

Clarion

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera down a path in a forest. The trees are bare and the scene is misty, with a warm, golden light filtering through the canopy. The person is wearing a dark jacket and is walking on a path covered with fallen leaves.

A Man as God Intended

Clarion

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What's Inside

Rev. Eric Kampen's lead article speaks of being sensitive to the language of our time with a focus on one particular word: "man." What should we say? Man, human, humankind, human beings, peoplekind?

Earlier this year, Dr. Cornelis Van Dam wrote two articles on what it means to be a Christian woman. We now have a follow up article from him: "The Calling of Husband and Father." In this issue we also begin a three-part series from Rev. Clarence Bouwman, starting with "Why Are We Canadian Reformed?"

Issue 12 also has a Treasures, New & Old meditation, a book review, and an article for Further Discussion.

Laura Veenendaal

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Man, Human, Humankind, Human Beings, Peoplekind *What Should We Say?*

In my task as minister of the Word, I try to be sensitive to the language of our time. I do this not just in case there are unchurched visitors attending worship, but in the first place for the members of the congregation. The gospel must be proclaimed in language that is used in daily life and can be understood. It is, of course, impossible to avoid using theologically loaded terms like justification, sanctification, or Trinity, but these terms will become familiar to those hearing these terms used on a regular basis. Attending worship and being busy with the Bible ourselves inevitably gives us a verbal advantage over those who are not exposed to biblical teaching. It is inevitable that first-time attendees will hear words and concepts that unfamiliar. With some persistence and effort, it is striking how quickly those who desire to learn begin to catch on.

Still, it is important to be in touch with the times when it comes to language, so that one will not use words that are easily misunderstood. Meanings shift. There are also words, however, where it is not simply that meanings shift, but that they become loaded with negative connotations. Because of the negative connotations, one may decide to perhaps avoid such words. The word that I want to focus on is the word “man.”

Politically incorrect

The word “man” is still considered acceptable as a term to refer to males. It is not, however, considered acceptable to refer to all human beings, male and female. It is seen as sexist, an indication of a patriarchal society where the name of the male of the species seems to be more important than the female. While one may wish to use the term mankind, the fact it begins

with the word “man” makes it little better than the word “man.” Therefore, it is suggested it is better to use terms like human beings, humankind, or even peoplekind.

This does raise the question as to whether this is really that big a deal. If it takes away possible misunderstanding leading to unnecessary offense, why not use a term like “human beings”?

It may be appealing to go this route, but there is a bigger issue at stake. This attempt to get rid of the word “man” to refer to all human beings is a symptom of the rebellion against God started by our first parents in paradise. There is more at stake than meets the eyes.

Act of rebellion

To see how it is an act of rebellion, we must think back to the opening chapters of Genesis. In Genesis 1:26-27, we read how God decided to create man. We read how he created man in his own image, male and female. The key point to note here is that God, as the creator, gave our first parents their name in distinction from the other animals. As for the animals, God did not name them. He gave that task to our first father. We read in Genesis 2:19-20 how Adam named all the animals. You see, man named all the animals, but he did not name himself. We can compare this to a family where parents name their child. A child may invent names for his or her toys, but they do not choose their own name.

Throughout Scripture, we see a recurring use of the word “man.” For example, in Psalm 8:4, David says, “What is man that you are mindful of him?” He follows that through by speaking of the honour and glory God gave man. In Romans 2, where Paul talks about the sinfulness of all, he starts off by saying, “Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, everyone of you who judges....” There will be times when the word “man” is used to refer to a male but, in many cases, it refers to man as God’s special creature, male and female.

When we see that it is God who called his chief creature “man,” the rejection of this name manifests a rejection of God. The name change is a change of gods, where the true God is pushed aside, and man puts himself on the throne. Man claims the right to name himself.

Is this overstating the case?


Does this seem like it is overstating the case? I don’t think so. The effort to replace God’s name for us strikes me especially every time I work through the Lord’s Days dealing with our sin

and misery. You can’t explain the fundamental doctrines about our sinfulness without using the word “man” in the way God intended it. In Question and Answer 6 it reads, “Did God, then, create man so wicked and perverse?” The answer starts off, “No, on the contrary, God created man good and in his own image.” In Question and Answer 7 it reads, “From where, then, did man’s depraved nature come?” In Question and Answer 9 it reads, “But does not God do man an injustice by requiring in his law what man cannot do?” In the answer we read, “No, for God so created man that he was able to do it. But man, at the instigation of the devil, in deliberate disobedience robbed himself and all his descendants of these gifts. In Question and Answer 14, in response to the question whether any mere creature can pay for us, the answer states that “God will not punish another creature for the sin which man has committed.”

We see the same use of the word “man” in Article 12 of the Belgic Confession, when it states that God sustains all creatures “by his infinite power in order to serve man, to the end that man may serve his God.” We see it also in heading of Article 14, “The Creation and Fall of Man” and the heading of Article 17, “The Rescue of Fallen Man.”

We need to realize, then, that the world takes offense at “man” language not because it is *sexist language*, but because it is *God language*. The word “man” brings out how we are creatures responsible to our Creator. By taking distance from the word “man,” there is not only a rejection of the fall into sin, but also a rejection of the gospel. For the gospel is about the man Christ Jesus. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:21, “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.” The use of the word “man” is not just a reference to our Saviour being a male. He was man, a full-fledged human being, and as man he has become the Saviour of man, male and female.

The gospel is countercultural

It will be difficult to maintain the use of the word “man.” It will seem outdated and sexist. Yet, we must maintain it if we wish to preach the gospel. We need to respect the name God has given us and not get tangled up in the babble of the world that has rejected him. The gospel teaches us to again see ourselves as God sees us. When we learn to do that, we will not be offended by the word “man” but, with David, we will be able to say, “What is man that you are mindful of him?” That was already true at creation, and it is even more true when we consider our recreation. 

Spiritual Leadership in our Pentecost Churches


"But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:17c-18)

Christians are correct to have high expectations of the ministers, elders, and deacons who serve them. Christ himself appointed them to their offices through the congregation, who chose them based on spiritual qualifications that give evidence of their sincere Christian faith and humble godly lives. They are under-shepherds serving the Good Shepherd, who bought the church with his precious blood. However, our Lord does not rest the future of the church solely on the shoulders of the ordained men in our churches. When he ascended into heaven, Jesus did not leave his disciples as orphans. Jesus promised to be with his church in a much richer and fuller way than God had ever been with them before (John 14:28). In the Pentecost church, the Holy Spirit gives leadership.

The disciples would know the Holy Spirit, for he dwelt with them and he would be in them. From Pentecost on, God is with anyone who confesses their faith in Jesus Christ, and he dwells in their hearts by his Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38). God the Spirit works directly in the hearts of all Christians through the Word. Praying for his guidance, every member of Christ's church can find comfort in God's promises, and wise direction in the truth of his laws. The Spirit of truth, who dwells within us, ensures that Christians always hear the voice of the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ. We are sheep, but we are not *helpless* sheep, because God's Spirit dwells in our hearts. This is what spiritual leadership looks like in Pentecost churches.

The Pentecost perspective has a great impact on the work of office bearers, for they may know that God himself is caring for his flock by his Spirit and Word. Members of Christ's church must learn to depend first of all on the Holy Spirit, who counsels and comforts them through the study and meditation on

God's Word. The wellbeing of the members of Christ's church does not depend on (ordained) people coming to visit at just the right time and saying just the right words of comfort and counsel. The Holy Spirit is the "First Responder" and wise office bearers will recognize the prior work of the divine Helper. When office bearers open their Bibles and make it their aim to assist believers to keep in step with the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, they can be sure that believers are cared for in the best way possible.

Our spiritual wellbeing does not depend on the stellar performance of some ordained men, but on the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives. Office bearers may work in the shadow of the Holy Spirit. By God's grace, our Pentecost churches have spiritual leadership, all day and every day. 

For further study

1. Read 1 John 2:20-29 and Romans 8:1-17 to see the powerful, visible work of the Spirit.
2. How does the Spirit help Christians in need as the First Responder?
3. How can office bearers work as servants of the Spirit of truth?



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The Calling of Husband and Father

In response to two articles on what it means to be a Christian woman focusing on Proverbs 31¹, I received requests on doing something similar for the place of the man, more specifically that of a husband and father. I gladly comply. Christian marriage is such a beautiful gift from God that it is always profitable to reflect on aspects of it in the light of God's Word. There is much that could be said, but we need to confine ourselves to some highlights.

To begin with, let's consider how a husband and wife relate to each other in terms of headship and submission. A classic passage dealing with this issue is Ephesians 5, where the apostle Paul begins a new section at verse 22 dealing with wives and husbands.

The husband as head of his wife

The apostolic instruction is clearly stated but not always properly understood. He wrote: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands" (Eph 5:22-24).

To understand this passage, it will be good to consider for a moment what constitutes the husband's headship. To do that, we need to go back to the very beginning. After the Lord God had created Adam, he said for the very first time: "It is not good." Up to now, God had always commented on his work of creation with "God saw that it was good" or something similar. But now he observed that "it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). Adam was the first human being and a part of his body became the actual

material from which the second human person, a woman, was made. And just as Adam had the authority to name the animals, so also he had the authority to name the woman who came from his side. Adam "called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20).

To understand male headship in marriage, one needs to keep in mind that Adam was created first and Eve in the second place. She was even made from his body. Furthermore, Adam had the authority to name the woman, Eve. These factors help us to appreciate why the male, Adam, had the position of head in the first marriage and why this pattern has applied to every God-pleasing marriage since. What happened at the dawn of history at creation continues to have relevance right up to the present time. Headship in marriage belongs to the man and not to the woman.

However, the events at creation also highlight another continuing normative element. Both Adam and Eve had an



¹ Cornelis Van Dam, "Who is this Woman?" in *Clarion* 69:5, 6 (March 6 and 20, 2020).

equal standing before God. Both were made after God's image (Gen 1:27). A wife is not inferior to her husband. This equality also comes out in the fact that Eve was made "as a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). Translating is difficult work and the term "helper" can suggest an inferior status. But that is not the meaning of the text. After all, the same term "helper" is used of God himself (e.g., Exod 18:4); to suggest that he is inferior to human beings is out of question! The meaning of "helper fit for him" is that God will give Adam someone like him who fits with him and corresponds to him physically and spiritually. As such she will be an equal and suitable counterpart for him. At the same time, she as his wife is subordinate to him, for he is the head as the first one created and as the one from whom she was made.

But this subordination did not make Eve unequal to her husband. Matthew Henry, a famous seventeenth century commentator, memorably commented on Eve's being made from Adam by writing that the woman was "not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."² In other words, a wife is not to rule over her husband, but she is also not to be a doormat for her husband to walk on nor his slave to be abused and treated as if she were his property.

When we keep in mind the biblical background of Adam's headship over Eve and their nevertheless being equal before God, we can understand that the apostolic call for wives to be submissive to their husbands does not suggest in any way the inferiority of the wife over against her husband. Rather, the apostle's words are a directive for Christian marriage in keeping with the divine creation of the first couple on earth. When a woman marries, she voluntarily subjects herself to her husband, not only to please him, but above all to honour the Lord. "Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.... Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands" (Eph 5:22, 24). What motivates this submission? It is a deep love for her husband just as the church has a deep love for her Saviour. Because of a wife's love for her husband, she is willing to enter into the marriage state and promise "to love and obey him, to assist him, and to live with him in holiness according to the holy gospel" (Form for the Solemnization of Marriage). She will live in subjection to him and love him just as

the church is to be subject to the Lord and loves him. She does it without compulsion, willingly, and with great love and so she reflects the relationship of the church to Christ.

Since a wife's loving obedience to her husband is as to the Lord himself, the onus is on the husband to fulfill his own calling towards his wife. This duty is awesome and challenging.

The husband's love for his wife

While the wife reflects the submission of the church to Christ, the husband must reflect the love that the Saviour has for the church and so submit to him. After all, "the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior" (Eph 5:23). A Christian husband therefore has an enormous responsibility. The apostle commands: "Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). That is a difficult task and yet that is the obligation that Christ has entrusted to Christian husbands.

To love your wife as Christ loves the church! If anything underlines the necessity of the work of the Spirit in a Christian marriage, this fact takes away any doubt that the Spirit's work is indeed necessary. To love as Christ loved means to be prepared to even give oneself up for her, that is to die for her (Eph 5:25). Did the Saviour not say: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13)? How much more is this the case if it involves your wife! Indeed, the apostle points out that "husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church" (Eph 5:28-29). As husbands would do anything for themselves, so they must do every positive thing they can for their wives.

Christ himself illustrated the type of love that he expects from husbands, and indeed from us all, but now the point is that husbands are to imitate the love of Christ. How did Christ show his love to his disciples? He was as a servant to them. As their Lord and master, he became as a servant and submitted himself to them in meeting their needs. At the last supper before his betrayal, he put off his outer garment, took a towel, tied it around his waist, got water and then began to wash the feet of his disciples. After he was finished, he said; "I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 10.

you" (John 13:12). In other words, as the Lord Jesus explained elsewhere: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:26–28). The message is clear. If a husband is to show the love of Christ, he will submit himself as a servant to his wife's needs. His Christ-like love for her will mean that he will do everything possible to make the relationship between them as one reflecting the relationship of Christ to the church. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). Then the fact that both husband and wife are joint heirs will be realized in tangible ways to their mutual joy and comfort. As the apostle Peter put it: "Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honour to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet 3:7).

On the other hand, a husband who likes to assert his authority in a sinful way over his wife is as far removed from the love which Christ exhibited as east is from the west. A husband who does not display servant love in submission to the needs of his wife makes the task of his spouse extremely difficult. But if a husband serves his wife in love and devotion, living in submission to the Saviour, and reflecting the very love of his Lord and master, then the calling of the wife to submit to her husband is made quite easy and is a joy. Who would not want to submit to such love that imitates the love of Christ himself?

The husband has a critical responsibility for making his home a happy place. As head of his wife and family he sets the tone by living in joyful submission to his head, the Lord Jesus Christ, and so reflects something of the love of the Saviour who came to serve and did everything possible for those whom he loves. A Christian husband should do no less.

Also as a father, the head of the wife and family sets the tone and serves the family's needs to the praise of the Lord.

The duties of father

As head of the family, a father has a position of enormous importance – a fact not always fully realized. The Lord holds him responsible for the wellbeing of the family entrusted to his care. Within the limitations of an article it may be useful to summarize his task under his identity as a prophet, priest, and king in God's service. The Heidelberg Catechism rightly confesses that every

Christian shares in Christ's anointing and thus has prophetic, priestly, and royal aspects to his identity (LD 12). So much more has the father as head of the household this identity.

As a prophet, the father is to enable his household to confess Christ. Although the mother also has her task in this regard, it is the father who has the first responsibility to ensure that their children are taught in the way of the Lord. As members of the new Israel of God (Gal 6:16), the words of old still retain their authority. The instructions of the Lord must be imprinted in the lives of the children. "Hear, O Israel ... You shall teach them diligently to your children. And shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deut 6:4, 7). The teaching of the father must reach the very heart of his children (Prov 23:26).


As a priest, the father presents himself and his family as an offering of gratitude to God (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). But, in order to do that, he must show priestly sympathy for the weaknesses of his wife and children just as the Lord Jesus as our only high priest does toward us (Heb 4:15–16). This includes being patient and forbearing in accordance with the divine Word. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). God expects earthly fathers to be compassionate as he is. "As a father shows compassion to his children so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him" (Ps 139:13). Fathers are to yearn for the well-being and salvation of their children as the father in the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11–32).

As a king, the father is to rule his family and guide it in God-fearing ways. He is to do everything possible to ensure that the family does not conform to the sinful patterns of this world (Rom 12:2). Rather he is to encourage them to focus on "whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable" (Phil 4:8).

The blessing

We live in challenging times and the family unit is under great pressure from a fast-paced secular culture that more often than not glorifies individualism and denigrates the family unit and the biblical roles of husband and wife. Yet, the family is the divinely ordained cornerstone of society and what happens within the walls of a Christian home has enormous consequences for the future spiritual wellbeing of the next generation and of the church.

As Christians we are blessed with knowing God's expectations for the task and place of husbands and wives. When we seek to follow God's will for our parental roles, be it with stumbling and sin, the family will, empowered by the Spirit, reflect something of the glorious relationship of Christ and his church (Eph 5:22-33)! Now that is encouraging! Such a family can experience something of the beginnings of the eternal joy. When Christian husbands and fathers do everything they can to conform to God's will and prayerfully seek the best for their spouse and family, then they can also ask with integrity that the Lord bless them as a family. When such petitions go to our

heavenly Father with our mediator seated at his right hand, we receive the peace and confidence in the Spirit that we need to continue to do our office and calling as husbands and fathers to God's praise and glory. 



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Why Are We Canadian Reformed?

For most readers of this magazine, the honest answer to this question is, I suspect, that we're Canadian Reformed because we were born into these churches. A minority of readers would say they're Canadian Reformed because they married a Canadian Reformed person. And a handful actually made a deliberate and well thought out decision to join this federation of churches.

The more pressing question then becomes: why are we *still* Canadian Reformed today? There are a couple of angles to an honest answer to that question.

First, on the more subjective, human side, many of us remain Canadian Reformed because the Canadian Reformed Church (CanRC) represents our comfort zone. That's a reference to:

a. We are generally comfortable with how things go in our church;

b. This is where our parents and siblings are and where our friends are. To leave this church would be very disruptive socially;

c. Very good schools are attached to the CanRC. Leaving the CanRC would/could have unhappy consequences for whether our children may attend these schools.

Of course, the interplay between these factors varies from person to person.

Second, on the more objective side, there's the conviction that the Lord wants us to be members of the CanRC. Then appeal is made to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, where three marks of a true church are listed: the pure preaching of the gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the right use of church discipline.

It seems proper to me that we all give the question some honest thought. What actually are my motives for being and remaining Canadian Reformed? Vital to this thought exercise needs to be: what does the *Lord* think of my being Canadian Reformed? And: is he pleased with my real reasons for remaining Canadian Reformed?

Plan

The last few decades have seen a gradual shift in CanRC circles of understanding what the church is and hence why we are Canadian Reformed. A simple illustration of that development is the observation that in my youth, withdrawing from the church was distinctly frowned upon and prayer was offered in church for the repentance of the withdrawing member. It has become more common today to note a member's withdrawal with the wish or prayer that the Lord bless the departing person in his new church family.

Because of this shift, it seems to me imperative that we pause to ask the question at the head of this article. Yet, to answer the question properly, we need, I'm convinced, to have our eye not on people or what suits us; we're instead to have our eye on the Lord. I say that because the church is not a human organization but is a divine work; Christ, after all, is the Head of the church. That is why the pressing question is: does the Lord want me to be Canadian Reformed?

With this question in mind, I intend in this article to dig into the past to show that the very existence of the CanRC is not people's work but the Lord's. That provides the first part of an answer to our question. But more will need to be said. So, the Lord willing, in future articles we'll talk about other church gathering work the Lord is doing in our land, give some attention to the current health of the CanRC, and explore other potential angles in pursuit of a good answer to this question.

Why did the CanRC come into existence?

We read in Acts 16 that Paul and Timothy were "forbidden" to speak the Word of God "in Asia" (the north-west corner of present-day Turkey). A bit later: "They attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (vv. 6f). That's because the Lord wanted the Word of God to go to Philippi instead, in order that his church might be established in that town.

We're curious how the Spirit of Jesus may have prevented Paul from travelling one way and instead nudged him to go another way. I have no idea what means the Spirit used. But

this anecdote is vital to our analysis of how the CanRC came into existence.

This federation of churches began with the arrival in Canada of migrants from The Netherlands after the Second World War (1939-1945). Predictably, these migrants took with them into their new country the memories and experiences and scars of the war. In a similar way, these migrants took with them what they'd experienced and learned in the church struggles that culminated in the ecclesiastical Liberation of 1944. In fact, the Head of the church used those experiences in The Netherlands to ensure the establishment of the CanRC in this new land. To demonstrate the truth of that statement, I take a moment to refresh our memories about what that Liberation was all about.

Liberation 1944

A number of doctrinal issues came under discussion in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands in the course of the 1930s, with several ending up on the table of General Synod 1939. As examples I mention the doctrines of Common Grace, Visible/Invisible Church, and Presumptive Regeneration. What prompted a split in the churches in 1944, though, was not these doctrinal discussions and Synod's conclusions about them, but the heavy-handedness by which those conclusions were forced upon the churches. Allow me to take one of these doctrinal topics to illustrate this point.

Abraham Kuyper was a man used mightily by the Lord at the end of the nineteenth century to work reformation in the Dutch ecclesiastical scene. Kuyper loved his Lord and Saviour, wrote prolifically about what it meant in practice that Jesus Christ was sovereign over every square inch of life, started a biblically-based university in Amsterdam in 1880, and became Prime Minister of The Netherlands in 1900; he died in 1920. But he had emphases in his teachings that led to unhappy consequences.

Kuyper noticed that not all children with whom the Lord God established his covenant (signed and sealed in baptism) ended up believing the promises embodied in the covenant. That observation led him to speak of an "inner covenant" and an "outer covenant." Those covenant children who ended up believing the Lord's promises were, he said, in the "inner covenant," while those covenant children who ended up in adulthood not believing God's promises were in the "outer covenant." The "inner covenant" was the real thing and overlapped those who were elect. The "outer covenant" was, well, somehow less than the real thing and contained little a parent of an "outer

covenant” child could work with. Kuyper added: those children in the “inner covenant” were regenerated (or born again) upon their baptism; those children in the “outer covenant” were not regenerated upon their baptism.

In the years of the Great Depression and the War, a substantial number of children died in infancy. Bereaved parents wanted to know whether their deceased child was with the Lord or not. Those who took Kuyper’s teaching on the covenant to its logical conclusion had to answer: we don’t know. For parents can’t know whether their child is in the inner covenant or in the outer covenant until their child has reached adulthood, when evidence of regeneration is real. Meanwhile, parents should *presume* the regeneration of their children when they were baptized. Obviously, you cannot comfort parents at the burial of their infant with a teaching on their child’s presumed regeneration – and hence election.

This restlessness in the pew led to discussions in the press and eventually to requests for General Synod to adjudicate whether this teaching was in fact scriptural. Now, I need to add that back in 1905, already, a synod had said that baptizing children on the grounds of presumptive regeneration was “less correct” than baptizing them on the grounds of God’s promises to them (so-called “Pacification Formula”). In other words, this synod thought it best to leave room for Kuyper’s teaching without saying that his views were scriptural. Synod 1939 (it ran through to 1943), however, decreed that Kuyper’s teaching was the only correct position. A new synod beginning later in 1943 (yes, during the heart of the War) received appeals on the matter. Despite arguments against the decision of the 1939-1943 synod (including requests to return to the 1905 position to “live and let live,” at least till after the war), this new synod decided that all office bearers had to embrace and teach this presumptive regeneration. When a noted leader in the churches, Klaas Schilder, professor of Dogmatics in the church’s Seminary, stated his objections to Synod’s decision, he was summarily suspended from his office as Minister of the Word and professor in Kampen. Candidates for the ministry who disagreed with Synod’s position were refused access to the pulpit. Churches that protested were put outside the federation. Efforts to soften Synod’s authoritarian and heavy-handed approach were futile.

That hardness resulted in a sizable percentage of the church membership liberating themselves in 1944 from Synod’s iron fist; yes, that’s seventy-six years ago this year. These people wanted space to believe what the Lord had revealed concerning their (deceased) children without having their consciences bound by human (synodical) teaching. This desire for *freedom to believe* God’s own promises came with our fathers to the new world.

Christian Reformed Church

Church leaders in The Netherlands, particularly Schilder, told migrants to the new world that Jesus Christ gathered a catholic church and so they should assume that there was already a church in Canada they could rightly join. The first post-war migrants took that advice and joined themselves to the existing Christian Reformed Church (CRC; its roots in North America go back to the 1840s). Because I’m living in the Niagara Peninsula (Smithville, to be precise), let me relate one episode centring on St. Catharines that illustrates what numerous Liberated migrants experienced across Canada.

By 1948, four Liberated migrant families were members of the CRC in St. Catharines (the family heads being C. Groenewegen, T. J. Hart, J. J. Knegt, and W. J. Hamoen); br. J. J. Knegt was even an elder in that church. In a letter dated 3 December 1948, these four brothers (plus a communicant son to br. Knegt) expressed concern to their Consistory on emphases they heard in recent months in the preaching as well as in catechism class. They also urged the Consistory to initiate action to exchange the existing sister church relation with the Synodical Reformed Churches in The Netherlands for a relation with the Liberated Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. They expressed their willingness to talk about these subjects with brothers from the Consistory in the near future.

The Consistory answered this letter on 22 December 1948, indicating that they would not enter into discussions with these brothers on the subjects raised; on the contrary, they admonished the letter writers for importing the Dutch church struggle into Canada. Some three weeks later, br. J. J. Knegt received a letter from his Consistory (dated 10 January 1949) stating that he had been suspended from his office of elder. This letter was

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signed also by delegates from the CRC in Hamilton. What made the matter particularly painful was the speed of the suspension combined with no existing evidence that the Consistory ever approached Elder Knecht for a discussion or verbal admonition about the contents of their letter. For men who came out of a context of heavy fistiness, this response to their letter was sufficient to close the door to further cooperation with the CRC. All four family heads withdrew their families from this church's membership.

Please note that this experience was not unique to St. Catharines; parallel episodes can be related from across the country. But the outcome was: The Spirit of Jesus did not permit these post-war Liberated brethren to remain in the Christian Reformed Church.

Protestant Reformed Church

During a prewar trip to North America, Klaas Schilder had befriended Herman Hoeksema, the principle leader in the Protestant Reformed Church (PRC; this church had broken away from the CRC in 1924 and existed only in the USA); Schilder was comfortable with much of what he heard about the PRC. So, he encouraged migrants to Canada to get in touch with Protestant Reformed churches south of the border to see if they would assist them in establishing PRCs in Canada. Protestant Reformed churches in Michigan were happy to send "missionaries" to Canada to assist the Liberated migrants in establishing church life.

To stay again with the Niagara region: Liberated migrants in the Hamilton area took up contact with the PRC in America and with their assistance instituted a Protestant Reformed Church in Hamilton on April 19, 1949. The four families who could find no freedom for their conscience in the CRC of St. Catharines joined this church. In short order, this church called and received a minister in the person of Rev. Herman Veldman from the United States. From the start of his ministry among the migrants, he stressed those points of doctrine where the PR position differed from the thinking of these Liberated people. One point of clear confrontation was on the covenant: does God actually make his covenant with non-elect children or not? Veldman insisted the answer was "no;" God gives his covenant promises only to those children whom he has elected to salvation. So, parents cannot impress on all their covenant children that God's promises are real for them; parents can only *presume* God's promises are for their children.


Given what Liberated people had been through in the old country, we can well understand that they pushed back against Veldman's teaching. But Veldman was unmoving and put his foot down; any new migrants seeking to join "his" church first had to submit to his instruction and embrace it. When the Consistory distanced itself from the minister's position, the matter came to Classis – and Classis sided firmly and squarely with the minister. This intransigence became the reason why Veldman's congregation (except for the minister) left the PRC. Again, parallel accounts can be related from elsewhere across the country. But the point is this: Here is an example of how the Spirit of Jesus did not allow these Liberated migrants to join the PRC.

Now what?

Other migrants in the late 1940s and into 1950 were well aware of what happened in relation to the CRC and the PRC. With no knowledge of other churches in Canada that could be said to be biblically faithful, they saw no option but to begin a new federation of churches. In Ontario, the first CanRC was instituted in Georgetown (now Orangeville) on August 13, 1950. A CanRC was instituted in Hamilton on May 20, 1951, with which the independent PRC merged soon after.

Christ's work

Were these institutions simply the work of men? Behind all the human toil and human weakness, we need to recognize the hand of the Lord. It was his pleasure that the heritage received through the church struggle in The Netherlands culminating in the Liberation of 1944 should result in the establishment of another federation of churches in Canada.

Why, then, are we Canadian Reformed? The first part of the answer needs to be: Because the Lord has formed these churches and – notably through birth – has given us a place in them. As we contemplate the question of whether we should *remain* CanRC, we must first acknowledge that the Lord *made* us Canadian Reformed. 



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Response to Dr. Visscher: *A Better Way?*

In his recent article, “A Better Way?” Dr. Visscher reflects on the decision of Synod Edmonton to mandate the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise to seek the input of the churches with respect to potential alternate psalm renditions, and as well as additional hymns that might be included in the Book of Praise.

There is some level of unhappiness with the Book of Praise among the churches, which Dr. Visscher seems to believe is the result of the “synodical model” for the approval of songs sung in worship. He refers – with agreement, it seems – to the claim made by a “well-known figure in the OPC,” that Article 55 is “proof of hierarchy in the Canadian Reformed Churches.” He urges that we need to reflect on “synodical control” over the songs which may be sung by the churches in public worship. He suggests that we should revisit Synod Chatham’s decision to cap the number of hymns in the Book of Praise at 100, proposes a different way in which our songs could be approved for use in worship, and that a digital collection of songs could provide flexibility that is not possible with a “hard copy” Book of Praise.

With respect to Dr. Visscher’s remarks about the format of the Book of Praise, it may well be that in the future the churches will decide that it is wise to move in the direction of a digital format. I can’t think of any confessional reasons why we might not do so. I can think of good reasons to add alternative psalm renditions and hymns which may be sung in public worship.

I do have some concerns, however, with the way in which Dr. Visscher frames the issue. He wonders whether Synod Edmonton’s decision will “bring happiness” to the churches with regard to our songbook. In principle, there are undoubtedly good reasons to add hymns, old and new, to our collection. But, if we do so in the hope that it will make people happy, we’re making a serious error. From a principial point of view, if there are such things as slippery slopes, this is surely one of the most slippery of all, because we would be feeding an illegitimate appetite. From a practical point of view, trying to make people happy by including all the songs that they would like to sing in worship services is a fool’s errand, because it will prove impossible.

Using “what will bring happiness” as a criterion for choosing what we will sing in worship is dangerous. It reverses the focus of worship from what pleases God to what pleases us. If there are such things as slippery slopes, this is surely one of the most dangerous of all. Our happiness in worship should derive from the confidence that what we are singing in worship will be pleasing to him.

Whenever worshippers evaluate public worship on the basis of their experience, specifically whether it makes them happy, there will be unhappy worshippers. Inevitably, there will be some who would have preferred to sing songs they know better and love more than the ones that were sung. Using worshippers’ happiness as a criterion for choosing songs for use in public worship – whether that leads us to stick with the ones we have, or, add new ones – begs the question: What will it take to make people happy?

From a practical standpoint, to paraphrase the Preacher: Of the making of songs, there is no end. We can be thankful for the gifts that God has given, and for the fact that believers want to use those gifts to compose and perform songs of praise to God. Many songs are confessionally sound, musically beautiful, and may thus be eminently suitable for public worship.

But which ones shall we sing? I presume that we all agree that someone should assess the songs we’re going to sing in public worship, to ensure that they are faithful to Scripture and the confessions, and to judge their musical integrity. We may entrust that responsibility to whichever body we think most appropriate – the local consistory, the classis, or the general synod. But practically speaking, regardless of which body performs the task, none of them has the time or resources to review all of the songs that have been composed, in previous centuries, or last year. There are so many to consider, both psalm renditions and hymns, and so many that we could sing in public worship.


Regardless of whether we have 100, or 200, or even 300 hymns, regardless of whether we put them in a book, or in digital format, choices will have to be made. Inevitably, some of us will be unhappy because some beautiful, faithful songs – and personal favourites – old and new, are excluded, and others of us will be unhappy with songs that have been included. We all have our personal preferences when it comes to what we sing

in the worship services. Some songs are admittedly of better quality than others; some songs are more enjoyable to sing than others. But genuine happiness in worship can only be produced by the confidence that what we sing is pleasing to God.

Dr. Visscher seems to accept the judgement of the “well-known” OPC minister, that Article 55 is “proof of hierarchy” in the Canadian Reformed Churches. I was taught, however, that in the Church Order we spell out what we – as “autonomous churches” – voluntarily promise each other and what we may expect of each other. In principle, what we have agreed to in Article 55 is not unique to the Canadian Reformed Churches. It reflects what churches holding to the Church Order of Dort have always agreed to, and reflects our mutual commitment to preserve uniformity, not in our singing, per se, but in our doctrine, and our commitment to maintain purity in worship.

Dr. Visscher seems to question the legitimacy of what we have agreed to in Article 55 because there is no Scripture passage from which it has been drawn. That’s really a bit of a red herring. No one claims that every article of the Church Order is or must be drawn directly from one or more Scripture passages. We only believe that they flow out of biblical principles of church government and are consistent with biblical teaching.

There are certainly other ways to work out those biblical principles of church government. Ours is not the only “system” that may be characterized as being consistent with biblical teaching. If we’re convinced that there’s a better or even an equally good alternate way of organizing our life together, we’re free to change our Church Order. But I simply don’t believe that the provisions of Article 55 prove that there is hierarchy in our churches, or that Article 55 is an instance of “synodical control.”

I am all in favour of happiness among our churches. But we will not encourage happiness among the churches if we speak about the decisions of General Synod in ways that imply that it is an independent body, which is somehow separate from the local churches, and with final authority over the churches. Because of the nature of our federation, when our major assemblies make decisions about the matters we have assigned to them, the truth is that we – not “they” – have made those decisions. 

Sincerely, in Christ,

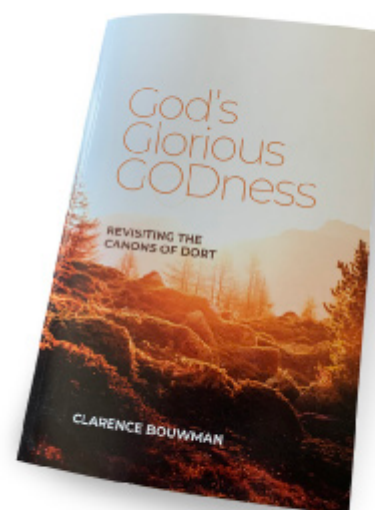
Dick Wynia

Time to Revisit the Canons of Dort

The occasion last year of the 400th anniversary of the international Synod of Dort (1618-19) saw renewed interest in and publications on the Canons produced by that assembly. Happily, among those publications is *God's Glorious GODness*, a commentary on the Canons of Dort by one of our own pastors, Clarence Bouwman of Smithville. With it he has given to us a thorough yet accessible explanation of one of our Reformed confessions that seems to be perennially (but undeservedly!) in our peripheral view at best. My hope is that Rev. Bouwman's book will bring the Canons of Dort front and centre and help many church members find refreshment in the cool and satisfying waters of the gospel it summarizes.

The Canons of Dort deal with some vital but often misunderstood teachings of Scripture. They are probably most famous for their explanation of God's decree of election, but along with that are found the doctrines of God's sovereignty as well as man's responsibility, and how both stand together. Other teachings include man's depraved nature and enslaved will and what Christ does to them when he redeems us. Want to know what God says of children who die in infancy? Do you struggle with knowing whether you are elect? Do you doubt your salvation? Should Christians live with assurance or not? It's all in the Canons! And Pastor Bouwman helps us understand these and many other truths with clarity.

Bouwman has written an explanation of the Canons of Dort before (1998) but, when the publisher approached him about reissuing it, decided it needed a thorough updating and expansion. And now we may enjoy the fruits of that additional labour. In the main body, the book takes the reader article by article through the four chapters (and five heads of doctrine) of the Canons. Each one is carefully explained as to its meaning but, just as importantly, the author takes great care to show the biblical underpinnings of what we confess. He is adamant that the Canons do nothing more than "echo" Scripture and so he writes out many texts in full to show the biblical origin of the doctrine. This is an invaluable aid for everyday Christians to assure themselves that what they confess in the Canons is simply the truth of the Bible.



God's Glorious GODness:
Revisiting the Canons of Dort

By C. Bouwman
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What is new in this edition? The introduction has grown and offers more insight into both the history of the Synod of Dort and the theological divisions that were developing in the Dutch Reformed churches of that time period. Lots of valuable information here! Many explanations of the articles have been rewritten for a fuller, more robust presentation. At the same time, the reader will find numerous helps to undertake a thorough study of the Canons. For instance, each article is written out in full (so you don't need a copy of the Canons open beside you); whenever another confession is referenced, it is set apart in a shaded box; and diagrams are regularly interspersed to help visualize certain points. An especially useful, new feature is the regular reference to the little-known Rejection of Errors that are found at the end of each chapter within the Canons of Dort. These are errors promoted by the original Arminians (and often still around today) and having them highlighted and explained is something not found in many works on the Canons. These clarifications help us understand where the Arminians went wrong and how we can avoid the same errors.

Probably the single biggest improvement in this new edition is the addition of discussion questions. Rev. Bouwman has thoughtfully divided up the explanation into manageable sections of some fifteen to twenty pages and the questions appear section by section. The questions are probing and detailed and also helpfully numbered to the corresponding article they deal with. The sixteen sections make this book an ideal length for a season of Bible study. The inclusion of both a Scripture index and a Confession index add further practical value to the work as they enable the reader to look up and cross-reference key passages.

Since the Canons of Dort contain a summary of some of the deeper and more challenging truths of Scripture, it is worthy of careful study by Bible study groups of all sorts. As you delve in and the Spirit goes to work, your faith will grow strong roots and your life will produce healthy fruit! To that end Pastor Bouwman's new book on the Canons will be a big help. Recommended! 