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# LuxMundi 35

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## LuxMundi | 35

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## Fraternal Delegates



*Karlo (Dr. R.C.) Janssen was ordained to the ministry in 1999. He received his doctorate in 2009 from the Theological University of Kampen in the fields of church history and church polity. He currently serves as minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Abbotsford BC, Canada.*

One of the most prominent items on the agenda of any denomination's most major assembly is ecumenical relationships. Hence such assemblies will enjoy the presence of so-called 'fraternal delegates'. These are people delegated by other churches to the assembly to bring over greetings, to rejoice and weep together, to request or offer help, to encourage, comfort, and admonish.

In May 2016 the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) meet in their general synod. Ecumenical relations feature prominently on the agenda. Currently the CanRC are actually served by four separate committees. The agenda item most closely watched by the global Reformed community will probably be that on the relations the CanRC have in The Netherlands. No doubt there will be many fraternal delegates at Synod Dunnville 2016.

### Delegates or Representatives

I have had the privilege of involvement in ecumenical relations since 1997.<sup>1</sup> One question that has intrigued me is the position of fraternal delegates at major assemblies. It is clear to all that fraternal delegates do not have the right to vote but do have the privilege of the floor. The question is, to what extent may fraternal delegates use their privilege?<sup>2</sup> For churches who practice the polity of Dort this is a real question. Those delegated to a broader assembly of their own churches are not delegated to represent their sending body. Rather, they are to debate and vote according to their personal conscience. They are like independent parliamentarians.

This could suggest the same is true for fraternal delegates. However, fraternal or foreign delegates are different from 'domestic' delegates. Fraternal delegates are sent to represent their denomination. They compare to foreign diplomats. When they speak, on whatever issue, they are to present the adopted positions of the churches they represent. The fraternal delegate is to be regarded as the sister church in person.

### To speak

For fraternal delegates it means they must know the position of their churches well. On the floor of the assembly they can only speak their church's mind, not their own. Now fraternal delegates may not always agree with the position or direction of their own church on something. This means that a fraternal delegate might say one thing on the floor of synod and quite another when free

from restrictions (e.g. during a meal). Such fraternal delegates are not guilty of doublemindedness. At different times they have different roles. It could happen that a fraternal delegate finds the disconnect between personal and denominational convictions so great he feels he cannot function well. In such a situation a fraternal delegate should resign as representative of his denomination.

### To observe

Fraternal delegates are not just present to speak. They are also present to observe. They are sent to see whether a sister church is faithful to God and His Christ. Thus it will not do for a fraternal delegate to arrive, attend just the session where he speaks, and then leave again. A fraternal delegate needs to spend time in the assembly and an assembly should do its utmost to accommodate fraternal delegates.

### Wisdom

Being a fraternal delegate at a major assembly is not an easy calling. It requires knowledge, wisdom, insight, sensitivity, humility, and above all love, love for God, for Christ and His Church, love for God's people in other churches, in other places. May the Lord bless all who are called to serve on committees for ecumenical relations, who are tasked with representing their own churches at the most major assemblies of other churches. May they be instruments of the paracletic of the Holy Spirit. May churches who receive fraternal delegates pay close attention to what they say and take their words to heart. For it is one sister greeting another.

### NOTES

- 1 I have been involved with the work of the International Conference of Reformed Churches since 1997 and have served for six years on the ecumenical relations committee of the Reformed Churches (liberated) in The Netherlands.
- 2 My request to speak as fraternal delegate at two CanRC synods (2004 and 2007) created a discussion of its own.

*Much to our regret this edition of Lux Mundi appears later than originally planned. The delay was caused by the unexpected resignation of our editor-in-chief, Rev. Kim Batteau. He left the editorial team for personal reasons. We thank him for his years of capable service. We had hoped to present his successor to you, but none has yet been found. We pray we will have by next time.*

The editorial team.



# Follow in the steps of Christ



Dr Rob (P.H.R.) van Houwelingen is professor of New Testament at the Theological University of Kampen, the Netherlands, as well as Research Associate in the Department of New Testament Studies at the University of Pretoria and Extraordinary Professor (New Testament) at the North-West University Potchefstroom, South Africa.

**T**rackers search for traces left by people or animals. These might be footprints, bloodstains or broken twigs. Ecologists follow such traces to determine the movements and activities of animals in their natural environments. Forensic investigation follows a similar process, to track down criminals or to gather evidence for prosecution. At a more existential level: in the course of their lives, some people may lose their way completely; it is as if their moral compass has stopped working. Then they may search for the right direction, and attempt to get their lives back on track.

## ■ Itinerant rabbis

In Bible times, people sometimes followed an itinerant rabbi. Day and night, you would accompany such a teacher, make him your example, and devote your whole life to him. Disciples in Israel were shaped by intensive personal training. Follow the rabbi, and your life will gain direction! Jesus of Nazareth, while no ordinary rabbi, also left such a path to follow, as he travelled around the land of Israel. Sometimes he followed well-travelled paths, sometimes he chose less obvious routes. And all the while, he taught. You could follow him by joining his company. Or rather, by giving heed to his invitation: ‘follow me’. This is how he gathered a company of pupils, and as they followed, he instructed them. Most of the time, Jesus was accompanied by followers: a small inner circle of twelve young men, with a somewhat larger fixed group around them, who in turn were surrounded by a varying number of interested spectators. It was



*“Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps ... by his wounds you have been healed.”*

(1 Peter 2:21,24)

not long before this rabbi’s unconventional instructional practices became more widely known. With him, discipleship is not a passing thing; no, being his disciple is to embark on a lifelong journey.

## ■ Losing oneself

Not everyone had what it took to follow Jesus. For he was on the road to Jerusalem, where death on the cross awaited him. He was prepared to lose his own life to save the lives of others. Sooner or later, each of his followers will come to the same crossroads. Are you prepared, then, to give up everything? As someone who is carrying a cross, on the way to a place of execution? Following Christ means cutting into one’s own flesh: prepared, even, to dare to lose one’s own life. To follow him is to nail your present life to the cross, and to make a completely new start. In one word: to lose yourself. John 6:66 says that, because of his ‘hard teaching’, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with Jesus. There, the Greek verb *peripatein* is used: ‘to walk about’, suggesting that these disciples did not really follow him.

It is not for nothing that all four gospels contain Christ’s solemn warning: *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it”* (Matthew 16:25-26; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24; cf John 12:15). Gain through loss of self!

## ■ Inimitable

In the Gospels, the Greek verb *akolouthein* is used to denote the following of Jesus Christ: ‘to accompany, to keep company with, to belong to a group’. Sometimes, the word *opisoo* is added, ‘to follow after’, in order to indicate the leader who is being followed. The Lord determines the path, and his way is unique. Others may well follow in his footsteps, that is, accompany him on *his* way, just as the first disciples did, when Jesus was still on earth and made his way around Israel. Still, we can feel it coming: this path on earth will come to an end. During the last evening before his death on

*Following Jesus* [photo lsd.org]



*Hold the concrete example of the suffering Christ before you*

the cross, Jesus had prepared his closest followers for that. I am going away soon, he had said, and where I go you cannot follow. Simon Peter had asked: *“Lord, where are you going?”* Jesus answered him, *“Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.”* Peter said to him, *“Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”* (John 13:36-37). Peter was prepared to follow Jesus into death, but what Jesus meant was his departure to heaven, his return to the Father who had sent him. For the present, this path is one that people cannot follow. That is also what made the farewell at the lake of Tiberias painful, as the end of the fourth Gospel shows. In veiled terms, Jesus foretold how Peter would glorify God by his death: he too would be crucified. Whereupon Jesus said to him: *“Follow me.”* When Peter turned, he saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved (John) was following them ... But Jesus said to him: *“You, follow me”* (John 21:19,20,22). This scene brings the Gospel of John to an end. Peter must follow, without looking back at his friend John. But Jesus disappears from view, and all that remains are a few footprints in the sand.

# \* being his disciple is to embark on a lifelong journey.

## ■ Learning by imitation

Following Jesus on earth is something different from following Jesus after he has gone to heaven. From here on, the New Testament begins to use another less physical verb: *mimēsthai*, ‘to mimic, to act in the same manner’. Hence: learning by imitation, just as small children, by mimicking their parents in everyday activities, learn for themselves how they ought to be done. Moreover, the New Testament shows us others, additional to

Christ, who also act as examples. One of these is the apostle Paul. When teaching the Corinthians that they ought to seek the interests of others, setting all self-interest aside, he writes: *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11:1). There are many believers who can be role-models for others: think of the examples of faith from the Old Testament (Hebrews 11), of Paul’s fellow-workers (Philippians 3:17), or of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem (Hebrews 13:7). The example of such believers can serve to encourage each one of us. That is how we as Christians can serve as the hands and feet of Christ in this world. At the same time, we must fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

## ■ Footprints

Seen against this background, it is striking that Peter speaks to domestic servants in Asia Minor as if they can literally walk in Jesus’ footsteps. Domestic servants had to take care of everyday things: cooking, cleaning, caring for children, and working in the fields or businesses of their owners. Peter advises them: *“Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust”* (1 Peter 2:18). Domestic servants were slaves, dependent on their masters. Some of these were harsh. Without cause or provocation, you were liable to get a thrashing, or worse. Were that to happen, says Peter, you must learn to suffer as a Christian, and hold the concrete example of the suffering Christ before you. He did not take refuge in lies or deceit; when he was reviled, he did not retaliate; he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. Follow in his steps, says Peter, and strikingly, he uses the word *akolouthein*, the verb that generally is found only in the Gospels. It is as if domestic slaves, of all people, are most able to follow in Jesus’ footsteps. Of course, Peter realizes only too well that the situation is no longer as it once was. His readers do not live in Israel, and Jesus is in heaven. Still, a trace remains of him, something that transcends time and space. Literally, Peter speaks of an ‘example’ (in Greek: *hupogrammos*, a writing template, used for copying letters) that Jesus ‘left you’. He has departed from this earth, but his footprints, as it were, are still visible in the sand. Follow that path!

## ■ A trail of blood

In the story of Christ’s suffering, Peter recognizes the image of the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. He was flogged till he bled, and carried the wooden cross on his back to Golgotha. Imagine that; keep that image before your eyes! Anyone who follows behind him will see his torn back, and all the stripes of his flogging. When you suffer undeserved punishment, think of him. That is Peter’s advice for Christian slaves, Peter’s first



# A Christian reading of the book of Isaiah

## ✱ Two renowned theologians on the following of Christ:

**Thomas a Kempis (ca. 1380-1471)** *From: The imitation of Christ (1441),*  
*“Whoever follows me, walks not in darkness, says the Lord. By these words of Christ we are advised to imitate his life and habits, if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of heart. Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ. The teaching of Christ is more excellent than all the advice of the saints, and he who has his spirit will find in it a hidden manna. Now, there are many who hear the gospel often but care little for it because they have not the spirit of Christ. Yet whoever wishes to understand fully the words of Christ must try to pattern his whole life on that of Christ.”*

*Tr. Harry Plantinga*

### Comment:

Thomas begins with a quotation from the Gospel of John, in which Jesus calls himself ‘the light of the world’ (John 8:12). The ‘hidden manna’ is a direct reference to Revelation 2:17, and an indirect reference to John 6:48-51, where Jesus calls himself ‘the bread of life’. Thomas lists three pathways by which we may follow Christ: to meditate on his life (as described in the Gospel); to live in the spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9; Galatians 5:25); to conform all of one’s life to the life of Christ (Romans 8:29; Philippians 3:10,21. Note: conformed is not the same as identical!)

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)** *From: The Cost of Discipleship (1937)*

*“Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living Son. And a Christianity of that kind is nothing more or less than the end of discipleship.*

...

*“Through the call of Jesus men become individuals. Willy-nilly, they are compelled to decide, and that decision can only be made by themselves. It is no choice of their own that makes them individuals: it is Christ who makes them individuals by calling them. Every man is called separately, and must follow alone”.*

*Tr. RH Fuller*

### Comment:

Faith is something deeper than merely accepting doctrinal statements or the message of forgiveness; it is more even than having trust in God. Because the Son of God became a human being, because he became the Mediator, writes Bonhoeffer, following Christ is a matter of obedience that excludes any kind of individual choice.

Bonhoeffer emphasizes the role of the individual, because no one can make a decision of faith for anyone else, especially not when any such decision calls for sacrifice. If necessary, following Christ requires swimming against the tide – including that of German national socialism.

In the end everyone is personally responsible before God.

readers. But it also counts for us later readers, with everything that we must suffer because of being Christians. Jesus’ stripes are our salvation, because he bore our sins on the cross. In this way, he carried the blows of his followers and healed their wounds. He gave his life for us. The footsteps of Jesus are the trail of blood that leads us to his kingdom.

### ■ Note

This article was first published in the Dutch language as: Van Houwelingen, PHR: *Volg het voetspoor van Jezus*, in: *Nader Bekeken*, 22 (3), 2015 (78-80). This translation by Aart Plug, by arrangement with the author.

When in October 2014 I took up the Henk de Jong chair as professor at the Theological University of Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, I asked in my inaugural address for attention to be given to a Christian reading of the book of Isaiah.<sup>1</sup> I did so within the framework of my job description: **Biblical Studies and Identity from a Netherlands Reformed perspective.**



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One of the consequences of historical-critical oriented Biblical scholarship is that the Old and New Testaments are often studied separately from each other, and that there is often a marked reluctance to relate the one to the other. With in the Netherlands Reformed Churches drs Henk de Jong, after whom this professorial chair is named, has made a significant contribution to scholarly reflection concerning the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and in particular to the question how the Old Testament can be read in a distinctively Christian manner. I am keen to pursue this question further, with a special focus on the book of Isaiah.

In John 12:37-50, the apostle draws together and takes stock of Jesus’ public ministry. At this pivotal point in his Gospel, John quotes from Chapters 6 and 53 of the prophecies of Isaiah, and in doing so, he makes a direct connection between these passages and the person of Jesus. In my address, I attempted to show that this was not just a creative interpretation of the evangelist, but that within the book of Isaiah these texts are already closely linked, and that this connection calls for a theological interpretation. Next, I drew some ‘handles’ from these intertextual observations to assist in a Christian reading of the book of Isaiah as a whole.

### ■ Key words

In order briefly to show the intertextual relationship between Isaiah 6 and 53, I point to the key words ‘high and exalted’. In Isaiah 6:1 the prophet describes how he sees ‘*the LORD seated on a throne, high and exalted*’ (*rām weniśśā*). In Isaiah 52:13, where the prophecy of Chapter 53 begins, it is said that the Servant of the Lord ‘*will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted*’ (*yārūm weniśśā*’ *weḡāḇaḥ me’ōḡ*). The combination of the verb forms *yārūm weniśśā*’ immediately reminds the reader of the ‘high and exalted’ throne described in Isaiah’s vision in Chapter 6.

In the most literal sense, the Servant of the LORD is elevated to the level of the holy God himself. In the theology of the book of Isaiah, this indicates a divine prerogative. The LORD alone is highly exalted (Isaiah 2:11, 17); he will share his glory with no other (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11). The fact that this exaltation and honour

are nevertheless assigned to the Servant of the LORD, described in Isaiah 53, highlights his absolutely unique position, one that is quite distinct from that of Israel or Zion. On the ground of his suffering, one in which he has fully carried out the will of the LORD and borne the sins of many, the Servant participates, so to speak, in the uniqueness of God himself.

This is confirmed further on in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 57:15 the most significant lines of Isaiah 6 and 53 are brought together in a most surprising manner. The same combination of words that describe the highly exalted throne of the LORD in Isaiah 6:1, and is a reference to the ultimate exaltation of his Servant in Isaiah 52:13, is used in Chapter 57:15 to identify God himself. He is the *rām weniśśā*’, the High and Exalted One: the One, however, who lives not only ‘*in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit*’, like the Servant.

### ■ God and his kingship

What does all of this say about God himself, and about the nature of his divine kingship? (cf. Isaiah 52:7-10). After Isaiah 53, it is no longer possible to speak about God and his kingship separately from the Servant. And it is also clear that after Isaiah 57 it is no longer possible to do so separately from any of his servants, separately from those who reflect the Servant’s image, those who are the Servant’s seed, his spiritual offspring (see Isaiah 53:10), those who are lowly in spirit. In the present shape of the book of Isaiah it is the prophecy of Chapter 53 that prepares for the connection between Chapters 6 and 57. The message that proceeds from this is that God’s dwelling with his servants (together with the accompanying promise of healing and restoration, v.18) is the visible fruit of the highly exalted position the suffering Servant has received from God.

The most important conclusion proceeding from this investigation is that a Christian reading of the book of Isaiah best begins by assigning a central position to the question about God: who he is and what he does. The persuasive power of such a reading stands or falls with a sound theological substantiation that is drawn from the book Isaiah itself, that is to say: drawn from how it speaks about God.

Of course, we must have an eye for the distinction between the Old and New Testaments. While it is true that the book of Isaiah relates the Servant of the LORD to the uniqueness of God, and while he does play a role in the manner in which God’s kingship becomes mani-



## ■ Fata Academica

At the end of 2015, on the occasion of the 161th anniversary of the university, rector professor Roel Kuiper delivered the Fata Academica, a speech in which it is customary to look back on last year and look ahead to what is to come. He addressed the three-barrelled question 'In what way are we as a university development-oriented, future-proof, and recognizable to the public?' Those interested in what is happening at Kampen Theological University can find the full translated text on the university website [www.tukampen.nl](http://www.tukampen.nl) (menu button English).

## ■ Congress Stanley Hauerwas: Conversation with a Radical Theologian

Stanley Hauerwas (b.1940), one of today's greatest theologians, i.e. of those that shape theology and being a church in the West, was present at a conference hosted by the TU Kampen on February 12, 2016: a unique chance to hear him speak and to debate his influence.

## ■ 5th ATSF - June 2016

From June 6 until July 1, Kampen Theological University will once again host the Advanced Theological Studies Fellowship (ATSF). The ATSF is a research opportunity for promising young theologians who are working on a PhD or have recently finished one. These researchers are brought together in Kampen for a month to work on their research, using Kampen's excellent facilities. Meanwhile, they are encouraged to form friendships and build academic fellowship with each other and the community of Kampen Theological University. All expenses for travelling and housing are covered by the University. More information on the programme and how to apply can be found on the university website.

## ■ Conference Just War - Just Peace

On June 24, 2016, the research group Reformed Traditions in Secular Europe (RTSE) from the Theological Universities of Apeldoorn and Kampen (Netherlands), will host an academic conference on the topic of 'The theories of just war and just peace in an age of new military conflicts'. Church and theology are called to contribute to peace. Besides, they are responsible for pastoral guidance to their members who could become involved in wars, and should partake in public debate on these matters, especially because of the renewed religious background of many conflicts. More information is to be found on the university website [www.tukampen.nl](http://www.tukampen.nl).

## ■ Bavinck Lecture 2016

On June 27 the university will welcome James K.A. Smith, Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College holding the Gary & Henrietta Byker Chair in Applied Reformed Theology & Worldview, for the second edition of the Herman Bavinck Lecture series. In this series scholars are invited who share Bavinck's love for the Reformed tradition, are aware of the appeal of his vision of grace as a transforming force in both personal life and in society and culture, and in their scholarly endeavour reflect his deep and catholic vision of the Christian faith. They are asked to address in their lecture key questions regarding the contribution that Reformed theology can make to church and society in a postmodern world.

## ■ MIRT Programme

Halfway through the first year of the Master of International Reformed Theology programme, students and lecturers were invited to give their opinion on this new international programme. 'I can now drink from the full teaching of the great Reformers and Professors at a Theological University with deep theological roots' says a student from Kenya. Read more testimonials on the university website.

fest, in Isaiah the Servant is not identified with God himself. Still, the exaltation of the Servant to the throne of God in Isaiah rightly provides an opening for later Christology to draw on.

## ■ 'Christotelic'

A responsible Christian reading of Isaiah can be described as 'Christotelic' (a neologism coined by Peter Enns). While there is no need to seek a reference to Christ behind every Old Testament text – after all, the Old Testament has its own primary theological focus – the term 'Christotelic' (from the Greek *telos*: goal, end-point, completion) does justice to the conviction that the Old Testament attains its purpose and destination in the person and work of Jesus. As a result of heated debates about the inerrancy of the Bible, in the United States the mere use of the term 'Christotelic' unfortunately might look suspicious to some, but in itself that is no reason to drop this meaningful term.

The manner in which the book of Isaiah speaks about God and about the unfolding of his exalted kingship reaches its fulfilment in the way Jesus has revealed God's glory. In this sense, we may still echo John's statement today, that Isaiah 'saw Jesus' glory, and spoke about him' (John 12:4).

## ■ Notes

This article was originally published in the Dutch language as 'Een christelijke lezing van het boek Jesaja', TUA Inzicht 19/2 (2015), 24-25. This translation by Aart Plug, January 2016, by arrangement with the author.

- 1 For the full annotated text of prof. Dekker's inaugural address see 'Jesaja doelde op Jezus...' Een christelijke kijk op God in het boek Jesaja. *Apeldoornse Studies* 64, *Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn* 2015.

# NAPARC 2015 | Press Release

By Rev. Ron (R.L.) Potter, pastor in the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) at Waymart, PA and Secretary of NAPARC.

The forty-first annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian Reformed Council (NAPARC) was held November 10 – 12, 2015 at the Quebec Inn at Québec City, QC. This Council Meeting was hosted by the Église réformée du Québec. Each Council session was opened with Scripture reading, devotions, and prayer. On November 11, the Canadian *Remembrance Day* was observed with a moment of silence followed by prayer.

Following the Interim Committee meeting on the morning of November 10, 2016, in which the docket for the plenary session of the Council was approved, the Council was called to order by the Chairman, Rev. Bernard Westerveld at 2.00 pm. Thirteen member churches were represented by their delegations as follows: the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC); the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC); the Église réformée du Québec (ERQ); the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA); the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC); the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC); the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) (KPCA-Kosin); the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC); the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA); the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PRC); the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS); the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA); and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). These churches were represented by a total of thirty-eight delegates.

The Protestant Reformed Churches in North America (PRCNA) as well as the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) attended as invited observers. A total of three observer delegates were present from these two churches. The annual NAPARC Meeting, by design, provides a venue for bi-lateral meeting between the interchurch relations committees of the member churches. Thus, in addition to the member and observer church delegates, a number of brothers from these various interchurch relations committees were also present to observe the proceedings. Upon recommendation of the Interim Committee the following officers were elected to serve NAPARC: Chairman, Dr. L. W. Bilkes (FRCNA); Vice-chairman, Rev. Bartel Elshout (HRC); Secretary, Rev. Ron Potter; Treasurer, Rev. Maynard Koerner.

A major item on the NAPARC docket is the reporting of member churches through both a standardized reporting form previously distributed with the docket and an oral presentation on the floor of the Council designed to supplement that report. Each reporting church is assigned another member church to ask questions of, and to pray for, the reporting church. Questions are also asked of the reporting church by the other member churches present. Extensive interaction thus took place between the NAPARC member churches concerning what the LORD is doing among us. Reporting took place on Tuesday afternoon and extended through Wednesday morning and most of Wednesday afternoon. During this time reports were also given by the observer churches present.

On the Tuesday evening of NAPARC a 6.00 pm meal and a 7.30 pm *Devotional Service* was hosted by the ERQ at St Marc Reformed Church with a number of members from St Marc's present for both the meal and the devotional service. Rev. Ben Westerveld led the devotional service and Pastor Mario Veilleux preached a sermon in French from Matthew 28:20 entitled: *I am with you always to the very end of the age*. Translation into English was made available in printed form. Hymns were sung in both French and English. Fellowship followed.

On the Wednesday evening a 6.00 pm meal and a 7.30 pm *Lecture* were hosted by the ERQ again at St Marc Reformed Church. Members from St Marc's church were again present for the lecture. At the lecture Pastor Patrice Michaud of the ERQ spoke on his experience within the ERQ as a church receiving the missionary support of English-speaking churches of North America. Questions from those attending followed. The evening closed with fellowship.

Among the various items of business deal with by the Council were the presentations of the Treasurer's Report, the Auditors Report, the Web Site Committee Report and the World Missions Consultation Report. In addition, discussions were held germane to organic union and as to how each member church receives baptized members into communicant membership. A budget for 2016 was also approved. Permission was given by the Council for a presentation by Pastor Paulin

## Introduction

In North America, churches (denominations) that subscribe the Three Forms of Unity and/or the Westminster Standards meet on an annual basis for mutual encouragement. This organization is known as NAPARC, which abbreviates North American Presbyterian And Reformed Council. This organization has its roots in the 1970s. In many ways it parallels at a continental level the global ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches), an organization with which Lux Mundi readers will be familiar. Indeed, more than half of the NAPARC member churches are also ICRC members, and all ICRC members in North America are NAPARC members. In many parts of the world ICRC members have created Regional Conferences. Previous editions of Lux Mundi have reported on the Asia-Pacific Conference of Reformed Churches and the European Conference of Reformed Churches. An African Conference of Reformed Churches is planned for 2016. A regional conference had also been planned for North America but had to be cancelled. Could it be because NAPARC already fills the need for a regional conference? Here follows the press release on NAPARC's most recent conference. For more information on NAPARC, please visit [www.naparc.org](http://www.naparc.org).

Karlo Janssen

Bedard of the ERQ to provide a PowerPoint introduction to *Ressources chrétiennes* (Christian Resources Ministry). In the light of the recent US Supreme Court decision, the Council also moved to 'remind the Member Churches of their biblical responsibility to teach the whole counsel of the Word of God, including that pertaining to the God-ordained institution of marriage as being between one man and one woman.'

The 2016 Council Meeting is slated to be held in Pompton Plains, NJ, and will be hosted by the FRCNA November 8-10, 2016. Those invited to observe the 2016 Council meeting are the PRCNA and the BPC. ■



# Never beyond your ability?



Rev. Egbert Brink (PhD) is lecturer of Old Testament and Practical Theology at the Theological University of Kampen and teacher at the Reformed Academy in Zwolle. He is still part-time minister of the congregation in Waddinxveen and regular guest lecturer at Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de Bangui and Faculté Jean Calvin in Aix-en-Provence.

## ■ Asking too much

You will not be tested beyond your ability.<sup>1</sup> You will not be given more to carry than you can bear. This text has often been used thus to comfort people who have fallen on hard times. Or those who meet with adversity and feel unable to deal with it. They feel that God is asking too much of them. But how can this be so? Paul tells us: God will not let you be tempted beyond your ability! And how does this relate to Paul's own experiences? In his second letter he writes that they were so burdened beyond their strength that they despaired of life itself (2 Corinthians 1:8)!

## ■ Temptation

Whoever delves into the context of 1 Corinthians 10 gains a different perception. Paul is talking about the journey through the desert, in which God's people were *tempted* in all kinds of ways and about evil desires that kept cropping up. He is referring more to temptation than to trials and tribulations. While it is true that the same word (*peirasmos*) is used for both in the New Testament, here it is clear, nevertheless, that this is about evil temptation and evil desires. This becomes even clearer when looking at the examples Paul gives. His great concern is that the Corinthians are living a self-satisfied and settled life. They act as though they have already arrived. Certainly, they *have* received the wealth of the good news of Christ and the many special gifts that have become apparent (charismatic). But this does not mean that one can sit back.

## ■ Be warned

Paul tells the history of Israel as *our* ancestral history. Forewarned is forearmed... It did not finish with the deliverance from Egypt and the baptism by the Red Sea. Would that were true! Our ancestors slipped up 'hopelessly'. The sequel to the story of liberation was one great let down. So many dropped out! A whole generation was lost. It is enough to make one despair. It started well, and it will be well again, but there are also evil powers at work that want to deprive us of our freedom.

And do not now say: 'That was then: those people were

*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

(1 Corinthians 10:13)

us. In other words: it is a *prototype* (*tupos*), a *type of event that one can expect*. In that time in the desert, we come to recognize a pattern of what will return later. We can recognize in this the tactic of the great tempter, of Satan. He is always of evil intent.

Paul is repeating what Jesus said. It is impossible that there will not be temptations. We cannot escape from traps or snares being laid along our path of life. 'Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!' (Luke 17:1). We have been warned.

## ■ Attacks

The freedom that we have received in Christ is under attack. Therefore, let us not live as though we have already arrived. Do not be so foolish as to think: that won't happen to me: I won't let that happen. There is a great danger of overconfidence. Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:12). Do not look down on others with an attitude that such will not happen to me. God would rather have us feeling weak and dependent, but alert, than that acting tough and strong. Evil is always lying in wait: luring, pulling, sucking, tempting. And the annoying part is that it dovetails with our deep evil desires, which dwell in us all. We happen to have a connection with evil. If you are being tempted, do not point to God, for it connects to your own desires (James 1:12-18).

Paul brings an area of temptation into the picture with the following traps: other gods, the power of *porneia*, provoking God, and living ungratefully.

## 1. Fake gods

But other gods do not really exist, do they? Indeed they do not, but they do present themselves as such. Demons do happen to exist. Paul is referring to the history of the Golden Calf. No sooner had God's covenant been made than the people were unfaithful. They did not want a distant God, to whom they had to listen and who sometimes kept them waiting. But a god who was close, that one could picture: the image of strength and fertility. A *god whom one can manipulate*. One

# ✱ it dovetails with our deep evil desires

who does what you want, and what you think is good and important. Whom you can move around and who can enter into your shoes. Who can be shaped into your image and your desires and to your satisfaction and pleasure. Does that sound familiar?

## 2. Porneia

The word says it all: sexual immorality. This repeatedly formed a threat throughout the history of Israel. Baal and Astarte were



*Grumbling* [sculpture by Benno Réwinkels-Wildenburg and Paul van Pieck tot Beest]

paragons of this evil. Baal, the god of the growing economy, went together with Astarte, the goddess of free sexual morality. In the desert this already becomes clearly visible. At the end of the desert journey the people settled at Baal Peor, and became a little too sociable with those girls of Moab: it degenerated into a 'Bunga Bunga' party.

This is the danger Paul now also sees in the city of Corinth. There is talk of a free sexual morality. If you are in the spirit, then you are free, and your body with all its desires belongs to the old you, which you have left behind. And visiting a prostitute from time to time appeared not to be a problem. Paul repeatedly uses the term *porneia*. *Flee from sexual immorality* (1 Corinthians 6:18). Sexuality is not wrong, but it is often wrongly used or abused. It can become a power that binds you. It can very easily become an addiction. The people back then were no better than today, but today's temptations are being multiplied through the media. Even a web filter does not fully guard against that. Porn can destroy your life.

## 3. Provoking

One could also say: mocking or challenging. This is about mocking Jesus, Paul says. That, in turn, has everything to do with *offending God*. Testing just how far you can go. You demand for yourself a space in which you can seek out the borders and subsequently cross them. God will then just have to look the other way...

## 4. Grumbling

*Grumbling is muttered multiplied*. If you grumble, you are dissatisfied. This is no good and that is no good. You have no eye for what you have. You are displeased. You make demands and are perhaps a 'prosperity child' [a child raised in our prosperous times]. Spoilt and not used to dealing with hardship. But if you grumble, you take it even further. Grumbling is clenching your fists. Grumbling is being at odds with others, obstructing, opposing, kicking up a row. If the cap fits, wear it.

## ■ Seize the promise of deliverance

Paul concludes as he started, with a promise. You yourself are not resistant to Satan's attacks and temptations. *But with the temptation, God also gives the escape. He provides a base of operations* (*ex-base*). It could be that he puts an end to the temptation and effectively frees you from the grip of evil. It could also be that he offers you an escape and provides a vent for release.

God does not, therefore, promise that you will always escape the temptation. You will have to pass through the area, and you might fall. But with that temptation he does not leave you to fend for yourself. In this way you are not tempted *inhumanly* and above your endurance. He offers a vent, but one that works only if you trust him. That can be by means of another who has been sent by him to help you. He can also do it directly. He promises his nearness and shelter. He sets a limit, so that the temptations you have to endure do not become inhuman. *With the temptation comes also his willingness to support you*.

One of the four temptations can make you fall really hard and can trip you up badly. But there is also a rock-hard promise: God will not yield. He never gives up. He remains faithful. That requires our faithfulness and trust. Christ has not endured all tribulations for nothing, enduring it even up to the very end. He did that, not for himself, but for you. ■

*It is not your perseverance with him, but his endurance with you, that is the deciding factor.*

## ■ Notes

This article was first published in the Dutch language as: Brink, E: Nooit boven vermogen? in Nader Bekeken, 9, 2013.

1 Some Bible translations speak of 'testing' or 'trials' [Tr.]

# ✱ a self-satisfied and settled life

still unconverted, stubborn Jews. We have come a long way since then, we have the Holy Spirit and his gifts.' What happened back then happened with a view to



# Kingdom of priests, an invitation to a new dynamic

The choice of every topic has a *Sitz im Leben*, a specific reason. The results of a group interview carried out by a researcher from the KASKI institute,<sup>1</sup> held in 2010 with a so-called focus group in a church called the ‘Boogkerk’ in Amersfoort, prompted me to develop the theme of my topic this afternoon. This research was done in the context of a survey among our rank and file supporters, carried out on behalf of the Theological University in Kampen.



Dr Mees te Velde (b. 1950) was professor of church history, church polity and church building at the Theological University in Kampen, The Netherlands. In addition, he was also rector and chairman of the board of directors of this university from 2009 until his retirement in June 2015. He has published various theological books and articles in his field of expertise [photo Vito Calandra].

As I was listening, I witnessed a twofold division within the group: people (mainly over 40 years of age) who live in the church and who from that perspective participate in society, and people (mainly under 40 years old) who live in society and who from this perspective participate in a church (i.e. a local congregation). All of a sudden I realized that a shift appears to be developing among our supporters: the point of departure for Christians does not lie within the church, but in everyday life. At the same time, it cannot be said that young church members are less involved and less active in their faith. On the contrary, they have a lot to contribute, a lot of potential, thoughtfulness, and ability to have an impact as Christians, both inside the church and outside. In their lives the old concept of prophet, priest, and king (the office of all believers) can still be powerful. But if the shift means that one’s personal and professional life, and one’s church life in the congregation become two worlds that seldom interact, then we have a problem!

Ever since that evening in the Boogkerk, I felt compelled to investigate what is happening here. After all, the churches have a legitimate expectation that here in Kampen we are not practising our theology somewhere in the rearguard, but that we are sensitive to developments as these unfold into the future.

As I continued to reflect and study, I came to two observations/theses:

1. In the context of Reformed ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) the congregation, as a gathering of members with their own faith and practice, has not been sufficiently developed as an entity of its own.
2. Related to this, our everyday, ordinary secular life is not factored sufficiently into regular church practices; it has not received the recognition it deserves. According to me these are two related weaknesses: in our vision, in our ‘church theory’; but also in our practice of being a church. Let’s map these out, and look for ways to strengthen them.

## THE FIRST WEAKNESS

### ■ Priesthood in the congregation

In practice, the congregation is a gathering of Christians who – organized locally – are served and led by office-bearers, especially the pastors. For the congregation, the concept of the ‘office of all believers’ is sometimes used. In Lord’s Day 12, question 32, of the Heidelberg Catechism, we even have a beautiful model of the three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king, the office which Christians carry out as they follow Jesus Christ. In ecclesiology (i.e. church theory) however, this issue receives very little practical application. For the most part, each one puts the general priesthood into practice individually; it does not have a well-defined structure and it does not constitute an essential and substantial part of being a Christian church. There is little clarity: which tasks, sources, forums, and which cooperatives are connected to this? For the special offices there is an extensive and a reasonably well crystallized theology, but for the congregation such a theology is much more diffuse.

The above issue is exemplified when one reads some of the more recent Protestant handbooks on systematic theology. In chapter 14 of Van den Brink and Van der Kooi’s *Christelijke Dogmatiek: Een Inleiding*<sup>2</sup> (Church – Sacraments – Offices) there is a reference to 1 Peter 2. But the means of grace are dominant in the whole picture, and therefore also in the church services, the offices, the preaching, and the sacraments. If other practices are named (p. 535), then they are the so-called medial structures: spiritual conversations, office, pastorate, diaconate, prayer and intercessions, mutual love, and almost completely inward-focused church activities. The relationship between the church and kingdom is specifically discussed with the help of the three models of office (Episcopal, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian). In this ecclesiology, the royal priesthood of God’s people does not receive a substantial and well-defined domain.

In Van de Beek’s broad ecclesiology in *Lichaam en Geest van Christus*<sup>3</sup> (almost 400 pages), he briefly discusses the universal priesthood of all believers. But his main application is that this universal priesthood should not be played out against the special offices. In his discussion, the metaphor of the priesthood immediately moves back to the image of the body: the believers are

*Archeological layers* [photo Ria Nederveen]

all members of the body of Christ. That is just about it: they figure ‘as a numerous multitude of anonymous (!) intercessors and witnesses.’

In his Trinitarian ecclesiology *After our likeness* (1998) Miroslav Volf makes a somewhat different sound. His argument (in his chapter about structures in the church, pp. 224–228) is interesting. He argues that the church is not one subject, but a congregation of interdependent subjects. He emphasizes that the calling to believe is the same for everyone, but that the *charismata*, i.e. gifts, are quite different. For that reason, the life of the congregation is not ordered around the office-bearers. The Spirit also establishes the church through each member. Each one of them has the task to administer grace, and therefore everything the ‘laity’ does is constitutive for the church. But additional elaboration is lacking; it remains general. This, I noted, is also the case in various other standard works. Following this short survey of systematic theology, the question arises: what is the situation from a historical-theological perspective?

### ■ Historical-theological perspective

In the ancient church we find the three-fold office of priest, king, and prophet. Jerome describes the priesthood of all believers as being rooted in baptism. In the works of Chrysostom and Augustine we find similar thoughts. In the wake of this thinking, the church developed confirmation as a separate sacrament: with holy oil the six-year-old child was anointed on the forehead as a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit, a ritual of installation in the full calling of a Christian.

In the Medieval church, however, the scope of this general ‘ordination to the priesthood’ was restricted to one’s own social context and lifestyle, and with this the witness to the pagans. Over time, there was an enormous sacralization and clericalization of the church, accompanied by a monopoly position for the clergy, and the development of a hierarchy that placed the ‘laity’ very much in a subordinate position of dependency.

Over against this background, Luther formulated his extreme pronouncements, for example his well-known expression: ‘For whoever comes out of the water of baptism is already consecrated a priest, a bishop, and a pope.’ And therefore his conclusion: away with the clergy who ruled over everything. A new church was needed in



which everyone had access to God and in which everyone had freedom to read and apply the Scriptures. In terms of preaching and doctrine, a thorough renewal of the church really took place. Nevertheless, the basic pattern, clergy–laity, remained in a moderate form.

Calvin also called attention to the priesthood of all believers. His emphasis on the calling (*vocatio*) of Christians in their whole life was typical of his theology. In his ecclesiastical design he went much further than Luther and Melancthon by a principled separation of church and state, and by creating offices of elders and deacons, men chosen from the people who, as lay office-bearers, would share in the functioning of and decision-making in the church. But when we come to the point, when we consider the Calvinistic church concept, the offices and the means of grace still dominate to a large extent. The special office is active and the congregation is receptive; this is, overall, the picture.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were alternative ecclesiologies with a greater emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. The Anabaptists (from 1525) and Mennonites (from 1560), the Baptists (from 1609), and later Congregationalists (from 1620), propagated a greater spiritual role for the individual believer. For example, they considered the meeting of the congregation as the ultimate decision-making body in the church, instead of a consistory or council of elders. These models, however, had a limited spread and impact until the twentieth century, at least in Europe. Moreover, after a while, almost all non-conformists ended up in

the same pattern: pastors (as leaders) and congregation (as followers).

### ■ Current situation

In the current situation in many Protestant and Reformed churches there are actually four ‘archeological’ layers.

1. The lowest layer is the direct access to God’s revelation in the Bible, and consequently, to God himself, (the great discovery and gain of the Reformation). Christians are free to read for themselves, to understand, reflect, and judge, to formulate their own opinions and concepts before God’s face. The Word of God lives in the hearts of individual believers. That was an enormous turnaround, even if church services continued to follow (as they still do today) the pattern of providers and consumers.
2. Since the seventeenth century a layer of personal piety was added: one experienced one’s own personal faith, and shared this mutually. Personal piety becomes a domain on its own. Think of Spener, Francke and Von Zinzendorf in Germany, the awakening in the Netherlands,<sup>4</sup> the Puritans in the Anglo-Saxon world, and later, Methodism of the eighteenth century and Neo-pietism and the Dutch Réveil of the nineteenth century. In addition to the reading and interpretation of the Bible (continually expanded exegetically and meditatively) this focus on piety became the most important contribution to the priesthood of believers well into the nineteenth century. It contributes to a broad stream of spiritual literature and forms of gathering outside of the church services.



3+4. In the third and fourth layers, two movements are mirrored that arose together (in part): the activation of the office of all believers,  
 a) in contributing to the upbuilding of the congregation (the concepts of church development and charismata),<sup>5</sup> and  
 b) in the spreading of the gospel, i.e. the concepts of Kingdom of God, the apostolate and Missio Dei/being a missionary church.

These movements, which began around 1870, were the first great mobilizations of church members/Christians for church development and outreach (Wichern, Kuyper). They were permitted to assist in the upbuilding of the congregation. After 1945, the apostolate approach (Kraemer, Hoekendijk, Karl Barth, David Bosch) contributed to this in an increasing measure. There was a focus on Missio Dei, a missionary witness in our highly secularized society, which connected lines of thought to the concept of 'discipleship' as the newest trend.

## ✱ the place and the status of the general priesthood are vague

### ■ Has the priesthood come to its own?

The above four movements have truly moved the church much further along. But has the guild of the Christian priesthood (*hierateuma*), of which initially the Lord's servant Moses and subsequently the apostle Peter spoke so loftily, come to its own in the church? And does it have its own ecclesiological story to tell with respect to the general priesthood as a reasonable counterpart to a theology of the offices?

I do not see that yet. Several other authors draw the same conclusion.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, four big steps forward have been made since the Reformation. But in practice it remains unsatisfactory:  
 1. that everything is still so inward-looking and focused on what happens inside the church, and  
 2. that it still largely remains in the spirit of engaging and delegating.

The believer reads the Scriptures him/herself, and develops his/her thinking about it, but within the congregation, at most, he/she may voice this in a small group. He/she is active in church development and missionary outreach, but only as an extension of the church's proclamation or pastorate, to go where the office-bearers do not go, or cannot get to.



This is noticeable, for example, in the administration of the sacraments and with the public profession of faith. You will find little or nothing in the liturgical forms in the Reformed psalter (e.g. Books of Praise) concerning our primary calling, the royal priesthood. Look at the questions posed before baptism, or those posed before public profession of faith. An analysis of other aspects of the congregation will lead you to similar conclusions.

The institutional and official side of the church is thus fully developed, but the place and the status of the general priesthood are vague and do not constitute an equivalent counterpart to the story. And this, while the congregation is not meant to serve the office and the means of grace, whereas the offices and means of grace are meant to nourish and build up the congregation in her calling expressed in Exodus 19 and 1 Peter 2, and focused on the glory of God. Consequently, there is a lack of distinct domain, a lack of freedom and independence for the members of the congregation as a priestly nation who have their own tasks in life and kingdom – tasks that do not need to be managed by the institution of the church and its offices. The 'lay' person has been 'churchianized', and that process is still going on. Of course, participation in the church is the first dimension of the universal priesthood. But it is not appropriate that church life is made so all-important that the second private dimension, and the third secular dimension of the universal priesthood remain underexposed and fragmented.

### ■ Vatican Council II

It is striking that the Second Vatican Council with its Constitution about the church *Lumen*

*gentium* (1964) has overtaken the churches of the Reformation in an unexpected way, at least as it concerns the vision and theological wording. The point of departure in *Lumen gentium* (p. 30) is the unity of office-bearers and 'lay' people, insofar as they belong equally to the one People of God, and that bringing salvation from God into this world is a task for all the people. Terminologically they are (p. 37) distinguished from each other as universal priesthood and official or hierarchical priesthood. In *Lumen gentium* they are developed as two circuits with a substantial unity in relation to each other. I will return to this later.

How can we, in our Reformed Calvinist setting, profit from all the reflection on the priesthood of all believers? It is my conviction that it is necessary, in a positive but critical fashion, to come alongside the shift in being a congregation, a shift that has already been underway for some time. Younger Christians no longer allow themselves to be led by an institution and office, and no longer do they live primarily within the church community, but they live expressly and primarily in their private and secular world. That is to say: in their own life, in their own setting, in their marriage, family, and upbringing, in their work and in their career, in their neighborhood and among their friends, in their sports activities and hobbies, in their social and economic relations. In connection with this ongoing shift, sometimes people warn that there is lacking an awareness of proper church membership (*kerkbesef*), and insufficient participation in church life.

On the other hand, in my opinion, this shift serves as a wake-up call for us to realize that the unique priesthood of every believer in both private and secular life deserves much more explicit and substantial attention in our being the church.

In this respect it will be helpful to look at the other weakness in more detail.

## THE OTHER WEAKNESS

### ■ Imbalance between sacred and secular

In my view, there is in practice an imbalance between the sacred and secular in how we function as congregation. Whoever mentions the word 'priest' invokes the sphere of the temple, of the holy of holies, of the immediate presence of God. But the Bible also teaches the importance of *latreia* and *leitourgia* (Rom. 12) before God in everyday life. Look at what follows 1 Peter 2: 9, 10: government, marriage, labour relations, etc. Priests in the temple and priests in the earth – that is the combination, and that is through and through who our God is. Proof text: Psalm 65. God is not a dualist, and he does not want us to be dualists either. Also, the pots and pans are holy (Zechariah 14). Everything that God has created is good and nothing is to be rejected, because it is sanctified through the Word of God and through prayer (1 Timothy 4). From my perspective, the average church concerns itself mainly with the sacred and much less the secular. How much does Sunday congregational worship reflect genuine secular life, in economic, political, technical, in the housing market, in the struggles in marriages and families, etc. It is interesting to note that largely privately organized phenomena such as marriage courses, women's spiritual support groups, Athletes in Action, men's spiritual support groups, e.g. Men of Integrity, etc., appear to pick up the secular needs as complementary para-church movements. That is a good thing; let it happen. Christian members of the church have lots of freedom to organize all kinds of things. It is even mentioned in the Roman Catholic Codex and in *Lumen gentium*.

In the meantime, Reformed churches should ask the question: what is going on here? In the path of Pietism and Methodism (and further back, in the line of the Reformation and the Middle Ages) we are dealing in the background with an imbalance of soteriology and pneumatology, or perhaps better: justification and sanctification. Communication in the congregation (liturgical forms and preaching) is focused strongly on soteriology, on justification, on being a child of God thanks to the Lord Jesus, on being saved from sin through his sacrifice on the cross, on the encouraging assurance that God wants to be your God and that he looks after you in his providential care. Personal salvation and security are especially central. Much less the personal

renewal, the honour of God, the expression of the good life in service to his glory.

In church communication, a systematic proclamation that covers the various spheres of life, the ten words of the Decalogue and Christian virtues, receives much less emphasis than a discussion of a selection of redemptive historical facts and a number of dogmatic themes. More doctrine than life, more words than deeds, more applied dogmatics than applied spirituality and ethics. I believe this emphasis is connected to this weakness.

### ■ The daily service to God and people

The American missionary theologian, Darrell Guder (2000) made the same observation, and dedicates many pages to this reduction of the Biblical message. Some time ago I came across this gap when I was preparing the material for my booklet *Congregational Development 2*.<sup>7</sup> In the latter booklet, the consecration of our lives, – the *leitourgia*, the *latreia*, the daily service to God and people – is described as one of the six core domains in the congregation. In other Congregational Development concepts, the consecration of our lives does not have such an essential place.

It is interesting to note Abraham Kuyper as a relevant author in this context. In the first sentences of his trilogy, *Pro Rege*,<sup>8</sup> he posits that it is necessary to abandon the separation between life in the church and life outside of the church! Kuyper did not only emphasize this in *Pro Rege*, but in all kinds of other situations. With him there was a strong consciousness that something like a distinction between the church as a institution and the church as an organism is necessary. If we do not make that distinction we reduce the priesthood to a number of loose patches of cloth spread around the firmly woven cloth of the church as an institution, nothing more.

*in your daily life let there be flowers that bloom for God everywhere*



It is fascinating to listen again to the Second Vatican Council. *Lumen gentium* not only joined the clergy and the people into a relationship with one another, which does greater justice to the uniqueness of the universal priesthood. But that uniqueness was developed even further with the aid of the concept of the 'secular life'. A secular character trait is unique to lay people (*Lumen gentium* 30-31). They have a task not only in the church, but also in the world. Their unique calling lies in the secular world: looking after temporal matters in a way that God wills it. As yeast, as it were, they contribute from the inside out, to the sanctification of the world, by letting their light shine on it and by ordering it. Letting their light shine on it means here: that the believer lives and works in such a way that things in this world remain completely as they are, truly earthly, truly human, creaturely, concrete, but at the same time permeated with a glow of grace, of loving dedication, of attachment to God, referenced to God, giving a meaning and a trust that all our life and work is not in vain.

Ordering means placing things in the great contexts in which they belong: the relation with God and the relation with our neighbour; ordering over against the forces that create such chaos and fragmentation that people can no longer see properly where things come from and where they are going. And let every aspect of secular life and work ring with God's good commandments together with the virtues to which he calls us, and the purposes for which he has established life. What the soul is to the body is what Christians must be to the world (Letter to Diognetus). In this way secular life is not relegated to powers outside of God, but is destined to be offered as sacrificial material in the service to the Triune God. In my own words: in your daily life let there be flowers that bloom for God everywhere, bells that toll for him.



Connecting God's name to a clever piece of technology [photo Pixabay/Wikimedia]

### ■ A spiritual sacrifice to the Father

In *Lumen gentium* this is further developed in the priestly (34), the prophetic (35) and the royal (36) service of the laity as performed in good works, prayers, apostolic acts, marriage and family life, daily work, in economic, political and social life, in the relaxation of the body and spirit, in all forms of suffering as well. They offer all of this in the 'eucharist' through the Holy Spirit as a spiritual sacrifice to the Father, and with this they offer up secular life and the world of humanity. *Consecratio mundi*, sanctification of the world.

No doubt it is true that the idea of meritorious good works resonates here. Also, we note that in the Roman Catholic Church the beautiful concept of the common priesthood and *consecratio mundi* have not led, nor is it leading, to a renewal in the church, because clerical and sacramental thinking stands in the way. For the reformed tradition, however, a number of useful lines of thought have been presented that can help us reflect in a positive way concerning the shift to the non-institutional and to the emphasis on the secular life that is currently developing in our churches, dedicating all of life in all its aspects to our good God. And not as good works done in our own strength, but for 100% drawing everything from Christ, and building on him as the Cornerstone.

### ■ New Dynamic

Now we have come to the 'invitation to a new dynamic'. When I say 'new', I do not mean that it is actually starting here and now. We are talking about an old, loving expression from God in Exodus 19 and 1 Peter 2, an expression that continues to have new power to pull us out of entrenched patterns and theological gaps. 'You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19: 6). This was recorded long ago and it has remained through the centuries. Still today it is a refreshing and stimulating promise and challenge. It establishes the congregation in her strength as a new, unique people of priests and priestesses, a people with a royal heart and a prophetic spirit who wish to practise this with head and heart and hands. And for those people this is not a job – it is their life, their identity.

Keeping the aforementioned in mind as a background, several things are necessary for a new dynamic. I will outline six.

1. The re-framing of our view of what it means



to be a church, especially by not viewing the church in a single dimension (office, institute, church service), but in three: church life, personal life, life in the world. And for each of these three dimensions, let each one be a unique domain functioning under the Lord Jesus Christ, in connection to and interacting with each other. As a result, our theology will gain a broader perspective, which we hope will connect not only with younger generations, but also with all generations of the church together in the inalienable priesthood that God himself has given us.

2. We must see and experience secular life in every aspect as a life dedicated to God. The reduction of the ecclesiastical message particularly to the otherworldly, the doctrines, the themes of atonement and providence, as well as our experience of these, can lead unintentionally to Docetism (the earthly matters do not really matter) and Gnosticism (our relation to God is a cognitive connection packaged in a cloud of words). If we have no message for or about secular life, the unfortunate result will be a two-world system, perhaps the greatest pitfall of all Christianity.
3. There must be cooperation between the special offices and the universal priesthood to develop an attitude that does not compete, but is complementary. In this way we do not create dilemmas and tensions between the sacred and the secular, justification and sanctification, collective and individual, acceptable congregational culture and continual innovation. But we will think in two-cycle mode: the one always in correlation with the other, in which church members eagerly establish their pastors in their strength for proclamation, instruction, and pastoral work. And in which pastors establish Christians in their particular strength for their personal relationship with God and a virtuous life, at home and in the broad expanse of the world.

In which they do not take their own tasks and documents and then burden the church members with all this, expecting them to work with it. But specifically, they must stimulate the believers and feed them so they can do their own job, fulfill their own priesthood. That division of responsibilities would also enormously simplify the organization! A further application of this approach leads to a seminary with the same broad perspective: training good ministers for the church, but at the same time providing thoughtful material for the fascinating priesthood of God's people who are engaged in their work in the world.

4. *Diaspora* and *ekklèsia*: believers stand immediately under God. They have a God-given mandate on the basis of their unique calling, with, as its core, a consciousness of their calling, willingness, and obedience. That dedication of their lives is not just an extra feature of their membership of the church. Christian life from Monday through Saturday in our houses, in our workplace, in the schools, is not a privatized and random appendix to the celebration of the Sunday, but actually is totally being the church of Jesus Christ, not private life but church life. If the church service is the heart, then the Christian life that surrounds it is the body. What would a heart want to do other than make sure that the whole body is living, really living?! In the congregation, therefore the dynamic of *Sammlung* and *Sendung* (= gathering and sending), from *ekklèsia* to *diaspora* and back is an essential dynamic. 'Go' structures and 'come' structures. The deeper you are rooted in the sanctuary, the deeper you can go into the world and make an impact. The church is meant to be not only a cultic community but also a kingdom community. View the congregation of Christ as a bridgehead, a beginning, a preview, a promise of the new world of God, without *hubris*, without pride, but in complete modesty.

It is not without significance that the Biblical images here are passive images: salt, yeast, and light. None of them makes any noise. It is about being, about life, not about making a lot of noise and doing a lot of talking.

5. Structure: the fact that the universal priesthood remains 'hanging' is in part because it has received hardly any structure. Therefore it would be appropriate here (inter-congregationally and ecumenically) to work with 'ordoide'<sup>9</sup> elements such there have always been here and there. For example, Christian women support groups, Bible study organizations, regional fellowships of Christian business people, conversation groups of 'Christians in health care', pilgrim groups, weekends devoted to the practice of *lectio divina*, etc. These could be a beautiful application of the Nazirite vow (Num. 6) with freewill vows and extra commitment. The organization of so-called 'orders' (which are separate units in addition to the normal congregation) is a welcome complement to our functioning as local church, and deserves encouragement and support from the 'official church'.
6. The challenge will be to develop good examples: there are enough words, articles, and books. At this point it is going to be important to focus on real-life situations, receiving directed instruction and practice, e.g. family devotions, conducting an authentic conversation as husband and wife, teaching one's children love and loyalty, simply connecting God's name to a beautiful butterfly or a clever piece of technology, the introduction of godly wisdom in a discussion with a colleague concerning his private life. All those things often remain below the radar, but these are the realities of people's lives. Congregations that are willing to experiment with this may apply!

Finally, classic patterns and new initiatives are both from God's hands. In both we may present God with the thank offering of our lives. Psalm 66:13, 'I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will perform my vows to you . . .' *Consecratio mundi*, by means of and through the crisis-bringing cross of Christ, we must facilitate dedication to God of all the things of this world. We must take up every component and all the themes of our lives, bring them to God and worship him with these, pray that he will purify this and provide his blessing. With every Word service, there is also the Sacrifice service of our lives: Psalm 40: 8a, 'I delight to do your will, O my God.' Central to the church, then, is the Lord's

Supper, the place where we embrace Christ and completely dedicate our lives again to God, and sacrificially give our lives away to our Deliverer. We respond to his atoning sacrifice with our sacrifice of thanksgiving. Nothing, however, is done in our own strength, but we build on the Cornerstone, and draw from the Spring. Let the shift go ahead. The Lord rules. The church is his. And his Kingdom is being established. ■

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(An extensive bibliography can be found on our website, see [bbk.gkv.nl/literatuurlijst-lm-2016-01/](http://bbk.gkv.nl/literatuurlijst-lm-2016-01/)

### ■ Notes

This article is the valedictory lecture of Prof. Dr Mees te Velde, held at his farewell on June 26, 2015 under the title 'Koninkrijk van priesters, uitnodiging tot een nieuwe dynamiek' (Kingdom of priests – Invitation for a new dynamic of being a church), and is translated by Pieter Torenvliet by arrangement with the author.

- 1 KASKI – Katholiek Sociaal-Kerkelijk Instituut, based at the Radboud University (Nijmegen). According to their website it is 'one of the oldest sociological research institutes in our country' (The Netherlands). The associates of KASKI are experts in the area of religious and worldview developments, as well as developments concerning the general processes in society such as individualization, increasing mobility, and cultural pluralism.
- 2 Van den Brink, G., and Van der Kooi, C. *Christelijke dogmatiek: Een inleiding* (= Christian Dogmatics: An Introduction), Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012.
- 3 Van de Beek, C. *Lichaam en Geest van Christus* (= Body and Spirit of Christ), Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012.
- 4 The Dutch 'Nadere Reformatie' was a religious movement of the seventeenth century that attempted to counter dead orthodoxy and scholastic intellectualism. The movement emphasized personal piety and commitment. Subsequently the movement was accused of scholasticism, and forms of mysticism. Among its main leaders were G. Voetius, W. Teellinck and J. Cocceius.
- 5 The concepts of church development and charismata.
- 6 H. Kraemer, C. Eastwood, H.M. Barth, R.P. Stevens.
- 7 Te Velde, M., *Gemeenteopbouw* 2, Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1992.
- 8 1912, Vol. I, p. v.
- 9 Ordoide: 'Of or pertaining to religious communities formed of individuals that distinguish or segregate themselves for the purpose of devotion to God in keeping with orders to which vows are taken.' For examples of something 'ordoide' consider monastic orders and similar religious societies. See among others: Thomas Eggensperger, et al., *Kirche in Bewegung* (= Church on the Move) <http://www.dsts.nl/kircheinbewegung.htm> and H.M.G.J van Golde, *Law of Grace. The Theological Foundations of Canon Law according to Hans Dombos in His Work "Das Recht der Gnade"* (<http://kerkrecht.nl/content/golde-hmgj-van-1988-title>).



To speak of creation in the Biblical sense is to speak of the creating God. The biblical testimony is the message regarding God's words and deeds in creation and history. Therefore, in this testimony, we are not dealing with an academic explanation providing us with all kinds of natural science information. Reading the Bible in this manner straitjackets the Scriptures.

## Creation



Dr Albert Noordegraaf (1933-2011) was minister in the Dutch Protestant Church (PKN) and was a lecturer of New Testament and church-building at the Dutch Reformed ecclesiastical education in Utrecht.

Through the advancement of scientific research in all sorts of fields, we now know more about the universe, in this respect, than the writers of the Scriptures. But this 'more' does not mean that, with our knowledge, we have tracked down the mystery of creation and life. For things in the created reality have their mystery (A. van den Beukel), pointing to God and his mighty works. We must not mix up the scientific approach of reality and the revelation of truth. Nor do we need to fear the scientific truth. If scientists talk to us about billions of light years and an infinite cosmos, then how infinitely large is He whose glory was praised by psalmists and prophets!

### ■ Genesis 1

The Bible starts with the testimony of the creation by God: 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth' (Gen. 1,1). That is an absolute beginning. When we start something, it is always preceded by something else. We always start with something. At the beginning of creation there was not something. Only someone: God stands at the beginning and he comes at the end. Who is this God? To Israel that was not a question. He is none other than the God of the covenant, who revealed himself to Moses as YHWH: I am who I am. The God of the covenant is also the God of creation (Ps. 136). Genesis 1 is expressed in the language of the ancient world and in the world perception of that time, in which they perceived the world as flat, and the sun appeared to circle the earth. It is an artistic poem, in which we are told that God created and arranged the cosmos in six days. The Creator rested on the seventh day. The verb 'created' occurs seven times, and the word 'made' is used seven times. Ten times we read about God speaking. Thus the writer makes something visible of the orderly character of the creation. Everything connects together. Created reality is not chaos, but cosmos. Through his speaking, God calls things to life (Ps. 33:6; Rom. 4:17). In this He reveals his omnipotence and his exaltation. In the world beyond Israel there was often talk of gods being created before the world came into being. Gods and people shared the same reality and nature had a divine quality. Heaven, earth, sun, moon and stars, trees and animals were considered to be divine. The biblical testimony says that the eternal God is enthroned above his creation. Being his creation, everything and all are dependent on him and are

being maintained by him. However much the LORD is involved with his creation, however much he inspires the creation with his Spirit, there can be no talk of pantheism. There remains a distance between God and his world. Where that is forgotten, we fall into idolatry. The biblical view of creation repudiates the concept of a divinized cosmos, and historically this has paved the way for the practice of natural science and technology. Wherever, however, it is forgotten that God is the Lord of the cosmos, renunciation of the divine results in secularization, and science and technology easily become ends in themselves.

### ■ Anti-heathen testimony

Creation means that God will transform the savage and dark earth – which originated from nothing – into a habitable world. As an eagle hovering protectively over its young, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. This depicts God's care for his world. Elsewhere this is expressed by the image of God combating the chaotic forces of nature (see e.g. Psalm 74:12, 17; 89:9-12; Isaiah 51:9-10). He succeeds in conquering those powers. He sustains and maintains his creation. The darkness must give way to the creating word of God. God summoned the light. Light... that is life, fertility, wellbeing. It is the creation work of the first day. The anti-heathen edge to the song of creation is striking. In the world of Babylon, sun, moon, and stars were worshiped as gods. The belief that man's fate was controlled by the power of the stars was widespread. Genesis 1 says that the heavenly bodies are lights in the universe, to serve man. In exile, the prophets reverted to this anti-heathen testimony to encourage the despondent people in Babylon. May not Israel believe that the LORD, the God of the covenant forgets his people! Their destiny is not written in the stars, as the ancient belief claimed, but rests in the hands of the powerful creator who calls the stars by name, and also knows all of his children. Genesis 1 is a song of praise for God's creating power, a song of consolation (G. Boogaard). We are not products of blind chance: our existence and that of the world were willed by God. In the prophetic testimony (for example. Isaiah 40), declaration of God's creative power stands in service of the proclamation of redemption and liberation.

### ■ Man

Man holds a special place in that created reality. The earth is being prepared for man. Only of man is it said



The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters [picture acrookedpath.com]

that God created him in his image. That means, among other things, that man, as God's representative, is charged with the care of creation. There is talk of sovereignty. But that sovereignty may not degenerate into abuse. Man has been called to this office in community with God. He is of lofty origins but at the same time he is a frail and weak creature (Psalm 8). In Genesis 2 that stands out strongly. The creator formed man of the dust of the ground. It is possible that wet, clayey ground is meant here, which can be moulded into shape. Man, however, owes his life to him who breathed life into him. If God takes the breath away, then there is no longer life. On the one hand man is dust of the earth. That refers to his littleness and futility. He is totally dependent on his creator. But as a created creature he lives on the breath of God's voice and is placed in a paradise, a fertile garden to cultivate and maintain. With regard to man, it is often said that he is the crown of creation. However important the task and the vocation of man may also be in creation, it is nevertheless significant that God's creative work leads to the seventh day's rest. With that he places the crown on his work. What we do in the working week, the six days, finds its completion on the seventh day. On that day we celebrate the goodness and the blessing of God's creation. In this, people may follow God. Resting is celebrating, knowing when to stop. We do not live to work. We work in God's creation to delight in God's blessing.

### ■ Christ and the creation

The New Testament continues along the same lines as the Old Testament. The creator is the God and father of Jesus Christ. Yet the revelation in Christ places its own accent when speaking of the creation. We see in John 1 that God's speaking at the creation means Christ is involved in creation as the Son, the Word from the beginning. The creation finds its foundation in him. Colossians 1 sings the hymn of the all-encompassing meaning of Christ as Lord of the cosmos. In Christ all things were

(are already) created through him and for him. In every respect he takes up a certain position with respect to creation. Probably, the apostle reverts to what is said about wisdom in the Book of Proverbs. Wisdom is presented there as a person who is present at the creation. In a poetical manner, the order and beauty, the harmony and the efficiency are praised as a fruit of God's wisdom, through which all was created. Well, Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God in person. He is Lord over all powers and strengths and puts them in their place. For this reason, the cosmos is no threatening reality to the congregation of Christ, because he who created it is, through his crucifixion and resurrection, also its redeemer. Thus, the New Testament is the testimony of the re-creation. In spite of the fact that the creation is a fallen creation, there is a perspective for man and for the world – because the creator, in his faithfulness, does not let go of his creation. Therefore the Bible concludes with the vision of the new heaven and the new earth, in which all will be full of the glory and splendour of God. ■

### ■ Note

This article was first published in the Dutch language in: H.G.L. Peels and P.H.R. Van Houwelingen, eds: *Studiebijbel in Perspectief*. Heerenveen: Jongbloed 2009. This translation by Sabrine Bosscha, February 2016.



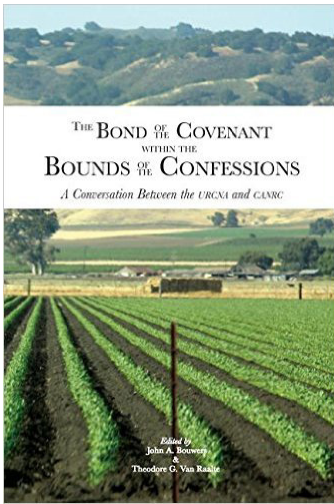
Creation of Adam [bas-relief in wood by Tadeusz Kowalski]



# Book announcement

By Dr. Lawrence W. Bilkes, *Grand Rapids, pastor-emeritus of the Free Reformed Churches of North America.*

John A. Bouwers and Theodore G. Van Raalte (eds.),  
***The Bond of the Covenant within the Bounds of the Confessions:***  
*A Conversation Between the URCNA and CanRC.*



For several years the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) have been discussing a merger of churches. The two federations have ecumenical relations, which allows them to do a variety of tasks together for the kingdom of God, and most members within both federations agree on various issues within the body of Christ. Nevertheless, there remains a hesitancy to make the final step toward complete unity. Most of the friction between the two federations has centred upon theological education, church polity, and church music.

### ■ A Special Colloquium

At the June 4, 2014 synod of the URCNA a colloquium about covenant theology was held between theologians of the URCNA (Dr Cornelis P. Venema from Mid-America Reformed Seminary and Dr W. Robert Godfrey from Westminster Seminary California)<sup>1</sup> and theologians of the CanRC (Dr Theodore G. Van Raalte and Dr Jason P. Van Vliet, professors at Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary). The colloquium was an initiative of the URCNA Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU). In the URCNA there were those who felt that differences about covenant theology in the CanRC were beleaguering efforts to work towards a merger of the two federations. Hence, this colloquium was proposed as a way to work through these differences. Prior to the colloquium, a number of documents had been prepared by the participants, accompanied by a letter from the CanRC Committee for Church Unity to CanRC church councils. The first document was from the URCNA representatives, in which they laid out their position. The second was from the CanRC representatives, in which they answered some questions that Dr Venema and Dr Godfrey had posed to them. As to the CanRC contribution to this discussion, Dr Van Raalte and Dr Van Vliet both stated that although they are professors at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, they did not present the ‘official’ covenant theology of the Canadian Reformed Churches, which has not yet been worked out in the kind of detail found in this document. This is in line with John Calvin. He often

spoke of ‘doctrine’, a term he preferred to ‘dogma’. To him, ‘dogma’ was the ‘dogma’ of the Roman Catholic Church, over against which he placed the sound and spiritual ‘doctrine’ of Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

### ■ Covenant and Election

One of the points discussed was the relationship between the covenant of grace and election. On this point, the URCNA delegates stated: ‘It is important to distinguish between the covenant of grace in its *historical administration* and the covenant of grace in its *saving efficacy* (sometimes called the “dual aspect” of the covenant).’ They went on to explain the distinction as follows: ‘In its substance and saving efficacy, the covenant of grace is the means whereby God saves his elect people in Christ. Redemption is ultimately a divine gift and gracious inheritance granted in Christ to fallen but elect sinners.’ At the same time, however, ‘the covenant of grace, so far as its saving efficacy is concerned, is not merely a “conditional offer” of salvation to those who are “under” the covenant, but it is also the instrument whereby God communicates to his elect people all that is granted them in Christ.’ In terms of the relationship with election, they stated: ‘With respect to the saving efficacy of the covenant of grace, God grants to the elect all that is theirs in Christ. The very “conditions”, which God stipulates in the covenant of grace, are obtained and granted to the elect upon the basis of the perfect work of Christ on their behalf.’

### ■ Covenant of Works

Another topic on which there was considerable

discussion concerned what is often referred to as the covenant of works. The URCNA delegates noted: ‘The covenant of grace, though it graciously realizes what was typified by the covenant of works, is properly viewed as a “second covenant,” and not simply as a re-institution of the covenant relationship. Because Christ, the Mediator of the covenant of grace, accomplishes all that is necessary for the redemption of His people, and communicates the promise effectually to them by His Spirit, we may not view the promises and demands of the covenant of grace as formally the same as the promises and demands of the covenant of works. Christ gives to His own what He requires of them in the covenant of grace.’

In response, the Canadian Reformed Churches representatives stated that there is no unique ‘CanRC doctrine/theology/view of the covenant’, but that they are bound by the Three Forms of Unity. Within those bounds, the churches ought to have a measure of flexibility. Their contribution at this colloquium as such had no official standing in the CanRCs. The URCNA Synod would be aware of the reticence of the CanRCs to adopt position papers. Nevertheless, they stated: ‘... We are in unity with our URC brothers in affirming the uniqueness of Adam’s relationship to God pre-fall compared to his and humanity’s situation post-fall. In other words, Adam’s situation while in a state of righteousness yet able to sin (*posse peccare*) was radically different from our situations in the states of unrighteousness wherein we can only sin (*non posse non peccare*) and of justification by grace through faith wherein we are enabled not to sin (*posse non peccare*)’ (p. 30).

### ■ Visible and Invisible Church

A point of considerable discussion concerned the concepts of visible and invisible church. The URCNA delegates brought up the point as follows: ‘Though the Three Forms of Unity do not expressly speak of the “visible” and “invisible”

church, they do distinguish between those who are “externally” in the church but not genuinely members of Christ (Belgic Confession, Art. 29).’ This is important to the discussion of the covenant, for the distinction between the covenant in its saving efficacy and historical administration is ‘parallel’ to the distinction between those who profess faith and their children and the elect, who are only known to God (2 Tim. 2:19). Dr Van Vliet responded by way of the topic of *pluriformity*. He referred to Abraham Kuyper and those following him, who worked with that. ‘... The idea developed that the church in its *real* essence, in what is *really* important, was invisible.’ The result is a very vague concept of membership to a church. Van Vliet continued: ‘To us this is the heart of the matter: the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, as it is gathered from Sunday to Sunday under the preaching and administration of the sacraments, *does* contain hypocrites. We confess that in *Belgic Confession* 29. We clearly speak of those who are *in* the church ... members of the church, but [who] are not really *of* the church, because they are putting on a show.’ Van Vliet acknowledged that the Westminster Standards use invisible and visible church in a way that is different from Abraham Kuyper’s (54, 55).

### ■ Different Nuances

Along the way, Dr Godfrey made three points with reference to the influence of the late K. Schilder in the Netherlands in 1944. The first concerns what Godfrey identifies as an objectivism that does not give adequate place for the ‘*subjective* doctrine of regeneration.’ Secondly, there was a corporate emphasis that did not give enough ‘place to the individual response of faith’. Finally, that the theology of the Liberated churches was ‘too *exclusive*, claiming ... that they were the only true church.’ In his own words: in the discussions they had had with the CanRC brothers he noticed that ‘as a result of those different histories, we do tend to talk a slightly different language. As I’ve enjoyed our conversations, what dawned on me, really only yesterday, is that the Dutch Reformed experience in the United States has been heavily shaped and colored and directed by the far larger dominance of Reformed theology in the United States, represented by Presbyterianism’ (49). In addition, Dr Venema introduced a question related to the *Federal Vision*. Some of its principal proponents have cited the influence and persuasiveness of what they understand to be Schilder’s

doctrine of the Covenant to their own development of the doctrine of the Covenant. This impinges on justification, specifically whether it is only the passive obedience of Christ that by itself constitutes the righteousness of Christ, or whether it comprehends his active and passive obedience. Bound up with this is the importance of a right understanding of the covenant of works. Also, the Federal Vision has given rise to viewing election loosely and as ‘losable, and therefore in a profound sense, conditional.’ He makes clear that he is not insinuating that these are the views of the Canadian Reformed Churches. However, he asks how they might differentiate themselves from and guard against them (55-56). Dr Van Raalte distanced himself clearly from the Federal Vision referring to the confessions, including Article 22 of the Belgic Confession as per the Synod of Dort: ‘He imputes to us all his merits and as many holy works as he has done for us and in our place.’ He also referred to the closing of Lord’s Day 23, Answer 60: ‘He grants these (*the righteousness, satisfaction, and holiness of Christ*) to me ... as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me.’ In addition, he mentioned that the Form for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper also includes, ‘By his perfect obedience he has for us fulfilled all the righteousness of God’s law’ (57, 58).

### ■ Covenant and the Heart

This volume is a fruitful dialogue on significant points relating to the doctrine of the covenant. It is notable that the confessions, subordinate to the Scriptures and yet in harmony with them, play such an important role in guarding, guiding, directing, and teaching. It is refreshing to see the productive interplay of the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms in the colloquium. It throws clarity on the relationship of election and covenant, covenant of works, and the dimensions of invisible and visible church. The confessional focus of the colloquium is refreshing and proves the foundational role of the confessions within the church. One area that is close to my heart, and I believe to the centre of covenant theology, that was largely out of focus in this volume is how the covenants of works and grace both bear down on the congregation and each of us personally through the work of the Holy Spirit, who convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and shows Christ, not just once, but again and again till glory. Older theologians from Reformation times on-

wards have not omitted this experiential thrust and outworking of the doctrine of the covenant. The covenant of grace brings the riches of a Trinitarian salvation to us in a way in which there are rich privileges given to covenant children; however, these riches need to be experienced in such a way that we find the covenant of works to lie broken in our hands, and the way to fellowship with God barred through this covenant of works. Saul of Tarsus was born on the terrain of the covenant of God, but he tried to work his way into favour with God, until God brought him to an end of himself, and showed him his absolute need for Christ, the whole Christ as the Mediator of the covenant, and received from him and appropriated through his Spirit. The Spirit brings to us from out of the covenant of grace untold benefits and blessings, not just once, but increasingly to live out of Christ more and more. There are deep experiential riches in the doctrine of the covenant. Preaching and pastoring and our own personal lives are greatly enriched when we do not simply assume that others and we know the truth of the covenant. The grace of the covenant of grace must truly become *grace* to us in our hearts and lives. When that is true, this will make such a difference in our preaching, witness, and lives.

### ■ Notes

- This book is published in paperback and electronic formats by: *Church Unity Publications*, St. Catharines, ON. SKU-13/ ISBN: 9780994796318.
- Dr Venema focused on the areas of greatest potential challenge. Dr Godfrey remarked that the URC is more presbyterianized than the CanRC. He made this remark in the context of his recognition of and deepened appreciation for the confessional unity that exists between URCNA and the CanRC. Dr Godfrey’s expressed challenges to the CanRC brothers in the three areas of objectivity vs. subjectivity, communal vs. personal, and the area of ecclesiastical exclusivity.
- Cf. J. van Genderen, W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (P&R), 2. J. van Genderen: In Dogmatics, we ‘are dealing with the church and her confession.’ Yet ‘Dogmatics must go beyond the confession ... to Scripture itself in order to “bring forth” out of that “treasure things new and old” (Matt. 13:52); Ibid., 6.



# Report on the Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship South Asia Conference 2016



Rev. L. Roshyama Hrangchal is the Vice Principal, Development & Projects at Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Dehra Dun Uttarakhand. He also serves as the President of the Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship of South East Asia.

RPF conference members [photo Roshyama]



The 7<sup>th</sup> South Asia Conference of the Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship was held during January 5–8, 2016 at Secunderabad. Seventy delegates came from several states of India and Sri Lanka. The theme of the conference was ‘Church Growth in the Midst of Challenges.’ Among the written papers were ‘Church Developments—A Biblical/Historical Perspective’ (Rev. Carte Bales, MTW), ‘Let the Nations Be Glad’ (Dr Paul Taylor, MTW), ‘Persecution and the Church: A Historical Overview’ (Dr Mathew Ebenezer, PTS), ‘A Reflection on Persecution based on 1 Peter’ (Dr Mohan Chacko, PTS), ‘Wise as a Serpent—In Bearing Witness’ (Dr Desan Jeyaraj, IRPF), ‘Appeal to Caesar—Claiming our Rights as Citizens’ (T Arora, ADF International), ‘Structures of a Healthy Church—Basic Principles’ (Rev. C Angert, RPCI). Two morning devotions were led by Dr Oosterhuis (BBK) based on the prophet Balaam, and one devotion by Dr Sukrit Roy (Kolkata RPC). Rev. Lawrence Ralsun, Rev. Sumit Naik, and Mr Arjun Nepali led the praise and worship.

Rev. Paul Billy Arnold, President of the RPF, in his opening keynote address expressed his appreciation to DVN and MTW for co-sponsoring the event, and to Mr Kiran Boddu for hosting the conference. He briefly expressed the relevance of the theme and also thanked PTS for organizing the conferences from the beginning. The conference started with worship and devotion on January 6 and ended with the administration of the Lord’s Supper on January 8, 2016.

The theme of the conference was ‘Church Growth in the Midst of Challenges’. When the committee discussed this theme, the persecution of the Christians was prominent. However, the word ‘Challenges’ was found to be more appropriate for the title as it gave opportunity to address other issues. Throughout Christian history down to the present time Christians have been persecuted and harassed. We find such acts more common in recent years from religious fundamentalists, including the state police in some areas, or indirectly through political parties. It may be expected that we as Christians will continue to face such challenges. The speakers helped us to see the growing churches, the problems, and how we should respond from a biblical perspective. The conference also created awareness of our legal rights as citizens and churches. Delegates expressed formally (at the time of discussions and feedback) and informally (when sessions were over) their great appreciation. The next conference was proposed to be held in Bangalore during January 10-13, 2018.

**New board members** The new elected officers of RPF are as follows:  
President: Rev. L. Roshyama Hrangchal (Uttarakhand)  
Vice President: Rev. K. Kuppusamy (Tamilnadu)  
Secretary: Rev. Samit Mishra (Madhya Pradesh)  
Treasurer: Rev. Pau Gualnam (Manipur)  
Members: Rev. Edwin Singh (Karnataka), Rev. Arbin Pokharel (Nepal)

Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship was started on April 28, 2001 at Presbyterian Theological Seminary as it was understood that there were several churches of reformed background that were independent and isolated in several parts of India. Eleven members from seven churches within India recognized the benefit of forming a fellowship in the areas of sharing of resource persons in seminars, financial assistance, teaching Reformed and Presbyterian faith and practices, training of elders and pastors, sharing about the ministry, and learning from each other. Today there are eight church and denomination members. However, approximately equal numbers of churches and denominations were present each time a conference was held. This shows that there is an interest in the reformed / evangelical movement in South Asia. ■

# Presbyterian Theological Seminary

## Training Leaders for Grassroots Ministry in North India – Fulfilment of a Vision

Over forty-five years ago, when Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) was established in northern India, the founders had one specific goal in mind – train pastors and church leaders for North India. Presbyterianism was a dominant tradition in northern India at one time. The influence of ecumenical and liberal forces eventually led to its decline.



By the 1960s there were no theological institutions in North India to train pastors and leaders from a Reformed and evangelical perspective. Some well-known Calvinistic institutions had closed their doors by then. Evangelical Presbyterians came together in early 1969 to address this need. The result was the founding of PTS. Although established to serve North India, there were more applicants to the Seminary from the South and the Northeast than from the North. The Church in the North had declined. Eventually, in God’s providence, PTS became the Centre of revival of evangelical, Reformed faith not just in India but in other countries of South Asia.

Almost half a century after its founding, PTS has returned to its original vision – training leaders for the North. The number of North Indian students in the residential programme has multiplied – from one or two in a batch to a substantial number today. But the vision of PTS is not just to train pastors for existing churches. Equipping grassroots-level leaders for planting and developing churches is a major need and concern today. Hundreds of clusters of believers can be found in this vast and populous area. Most of these groups are ministered to by leaders who are ill trained or have no training in the Bible at all. PTS began its distance education program at diploma level (Hindi medium) to meet this need. Faculty members and others would travel to

various centres to take week-long classes in Bible, theology, ministry, and other subjects. Each batch has about 10-15 students. The students have other occupations like farming, but also are fully involved in ministry. The first batches in Kanpur, Jabalpur, Gurgaon, and Delhi have completed their programme, and are fruitfully engaged in ministry as a result of this programme. During 2015 alone, there were four graduations taking place in Dehradun, Kanpur, New Delhi, and Jabalpur. Financial assistance from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) made some of these groups possible.

Rev. L. Roshyama Hrangchal is Vice Principal of PTS, Dehra Dun.



**Jesus said,  
“I am the light of the world.”**

John 8:12