have never been exposed to an alternative form of Islam which is modernist and humanist in nature."

The report emphasizes that it is "not against Islam in its totality, nor is it against Muslims. It is against Islamic extremists." Its purpose is "to help uncover the sources of extremism that sometimes lead to isolation, hatred and terrorism. It aims to teach us how to resist the Islamist extremist influence and to eliminate it." May this report help to do just that. It is recommended reading.

It is however prudent to be realistic and note five points which Drs. Machteld Allan, a historian and Arabist at the University of Leiden made in *Nederlands Dagblad* last December. First, due to the nature of the religion, Islam is intolerant. You cannot change that. Second, those joining

EXAMINATION TO SPEAK AN EDIFYING WORD SUSTAINED

Examined by Classis Northern Ontario, June 9, 2017 and granted permission to speak an edifying word:

Brother Darren Feenstra

CALL EXTENDED

Called by the Bethel United Reformed Church of Brockville, Ontario:

Candidate James Zekveld

Graduate (2017) of the CRTS

CALLS DECLINED

Declined the calls to the St. Albert Canadian Reformed Church, Alberta, and to the Free Reformed Church of Melville, Western Australia:

Rev. Arend Witten

of the Vernon Canadian Reformed Church, B.C.

Declined the called by the Yarrow Canadian Reformed Church in Yarrow, BC:


Rev. R. Vermeulen

of the Trinity Canadian Reformed Church in Glanbrook, Ontario

CHURCH NEWS

jihad, the struggle against the enemies of Islam, are not motivated due to social economic factors or psychiatric conditions. The desire to join jihad is a practical consequence of what Islam teaches. Third, if criticism of one religion, such as Islam, is not possible because people are afraid of being called racist, then there is no freedom of religion. Fourth, Islam is a barrier for integration. A Muslim can only truly integrate into a Western society if Sharia law is accepted. Sharia is of course antithetical to Western values. Fifth, there is no moderate form of Islam. Allan goes on to note that happily most Muslims in the West are not busy with the question of how to be a good Muslim. They simply participate in society. Often their participation in Islam is superficial, but they mostly do not leave Islam. They know the Qur'an says that other Muslims can then kill them. We call such superficial Muslims moderate. But a moderate Islam, as a religious conviction, does not exist.

Our country needs an open discussion on Islamism. Not to do so plays into the hands of the Islamists.

Resources: Saied Shoaib and Thomas Quiggin, *"The Lovers of Death"? Islamic Extremism in Our Mosques, Schools and Libraries* (Second Star Publishing / Terrorism and Security Experts of Canada, 2016). It can be downloaded in PDF for \$9.95 CDN; Machteld Allan in "Grenzen stellen aan de islam?" *Nederlands Dagblad* (December 31, 2016). 

A National Conference of Reformed Teachers Teaching Reformed Studies

Arthur Kingma
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Emmanuel Christian High School
in Fergus, Ontario.
akingma@echhs.ca



*He loves teaching Church History and
is also a grateful grandpa of eight
wonderful grandchildren*

Two weeks after the flood waters subsided, one could hardly notice water damage or sandbag residue in the town, but an observant citizen could notice a flurry of activity in the Carman West church building on Thursday, April 27. Teachers representing thirteen Christian high schools in WA, BC, AB, and ON, and representing the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College in Hamilton, flew into Winnipeg, drove west on Portage Ave, south on the Perimeter, and south west on Hwy 3 to meet together with colleagues from Winnipeg and Carman. The two kitchen staffers, Agnes Vanderveen and Janine Lodder, heard a growing hub-bub of hearty conversations as more and more colleagues joined together for this two-day conference.

The Reformed Curriculum Development Committee (RCDC), a committee based in BC, approved the funding for this conference in December 2016. Earlier, members of that committee and other teachers in the West recognized that “a lot of work has been done at the elementary level to plan a uniform course of study in Bible and Church History in these schools. The work done by CARE (Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Education) for Bible and Church History curriculum, as well as by RCDC in Church History, serves as invaluable resources for our elementary schools.” They then desired to “start a discussion among the secondary reformed schools regarding Bible Study and Church History.” According to them, they wanted colleagues to “engage in open dialogue about the goals, content, pedagogical practices, and practical implications in these courses. . . .” Their intent was not to create a uniform curriculum across the country, but to have a time of “iron sharpening iron” that will serve as “an opportunity for school communities to reflect on their current practices and will serve, potentially and most likely, as an impetus for some changes in practice and/or curriculum at a local level, if necessary or desired.”

Teaching Bible

After Chris DeBoer, principal of the hosting Dufferin Christian School, led the opening devotions, he challenged

us to look beyond triangles and boxes. In the presentation “Moving beyond the narrative: Teaching Bible Studies at the Secondary Level” he and Jordan Ellens, another teacher at DCS, encouraged high school teachers to go beyond story telling (everybody loves a good story, though). They urged us to structure Bible courses where students search out themes in Scripture, or where students learn to do *exegesis* of Scripture (interpretation or analysis of Scripture). Teachers were warned to avoid the pitfalls of creating a classroom of silence (students do not dare or care to share) or a classroom of *eiseesis* – which is the interpretation of a passage based on a subjective, non-analytical reading (students do not get beyond the sharing of “gut” feelings about the passage). The presenters also argued that a high school’s religious studies program should include the teaching of Church History, a course in apologetics (learning to share the Christian faith with others), another course to learn about different world views present in our culture or in cultures around us, and a unit or a course that covers more practical discipleship lessons. As any reader may notice, the participants got into big language, big ideas, and serious stuff quite quickly.

After this tone-setting, opening speech, various school representatives were given opportunities to share their school’s religious studies programs. These presentations helped participants see similarities and differences among schools, giving time for “iron to sharpen iron” as motives, differences, and unique perspectives were shared. Schools referenced the church-home-school triangle or the prophet-priest-king triangle. One presenter waxed eloquent when talking about permeable membranes inside these triangles. Another school shared subtopics for their discipleship course, which included: transitioning into post-secondary, apologetics, relationships, financial stewardship, and contemporary culture – modesty, pornography, ethics, etc.

Role of the school

In the evening, members of the Carman community joined teachers to listen to Rev. Wynia, pastor of Vineyard

Canadian Reformed Church in Lincoln, Ontario, who spoke on “Challenging students to live lives of holiness: the role of the school.” Rev. Wynia reminded his audience of a very controversial speech in which Rev. W. Wielenga Sr. shared that it’s not the mandate of the school to shape the souls of the students. Rev. Wielenga’s point, according to Rev. Wynia, was that the particular aim and purpose of school should be separated from the particular aims of the home and the church. Rev. Wynia built his own argument that it’s an unavoidable reality that the school will have an impact on the child. The school will influence the way a child acts as image of God. The schools, Wynia continued, must infuse students with a Christian worldview, with Christian goals, and with Christian principles. It is their task to do so. Christian parents do not want children to simply survive in a secular school, but to grow and be equipped to serve God with knowledge, skills, and principled direction in a Christian school, if at all possible. True, schools do not have a biblical mandate as the church and the home do, but they are to assist parents in encouraging students to be holy in the classrooms, on sports fields, and on field trips. School should do this incidentally, by modelling holiness, and by instilling the seven intellectual virtues: courage, carefulness, tenacity, fair-mindedness, curiosity, honesty, and humility.

Teaching Church History

After a hearty breakfast on Friday morning, participants geared up to listen to a second argument presented by Rev. Wynia, “An argument for teaching Church History.” Some schools may not wish to teach Church History at school, thinking that it may be the parents’ or the churches’ tasks to do so. What position did Rev. Wynia take? He shared the following argument: Premise 1: All God’s truth is true. Premise 2: Church History is true. Conclusion: What would disqualify Church History from our schools? Church History is no different from every other area of study. Every school should teach it. Rev. Wynia then continued to refine the argument by sharing why we should teach it and to what end we should teach it. If we teach Church History as propaganda, we are guilty of sectarianism. If we teach it, however, as Christ’s gathering, defending, and preserving work, it’s good. If we sanitize it from rebellion and apostasy, then we are not faithfully presenting the church or God’s preserving work. We need to be brutally honest in sharing so that students may see that despite the sinfulness of man, Christ continues his work of building the church. His grace and love abound.

Servant Leadership

After hearing more schools share their programs of religious studies, and noting that various schools already have a Church History component in their programs, Rev. Wynia

tackled another ambitious topic called Servant Leadership. Should the Reformed high schools push for a program that include Servant Leadership? To set the stage, Rev. Wynia first had to lay the facts on the table: servant leadership is in government curricula, it comes to the schools from a secular business perspective, but that doesn’t mean Christian schools should *not* do it. We should include it, Rev. Wynia argues, but he immediately cautions schools not to get involved in social engineering, but to keep in mind that teachers are assisting parents in this area also. Serving is an act of holiness. Schools need to help students see serving as a calling, a calling which is counter-cultural to our society of individualism. Schools do not need to make students *world changers*, but *world dwellers* – Christian students are to assist in their communities to evidence their faith. They can volunteer in their own schools, their own church communities, and in their own neighborhood communities. In Servant Leadership, schools can assist parents to help students practice self-denial, to do “the hard things,” and to experience the joy of giving for nothing (Zech 8:28; 1 Thess 4).

Wrap up

After having time to enjoy more food and drink prepared by the ladies, and after having had the chance to visit all the classrooms, offices, nooks, and crannies of Dufferin Christian School, participants got together for a wrap-up session. In this session, participants were encouraged to continue dialoguing on the “big” topics. Some were: Do our Bible courses need an active/practical element? Is there a place for a Servant Leadership unit in the Religious Studies program? Do we teach religious study topics cross-grade? Sermon journals – a good thing? A devotion program – which one? The one prepared by Rev. Agema for Guido De Brès was highlighted. Do we do incidental or intentional “touching” of the souls?

Any observer could notice that all the participants thoroughly enjoyed the conference. A wonderful spirit of openness and collegiality pervaded the room at all times. As a participant, and on behalf of all, I like to publically thank RCDC for setting up and financing this conference, Chris DeBoer for ably leading it, Carman West for allowing us to use their spacious church building, the ladies for nourishing us, local school boards for allowing us to meet, and the Carman community for providing comfortable beds to sleep in. God graciously provided, and we thank him for the unity of faith, for safety in travel, and for this opportunity to encourage each other in improving our local religious studies programs.

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@echs.ca.



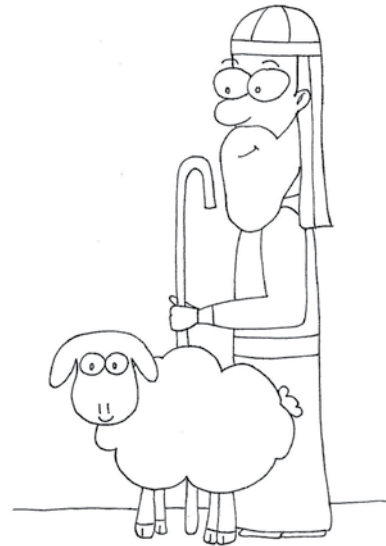
The LORD is My Shepherd

Psalm 23

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me besides still waters. He
restores my soul."

God takes such good care of you, just like
a shepherd takes care of his sheep. He will
always make sure you have everything you
need. He gives you a family and food to
eat and a place to sleep. God promises to
take care of all those who love him and
serve him. We don't have to be afraid of
anything because God will watch over us
and protect us, just like a shepherd.

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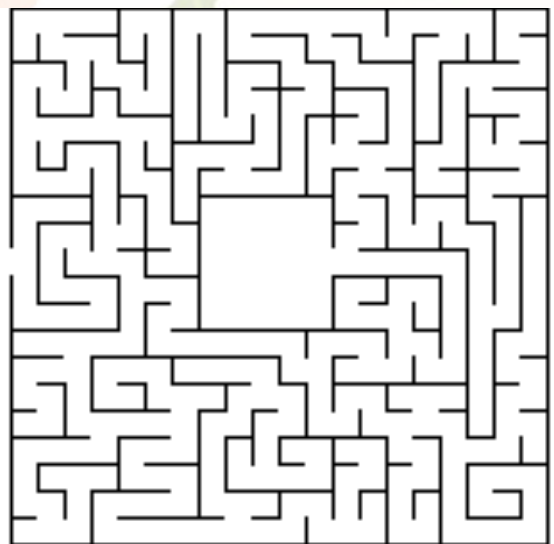
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Care	Pastures	Restores
Family	Promise	Sheep
Love	Protect	Shepherd

Maze

The shepherd leads his sheep on safe paths.
Do your best to get through this maze safely!



by Emily Nijenhuis

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Q The Apocryphal books – are they useful for study?

After reading Belgic Confession Article 6, I had a couple of questions. First, to what extent is it useful for someone to study through the apocryphal books? I've briefly read through some of the books and was wondering if it is upbuilding to study them beside the Bible? The second question is that the book of Enoch is not included in the list in BC Art. 6 as part of the apocryphal books; why is that? Was it just not available when the Belgic Confession was drawn up, and if so should it be included now?

A The name “apocryphal” is derived of the Greek word for “hidden,” “concealed.” It can be, and has been, used in various connotations; yet, in the history of the canon of the Bible the word “apocryphal” denoted that these books were considered inferior to the canonical books. The canonical books were the books of the Bible which the church received as inspired, and used for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith. These apocryphal books entered the picture of the canon when in 200 BC Jewish scholars translated the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek. They did so for the sake of those Jews who no longer knew the Hebrew language, as well as to reach non-Jews with the Word of God. We don’t know why, but at that time also the apocryphal books received a place in the Greek Bible (Septuagint); yet, these were books that did not come to the church in Hebrew but were already in Greek. The fact that these books were included, however, has been a confusing factor giving the impression as if they were canonical as well.

The church of the OT has never included the apocryphal books in the canon. They were not written in the language in which God had spoken to his people Israel in the old dispensation (cf. Ps 147:19, 20). In the NT, also, the apocryphal books are ignored; the Lord Jesus nor the apos-

tles have ever referred to these books. Besides, also the contents of these books are questionable. Although there have been strong opponents of the acceptance of the apocryphal books (e.g. Jerome, the translator of the Bible in Latin, the Vulgate, in approx. 400 A.D), the early church used them and honoured them nonetheless. The Reformers, however, rejected them as non-canonical and labelled them as apocryphal, i.e. spurious, inferior. Yet, due to its long tradition of usage they continued to find a place close to the canonical books of the Bible. Luther included them as an appendix to his edition of the Bible, commenting that though these books were not equal to the canonical books of the Bible, they were still good and useful for personal reading. The National Synod of Dort 1618/19 translated these books and placed them in the back of its version, be it in small print. They added a word of caution as well, stating that these books ought not to be read in the congregation but that the reading of them could be useful for personal benefit. The Belgic Confession in Article 6 articulates the same sentiment, namely that “the [members of the] church may read and take instruction from these so far as they agree with the canonical books.”

As far as reading these apocryphal books are concerned, it may be said that for example the first book of the Maccabees, generally speaking, is an interesting and informative source of historical value (e.g. regarding the

inter-testamentary period between Malachi and Matthew). Although in many ways the book of Jesus Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) contains many worthwhile words of wisdom in an ethical sense, it also contains proverbs that are far below the level of biblical wisdom (even banal). Another observation that must be made with a view to these books is the fact that they contain historical inaccuracies (*Judith*, re Nebuchadnezzar's battle with Israel *after* the exile and presented as King of Assyria), presentations of biblical figures like Daniel who are praised for their good works, and additions to canonical books (e.g. additions to Esther) that originate from the imaginations of later authors.

As for the aspect in the question related to the book of Enoch, we should note that this book belongs to a wholly different category of "apocalyptic writings," which are even less trustworthy ("spurious") and don't even qualify for the category of apocryphal books. They have an entirely different background and history of origin. They also contain information that has come up in the heart of an unknown author, who attached the name "Enoch" to it because his book contains heavenly secrets, supposedly, that Enoch saw on his

journeys through the heavens. "Enoch" then also discloses secrets about the end of the age and the coming of the kingdom of God; as well as secrets about many of the mysteries of life and the world. The books of Enoch are part of a "List of Sixty," as they were known in the seventh century A.D., which were characterized as "apocalyptic" (disclosing the end of the age) books that were considered unacceptable for even private reading. Finally, we should realize that there are many, many other books that could be labelled as "apocryphal" and that originated in various sects that claimed to preserve a tradition of secret accounts of apostles and acts of the leaders in the early church. These were even more spurious, suspicious, and heretical and have not been recognized by the church.

*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. den Hollander
denhollanderw@gmail.com

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0



PRESS RELEASE

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario June 16, 2017

The meeting was called to order by Br. B. DeBoer of Bethel Church, who led the assembly in the opening devotion after some opening remarks.

The delegates of Fellowship examined the credentials of all delegates and found them to be in good order.

The executive suggested by the previous classis was appointed, with Rev. C Vandervelde of Rehoboth as Chair, Elder P. DeBoer of Bethel as Vice-Chair, and Rev. J. van Popta of Fellowship as Clerk. Classis was declared constituted.

Under memorabilia, Rev. Mulder, recently called to the Lord, was remembered. The passing on to glory of Rev. DeJonge was also remembered. The chairman reminded Classis of their respective work in the churches over the years. We pray that their wives and families will be comforted by the Lord in this time.

Bethel presented a request for the honourable release of Rev. Versteeg from the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments according to Article 13 of the Church Order. Classis and the deputies of Regional Synod concurred with the request and

supported the financial arrangements proposed by Bethel, noting that these were subject to review as needed, and at least annually. The chairman brought this matter to the Lord in a prayer of thanksgiving, asking for a blessing over Rev. and Mrs. Versteeg in their retirement.

The reports of all churches in this classis were received in closed session. During question period according to Article 44 of the Church Order, one church requested advice which was given in closed session.

A proposal from Rehoboth to distribute the Acts of Classis Central Ontario electronically was approved.

Burlington Ebenezer was appointed to convene the next classis on September 15, 2017. The recommended officers are Rev. J. van Popta as Chair and Rev. G. Bruintjes as Clerk, with Burlington Ebenezer to provide an elder as Vice-Chair.

After question period, the chairman noted with thankfulness that Christian censure was not required.

The Acts and the Press Release were read and approved. Classis was closed in prayer by the chairman.

For Classis Central Ontario June 16, 2017,

Elder Philip DeBoer

