

# Clarion

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IS THE TENTH COMMANDMENT  
ABOUT PROPERTY?





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# Pastors and Property Laws (Part 1 of 2)

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## *Obeying the tenth commandment is difficult for anyone*

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Last fall my wife and I had the wonderful privilege of attending the Western Ministerial, joining a crowd of Canadian Reformed and United Reformed ministers and their wives at the Cedar Springs Christian Retreat Center in Sumas, Washington. I'd been asked to give a few presentations there, and for one of the sessions I'd chosen to speak on the property laws of the Old Testament, particularly in light of the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, his field," and so on. After all, I thought, I'd lectured on these laws at the Seminary, and it shouldn't be too difficult to turn that lecture into a speech. I think it was on the flight to B.C. that it suddenly hit me: I'm going to speak about landed property to an audience of people who tend to have precious little of that sort of thing. Talk about irrelevant! But then I realized that the tenth commandment is not about *our* property but about our *neighbour's* property, *his* house and field. Perhaps I had a speech after all.

We pastors and our dear wives live in congregations filled with people putting down roots, building their businesses, renovating their homes, landscaping their properties, while we live in a "glass house" – perhaps a very comfortable manse, but it's not our own, or perhaps it *is* our own but it's not very comfortable – and we put down our roots in the full awareness that the Lord might call us at any moment to yank them up again. And in such a situation we're called to obey the tenth commandment, the essence of which is to be content with what the Lord has apportioned to us and not to desire what he has given to our neighbour. A challenge, to be sure! Ministers' families need to wrestle with the sin of covetousness. But so does every other Christian. Obeying the tenth commandment is difficult for anyone.

Lord's Day 44 of the Heidelberg Catechism explains the basic requirement of this command: "That not even

the slightest thought or desire contrary to any of God's commandments should ever arise in our heart. Rather, with all our heart we should always hate all sin and delight in all righteousness." This explanation sounds very general; it may leave the impression that the tenth word of the covenant has no independent identity, that it's simply a summary of the other nine. Such an impression is mistaken, however. For one thing, the tenth commandment belongs to the second table of the law: it repeatedly mentions the neighbour. For another, it lists a number of specific people and things that one might be tempted to covet: the neighbour's wife, his house or land, his servants or animals, or anything else that belongs to him. It's true that the tenth commandment is about the heart, but it's equally true that it's about property.<sup>1</sup> Much can be learned by studying the tenth commandment within the broader topic of the Old Testament property laws. This article will focus especially on landed property, considering firstly, ownership of land, secondly, the protection of property, and thirdly, the meaning of a particular law found in Leviticus 27:16-21.<sup>2</sup>

### **Land ownership**

Scripture teaches that God is the ultimate owner of the land by virtue of the fact that he created it. "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters" (Ps 24:1). When Melchizedek blessed Abram in the name of the Lord, he referred to God as "Creator of heaven and earth" (Gen 14:19). The Hebrew word translated as "Creator" actually means "Owner." As the Owner of the earth, the Lord has the right to distribute it as he wills. Think of Acts 17:26 where Paul said that God "made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and

the exact places where they should live.” That’s why God could say to Abram, “To your descendants *I give* this land” (Gen 15:18). It was his to give.

Generally speaking it may be said that the patriarchs were so-jourmers; their descendants were to be the actual heirs of the land. Yet the patriarchs did become owners of small portions of it. Abra-

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

It is our privilege to have a Guest Editorial in this issue. Dr. John Smith writes about the property laws of the Old Testament, which can help us to understand the tenth commandment better. The coming issue will bring readers a second part to this article.

As many Canadian Reformed churches are switching from the use of the NIV to the ESV, Dr. Wes Bredenhof has taken the time to compare two study Bibles available to us: the ESV Study Bible and the Reformation Study Bible.

In this issue Dr. Cornelis Van Dam’s series on our Dutch sister churches comes to its conclusion. He has also written a book review and an article for the Clippings on Politics and Religion column.

In addition, Issue 14 contains the Treasures New and Old, Education Matters, Ray of Sunshine, and You Asked columns as well as a Mission News insert. There is also a letter to the editor and a press release. A special thank you to Patricia Gelms, who has written her final Ray of Sunshine column for *Clarion*. We appreciate your work and dedication to the column!

Laura Veenendaal

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# Clarion

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ham negotiated with Abimelech for rights to a well which he had dug (Gen 21:30). He also purchased the field of Machpelah from the Hittites as a burial ground for Sarah (Gen 23). Isaac planted crops in the land of Gerar and reaped a hundredfold, and he also negotiated successfully for wells (Gen 26:12-33). Jacob bought a plot of ground near Shechem for 100 pieces of silver (Gen 33:19), and just before he died he gave it to Joseph (Gen 48:22), whose bones were eventually buried there (Josh 24:32).

The Lord also determined which lands the tribes of Israel should receive. He forbade them to take the lands of the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites. These nations had a family connection to the patriarchs, and the Lord in his kindness granted them a homeland on the borders of Israel. Moses gave the two-and-a-half tribes the lands of Sihon and Og on the east side of the Jordan River on the condition that they would first help their brother tribes to conquer the land of Canaan (Num 32). The Bible specifies that Moses assigned these lands to them clan by clan (Josh 13:15, 24, 29). God commanded that the rest of the tribes were to receive their territories by lot (Num 26:52-56; Josh 14-19). Joshua, together with Eleazar the priest and the heads of the clans, assigned them to the various clans of each tribe. This was done by casting lots at the entrance of the tabernacle in Shiloh, which means that the division of the land took place by God's revealed will (Josh 19:51).

## Protection of property

How could an Israelite be sure that his property would be left intact and not be encroached upon or stolen by his neighbours? The Law put a number of safeguards in place. First of all, the Lord impressed upon his people that he himself had revealed by lot how the land would be divided. To take someone else's land would be an act of rebellion against the Master of the Land. Secondly, by dividing the land into tribal territories and subdividing the tribal territories for the various clans, the Lord ensured that a man's neighbours were the members of his own family and his own tribe – the people most likely to show loyalty and to look out for each other. Thirdly, God established various laws to ensure that the tribal boundaries would remain intact, and he made provisions whereby the clans could receive back any lands that they had lost. Think of the laws of the Sabbath year and the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25), as well as the instructions given in relation to the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27:1-11; 36:1-12; Josh 17:3-4). Fourthly, in the tenth commandment God forbade covetousness; that is, even to desire the neighbour's

land was forbidden. Fifthly, to move a neighbour's boundary stone was forbidden by God (Deut 19:14); in fact, the people agreed on Mt Ebal that anyone who did so would be cursed (Deut 27:17; cf. Job 24:2; Hos 5:10).

God showed that those who encroached on their neighbour's land would have to reckon with him. As Proverbs 23:10-11 puts it, "Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their Defender is strong; he will take up their case against you." When Ahab took possession of Naboth's vineyard despite the latter's warning that it was "the inheritance of my fathers" (1 Kgs 21:5), the Lord sent Elijah to tell him that the dogs would lick up his blood." In 1 Samuel 26 David said to Saul that he and his men had driven him away from his share in the Lord's inheritance and had told him to serve other gods. This may be the background for Psalm 16 where David said, "The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. . . LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance." David found his happiness not in the security of his property but in his relationship with God. That's the lesson the Lord wanted his people to learn: they were not to be anxious about their inheritance, for they had received it from God and they could trust in him to protect it. Very striking is God's promise in Exodus 34:24: "No one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the LORD your God."

In summary, the property laws of the Old Testament can help us to understand the tenth commandment better. These laws show that the Lord as Owner and Distributor of the land graciously put a number of measures in place to counteract the sin of covetousness. Next time we'll focus on a particular passage, Leviticus 27:16-21, and then draw some conclusions.

<sup>1</sup> To be sure, a wife "belongs" to her husband in a different way than land, animals, or slaves would. Scripture teaches that marriage is to be a lifelong bond of love in which husband and wife give themselves fully to each other. For an explanation of the marriage laws of the Old Testament, see my article, "Marriage vs. Mawwiage: What the Bible has to say," *Reformed Perspective* 32.9/10 (September 2013): 20-24.

<sup>2</sup> For information on laws protecting slaves, animals, and material goods, see the following articles: "Out of the House of Bondage: The Old Testament Slavery Laws and Our Redemption in Christ," *Clarion* 61.3 (February 3, 2012): 58-62; "Stolen Goods, Broken Trust: The Law and Gospel of Restitution," *Reformed Perspective* 31.1 (November 2011): 20-24.





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# Healthy Self-Talk

***"Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name."***

Psalm 103:1

Our journey through life is filled with many emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual challenges. Not only do we experience high points but we also know of the valley of tears and sorrow. For some the lows leave an indelible mark on their lives, making it difficult to see anything positive. It affects their ability to function or to see beyond the troubles of the present moment. When Christian experience takes you down into a dark valley for a prolonged period of time you may think you have very little reason to smile. Since "everything" *feels* bad you think everything *is* bad and you lose sight of reality.

The Lord frequently brings us into dark places to correct our vision and to bring us to a closer walk with him. The dark valleys are made into valleys of vision. In the valley God teaches us to see our utter wretchedness and, at the same time, his great faithfulness and mercy. Is this not the story told in many of the psalms? Children of God are not left to mope in their misery. No matter where we are on our journey through life, we have

reason to bless the Lord, to praise and worship his holy name.

Psalm 103 was written by David, most likely at a dark time in his life. As he passes through the valley he recalls the mercy and grace of the Lord shown to the people of God in ages past. He also reflects on how the Lord has carried him through the ups and downs of his own life. All of this leads David to praise God for his mercy and compassion. With the words of this psalm the Holy Spirit, as the primary author of Scripture, encourages us to do the same. Even though we may feel that the corners of our mouth have no reason to go up, the Lord Jesus has given us every reason to smile, to rejoice and to have a positive attitude.

Yet our awareness of what the Lord has done and is doing in our lives is not always as sharp as it ought to be. It is as though David takes himself in hand for a time of healthy self-talk. He may not let negative circumstances dictate how he feels, thinks or moves into the future. This is why he says, "Praise the Lord, O my soul;

all my inmost being, praise his holy name." In other words, "Come on my soul! Look at what God has done! Pay attention to all his acts of love and all his benefits." And we, who take this psalm on our lips today, are led to a deeper response of worship, because we have seen so much more of God's love, mercy and compassion. We know what he has done for us through Jesus Christ. Knowing everything the Lord has given to us in Christ should lead us to praise the Lord with every fibre of our being.

As a child of God, it's important for me to hear all this because there are so many things that can distract me from truly blessing God's name, from giving the Lord wholehearted praise. Consequently my praise falls flat and lacks zeal and fervour – it does not come forth from "all my inmost being." On regular intervals I need to engage in healthy self-talk. Praising the name of the Lord with my whole being will keep me on track as I travel through both the valleys and over the mountains of Christian experience. "Praise the Lord, O my soul!"



## For Further Study

1. David, through healthy self-talk, tells himself to "Praise the Lord." What is the Holy Spirit teaching us in the first verse of this psalm? What happens when we don't?
2. The psalmist gives us a number of reasons for praising the Lord. How will "praising the Lord" invariably lead us to Christ?
3. Reflect and comment on the following: "The Lord frequently brings us into dark places to correct our vision and to bring us to a closer walk with him. The dark valleys are made into valleys of vision."



# Developments in our Dutch Sister Churches and Lessons to be Learned

(Part 4 of 4)



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## What can we learn from these developments?

It is relatively simple to criticize someone else. It is much more difficult to look at ourselves and see if there are weaknesses with us in the light of what is going on in The Netherlands. We are no less prone to the spirits of the age than our Dutch brothers and sisters. What we have is all of grace alone. So we must be aware of a “holier than thou” attitude. We face our own challenges and we should consider in all humility what we can learn from the disquieting events on the other side of the ocean. Let us first consider the place of the training for ministers.

## The seminary

Events in Holland show how critically important it is to have a training for the ministry that is faithful to the Scriptures and has a close and meaningful relationship with the churches. We can be thankful to the Lord for our current faithful faculty at our seminary. This is a great gift of God. It is also very good that faculty regularly travel to the churches in western Canada, give presentations, and seek in numerous ways to foster a healthy bond of the seminary with the churches. Now southern Ontario is not part of these regular excursions and I realize that professors are regularly on the pulpits in this province but it would be good if the speeches they give to the western churches also be presented here. We should do everything possible to encourage a close relationship between the seminary and the churches. The seminary exists for the churches and is in the service of the churches. It should never simply become an ivory tower academic institution.

That is a challenge that Kampen is facing. They realize their need to train ministers, but the pressures of academia and government regulations also mean that they have to spend considerable manpower on purely academic research. The Theological University receives regular visits from government officials whose task it is to make sure that the university is maintaining the proper standards. Now our seminary also has regular visitation from the Association of Theological Schools through whom we have academic accreditation. But we have no pretensions of being a university and so the norms governing our accreditation are much more congenial to the task at hand. We are also blessed with a far more robust conservative scholarship in this continent than is the case in Europe. In a sense the pressure of secularized biblical scholarship is less here than in The Netherlands. We can be thankful for that. We have encouraged our Dutch colleagues to interact more with conservative North American biblical scholarship through organizations such as the Evangelical Theological Society and others, along with their conferences. That would help them in their work, also as academics.

In my view, the work of a Reformed seminary should make use of the best academic tools possible but use them in a biblical, counter-cultural way. In the past the word antithesis was used when it came to theological education. It was a favourite term of Abraham Kuyper. Today much theological education in Kampen is no longer done that way. We need to remain counter-cultural by being faithful to the Scriptures. They set the tune and should determine our hermeneutics and not the current culture. This can be a very difficult area but we should keep the main contours of the issue clearly before us.<sup>1</sup>

## The place of women

The only real issue on the place of women in our federation is whether women voting should be allowed or not. Since this matter would probably come up in question period, I thought I would briefly touch on it here. This has become a hot-button issue for many in our midst, and I respect the genuine concerns that are raised. However, I would like to remind the brothers not to make more of it than it is. It is true that in Holland women in office has followed chronologically to giving the women the right to vote. But observing a chronological sequence is not the same as proving that simply giving the women the right to vote must lead to women ordination in ecclesiastical office. The reasons for the one decision are different than the reasons for the other. What is driving the discussion in Holland is the pressure of culture and they twist and turn to try to make the Bible say what it does not say. "If women are mayors and judges why can they not be elders and ministers?" That is what you hear and what we heard at Synod Ede.

We should not get too wound up about the voting issue. The issue will probably return to our next synod but we should not blow this matter out of proportion. There is something to be said for Synod Burlington's decision that gave some freedom in this area. This matter should not become a litmus test for orthodoxy. It is important to realize that stalwarts of the Reformed faith such as Lucas Lindeboom (1845-1933) who taught New Testament in Kampen and Herman Bavinck, the well-known Reformed dogmatician (1854-1921), were in favour of women voting. Our sister church in Scotland has had women voting for over a hundred years and the United Reformed Churches have the same practice. We have never raised the issue with them as being evidence of degeneration. Neither of these sister churches would even contemplate opening the office to women. What is important is that we need to be faithful to Scripture and vigilant with respect to cultural influences and remain counter-cultural.<sup>2</sup>

This brings us to the next area.

## The cultural challenge

A huge underlying issue is the matter of culture. How does the church and the seminary relate to the culture of the day? Canadian Reformed visitors to our Dutch sister churches sometimes get a shock when attending worship service there. Now there are still places in The Netherlands where the traditional worship service remains

the standard. However this is often no longer the case. There is a desire for change and a genuine heartfelt need to be more relevant to the culture of the day. You hear things like: "People need to feel more at home in our worship service; strangers should feel more welcome." Also "I don't get much out of church; it should be more relevant. We need change in order to hang on to our young people." And so elements of the dominant civic culture are brought into the church. One hears similar sounds in our own circles. How should one respond to these sorts of sentiments?

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***The work of a Reformed seminary should make use of the best academic tools possible but use them in a biblical, counter-cultural way***

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The topic of liturgy and how we conduct our worship services is of great importance. It concerns how we approach God and is therefore also a reflection of how we think of him. In a way, the Sunday liturgy sets the tone for our relationship with God and how we view ourselves as Christians. The area of liturgy has also become a bit of a touchy subject in some churches in our federation. In discussing these matters we need to keep some basics in mind.<sup>3</sup>

## Worship

First, we worship in order to bring praise, honour, and thanksgiving to God. We do not worship for ourselves in the sense that our needs are in the forefront. God is in the centre. He is the object of our worship. Second, we worship to place ourselves in God's presence to receive his blessing and to hear the gospel and use the sacraments. When people raise questions about our services becoming more user friendly and more appealing to outsiders, the sorts of questions that one hears in Holland and also here, then we forget that worship is not in the first place for evangelism or to make people feel good and comfortable. Unbelievers in the presence of holy God should feel uncomfortable. Our worship services must carry a sense of awe of the holy. We are in God's presence. How we think of that is also reflected in how we dress for worship. There is a very fine line that can be crossed when we speak of worship being more inviting and more open to outsiders; when we ask, what do I get out of the service, instead of asking, what am I giving to God in terms of thanks and praise? There is the

danger of a narcissistic self-interest that is endemic in our culture but that is hostile to the gospel. Worship is not about being comfortable and making you feel good. Office bearers need to counter such thinking every step of the way. That may prevent unhelpful distortions to our liturgy and manner of worship and keep the focus on the Lord our God and his Word. The Word is the sword of the Spirit by which hearts are changed and the church is gathered (Rom 10:8-17; Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12). The church is not gathered and hearts are not changed by music that tries to imitate current cultural styles and can bring worldly influences into the church.<sup>4</sup>

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***There is the danger of a narcissistic self-interest that is endemic in our culture but that is hostile to the gospel***

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Besides having a clear biblical vision of what worship is all about, consistories should make sure that the minister is in charge of the liturgy, not a music committee. Part of the problem in The Netherlands is that music committees or liturgical committees have been given too much to say and control elements in the liturgy. That responsibility should belong to office bearers.

### **The bond of churches**

Another lesson we can take from events in Holland is that we encourage and remind the churches to honour the bond of the federation that unites us together. By adopting our *Book of Praise*, we have agreed as churches to abide by the basic classic orders of worship as printed therein. We should stick to those. For example, in The Netherlands not a few churches leave out the reading of the law. This should not be done. If there should be a minister or consistory in our midst that thinks the law should not be read, let reasons for this position be presented to a major assembly with the request that the option of not reading the law be including in our order of worship. Then a discussion can take place and the matter dealt with in an orderly and edifying way. We should avoid the situation where one church tries something like this and does it more and more without too much objection from its members and the practice gradually spreads without any discussion. In the process we lose a major

part of worship without any due process. Similarly, we should remember the agreement to have preaching using the Catechism in the afternoon service and not another free text. This ensures that the major areas of biblical teaching are covered and that the proclamation of the Word remains balanced and instructive.

### **New songs**

Similarly, we should not introduce songs into our official worship services that are not in the *Book of Praise*. Such an inclusion could sometimes be justified by saying that such and such a hymn means more to me. It helps me. It is good for me. (Again the person is put in the centre.) This is not a matter of being legalistic. Much is at stake here. We have agreed as churches what goes into the *Book of Praise*. Hymns convey a theology and if the theology is not biblical, the hymn will ultimately have negative effects on the well being of the church. History has shown how wrong hymns can introduce bad theology to the hurt of the body of Christ. We should honour our agreements made with each other in the federation also in this respect. Some of these issues can be particularly challenging for a mission church plant. It is tempting to bend the rules for such a work. But if certain hymns are deemed to be especially good for home mission, let them be included in the *Book of Praise* in an orderly way. The process that developed in Holland is not good. Hymns were included in worship that had not been approved by the federation. Eventually, there were few criteria and just about everything went. In the end, Synod Ede approved a massive collection of more than a thousand hymns, *Liedboek-Zingen en bidden in huis en kerk*, and left it up to the local church to decide what is Reformed (*Acta*, Art. 5-12).<sup>5</sup>

### **Church discipline**

Another aspect of the cultural challenge we face is church discipline. Our civic society considers it mean and vindictive to exercise church discipline. Let everyone do his or her own thing. Do not be hard on each other. Everyone has his or her rights to be different. This spirit has infected the Dutch churches with an acknowledged lack of consistent discipline. We should never give into this cruel spirit of the times. Church discipline is the loving administration of God's mercy in calling a sinner back to himself. We need to continue to show the love and mercy of Christ in this way.



## CALLS EXTENDED

Called by the Rehoboth CanRC of Burlington-Waterdown, ON:

**Rev. C.J. VanderVelde**

of Elora, ON.

## CHURCH NEWS

More examples of cultural influence in the church can be mentioned, such as the acceptance of scientific theory instead of the plain teaching of the Word of God in matters of evolution and creation; or the acceptance of supposedly sure archaeological theories as if they were proven facts to the detriment of the clear testimony of Scripture.

### In conclusion

Perhaps the present discussion can best be summed up this way. Christians and the church as a body should be counter-cultural, challenging the ungodly elements in the culture of the day. Rather than being eager to be “with the times” and seek to adapt as closely to the world as possible, we should rather recognize the antithesis that runs through all of life and seek to renew church life and culture in general in line with God’s expectations. Does Scripture and therefore does God not exhort us: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom 12:2).

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Van Dam, “Interpreting Historical Narrative,” 94–96.

<sup>2</sup> See on this Cornelis Van Dam, “Slippery Slope?” *Clarion* 60 (2011): 234–36. On the Free Church of Scotland and others who allow female members to participate in voting for office bearers, see the report that served Synod Ommen 1993. *Bijlage 3: Commissierapport inzake het vrouwenstemrecht*, §7.6.2 available at [www.kerkrecht.nl/](http://www.kerkrecht.nl/).

<sup>3</sup> For what follows, see, e.g., Cornelis Van Dam, *Perspectives on Worship, Law and Faith: The Old Testament Speaks Today* (Kelmescott, Western Australia: Pro Ecclesia, 2000), 22–25 and A.J. de Visser, “An Attractive Church,” *Clarion* 54 (2005): 418–20.

<sup>4</sup> The large part that music has come to play in many worship services is due to charismatic and Pentecostal influences. See, e.g., W. Robert Godfrey and D.G. Hart, *Westminster Seminary California: A New Old School* (Escondido, CA: Westminster Seminary California, 2012), 83–87. I witnessed a worship service in one of our Dutch sister churches that at certain moments totally contradicted the holiness of worship in the presence of God especially when the youth band got going with a gyrating lead singer.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the critique in J.P.C. Vreugdenhil and H. Vreugdenhil-Busstra, *Lied Tegen Het Licht: Handreiking Bij Het Toetsen Van Gezangen, Woord en Wereld* (Bedum: Woord en Wereld, 1998) and H. Vreugdenhil-Busstra, *Weet Wat Je Zingt! De 121 Liederen Van “Leusden”*: Een Verantwoorde Keuze? (Bedum: Scholma, 2001). Also, Douma, Afscheid, 51–54.



### Netherlands Reformed

For those who may have wondered, in Dr. Van Dam’s recent first article on developments in our Dutch sister churches, the reference to the Netherlands Reformed Churches was, as the reference in the footnote indicated, to the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (“Buitenverbanders”) (<http://www.ngk.nl/>) and not to those churches in North America called Netherlands Reformed Congregations.





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# The ESV Study Bible vs. The Reformation Study Bible: A Comparison

A good study Bible can be a great blessing for one's personal devotions. For a couple of years, I used a Bible without any notes and, while it was still edifying, there were many times where a passage would raise questions. Of course, it's not that difficult for me to pull a commentary off the shelf to explore possible answers, but it's far easier to have a good set of notes immediately at hand in your Bible. This is all the more true if you don't have a sizeable collection of commentaries like most pastors do.

Over the last couple of years, many of our churches have been making the move over to the English Standard Version. Along with that move comes the question of what to purchase if you want to have a study Bible. While there are other choices available, the top two are generally going to be the ESV Study Bible and The Reformation Study Bible. Published by Crossway, the ESV Study Bible has been around for a few years already. The Reformation Study Bible has also been around in one form or another for a few years. Recently, however, Reformation Trust (a division of Ligonier Ministries) has issued a revised edition. In this article, I'm going to compare the ESV Study Bible and The Reformation Study Bible (2015 edition). The intent is to help you pick the study Bible that might best meet your needs or purposes.

## Study notes

Let's begin with the "bread and butter" of a study Bible. Both the ESV Study Bible (ESB) and The Reformation Study Bible (RSB) contain extensive notes throughout both the Old and New Testament. However, the ESB is far more comprehensive in its notes. As an example, take Psalm 62:11, "Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this. . . ." RSB offers nothing to explain this expression, but ESB notes, "To say *once*. . . *twice* is to indicate that

the idea is sure, namely that to God belong both *power* (by which he can carry out his will; contrast v. 9) and *steadfast love* (in which he has pledged himself to the faithful, and for which they may safely trust him)."

The quantity of notes needs to be seen in the light of the quality of the notes. ESB comes from a theological perspective that is generally consistent with historic Protestantism. The notes are mostly reliable and orthodox. However, RSB is far more so. The study notes in RSB are typically more in line with confessionally Reformed convictions. For example, 1 Timothy 2:1-7 has been a controversial passage in terms of the intent and extent of Christ's atonement. It says that God desires all people to be saved, and Christ gave himself as a ransom for all. ESB gives the Calvinist and Arminian interpretations, but stops short of taking one side or the other. RSB, however, is committed to the historic Reformed understanding of these words: the "all" refers to all types of people. Similarly, the notes about passages dealing with speaking in tongues reveal ESB giving latitude to the continuationist view, whereas RSB is firmly cessationist (i.e. tongues ceased with the apostolic era).

We should also examine how these study Bibles treat the early chapters of Genesis. Unfortunately, both display some openness to less literal understandings of these chapters. Both are consequently more inclined to allow for alternative understandings of the days of creation. However, they are more careful when it comes to the origins of man, with RSB being the most insistent on Genesis 2:7, "Man is not formed from pre-existent life." A little later in Genesis, ESB is not committed to the flood being a global phenomenon, whereas RSB states on Genesis 6:17, "A worldwide flood is in view."

## Additional study resources with the main text

ESB absolutely outshines RSB in this department. In fact, I have not seen any study Bible *ever* that has all the resources found in ESB. ESB has numerous helpful charts – RSB has none. At Isaiah 13, for example, ESB has a chart laying out all the oracles against the nations in the prophets. James 5 has a chart illustrating how Leviticus 19 is used in that chapter. ESB also has timelines accompanying all the New Testament books and some of the Old Testament books – again, RSB falls short with nothing to compare. Perhaps the best features of all in ESB are the full colour maps and diagrams. These are plentiful and easy to read. They add a lot of insight into various passages. RSB has no diagrams of any sort, but does include some maps. Unfortunately, these are black and white, few in number, and with only microscopic print.

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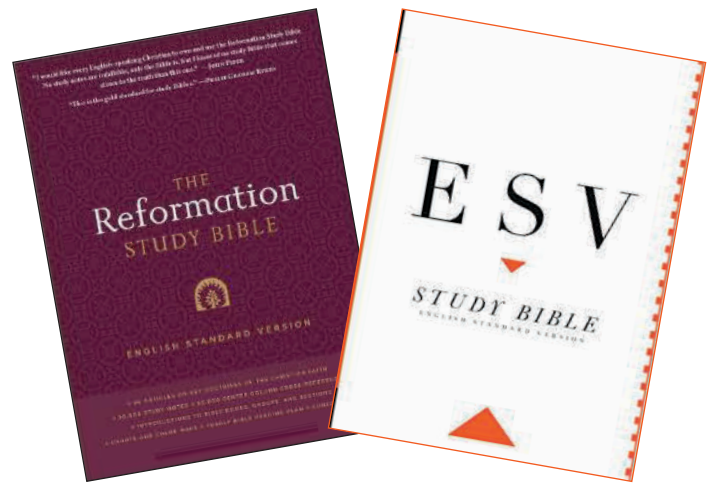
***The intent is to help you pick the study Bible that might best meet your needs or purposes***

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Both RSB and ESB include introductions of the Bible, but the ESB introductions are far more comprehensive and helpful. Finally, RSB includes seventy theological notes scattered throughout on a range of topics including infant baptism, legalism, the unforgivable sin, and divorce. From what I can tell, these notes generally represent the Reformed confessional consensus on these topics.

## Appendices

Each of these study Bibles has a collection of resources following the biblical text. As one would expect, both include a small concordance (with ESB's being more comprehensive). There's also a daily reading plan included in both. There are articles in each study Bible on various subjects and ESB's collection is fuller on this score. ESB also includes helpful features such as a section on "History of Salvation in the Old Testament" and "Old Testament Passages Cited in the New Testament." However, the RSB includes a section of Reformed confessions. For Canadian Reformed users, having a copy of the Westminster Standards on hand in your study Bible could definitely be considered a plus. This reviewer does question the inclusion of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, especially since it largely repeats the Westminster Confession (except on points like infant baptism).



## Online resources

When you purchase a study Bible these days, generally you can expect to get some accompanying online extras. The ESB website offers a fully searchable text of the ESV Study Bible with all the notes and resources. Additionally, you get access to all of John Piper's sermons plus cross-referencing to the most significant Reformation confessions. Although the RSB study notes are available for free at BibleGateway.com, RSB itself does not offer an online searchable text of any kind. However, registering your RSB does open access to a variety of teaching resources from Ligonier Ministries, including some electronic books, and a six month subscription to *Table Talk* magazine.

## Which to choose?

There are obviously pros and cons for each of these study Bibles. Whichever one you use, it must be used with discernment. Unlike the text of Scripture itself, the notes and resources are not inerrant. The question really comes down to one's own ability to discern. What really complicates matters is that most people overestimate their level of discernment – it's a function of our innate sinful pride. That said, the ESB would be more suitable for a mature Bible student – it requires a greater level of discernment, especially because of the subtlety of some of the errors it features. Since it generally follows a confessionally Reformed track, the RSB would be a more suitable study Bible for young people or those who have not yet invested a lot of time and effort into sharpening their theological knowledge. Both study Bibles can be used with great benefit and I certainly would rather anyone diligently use either than none.







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# Chinese Persecution of Christians Intensifies

According to China Aid's 2014 Annual Report, persecution against Christians has increased overall by over 150 percent during the course of 2014 compared to the year before. It should be kept in mind that China Aid can only go by what has been brought to their attention and so it gives an incomplete picture. Fear of reprisals keep many abuses unreported. But even this incomplete picture is disturbing enough. One can read all the detailed numbers in the report available on the Internet. Behind these numbers is incredible human suffering due to abuse, torture, and imprisonment. The current persecution is the harshest in over a decade.

One could ask, Why is the Chinese government so hostile to Christians? The Communist Party of China (CPC), which rules the nation, officially endorses atheism and so hates all religion, especially Christianity. As the Report notes: "It is fair to say that the rapid increase in the number of Christians in China over the past decade has triggered a unique sense of crisis within the CPC. As the Christian faith continues to grow in China, so does the number of Chinese citizens who embrace rule of law, oppose totalitarian governance, and support the expansion of civil society." Thus the ongoing and rapid growth of house churches in rural and urban areas is frightening the rulers of the land. The growth of Christianity in China is so vigorous that "Dr. Yang Fenggang, a professor of religion and sociology at Purdue University, has estimated that by 2030, the number of Christians in China will exceed those in the United States, thus making China the largest Christian nation in the world." Faced with this reality, even the officially recognized church is not spared oppression, harassment, and the destruction of their church buildings. Indeed, the Report says that the measures taken against the official Three-Self churches is the most severe since the Cultural Revolution.

The government knows that persecution alone will not stop Christianity and so they attempt to poison Christian teaching. The Communist Party has embarked on a campaign to "sinicize" Christianity to ensure that "Christianity takes root in the soil of Chinese culture, ethnicity, and society." A government spokesman stated ominously that for this to happen "churches will need guidance and support from government agencies in charge of religious affairs." Without the euphemism this means that government will try to dictate Christian doctrine so that it suits the Communist Party's agenda for the nation. To this end government sponsored seminars are organized, pastors need to go to Patriotic Education Sites to study and practice patriotism, and print and electronic media will be used to "educate" the people. "The essence of Christian sinicization is to prioritize loyalty to the CPC over religious identity and transform Christianity into a socialist force that complies with the authority of the Chinese government." Needless to say, this means that Christ must no longer be recognized as the head of the church and the core of the Christian faith must be disowned.

And yet, in the midst of all this harassment and persecution, the church grows and the number of believers increases. How is this possible? Of course, the Son of God gathers his church and he is sovereign Lord! Furthermore, suffering strengthens the church. It may seem paradoxical, but God's Word does say: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:2-3). In the free and easy West the presence of Christianity shrinks and many Christians succumb to the idols of materialism, consumerism, and self-centredness and leave the faith. In China the number of Christians increases. Could it be that we are missing something of the joy in the face of persecution which Chinese Christians have? "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).





*Chris Deboer*  
Principal of Dufferin Christian  
School, in Carman, Manitoba

# Edu-Sketch

Another school year is finished once again. Much has been done in our various schools; much joy and some sadness. Much has and will change and much has stayed same. But in all these things we have seen the hand of the Lord; he is at work constantly in our lives, also as school communities.

## Finding principals

One of the biggest challenges facing a number of schools again this year was finding principals. So many changes have taken place that I have to divide this topic into two paragraphs! One interim appointment in Orangethorpe two years ago has become a permanent appointment. Mr. Jelko Oosterhof will remain in that position for a while, it seems. In addition, Mr. Mike Raap has been appointed to take over the reins as principal for Mr. Pieter Torenvliet in John Calvin School, Yarrow, BC. Brother Torenvliet has served the Reformed schools for many years and his service to Reformed education, right across the country, is greatly appreciated. At the same time, the school community of Winnipeg bade farewell to Mr. Peter Veenendaal who is retiring as principal this year. He has actively been training Mr. Mark denHollander who will take over the position of principal for the 2015-2016 school year. Mr. John Jagersma of Edmonton, Alberta, has decided to pursue another career opportunity by serving as the Director of the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta. It is an important task and it is good to see a Reformed thinker taking on such a leadership role within the province. His replacement for next school year will be Mr. Ken Leffers, on an interim basis.

Furthermore, Mr. Heres Snijder, of Credo Elementary is also leaving the position of principal to pursue other callings for service. That has left open another position which has been filled by Mr. Otto Bouwman who will serve as principal at seventy percent time allotment. Mr. Jason Heemskerk will also be stepping down as principal from John Calvin School, in Burlington, as he has been appointed to the new position as League Coordinator of the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies of Ontario. However, because JCS and Covenant Christian School in Flamborough, ON will be amalgamating, you might think

the principal of CCS will take over the new role in the new school. CCS' principal, however, was also working on an interim basis and so the new school has found a new principal in Mr. Mike VanderVelde. Mr. Henk Plug has plans to move back "down under" as he has been appointed to take on the position of principal in a school there. Mr. Mike Noot has been found willing and able to take on this position. He will be leaving his long tenure at Guido de Brés and will be sorely missed. Guido's loss is Timothy's gain. In addition, Harvest Christian School in Owen Sound will be doing something quite unique; it will be operating the school with a "principal committee."

## Amalgamating

While it was already mentioned that John Calvin School of Burlington and Covenant Christian School of Flamborough are amalgamating, I want to mention this again. This plan has been talked about, discussed, debated for a number of years and then voted on. It has not been accomplished easily or without controversy, but through the process of negotiation and compromise, Grace Christian School can, DV, open its doors in September 2015. This opening means that two schools are closing, and this is always an emotional time for parents, students, and alumni. We have close attachments to our schools and the importance of the school to our church communities cannot be overestimated. It is our prayer that the LORD will continue to bless the members of Grace Christian School and that it receives full support from the various communities it seeks to serve. Above all, may the Lord bless this school and may it serve parents and covenant children for many years to come. The chairman of John Calvin School is encouraged: "There is a sense of excitement in the community and there is eager anticipation for this September when both JCCS and CCS will start the new school year as Grace Christian School."

## Professional development

Professional development is a continual point of discussion in our schools. A good number of the schools in our Canadian Reformed circles have spent some time studying and discussing the book *Virtuous Minds*:

*Intellectual Character Development* by Philip E. Dow. This book reminds us of the need for developing intellectual character including courage, carefulness, tenacity, fair-mindedness, curiosity, honesty, and humility. Each of these characteristics is characterized by “an earnest desire to know the truth.” This knowing of the truth suggests that there is an objective truth and as teachers, we are privileged to declare this truth to our students, and to help them pursue their understanding of all truth as far as they are able. Another, fairly new development is the Teachers College offering of the Certificate of Reformed Education. To obtain the certificate, teachers will complete six courses: four addressing foundational matters for Reformed Education and two electives. These electives include Storytelling, Leadership, Legal Issues, Ethics, and subject specific offerings such as Science for the Reformed Classroom. This is a welcome development for our schools as the Teachers College becomes increasingly relevant to our schools across the country. We also pray that the College’s continual efforts to obtain permission to grant professionally recognized certification in the area of education may be successful. These efforts are in much higher gear than ever before. We patiently and eagerly wait to hear how things progress.

## **Education in Alberta**

Our schools in Alberta continue to be confident of the LORD’s blessings despite the challenges that may come their way with a new NDP government. The NDP government, in the past, has run on a platform of defunding independent schools. While that was not explicit in the most recent election platform, there continues to be reason for concern. So, with confidence in the Lord, the community in Neerlandia was encouraged: “Now is a good time to talk to our MLA, to encourage him to stand up for our schools if pressure mounts to defund us. Let us also continue to remember our schools in our prayers; let us not take for granted the funding support that the Lord has allowed us to enjoy for many years. Finally, at this time of uncertainty, perhaps we should all make an effort to be just a little bit more vigilant with our spending. Even if you do not have school-aged children, let us all think twice about the non-essential purchases that we make, bearing in mind that the time may be coming soon when we are all asked to dig a little deeper into our wallets in order to assist parents in providing their children with a Reformed education.”

## **Absenteeism**

Another topic that is often discussed around staff room tables is absenteeism. Mr. Wieske from Cornerstone Christian School in Guelph writes a good paragraph about it, with a good deal of wisdom.

“Absenteeism: Often. . . there are parents who take their children out of school for a number of days during the winter months to go on a vacation. I can understand why this is done, and when looked at from the family’s perspective such a trip can be a great decision. Most students can afford it easily to miss a few days without much difficulty. However, from a collective perspective this can be a very frustrating and inconvenient practice. Well-organized parents will approach the classroom teacher well in advance to make her aware and ask for a package to be prepared so the child will not fall behind on the core subjects. This seems reasonable and well-thought out, but it is not. Our teachers are more than willing to help out, but it often means planning far ahead and taking extra time to prepare these packages. In addition, when multiple families do this, we get the collective brunt of these absences in the classroom and it can be very difficult to keep things rolling if everyday someone else is missing. Our Parent Handbook states that, as a rule, students should not be taken out of class on regular school days. I believe that this is a good rule, and on behalf of the staff I would like to ask everyone to be considerate of the impact personal family decisions like these have on the learning environment of our school.”

## **In Memoriam: Gary Drost**

The school communities of Parkland Immanuel in Edmonton and Timothy Christian in Hamilton mourned the loss of a colleague during this school year. Mr. Gary Drost taught in Alberta for five years and had just moved to Hamilton in September of 2014. Brother Drost’s sudden passing due to liver disease was a trial for his students, past and present, as they wondered why the Lord would take such a good teacher away so quickly and so early. Gary’s fiancé, Grace Hulleman, is a teacher at Guido de Bres high school, and so his passing touched on this school family as well. On a personal note, Gary was a life-long friend of mine and he is greatly missed by many. We all take comfort in the Lord’s providence and his love.

A lot of schools have been busy working things through for the next school year. Teachers have found new positions, some have retired, and some will continue to remain in the schools in which they presently serve. As of the end of May, many schools were still looking for teachers. Mr. Stoffels, from Smithers BC writes, “It has been one of the most difficult years for staffing that I can recall. Other schools have been struggling to find staff as well. I would like to encourage the youth of our supporting churches to consider teaching as a career.” What better way to end an Edu-sketch?







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**Q** When asked at a gathering of Reformed people, a large majority indicated that they had “friends” among unbelievers. This was followed by a reaction of thankfulness. Are playmates, fellow-workers or colleagues and other social contacts automatically “friends”?

What then is the meaning of the saying, “Tell me who your friends are and I tell you who you are?” Is having friends the same as being a friend to others? Are those “friends” only acquaintances or just people you know like “Facebook friends”? Is a friend not much, much more than that? How can having friends outside the community of godly believers be praiseworthy when we read that “friendship with the world is hatred toward God” and do not invite, take into your house or welcome anyone who does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh? (2 John) etc.

**A** As with so many words in our vocabulary, they have different connotations which are derived from different contexts and situations. In relationships there are different levels of acquaintance, familiarity, affection, intimacy, and trust. The word “friend”

also is used in different contexts, so that a general colloquial use of the word “friends” in the social media such as Facebook has a much more superficial connotation than when we think of bosom friends (like David and Jonathan were, for instance) or even of the friendship the Lord Jesus expressed regarding his disciples (John 15:14, 15) or James mentions regarding the relationship between the LORD and Abraham (James 2:23; cf. Isa 41:8).

The Webster Dictionary defines the word “friend” as “one who cherishes kind regard for another person; an intimate and trustworthy companion,” while friendship is described as “mutual regard cherished by kindred minds.” My dictionary adds an explanation that will be helpful to illustrate how people in general consider “friendship” among men: “Friendship is a deep, quiet, enduring affection, founded upon mutual respect and esteem. Friendship is always mutual. Friendship is more intellectual and less emotional than love. . . .” The

dictionary also distinguishes between friendship and friendliness, which is “a quality of friendly feeling, without the deep and settled attachment implied in the state of friendship.”

In our life we are engaged in a variety of relationships: at work, in the neighbourhood, in a sports team, or in the church. Generally speaking we call this our social life, which entails companionship, collegiality, connectivity that take the form of relationships in which we learn to esteem one another, respect each other, show sympathy to each other, and which we use to help, assist, and encourage one another. In the development of these relationships we show friendliness (as one of the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, Gal 5:22) but in the course of time certain relationships grow and deepen to a more affectionate, appreciative, and attractive bond of trust and confidence. Although this can be the case in certain relationships with unbelievers, depending on the reality of kinship and kindness, for a friendship to grow and deepen into a bond of love and intimacy depends on the unity of faith. Indeed, that’s the *ideal friendship* which is possible with fellow-believers only (though certainly not with every brother or sister either!).

In the context of such a social life and a variety of relationships, it is true indeed that it characterizes a

person when we see with whom and with what kind of people they develop a relationship of greater or lesser depth (i.e., “Tell me whom your friends are and I will tell you who you are!”). Also with regard to our place in the midst of this world “friendship with the world” (James 4:4) characterizes where someone’s heart is: with God or with the world, in a worldly lifestyle. God wants to have our heart, soul, mind, and spirit, yes our whole life, which will certainly restrict our abilities in developing relationships with people at work or in the community. Establishing a relationship with a friend in the world, however, does *not* imply “friendship with the world.”

With regard to John’s second epistle also, we have to note that John is speaking about *not* receiving deceivers, false teachers, into your home; i.e. people who will lead the congregation and or the individual believer astray. John, otherwise, promotes the well-known Eastern hospitality (3 John) and would support and promote very much an approach of relationship evangelism! Then we

will experience differences in the development of relationships with some compared to those with others, so that we won’t become friends with everyone in our social circle automatically; yet, we may be thankful for such friendships with colleagues or teammates or neighbours with whom we have a deeper than superficial relationship in which we can help, assist, and support one another. When we then develop a deeper relationship of friendship with some people in the context of our social life and daily contacts, we certainly may prayerfully and thankfully use such a friendship for the pursuit of faith and hope and love with the neighbour as well!

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

### **Ask us a question!**

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Nancy Pearcey, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning*. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010**

**Additional Information: 328 pages. Also available as an eBook**



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### **Saving Leonardo**

How can we best influence our world and the society in which we live? In this important book, Nancy Pearcey shows that it is not by political action in the first place but by influencing the culture. She recounts how after the upheavals in the universities in the 1960s, the Left

marched on the English department while the Right took the White House. But which was the more effective strategy? The Left managed to take over teaching positions in universities and pass on their radical ideas to many young minds with the result that an intellectual consen-

sus on issues like the legitimacy of abortion and homosexual rights was achieved. This transformation of the thinking of that generation made subsequent legislation on abortion and gay rights possible. Pearcey mentions this development at the beginning of her book to illustrate the importance of worldviews in shaping society and political action. She also shows how the forces of secularization have co-opted Christian culture and used it for their own ends. For example, the scientific enterprise arose out of a biblical view of nature but is now used to attack Christianity.

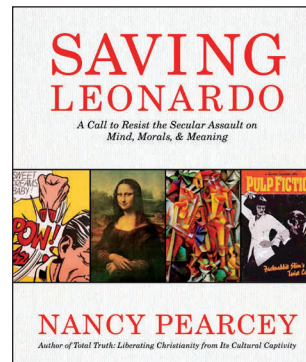
### Issuing a challenge

Within this context, Pearcey issues the challenge for Christians to be counter cultural, as the early church was, and liberate people from the power of false ideas. Being isolationistic and simply condemning the bad in the culture around us is not the answer. Christians should aggressively promote the biblical worldview in all areas of life so that a distinctively Christian culture stands out as a clear alternative to the dominant secular one. In order to do that we need to understand what we are up against so that we can respond effectively. For that reason, the bulk of the book is devoted to examining how we have arrived at the present cultural crisis in order that we may respond in the most effective manner.

The key issue is the matter of truth. The biblical concept of truth being a comprehensive unity and a unified whole is no longer a common conviction. During the 2008 American presidential campaign, some Christian teens were interviewed. They were pro-life, but many of them indicated that their favourite political candidates were for abortion. They explained this disconnect by saying that you can't pass judgment on someone because that's their belief. "They had accepted a secularized view of truth that reduces Christianity to a subjective preference, draining it of any spiritual or cultural power" (23). Secularism teaches that moral values are only personal. There is no absolute true morality for everyone. Absolute truths are only those that can be scientifically established as an empirical fact.

### Fact/value view

Pearcey shows how this fact/value view of truth has impacted all cultural activities, including the arts and sciences. Chapters two to nine give a clear and well-illustrated journey through time of how this dualism has affected and shaped different fields of cultural endeavour. She considers Enlightenment rationalism



and romanticism to be two divergent paths to secularism. These chapters are an enriching read and very helpful for understanding the issues involved. For example, secularism teaches that only science constitutes true knowledge. The Bible is only true in a spiritual non-literal sense. It's the message that counts and not what it literally says, because what the Scripture says cannot be verified. So if science, for example, says one thing and Scripture says another, then one must adjust one's interpretation of Scripture to the findings of science. One can see this destructive influence of scientific materialism for instance in the dogma of evolution. When it comes to the arts, Pearcey has richly illustrated her writing with appropriate coloured pictures to drive her message home.

### Bach as missionary

Although the analysis that Pearcey presents is in many ways depressing, given the cultural hegemony of secularism, yet she ends the book on a high note. She notes how Bach's music is taking Japan by storm and even inspiring a spiritual revival. Masaaki Suzuki, founder and conductor of the Bach Collegium Japan, said in an interview that "Bach works as a missionary among our people. . . . After each concert people crowd the podium wishing to talk to me about topics that are normally taboo in our society – death, for example. Then they inevitably ask me what 'hope' means to Christians." He concluded: "I believe that Bach has already converted tens of thousands of Japanese to the Christian faith" (267). Pearcey then asks: "Where are today's counterparts to Bach? Where is the music and art that expresses biblical truths so eloquently that it invites people to embark on a search for God? Christians must go beyond criticizing the degradation of American culture, roll up their sleeves, and get to work on positive solutions. The only way to drive out bad culture is with good culture" (268). She also aptly reminds us that a biblically functioning church is the best apologetic for a Christian culture and worldview. So as church members we are all involved and we can all get to work! Reading this book will be of considerable help and encouragement. Highly recommended.

**C**



*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jew or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13)*

## Hymn 50:1, 2

*The Spirit came, as promised, in God's appointed hour;  
and now to each believer he comes in love and power.  
And by his Holy Spirit, God seals us as his own,  
and through the Son and Spirit makes access to his throne.*

*The Spirit makes our bodies the temple of the Lord.  
He binds us all together in faith and true accord.  
The Spirit in his greatness brings power from God above,  
and with the Son and Father dwells in our hearts in love.*

Have you noticed something about people? Well, that is a silly question because there is a lot to notice of course, but I've been thinking about how people that we know are similar to each other, but different as well. If I look at my own family I see similarities in how they look and how they act but I also see differences in their characters. One child will feel shy in a crowd whereas another feels energized by a group of people, one will jump and play enthusiastically whereas another will quietly read a book. We are all in the same family and we have things about each other that are the same and yet we are different from each other because we are individual people. I think that's part of what Paul is saying to the Corinthians in the passage that I've shared with you. We are all different people but we are in one family, God's family.

We have different gifts and talents from other people in God's family, yet we are the same because we belong to the Lord. We have all been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ. He died on the cross and paid for our sins. We have been buried with him and we have all been raised to a new life. Wow, it is such a wonder and such a gift to be part of God's chosen people. We are different from each other and each of us has our own experiences and challenges yet we are the same in our standing before the Lord. When you celebrate your birthday this month then I encourage you to remember who you are: A child of the Lord, chosen and redeemed to be his special treasure. I hope you have a wonderful day celebrating this with your family and friends.

## August

### 4 **TERENCE BERENDS will be 39**

6528 1st Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

### 5 **PHILIP SCHUURMAN will be 56**

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### 9 **ROSE MALDA will be 58**

Mt. Nemo Christian Nursing Home  
4486 Guelph Line, Burlington, ON L7P 0N2

### 18 **FENNY KUIK will be 63**

140 Foch Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2C 5H7

### 23 **JACK DIELEMAN will be 43**

6528 1st Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

## A NOTE TO CELEBRANTS, PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

*The Ray of Sunshine column has moved to a new desk and, consequently, a new address! Rachel Vis is eager to take over the administration of the Ray of Sunshine. Rachel is married to Thomas Vis and attends the Canadian Reformed Church in Attercliffe. Rachel has completed the recreational therapy program at Niagara College and for about three years has been working for the Anchor Association between the Anchor Home in Beamsville and the Beacon Home in Dunnville. She has gone to Anchor Camp for the last three years and has absolutely enjoyed the time she could fellowship with the campers. She has met many of our Ray of Sunshine participants and has a deep love and appreciation for each one of them and looks forward to an on-going communication via this column. Just recently Rachel has become a Mom! Congratulations Rachel and Thomas with your baby girl, Chantelle Ruth; may you experience a shower of blessing from our Lord as you step into this new chapter in your life.*

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## Misapplication of Article 30 C.O.

The church has in recent years fallen into the practice of assuming that all matters intended for general synod must first be presented to classis, and then to regional synod, for endorsement, before they can be presented to general synod.

This practice is incorrect, as demonstrated by the recent proposal from Providence CanRc to amend the Belgic Confession. This proposal was endorsed by Classis Ontario West, and will be on the agenda of regional synod which will (presumably) endorse it and pass it on to general synod. Dr. J. Visscher recently made some comments regarding the substance of this proposal. My comments deal with the process being employed. Submitting this matter to classis is incorrect. As per Articles 30, 31, and 37 C.O. this proposal should go directly to general synod and has no place on the agenda of classis or regional synod.

Let's have a good look at these articles.

### Article 30 – Ecclesiastical Matters

*These assemblies shall deal with no other than ecclesiastical matters and that in an ecclesiastical manner.*

A good regulation,

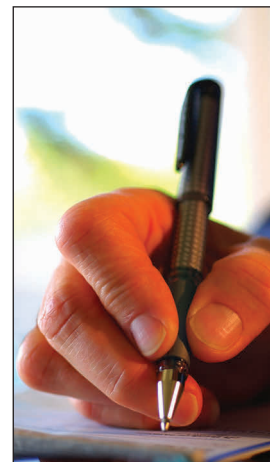
*A major assembly shall deal with those matters only which could not be finished in the minor assembly or which belong to its Churches in common.*

A major assembly (classis) *shall deal with those matters only. . . which belong to its churches in common.* The churches in common to Classis Ontario West are the churches in that classis, which does not include all the churches in the federation. Classis has jurisdiction in matters that affect its member churches. It has jurisdiction to “deal with” these matters, and its decisions are “considered settled and binding” as per Article 31 C.O. No classis has jurisdiction to “deal with” any matter that goes beyond the churches under its jurisdiction, as this proposal clearly does. This matter cannot be finished in any minor assembly, and only general synod has jurisdiction to deal with a matter that affects all the churches in the federation.

Further, if a proposal is not endorsed by classis, does that mean it cannot proceed to synod? Is that decision of classis “settled and binding”? Does classis determine the

agenda for general synod? Does synod need the endorsement of classis in this, or in any matter? Does the Providence Consistory need to convince two other ecclesiastical assemblies of the merit of their proposal before it can be presented at synod? Where do we find this in our C.O.?

*A new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it.*



Also a good regulation No one can appeal a decision of his or her consistory directly to regional or general synod. It must first be dealt with by classis.

### Article 31 – Appeals

*If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to the major ecclesiastical assembly; and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.*

This well known article is clear. Whatever is agreed (decided) is settled and binding. However, classis cannot make a “settled and binding” decision for the whole federation. Only general synod can do that.

### Article 37 – Jurisdiction

*The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the regional synod has over the classis, and the general synod over the regional synod.*

Article 37 is fully in accord with the previous articles. General synod has jurisdiction over all regional synods, classes, and consistories. Regional synods have jurisdiction over classes in their area. Classes have jurisdiction over their member consistories.

A proposal to amend one of our confessional standards clearly affects all the churches in the federation. Only general synod has the jurisdiction to place this matter on its agenda and deal with it. Neither classis nor regional synod has jurisdiction to deal with a proposal that affects all the churches.

The idea that a proposal intended for general synod must be “endorsed” or “supported” or “approved” by classis and regional synod is not supported by Article 30 and is foreign to our C.O. We have fallen into a bad habit. A proposal affecting all the churches, as this one does

should go directly to general synod, and classis should realize that it has no jurisdiction to deal with it.

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Harry Harsevoort, Hamilton, ON*

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



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Press Release of Classis Ontario West, May 27 & June 10, 2015, convened by the Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church**

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. J. Ludwig opened the meeting in the usual Christian manner. Some items of memorabilia were mentioned and prayed for:

- Rev. B. DeJong was recently installed as the new pastor of Blessings Christian Church.
- Cornerstone extended a call to Rev. J. Louwerse of Neerlandia and he accepted this call.
- Rev. R. Bredenhof has departed London for Mount Nasura, Australia.
- Rev. W. Bredenhof is still waiting for the approval of his Australian visa.
- The ongoing health concerns of retired professors Dr. N.H. Gootjes and Dr. J. De Jong.
- Elder G. Woudenberg of the Ancaster church recently had open heart surgery.

The delegates from Ancaster reported that all the churches were duly represented by two delegates. Classis was declared constituted and the executive took their seats. Rev. J. Ludwig served as chairman, Rev. W. Bredenhof as vice-chairman, and Rev. D. De Boer as clerk.

Classis proceeded to conduct eight licensure examinations: Brs. Tim Schouten, Iwan Borst, Jonathan Chase, Jeremy DeHaan, William den Hollander, Hilmer Jagersma, David Pol, and Jake Torenvliet. These brothers were all given permission to speak an edifying word in the churches for a period of one year.

Correspondence was received from two recent seminary graduates, Brs. Johan Bruintjes and Steven Van

Leeuwen, requesting an extension of preaching consent. Classis granted these requests.

A report from the classis Treasurer was gratefully received for information. An audit of the classis finances was also received with thankfulness.

The chairman asked the delegates the questions from Article 44 of the Church Order. The work of the office bearers is being maintained, the decisions of the assemblies are being honoured. Only one of the churches required the judgment of Classis in a disciplinary matter.

The London church was appointed as the convening church for the next classis, scheduled to be held September 16, 2015. The suggested executive: Rev. W. Bredenhof (chairman), Rev. D. De Boer (vice-chairman), Rev. B. De Jong (clerk).

Classis adjourned on the evening of May 27.

Classis resumed with renewed fervour on the morning of June 10. The chairman opened the day's meeting in the usual Christian manner.

Classis proceeded to conduct a licensure examination for Br. Hangil Lee. He sustained his examination and was granted permission to speak an edifying word in the churches for a period of one year. Classis then examined the following three brothers for candidacy in the churches: Rick Vanderhorst, Gerard Veurink, and Randall Visscher. Br. Vanderhorst was declared eligible for call. Brs. Veurink and Visscher did not sustain their examinations.

Opportunity was provided for personal questions. Censure was deemed unnecessary. The Acts and Press Release were approved and this assembly concluded in the usual Christian fashion.

*W. Bredenhof, Vice-chairman of that classis*