



Clarion

48 MONEY MATTERS 57 NAPARC 2023

66 TIMOTHY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL—CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

what's inside

As we begin this new year let me ask: will your walk with the Lord be richer and fuller at the end of 2024? It can be if you and I follow our Lord's instruction through Peter as Arjen Vreugdenhil's meditation shows. Another query: are you (and your children) being faithful stewards with God's money? Wade Van Bostelen provides some sage advice in his first entry of a new occasional column, *Money Matters*. Welcome aboard Wade! You'll also find Keith Sikkema's next installment in his church history series, showing us how the Lord brought Christianity to the barbarian peoples of Europe.

Mission organization and church polity are hot topics in our federation currently and so we are happy to present Arjan de Visser's follow-up on the former subject while Karlo Janssen tackles the latter, breaking down for us the current messiness of how overtures (proposals) are dealt with in our broader assemblies. In *Readers' Forum* you'll also find interaction with a recent article on the subject of hierarchy. Jan DeGelder's column *Governing the Church* returns to discuss the reason why our churches long ago decided to sing only songs approved by a general synod as well as what it means to "use" the liturgical forms (CO Art. 56).

Alongside these informative articles we have a report on the most recent meeting of NAPARC, a newsletter from MERF, a celebratory recounting of Timothy Christian School's 50th birthday, something for the kids, birthday greetings, a book review, and two press releases. And to start the whole issue off is a little editorial from yours truly looking once more at the issue of pronouns but from a different angle. May all these pieces help to inform, encourage, and engage you in the issues of our time.

Peter Holtvlüwer

contents

- 43 Editorial
Peter Holtvlüwer
- 44 Treasures, New & Old
Arjen Vreugdenhil
- 45 Mission Organization of the CanRC
Arjan de Visser
- 48 MONEY MATTERS
Wade Van Bostelen
- 51 The Ecclesiastical Route (1)
Karlo Janssen
- 54 Governing the Church
Jan DeGelder
- 57 NAPARC 2023
William Gortemaker
- 61 MERF Newsletter
- 63 Alcuin the Scholar and Charles the King (2)
Keith Sikkema
- 66 Timothy Christian School
Celebrates 50 Years
Marsha Leistra
- 69 Ray of Sunshine
Rachel Vis
- 70 Clarion Kids
Amanda DeBoer
- 71 Book Review
In Holy Service
Wes Bredenhof
- 73 Readers' Forum
- 75 Press Release (Classis MB, Dec 8)
- 76 Press Release (Classis Niagara, Dec 13)

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Clarion

A trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed
Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

STATE YOUR PRONOUNS?

Have you been asked at work to state your pronouns? Or perhaps at university the professor has introduced himself, announced his pronouns, and asked all the students to do the same. As a Christian, what should you do?

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

One answer might be to simply go ahead and state your own pronouns. After all, you are not stating anything untrue. And more than that, you will be expressing love toward your transgender neighbour whose chosen pronouns are different from their biological gender and thus need to be stated. If you, a non-transgender male or female, do what your transgender neighbour does, they will not feel so isolated or marginalized. They may begin to see you as an ally. By the simple act of stating your pronouns, you will help your transgender neighbour feel normal and accepted. In that atmosphere, you as a Christian could continue to show care toward to transgender individuals, looking for opportunities to speak to them about salvation in Jesus Christ. Would it not be good to love our neighbours this way?

Certainly, one of God's commands is to love our neighbour, but what is love? Is loving doing what makes your neighbour feel good in the moment? That's how the unbelieving world currently defines love, but God's definition is quite different: love is first and foremost doing what makes your God feel pleased (Deut 6:5; 1 John 3:22). Only obedience to God will ultimately be good for our neighbour.

Many things we might do will make our neighbour feel good in the short-term but are offensive to God. For example, in chatting with unbelieving neighbours, when the conversation turns to criticizing and putting down someone you all know, you might go along and add your own cutting remarks. Your companions will feel good that you participate, that you think like them, but is your God pleased with such gossip? He calls it sin (Rom 1:29). In that scenario, what would have pleased the Lord is if you had stood up for the maligned person and urged the others not to run him down. But how would your exhortation make your neighbours feel? We would hope they would see your point and stop their bad behaviour, but very likely they would take offense at you. It would be natural for them to feel judged and turn on you.

PLEASING GOD FIRST

That's the risk we run when we aim to please the Lord first. Since the will of unbelievers is regularly opposed to God's will,

by choosing to please God, we may well leave them displeased, disgruntled, or with other bad feelings. That's not our aim, of course, but by speaking up our neighbours will have heard the truth of God's Word and we pray for the Holy Spirit to go to work on their conscience. How many times didn't the Lord Jesus leave his unbelieving neighbours with such bad feelings? Think only of the rich young man, Nicodemus, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or King Herod.

So, what about stating our pronouns? Pronouns only need to be stated when gender is something a person chooses rather than being the binary biological reality of male or female as created by God. The latter is the truth revealed by God while the former is a human lie spurred on by Satan.¹ Simply by participating in this activity, then, you support the lie. Can God be pleased with this? When you make your transgender neighbour feel that their chosen lifestyle is normal and acceptable, can God be pleased with that?

Think, too, of how your participation makes your transgender neighbour think that you support their worldview when in fact you do not. If, in later conversations, it becomes clear to them that you believe in a created binary after all, will they appreciate that you made it seem otherwise when you willingly stated your pronouns? No one likes being deceived. Would not true love for God and neighbour in this situation be to politely decline to participate or to otherwise make it clear that because God created you to be the man or woman you are that your pronouns do not need to be stated?

Whatever is said, we must avoid being mean, callous, or cold, for none of these please God either. Like the Lord Jesus, we want our unbelievers to repent, believe, and be saved. What pleases God and in the long run also benefits our neighbour is when we speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Let's aim to act kindly while speaking forthrightly and trust the Spirit of Christ to do the work of heart-change that only he can do. ☑



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¹ For a fuller outworking of this point, see my article "Preferred Pronouns?" in *Clarion*, Vol. 72, No. 7, May 19, 2023.

SUPPLEMENTING YOUR FAITH

Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue . . . knowledge . . . self-control . . . steadfastness . . . godliness . . . brotherly affection . . . love

2 PETER 1:5-7

Faith in Jesus Christ is the essential quality of any Christian. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). The Reformers rightly proclaimed that we are saved *sola fide*, by faith alone. There are no other requirements to receive the gracious salvation that our Lord accomplished for us.

But faith may not remain alone. It must have consequences in our lives. Faith without works is dead, wrote the apostle James. Peter makes the same point but fleshes it out in more detail. What are the works that belong to a living faith? In 2 Peter 1:5-7 we find a list of seven “qualities” in which all believers should grow. It is instructive to study this list and apply it to our lives. In what areas have we grown? In what respects are we stagnant, or still immature?

Each of the seven qualities in this list builds on the previous one. From less advanced to more advanced. A sincere believer will grow in *virtue*: a basic understanding of right and wrong that influences the choices of everyday living. As we grow in virtue, this must be combined with *knowledge*, especially knowledge of Jesus Christ (v. 2, 8) and his Kingdom teaching, to guide our virtuous living. When you try to give that practical Christian knowledge a place in your life, you will find that you need *self-control*; you need to disregard many of your natural inclinations, deny yourself, and keep your thoughts and actions in check. When self-control is tested through trials and temptations, you develop the important Christian quality of *steadfastness* (or *endurance*).

By *godliness* Peter means more than just doing what is right; that is already covered in the word *virtue*. Godliness goes deeper: as our faith grows, our life is filled with deliberate acts of worship, with ongoing prayer for ourselves and others. We learn more and more to see the world through a spiritual lens and approach it in a spiritual way. This affects our relationships: first of all, with other believers, as we learn *brotherly affection*, real and practical care for our fellow Christians. On this basis, finally, we develop genuine Christian *love*, which reflects the love of God toward all people; love that is not only kind, but a love in which we sacrifice ourselves for others, go the extra mile, and do good even to our enemies.

A beginning Christian is only just starting to grow these qualities. But if we consider ourselves mature, we’d better excel in all these things. They are not optional. The apostle presents it to us as necessary homework. “Make every effort!” (v. 5). If you don’t

work on these things, you risk being unfruitful (v. 8), as if you are blind to the basic idea of being a Christian (v. 9).

The list in 2 Peter 1:5-7 is a program for growth. You could use it as a personal training program: How can I be more virtuous today? How do I control myself better? To whom can I show more brotherly affection and love? It can also be helpful for mentoring and discipling, or as a conversation opener in family visits.

Working on growth—it is not an easy task; it is a serious challenge. But it is work we do in dependence of God and in the power of his Holy Spirit. Remember verse 3: his divine power has granted to us all things that we need for this growth. So, let’s get to work, making every effort to follow Jesus, to act more like him. Our reward will be to be like him; when the Day finally comes, we will be perfect as he is perfect and share in his heavenly glory. 📖

SUGGESTED READING:

James 2:14-26

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Think of concrete examples where our Lord Jesus exhibited qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7.
2. The word “virtue” (or “excellence”) is also found in Philippians 4:8. Use this verse to discover different aspects of Christian virtue.
3. What analogy does Paul use to explain “self-control” in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27? How can we train ourselves in this Christian value?
4. Use passages such as Romans 12:9-21 and 1 Corinthians 13 to discuss what it practically means to supplement our faith with brotherly affection and love.
5. Could the list in 2 Peter 1:5-7 be helpful in determining whether a man is qualified to be an office bearer in the church?



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Mission Organization of the CanRC

ARJAN DE VISSER

In the previous article we evaluated the decisions of the URCNA Synod Niagara 2022 with respect to the way the federation organizes its mission projects. In the present article, we take a look at the way the Canadian Reformed Churches go about organizing their mission projects. In a third article, I plan to evaluate the CanRC's organizational model and offer some suggestions.

The way the CanRC organizes their mission projects is very much decentralized. The churches do not have a federational mission agency or anything like that. Foreign missionaries are ordained, commissioned, and supervised by individual churches in Canada (e.g. Hamilton, Toronto, Aldergrove). To keep the workload manageable, each sending church typically appoints a

mission board that takes care of most of the work involved. The same applies to home mission and church planting in Canada. Everything is left to local initiative. The only form of cooperation is that every sending church has a cluster of congregations around it that support the work financially and prayerfully.

The only exception, as far as I know, is the organizational structure for Mission in Mexico. This project is not overseen by a single church but by a group of three cooperating churches (Vernon, Abbotsford, Willoughby Heights). These three churches have established a supervising body, called CCiM (Cooperating Churches in Mission) that meets every six months.¹

¹ Information based on email correspondence with Dr. Karlo Janssen. Hopefully, Dr. Janssen will find time to explain the modus operandi of the Mission in Mexico project in a separate article.

The closest thing to cooperation the CanRC has is the Canadian Reformed Missions Association (established in 2011), which is a platform for sharing information. The CRMA organizes an annual conference with speakers addressing various mission-related topics. But foreign mission work as such is never discussed at classis or synod level. Home mission projects might perhaps be discussed at classis level but not at synod level.

Why does the CanRC maintain this decentralized approach? There is historical background here. The CanRC was established by immigrants from the Netherlands in the 1950s and 1960s. The Dutch churches had just come through the Liberation of 1944. Apart from doctrinal issues, there were church-political issues that played a role in that struggle as well. As a result of what had happened during the schism, there was a strong resistance against anything that smelled like hierarchy and centralized power in the church.

It would not be unfair to say that the Dutch churches were reacting (some would say: overreacting) to drawbacks of the centralized approach which they had observed in the mission structures of the Reformed Churches before the schism of 1944. In order to understand this, we need to briefly look at the way mission work was organized by the Dutch churches in the years before 1944.²

MIDDELBURG 1896

The organizational model for foreign mission had been established by the Synod of Middelburg 1896. The synod's decisions were influenced by the views of Dr. Abraham Kuyper and his colleague F. L. Rutgers. Kuyper believed that all office-bearers (including missionaries) should be ordained and supervised by individual churches (not by ecclesiastical assemblies). At the same time, he recognized that local churches may lack the expertise that is needed to supervise foreign mission projects, and therefore the churches should develop ways to cooperate and help each other. At a mission conference held in 1890 in Amsterdam Kuyper had stated: "The authority and calling to do mission lies with every local church. Since individual churches are lacking in manpower and resources it is necessary that churches cooperate for this purpose. This cooperation should be organized not by way of a separate

organization but through the regular ecclesiastical structures, and be subject to decision by the churches in their synod."³

Practically, this meant that Kuyper felt that the synod should appoint a standing committee that would serve sending churches with support and advice. He also suggested that regional synods should appoint deputies to serve sending churches with advice in practical decisions. The mandate and authority of such deputies should be regulated in a kind of church order for mission work or, as it came to be known, a Mission Order (*zendingsorde*).

Thus, the missionary vision and structure proposed by Kuyper may be summarized as follows: First, foreign mission is the mandate of the church, not a society. Second, missionaries should be sent out and supervised by local churches, not by major assemblies. Third, the churches together (at synodical level) should formulate a set of guidelines to which sending churches would bind themselves. Fourth, synod should appoint mission deputies to help the sending churches with advice and to facilitate consultation and cooperation.

SENDING CHURCHES AND A MISSION ORDER

The Synod of 1896 accepted Kuyper's proposals. Local churches were encouraged to consider becoming "sending churches" (or: calling churches) but Synod also appointed a central mission committee. The suggestion to develop a Mission Order was accepted as well. In 1902 the churches adopted a Mission Order which contained regulations about various aspects of mission work such as: the training and examination of candidate missionaries, the financial support of sending churches, the use of native evangelists on the mission field, and the installation of office-bearers on the mission field.⁴

The decisions of the Synod of Middelburg opened the door for the Reformed Churches to engage in mission projects with much vigour and zeal. During the first half of the twentieth century many missionaries, mission teachers, medical doctors, and nurses were sent out to Java and other islands in the Dutch East Indies (present day Indonesia).

As the work on the mission fields expanded and flourished, something else expanded as well: the influence of the central mission committee. Mission historians observe that the mission

² For a more detailed overview, see my chapter "Foreign Mission by the Local Church" in *Living Water from Ancient Springs: essays in honor of Cornelis Van Dam*, Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011.

³ Translated from "Referaat van Dr A. Kuyper over 'zending.'" In: P. N. Holtrop (ed.) *ZGKN100: Een bundel opstellen over de Zending van de Gereformeerde kerken in Nederland ter gelegenheid van de honderdjarige herdenking van de Synode van Middelburg 1896*. (Kampen: Stichting WZOK, 1996): 176

⁴ The Mission Order was revised and expanded significantly in subsequent years.

deputies usurped more and more power and that the sending churches were sidelined in the process.⁵ Missionaries were sometimes frustrated by decisions by the central mission committee. There was a feeling that mission was not run by the sending churches but by a small group of deputies. The word *deputaten-zending* (mission by deputies) was coined to refer to the situation, and it was not intended to be a compliment.

LIBERATION 1944

After the Liberation of 1944 the newly established Reformed Churches (liberated) made a new start. The churches had to find new mission fields and to reorganize the structures for doing foreign mission work. Because of the painful memories of the heavy-handed approach of the Synod of 1943–44, there was a strong backlash against anything that smelled like hierarchy.

The Synod of Kampen (1951) made drastic decisions with respect to foreign missions: Article 52 of the Church Order, the article that stipulated that the foreign mission work of the churches was regulated in the Mission Order, was deleted. In addition to this, Synod decided to discontinue the standing committee of mission deputies. From now on there would be no general regulations for foreign mission work, and it was considered inappropriate to discuss matters concerning foreign mission work at major assemblies. The responsibility for foreign mission work was to be carried solely by local churches.

The decisions of Kampen 1951 were hailed by many as a victory over hierarchy and a kind of liberation of mission work. Others were more cautious. Dr. Klaas Schilder, reflecting on the decisions of General Synod, stated: “Mission deputies, as a top-down functioning institution, are no more; we understand this and we agree with the rationale to do this, and thus we agree with the decision as well. Time will tell, however, whether there may not

be a need arising from the grass roots level to appoint general advisory committees. There is so much in common that needs to be thought through.”⁶

CANADA

The developments in the Netherlands informed the approach the CanRC took when they set up their foreign mission work in the 1950s. A meeting of delegates of churches was held in Carman in 1958. This meeting was planned in such a way that it would coincide with the synod that was held in Carman at the same time. However, the meeting was not formally part of synod business.⁷ It was decided that the church of Toronto would be asked to take the initiative and call a missionary to be sent out to Dutch New Guinea (present day Papua).

As the CanRC grew in numbers, a few more mission fields were added and a few more congregations took up the task of being a “sending church.” The basic organizational model, however, remained the same. Missionaries were sent out by sending churches in Canada (Toronto, Hamilton, Aldergrove, etc.) with each sending church being supported by a group of churches in its region. Nothing has ever emerged at the federational level except for the Canadian Reformed Missions Association (established in 2011), which functions as an informal platform for consultation.

Clearly, the approach of the CanRC mirrors the approach of the Dutch churches after Synod of Kampen (1951)—an approach which, it should be mentioned, has by now been abandoned by the Dutch churches themselves. In the next article, we will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this organizational model. 



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⁵ J. A. Boersema, “Een halve eeuw Vrijgemaakt-Gereformeerde Zending,” 62. See also D. Griffioen, “De structuren van de zending.” In Haak, C. J. et al, *Met vereende kerken: De ‘zendingssynode’ van Middelburg 1896 na 100 jaar herdacht.* (Zwolle: Gereformeerde Missiologische Opleiding, 1996), 49.

⁶ Translated from: K. Schilder, “Jaaroverzicht 1951/52,” in: *Handboek ten dienste van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland 1952* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1952), 168.

⁷ A report of this meeting found its way into the Acts of Synod Homewood-Carman 1958 but it was noted that the report was not part of the Acts of Synod. See “Kort Verslag van de zendingvergaderingen gehouden te Carman, Manitoba, door de afgevaardigden naar de synode van Homewood-Carman 1958.” In: *Acta van de Synod Homewood-Carman 1958 der Canadian Reformed Churches.* (Smithville: Canadian Reformed Publishing House, s.a.), 227-230.

The GAS Principle

WADE VAN BOSTELEN

On the wall of my home office hangs a small plaque I purchased at a seminar about twenty-two years ago, shortly after I started working in the financial services industry. My wife and I attended a seminar, *Managing God's Money*, facilitated by Michel A. Bell, a former senior executive at Alcan. Michel became a believer after spending two years trying to convince his twelve-year-old daughter that Christianity was for uneducated, feeble-minded folks.

I felt that having a biblical perspective on my work was necessary, so when Michel Bell introduced me to the GAS principle, I knew I needed to incorporate it in my professional practice.

If we agree that this simple summary contains many biblical truths about money, it may also have the power to focus our view of our finances. Let's grapple a bit with these principles.

GOD OWNS EVERYTHING!

Since the earth and everything in it belongs to our Lord and, as saved believers, we each belong body and soul to our faithful Saviour, then everything we have is given to us in the role of steward of his assets. Jesus refers to stewards, good and bad ones, in multiple parables. My definition of a steward is a person who has executive control over assets entrusted to them by an owner, and who acts as a trustee according to a set of outlined parameters. So, how do saving and investing work into that principle?

Society teaches that what you have is yours, that you should always want more, and that gaining more will increase personal benefit and enjoyment. I do not suggest that those who labour cannot enjoy the fruit of it, but stewards must understand that



ACCEPT WHAT YOU HAVE!

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you look at something you did not think you needed (before seeing it)? Then you purchased it because it only cost a little bit. You did not need the impulse purchase, but you justified the purchase because it was relatively cheap. The next time you find yourself with an “it’s only” moment, catch yourself. If “it’s only” is an insignificant amount to you, would it still be insignificant if you donated that amount to a charity, or provided someone you know with a hand up? If that “it’s only” moment means you do not need it—give it away. Few people will give away money on impulse because charity does

G **GOD OWNS EVERYTHING!** *The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.* – Psalm 24:1–2

A **ACCEPT WHAT YOU HAVE!** *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* – Hebrews 13:5

S **SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM** and submit your requests to him! *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* – Matthew 6:33

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand. – Proverbs 19:21

their career, income, and everything they have been entrusted with will be accounted for. One example of this accounting can be found in the parable of the talents (Matt 25), which outlines the importance of faithful stewardship. Saving and investing provides the opportunities to grow the assets entrusted to you so that you can continue caring for the needs of yourself and others. Investing also generates economic activity to benefit society by stewarding those gifts to help many others, directly and indirectly. In an indirect manner, invested savings provide the financial capital needed to start businesses, finance infrastructure projects, and provide employment for others. When saving and investing, you steward your assets for more than your personal use.

not feel as good as acquiring something new. Throwing money away on an impulse purchase feels good even though it produces few lasting benefits because you did not need the item before and likely still do not need it. If we are more deliberate with our “it’s only” moments, we will also become more content in accepting what we already have.

I do not seek to curtail the “Protestant work ethic” or to stop people from working to the best of their abilities by accepting this principle—the opposite is true. I highly recommend you use the gifts and talents God has given you to the best of your ability. We have been given our gifts and talents as stewards, so being faithful with our God-given talents is as essential as our faithfulness in using the fruit of those talents.

Accepting what you have helps you gain perspective on your role as steward to avoid the frivolous use of assets. This concept is important if we take the role of steward seriously because these assets are not ultimately ours.

SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM!

In Canada, we are blessed to live in one of the most prosperous nations in the world. We may not realize it because of how we measure what we have. Society teaches us to measure success through comparison to others. Competition seems to be in our DNA, and we measure success by the stuff we accumulate or the experiences we have. When we compare ourselves to others, we tend not to take a global view, and focus only on others in first-world nations. In their documentation on their initiative to end world poverty, the Red Cross says the following:

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep . . . then you are richer than 75% of this world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace . . . then you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

We likely all know of Elon Musk, Bill Gates, or Warren Buffett because they are held up as models of success. Christians are not immune to the tendency to keep up with society's quest for upward mobility. Based on the Red Cross data, all my clients are in the top 8% wealthiest in the world, though the range of wealth is considerable.

As Christians we must grapple with how to first seek the kingdom of God as wealth stewards. In the financial industry, a trust document provides direction to trustees on how to act responsibly on the assets in their care and in many cases they are compensated for their work. Likewise, God gives his stewards direct control over 90% of what he gives us to manage. The remaining 10% is what he requires of his stewards. This principle is commonly known as the tithe and is outlined in Leviticus 27:30 and, more generally, referred to as "first fruits" in Proverbs 3:9.

TITHING BLESSINGS

Why do we give in a tithe-like manner? Does God need the money? Of course not. His purpose will prevail with or without our

funding! Tithing serves to refocus believers on the GAS Principle and is expected in our "trust agreement" in some form. I won't define what income ought to be included in the tithe. Should it be before or after-tax income? Investment gains and dividends? Tax-free income such as inheritances? Each Christian must determine this for him/herself and then carry it out joyfully. "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7). With tithing, consistency and follow through is important.

Perhaps a refocus is necessary. I hear from church treasurers that there are members who give nothing to the church annually, an experience that occurs across various Christian denominations. According to Subsplash, an organization that tracks online giving in US churches, 10–25% of Christians give to their church regularly, and, of those that donate, they estimate that only 11–20% give tithe-like amounts.

Interestingly, those who practice tithing often give more than 10%. Regardless of the amounts donated, the principles outlined in the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem indicate our giving should be deliberate and purposeful. As in Corinth, intentional giving will be blessed to both the giver and the receivers: to the giver, they deliberately and joyfully recognize the source of their assets, and the receiver will be able to flourish under the blessing and support of others.

The GAS principle provides Christians with a framework for managing money and wealth. By truly understanding the source of everything we have, we stop focusing on self. When we accept what we have, we stop comparing ourselves to others and count the rich blessings we have. By seeking the Kingdom of God first, we share in God's work with the assets he has entrusted us with. 



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The Ecclesiastical Route

(1)

KARLO JANSSEN

There's a "bureaucratic mess" in our Canadian Reformed churches. A church once predicted it could happen; don't take offense at the phrase I borrowed. Maybe "mess" is saying it too strongly. However, there's certainly confusion within our churches when it comes to "the ecclesiastical route."

What is this "ecclesiastical route" (aka "the way of the church order")? What evidence is there for a "bureaucratic mess"? How did this all come to be? And what might be done to clear up the confusion and clean up the mess?

Having observed this bureaucratic mess firsthand as clerk of Regional Synod (RS) West 2018 and first clerk of General Synod (GS) 2019, I began to research this mess with the intention of writing a series of articles for *Clarion*. Circumstances meant the project was shelved. Then I found myself serving as clerk of RS

West 2021 and first clerk of GS 2022. The mess was even worse. I became determined to finish the research, write the articles, and then reflect on how to set the ball in motion to have the mess cleaned up.

The research has been completed and the number of articles ballooned to fourteen, too long for *Clarion*. Hence, they have been published as blogposts on the website officebearers.com > opinion. In two articles in this magazine (starting with this one) I present an overview of those blogposts, in the hope that readers will check them out for the detailed and documented narrative.

I want to acknowledge with gratitude the input of Rev. J. De Gelder prior to these *Clarion* articles being published, and the input of a larger number of people with respect to the fourteen articles published online.

“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.”

ORIENTATION

The ecclesiastical route is articulated in the last sentence of the Canadian Reformed Church Order Article 30 as follows: “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.” What this means is that a major assembly—a classis, a regional synod, or a general synod—can only deal with items that have been placed on its agenda by the minor assembly. Note the definite article “the” in “the minor assembly.” Only the assembly that is minor to the major one can put things on the agenda of the major assembly.

This “ecclesiastical route” applies to the two types of submissions listed in our Church Order: appeals (Art. 31) and proposals (Art. 30, 33). With respect to appeals, the route functions well. With respect to proposals concerning new matters, the route has proven bureaucratically messy.

SORTING OUT THE MESS

GS 2007 admitted a proposal from a church which was received directly from that church. GS 2010 received an appeal against the decision to admit that 2007 proposal. The appeal argued the proposal should have travelled the ecclesiastical route. In considering this appeal, GS 2010 observed inconsistency prior to 2007. It described how GS 2007 had struggled with the question of when the ecclesiastical route applies, observing there had been a majority and minority position at GS 2007. The majority allowed churches greater freedom in placing matters directly on the synod agenda. The minority emphasized the need for churches to go the ecclesiastical route.

GS 2010 researched the issue and considered: “It seems that the new sentence added to Article 30 in 1983 is the source of the difficulty” (Art. 62). It sought to resolve the issue by regulating the 2007 majority view (which it dubbed the “older view”) in the Synod Guidelines.

GS 2013 received several appeals against the GS 2010 decision. GS 2013 considered: “Synod 2010 attempted to clarify Article 30 CO by enacting Guideline 1.E for the benefit of the churches, but in fact it rendered the last paragraph of this article ineffective.” Thus GS 2013 (Art. 99) upheld the appeals and replaced the 2010 guideline with another. That new guideline outlined how regional synods should submit overtures to general synod. With this,

the 2007 minority view (aka “newer view”) became the process prescribed in the CanRC.

CONFUSION AND MORE MESS

Stories told in GS 2016 Articles 111 and 112 illustrate confusion about terminology and process. In Article 111, Synod adopted a “proposal” contained in an “appeal” submitted by a church in response to a synod-commissioned report. In Article 112, in response to two overtures (proposals), GS 2016 considered “The Overture does not contain a clear request for action, nor a statement that can be adopted.” This means a proposal that travelled the ecclesiastical route through the minor assemblies was not written properly, and no one along the route realized this.

GS 2019 and GS 2022 dealt with ten overtures in total, and several appeals relating to overtures. Seeking answers to some practical questions in the light of what major assemblies decided between 2016 and 2022 will illustrate the confusion and mess that has existed or still exists.

1. Who submits the overture: the original author or the minor assembly?

Both have happened. Given CO Art. 30 and the 2013 Synod Guideline, it is to be “the minor assembly.” For example, only a classis can submit an overture to a regional synod.

2. Can an overture be “tweaked” as it travels the ecclesiastical route?

Initially the prevailing opinion in RS West was “no;” in RS East it was “yes.” Action by GS 2019 (Art. 85) and a deliberate decision by GS 2022 (Art. 76) suggest “yes.”

3. Is it possible to appeal the substance of the decision of an assembly to forward an overture (proposal) along the ecclesiastical route?

With the word “substance” we are indicating that the question is not about the “procedure” being followed (e.g. the admissibility question) but what the overture is about. Both GS 2019 and GS 2022 were confronted with this question through appeals. GS 2019 (Art. 62) said “yes,” GS 2022 (Art. 77) said “no.” Moreover, the GS 2019 decision implies that GS 2016 (Art. 111) erred in how it dealt with the “proposal” found in an “appeal.”

4. Is it possible to appeal the substance of an assembly's decision to refuse to forward an overture (proposal) along the ecclesiastical route?

Decisions of GS 2019 (Art. 130, 142, 143) suggest the answer is “yes.” This could mean that, to advance an overture that has stalled on the ecclesiastical route, the church that initiated it can switch to the path of appeal. This means that in substance the overture by-passes the “road closed” sign and still (sort-of) travels on.

Now things really get messy. For what I just wrote was not in jest: it has already happened.

5. If a church appeals an assembly's decision to halt an overture (proposal) (i.e. not forward it on), should that appeal be shared with all the churches?

One might argue that this is a matter “common to all the churches.” This happened in the run-up to GS 2019. The response of GS 2019 (Art. 130) to the appeal and the five letters it received regarding the appeal does not give a clear answer to the question.

GS 2022 (Art. 78) also received an appeal (from the same church that sent the appeal in 2019 just referred to) which had an “overture (request)” “embedded” in it. That “appeal, and the overture within it” were not shared with the churches. GS 2022 upheld the appeal but declined to deal with the overture “since all the churches have not had the opportunity to interact with the overture.” It carefully considered the two ways in which this overture could be addressed again, the older and newer views, and opted for an approach analogous to that decided to by GS 2010 (!).

6. Can a church that receives a copy of an appeal submitted to a broader assembly regarding an overture interact with that appeal by submitting something to that broader assembly?

As mentioned, GS 2019 received five letters from churches with regards to such an appeal. Curiously, GS 2019 (Art. 130) explicitly considered the admissibility of the appeal, but not the admissibility of these letters, which is rather odd.

GS 2022 (Art. 78) received an appeal with an overture “embedded” in it. As not all the churches had seen it, the overture was not dealt with. I wonder what would have happened if this appeal with

an “embedded” overture had not just been submitted to general synod but also to all the churches as had been done in 2019.

As mentioned, GS 2022 did prescribe how the halted overture might be set in motion again, following a process analogous to the GS 2010 approach. We need to realize that this route would actually bypass approval of *the* minor assembly, for it will allow an overture, adopted by a classis and rejected by a regional synod, to be dealt with by a general synod.

We're getting to the point where a flow chart would be helpful. That tells us we've got a ballooning bureaucracy. If a flow chart was made, there will be many junctures where there is no clarity (yet) as to what one should do.

Join me in the hypothetical mess.

Here is the path we are seeing. Church A sends an overture (proposal) to Classis X of April 2024 seeking its agreement to forward it on the upcoming regional synod. Classis X agrees and forwards it to RS West 2024. RSW 2024, however, refuses to forward the overture to GS 2025. Church A appeals the decision of RSW 2024 to GS 2025. GS 2025 sustains the appeal of Church A. In the wake of that, Church B (a different congregation) then submits the overture to GS 2028.

That's complex but still fine. However, what if there is also an appeal from Church C to GS 2028 against the decision of GS 2025 to sustain the appeal of Church A against the decision of RSW 2024?

We haven't had enough synods for that yet, but it is bound to happen.

NEXT TIME

In the next article I'll tell a little about how this all came to be and make some suggestions as to a better way forward. If you want to know already, check out the much longer series on officebearers.com > opinion. 



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Come Let Us Sing

JAN DEGELDER

So far, our search for evidence that the Church Order is the villain who shuts down our desires to make changes in the manner in which we worship has not yielded much. We have read about the number of services, catechism preaching (Art. 52), times of commemoration (Art. 53), and days of prayer (Art. 54). But in the Church Order we don't find an adopted order of worship for all the churches. There is much opportunity for local diversity here.

This does not, of course, mean that there are no good reasons why corporate worship in Reformed churches has the format we are familiar with. On the contrary—how we worship is not irrelevant. Liturgics is an important field of study, and decisions to

change liturgical practices that have a long history should only be made after thorough study of God's Word and the history of worship.¹ However, none of this is in our Church Order. Our unity of faith as federated churches does not require uniformity in all our liturgical practices.

But then we get to Article 55: "The metrical psalms adopted by general synod as well as the hymns approved by general synod shall be sung in the worship services." We can also add Article 56 here: "The sacraments shall be administered . . . with the use of the adopted forms."

¹ Between the older books by Dr. K. Deddens (*Where Everything Points to Him*) and Rev. G. VanRongen (*Our Reformed Church Service Book*) and the more recent publications of Dr. W. Bredenhof (*Aiming to Please*) and Dr. C. VanDam (*Worship Matters*), there is much to learn. I'd also recommend D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe*.

Why have we agreed that throughout the federation the churches restrict themselves to singing only the songs, and using only the liturgical forms, we have approved and adopted together at general synod?

As such the articles are simple and straightforward. But in light of the flexibility we just noticed, it triggers the question: Why have we agreed that throughout the federation the churches restrict themselves to singing only the songs, and using only the liturgical forms, we have approved and adopted together at general synod?²

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

There is no doubt among scholars that in the early church Christians were singing psalms in worship, but opinions differ about the question of whether other songs were also included. During the Middle Ages congregational singing disappeared altogether, but the Reformation gave singing back to the congregation. John Calvin in particular was instrumental in teaching the Reformed churches to sing the psalms again. From the beginning these churches also allowed for other songs in worship, but only as they were found in Scripture. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, they were very reluctant in making room for other, free NT hymns. Over the last century or so most Reformed churches have approved a growing (but still limited) number of hymns. “Limited” because, as the URCNA Church Order puts it: “The 150 psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches” (Art. 39). In an older version of the Christian Reformed Church Order it says this: “While the singing of the Psalms in divine worship is a requirement, the use of the approved hymns is left to the freedom of the Churches” (Art. 69). Behind all of this is the conviction that Reformed churches should continue to be psalm-singing churches. And it is a simple observation that this becomes more and more a challenge when the number of NT hymns continues to increase.

BUT WHY?

Back to the question above: Why have we agreed as churches to sing in worship only the songs and use only the forms adopted by general synod?

It has to do with the fact that of all the various aspects of our liturgy—all the different things we do when we gather for corporate worship—what we sing and how we explain the sacraments reflects most directly what we believe, our doctrine as we have it in our confessions. These stipulations are here because they serve one of the main goals of adopting the Church Order: our mutual responsibility to help one another safeguard the true doctrine of Scripture and the faithful teaching thereof.³ This should be obvious when we think of using liturgical forms. They explain and teach what we believe. But it is equally true for what we sing.

In his foreword to Sinclair Ferguson’s book *In Christ Alone*, Alistair Begg comments on the loss of focus on the gospel in many contemporary songs. He says: “In many cases congregations unwittingly have begun to sing about themselves and how they are feeling, rather than about God and about his glory.” He also quotes Alec Motyer: “When truth gets into a hymnbook it becomes the confident possession of the whole church.” I would say that’s also true when untruth gets into a hymnbook. And then it becomes dangerous.

A. W. Tozer once said: “The things you read will fashion you by slowly transforming your mind.” Again, that’s also true for the things you sing, especially when they come with attractive melodies that you sing over and over again. The point is, we should sing what we believe. But the challenge is, how to prevent us from believing whatever we sing.

The apostle Paul understood the significance of this when he describes singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as

² Much of what follows I wrote about more extensively in “Article 55—Straightjacket or Wise Agreement,” *Clarion*, Vol. 68, No. 8, 231–233, April 19, 2019.

³ See Jan DeGelder, “Governing the Church: Checks & Balances,” *Clarion*, Vol. 71, No. 24, 714–716, November 25, 2022.

“addressing one another” (Eph 5:15) and “teaching and admonishing one another” (Col 3:16). Indeed—singing is teaching and hymn-writers are teachers, which reminds us of what Scripture says about the need to distinguish between faithful teaching and false teaching. Congregational singing is powerful. Psalms and hymns you are familiar with give you a musical reservoir in your heart and mind that provides you with comfort and encouragement when you need it in your life. Recognize all of this as background for Article 55 CO, about what we sing in worship, and Article 56 CO, about the forms to be used in worship.

SYNOD OR CONSISTORY?

However, in recent years some questions about Articles 55 and 56 have been raised that resulted in overtures to our recent general synods.

With regard to Article 55, to begin with, it may be good to make clear that “metrical psalms” are not the same as Genevan tunes. Regardless of historical value or personal preference, by provisionally approving a number of metrical psalms with alternate tunes, GS 2022 was not in conflict with the Church Order. In fact, the earliest CanRC synods already mentioned the option of adding non-Genevan tunes to the psalter.

As for the hymns, two things were questioned. Why must new hymns be approved by a general synod for the whole federation? Why can this responsibility for the local church not be left to the local consistory? Is a synod more capable of doing this than a council or consistory? No, not necessarily. But this is not a matter of who is more qualified to choose and approve. It’s about churches that are united in faith and therefore desire to sing theologically and spiritually from the same page, so to speak. The freedom to sing locally selected hymns can easily split the churches into groups that end up having entirely different song repertoires.

Another stumbling block (at least for some) is the infamous cap of 100, set by GS Chatham in 2004. Does that not sound like a totally arbitrary number? In a way this is true, of course. Why not 89 or 134? As mentioned earlier, the idea is that hymns should not crowd out the psalms.

But there is a bit more to it. Research has shown that the average church member who is not a musician will not be familiar with more than somewhere between 100 and 150 hymns, probably less, even if a church has a hymnbook with 500 or more songs. In other words, if we want the congregation to sing robustly, we had better make sure that they know well the very best 100 hymns we can come up with.

As for the forms, mentioned in Article 56, “using” or “with the use of” simply means what it says. As churches we have agreed to use the forms we all adopted “as they are.” It’s true, the forms do not have confessional authority. But they do have ecclesiastical authority in the sense that we agree that they reflect the teaching of Scripture as summarized in the confessions. Using these forms is therefore a good way to prevent errors and misconceptions in the doctrine of the two sacraments.

But what if what we have adopted in the past has outdated language, is not clear, is not enough, or is too much in different circumstances? Then let’s make the needed changes. But let’s do it together, so that these forms continue to reflect our unity of faith. **C**



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NAPARC 2023

November 14–16

WILLIAM GORTEMAKER

There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:5–6

These words from Ephesians 4 were continually brought to mind during the recent meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). Delegates, observers, and other representatives from fifteen Presbyterian and Reformed denominations gathered near Providence, Rhode Island to learn from and encourage one another and to enjoy the sweet fellowship of those united in one faith.

Throughout the day on Monday, delegates began to arrive in Rhode Island. The Canadian Reformed delegation of Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) members—Henry Schouten, Rev. Jeff Temple, Rev. Steve Vandevelde, and William Gortemaker—was sadly missing our leader, Rev. Marc Jagt, who at the last minute was ill and unable to join us. Home base for accommodations

was a hotel conveniently connected to the airport in Warwick. The hotel featured large common spaces in the lobby and lounge areas which began to fill with an air of joy and fellowship as the veterans of NAPARC renewed friendships and newcomers such as I made fresh connections. Interestingly, we soon discovered that a conference of Pentecostals was being held at the same time, using the same hotel as home base.

PLENARY SESSION

This year's hosts, the Presbyterian Reformed Church, had secured the use of the building of Beacon Free Will Baptist Church, a twenty-minute drive south of the hotel. Here the formal business of the Council was conducted. In plenary sessions of the entire





Council, officers were elected and reports of the treasurer and committees were received. But the largest portion of the plenary sessions is reserved for the reports of the Member and Invited Observer Churches. Each denomination had submitted a written report prior to the meetings. During plenary session, each denomination reviews and highlights its written report, after which a representative of another designated denomination asks clarifying questions, and then prays for the denomination.

A number of common themes came out of these reports. Most of the churches have a need for more young men qualified to

serve as ministers or missionaries. To that end, they're invested in supporting seminaries from which they can receive such men. In many places, churches lack enough men suitable to serve as elders or deacons. Too many young people are being lost. Reaching second-plus-generation Canadians and Americans is difficult. On the other hand, immigrants tend to be more open to the Word, and both countries have admitted many new immigrants. Often our joys and struggles are similar. How important it is, then, to support one another and to bring these joys and struggles in prayer to the King of the church.

MEMBER CHURCHES

Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)
 Canadian Reformed Churches (CANRC)
 Église Réformée de Québec (ERQ)
 Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)
 Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)
 Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC)
 Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) (KPCA)
 Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
 Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
 Presbyterian Reformed Church (PresRC)
 Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
 Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA)
 United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA)

INVITED OBSERVERS

Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA)
 Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC)

OTHER MEETINGS

Some of the most important work at NAPARC happens outside of the plenary sessions. Each denomination schedules bi-lateral meetings with its counterparts in other denominations. Beacon Church's facilities included several meeting rooms, where many of these meetings took place. But others happened back at the hotel over breakfast or an evening snack. The CanRC delegation met in bi-lateral meetings with its counterparts from the ARP, ERQ, FRCNA, HRC, OPC, RCUS, RPCNA, and URCNA.

These meetings are a time of brotherly dialogue, to understand where each party is at, what areas of cooperation should be explored, what concerns or questions we have for one another. At their best they are very open and free conversations that allow for frank but loving challenge and encouragement for one another. Time limits are good in that they ensure the meetings all happen and are somewhat focused. On the other hand, it's hard to hold to these limits when you're having fruitful conversation. But these good things too must come to an end; the bi-laterals concluded, as they began, with prayer for one another.



From the
NAPARC Constitution:

BASIS OF THE COUNCIL

Confessing Jesus Christ as only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life, we affirm the basis of the fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts and to its teachings as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, the Westminster Confession of faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter catechisms.

PURPOSE OF THE COUNCIL

We regard this basis of fellowship as warrant for the establishment of a formal relationship of the nature of a council, that is, a fellowship that enables the Member Churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another and hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

While representatives are delegates with official business, mutually beneficial relationships depend on getting to know one another on an individual and personal level. There is much joy and encouragement in getting to know our brothers who hold to the Reformed confessions. We give thanks then for the break and mealtimes. It was easy to end up sitting at a table with someone different every time, giving the opportunity for informal personal relationship-building. This spilled over outside of our time at Beacon church too. The hotel lounge area was put to good use each day for more informal conversations over breakfast or an evening snack. We certainly took the opportunity to be together as much as possible.

And then, very quickly it seemed, the time came for delegates to begin their travels home. Our delegates and committees return with some homework: to consider how to proceed on points of discussion raised, the nature of our relationships, and continued support for one another. But though NAPARC's meeting ended, its work has progressed by growth in official and personal relationships, many prayers of thanks and petition offered to God, and a sense of eagerness to continue the same work in God's kingdom. **C**

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Every Nation, Tribe & Tongue

By Sarah Wieskamp



MERF IC 2023 - right front Sarah Wieskamp

The 2023 MERF International Council (IC) of field and support representatives met November 17-19 in Jakarta, Indonesia. Most arrived by Thursday evening, providing the chance to have a meal together -- a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old friends and get acquainted with new ones. Dinner closed in prayer, praising God in multiple languages from around the world. The gatherings were a beautiful glimpse of what Revelation reveals to us about heaven:

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm

branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev 5:9-10)

The whole weekend was filled with heavenly glimpses of brothers and sisters together- from every nation, tribe and tongue. Yet, there was also an incompleteness as several were unable to attend due to illness or the ongoing Middle East conflict. While never the same, technology enabled some to attend the Saturday meeting online.

There are many wonderful aspects to gathering with those serving with MERF all over the world, but the field updates are particularly encouraging. God has been wonderfully working

in Arab and Muslim lands through teams of national workers, often in the midst of difficulties.

In the **Lokichoggio (Loki), northern Kenya MERF Center**, the team continues to faithfully carry out three intensive biblical training courses back-to-back over the year for **South Sudanese** and other **East African** church leaders. Augustine Program Coordinator,

Pastor Timothy Burden asked *prayer for wisdom in streamlining the wide curriculum to focus more on key concepts*. Thankful for guest teachers and the opportunity to extend training to Tanzania, *prayers were requested for the Lord to provide a resident teacher in Loki*.

It was also reassuring to hear how God continues to use the efforts of teams in



Fellowship at an Indonesian meal

North Africa and Ethiopia to spread the gospel. **North Africa** shows encouraging results of more individuals coming to faith and more doors opened to continue producing videos and TV programs introducing biblical concepts.

Despite unrest within **Ethiopia** and persecution of churches in some areas, the gospel still goes out. In addition to the radio ministry in 3 languages (*Amharic, Oromo & Somali*), literature, biblical training seminars and diaconal aid, the team also had the opportunity to start an English class this summer. Initially for covenant children, it expanded when Muslim and Coptic Orthodox neighbors asked for their children to attend too. Thus, the gospel also went out while learning English.

Gospel work is being done in many different ways within the many countries dominated by Islam in the **Middle East**. The *MERF Arabic Media Ministry* continues to thrive, reaching out far and wide by radio, internet, books and Sunday school materials. Social media is still the most prom-



Ethiopia Bible teaching and distribution

inent way of reaching Arabic speakers, through online radio programs, videos and interactive platforms to which hundreds respond daily. The newest website, *merf-arabiclibrary.com* provides many Christian publications.

MERF volunteers from **Lebanese churches** organized sending and **Syrian churches** distribution of food and household goods to earthquake victims. Diaconal aid also relieved the suffering of the needy displaced by the civil war in **Khartoum, Sudan**.

Encouraging work is being done in **Pakistan**. In this dominantly Muslim country,

where Christians are often persecuted, MERF's partners, *Westminster Biblical Missions* and *the Bible-believing Lahore Churches* continue to serve and even expand the Christian schools, sewing centers, seminary, literacy centers and medical clinics. The team is thankful for the opportunities and *ask prayer for a doctor to reopen the closed medical clinic and for efforts to add a fifth Christian school soon*.

Wonderful work is being done all over **Indonesia**. Teams are based in *Jakarta, East Java* and *Sulawesi*, evangelizing in 6 languages by radio broadcasting and social media and providing

biblical training to church leaders as well as Sunday school teachers and Bible school activities for children. Diaconal aid projects better the lives of the needy. It was especially encouraging to hear how God provided opportunity to connect in a remote Muslim region formerly not open to Christian teaching. *Prayers are requested for a resident teacher for the many biblical training opportunities in the very modern city of Jakarta*.

We praise God for His continued blessing on MERF's faithful work. It is truly amazing to hear all that is being done by teams zealous to share the gospel with their own people.



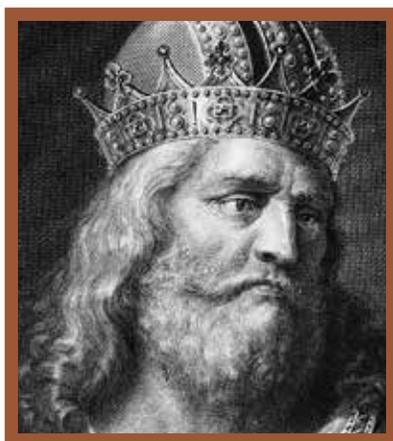
Malang, Indonesia youth ministry

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Alcuin the Scholar and Charles the King

Part 2: Charles the King

KEITH SIKKEMA

BACKGROUND

Around AD 496, King Clovis I of the Franks took his wife Clothilde's advice and decided that Franks should become Christians. He mixed Frankish, Roman, and Christian beliefs and traditions, conquered other lands, and even appointed bishops. His descendants and successors took it easy, however, and let their chief officials (called "Mayors of the Palace") do the hard work, like fighting and winning battles.

*Eventually, in 751, Frankish nobles elected Mayor of the Palace Pepin the Short (714–768) to be their king instead. He was a son of Charles Martel. In 754, Boniface (Archbishop and missionary) anointed him *Dei Gratia Rex*—King by the Grace of God. Pepin's sons Carloman and Charles succeeded him in 768, but when Carloman died in 771, Charles became king over all the Frankish lands.*

GETTING UP

It is an early fall morning in Worms (Germany) in 780. Across the Rhine River, the sky is tinging slightly orange. King Charles of the Franks wakes up. He rubs his round head and short neck, snorts his large nose, yawns regally, and stretches his six- or seven-foot body. His bedroom assistants groom his moustache, wavy hair, and short beard. They dress him in his blue Frankish tunic, thigh-high leggings, and leather shoes. He puts his

gold-and-silver sword, "*Joyous*," on his belt's right side. He is ready for the day's business. He has been thinking about a trip to Rome and instructs his waiting agents. "For peace and the well-being of our lands, God's Church and my family, finalize arrangements for us to go to Pavia in Lombardy, Italy, by Christmas. For Easter, we must be in Rome to meet the pope and Byzantine envoys."

Behind the curtain, Queen Hildegard also wakes up. She is 22 and has been Charles's wife

for nine years. Attendants do her hair, and dress her in a maroon silk tunic, leggings, and shoes. In their own quarters, Hildegard's children, too, get dressed: Charles (8), Carloman (7), Rotrude (5), Louis¹ (2), and Bertha (1). They will join for morning worship, called Lauds.

LAUDS & AUGUSTINE

As the rising sun brightens the trees' fall colours and the birds sing, Hildegard and Charles walk side-by-side to the cathedral for morning worship. Their children and attendants follow.

Charles bends over to Hildegard, who is much shorter, and whispers, "*Tempus pacis.*"

It is my task to protect the City of God against its enemies

"Yes, how peaceful!" she agrees, smiling.

Active as always, he asks, "Can we talk about Christmas?"

"Tomorrow afternoon?" she answers. He nods, and they walk on.

A doorkeeper greets them, "May peace be with you!"

"And with you!" they answer. They cross themselves and sit down facing the altar and the men-and-boys choir behind it.

Bishop Erembert greets everyone, "The Lord be with you," and all answer, "And with your spirit."

Following a Roman liturgy, as Charles likes it, Erembert leads the choir in antiphonal chants, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise," and "*Christe Eleison*—Christ have mercy!" He then reads a common prayer, "O God, You are the Author of love, and Lover of peace and affection. Let all who are terrified by fears, or afflicted by poverty, or harassed by tribulation, or tired from illness, be set free by Your tenderness, raised up by amendment of life, and cherished by Your compassion, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

The choir chants psalms of praise about God's Fatherly care, and after each psalm, all respond, "Amen."

"For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken" (Ps 62:1, 2).

"Amen."

"Shout for joy to God, all the earth. Sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise" (Ps 66:1, 2).

"Amen."

They end with Psalms 148-150.

As pilgrims, Christians use earthly goods but do not worship them

Erembert reads from 1 Timothy 2, "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Charles nods, and thinks, "Exactly! Including Frisians and Saxons!"

Erembert preaches on Luke 12:51, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No . . . but rather division," and explains that not all find salvation and peace in Jesus Christ. Believers and unbelievers are divided. "What side are you on?" he asks.

In closing, he gives thanks and greets everyone, "May peace be with you today!"

"And with you!" they respond.

Charles spends the morning consulting with counts, bishops, and abbots from the area around Worms. He consults with such people at every palace to which he makes his rounds in his lands. He wonders whether he could promote the City of God from just one central royal residence, like Aachen.²

REST

After eating lunch with his family, he takes his two-hour afternoon rest, as always. While Charles rests, his chaplain reads to him from Augustine's *The City of God*, "There are two cities. They are formed by two loves: Earthly love or heavenly love. The earthly city is made by the love for self and ruled by the love of being obeyed. It seeks its own strength and imagination. It will disappear." (How foolish!) "The heavenly city is made by the love for God. It is ruled by serving one another in love. It rejoices in the glory of God. It is everlasting, so God may be all and in all."³

Charles asks, "It is my task to protect the City of God against its enemies. Shall we say that unbelievers are such enemies, and Basques, for ambushing us at Roncesvalles after the Spanish expedition?"

The chaplain continues, "Right. When evil happens to the godly, shall we pretend there is no problem? Shall we reject the Paul's comfort, when he says, 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God?'"

Charles shakes his head, "Never!"

¹ Clovis=Louis=Lewis=Lodewijk

² Aachen is also known as Aix-la-Chapelle

³ XIV:28; Rom 1:18; 1 Cor 15:28

“The believers’ greatest hope and wealth are not their earthly possessions. In God’s eyes, it is the possessions of their heart that are most precious. They are more certain than any earthly wealth. As pilgrims, Christians *use* earthly goods but do not *worship* them. They accept the discipline of this earthly life because it teaches them for life eternal.”⁴

Charles agrees, “We grieve, yet hope, for God gives peace, even in hardship. Now let me think about that and rest, brother.”

HILDEGARD

The next day, Charles meets Hildegard in private. “Peace be with you, my dove!”

“And with you . . . what’s up, my dear Karl?”⁵

“A lot, dear. When Boniface came to the Frisians and Saxons, some were baptized. We built churches and monasteries for them, like Fulda Abbey in 744. However, they were ravaged by the Saxon Wolf, Widukind, and his bands. They feared the wrath of their gods, Odin and Thor. Yet, we sent more missionaries to build the City of God. There is peace in the north now, and Lombardy . . . hmmm, why do you frown?”

“Can we trust Widukind, dear? Is peace really settled?”

“We taught them a lesson, my sweet Comrade in Arms.⁶ In the south, Lombardy and Pope Hadrian need my attention now. To their east, apart from the Muslims, the Byzantines of Constantinople could mean trouble because of the ‘Donation of Constantine’ papers.”⁷

“What does Rome have to do with Byzantium?”

“It is complicated, but these ‘Donation’ papers say that Emperor Constantine (272–337) gave popes authority over some eastern cities, plus Rome, Lombardy, and the West. Pope Hadrian likes that, but the Byzantines and I don’t. They help keep the Muslims away, but Hadrian may want me to fight them. I will gladly pay my vows in Rome, help Hadrian with gifts, and protect him, but he may not control me!”

“Your voice sounds agitated, dear!”

“Whatever. In 774, to help Hadrian, I defeated Desiderius of Lombardy, my ex-father-in-law, for stealing Papal and Byzantine lands. I put his iron crown on my head. As King of the Lombards, it is my duty now to maintain peace and ease their suffering.”

“What suffering, dear?”

“Lombard men joined my army and left their farms untended. Bad weather then resulted in crop-failure and starvation.

To get food to eat, people sold properties, and even Christians!⁸ I ordered restoration and justice, but they still suffer. To promote the City of God, we also need to cultivate friendship with Hadrian and the Byzantines.”

“Poor Lombards! But must we all come?”

“Think of Roncesvalles. We must all die one day, dear, and plan for succession. Charles, your son, is my heir. He should stay in Worms to train for his future roles as king. (My older illegitimate hunchback son Pepin doesn’t count and can stay here as well.)”

“Charles, this sounds ominous!”⁹

“Hmmm, perhaps, but in Rome, at Easter, we’ll have your son Carloman rebaptized as Pepin, after my father. With Hadrian’s consent, he will become subking over Italy and the Lombards, and your son Louis over Aquitaine. That will also help keep the kingdom together. They must come. Of course, you and the girls¹⁰ must come, too!”

“Your plan is good, my dear Karl!”

JOURNEY

They leave in October for the 800 km trip. Pack horses set the pace. Sometimes roads are in poor repair but Hildegard and the children travel somewhat comfortably in the royal coach. They lodge at monasteries, bishop’s residences, and palaces, where Charles also meets with local councillors. Their entourage sets up tent camps as needed.

They cross the stone bridge into Pavia before Christmas and stay in the palace. Like he did in Worms, Charles meets Lombard church and government officials to hear and address their people’s concerns and to promote peace and justice. In the cathedral, they see the sarcophagus with the bones of Augustine of Hippo. Charles likes Augustine.

In March 781, on their way to Rome, the Lord has a providential surprise for them. 



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⁴ Job 1: ; Rom 8:28, 5:3–5

⁵ A Old High German, meaning “Free man, husband.” Charles summarizes his political ambitions here.

⁶ The German name Hildegard may mean “Comrade in Arms.”

⁷ Now Istanbul. The “Donation of Constantine” was exposed as a forgery around 1440.

⁸ See Neh 5

⁹ In 792, he conspired against his father, and was sent to a secure monastery.

¹⁰ Perhaps including Gisela, who was baptized on the return trip.



50
YEARS
TIMOTHY
CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

**"Continue in what you have learned
through faith in Jesus Christ"**
-2 Timothy 3: 14 & 15



Great is Thy Faithfulness



TIMOTHY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Celebrates 50 Years

*I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord, forever; with my mouth
I will make known your faithfulness to all generations*

– Ps 89:1

MARSHA LEISTRA

On Saturday, October 28, 2023, Timothy Christian School in Hamilton held an open house to celebrate their fiftieth year in operation and to praise God for fifty years of his faithfulness.

The Canadian Reformed School Society of Hamilton was established in June 1957 with the purpose of providing a faith-based education to the children of the churches. Society members desired to provide their children with an education built on the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ consistent with the doctrine confessed in the church and implemented in the home. On September 4, 1973, the doors opened to thirty-five students from Grade 1-8. Today, the school has a population of 213 students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8.

OPEN HOUSE

The open house was an opportunity for supporters past and present to walk the halls and take a trip down memory lane through various photos and displays. Congratulatory messages from past principals and vice-principals as well as old photos and artifacts were on display. The students created many commemorative projects for our Celebrate Timothy Month, which were on display for the open house. For example, one of the younger classes made a Timothy School themed alphabet book, complete with photos from around the school that started with each letter of the alphabet. Another class drew plans for what school might be like fifty years from today and wrote about some of their wishful predictions. One of

Photo credit: Rachel Schoof



the older classrooms had a graphic designer come visit their class so that they could learn the basics of logo design and try their hand at designing a new Timothy logo. Students in one of the classrooms created graphs comparing the student distribution in the grades in 1973 vs. today. Yet another class created a 3-D map of Hamilton showing the three different locations of the different school buildings we've been in. Students researched what life was like in 1973 and created posters comparing life in 1973 to today. These were just a few of creative and commemorative projects shared on this special day.

DIVINE FAITHFULNESS

Guests were treated to coffee or tea and a piece of cake to celebrate the Lord's great goodness and faithfulness to this school community over the past fifty years! Three former principals (Miss Judy Kingma, Mr. Henk Nobel, and Mrs. Karen Dieleman) were able to attend, as was our local city councillor, Ms. Esther Pauls. We were also blessed to see some of the original founders of the school as

well as students from the school's first year attend the open house. When it opened in 1973, the founders chose 2 Timothy 3:14-15 as the theme text for the school: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Today, this text is engraved in a stone block which has been embedded in each of our three different buildings. Timothy Christian School's mission is to assist the parents by providing a quality, biblically based, Christ-centred, elementary education to Reformed, covenant children with the intent that they develop their talents and grow in love and service to God and their neighbour. We thank and praise our heavenly Father that he has allowed us to provide this type of education for the past fifty years. 📖

Marsha Leistra



RAY OF SUNSHINE

Rachel Vis

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Trevor, David, Gerry, John, Tinielle, Lisa & Jim!

May the Lord bless each and every one of you in the coming year. May you have a great day celebrating with all of your loved ones. We thank the Lord for each one of you as you continue to serve the Lord each day.

To all of our readers, let us continue to remember those with disabilities in our prayers. Let us pray for them that they may feel the love and peace of our heavenly Father, that they can serve the Lord with their special talents and gifts, and that they may be a light to all of those around them. Also pray for them that when they struggle they may find their comfort in the Lord. Let us as a church community lift them up and support them in any way we can. ☺

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

- 3** Trevor Hofsink will be **44**
14407 McQueen Road
Edmonton, AB
T5N 3L3
- 9** David Rawson will be **60**
c/o Twin Oaks
3217 Twin Oaks Cres
Burlington, ON
L7M 3A8
- 12** Gerry Eelhart will be **60**
c/o Mrs. Grace Eelhart
120 13425-57 Street,
Emmanuel Home
Edmonton, AB
T5A 2G1
- 13** John VanWyngaarden will be **45**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8
- 14** Tineille VanRootselaar will be **27**
219 Lock St W
Dunvi lle, ON
N1A 1V2
- 14** Lisa Alkema will be **42**
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON
L9B 2K3
email: lhalkema@gmail.com
- 15** Jim VanderHeiden will be **64**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON
N1A 1T8

CLARION KIDS LORD'S DAY 4!

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

The Seventh Commandment is "You shall not commit adultery." **COMMIT** means "do." **ADULTERY** is a little harder to explain. Read carefully! Adultery deals with people who are married, but also all God's people, married or not. When a man marries a woman they become husband and wife. They have a special relationship that is only for the two of them. They must love and care for each other in a special way. They may not love and care for anyone else in that special way. If they do, then they commit adultery. For all God's people, we should be careful with what we do with our bodies. One example of this is how we dress. We should be careful to find clothes that fit and cover us nicely. Why does the Lord want us to do this? It is because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. God lives inside of us! And that is very special, isn't it?

WORDSEARCH

adultery
body
commit
temples

I	S	C	O	U	E	W	E	A
S	E	L	P	M	E	T	F	F
P	X	H	Y	M	A	F	J	L
O	T	I	M	M	O	C	V	D
S	U	Y	O	P	E	S	S	R
A	K	S	D	M	D	Y	B	Z
L	M	Y	I	O	A	G	Z	Y
S	B	S	H	G	B	U	C	G
A	D	U	L	T	E	R	Y	Z

What should we do with our bodies? Unscramble the words in the text below to find out.

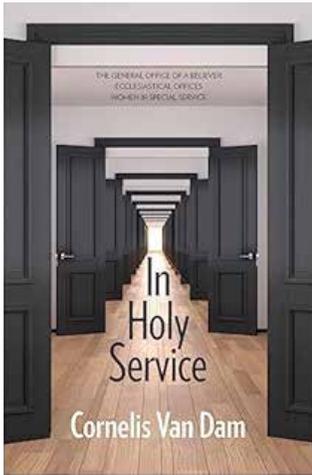
"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So _____ (fgilory)
God in your _____ (bdoy)." – 1 Corinthians 6:19b, 20



HEY KIDS!

Do you have questions about something you have read in the Bible or heard in a sermon? Maybe you are wondering about something you have read in a Lord's Day. We have a new column coming called KIDS' QUESTIONS. We warmly invite you to ask Mrs. DeBoer your question! With your parent's permission, email deboerca@gmail.com and find your question and an answer in Clarion!

AMANDA DEBOER



A GUIDE FOR SERVICE— FOR EVERYONE

In Holy Service: Essays on Office—Personal and Ecclesial, Cornelis Van Dam. (Hamilton: Lucerna CRTS Publications, 2023). Paperback. 239 pages. \$29.53 CDN.

At the heart of this new book by retired OT professor Dr. C. Van Dam is the well-known truth that all believers are office bearers. While some are special office bearers (pastors, elders, deacons), all are general office bearers (prophet, priest, and king). In the church, no one is excluded from the opportunity, privilege, and responsibility to serve God and one another. This book is a solid guide answering the big question of *how* we may and must all serve.

In Holy Service divides up into three parts. Part A consists of four chapters on the general office of every believer. Part B has seven chapters on the special offices of the church. Van Dam focuses particularly on the offices of pastor and elder—although it should be noted that he has written an entire book devoted to the topic of deacons as well (*The Deacon: Biblical Foundations for Today's Ministry of Mercy*). Part C may very well be the section most people read first: “Women in Special Service.” The three chapters of this section respond to the egalitarian challenge, but also offer a positive vision of how women should be actively serving in Christ’s church.

This last part makes a valuable contribution to the debate around women in office. I especially appreciated chapter 13, “Prophetesses in God’s Service.” In this chapter, Van Dam discusses Deborah, Huldah, and other prophetesses in Scripture to investigate whether they might provide a biblical basis for women serving in the special offices of the church today. And what about Junia (Rom 16:7) and Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2)? Van Dam discusses them in chapter 14. While he doesn’t respond to all the arguments from the egalitarian side, he does hit on the main ones.

Several churches in Australia (FRCA) and Canada (CanRC) now invite all communicant members of the congregation to participate

fully in the election of office bearers. What ought we to think of such a development? Van Dam brings a biblically-informed perspective seasoned with grace in chapter 10, “Congregational Involvement in Electing to Office.”

AUTHORITY & SUBMISSION

It’s a sad fact that complementarian teaching has sometimes been hijacked for abusive agendas. Abusive husbands have been known to weaponize the Bible’s teaching about the authority of husbands and the submission of wives. Van Dam demonstrates how such an approach is an affront to God and the Scriptures he inspired. While wives are to submit to their husbands, and husbands do bear authority, there’s also a real sense in which husbands are to submit to their wives: “If a husband is to show the love of Christ, he will submit himself as a servant to his wife’s needs” (p. 54). A short while later he writes:

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 (p. 55).

In the hands of abusive men, complementarianism makes the case for women in office seem more credible. But if men were to follow what Van Dam writes, they would find that, because their wives feel respected, they find it easy to submit to them.

TRAINING FOR ELDERS

I’d like to interact somewhat more with chapter 9 regarding special training for elders. In this chapter I was surprised to learn that historically there has been opposition in Reformed circles to the

idea of providing pre-ordination training. Van Dam mentions Dr. H. Bouwman. He had several reasons for opposing the idea. Van Dam concludes that “one can hardly object to an education program for ruling elders-to-be which seeks to prepare them for the office in a biblical manner” (p. 131). However, he wants to see all communicant males of the congregation invited to attend such a program to avoid elitism, one of the pitfalls mentioned by Bouwman. I read this with interest, since I’ve been offering a leadership training program for young men (25–35) in our congregation for a few years. One of the problems with inviting all the communicant males of the congregation to attend is that initial interest might be strong, but over time it would invariably fall off. Another issue is that the large size of the group (especially at the beginning) would prohibit any kind of meaningful individual spiritual mentoring—important because character and integrity matter far more than knowledge. Consequently, each year our consistory nominates five to six men in the 25–35 age bracket for our Service and Leadership Training (SALT) program. Being nominated assures a stronger level of commitment to the

program. This has worked well in our context, with a fair number of men going on to serve as elders, deacons, and school board leaders. To address Bouwman’s concern of an “elite” cadre of men in the congregation, I’d point out that our SALT training is not a pre-requisite for being nominated as an office bearer. In fact, many men have been nominated (and elected) who haven’t participated, and some who have participated haven’t been nominated or elected.

Whether you’re a special office bearer or “only” a general office bearer, whether you’re male or female, this book has something to enrich your service for the Lord. Van Dam honours the authority of Scripture, writes clearly, and the issues he addresses are living and relevant. Good stuff and warmly recommended for one and all. **C**



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>>	MY FRIEND
>>	MY BROTHER
>>	MY CHILD
>>	MY GRANDCHILD
>>	MY NEIGHBOUR



RESPONSE TO

When a Church Does Not Comply (2)

(by Karlo Janssen Vol. 72 No. 15)

Thank you, Rev. Janssen, for your informative articles and how that might relate to current situations. Rev. Janssen mentions that he is more inclined to the GKv polity than to Canadian Reformed polity, apparently because it is more centralized than decentralized. He also argues for a more active role by broader assemblies. While I think this may be beneficial, even needed especially when doctrinal issues are at stake, it also can have its pitfalls i.e., synod overreach as Rev. Janssen states was the catalyst behind the 1944 Liberation in the Netherlands. If my sources are correct, it was also a very strong synodical pitch in the Liberated (former sister) churches in the Netherlands to allow women to serve in all the offices and which necessitated another parting of ways with the Canadian Reformed Churches just a few years ago.

Synod overreach (hierarchy) was nothing new and was alive and well in the churches before 1944 and not only at the federative level. In the book *Bound Yet Free* (Winnipeg: Premier Printing, 1995), referenced by Rev. Janssen, F. L. Rutgers, considered the father of Doleantie church polity, writes: "This is not to say that, even in the golden age of our churches, all ministers of the churches were equally free of hierarchical leaven. As far as that is concerned, each person has a little pope in his heart."

In the once popular Church Order commentary from Van Dellen and Monsma we read "they (deacons) should also be very careful not to assume an attitude of parity with the consistory." This is in sharp contrast with W. W. J. VanOene's position in his

book, *With Common Consent*, on the place of deacons within the consistory where he argues for full inclusion. He writes: "We prefer a complete return to Art. 30 B.C., and the Synod of Emden 1571." The first article of the Emden Church Order reads: "No church shall have dominion over another Church, no minister of the Word, or elder or deacon shall exercise dominion over another. Rather shall they be vigilant lest they should give cause to be suspected of desiring dominion." This is now summarized in Article 74 of our current Church Order. Rev. VanOene's position is more in line with the Reformation and the Liberation of 1944 in which the Canadian Reformed Churches have their roots.

HIERARCHICAL DRIFT?

Are Canadian Reformed Churches drifting into hierarchy? Somehow deacons in many cases have had to settle for second place behind the elders when it comes to applying the Word and discipline, an absurd way of thinking, since charity without the Word or discipline is no charity at all! Just prior to a presentation on "The Deacon in Reformed Church Government," in 2017, a Deacon Survey was circulated to Canadian Reformed, American Reformed, and Australian Reformed churches on how the deacons functioned in their churches. One of the questions posed was: Who would you say functions as the governing body in your church? Of the sixty-six responses, thirty-three replied it was the Consistory, (elders and minister(s)) and thirty-three replied it was the Council

(elders, deacons, and minister(s)). Although a survey does not tell us everything, the question which could be asked is: are we succumbing to hierarchy, and could it be that churches that “do not comply” are struggling with an internal hierarchical problem? A careful reading of *Bound Yet Free* will help in understanding the negative consequences of hierarchy at all levels and care should be exercised when using major assemblies to deal with churches that “do not comply.”

Bound Yet Free offers some good biblical direction. Here are some highlights from three of the contributors:

1. S. Greijdanus describes synod overreach:

In this respect, the Westminster Synod was totally mistaken when it claimed, in the Westminster Confession, that “the decrees and determinations” of synods and councils “are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power of the assembly whereby they are made.”

2. Mr. J. van Dalen writes positively about the editor of *Bound Yet Free*, Prof. J. De Jong:

The greatest achievement of the writer, however is that he does not construct theories or engage in speculation, and does not appeal to ecclesiastical practice as if that would be normative for the church’s actions: rather, from the beginning to end, he allows Scripture to be his *magistra et norma et iudex* as it used to be said: teacher, norm and judge. . . .

This method of arriving at conclusions in church polity is superior to having our thoughts shaped by theory or experience.

3. C. Veenhof states:

The men of the Doleantie taught clearly and unambiguously that the consistory of the local church has the highest authority in the government of Christ’s church. . . . The consistories had an inherent and original authority, the major assemblies had derived and assigned authority.

It must be noted that this was when the deacons were still part of the consistory. C. Veenhof gives the account of Barnabas visiting the newly formed Church at Antioch (Acts 15) and says,

It is worth noting just how he arrives, and what he does there. He does not come as a kind of inspector from the “mother church” to inspect and regulate everything. Jerusalem does not make any demands, does not impose anything. Sending Barnabas is merely proof of interest and recognition . . . there is certainly no evidence of supremacy on the part of Jerusalem.

Caution should be taken that church visitors and broader assemblies stay under the “derived and assigned authority” category.

The principles expounded in *Bound Yet Free* are relevant for today and bring important scriptural norms into focus. Using broader assemblies too quickly can take away the onus on local congregations to comply.

Blessings,
Aubrey Vandergaag

CLASSIS MANITOBA

December 8, 2023

On behalf of the Canadian Reformed Church of Carman West, Rev. James Slaa welcomed the delegates, candidate Dathan Pleiter and his wife Katrina, and guests (in person and on the livestream). He also welcomed the deputies of Regional Synod, Rev. Doug Vandeburgt and Rev. Julius Van Spronsen. He read Psalm 139 and the assembly sang Psalm 139:1, 13.

For memorabilia it was mentioned that candidate Dathan Pleiter has accepted the call from the church at Elm Creek, for which the churches are very thankful. Rev. Rick Vanderhorst has accepted a call to the church at Smithers, BC meaning that by December's end Winnipeg-Grace will become a vacant church. The ongoing vacancy at Ambassador was also remembered. Updates were given on the retired ministers in our classis. Rev. Slaa led in prayer.

Credentials were received from all the churches and examined. The churches were all properly represented. Executive officers were appointed: Rev. Rick Vanderhorst as president, Rev. Joe Poppe as vice-president and Rev. James Slaa as clerk. Rev. Vanderhorst thanked the convening church for organizing and hosting classis. A proposal from the Committee for Contact with Neighbouring Classes and Presbyteries was submitted late and was deemed inadmissible. The agenda was adopted. The deputies of Regional Synod West were seated.

PEREMPTORY EXAMINATION

At this classis, candidate Dathan Pleiter, who had accepted the call extended to him by the Canadian Reformed Church at Elm Creek, presented himself for a peremptory examination. Classis examined the documentation and found all to be in order.

Candidate Pleiter proceeded to read John 2:1-11, and to deliver his sermon proposal on this text. In closed session, classis deemed this sermon proposal sufficient to continue with the rest of the examination, and the deputies of regional synod gave their

concurring advice. Candidate Pleiter was examined in exegesis Old Testament, exegesis New Testament, doctrine and creeds, church history, knowledge of contents of Holy Scripture, ethics, diaconiology, and church polity. Classis went into closed session to evaluate the exam. It deemed the exam sufficient, and the deputies of regional synod concurred, opening the way for candidate Pleiter to be ordained as Minister of the Word and sacraments. The president thanked the deputies of regional synod for their presence at classis and giving concurring advice in the examination of brother Pleiter. The support for the Pleiter family was examined and was deemed to be sufficient, and classis approved the call.

The president communicated the result of the examination to brother and sister Pleiter and the audience, and wished candidate Pleiter the Lord's blessing as he is ordained and takes up his work. Rev. Joe Poppe read from 1 Timothy 4:11-16, Rev. Rick Vanderhorst led in a prayer of thanksgiving, and we sang a doxology from Hymn 8. A certificate of admission to the ministry in the Canadian Reformed Churches was issued. The deputies of regional synod were thanked for their work and were excused from the meeting. Classis appointed Rev. James Slaa to be present at the ordination of candidate Pleiter and pass on classis's greetings. Classis adjourned and an opportunity was given to congratulate brother Pleiter and his wife.

REQUESTS

The church at Winnipeg Grace requested an honourable release for Rev. Rick Vanderhorst (CO Art. 9). Upon presentation of the documentation, the honourable release was granted, and Rev. Vanderhorst was thanked for his eight-year service at Grace and in our classis. The vice-chairman wished him and his family God's blessing as they moved to Smithers, BC, and as Rev. Vanderhorst begins his ministry there. Rev. Vanderhorst spoke words of appreciation and farewell.

The church at Winnipeg-Grace requested the appointment of a counsellor (CO Art. 45). Rev. Joe Poppe was appointed. Grace church also requested Classis Manitoba to provide pulpit supply through the monthly pulpit exchanges. Classis agreed to do so.

Question Period according to Art. 44 C.O. was held. One church asked for advice in a matter of discipline. In closed session, concurring advice was given to this church.

CLOSING

The church at Elm Creek was appointed as convening church for the next classis. Classis is scheduled for March 22, 2024 at 9:00 am. Suggested officers are: Rev. Carl Van Dam as president; Rev.

James Slaa as vice-president; Rev. Joe Poppe as clerk. Brother Dathan Pleiter was appointed as examiner for New Testament exegesis and the Knowledge of Holy Scripture.

Personal question period was held. No censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order was necessary. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved for publication. The president read from Isaiah 52:7-10, led in closing prayer, and requested that the brothers sing from Hymn 52:1, 2, 4.

For Classis Manitoba,

Rev. Joe Poppe

Vice-president at that time

CLASSIS NIAGARA

December 13, 2023

On behalf of the convening church of Niagara South, Rev. Offringa opened the meeting in a Christian manner. In prayer he remembered Rev. Swaving's improving health, Dunnville West's call to Rev. James Sinke, the vacancies in the classis, the acceptance of the call extended to Rev. John Louwerse by Grassie, the completion of the major renovations at Lincoln, the purchase of a church building by Niagara South, and CRTS as they finish another semester.

Upon the constitution of classis, Rev. Rodney Vermeulen was appointed as chairman, Rev. Ruurd Offringa as vice-chairman, and Rev. Daniel Shin as clerk.

The agenda was adopted, and the chairman asked each of the churches the Article 44 questions. All churches affirmed that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued and that the decision of the major assemblies were being honoured. One church asked for advice in relation to change in church counselor and another church in relation to discipline. Both received advice, the latter in closed session.

The church of Smithville submitted a proposal to address the concern that churches are not following the decisions of the major assemblies. After discussion it was decided to appoint Smithville to investigate the truth of the claims and explore the most brotherly path forward.

Classis appointed the church of Smithville to convene the next classis, to be held on March 20, 2024, with June 12 as the alternative date, and suggested officers for that classis.

Brothers Carl Oosterhof and Tony Linde were appointed to the Committee of Appeals as second and third alternatives respectively. Br. Bill Heemskerck was appointed to serve as a Deputy for Contact with Neighbouring Classes/Presbyteries.

After question period, the acts were adopted, the press release approved, and Rev. Vermeulen led closing devotions and closed classis.

Rev. R. Offringa

Vice-chair at the time

