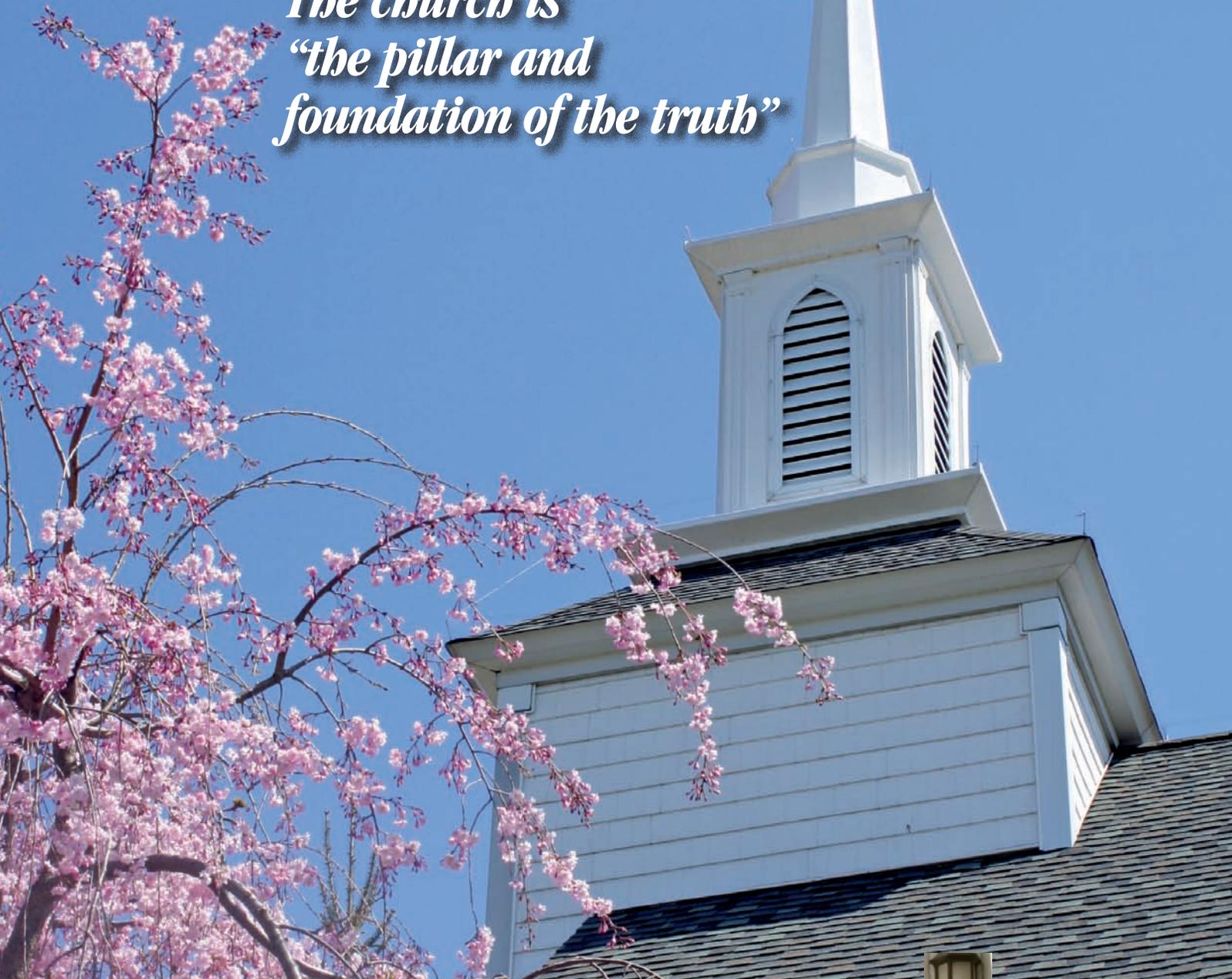


Clarion



THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
Volume 60, No. 6 • March 11, 2011

*The church is
“the pillar and
foundation of the truth”*



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- Hermeneutics





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The Right of Private Interpretation?

Believers are expected to accept the teaching presented to them

We live in a pluralistic society. This means that we have to find ways to live with people who hold many different ideas and beliefs, and who follow different lifestyles than us. We are not supposed to pass judgment on each other. Our society is made possible by respecting each other's personal rights and freedoms. This is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

This "rights" mindset also shows up in the life of the church. This should not surprise us. The church is supposed to be the salt and light of the world. The reality is often the reverse in that the church picks up the habits and mindset of the society in which it lives. This includes the ideas of rights and freedoms.

*The church is
 "the pillar and foundation of the truth"*

In a society where we are to respect personal choices without passing judgment, believers may feel hard pressed to judge the opinions and actions of other believers. Discussions about the teachings of Scripture are peppered with phrases like, "I think," or, "in my opinion." Official teachings of the church can be overruled by saying, "I just don't see it that way," or, "I just don't agree." Possibly it might be put even stronger by saying, "I cannot in good conscience accept that." A personal opinion is given more importance than the accepted doctrine of the church. The individual overrules the community. The real clincher in the argument may be to say that it is one of the principles of the Reformation that every believer has the right to interpret the Bible for himself.

We should realize that talk of the right of every believer to interpret the Bible for himself is neither rooted in history, nor, more importantly, in Scripture. Historically, it is usually linked to Martin Luther's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and the right of private interpretation. In my reading, I came across an article in which the author showed that this is a misrepresentation of what Luther taught.¹ His two main points are worth passing on.

First of all, he pointed out that when Luther spoke of the priesthood of all believers he was dealing with the contrast that had developed over the centuries between clergy and laity. At the dawn of the Reformation, the prevailing thought was that the people could only have access to God through the priest. Over against this, Luther taught that each believer had direct communion with Christ through faith. Furthermore, the priesthood of all believers also obligated the believer to serve others. This explanation brings to mind the elaboration on the phrase concerning the communion of saints in Lord's Day 21:55. Each and every believer has direct communion with Christ. This is immediately followed by mentioning the obligation to serve fellow believers.

Second, he pointed out that when Luther spoke of the right of private interpretation, he did not mean that each believer was free to interpret Scripture for himself. Rather, private interpretation or judgment has to be understood in relation to the official ministry of the church. He quotes another author who stated, "For Luther. . . the office of all believers was being exercised privately when one brother mediated the Word of God to another in personal converse. In this context, 'private' means simply, 'non official'!"²

The suggestion that the Reformation established the right for every believer to interpret the Bible for himself is also contradicted by the development of

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

Subscriptions: clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

Advertisements: clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

Website: www.premierpublishing.ca

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Subscription Rates for 2011

	Regular Mail	Air Mail
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International	\$95.00	\$145.00

*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra. GST/HST – No. 890967359RT

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Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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various confessions. The followers of Luther were bound to the Augsburg Confession. The Church of England also formulated its faith in confessions. Those influenced by John Calvin also developed confessions which bound them together. The development of confessions in the three main streams of the Reformation is evidence that the Reformers did not teach that each individual has the right to interpret Scripture for himself but interpretation is the task of the community of believers.

If one wants to look for the practice of the right to interpret the Bible for oneself in the time of the Reformation, one would need to look to the Anabaptists. That right, however, led to endless splintering. It is estimated that, in Calvin's lifetime, there were at least thirty-five different types of Anabaptist groups.

What's Inside

In this issue Rev. Eric Kampen addresses the "right of private interpretation." We live in a pluralistic society, which functions by not passing judgement on those who have different beliefs and lifestyles from our own. Does this "rights" mentality affect the life of the church? Do we have the right to interpret the Bible for ourselves?

Speaking of interpreting the Bible, Rev. John VanRietschoten discusses two approaches of hermeneutics, and poses the question: What is a minister of the Word going to do when "new" hermeneutics undermine his trust in the Bible as the inspired Word of God?

Rev. Wes Bredenhof reviews *Letters to a Young Calvinist* by James K.A. Smith, which deals with advice written to young people discovering Reformed theology. He also reviews *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom*, by Peter J. Leithart.

Also dealing with young believers in our church, Rev. Reuben Bredenhof writes about preparing for public profession of faith and the questions that we often have at this stage of life. A timely subject as we approach the season when many young people in our federation traditionally make public profession of faith. Soon many of us will witness another group of church members making this beautiful declaration with confidence and boldness. What a blessing!

Issue 6 includes regular columns Treasures New and Old and Roadside Assistance. There is also a press release from the Board of Governors of our Seminary.

Laura Veenendaal

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More fundamental than an argument from history is the argument from Scripture. It does not support the right of each believer to interpret Scripture for himself. On the contrary, believers are expected to accept the teaching presented to them. We come across references to a clearly defined body of teachings. Jude, for example, wrote about "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). In the introduction to his teaching about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul starts off by listing some of the core teachings of the gospel. Over the centuries, the teachings of Scripture have been captured in the creeds and confessions of the church. Paul wrote to Timothy that the church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15).

Besides this, one should also consider the logical consequences of the right of every believer to interpret Scripture for himself. The logical consequence is that the unity of the church would no longer be in the content of faith. At best there would be a unity in the activity of believing, but each person might have totally different beliefs. Logically, this would lead to a church that could include people from all the different religions of the world.

But what if, upon serious reflection, one cannot get his mind around a certain teaching of the church? Perhaps a person even has gone so far as seeking a change in a certain doctrine but the church has upheld its teaching. Does one then have to go against his conscience? Not really. Practically, a person could leave the church. Without doubt one could find some group that shares his or her private interpretation.

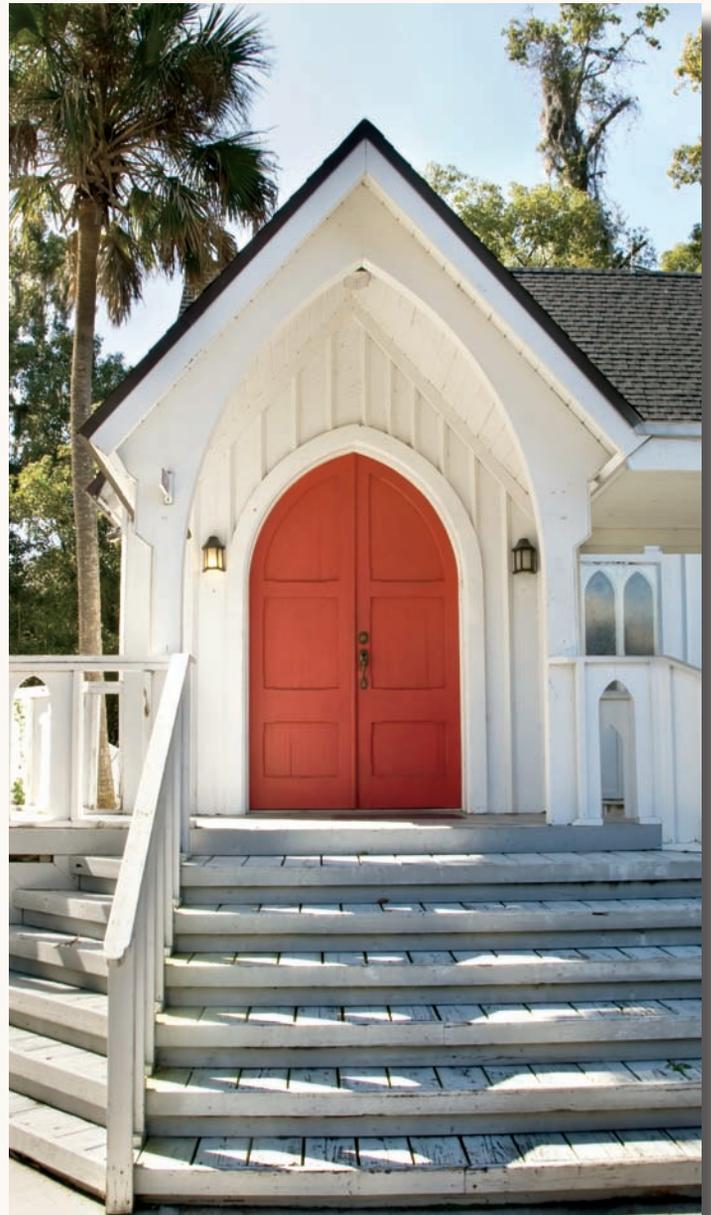
There is also another way, which is more in keeping with the nature of the gospel. That other way is to follow the teaching of the Apostle Paul as found in Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." In the case of understanding Scripture, this would amount to considering the interpretation of others better than your own interpretation. It would mean that in humility one would say, "I submit myself to the wisdom and direction of others, even though I personally don't see it yet." In the end, this would be the better way, for this would give recognition to the fact that the interpretation of Scripture is not a private matter but belongs to the church as community.

All this impresses on us that we should not let ourselves be driven by the "rights" mindset of our

society. In humility we should be ready to set aside our own interpretation. After all, the church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth."

¹ Mark Rogers, "A Dangerous Idea? Martin Luther, E.Y. Mullins, and the Priesthood of all Believers," *Westminster Theological Journal* 72 (2010): 119-134.

² *Ibid.*, 132 (Brian Gerrish, "Priesthood and Ministry in the Theology of Luther," *CH* 34 (1965): 411).





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Saviour of Little Faith

MATTHEW 13:52

"Gideon said to God, 'Do not be angry with me. . . . Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew.' That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew."

Judges 6:39-40

James is by far one of the most popular books for Bible study groups. People are inevitably attracted to the practical and concrete commands found throughout this epistle. Most likely, you've studied James at some point. And as you did, you likely spent some time mulling over chapter 1 and the subjects of trials and temptations.

In those discussions Gideon is sometimes introduced as one who tested God. So, the question gets raised, may we today test him? Can we, like Gideon, demand signs from God? Does Gideon give us an example of how we as believers are to make decisions in our daily lives? Are we to put out the fleece, so to speak?

The story of Gideon and the fleece is not given so that we'll have a procedure to follow when we're in doubt about what to do with our lives. Even if we come up with a substitute for the fleece, this is not what God is teaching us in his Word here. Rather, what we see revealed is a man of little faith and, more importantly and centrally, a God of great patience.

Gideon had already received a dramatic sign or two from God. Earlier in chapter 6, we read of how fire rose out of a rock and consumed the meat and broth. This was done in response to Gideon's request for a sign. Then, when Gideon destroys the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole, God provides another sign by

using Gideon's father to save his life. Now Gideon is still looking for signs. This man is no example of faith. His faith is weak and constantly in need of propping up. How could this one be the long awaited Saviour of God's people? How could he be the one sent to crush the head of the serpent? He can't be. But despite all of that, God is very patient with him. We might be inclined to say, "Forget this one, he's a dud. Every time God gives him something to do, he backs away in fear. He always needs someone to hold his hand. Find somebody else." Nevertheless, God acts and gives Gideon yet another sign. God's power is made perfect in weakness. God chooses what is weak and despised to shame the strong. In this way, even because of his weakness, nay, even through his weakness, Gideon points ahead to the cross.

The Saviour who hung on that cross was weak and despised by men, but he was not lacking in faith. He didn't require signs from God to confirm him in his life's work. Those signs were given, but not for his sake. Think of the voice from heaven, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." That voice was for the benefit of others. Or think of when Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead. Even before he went to Bethany, he said that what he was about to do was "for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). God

heard him and the heart of Lazarus started beating again; Jesus said this was "for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me" (v. 42). Jesus didn't need these signs for himself. His faith didn't require strengthening.

On the other hand, there's us. Since we are so often weak in faith, God does give us signs. Because he is patient with us and because the Lord knows that we are only dust (Ps 103:14), he gives us not only his Word, but also the sacraments. As we confess from Scripture in Article 33 of the Belgic Confession, God is mindful of our insensitivity and weakness. God was patient with Gideon and so he is also with us. Therefore he gives not only the audible preaching of the gospel through the regular administration of the Word, but also a visible preaching of the gospel in the sacraments.

No, the sacraments don't work as signs telling us the details of our lives, but they do proclaim to us what is most important and most comforting: we have a powerful and faithful Saviour with whom we are united. All his perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness are ours. Moreover, we also have the gift of his Spirit. In Isaiah 11:2, he is called the Spirit of wisdom. God promises that the Spirit will work with his Word to give us wisdom in making decisions about the details of our lives. Pray for this work and trust that he will do it.





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Preparing for a Profession

Spring is in the air

The birds are singing. The flowers are blooming. The sap is running. And young people among us are preparing to profess their faith. In many churches in our federation, one of the sure signs of spring is the various activities that surround youth making a public profession of faith. There are interviews to be held with the consistory, announcements of names made to the congregation, and then there is that happy day when the church auditorium is filled to overflowing and those young people stand at the front and give their solemn "I do."

It's a joyful time in the life of a congregation, when young brothers and sisters declare publicly their love for the Lord, their faith in his promises, and their commitment to serve Christ as living members of his church. We should know by now not to take any of these things for granted, for there are many churches today where the young people have long since found the exit. Instead, we give all the praise to God the Holy Spirit, who works his grace in the hearts of his people.

A phenomenon to ponder

While it could sometimes be viewed as just another matter of course in Canadian Reformed church life, it's good to take a closer look at this spring phenomenon known as "profession of faith." What's it all about? Why is it so necessary? And as for those young people who are maybe thinking about taking this step, how can they know when they're ready to do so?

More than a spectator

We first need to back up a little. Before someone may partake in the Lord's Supper, it is necessary that he have a true faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Already on that night when Christ instituted this sacrament, he commanded his disciples, "Do this" (Luke 22:19). More than being passive spectators at some mysterious rite, Jesus said that those at the table needed to be actively involved – they had something

to do! The disciples had to participate in the broken bread and the cup of wine in a spirit of "remembrance," reflecting on the imminent sacrifice of the Lord and its saving power for them as sinners. To borrow the words of the Lord's Supper form, they had to "remember and believe."

Is it possible that some people, back then and also now, could partake in a spirit other than one of faith? In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul warns against just this, eating and drinking "in an unworthy manner" (v. 27). Let's understand that word "unworthy" in the right way. It's certainly not that we can make ourselves deserving of God's grace in this meal, as if he hands out nourishment and refreshment based on the goodness of our lives or the strength of our beliefs. But Christ has given the Supper for our encouragement, which means that if it will have any benefit to us at all, it must be celebrated with a sincere attitude and from a believing perspective. Table manners matter!

The problem in Corinth was that many were treating the Lord's Supper as an opportunity to flaunt their wealth or to let loose in some indulging. They evidently thought nothing of the privilege of coming to the table and God's judgment was upon them because of it (v. 30). But anyone who participates in the sacrament needs to come knowing himself to be in a position of utter dependence on God's grace in Christ. This is what Paul insisted to the Corinthians, that as they celebrated they had to "discern the body of Christ" (v. 29). That is, there has to be an acknowledgment of how the body of Jesus was once offered up as the only atoning sacrifice for sin. And if there's that acknowledgement, then let there also be faith.

Speak up!

According to the Bible, our faith must never remain a hidden commodity, inert and silent. It needs to be expressed, actively and publicly. That word "profession" implies that it's an open declaration, that we speak out with confidence and boldness. This is the

pattern that we find in the Scriptures, like in Matthew 10:32 where Jesus says, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven." The example of the young man Timothy can also be pointed to, when he made "the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim 6:12). Even the act of participating in the Lord's Supper is like a public declaration of our faith in Christ: "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you *proclaim* the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Joyful celebration of this sacrament is a clear testimony to the Lord in whom we've put our trust and the Lord for whom we wait.

How can they know when they're ready to do so?

The Triune God receives the glory when his people openly and boldly speak of their faith in him. What is more, we profess our faith in the midst of the congregation with whom we enjoy spiritual unity and who can also assist us in our continued walk with Christ. Such profession of faith has always been a public and communal act, like David demonstrates in Psalm 40, "I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly. . . I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation" (vv. 9-10).

The final "examination"

In connection with public profession of faith, the consistory of the church has a significant responsibility. They are tasked by the Lord Jesus to keep his table pure and holy. This means that when a young person comes before the consistory in order to be interviewed prior to admission, he or she must show real evidence of faith. If we take the definition of faith in Lord's Day 7 as our general guide, this "faith" means two things. First, that he or she has a sure knowledge of the Bible's teachings – what's the *content* of this member's faith? Second, that he or she has a firm confidence in these things – what's the *conviction* of faith?

Of course, the elders cannot know for certain that each person will go on to celebrate the Supper in a worthy manner. Here our confession in Canons of Dort III/IV:15 is good counsel, "About those who



outwardly profess their faith and amend their lives we are to judge and speak in the most favourable way, according to the example of the apostles, for the inner recesses of the heart are unknown to us." All the same, the elders can ask wide-ranging questions about the member's understanding of the Word, and they can also ask probing questions about personal engagement in that same Word. Has this brother, has this sister, embraced God's promises with both arms, and have they also endeavoured to put God's commandments into practice?

It's probably true that young people are sometimes frightened at the thought of sitting down for a discussion with all those grey-headed men, gathered around an imposing and book-strewn table. But while the elders are certainly seeking to preserve the holiness of the Lord's Supper, they aren't out to trip someone up or to cause personal embarrassment. As shepherds of Christ's flock, the elders desire nothing more than to hear a sincere testimony of living faith in the Lord, and to grant admission to the sacrament.

Am I ready?

All this means that a young person has a lot to think about and to pray about. Professing the faith needs to be something done in deep humility, in full awareness, and serious desire. Paul urged the Corinthians too, to “examine themselves” (11:28). Before they profaned something holy or trivialized something important, the Corinthians needed to test themselves spiritually – even on an ongoing basis. Asking direct and honest questions would help to determine whether their faith was genuine, or whether they were going to the table for the wrong reasons entirely.

The elders desire nothing more than to hear a sincere testimony of living faith

Admittedly, asking questions of oneself can be dangerous. It’s an exercise that has been known to stir up the worrying clouds of doubt. Questions posed also by others can raise issues that we hadn’t even considered before, and that can be troubling. But true self-examination, also before a public profession of faith, should never be conducted without holding the mirror of God’s Word steadily before us (see James 1:23-25). When God’s children gaze intently into that mirror, some questions will receive tough answers – as they should – but more questions will find answers that are richly encouraging and assuring.

Questions to consider: Faith?

The first and most important question to consider is this: Do I have faith? And that’s a tough one. Faith, something residing deep within the heart and therefore somewhat intangible, can be hard to see. From reading certain books or talking to other Christians, there is sometimes also the expectation that every true believer will have a real and definable conversion experience, a “born again birthday” that you can pinpoint on the calendar. And if you can’t, do you really have faith?

But working with Lord’s Day 7 is again helpful. There we confess that truth faith is “a sure knowledge of all that God has revealed to us in his Word. At the same time, it is a firm confidence that not only to others but also to me, God has granted forgiveness

of sins. . . .” The key words again are *knowledge* and *confidence*. So let it be asked: Do I know the Scriptures, their story and their teaching, and how they’ve been summarized in the confessions? And when I read the Bible or listen to it preached, do those words find a certain resonance in my life? That is, can I say that the Scriptures describe my deepest struggles and temptations, but that they also bring provide me with solid comfort and hope, and set before me my true purpose and calling?

Motivation?

It’s also good to examine oneself on the matter of motivation. For what reason would I be professing my faith? Is it because I want to acknowledge gratefully God’s covenant claim on me? Is it because I desire to commit my life publicly to Jesus Christ and his kingdom and church? So our motivation should be. Yet there can also be an unfortunate pressure to sign up for profession because pretty well everyone else in your class is doing it. Or family pressure, when Dad and Mom all but presume that you will be “taking the next step” – and they’ll be disappointed if you don’t. Or might it be for the sake of convenience, to at last free up your Tuesday nights for things other than attending classes in the cold basement of a church?

In this connection, some consistories have seen wisdom in changing the procedure around profession of faith. The timing of it is not so much according to the completion of a certain course of training, but according to the young person’s own decision and request. The instruction might continue, but baptized members are free to request the opportunity at any time. Profession doesn’t need to take place in the spring then, but at different points in the year, often just before the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Perseverance?

It’s been said that profession is only one step in the marathon that is a life of faith. The Apostle Paul’s words in Philippians 3:14 speak to the truth of that, “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” And so a young person would also do well to ask: After the excitement of this moment fades, am I firmly committed to pressing on in godliness, to growing in faith? Exactly what will I do to carry on this journey after making

public profession? There should be an earnest desire that the process both of learning about the Word and “perfecting holiness” (2 Cor 7:1) will continue in the coming years.

Prior to partaking

The knowledge component of our faith should include special attention for the sacrament of Lord’s Supper. As Paul counseled the Corinthians, there ought to be a “discerning of the body of Christ.” Before a person requests admission to the table, he or she needs to understand what the Lord’s Supper is all about. What’s the purpose and point of this celebration? What does it say about the presence of Christ, or about the unity of believers? And do I long for this communion with Christ and his people?

Our faith needs to be expressed, actively and publicly

Together with an understanding of the sacrament, someone should consider whether he’s mature enough to examine himself in a meaningful way. We’ve already said that self-analysis is a much needed exercise – and not only before participating in the Lord’s Supper every couple of months, but at frequent intervals in our Christian life. For if we’ll effectively resist temptation and sin, then we need to search out and identify what our regular and repeated sins actually are. If we’ll humbly live in dependence on God, then we must honestly consider whether we are setting our hope upon him in all circumstances, and cherishing his Word of grace. And if we’ll gradually progress in our service of the Lord, then we ought to recognize what good abilities we’ve received for this holy task, and what shortcomings we still have. Are we now dedicated to glorifying Christ in the church, in this world, and with the rest of our life?

More questions could be asked. A prospective “professor” should read carefully the Form for the Public Profession of Faith, where further challenging points are raised. For example, what about submitting to the discipline of the church? It’s not an easily accepted idea in today’s culture, but do I acknowledge that the elders have been given authority over me, to

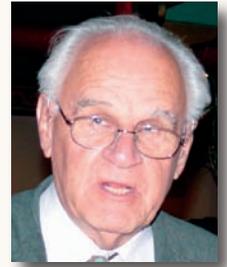
encourage me and also to admonish or discipline me, if necessary, for my good? And what about those last, ominous-sounding – but also reassuring! – words in the Form, “After you have suffered a little while. . .” (1 Pet 5:10-11)? Am I really ready to *suffer* on account of my profession, prepared to take up my cross daily and follow Christ? No matter what, will I trust in his promise to strengthen and restore?

Responding to your baptism

As a young person reflects on all these questions, it must be done against the backdrop of what’s really happening at public profession of faith. Our “I do” on that special day doesn’t come out of the blue; it’s not a dialogue that we’ve seen fit to initiate. In reality, our declaration is only a lowly response to the majestic word of someone else. Long ago, the LORD received us into his covenant, and at baptism he graciously signed and sealed to us his promises. It happened at a time when we lacked any ability or will to respond, yet we weren’t considered to be any less members of the covenant. But as that baptized baby grew into a toddler, became a child, entered adolescence, and matured as a teenager and young adult, the question of our response to those promises of God became more and more pronounced. We are already in the covenant, so do we live like it? We already have God’s Word in our possession, so do we believe it?

In baptism, the LORD placed beautiful obligations upon us

This lends an urgency to the matter of professing our faith. Years ago the Triune God extended his grace toward us, and spoke his Word of promise to us. It would therefore be wrong to ignore this divine initiative and sinful to delay our response unnecessarily. In baptism, the LORD placed beautiful obligations upon us, chief among which is a believing acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So let us pray intently for his Holy Spirit, so that we might respond – and *continue* to respond!—with a voice of faith, loud and clear. 



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Hermeneutics: A Difficult Word? Yes, But. . .

Hermeneutics is not an everyday word. The word hermeneutics is used by ministers and theologians who research the Bible. For most of us hermeneutics is a difficult word. But, I am not going to tire you with a scientific discourse.

I looked into the Acts of Synod 2010 and found the word "hermeneutics" there. The Synod of our churches decided to approach our Dutch sister churches on the matter of hermeneutics. There is concern about how hermeneutics is taught and practiced in our sister churches. Synod took this action on behalf of all the members of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

This lays upon you and me the need to know something about hermeneutics. Hermeneutics has to do with how you approach the Bible and how you interpret the Bible. There are two ways in which to approach the Bible. You either approach the Bible as written by humans about God, or you approach the Bible as written by God about himself, inspiring humans to write down his words. To put it differently, you can approach the Bible horizontally – with a focus on human authors – or vertically, with faith in the one divine author, namely God the Holy Spirit. For many centuries the horizontal human approach has been practiced by, what I call, worldly philosophers and historians. For many more centuries the divine author approach has been practiced by men and women born of the Spirit of God. I hope I am right when I say that the divine author approach has been practiced by you and by me.

Talking to the author

Have you ever read a book and wished you could ask the author about his intention? What message did this author really want to bring us?

Let us take the trilogy of J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*. The reading of Tolkien's books leaves you wondering what this author really wanted to tell us. Tolkien died the second of September 1973. It has thus become impossible to ask Tolkien to interpret his books for you. Tolkien's books have become one of the great literary texts of the twentieth century.

The Bible is the Great Text from God for the world. The author is God the Holy Spirit who is and who was and who lives for ever. You cannot ask Tolkien, or Shakespeare, or Plato, or Pharaoh Akhenaten what their texts tell us. However – and there lies the great difference! – God the Holy Spirit is definitely able to interpret his own book for you. As you read your Bible you can pray to God the Holy Spirit to enlighten you and to enlarge your understanding. There you have the wonderful basis for interpreting the Bible.

We tend to speak of Luther, Calvin, and John Knox as the great reformers of the church. By God's grace they were gifts to the church; their greatness came from God the Holy Spirit, who heard them when they prayed for understanding. They were on their knees begging for understanding from the living divine author of the Scriptures. Whenever you hear from the pulpit a true explanation of the Word, rest assured: your pastor has been on his knees prayerfully seeking from the Holy Spirit the understanding of the message. The first rule of hermeneutics is listening to God the Holy Spirit as you study the Bible. He is the first author.

Compare Scripture with Scripture

God the Holy Spirit is the author of the whole of the Bible and of all its parts. The Bible contains many and diverse books. Since there is only one first author of these books there is one line and one purpose that runs through the whole of the Bible from Genesis to

Revelation. It is God himself who has united all these books into one. God has made it possible for us to compare Scripture with Scripture.

It may happen that our reading leaves us with a question. When that happens we must apply a second rule of hermeneutics: Scripture is its own interpreter. What is difficult in one place of the Bible is explained somewhere else in the same Bible. Regular and prayerful reading of the Bible brings us the ability to find answers to our questions.

These simple rules of hermeneutics are adhered to and taught at our Theological Seminary in Hamilton. On paper these are also the rules adhered to by the Theological University of our sister churches at Kampen, The Netherlands. However, the practice has become different. In practice the teaching of hermeneutics has been influenced by the hermeneutics of critical historians.

The hermeneutics of the critical historians

A major representative of this critical history method is Dr. Baruch Halpern.¹ In 1988 Halpern published his book *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History*. This book became very influential. From the title of his book you can see that Halpern is a student of the Old Testament.

Have you ever read a book and wished you could ask the author about his intention?

In this book Halpern specially focuses on the books of Joshua through the Kings. Of major interest to him are the books of Joshua and Judges. On page 13 of his book Halpern writes, "This volume limits itself to the former Prophets, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings." The book was republished in a paper edition in 1996.

While preparing his dissertation during the nineties, Koert Van Bekkum was doing post-graduate work at the Theological University of our sister churches. There Van Bekkum became acquainted with the works of Baruch Halpern. At one time Van Bekkum worked at an archaeological dig at Megiddo under the supervision of Dr. Halpern. Van Bekkum attended

a number of seminars by Halpern while at Megiddo.² In 2010 Van Bekkum earned his doctorate from the Theological University of our sister churches with honours (cum laude). The title of his dissertation is *From Conquest to Coexistence: Ideology and Antiquarian Intent in the Historiography of Israel's Settlement in Canaan*. The title of the dissertation reminds us of the work of Baruch Halpern. Van Bekkum is a dedicated student of Halpern, deals with the same material, and uses Halpern's methods. In contrast to Halpern, who approaches the Old Testament as the book of Israel, Van Bekkum tries to come to conclusions that are faithful to the Scriptures.

The big question now becomes whether it is possible to use Halpern's methods and remain faithful to the Scriptures.

The first thing that disappoints us in the approach of Baruch Halpern is his horizontalism. Halpern does not approach the Bible as God's revelation, written by men inspired by God the Holy Spirit. Rather, he approaches the Old Testament as the product of scribes whom he calls historians. A second item in which Halpern disappoints us is his claim that the scribes, who wrote Joshua and Judges, were not contemporaries but lived a few centuries later. Supposedly these scribes lived in the time of King Josiah. According to Halpern these scribes were historians who used sources about real events but recorded these events in an idealized manner. On page 68 of his book Halpern writes, "Fictionalized history is the almost right word." Because Halpern reads the book of Joshua as "almost fictionalized history," he has no room for miracles. According to Halpern the sun did not shine double time by divine command to give Israel the victory (Josh 10:12-13).

This partial and very brief sketch of Halpern's method must suffice for we must proceed to the question whether it is possible to use Halpern's method and come to a faithful reading of the "Former Prophets."

Dr. K. Van Bekkum's intention to praise the LORD [YHWH]

On p. 199 of Van Bekkum's dissertation we read the following words of praise: ". . .The story about YHWH's gracious gift of the land to the people of Israel. The variations in the descriptions of these items not only

make it possible to elaborate on the land as a beautiful present which is almost salvation itself and to sketch the process of it being handed over, but are also used to characterize the relation between YHWH and Israel. . . .”

Similar praise is found on p. 345 in the section *Scribes*, “Neither Joshua nor the king is in the centre of the attention, but only YHWH, their God, who gave the obedient leaders Joshua and David their glorious victories and whose guidance still enhances a promise for the future: if the king and the people are obedient, YHWH’s grace guarantees again the promise of the land.”

Similarly we read on p. 267, “Finally, YHWH’s position as a unique god (sic) is most prominent in his violent epiphany in battle as depicted in 10:10a-14c. The God who is giving the promised land to his people turns out to be King of the universe.”

~~~~~  
*Regular and prayerful reading of  
the Bible brings us the ability to find  
answers to our questions*  
~~~~~

The beauty fades when we realize that the scribes are the ones who wrote the book of Joshua bringing praise to YHWH. The scribes bring praise to YHWH in their historiography attributing more to him than really happened. The land did not really have rest yet. The sun did not really stand still. The land did not have rest until the reign of King David. The LORD gave the victory but not in the way the scribes wrote their fictionalized history.

Who were these scribes?

According to both Halpern and Van Bekkum, these scribes lived and wrote in the time of the Kings David, Solomon, Rehoboam, or Asa (p. 345). From their vantage point the scribes read sources and heard stories and then wrote the book of Joshua crediting YHWH for giving their forefathers the land.

Who were the scribes that the Holy Spirit used to write down his words? Were they historians? The Holy Spirit calls them prophets, seers but not historians. Abraham was a prophet (Gen 20:7); Moses was a prophet with whom YHWH spoke “face to face” (Num 12:8); Samuel was a seer or prophet (1 Sam 9:9). These men were not historians writing in a horizontal fashion. These men received revelation from God and passed on the truth for future generations.

Church News

Declined the call to the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church:

Rev. M. Jagt

of Taber, Alberta.

Declined the call to the Canadian Reformed Church of Carman East, Manitoba:

Rev. R. Eikelboom

of Launceston, Tasmania (FRCA).

Declined the call to the American Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI:

Rev. C. Bouwman

of Yarrow, British Columbia

A word check of Van Bekkum’s dissertation shows multiple use of words like “intent,” “ideology,” “antiquarianism,” “historiography,” etc. The same word check shows what words are not there. The words “revelation” and “truth” are not there. The latter two are words prominent in the “old” hermeneutics. The former four words are prominent in the “new” hermeneutics.

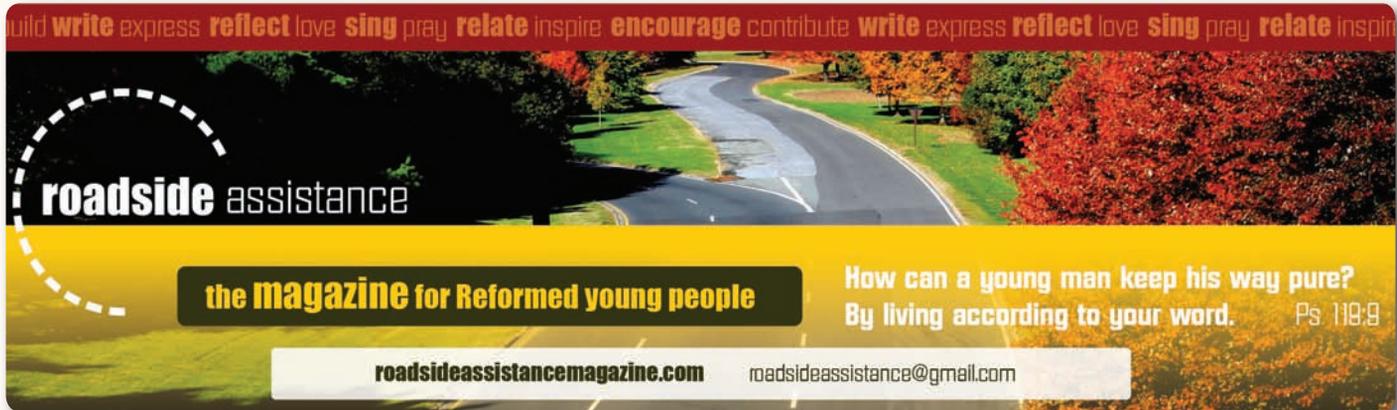
The Theological University of our sister churches at Kampen, The Netherlands declared Van Bekkum’s dissertation worthy of honours (cum laude). As far as academic skill is concerned, this declaration may be fitting. As far as opening the Scriptures is concerned, however, Van Bekkum’s work falls far short of the mark.

What is a minister of the Word going to do with a book that undermines his trust in the book of Joshua as the inspired Word of God? Is he going to edify the congregation with fictionalized historiography and intent, but not truth?

I realize that this is a compact overview but it is sufficient to conclude that our Synod of 2010 had reason to approach our sister churches on the matter of hermeneutics.

¹ Baruch Halpern is Chaiken Family Chair in Jewish Studies, Professor of Ancient History, Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies, and Religious Studies at Penn State University.

² “Halpern gladdened me with fascinating seminars during the Megiddo Expedition of 1998 and 2000 and with short, but highly effective emails thereafter. In the end, he even agreed to join the examination committee”. “Acknowledgements” on p. V of the dissertation.



On Growing in Faith

By Jonathan Chase

"Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance" (Matt 13:12). That's the line that comes to mind every time I visit the back end of the gym where the free-weights are. After I stretch out, drink some water, and setup a forty-five pound weight on each end of the barbell, some kid from the high school football team comes along and sets up the bench next to me – almost like he's waiting for the opportune moment. First a forty-five on each end. Then another. Good grief, not another. No, good, it's just a ten pounder. He rests his head on the bench, grabs the bar with his palm, and starts to knock 'em out. Nope. He shakes his head, sets it back down, and replaces the ten with a twenty-fiver. Now he's good to go. I guess I should focus on my own ninety pounds before he notices me staring.

"Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance." And what was that about him who has not?

The principle that Jesus was talking about shows up everywhere. You can see it in the world of money: rich people can afford to send their kids to college or make big investments so they get even richer. Leaders take the initiative to lead and so they gain experience and learn leadership skills. Good hockey players play hockey more often so they become even better.

The first time the Lord spoke of this principle was after someone asked him why he spoke in parables. Jesus explained that it wasn't so he could make a really complex sermon easier to understand. He did it so that if someone didn't have enough faith to try and figure out the parable for themselves, they wouldn't

get anything out of it at all. That way, the people who have enough faith to try to understand are separated from those who don't have enough faith. The more faith a person has, the more that person will want to grow in faith. And whoever is content with their faith as it is ends up losing it altogether.

Maybe this sheds some light on the parable of the lamp (no pun intended) that Jesus told immediately afterwards. We all want to have the candle burning in our hearts, so to speak, but sometimes we like it best when we keep the flame a candle. "All things in moderation," we like to tell ourselves. But Jesus says, "Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Matt 25:29b). So if we're putting that lamp under a jar, not lighting up our lives and not showing us all the flaws we don't want to see, eventually it's just going to die, flickering there under the jar.

Is your faith something that's growing? Can you look back a couple years and think, "Yes, I have made progress!"? When you look ahead to the future, do you expect that your faith will have grown since today? Or are you more or less comfortable with your faith as it is?

Faith is a lot like a muscle: you use it or lose it. It needs to be exercised and it needs to be nourished. We can nourish our faith by regular Bible reading and prayer. Do you read your Bible and pray in the evening? What about in the morning? At noon? It takes a lot of discipline to build these habits and keep them. Do you get together for Bible study and do you invest energy into it so that you and others can get more out of it?

And what about listening to the sermon? Sometimes a so-called "boring minister" can work a lot like one of Jesus' parables: those who have enough faith to listen will be really enriched by the preaching; those who don't will suggest that the church get a more youth-friendly minister. Sometimes they're right and the problem really does lie with the minister. But have they tried taking notes, drinking some water before church starts, or getting to bed on time the night before?

*The more faith a person has,
the more that person will want to
grow in faith*

Those are ways that faith can be nourished. So how can we exercise our faith? One way is through the choices we make. You want a music album: you can get it for free by downloading it illegally, or you can buy it at the store or on iTunes. If you choose to download, your faith will suffer for it, because it's sinful and your faith will need to be suppressed. You can't possibly expect your faith to be healthy then. But when you make a hard choice and choose for faith, then your faith grows.

Faith makes us do things that we wouldn't otherwise do, like obeying our parents when they'll never know any different, being faithful to a spouse when it might not be the most enjoyable option, not cheating on an exam when we just as easily could get away with it, not lying to customers even if the boss encourages us to do so, or showing kindness to people who can't do anything for us, for example. These are

hard things to do and something intangible like faith hardly seems like a good enough reason; but when we fear God then we do these things anyways and our faith grows as a result. So to those who have, more is given to them.

God expects us to cultivate our faith. No matter how much faith a person starts with, his or her faith life will never be healthy if it stays flat over time; it needs to be growing. That's why it doesn't make a difference how much someone else has; obviously, some people are given more faith than others. But God expects each of us to be investing the faith that we do have so that we have more. It needs to be a forward journey. I might never be able to bench two hundred thirty pounds like the guy next to me, but I won't be stuck here at ninety forever either.

God expects us to cultivate our faith

There was one other time when Jesus said "Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Matt 25:29b). That was after telling the parable of the talents. One worker was given five talents and he went to work with them and made five talents more. Another was given two and he went and made two more. But the third worker was only given one and he went and buried it and then dug it up later again for his master. Which one of these workers are you? Are you investing God's promise at your baptism into your life, so that you cling to it more and more and produce fruit by it? Or are you keeping it buried safe in the ground, hoping that later you can just dig it up and present it to God when he asks for it?



Press Release for the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches [Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary] for a meeting held on January 6, 2011

The Board of Governors met at the Seminary facilities in Hamilton, Ontario on January 6, 2011. Present at the meeting were Archie J. Bax, Hank Kampen (Treasurer), Lammert Jagt, Rev. R. Aasman (Chairman), Barry Hordyk, Dr. Andrew J. Pol (Secretary), Rev. Willem B. Slomp, Rev. Eric Kampen, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, Rev. John Ludwig, and Karl J. Veldkamp (Vice-Chairman/Corresponding Clerk). All board members were present, together with the Principal, Dr. G. H. Visscher. Condolences were conveyed to Barry Hordyk upon the recent loss of an uncle, Br. Arie Hordyk, who was one of the original governors of the Seminary, and the loss of his mother-in-law, Sr. Catharina Vanderkruk. The meeting was opened by Rev. R. Aasman with the reading of Luke 2:41-52.

Minutes, agenda and matters arising from the minutes

The minutes of the Board meeting held on September 9, 2010 were, with amendments, adopted. The agenda for the meeting was settled. As follow up to the minutes the following items were addressed and dealt with:

1. Following discussion and consideration, an amendment to the operating bylaw was approved whereby the Vice Chairman would be considered officially part of the "Executive," with a corresponding amendment that the quorum for the Executive would increased from two to three. These amendments will have effect going forward and will be submitted for affirmation by the churches by way of the next general synod to be convened in 2013, d.v.
2. It was reported that the prospective student from Nepal was unsuccessful in securing a study visa and accordingly would not be attending the Seminary.
3. The matter of reviewing and considering the proper terminology and reference for those who are not part of the Faculty, but are permitted to instruct on a one off or part time basis, remains under consideration by the governance committee.

Correspondence of note

1. Letters were written to each of Dr. A.J. de Visser and Dr. G.H. Visscher confirming their tenure

appointments. Each of these professors acknowledged their appointments in writing and confirmed their commitment to the tenure policy and the underlying basis of the Seminary.

2. Letter of encouragement was delivered to the Farel Reformed Theological Seminary (Montreal, Quebec).
3. Letters of appreciation to Rev. J. de Gelder and the Canadian Reformed Church at Flamborough expressing appreciation for Rev. de Gelder's work at the Seminary.

Receipt of reports-material items

- a. **Academic Committee Reports:** their provisional minutes of their most current meetings were received for information. Of particular note was their conclusions relating to considering applications by students from out of country (that is, from developing nations). Admitting such students has demonstrated significant challenges and the intended results and goals are not necessarily achieved.
- b. **Visits to the Lectures:** The report relating to the visits to the lectures conducted by Revs. J. Ludwig and J. Van Woudenberg on October 26 and 27, 2010 were received with gratitude. Additional lecture visits are scheduled for January 5 and 6, 2011, to be reported on at the next board meeting.
- c. **Finance and Property Committee:** Minutes of their most recent meetings were received for information. It is confirmed that the Seminary had received a special bequest from an estate in the amount of \$200,000.00 with much gratitude. Consideration is being given to the appropriate way in which to utilize such material gifts. This will be subject to further consideration and review.
- d. **Conference Reports:** Reports were received with respect to: the 2010 NAPARC World Missions Meeting in Philadelphia, by Dr. A.J. de Visser; the Sixty-second Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society and the 2010 Meeting of the IBR, by Dr. C. Van Dam; Atlanta 2010 Conference, by Dr. G.H. Visscher; and contact and trip to Singapore, by Dr. G.H. Visscher.
- e. **Pastoral Training Program:** The report for this program for 2010 was received with gratitude. There was concurrence that this program continues to be fully appreciated and valued by the churches and the participants. There was discussion around the need to continually improve and refine the training as it relates to the preparation and delivery of sermons.
- f. **Exit Survey Report 2010:** This report was received for information on the understanding that its results

have a limited value on a current basis due to the low number of participants and the time necessary to compare to other results and to observe trends had not yet passed. The Principal and Vice Principal will have full opportunity to interact and comment upon any comments found in such surveys.

- g. **Review and Accreditation Committee:** This committee provides an interim report wherein they provide a comprehensive mandate affirmed by the Board. The process of accreditation with the Association of Theological Schools continues on schedule. There was thorough discussion around the underlying reasons and considerations for the addition of a fifth professor and the proper rationale for such appointment. The matter is left with the committee for further consideration and reporting to the Board.
- h. **Appointments, Teaching, Principalship and Program considerations:** It was noted that Dr. N.D. Kloosterman as a lecturer in Church Polity will

shortly be commencing teaching for the second term. Dr. C. Van Dam had delivered his last formal class lectures in December of 2010 and was fully on his Sabbatical. With reference to the position of a Principal, it was determined that the Board was not in support of a permanent principalship. The Board also determined that it was not in support of being committed to a regular system of rotation, but would retain discretion when reappointment was required.

Next meeting of the Board is tentatively scheduled for March 24, 2011, d.v.

Press release and closing

The completion of the Press Release is delegated to the Vice Chairman in consultation with the Executive and the meeting was closed with prayer and thanksgiving.

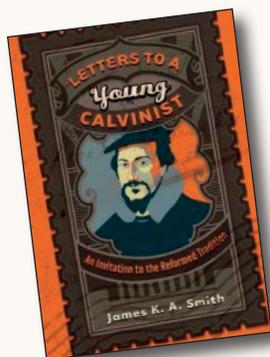
On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Karl J. Veldkamp,
Vice Chairman/Corresponding Clerk 

Letters to a Young Calvinist: An Invitation to the Reformed Tradition, James K.A. Smith, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010.

Additional Information: Paperback, 134 pages, \$16.99

I went through it and so have many others. Discovering the Reformed faith can make young people (especially young men) obnoxious. They call it the "cage phase." You get pumped about everything Reformed and can't understand why no one else is excited about what you see. You get frustrated and even perhaps angry and the people around you, rather than getting drawn to the Reformed faith, are turned off. *Letters to a Young Calvinist* is addressing those in the "cage phase." It's an attempt to give some winsome counsel to those just discovering Reformed theology.

The author is a professor of philosophy at Calvin College. He's written several books, including a volume that I recently reviewed, *Desiring the Kingdom*. Smith was not born and raised Reformed, so he speaks from personal experience.



reviewed by Wes Bredenhof



Dr. Wes Bredenhof is pastor of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario
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The book is structured around twenty-three letters addressed to a fictional "young Calvinist." The addressee is a composite of various individuals that Smith has encountered. Interspersed are also four "postcards" from Geneva, Princeton, Amsterdam, and Seoul. Through these letters and postcards, Smith wants to orient "Jesse" to the depth of "the Reformed tradition," especially getting him to see that it stretches far beyond five points relating to God's sovereignty in our salvation.

I appreciated the two letters about pride. Given the doctrines of grace, it is an odd thing for Reformed people to be proud, and yet this is one of our most besetting sins. Smith encourages "Jesse" to read the

Confessions, beginning with the Belgic Confession. He emphasizes the connections between the early church and “the Reformed tradition.” He points out that Calvinism affirms the essential goodness of creation. Only the good Creator can create, but “the devil can’t create a thing. He can only corrupt and corrode” (119). Moreover, Smith writes accessible and enjoyable prose – this is not difficult reading.

Unfortunately, there are problems in this little volume. There are problems of facts. For instance, on page 19, Smith asserts that the doctrine of total depravity comes first in the Canons of Dort. Actually, it does not get unfolded until Chapter III/IV. He speaks of the United Reformed Church in the singular, whereas it should be plural, “Churches” (35). In his postcard from Amsterdam, he goes to the Free University established by Abraham Kuyper and wonders, “. . . what sort of Calvinism makes one found not a seminary, but a university?” Of course, there already was a seminary in Kampen, and besides, the Free University included seminary training, making this an odd question.

But those problems could be overlooked. Others cannot. On pages 104, he states that N.T. Wright’s “account of justification deeply resonates with covenant theology.” He then provides a lengthy quote from Wright. This is troubling since Wright denies the imputation of Christ’s righteousness in our justification and thereby gets the gospel wrong. What is Reformed about this account of justification when it contradicts Article 22 of the Belgic Confession? For more on why Wright is so wrong, I would highly recommend the first four chapters of *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Imputation*, edited by Gary Johnson and Guy Waters.

Related to that, Smith follows Kuyper in saying that the Lutherans make justification central (“the dominating principle”), while Calvinists make God’s sovereignty central. The consequence is that Smith marginalizes justification. More recent scholarship has uncovered the fallacy of the “central dogma theory.” Both Luther and Calvin were convinced of the importance of justification by faith alone through Christ alone. Moreover, it was a Reformed theologian (J.H. Alsted) who first directly said that justification is “the article by which the church stands or falls.” Luther and his followers had expressed similar thoughts, but Alsted is where the words originate. And Alsted was simply echoing the Reformed consensus.

One of the oddest things in the book is the discussion of the “Young, Restless and Reformed” movement in Letter 12. Smith finds it strange that five point Calvinism would be so widely embraced

in Baptist seminaries and churches (and other non-Reformed churches), while the rest of the Reformed faith is ignored. He lays the blame for this at the feet of the Westminster Standards because they do not adequately emphasize the church. Now it is true that the Westminster catechisms are short on the church, but the Confession has a full chapter dedicated to it. Moreover, there are a good many confessional Presbyterians who argue forcefully for a robust ecclesiology and a church-centred, means of grace approach to spirituality and ministry. I don’t see how Smith’s conclusion follows from his premises here. I sense that Wright’s New Perspective insistence that the gospel is more about the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) than about salvation (soteriology) may be playing a background role here.

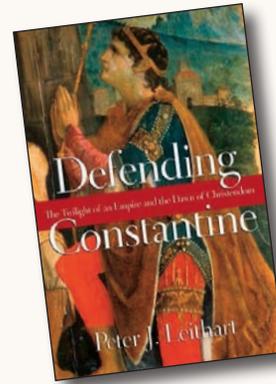
That leads us to another issue where there is some irony. When discussing church membership with “Jesse,” Smith neglects to mention the ecclesiology found in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. There are true and false churches. True churches can be determined with the marks outlined there: pure preaching, pure administration of the sacraments, and faithful use of discipline. Why not counsel “Jesse” to apply these marks and find a true church?

I’ve got other beefs with this book, but let me finish with this one. On pages 94-95 Smith discusses the issue of women in office. He states that a Reformed hermeneutic of “creation-fall-redemption” is what led him to this position. He argues that the subjection of women is bound up with the fall, not with creation. I don’t find this argumentation persuasive. When Paul asserts that women should not have authority in the church in 1 Timothy 2:12, he gives two reasons: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” Creation is part of this and it comes first. And when he compares the issue with slavery he clouds matters, because slavery in the New Testament was much different than slavery in modern times.

The subtitle says, “An Invitation to the Reformed Tradition.” I’d like to suggest a revision: “An Invitation to a Reformed Tradition” or perhaps better: “An Invitation to the *Christian* Reformed Tradition.” This volume doesn’t present a monolithic “Reformed Tradition” consensus, but an idiosyncratic version. Sadly, for the few good things in this book there are also some serious problems, problems which reflect the state of the Christian Reformed Church. Yet we do need a book like this for the young Calvinists – *Welcome to a Reformed Church* by Daniel Hyde would be a better choice.

***Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom,*
Peter J. Leithart, Downers Grove: IVP
Academic, 2010**

**Additional Information: Paperback, 373 pages,
\$29.99**



The question is not whether I should put a disclaimer with this book review, but where. Let me put it right up front. Peter Leithart is a controversial figure in the Reformed and Presbyterian world. He is a signatory on the Joint Federal Vision Statement. While this book may have overlap with some Federal Vision emphases, it is not, so far as I can tell, an argument for FV theology. My recommendation of this volume is not a blanket statement of approval for Leithart and his theological trajectory. One should always use discernment when reading anything except the Bible, but I would urge a special degree of discernment when reading anything by this author.

Dr. Peter Leithart is a minister of the Presbyterian Church in America, but he is the pastor of Trinity Reformed Church in Moscow, Idaho. This church is affiliated with the Confederation of Evangelical Reformed Churches, a Federal Vision-friendly group of churches. Leithart also teaches at New Saint Andrews College in Moscow. He holds a Ph.D. in theology from the University of Cambridge. He is the author of numerous books and articles.

This book is about the first Christian Roman emperor. Constantine (ca. 272-337) is a fabled figure in church history and not always appreciated. More often than not, he becomes a lightning rod for all sorts of criticism, especially regarding the relationship between church and state.

Defending Constantine is not exactly a biography, although it definitely contains biographical aspects. Leithart tells the story of Constantine's life. We get treatments of the standard important historical events such as the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Constantine reportedly saw the sign of the cross and the words "In this sign conquer" in the sky. Leithart dissects this pivotal event and provides a natural explanation for the sign. The author deals with other significant happenings as well, including legislation that favoured Christians (the Edict of Milan) and Constantine's role at the Council of Nicea in 325. All the standard questions and topics are here and therefore the book serves as a helpful introduction or review.

The main substance of the book, however, is captured in the title. Leithart's intent is to put to bed all the unfair criticisms of Constantine that have been sounded over the years. His main target is the influential Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder. Leithart convincingly puts forward the case that Yoder misunderstood the history: "...his claims are, as historical claims, sometimes questionable, sometimes oversimplified to the point of being misleading, sometimes one-sided, sometimes simply wrong" (254). Yoder's Mennonite background coloured his understanding of early church pacificism and the relationship between the emperor and the church. Many other authors have since relied on Yoder's account of Constantine and Constantinianism, so it's good to make another critical evaluation.

I'm not an expert on Constantine or the period in which he lived. Judging from the footnotes and bibliography, it appears that Leithart is not bringing forward any new facts. In fact, most of the book is regurgitated material from other authors. If there is anything new here, it would be in the way that the author presents the facts, coordinates them, and interprets them. This is especially the case in the concluding chapters. For example, the last chapter is entitled "Rome Baptized." Leithart argues that Constantine baptized the Roman Empire and this baptism necessarily involved the abandonment of blood sacrifices. An interesting thesis, but one that I'm not qualified to judge.

I can see three kinds of people being interested in *Defending Constantine*. Those who might enjoy it the most would be those with an interest in applying the Christian faith to political questions. Those with an interest in the history of the early church would also find this an engaging read. Finally, theologians will also be stimulated by considering the life and thought of Constantine. While there are a few small typos and some infelicitous expressions, generally it's a book that reads well. It's also well-researched. I don't agree with Peter Leithart's FV convictions, but I did appreciate this book.

