

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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**How tall  
was Goliath?**



*WISDOM IS CALLING  
WHY NOT USE NAMES LIKE "SCRIBA"?*

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

In this issue we have a guest editorial from Dr. John Smith, professor of Old Testament studies at CRTS. He takes a look at multiple sources to discuss how tall Goliath really was – and discusses how we can look at discrepancies in the original text.

From Dr. James Visscher, we have an article entitled, "Church Conflict and Acts 15," using a scriptural example to work through some basic principles for dealing with conflict in the church wisely.

This June the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) held their synod in Wheaton, Illinois, USA. The Revs. Willem B. Slomp and William den Hollander attended as fraternal delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches. In this issue we include the address to Synod by Rev. Slomp.

Issue 14 includes a canticle and a press release, as well as the columns Treasures, New & Old, Clippings on Politics & Religion, *Clarion Kids*, and *You Asked*.

Laura Veenendaal

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Cover photo: Painting of David and Goliath in Regensburg, Germany



# Just How Tall was Goliath?

## *Translators have to decide which reading is best*

*And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him (1 Sam 17:4-7 ESV).*

So begins what is arguably the best-known story in the Bible. Everyone knows it – believers and unbelievers alike. It feeds into society's perennial fascination with extremes. Sports and business writers regularly use the metaphor of David and Goliath to describe the little guy who triumphs despite great odds. In the popular imagination, Goliath perhaps resembles the giant from the English fairy tale, Jack and the Beanstalk, with his “Fee-fi-fo-fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he alive, or be he dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread.” Or think of Roald Dahl's *Big Friendly Giant*, big enough to carry ten-year-old Sophie in his ear, yet only half the size of the evil, bone-crunching, fifty-foot brutes who terrorized London, till they were carried away by the Queen's military helicopters (or “belly-poppers,” as the BFG called them) and dropped into a five-hundred-foot hole in the ground. Add some special effects from Steven Spielberg and Walt Disney Studios, and the popular image of a giant becomes truly colossal.

But how tall was Goliath really? “Six cubits and a span,” says the ESV, and most other translations agree, though many convert the measurement to feet and inches. As Andrew Steinmann explains, “An ancient cubit could range anywhere from sixteen to eighteen inches, and a

span – the width of a flared hand, thumb to little finger – was commonly reckoned as half of a cubit. According to the MT, then, Goliath was between eight feet, eight inches (264 centimeters) and nine feet, nine inches (297 centimeters).”<sup>1</sup>

### Different versions

The “MT” to which Steinmann refers is the so-called “Masoretic Text,” the Hebrew text preserved by Jewish communities for many centuries. Most of the Old Testament manuscripts that survive belong to this text type; it is carefully copied and generally reliable. The Masoretic Text is not the only version to survive, however, and sometimes the ancient texts disagree with each other. Then translators have to decide which reading is best. Sometimes they will put the alternate reading in a footnote. The ESV has a very interesting footnote at 1 Samuel 17:4, namely that the Septuagint, one Dead Sea scroll, and Josephus all say that Goliath was not six and a half, but four and a half cubits tall. That would make him somewhere between six feet (183 centimeters) and six feet, nine inches (206 centimeters).

What are these texts exactly? The Septuagint was a translation of the Old Testament into Greek, completed sometime before the birth of Christ and widely used by Jewish communities in the dispersion. This was the version that the New Testament authors used when they quoted from the Old Testament. The Dead Sea scroll in question has been dated to the first century BC and is the oldest surviving copy of this passage. As for Josephus, he was a Jew living in the first century AD who wrote a history of the Jewish people. Here's how he described Goliath:

And now there came down from the camp of the Philistines one by name Goliath, of the city of Gitta, a man of gigantic stature. For he measured four cubits

and a span, and was clad in armour proportioned to his frame. He wore a breastplate weighing 5000 shekels, with a helmet and greaves of bronze such as were meet to protect the limbs of a man of such prodigious size. His spear was not light enough to be borne in the right hand, but he carried it elevated on his shoulders; he had also a spear weighing 600 shekels, and many followed him, carrying his armour.<sup>2</sup>

So which version is right? Was he six-foot-something or nine-foot-something? It cannot be both – he must have been one or the other! We might quickly dismiss the smaller number. After all, it is common enough nowadays for a man to be taller than six feet (especially in the NBA!); we would not call such a person a giant. Yet, as we'll see, height is a relative thing: the shorter you are, the more giants you see. Notice for instance that Josephus still calls Goliath "a man of gigantic stature," at four and a half cubits!

When experts are confronted with a disagreement like this, they look for the simplest explanation. Was there a motive to reduce Goliath's height? Then the taller reading is original. Was there a motive to increase his height? Then the shorter reading is original. Or could a Hebrew scribe have made a simply copying mistake that could explain the difference? If so, can we tell which reading is wrong and which is right? Let's consider the options one by one.

### Is bigger better?

Was there a motive to reduce Goliath's height? Some have suggested that the Septuagint translator made him shorter to make the story more believable. That seems unlikely, however. Translators don't usually tamper with the text, and the Dead Sea scroll discovered at Qumran (4QSam<sup>a</sup>) shows that the smaller height was found in the Hebrew text already before the birth of Christ. What's more, copyists knew their Bible very well; they would have known of other giants in Scripture: Og, whose iron bed was nine cubits long (Deut 3:11), and the Nephilim, or sons of Anak, of whom the ten spies said, "We seemed like grasshoppers to them!" (Num 13:33). Some of these sons of Anak survived the conquest of Canaan and settled in Gath (Josh 11:22). It's possible that Goliath was descended from them. Further, in both ancient and modern history there are anecdotes of men who were unusually tall. The *Guinness Book of World Records* mentions Robert Wadlow, who by the time of his premature death in 1940 had surpassed eight foot, eleven inches, and was still growing, due to a hyperactive pituitary gland. In any case, it is conceivable that a man could reach the exceptional height of nine feet plus. As others have pointed out, why would a scribe reduce Goliath's stature, since that would only detract

from David's victory? If anything, you might expect a later scribe to make him taller: after all, fishing stories tend to get bigger and better over time.

So was there a motive to make Goliath taller, to embellish the story the more it was told? Perhaps. Certainly that happens in the storytelling world. Yet, as I mentioned, scribes were careful men, the more so because they were handling Holy Scripture. We would not expect them to tamper with the text. They were not perfect men, of course. There are many small differences and little mistakes in the thousands of copies that have been handed down to us. By comparing the copies it's usually possible to tell where the mistakes happened and to deduce what the original text must have said. Is that also the case in 1 Samuel 17:4? Can we tell how a mistake might have been made?

A scholar named Michael Coogan has made a tantalizing suggestion.<sup>3</sup> He noted that the phrase "six cubits" in verse 4 (spelled *šš 'mwt* in ancient Hebrew) is almost identical to the phrase "six hundred" just a few lines down in verse 7 (spelled *šš m'wt* in ancient Hebrew). Coogan proposed that when an ancient scribe was copying Goliath's height in verse 4, the scribe's eye skipped down the page to the very similar phrase in verse 7, and so he mistakenly wrote "six" instead of "four." This mistake was then preserved in later copies of the Hebrew text. If that's true, then the Dead Sea scroll, the Septuagint, and Josephus got it right, and all the other Hebrew copies got it wrong. In short, Goliath was not as tall as we've been led to believe. That might seem disappointing: we like to imagine the suspenseful silence as David whirls his sling-shot, the whack of the stone hitting Goliath between the eyes, the earth-shaking "thud" of his gigantic body crashing to the ground, and an eruption of raucous cheers as the crowd goes wild. As diminutive boxer Joe Walcott used to say, "The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

### David and . . . Saul!

Yet it's precisely here that our imaginations lead us astray. After all, the larger story is not really about Goliath at all. Steinmann puts it well: "The real contrast in the account is not between David and Goliath, but between David and Saul. David's height is never mentioned, but Saul's height is clearly his outstanding physical feature (9:2; 10:23). Moreover, Saul was chosen to be king specifically to fight the Israelites' battles (8:20). The average Israelite is thought to have been between five feet (152 centimeters) and five feet, three inches tall (160 centimeters), and tall Israelites were most likely about five feet, eight inches (173 centimeters) tall. Yet Saul was taller than even these literally "from his shoulders upward" (9:2; 10:23). Thus, Saul was a good ten inches (25 centimeters) taller than the tallest Israelite – in the same



height range as Goliath according to the Septuagint. Therefore, Saul ought to have fought the Philistine.”<sup>4</sup>

In a sermon on this passage, Rev. H. de Jong takes the similarity between Saul and Goliath even further, noting that Saul’s weapon of choice, too, was a spear; Saul too had a helmet of bronze and a suit of armour.<sup>5</sup> Yet Saul was afraid to face his Philistine counterpart (17:11). Instead – most ironically – he put his armour on David, he put a bronze helmet on David’s head, and gave him permission to fight the Philistine – why? So that he might unwittingly prove the truth of the previous chapter, that the Spirit of God had departed from Saul and had come upon David instead (16:13–14). Though still the anointed of the Lord in title and office, Saul had lost his spiritual effectiveness to lead the armies of the living God to victory against the Philistine. Originally chosen because the people had requested a king like those of the nations, Saul is now faced with the best that the nations can offer, a champion whose armour outshines his own – and he finds himself wanting, a “has-been.” And so the LORD teaches Israel the shortsighted folly of their request and at the same time reveals his choice of a man who declines the weapons which Saul and Goliath would choose, and instead goes forth in the name of a God who does not save his people by sword or by spear, a God who does not look at outward appearance but at the heart.

Was Goliath a giant of a man? Yes, he was, even if he was not nine feet tall. After all, the Bible tells us what he looked like to the Israelites, a people informed not by the imaginary

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## CHURCH NEWS

world of fantasy novels and superhero movies but by the realities of warfare in the Promised Land. If a shorter Goliath does not satisfy our natural obsession with extremes, so much the better. We don’t need a tall tale that tickles our fancy; we need a gospel that reveals our salvation!

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Steinmann, *1 Samuel* (Concordia, 2016), 326.

<sup>2</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* (trans. Ralph Marcus; Harvard UP, 1934), vi.171.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel* (Anchor Bible; Doubleday, 1980), 286.

<sup>4</sup> Steinmann, *1 Samuel*, 327, citing J. Daniel Hays, “Reconsidering the Height of Goliath,” *JETS* 48.4 (Dec 2005): 701–14.

<sup>5</sup> Hendrik de Jong, *De twee messiassen* (Amsterdam, 1976).



*Dead Sea Scrolls, Qumran Caves Scrolls, manuscripts found in the Qumran Caves near the Dead Sea in Israel*





# Wisdom is Calling

***“Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, at the entrance of the city gates she speaks. . .” (Proverbs 1:20-21)***

We have a lot of *information* available today in ways that we’ve never had before. Siri and Alexa can answer obscure questions for us in moments. Family arguments can often be ended with a quick look at Google. But as most Christians know, information is not *wisdom*. Wisdom is different. Wisdom is being able to discern right and wrong and what choices are best to make, while wading through the complexities of life. Wisdom is needed to figure out how best to raise children, what route should be taken after high school, how best to reconcile a broke relationship. Information can be nice to have, and a lot of people are very “informed,” but there are much fewer who are wise.

Solomon startles us by pointing out that it is *our own fault* that we are not wise. Why? Because wisdom has made herself widely available to be listened to. In four parallel lines, Solomon describes four slightly different public places: “in the street,” “in the markets,” “at the head of noisy streets,” and “at the entrance of the city gates.” Then Solomon uses four different words for calling out. Woman Wisdom isn’t hiding. She is not making herself available

only for the intellectually elite or for the theology buffs of the world. She is calling out in a loud voice in the most obvious places, giving everyone equal opportunity to heed her. Unlike information, wisdom has always been readily available for every human being. The problem is that even though everyone is hearing Woman Wisdom, so many are refusing to listen to her (Prov 1:24).

For us as Christians too, there is much blame to go around when it comes to taking in wisdom. We don’t take it in like we should. We have so much available. We have so many wise people that have gone before us that we could learn from. We have preaching that is faithful to God’s Word. And we have God’s Word in an overwhelming number of translations for our English language, but still we struggle to listen to its wisdom. Like a teenager who just wants to learn the hard way, who just wants to learn from their mistakes and sow their wild oats, we all naturally grow up unwise and with very little interest in listening.

There was only one man who from a young age was already listening to Woman Wisdom, was taking her words in every chance that he got. He was in the temple asking questions in order to

grow in wisdom. And through his listening “he became to us wisdom from God. . .” (1 Cor. 1:30). He became wisdom in the flesh. His actions, though they seemed like foolishness to the world, were the wisest, because they brought about a glorious salvation, and a glorious redemption for this world.

Thankfully this wisdom from God continues to make wisdom available to us. And not only is this wisdom calling out through the Scriptures and through the preaching for everyone to hear, but Christ also pours out his Spirit of wisdom into our hearts, so that we actually listen to that wisdom, so that we actually take it in.

We so often run into difficult and complex situations in this life. Sin makes things even more complicated. In all the things we disagree about, the controversies that we run into in church life and in the world, we can think we are making a wise decision, only to find out later the damage that decision produced. But when we look to Christ prayerfully, and search the Scriptures that our LORD has given us, by his blessing God can work wisdom into foolish hearts.

## For further study

1. Can you see times in your recent past where God’s Word and wisdom was easily available, but because of time constraints or pride, you simply went without? What were the results?
2. What is the last disagreement you’ve had? How could prayerfully listening to the available wisdom of Christ help in that situation?





# Church Conflict and Acts 15

Conflict is a common human reality. No matter where you turn, how far you look, what you read or watch, who you meet, it raises its ugly head. And why is that? Sociologists say that the roots of conflict lie in poor living conditions, in such injustices as discrimination, racism, and prejudice. Educators will tell you that the problem is a lack of accessibility to quality education. Economists point to an absence of economic opportunity and to an uneven distribution of wealth. In short, everyone has an answer when it comes to the cause of conflict.

## A brutal answer

Nevertheless, it also needs to be said that no one has as basic and brutal an answer as the Bible. Listen to the apostle James: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" (James 4:1) After which he points to desires gone awry, to coveting, to wrong asking, to adultery. In other words, the problem, he writes, is deeper than poor housing, bad education, poverty, and a host of other things. The problem is people. It lies with us who are human beings. There is something fundamentally wrong with us and it has to do with the fact that we cannot control our passions. At bottom, conflict is an inner human problem, or better yet, a heart problem.

Yet it is also something else. It is, as mentioned above, a common problem. No race is exempt. No people are above it. No class has managed to stick handle around it. No, it is everywhere.

## Conflict in the church

Yes, and it is even in the church. In the beginning it was there in the church of Adam and Eve. Look at Cain and Abel. It was there in the church of Noah. Look at Canaan. It was there in the church Abraham. Look at Esau. It was there in the church of the Judges, the Prophets, and the Kings. Look at Samson, Samuel, and David. It was also

there in the church of the New Testament. Look at Corinth, Galatia, and Rome.

So what is the answer? Is there a way to get rid of it? Scripture makes clear that this is a problem that will not go away completely in this life. Conflict is part of our broken world and our fallen personalities. It also reveals that the solution to this problem has to do with a heart transplant. Only this transplant is not the work of any human heart surgeon. It takes someone much more skilled and able. It takes God. Specifically, it takes God the Holy Spirit. Only he can give you a new heart. Only he can change your passions.

Yet the Spirit does more than give us new heart. He also gives us wisdom. He guides and directs us we live as individuals, as societies and as churches in this fallen world. Where do we find that wisdom? Why, in his Word. Indeed, we find it in many different parts of that Word.

## Acts 15

What parts in particular? How about what we come across in Acts 15? Most of you have read it more than once. What's it about? It's about conflict in the early NT church. In particular, it's about conflict around such issues as circumcision, food, idols, blood, sexual immorality, and Jewish laws. In other words, this is serious stuff!

So how did the church deal with this conflict? Walk with me through Acts 15 and you will learn a number of valuable lessons on resolving conflict. These lessons will not make it go away, but they will make you wise in dealing with it.

## Lessons

Some of the lessons are as follows:

### a) Define the conflict accurately

Many times, when there is a conflict, the issue or issues are not clearly identified, with the result that confusion

reigns. One person thinks that this is the issue, while another is convinced that it is something else. In the end it is possible that both miss the mark.

As a result, it is important that every effort be made to identify what is really the basic issue at stake. Only when this has been done can the discussion move forward.

You will note that in Acts 15 the issue is clearly stated as “unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (v. 1). Obviously, the issue is about circumcision and it is also about salvation and how the two are related. The men who came from Judea were teaching a doctrine of *plus* – Christ *plus* circumcision equals salvation.

### **b) Debate the conflict squarely**

It is obvious that not all agreed with this teaching of the Judeans. Among those who disagree are Paul and Barnabas. It says that “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them” (v. 2). This is really a polite way of saying that Paul and Barnabas were in total disagreement with this teaching.

It is noteworthy that they do not ignore the teaching of these men from Judea, nor do they minimize it. No, they make it very clear early on that they are very much opposed to this doctrine of *plus*. In addition, they even debate the issue with these men.

After arriving in Jerusalem, the debate continued in front of the apostles and elders. No doubt it would have been most interesting to have been a fly on the wall and to have heard all of the arguments. In any case, Acts 15:6 states that was “much debate,” meaning that this matter was not taken lightly. Rather, it received a thorough airing.

And really, that is the way it should be in the church. If there is a contentious issue, it should be debated fairly, fully, and frankly. Both sides should receive the opportunity to state their case.

### **c) Ask advice willingly**

What happens when the two sides cannot agree and be reconciled? Then it is time to seek advice. In this case, Paul and Barnabas are appointed to go to Jerusalem and seek the advice of the real leaders in the church, namely “the apostles and the elders” (v. 2) in that city. They, however, are not the only ones as some other people were appointed to go to Jerusalem as well.

The lesson here is that the brothers are not afraid to ask for advice. Paul did not dig in his heels and say, “But I am an apostle too and thus there is no need to go to Jeru-

salem.” He could have done so, and others in similar situations surely would have. Many see asking for advice as a blight on their honour. Yet it makes good sense, especially in cases of serious conflict.

So do not wait, let it drag out, and thus allow the issue to fester. Take action! Do it sooner rather than later.

### **d) Explain the conflict openly**

As Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem, they go by way of Phoenicia and Samaria. They do so in order to inform the believers in those places about the conversion of the Gentiles. Why inform them about this? Most likely because this clearly affects them. Phoenicia is a Gentile city and thus the church there is mostly of Gentile persuasion. As for Samaria, it is a place populated by a mix breed of people, not quite Jew and not quite Gentile.

You can be sure that in both places the believers are keenly interested in this issue. Would the church require them to be circumcised or not? Would they have to undergo this Jewish rite or not?

The lesson in this is that there was apparently no attempt to hide the fact that there was a serious disagreement in the church on these matters. At times when there is conflict in the church, the different sides of the debate are muzzled and not allowed to make their position known. Such is not the case here. The believers in both cities rejoice to hear what the gospel is accomplishing, and they are glad about the stand that Paul and Barnabas have taken with regard to circumcision, and, by extension, with Jewish laws and ceremonies.

### **e) Listen to the main participants respectfully**

After the debate has been going for some time, Peter stands up and speaks. He argues forcefully that the church should not place “a yoke on the neck of the disciples” by requiring that they be circumcised. His reasoning is based on the fact that God ordered the word of the gospel to go to the Gentiles and that he then confirmed it by giving them the Holy Spirit. In short, Jew and Gentile are treated alike. Furthermore, it is the grace of the Lord Jesus that saves both.

What is remarkable here is that Peter speaks in this way. Earlier Peter had been of a different mind; however,

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heart problem**



God had taught him differently through his visit to Cornelius (Acts 10, 11).

Further support is given by Paul and Barnabas, who describe the signs and wonders that God had done among the Gentiles through them.

The impression that one receives is that the church listened carefully and respectfully to the main participants in this disagreement. There is no evidence of spite, rancour, ridicule, or name-calling.

#### **f) Search the Scriptures carefully**

In the end the matter is left to James, the apostle and brother of the Lord Jesus, to comment on. He had listened carefully to Peter and saw how God had “visited the Gentiles” (15:14). But then he goes a step further. He searches the Scriptures and lands on Amos 9:11, 12. There he finds the evidence he needs to support the stand of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas.

The lesson here is that whenever a disagreement arises in the church, the Scriptures should be brought to bear on the issue. If it can be proved that they support a certain position, then that position needs to be approved and endorsed.

On the other hand, if the Scriptures are silent, the church needs to exercise great care. You cannot legislate where God has not decreed. Caution and charity are called for in the face of biblical silence.

#### **g) Resolve the matter wisely**

In the end, James rules that “we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God” (15:19) and thus not require them to be circumcised and uphold ritual laws. At the same time, James is sensitive to various Jewish concerns and thus adds that the church should write to the Gentiles and urge them “to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20).

What we have here are four requirements or requests, of which three are optional (idol food, strangled food, and blood) and one (sexual immorality) is not.

In summary then, the Jews need to welcome the Gentiles as equals and not demand that they follow their ceremonies, and the Gentiles need to be sensitive to Jewish concerns and not offend them.

What this decision reveals is that James, led no doubt by the Holy Spirit, comes to a decision that is sensitive to the concerns of both parties in this dispute.

#### **g) Communicate the decision clearly**

Having made the decision, it then needs to be commu-

nicated to the churches, and it needs to be done clearly. To that end, a letter is drafted, and we know its contents from what we read in Acts 15:23-29).

In the end there can be no doubt about what the brothers in Jerusalem decided, for it is clearly spelled out in their letter to the churches.

The lesson here is that when important decisions are made in the church they need to be written clearly, precisely, and plainly for all to read and understand.

#### **h) Show leadership decisively**

In the face of a most contentious issue, indeed an issue that had the potential to split the church, there is every indication that the church leadership in Jerusalem acted decisively. It did not waver. It did not drag its heels. It did not compromise. It did not retreat into ambiguous language.

The lesson is that decisive leadership is something that should be expected from those whom the Lord has appointed to rule over his church. This means that in situations of serious dispute, the elders today need to be prepared to act in a firm and decisive manner.

#### **i) Monitor the situation closely**

There is one last element that should have our attention and that relates to the fact that the leadership does more than act, it also monitors. Paul and Barnabas decide that it would be beneficial for them to visit the churches again “to see how they are” (Acts 15:36). They want to know how they are doing and also how well the Jerusalem decision had been received.

Again, there is a lesson here in that once an important decision has been made in the church it tends to be forgotten and the matter is closed. Nevertheless, that is not always a wise approach. Important decisions need to be monitored to see that they are having the desired effect.

### **After conflict – blessings**

From all that follows in Acts 15, it becomes clear that the decision of the churches at Jerusalem was richly blessed by the Lord. The apostles continued to do their work. The church continued to grow and reach out. The name of the Lord was spread far and wide among both Jew and Gentile alike. What had the potential to become a disaster turned out in the end to be a great blessing. Looking deeper still, we see that our Lord Jesus Christ continues “to gather, defend and preserve” his church (HC, LD 21).





# Address to Synod Wheaton 2018 of the URCNA

*The United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) held their synod from June 11-15, 2018 in Wheaton, Illinois, USA. The Revs. Willem B. Slomp and William den Hollander attended as fraternal delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches. Below is the address to Synod by Rev. Slomp.*

On behalf of the CanRC, I bring you our warmest greetings,

Brothers, it is a pleasure and an honour for me, together with my colleague Rev. William den Hollander, to be present with you in Wheaton, Illinois to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and to enjoy your fellowship in the unity of the true faith. Such unity is possible only because of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He made us one and called us to be one and for that reason made us office bearers in his church so that, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:13, "... we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

It is a great joy for us that you have your synod at the same time as the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches (OPC) and that we may witness that. As you know, the CanRC have a common and cherished bond with both of you, that we, despite our different histories, need to share and to sustain. The CanRC were not established in North America until after the Second World War, and then, with a few exceptions, have primarily remained in Canada. You have a much longer and broader history in North America, as does the OPC. And so, our history as immigrants from The Netherlands is not as deeply embedded in North American society as yours. Of course, we cherish our own history, not because of who we are, but because of the way that God, in spite of our sins, has shown his faithfulness to us throughout the centuries. Our CanRC history shows that the Lord has brought us back on the straight and narrow path time

and again when we were straying. We must learn from our past. We do not want to deny that history.

But, we also need to understand and appreciate your history, especially those of you in the USA. To appreciate and understand each other takes time. When we first embarked on the road to unity together, many of us, especially from the CanRC, believed such unity could be accomplished in a fairly short time. After all, we both have the three forms of unity and the Church Order of Dort. We had in mind what happened at the time of the two separate secession churches established in 1834 and in 1886, and the unity that took place six years later in 1892, and imagined that this will be possible in our situation. We were happy and excited as we anticipated establishing unity together.

However, the Lord had different plans. The process is taking longer than we anticipated. As federations of churches we both still had some maturing to do. Indeed, it is not always good to rush into things. Maturation is an ongoing process. We must learn to understand each other and to learn from past mistakes and sinful actions and thinking. To become mature is humbling, for you must recognize your own weaknesses and limitations. That is not easy. I also realize that for myself personally, even at my age. Maturity is something you strive for all your life. Constant self-examination is necessary, as well as loving correction from those who are close to you. As Paul says in Philippians 3:12, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own."

The process that we have gone through in the last twenty or thirty years has been humbling, and yet joyful and greatly satisfying. It is a great blessing that we have been able to get to know each other, and that we can continue to do so as church federations. As stated in the positive report

of your committee to Synod, our contact together has been “rich and deeply profitable.”

Personally, I feel a strong bond with the URCNA. It is a bond that I already experienced in the late 1980s and mid-1990s when I was a minister in Northern British Columbia. At that time, I had regular and close contact with my colleagues who were going through the transition of joining the Alliance of Independent Reformed Churches which later on became the URCNA.

In those days we did not yet have pulpit exchanges. But, by the time I came to Edmonton, AB in 2002 that had changed. We had established an ecclesiastical fellowship wherein we could have pulpit exchanges fostering greater interaction which in time became more and more satisfying and stimulating. As an emeritus minister of the Immanuel CanRC in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, I regularly lead the worship services in your churches, locally and in the rest of the province, and in other parts of Canada. Many of my colleagues do the same. We also enjoy having your ministers on our pulpits. For me personally it is always a joy to lead your worship services. The Lord God has been good to us.

And so, brothers, I do not just speak for myself, but also for my colleagues and for the members of our churches, when I tell you that we feel a strong kinship with you and that we thoroughly enjoy the cooperation that we have in local endeavours such as combined worship services, home mission, Christian education, political action, and in broader endeavours such as combined classes, conferences, ministerials, and seminary education. Such interactions are helpful and stimulating. We truly feel quite at home among you and feel a strong connection because of our shared commitment to the Reformed faith.

Yet, there are still some factors that keep us apart. For one thing, because of the geographic distance between us, those of you in the USA do not know us very well. Our last synod of 2016 added two members to the unity committee, Rev. Andrew Pol and me, in the hope that along with the original members, Rev. William den Hollander and Rev. Clarence VanderVelde, more of us would be available to preach, to interact with you at your classis meetings, to answer questions and concerns and to work together in any meaningful way possible. We are still patiently waiting for your invitations from south of the border. We appreciate that you as Synod also adopted a recommendation to that effect.

There are also matters that keep us organically apart. There is a perception that we are somewhat hierarchical in church polity. We believe that it is a wrong impression and we would welcome a colloquium to discuss this. It would be good to hear your concerns articulated so that we can carefully consider them, and if necessary, make changes. It is regrettable, therefore, that, as your report states that you “are currently not prepared for, or sufficiently interested in, such a discussion.” We understand, though, that you are willing to discuss this once we enter into phase 3A. We are thankful for that. Indeed, a lot of work has gone into the proposed joint church order (PJCO) which shows that in most ways we have much in common also in matters of church polity.


Where do we go from here? Our drive towards organic unity has been stalled. This is disappointing to many of us in the CanRC. But, we need to be mature and be patient and trust in the Lord and seek his will.

Throughout the ages we have seen that there are two ways in which God’s people go astray: by taking over worldly sinful practices and thinking, and by a legalistic interpretation and application of God’s law. Both are deadly. Both appeal to our natural instincts, to the sinful flesh. That is why we must be aware of those two dangers today as well. For we live in a postmodern culture that undermines the importance of history and that dogmatically imposes a rigid set of values divorced from the Word of God.

Brothers, we need to help and encourage one another to stay on the straight and narrow path that God has shown us in his precious Word. We need each other to guard against the appropriation of modern day morality on the one hand and dead orthodoxy on the other. Together we need to strive to be mature.

At this point we do not know yet where we are going in our relation as federations of churches. Are we going to be one United Federation? Perhaps in time we will. We don’t know. We are in God’s hands and must be obedient to him.

Brothers, it is our sincere desire and our prayer that the Holy Spirit may guide you in your deliberations and in the decisions you make and that the King of the Church guide you so that you may come to decisions that are pleasing in God’s sight, and to the furtherance of God’s kingdom. To him be all the glory and praise!

*Bill Slomp, Fraternal Delegate* 



# Canada's Supreme Court Rules Against Christian Freedom

It was a very disappointing June 15 when the long-awaited decision of the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) turned out to be a blow against the exercise of Christian freedom. The majority (7-2) of the court ruled against the proposed law school of Trinity Western University (TWU). The contested issue was whether it was reasonable for the Law Societies of British Columbia and Ontario not to approve TWU's proposed law school because they objected to the university's Community Covenant which affirmed the biblical view of marriage.

The Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) was one of many interveners in the case, with André Schutten and John Sikkema acting on its behalf. After the judgment was released, these two lawyers noted several major problems with the majority judgment.

The decision "justifies the law societies' rejection of TWU not based on an intelligible legal rule or standard, but based on the undefined, amorphous concepts of 'Charter values' and 'public interest.' The majority [of the court] says the law societies were entitled to choose to give the meaning they wanted to their statutory objective to protect the 'public interest.'" Such a subjective approach to the issue at hand means that what was decisive in resolving this case is not the law of the land, or for that matter the Charter, but prevailing public opinion. As ARPA further explained: "Neither the law societies nor the courts are in the business of public opinion polling, nor should they make decisions based on prevailing public opinion on sensitive issues."

Furthermore, the SCC "fails to recognize the public interest benefits of a diversity of educational institutions and a diversity of moral and philosophical perspectives in the legal profession. . . . It is not against the public interest for individuals or civic institutions to hold to different views on sexual morality and marriage."

For ARPA, "Perhaps most disappointing from our perspective, the majority [of the court] failed to account for or

even address the equality rights of prospective TWU students or TWU's freedom of association." The message seems to be: it's alright to be a Christian, but keep your religion to yourself. Do not bring it into the public square. Such an implication is most disheartening for a nation that was founded on a Christian heritage. To affirm Christian beliefs and biblical morals is now seen as detrimental to society! Indeed, as André Schutten pointed out in an ARPA video of June 15, 2018, the majority decision of the court holds that if a Christian community maintains a biblical view of marriage or sexuality, then maintaining such a belief is harmful to any gays or lesbians who may be part of that community (sections 96, 98 of the decision). In other words, you should not hold to biblical norms within a Christian community in our current culture for it hurts those who disagree. Here is not only a lack of understanding of what a loving Christian community entails, but it is also another indication of our highest court's complete abandonment of biblical norms for our life as a nation.

The two dissenting judges strongly objected to the majority decision, citing, among other reasons, that by rejecting TWU graduates, the Law Societies in fact denied access to the public square "to a segment of Canadian society, solely on religious grounds" (sec. 261), thus infringing on their freedom of religion. The minority also stated that "what is troubling. . . is the imposition of judicially preferred 'values' to limit constitutionally protected rights, including the right to hold other values" (sec. 308).

The SCC's decision will undoubtedly have ramifications, although it is not clear at the moment what they will be.

Sources used: Unless indicated otherwise, quotations are from "Supreme Court rules against TWU" on ARPA's website; the full text of the decision "Law Society of British Columbia v. Trinity Western University" can be found on the website of the SCC.





# Clarion Kids

## The Parable of the Sower

### Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-9

Jesus told the people a parable about a man sowing seed. Some seed fell on the path and the birds ate it. Some seed fell on rocky ground, but it couldn't grow roots and the sun quickly dried it up. Some seed fell among thorns and it wasn't able to grow. But some seed fell in good soil and was able to grow into a rich harvest. Jesus used this story to explain what can happen when people hear God's Word. Every Sunday we go to church. We have to make sure that when we hear God's Word it is being planted in good soil in our hearts. Then it will be able to take root and grow up strong.

Go to [www.clarionmagazine.ca](http://www.clarionmagazine.ca) to print and colour this picture!



### Crossword Puzzle



Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.

#### Down

1. What kind of story is this?
2. What the seed on rocky ground couldn't grow.
4. Some seed fell among these.
5. Where we go on Sunday.

#### Across

3. We have to make sure our \_\_\_\_\_ provides good soil for God's word.
6. What ate the seed on the path.
7. The seed on good soil gave a rich \_\_\_\_\_.
8. A person who plants seeds.

by Emily Nijenhuis



# Q The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized right away; what about newcomers today?

*In our Bible study society we are studying the book of Acts and came across the story about the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized immediately. Why is it that when we have a newcomer to the faith we require classes and instruction before they can be baptized? We have brought together adult baptism and profession of faith – why is that?*

**A** This Ethiopian servant of the Candace had been in Jerusalem to worship (presumably) God. He knows the LORD. That can be derived from the fact that in Egypt (and further south, in present day Sudan) there were Jewish colonies. Thus, he established contacts with people of God living there and he became acquainted with the writings of the Jews. In this way he developed a deep respect for the God of Israel. He became a “God-fearing” man who was attracted to the people of God, to the LORD of this people, and to the Word of this God. He even made a trip to Jerusalem in order to worship there the God of Israel.

This journey to Jerusalem may not have been sheer joy. Assuming that the man had studied the Scriptures, he will have scrutinized the Law of Moses. In it he will have learned about the restrictions contained in it regarding a eunuch (Lev 21:16; Deut 23:1). The fact that he was “blemished” and “cut” in his body meant that he would be excluded from the priesthood, from being circumcised, and from becoming a proselyte. Nevertheless, he was attracted to the God of Israel very much, knew him, loved him, and desired to worship him! Even though he could only enter the temple

court in the outer court (of the heathen), he still wanted to come near the LORD as closely as possible.

The Ethiopian eunuch had purchased the scroll of Isaiah. That could well be for what he had read in Isaiah 56:3-5, regarding the hope and future that was prophesied there concerning people like him (a dry tree). Then we read in Acts 8 that the Lord calls Philip to go and join this eunuch in his chariot. He hears him read the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 53, the passage about the suffering servant of the LORD. The eunuch doesn’t know who is meant with this suffering servant and asked Philip for an explanation. Philip, then, has an opportunity to preach Jesus the Christ, not only as the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 but as the fulfilment of all the Scriptures. Philip opens the Scriptures that already were so familiar to this Ethiopian eunuch. Then we should not forget that this Ethiopian was well-versed in the Word of God already. Only now, everything falls into place!

Therefore, thanks to the proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, all the doors to the salvation in Christ were opened to him. In Jesus there was life, and hope, also for a eunuch; he will take him up in his kingdom, give him a name that is better than sons and daughters. When you know Jesus as the Christ of the Scriptures then you won’t be a dry tree;

then you are alive, by faith in him! That's when he wants to belong to the LORD too; he desires to receive the sign of the adoption into the family of the Father. So, after he confessed his faith in the Son of God, the Saviour and Messiah, he receives the sign of baptism.

Hence, this baptism is not a quick one, administered after a mini pre-confession class, but rather the conclusion of a long road of studying God's Word, the Law, and the Prophets, leading him to see the fulfilment and salvation in Jesus Christ, who died for sinners and who restores what is broken!

## Q Why not use names like "scriba," "praeses," and "moderamen"?

*Why don't we use the words "scriba" and "praeses" instead of clerk and chairman? Council meeting sounds more like a meeting in a municipality than of a consistory, or an ecclesiastical meeting. Can't you use the words "consistory wide and small" instead of council and consistory meeting?*

A It's interesting that I received this question while I was engaged in an Interim Ministry in the Free Reformed Churches of Pretoria and Johannesburg, South Africa. There they call the clerk a "skriba," the chairman is "vorsitter," who together with "skriba" and "vorsitter" form the "moderamen," while they call the consistory the "kerkeraad." Here too we recognize the Dutch background, just as I do in the questioner's expression of the "consistory broad and small" ("brede and smalle kerkenraad" in The Netherlands).

Every country has its own history and *lingua franca*. That's true for the language in the church as well (the ecclesiastical lingo). It is what it is, and "what it is" has become common lingo over the years, which people won't change because they're used to a certain expression for it, and everyone knows what it means. The word "council," too, stands for more than a board in a municipality; it's a common expression denoting a meeting of governors of one kind or other.

There is no norm or value, no reason or argument to be made for one name or other. In Holland they call it one way (Latin background), in Canada another way, and in South Africa or New Zealand again another way. Two years ago, I served in an Interim Ministry in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (Hastings) and they speak about a "session" for the consistory (or council), about a "scribe" for clerk, and about a presbytery for classis; they have a "hybrid" kind of Church Order, seeing that their churches have either a Presbyterian or Reformed background in their history.

*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

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# The Ten Commandments

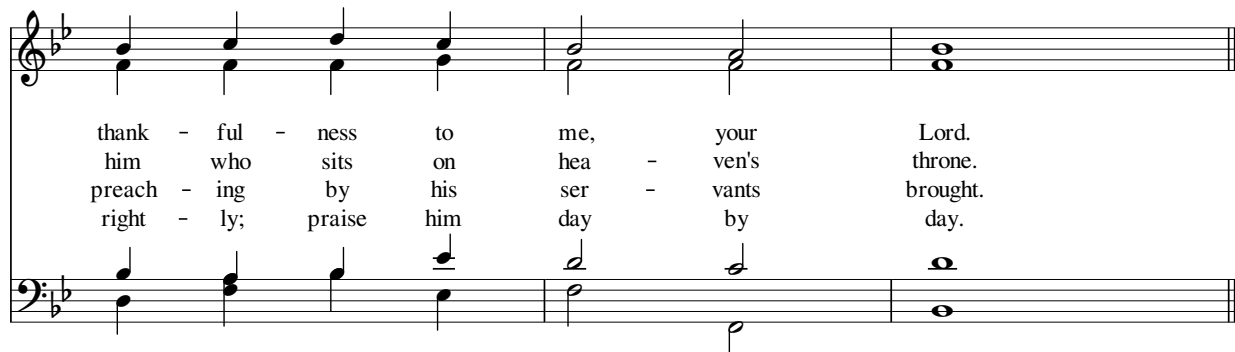
1. I am the Lord, your God who set you free. I brought you  
 2. The first com - mand - ment says that I must know the one true  
 3. The sec - ond word re - minds us not to make an im - age  
 4. The third com - mand - ment tells us what God hates: he loathes the

out from your cap - tiv - i - ty. Do not for - get that you were once en -  
 God, and to him hon - our show. I will a - void and flee i - dol - a -  
 of our God; we must for - sake all self-willed wor - ship of our jeal - ous  
 one who his Name den - i - grates. Do not blas - pheme the ho - ly Name of

slaved by that cruel Phar - aoh, who a - gainst you raved.  
 try and trust in God with all hu - mil - i - ty.  
 Lord. Such sense - less reve - rence goes a - gainst his word.  
 God which by all peo - ple must be feared and awed.

You are my chil - dren, hear my cove - nant - words and live in  
 I will ex - pect all good from him a - lone and wor - ship  
 He's told us how he wants us to be taught: through liv - ing  
 Ex - alt the Lord in all you do and say. Con - fess him





5. The fourth commandment says that we must rest to hear the preaching, that we may be blest. With all God's people call upon his Name. In prayer and song we will the Lord acclaim. Rest evermore from all your evil ways. Begin right now a life of constant praise.

6. The fifth commandment calls me to obey both of my parents, who teach me God's way. Them I must honour and love faithfully and do the things with which God's Word agrees. If I submit to their wise ruling hand I may look forward to the promised land.

7. The sixth commandment says I'm not to kill my neighbour nor am I to do him ill. Moreover I am not to harm myself but take great care of my God-given life. I must show love and heartfelt friendliness to every neighbour, with all gentleness.

8. The seventh word forbids unchastity. It's cursed by God, and from it we must flee. Whether we're single or are man and wife the Lord calls us to live a holy life. Because I am a temple of the Lord I'll not do that which by him is abhorred.

9. The eighth commandment forbids robbery and wicked schemes, false weights, and usury. Greed is condemned as is all squandering. Creator God is Lord of everything. I must be gen'rous and work faithfully to help the ones who suffer poverty.

10. The ninth commandment calls me to be true in all I say and everything I do. I may not twist my neighbour's spoken word, but love the truth as one who serves the Lord. Deceitful words are Satan's own domain. My neighbour's reputation I'll maintain.

11. The tenth commandment says that I must be well satisfied with what God gave to me. My neighbour's goods belong to him alone. I must respect the things he calls his own—his fields, his cattle, all his lands and house, his stewardship from God, and his own spouse.

12. We've been delivered from our wretchedness by Christ, who shed his precious blood for us. Now by his Spirit we are born once more that we may praise our Lord, whom we adore. All praise to God who sits on heaven's throne. Praise Father, Son, and Spirit, Three in One.

### Press Release of Classis Northern Ontario, June 1, 2018

Classis Northern Ontario was convened on June 1, 2018, in the Canadian Reformed Church at Grand Valley. Rev. Visscher on behalf of the convening church of Grand Valley opened the meeting in a Christian manner. All the churches were properly represented and Classis was constituted. Rev. Visscher served as Chairman, Rev. Pol as Vice Chairman, and Rev. VanLuik as Clerk.

The Chairman, Rev. Visscher welcomed Darren Feenstra and family to Classis. Note was also taken of the fact that the Kamphuis family in Orangeville has had a child that passed on to the Lord just before birth. The Chairman reflected on the impact that this event has had on the family and the community and prayed that they may be comforted.

Classis proceeded with the Preparatory Examination of br. Darren Feenstra, for the purpose of becoming eligible for call, after finding that the necessary documents were in order. Br. Feenstra then presented his sermon proposal on Luke 16:19-31. Classis determined that he had sustained his sermon proposal and that the examination could proceed. At the conclusion of the examination on Old Testament, New Testament, and Doctrine and Creeds, Classis judged that he had sustained the exam and declared him eligible for call in the Federation. Br. Darren Feenstra promised to abide by the Word of God as summarized in

the creeds and confessions and the Vice Chairman, Rev. Pol gave thanks in prayer.

Reports were given on church visits to the following churches: Grand Valley and Owen Sound. These church visitation reports were received with thankfulness.

The churches answered in the affirmative that the ministry of the office bearers is being continued and the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured (Art. 44 C.O.). The church at Fergus North asked for advice regarding a matter of discipline. Advice was given.

Classis dealt with a proposal from the Living Word Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph to establish a classical committee to review the classical regulations re: Examination Procedures.

Classis has adopted the proposal and has assigned Living Word Canadian Reformed Church to propose names for the committee.

The next classis was scheduled for September 28, 2018, to be convened by Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph and officers for the next classis were appointed. Guelph Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church was appointed to respond to invitations to Classis where feasible.

The Chairman noted with thankfulness that the meeting could be conducted in brotherly harmony. After thanksgiving in prayer, the meeting was closed.

*Rev. D. Pol  
Vice Chairman at that time* 