



Lux Mundi

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Jesus said: "I am the light of the world." John 8:12



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Magazine published by the
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Reformed Churches



In the LORD's Shadow

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*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will
abide in the shadow of the Almighty. (Psalm 91:1 ESV)*

Have you ever looked for shade? Set up an umbrella at the beach? Had a picnic under a tree? A shadow, especially in summer, is a place of refreshment and relief from the heat. That's also what our God is like. In Psalm 91, the psalmist tells about the refuge that God's people can find in him when they abide "in the shadow of the Almighty."

Just what is this shadow of the Almighty? We know that only physical and bodily things have shadows, while our God is spirit and invisible. When Scripture speaks of God casting a shadow it means that he is a welcome refuge from trouble for those who trust him.

This psalm speaks honestly about the difficulties we can face (vv. 3–6). In this life, there are the constant temptations from the devil, the attacks of unbelievers, and the weakness of our own nature. There can also be serious troubles with your loved ones, your health or with money. But in such times, you can find in the Most High your shade. In such times he's promised to be near you, and to protect you from what threatens.

For this God is very close. In the Old Testament when the Lord dwelt in the tabernacle and temple, this was the ready "shelter" that the people could run to in prayer and worship. Today, amazingly, the Lord is even closer to us. For in Christ, God dwelt on earth in the form of man. Christ is Immanuel—"God with us"—so that by his shed blood and

through his Spirit we can again enjoy true friendship with our Maker. Now our life is hidden with Christ in God! (Col. 3:3).

But realize something important: you have to walk very close to a person for his shadow to fall upon you. If you're far from God, then you won't benefit from his gracious presence. If you stray from his ways, his protecting shadow won't help. The psalmist says we have to "dwell" in God's shadow. Remain with him! If you do, you'll find true rest. You won't be shielded from every trial or sorrow or temptation, but even in the midst of these difficult things, God will give refreshment and a renewal of hope.

So live in fellowship with him. Be at home with God. Because of the Son, the Lord always has us in his shade. ❄

Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms – Devotional is a collection of daily meditations on all 150 Psalms, enough to cover a whole year. Sixteen Reformed pastors from Canada and Australia worked together with the special focus of bringing out the legitimate connection to Christ in every psalm. The meditations are written for teenager and up and are suitable for personal, couple, or family devotions. All proceeds from the sale of the *Devotional* are going to support mission work in Brazil. These same pastors have also written a *Study Resource* on the book of Psalms, providing explanation and comment on every psalm with care taken to show the lines to Christ. The *Study Resource* is to be released in late 2019, the Lord willing. For more information, please consult the editor's website, peterholtvluwer.com



The logo combines the ICRC logo with the Lux Mundi monogram, an early Christian symbol combining the initials of Jesus Christ (in Greek I and X), referring to Him as the Light of the World (Lux Mundi).

Front cover picture: The "round" table of General Synod 2019 of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the Edmonton-Immanuel church

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BLESSINGS AND BROKENNESS

Songs commonly sung by God's people when folks or churches of differing backgrounds meet will include Psalms 122 and 133.

With respect to Jerusalem, the psalmist has us sing: "For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, 'Peace be within you!' For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good."

With respect to community Scripture has us say "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"

On many occasions such peace and unity are present. The work of the Lord can advance. God's will is obeyed. The Kingdom is furthered. The Name of our Triune God is hallowed and honoured. In the following pages you will read of some of those blessings.

The work that can be done in the vast subcontinent of India by the Presbyterian Theological Seminary – for 50 years already! Thanks be to God!

The expanding work in Central and Eastern Europe within the territories of Hungarian speaking peoples. I've personally had the privilege of being in Miskolc twice, decades ago, and it warms my heart to see how the churches have grown to the point of being able to form two presbyteries and have their first general assembly. Praise the Lord!

The labours of a community health team in Uganda: an example of how one church community (the OPC) thousands of miles distant reaches out to help others. Great is God's mercy.

There are also two announcements regarding regional conferences of Reformed churches. The first is to be in Australia (Asia-Pacific) this October. The other is to be in Uganda (Africa) in August of 2020. And I can already add a third: there is to be an ICRC regional conference in Anaheim, California, this November for North America. And even a fourth: the next International Conference is – pending government approval – to be held in Delhi, India, in October of 2021.

What a blessing it is to experience peace in the church, unity among the brothers.

Sadly, such upbeat feelings are tempered by the realities of brokenness. Psalm 122 does not skirt this reality: one needs

to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, for such peace is not always present.

Our opening article is the speech of the moderator of this year's general assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). It is some twenty years ago that the Division took place in the Free Church of Scotland. A difficult time, not just for the churches in Scotland, but for the whole ICRC community. Thankfully the division was not of such a nature that the two parties denied each other membership in the ICRC. However, the division continues. In his address, the moderator reflects on where the FCC is at: the positives, the negatives, the problems, possible solutions, and thus comes to encouraging the churches. A message that not only speaks to the FCC, but to us all. Hence we share it. May God grant us humility.

Of deeper grief is the division that has recently taken shape between "mother" and "daughter" churches: the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands and the Canadian Reformed Churches. The press release of the CanRC general synod 2019 makes mention of this. The division is serious: the CanRC will write to each RCN congregation individually regarding the decision to terminate the sister church relationship.

As both RCN and CanRC are ICRC member churches, it seemed appropriate to publish in *Lux Mundi* the speech of the chairman of the last RCN general synod in these pages. It serves as a public explanation of why the RCN believe they are within the bounds of Scripture in their decisions on women in office. We also publish a response written for congregational members by one of the CanRC delegates at the general synod. In case you are not aware, in 2017 the ICRC judged that the RCN is not in line with the confessional foundation of the ICRC. Here is a division that will not be tolerated.

It is good and pleasant when brothers dwell in unity. It is evil and grievous when brothers do not. May the Lord grant faithfulness to all and restore the peace of Jerusalem in keeping with the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Lord we pray, bless your people with peace and unity in Your truth. Your Kingdom come.





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MODERATOR'S ADDRESS: FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (CONTINUING)

It is now almost twenty years since the Division which took place in the Free Church of Scotland on the 20th of January, 2000. It is a time for assessment, to look back but also to look ahead. My own ministry is drawing to a close after forty-three years in the active pastoral ministry. This summer I will have been 50 years a member of the Free Church. What huge changes have taken place in society but especially in the church since my boyhood in Stornoway Free Church!

First, I would like to look at some of the positives with regard to our own denomination. There are such. Then I would like to look at the negatives with regard to our own church, other churches, and society in general. Thirdly, I would like to consider what are the particular problems we face. Fourthly, I wish to present what, in my humble opinion, is the answer. Finally, I wish to present some of the encouragements that the Lord gives us in his Word.

The Positives

1. In the year 2000 it was confidently predicted by our opponents that we would not survive ten years. They said we were such awkward, hardline and unreasonable men that we would soon fall out among ourselves. Actually, on the whole, we have got on very well. We have been able to disagree at times and yet to respect one another. Important matters of controversy have arisen from time to time but we have been able to work our way through these. At the present time there is remarkable harmony amongst us. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps.133:1).
2. In January 2000 it was mostly the older, more mature folk who sided with us. We did not have many young families and children. Today we are older and a bit smaller but we are still there, 20 years later. Some have left us for other churches, a few have fallen by the wayside, many have departed to glory, but others have joined us.
3. We were left with little property yet we now have churches and manses for most of our congregations. Our property now will be worth millions of pounds. Our

ministers have had their salaries paid to them every month. None has lost out by associating with us.

4. Training for the ministry is very important for the survival of any church. With our limited resources we wondered what was possible. Our first ministerial candidate was trained in the Reformed Presbyterian College in Belfast. However we now have our own Seminary and over the years have trained some 20 men for the ministry, most serving in our own church, but some serving elsewhere. Two able men have finished this session and there is one other man in training. We have only three vacant charges which could possibly be regarded as suitable to sustain a full-time ministry.

5. The Free Church mission work in Peru, India and South Africa remained with the majority Church. Doors of service in overseas work seemed closed. However the Lord brought to us new opportunities. A good work was begun in Zambia, a college was built and continues to train men for the ministry. Educational and charitable work there has been supported by us. A reformed and presbyterian mission was begun in Sri Lanka. Two congregations have been established with an indigenous pastor. Three small congregations in Spain and one in Southern France are supported by us and have their own Spanish pastor. Considerable opportunities have arisen in China and through Hudson Taylor Ministries many of our ministers have been involved in training house-church leaders. Other doors have opened to us in Kenya and Brazil. We continue to support Jewish missions in the form of Christian Witness to Israel.

6. We have a Home Mission Worker who has served diligently all over Scotland. Millions of tracts, leaflets and evangelistic magazines have been distributed. Thousands of folk up and down the country have been spoken to about their souls and challenged regarding their need to make their peace with God.

7. We have some twenty-five congregations in Scotland. A congregation in Northern Ireland and five congregations in North America have joined us. We have forty-three ministers, twenty of whom serve as pastors in Scottish

congregations, one in Northern Ireland and six abroad. The rest are retired men many of whom preach most Sabbaths.

8. We have a monthly magazine, *the Free Church Witness* and a youth magazine, *the Explorer*, and print some 1000 copies of each. Useful and edifying books have been written by several of our ministers.

9. Hundreds of thousands of the sermons preached by our ministers are downloaded from the internet all over the world.

10. Our Church has sought faithfully to bear witness to the truth and the law of God in an increasingly secular and immoral society.

So there is much for which to be thankful. In the dark days of 1999 we wondered was our ministry finished. Our brethren in essence expelled us from the church. On 20 January 2000, twenty-two ministers, those who had chosen to answer the libel in person, were suspended from the exercise of ministry. We were forced to disassociate from the majority in order to continue our God-given ministries. But the Lord has blessed and prospered us. There have been difficult times and dark days but the Lord has brought us through them all. When we have been desperate we have cried to the Lord and he has saved us. We have the Great Commission: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt.28:18-20). We have sought by grace to fulfil it and we have his continuing promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world".

Negatives

We have to be honest and face the realities. All is not as it should be. There are real problems in our own church, in other churches and in our society. Let us consider some of these.

1. We have not grown. Some folk have joined us but more have left us. We are smaller. Now it is a fact that all the churches of our land have declined apart from the few that have grown by attracting members away from neighbouring churches. Some churches are popular because of a specially gifted minister or a huge programme of social activities. But the question remains, Why is God not blessing us numerically?

2. We have seen few conversions. Our adherent base has

diminished greatly. This is true of all the churches. It used to be common practice for people to go to church whether they were Christians or not. Today the unconverted have little fear of God and spend the Sabbath watching television, on social media, on the internet, in sport and pleasure, or working.

3. Relatively speaking we do more outreach than we have ever done, yet little blessing seems to rest on the work.

4. Society is becoming increasingly secular. Attempts have been made to remove all traces of our Christian heritage from us as a nation.

5. LGBT enthusiasts have taken over the media. They have been aggressively "evangelistic", intimidating all opposition and persecuting some of the Lord's people. Some Christians have lost their jobs because they believe in marriage as taught in the Bible and that sex is only for marriage. We hear lots about homophobia but nothing about christianophobia.

6. Islam is becoming more and more influential. Amongst the many kind, upright, loving, Muslim people now in our land there is a substantial minority who have no wish to integrate, who have very different values from our traditional ones, and some who support terrorism. Any criticism of that minority, or even discussion of these issues, is dismissed as Islamophobia.

7. The Church of Scotland, by far the largest Protestant church in our land, has been totally taken over by liberalism. There are still many born-again Christians and some faithful evangelical ministers to be found amongst them. However, there are also practising homosexuals among its ministers. Biblical standards of morality are generally despised. The gospel of God's redeeming grace is either denied or ignored in many sermons. This confusion about what a Christian really is, makes the work of evangelism even more difficult than in the past.

8. The largest evangelical church in Scotland is the one from which we separated. Having lost its conservative wing, it is changing rapidly. It has become much more pragmatic. It will do almost anything to get people across its threshold. In 2010 it changed its form of worship, though all its ministers and elders had vowed at their ordination to "assert, maintain and defend the purity of worship presently practised in this church". Where will it end up?

9. Charismatic churches grow rapidly and then seem to

disintegrate even more rapidly.

10. Even the Roman Catholic Church which has the largest attendances on a Sunday is struggling to hold onto its people. Sexual scandals have done massive damage to it. Sadly all churches and ministers are blackened.

So today the church in Scotland is in the weakest position it has been since the Reformation. The majority of the people in Scotland are practical atheists. While they might not deny the existence of God they live as if there is no God. There is no fear of God in our land. I, myself, think back to my childhood 60 years ago when large churches were full to the front. Often at communion times and special services, extra seats had to be placed in the aisles. As a student I preached sometimes to over 1000. Today, I seldom preach to fifty. We have the wonderful glad tidings of great joy but no one wants to hear. There are more evangelical ministers than ever, especially in the Highlands and Islands, but fewer and fewer hear the gospel. Also the power is gone from the preaching. Unlike in the past, it is rare to see someone today convicted and weeping under the gospel. Sermons are listened to with sleepy indifference. Surely God has forsaken us and our land?

What is the Problem?

Why has God forsaken us? What is the problem? What is God saying to us? "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa.59:1). The trouble is in the church, not in the world. It is the sins of God's people that has caused him to withdraw his felt presence. What are these sins?

1. Self-righteousness

Self-righteousness grieves God. It is to be found among ourselves. Sometimes you hear even old Christians asking, "Why is God not blessing us? We made a stand for truth and righteousness. If what we did was right, surely we should be growing and successful". How foolish! We think we deserve blessing! Everything we do and ever have done is tainted with sin. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam.3:22). "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps.130:3). "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa.64:6). We deserve nothing but God's wrath and judgment. The very best church and the very best Christian is like a filthy rag to God.

Our only hope is the righteousness of Christ and "the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb.12:24). We have done nothing to merit God's favour and there is nothing that we can do. We, in the Free Church (Continuing), must come to the Lord as poor, unworthy, beggars pleading for his mercy.

2. Pride

Pride is a huge problem in the churches and in our own church too. It is closely linked to self-righteousness. There are few things more obnoxious to God. Some years ago I heard one of our ministers say that we have the best preachers in our church. We think of ourselves as superior to others because of our orthodox theology, our reformed worship and faithful church discipline. We think we are the most consistent Christians. These things are good but we must beware of pride. Is there perhaps a readiness to look down on other churches. Sometimes we share information about other churches, pointing out their faults, and we do it smugly. We look down on them from our high and holy position. We made a faithful stand for the truth and holiness and church discipline. Our worship in form is superior to many other churches, but we forget that God sees the heart. We may be right in form but our hearts can be far from God. Pride is often very subtle. We can be critical of the pride, arrogance and boasting of others and be rotten with pride ourselves, though covering it from man.

3. First Love

The church of Ephesus was criticised for having lost its first love. It was a sound church, orthodox, busy, faithful in discipline but Christ threatens to remove his candlestick out of its place. It would no longer be a church of Christ. This letter must really have shocked the Ephesians. On the surface all looked well. They were a well-attended sound church but something was seriously wrong. Is it not true that we too have lost our first love?

4. Lukewarmness

If anything the church in Laodicea received even more serious criticism than the church in Ephesus. The Laodiceans thought, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev.3:17). They were lukewarm. They had become complacent. They were satisfied with their achievements and thought all was well. Are we not like that? We are

neither hot nor cold. Where is the passion for God? A dull, sleepy, worldly spirit has taken us over. We are taken up with our jobs, our families, our homes and making money. We are satiated with worldly enjoyments and have become, “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2Tim.3:4).

What is the Answer?

There is a great danger that we simply accept the situation and feel there is nothing we can do. As those who believe in divine sovereignty we can become fatalistic. We cannot convert one soul. We cannot sanctify ourselves. All we can do is wait and maybe God in His mercy will come and bless us. Is it not all of grace? But whether we read the prophets of the Old Testament or the epistles of the New Testament the message is the same. God never says do nothing. He lays the responsibility totally on us. He always says repent and return and I will bless you.

1. *Humble Yourself*

God through Moses made the promise that when he brought his judgment on Israel, if they would return to the Lord that he would turn again their captivity and have mercy upon them and do them good (Deut.30:1-5). Through Hosea Israel are exhorted, “Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us” (Hosea 6:1-2). Peter writes: “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1Pet.5:5-6). We have been brought very low. We want to be exalted. So here is the answer.

2. *Prayer*

Hosea encourages God's people to come again in prayer: “O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips” (Hos.14:1-2). God loves to hear his people's prayers. There is a wonderful promise: “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon” (Hos.14:4-5). Jesus taught his disciples to pray a prayer which will certainly be answered, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mat.6:10). Paul wrote “Pray without ceasing” (1Thess.5:17). Christ advised the church in Laodicea to ask

for, “gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see” (Rev.3:18).

3. *Faith*

When the situation seemed desperate for Israel God said go ahead in faith. There were mountains on either side. The Egyptian army was charging down on them from behind and the sea was in front of them, but God spoke to Moses: “Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward”. By faith they crossed the Red Sea and the Egyptians trying to do the same without faith were drowned. God said through Isaiah: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Is.45:22). This is the look of faith. Jesus said to his disciples, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt.17:20). Mighty miracles are achieved in response to faith. The shield of faith is able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Eph.6:16). We are told of those, “Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions” (Heb.11:33). By faith the impossible becomes possible.

Encouragements

1. *God Reigns*

The Psalmist states. “The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice”. Here is a great reason for joy and the only reason. God is in control and is working out all things for the good of his church and his own glory. His kingdom shall come, his name shall be hallowed, and his will shall be done on earth as in heaven. “Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him” (Is.62:11). Jesus has been exalted to the highest throne and God “hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church” (Eph.1:22). He rules the nations for the benefit of his church.

2. *We should have an optimistic eschatology*

The little stone of Daniel 2, which represents the kingdom of God, smashes all the earthly empires and becomes a mountain which fills the whole earth. Jesus' parables describe a great future for the church. The little mustard seed becomes a tree “so that the birds of the air come and

lodge in the branches thereof" (Mat.13:32). The leaven spreads through the whole lump of dough till all is leavened (Mat.13:33). We think of the Jews cast off because of unbelief, but Paul argues, "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (Rom.11:15). As touching election the Jews are beloved for the fathers' sakes. "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom.11:29). Through the mercy of the Gentiles they will obtain mercy. They will bring great blessing to the church presumably by becoming mighty missionaries. This will become a life from the dead experience to God's people.

3. Fascinating Promises

The Book of Revelation was written at the end of the first century to encourage a church suffering intense persecution. In Revelation 20 an angel is pictured laying hold of Satan, and binding him for a thousand years. We are told that he "cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season" (Rev.20:3). This is fascinating. He is not just bound and on a long chain and so able to do some limited harm. He is shut up and sealed. That means he cannot get out. For a long period of time he cannot do what he has so successfully done in the past, deceiving the nations. Some see this as what Christ did at Calvary. But the problem is that Satan continued after Calvary deceiving the nations. What is the great Antichrist of Rome but a massive deception of the devil? How can John say the devil is locked up when Peter writes that "your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1Pet.5:8). In Peter's day Satan was definitely not locked up. Paul too, sees the devil as a continuing problem: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph.6:11). A further difficulty with this interpretation is that John states that Satan shall be loosed out of his prison at the end of the thousand years (Rev.20:7). If the binding was Christ's finished work of crushing Satan's head, then a day will come when this work shall be undone. God forbid! Away with such a thought! John is shown that a day is coming when our great enemy the devil will be greatly restricted in his work and Christ reign over the nations will become clearer for all to see. This period would tie in with

the Old Testament prophecies of future prosperity for Messiah's kingdom, e.g. his "dominion being from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth" and "the whole earth being filled with his glory" (Ps.72:8, 19). "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name" (Ps.86:9). Or in the words of Isaiah: "Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men



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may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted" (Is.60:11-12). This will be the last great revival involving the conversion of the Jews to Christ, "the life from the dead" of which we spoke earlier. It will be followed by a short period when Satan will be loosed again and create havoc. We are encouraged to look forward to a great period of gospel prosperity.

Conclusion

We are called upon to humble ourselves, to confess our sins, to repent, to fast and to pray, to return unto the Lord our God and he will return unto us. God does not say "Seek ye me in vain" (Is.45:19). He loves us and delights in the prayers of his children. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas.5:16). "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Lk.11:13). Let the hope we have inspire us to labour expectantly for the Lord.*

GENERAL SYNOD 2019 OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

On Monday May 13, twenty-four delegates from across Canada gathered in Edmonton Alberta in preparation for the convening of the 2019 General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches. In the evening, Rev. Richard Aasman, the chairman of the previous General Synod in Dunnville, led a special worship service. He preached on 1 John 3:1-3 – focusing on how lavish is the love that the Father has showered upon us in Jesus Christ. This message provided encouragement to the delegates about to begin their work the next day and to the many members in attendance from the Immanuel and surrounding congregations.

On Tuesday morning, Rev. Julius VanSpronsen, on behalf of the convening church opened the meeting, by welcoming all present, especially the delegates to GS 2019. He led in opening devotions which included a brief meditation on the words of 1 Timothy 6:11-21. The credentials were examined and found to be in good order. Twenty-two primary delegates and two alternate delegates were present and signed the attendance list.

Through a free vote, the following brothers were chosen to serve in the executive: Rev. Douwe Agema as chairman, Rev. John Louwerse as vice-chairman, Rev. Karlo Janssen as 1st clerk, and Rev. Peter Holtvluwer as 2nd clerk. On behalf of the convening church, the Rev. VanSpronsen declared Synod constituted. The newly chosen chairman thanked the assembly for confidence expressed in the elected officers of Synod. He expressed much appreciation to the convening church for all the work done in preparation for Synod. Apart from receiving and organizing hundreds of documents, the host church also arranged lodging and transportation for the delegates and had the responsibility of providing three meals a day for at least twenty-four men and often more when delegates from sister churches were present. This work was very much appreciated by the delegates.

Synod was briefly adjourned, while the executive took the opportunity to prepare proposals regarding the proceedings of Synod and the division of tasks among the various members of Synod. When Synod reconvened, the agenda was adopted, and 5 advisory committees were appointed. Each committee was assigned particular agenda items to consider and came forward with proposals for discussion, deliberation and adoption in plenary session. In the early stages of Synod most of the time was devoted to

meetings of these advisory committees. As time went on, there were more and more plenary sessions.

In the following paragraphs, the major decisions of Synod Edmonton Immanuel will be reviewed, not necessarily in the order they were made. Synod had to deal with several personal and confidential appeals, as well as appeals and overtures from individual churches, which are not included in this review.

Anyone who wishes to have more detail about the decisions of Synod can explore the *Acts of Synod* which have already been published on the Canadian Reformed Churches website and will be released in printed form in the near future.

Ecumenical Relationships.

The Canadian Reformed Churches enjoy ecclesiastical fellowship with various churches in North America and around the world. Delegations from these churches were present at General Synod and were given the privileges of the floor and many availed themselves of this opportunity.

On the first evening of General Synod, a letter of greetings from the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (GGRI) was read, as these churches were unable to send a delegation to Synod. The Rev. Ben Westerveld, delegate from the Reformed Churches in Quebec (ERQ), addressed Synod describing the ERQ and its ministries and expressing gratitude for our sister church relationship. Elder Dr. James Wanliss, spoke on behalf on the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)(FCC), describing the FCC, its worship and outreach efforts, its history and distinctives and expressing gratitude for the unity of faith. The Rev. Travis Grassmid, representing the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS), expressed appreciation for the relationship with the CanRC and urging the Synod to be faithful to the Word in the matters before it.

On the second evening, Br. Johannes Moes, delegate from the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa gave an address, describing the FRCSA, its history and its ministries. He expressed gratitude for unity in the faith, evident in the assistance the FRCSA received from CRTS in training theological students. He outlined the need for financial support in South Africa for mission projects and described the inter-church relations of the FRCSA. The Rev, Adriano Gama, one of three delegates from the Reformed Churches



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of Brazil (IRB) addressed Synod, expressing gratitude for the relationship with the CanRC and the 48 years of work by the CanRC in Brazil. He also described the history of the IRB and some of its projects and ministries.

The Rev. Yonson Dethan, delegate from the Reformed Calvinist Churches in Indonesia (GGRC) was given the opportunity to address Synod. Besides passing on greetings, he expressed appreciation for the ties with the CanRC and regret over the fact that those ties have not yet become ones of ecclesiastical fellowship. He described the history of the GGRC, its Indonesian context, its current ministries and outreach projects, including its involvement with Smithville's mission work in Timor.

The Rev. Rinze IJbema and the Rev. Dr. Melle Oosterhuis, delegates from Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv) also addressed Synod. Rev. IJbema brought greetings and described the origin of the relationship between GKv and the CanRC in 1952. He also expressed regret about the tension that exists between the GKv and the CanRC at this time and stated that the GKv would dearly love for the sister church relationship to continue. The Rev. Dr. Oosterhuis then addressed synod, explaining the decisions of GS-GKv 2017 (Meppel) especially regarding hermeneutics as the background to GKv decisions that concern the CanRC.

On the third evening, the Rev. Hendrik Alkema, delegate from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia addressed Synod, expressing appreciation and gratitude for the close ties between the FRCA and CanRC. He described some of the many ways in which the two federations are connected. He spoke briefly of the development of the Australian *Book of*

Praise and the study of the feasibility of training for the ministry in Australia. He also gave an overview of the inter-church relations of the FRCA. The Rev. Leo de Vos, delegate from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand described the history of Christianity in New Zealand and the blended character of the RCNZ. He gave an impression of church life in the RCNZ and expressed appreciation of the way in which the RCNZ and CanRC cooperate in mission in Papua New Guinea. The Rev. Bill Pols

delegate from the United Reformed Churches of North America expressed appreciation for the ties between the URCNA and CanRC, describing how some of those ties are evident in church life. He outlined some of the recent developments in the URCNA, including the doctrinal affirmation on marriage and the introduction of the *Trinity Psalter-Hymnal*.

The last fraternal observer to address Synod on Thursday evening was the Rev. Bill Barron, from the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC). He spoke of the history of the ARPC and its current character. He described how the ARPC and RPCNA are growing together. He gave an impression of some of the works in the ARPC, including its education ministries and its mission projects.

On Monday evening a letter of greeting was received from the Rev. Jack Sawyer on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Personal circumstances that arose at the time of Synod prevented him from coming. Hence the Rev. Holtvluwer read the speech prepared by Rev. Sawyer. The history of the OPC was briefly described, followed by a description of ministries and current activities of the OPC.

It was good to hear about the gracious work of our Lord Jesus Christ in many countries and church federations. It was also a joy when Synod decided to maintain ecclesiastical fellowship between the CanRC and these various church federations and maintain our participation in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) as well as the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

One of the most difficult decisions which Synod had to make was, with sadness, to discontinue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and to implore the Canadian Reformed Churches to continue in prayer for these churches. This decision came upon the recommendation of the subcommittee appointed by a previous Synod to deal with the Dutch sister churches. In coming to this decision, Synod considered, that nothing in Rev. Oosterhuis' presentation showed that the sub-committee's outline of developments was inaccurate or that its assessment of these developments and their implications was in error. Synod also observed that sister churches from around the world have encouraged the GKV to rethink the course upon which they have gone, and yet in Synod Meppel 2017, the GKV were not convinced by the admonitions of their sister churches. And Synod noted that now these churches approve of developments contrary to the Lord's instruction in his Word; the marks of the true church cannot with confidence be said to be consistently present in these churches. Further, it considered that continuing a relation with the GKV would communicate that we are not sorely grieved by their recent decisions and are not earnest about our past letters and words of admonition. Conversely, severing the relation would communicate to our own members the need to be watchful that we in the Canadian Reformed Churches do not follow a similar path. At the same time severing the relation would give encouragement to the faithful members in the GKV to take similar action. Lastly, it noted that the discontinuation of the relationship at this time is not irreversible. Should a future synod of the GKV give evidence that the churches have reversed their direction, the CanRC's can reestablish relations. Synod also adopted the text of a letter to be sent to all the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKV) and brought in person to their synod 2021.

New Contacts and Relationships

Synod Edmonton did decide to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Calvinist Churches in Indonesia (GGRC). Synod also decided to extend ecclesiastical fellowship to the Reformed Churches Indonesia (GGRI) as a whole, being the federation of the churches in Kalimantan Barat (GGRI-KalBar), the churches in Nusa Tenggara Timur (GGRI-NTT) and the churches in Papua (GGRI-Papua). These decisions were a reason for thankfulness.

It was also decided to accept the invitation of the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC) and the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA) to enter into their Level One correspondence. The Committee for Contact with Churches in North America was mandated by Synod to engage in continued dialogue and contact with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America.

Synod decided to mandate the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) to continue contact with the Reformed Churches in Korea (RCK) and the Independent Reformed church of Korea (IRCK) where possible.

On another note, Synod decided to instruct two of its committees, the CRCA and the CCCNA to jointly do a thorough study on how Article 50 CO can best be executed in today's ecclesiastical realities. This study would, among other things also indicate how these two committees might most effectively and efficiently work together. These two committees are to submit a report to the churches 6 months prior to the convening of the next Synod.

Unity with the United Reformed Churches.

Synod decided that the coordinators for the committee for Church Unity have completed their mandate given by Synod Dunnville 2016 to seek ways to facilitate the work of building unity on the local level, as well as visiting churches and Classes of the URCNA, particularly in the United States. Also, the decision was made not to reappoint the Committee for Church Unity, (including the sub- committees - Church Order, Theological Education, Common Songbook and Creeds and Forms).

General Synod, however, also expressed that the CanRC remain committed to the pursuit of unity with the United Reformed churches and are looking forward to re-engaging in this discussion when the URCNA is ready. Thus Synod decided to continue ecclesiastical fellowship (phase 2) with the United Reformed Churches in North America under the adopted rules.

Committee for the Official Website.

Thanksgiving was expressed by Synod to those involved in the development and implementation of the new federation website. When perusing the website you will find all the Acts of Synod Edmonton 2019 available for everyone to read. The committee was given a mandate to maintain the existing website and associate technical functions. Some of the technical functions associated with the website will be changed.

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary.

The Board of Governors informed General Synod that it granted Dr. G.H. Visscher's request to retire upon the completion of the 2019-20 academic year. Synod approved of his retirement and expressed deep gratitude for his many years of faithful and diligent service to the Seminary and the Churches as professor of New Testament and of his nine years as Principal of the Seminary. The Board of Governors was directed to appoint Dr. William DenHollander of Langley as Professor of New Testament at CRTS. Dr. DenHollander was able to visit and address Synod and inform the body of his acceptance of this position at CRTS.

The Synod received the report of the Board of Governors in which it could be noted that CRTS continues to be a source of great blessing in the churches and to many others around the world. Synod appointed three new governors, the Rev. Rob Schouten, the Rev. Clarence Vandervelde, and br. Allan Datema. Thankfulness was expressed for the support of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the financial contributions of the Women's Savings action to the well-being of the Seminary.

Synod adopted a proposal which came from both Regional Synod East and West which gave permission to seminary students to pursue licensure following two years of study in the M.Div program. This permission to speak an edifying word in the church after two years was granted under several conditions. It was also decided to mandate the Committee for Pastoral Training Program, to continue with its present mandate by funding one full-summer internship for each M.Div. student of CRTS who aspires to ministry in the CanRCs, whether the internship occurs after the second or third year of a student's studies at CRTS. The PTP continues to function very well in the churches.

The Committee for the Needy Students Fund was instructed to seek advice, and if need be propose bylaw amendments to ensure that they remain in compliance with the Canadian Income Tax Act (CRA regulations) and the Church Order.

The Standing Committee for the Book of Praise.

Synod Edmonton made a number of recommendations with respect to the *Book of Praise*, including the one, which had also been given by previous synods: "seek, receive, evaluate, and recommend proposals for changes to the hymn section to be compiled for possible submission to a future Synod." Connected with this recommendation that has great importance for the future of the Book of Praise in answer to an overture submitted by Regional Synod West 2018. This Regional Synod had sent an overture to General

Synod 2019 to approve, in addition to the adopted Book of Praise, the Psalms and Hymns of the *Trinity Psalter-Hymnal* (TPH; psalter-hymnal recently adopted by the OPC and URCNA) for use in public worship as per CO Article 55. Many churches made submissions interacting with this overture. General Synod decided to receive the overture submitted by RSW 2018 and to mandate the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise with the following:

Concerning Psalms: to seek input from the churches as to which non-Genevan renditions of the Psalms could be added to enhance the Psalm section of the BoP and to compile a list of suitable additional Psalm renditions for possible inclusion in the Book of Praise, using the TPH as a primary source.

Concerning Hymns: to seek input from the churches concerning replaceable and additional hymns for the 2014 Book of Praise, using the TPH as a primary resource: to compile a list of such hymns keeping in mind that at this time the final number of hymns in the Book of Praise should not exceed 100(as per GS 2004) and being flexible with the structural template (Apostles Creed) of the hymn-section of the 2014 Book of Praise.

Synod also gave the Committee the following instructions: to send, at least 18 months before the next general synod, an explanatory report out to the churches together with a provisional list of songs for immediate testing in the worship services if so desired, so there can be well-considered feedback to the next general synod and to receive feedback from the churches on the Committee's interim report and include its evaluation of that feedback along with actionable recommendations in its report six months before the next general synod.

This decision with respect to the overture from Regional Synod West 2018 was considered to serve as answer to several appeals/requests from a few churches.

Concluding thoughts.

We may give thanks to the Lord for the good working atmosphere among the delegates both while at work in committee and in plenary session. Under the capable leadership of the chairman Rev. Douwe Agema, General Synod could complete its work in eight days, making this Synod one of the shortest in recent times. May our Lord Jesus Christ bless the work of Synod Edmonton 2019 and may He also guide the churches as they consider and evaluate and implement the decisions that have been made by our broadest assembly. May the love of our Lord continue to rest on the churches represented at Synod Edmonton 2019.



HERMENEUTICS BACKGROUND TO THE GKV DECISION ON WOMEN AND OFFICE

Author: Rev. Dr. M. Oosterhuis

Melle Oosterhuis is a minister with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. He served as chairman of General Synod Meppel 2017



Following is the text of Rev. Oosterhuis' address on behalf of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands to General Synod 2019 of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Dear chairman, dear brothers and sisters,
First of all I want to thank you for your kind hospitality, which my companion and I have experienced since we arrived in Edmonton already last week Friday. This hospitality reminds me of the last time that I was as a guest in your midst as Canadian Reformed Churches. That was in the summer of 1966.

I was 17 years old only and came for two months for a holiday job with Ziedler's Plywood Plant. As a practical preparation for my study in forestry.

I stayed with my family at 11628 50th Avenue, and they belonged to the CRC. But weekly families came from your churches, especially a number of Leffers families came to pick me up to bring me to your church services and have me over the whole Sunday and we enjoyed Christian fellowship together.

And in the church, I was even welcomed from the pulpit as a guest from the GKv, when I am not mistaken by Rev. Van Popta.

In those days I had no theological aspirations yet. And maybe for that reason I used to have a problem in the morning services with the reading of the ten commandments. I had a problem with the tenth commandment, where we are told not to desire the donkey of our neighbour. There were no donkeys in the place where I lived and I felt not the slightest intention to steal a donkey. So I thought this was not applicable to me.

I struggled even more with the fourth commandment, which mentions the 7th day to be celebrated as day of rest. But we in The Netherlands and, as I came to know, also you in Canada used the first day of the week as a day of rest. Maybe these problems were among the triggers finally not to go for forestry but for theology and to become a minister of the Word.

This brings me to the topic on which I would like to concentrate in my speech, the topic of hermeneutics, more precise the hermeneutics at the background of the synod's decision on women in office.

According to your deputies these hermeneutics would clearly demonstrate how our churches have neglected the divine authority of Scripture, in order to be free to adjust our

church life to the egalitarian culture in which we live. This is the main reason for their proposal to discontinue the relationship with our churches.

One of our professors, prof. A.L.Th. de Bruijne, expressed his disappointment about synod's decision in the *Nederlands Dagblad*. According to him the Synod had tried to solve the problem of women in office, just by biblical exegesis and had totally neglected the hermeneutical considerations.

The conclusion of your deputies is quite the opposite.

But what do they mean with new hermeneutics in synod's decision on women in office?

The main point that returns time and again is the consideration of the historical and cultural background of the Bible text and the comparison of it with the actual cultural context of the reader, when it comes to the application of the text to God's people today.

In my presentation and attempt of clarification of synod's decision I would like to focus on these two questions. What's wrong with and what's new about the way the synod approaches and applies the Bible in her decision on women in office?

What's the problem, when the cultural context of a Bible passage is taken into account when the reader tries to apply that passage to himself or the church of Christ nowadays? In his revelation God himself accommodates his message to those to whom he originally revealed Himself. All his revelation is full of it. It's a prerequisite for divine self revelation. In anthropomorphic figures and anthropopathic expressions the inconceivable God accommodates himself to the common human imaginativeness. He does the same when it comes to the worldview in biblical times, accommodating himself to the ancient worldview of those to whom he addressed himself through men and women of that same worldview and culture.

But also when it comes to his commandments and religious institutions God is accommodating to the restrictions of his people, as given by original sin, their human restrictions and the world in which and the peoples and the religions among which they live.

Therefore application today of all kind of biblical institutions requires our knowledge of that context. Think of polygamic

practices like the levirate marriage, quite in contradiction to the creation order. Think of circumcision. We will never fully understand the covenant sign of circumcision in Israel when we do not take into account the extra-biblical practice of circumcision among the surrounding peoples.

So far it's mainly about God's revelation through Moses and all the prophets in the OT. But the same can be said of God's revelation through the apostles. Think of Paul, in his writings and also in his apostolic practice. He takes into account the situation and the conditions of those whom he approaches with the message. So Paul circumcised Timothy, according to Acts 16:3, 'because of the Jews'. And there are more examples of such accommodation to the Jews. This should be taken into account for instance when it comes to the liturgical rules in early Christian services. Much was taken over from the synagogue. On the other hand Paul also accommodated to the customs of the Gentiles. And he instructs for instance women to do the same when it comes their non-Christian husbands in order not to be an obstacle for them to embrace the gospel. We have to keep that in mind reading and applying different instructions for the early Christian churches. Otherwise we might be blind to the real intension of God's revelation towards us nowadays. This hermeneutical rule is crystal clear from the teaching of Jesus.

For instance in Matthew 19. The Pharisees approached Jesus with the question: 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?' Based on the revelation about the creation of husband and wife, Jesus declares that it is not allowed. Then the Pharisees refer to the Mosaic institution of a divorce letter. They copied what they read in the books of Moses literally to the daily life in the fullness of time, which resulted in an ungodly lifestyle. Jesus therefore criticized this practice by emphasizing that they had to take into account the historical background of this prescription of Moses. I think this is a basic hermeneutical instruction of Jesus. So therefore there is nothing wrong with this kind of hermeneutics.

Let's now focus on the question, what's new in the hermeneutics at the background of the synod's decision?

It's as old as the church is. Taught by Jesus and practiced by his apostles. That's also, as I understand it now, how the observance of the seventh day silently disappeared in the first centuries of Christian church history. Without any explicit command of the Lord the early church chose to celebrate the first day of the week as sabbath day, contradicting the text of the fourth commandment, which emphatically bases this practice on creation order, God's command on the first seventh day.

This way of dealing with certain biblical prescriptions is also practiced nowadays. Think of Paul's prescription in 1 Corinthians 11:5, also emphatically based on creation order. A wife needs to cover her head when praying or prophesying. But as far as I know, I don't remember how it was in the sixties, this prayer practice at least nowadays is no obligation anymore in your churches.

This treatment of Paul's prescription seems to be based on hermeneutical intuition.

But intuition is not always reliable. We should give account of the way we treat the Bible by describing our hermeneutical principle.

This is what happened in the GKV step by step ever since the Liberation 1944, 75 years ago which we gratefully celebrate this year. One of the blessings of the Liberation was the revival of a redemptive-historical approach of the Bible, thanks to church leaders like Schilder and Holwerda, replacing the Biblicist exemplaric approach which had become dominant in the preaching practice in the Reformed churches in the first part of that century.

The movement of Schilder, Holwerda and others taught us not to use the Bible as a divine handbook with timeless prescriptions and models to be copied during all ages. It should be read first of all as God's book of church history, describing salvation history through which God reveals himself.

This reading of the Bible as book of salvation history implies the need of taking into account of the historical context for the wright understanding and application of God's revelation.

As a young boy I thought the tenth commandment was partly not applicable to me, until I came to know that in the ancient culture and economy the donkey was something to be compared with a car or a truck for its owner. From that time on I was able to apply that part of the tenth commandment adequately to my fascination about the Oldsmobile of the family Leffers and the Mercedes of our Dutch neighbours.

For the same reason, as a student in Kampen 45 years ago, I would not be accepted to become an Old Testament scholar, unless I studied the Akkadian language with prof. J.P. Lettinga. Not just to have a better understanding of the Semitic languages, but also to be able to study the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian culture and religions, the famous Law of King Hammurabi, the omen texts of the baru priests and the inscriptions of the Assyrian kings. And that same professor Lettinga was also welcomed in the fifties as an expert in the Ugarit literature, useful for a better understanding of the Canaanite cultures among which the

people of Israel lived.

The need of this knowledge has also been expressed by professor Jacob van Bruggen in his book *Het Lezen van de Bijbel*, 1981. The way in which according to Gen. 16:4-6 Sarah and Abraham treated their female slave Hagar, can not be understood without the knowledge of the rules about slavery in the Law of King Hammurabi, he explains.

In another book *Het Kompas van het Christendom* (2002), he says, that when we would neglect this kind of information, we would be guilty for the loss of the clarity of the bible.

This focus on hermeneutics in our churches finally resulted in a publication of the TUK *Gereformeerde Hermeneutiek Vandaag* (2017), explaining and giving account of a hermeneutical practice that has been in use in our churches already for many decades.

Of course this book can not be considered as the hermeneutics of the synod 2017. Think of the critics of prof. De Bruijne and think of the fact that this book was only published after the synod's decision on women in office. But I am sure, that it is in line with the hermeneutical practice that has been in use in the reformed churches in the Netherlands since decades, and in line with what initially was taught by Jesus.

Of course there is much more to be said about synod's decision. You can disagree with synod's exegetical conclusions, for instance about 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. But then one would need to deliver far more evidence concerning those texts than your deputies do. Are these texts about the submission of women in general to

men in general? Why then is the Greek verb for submission in the whole NT without exception only used for the submission of wives to their own husbands? Is it true that the place of action which Paul has in mind in 1 Tim. 2 was the worship service? Why then does he in verse 8 speak of 'every place'? What was the meaning of prophecy in 1 Cor. 14? How strong are the arguments of your deputies to reject the classical opinion, that it was about preaching, just as it was on the day of Pentecost, proclaiming the great deeds of God? Etc.

If you want I can provide you the digital version of dr. N.J. Hommes' *De Vrouw in de Kerk* (1953) very useful, especially when it comes to the exegesis of 1 Cor. 14 and 1 Tim. 2.

But the main reason to discontinue the relationship with our churches, which your deputies find in the hermeneutics at the background of the synod's decision, is not sufficient to give account of the discontinuation of our relationship towards your churches and ours, but most of all to our common heavenly Head of the church, Jesus Christ.

Therefore we hope and pray that your synod will not decide according to their proposal and take time, at least until our next synod, before deciding about the relationship with our churches.

Dear brothers, may the Lord bless you as synod working through the whole agenda, may He grant you the guidance of the Holy Spirit. May He richly bless you as Reformed churches in Canada, with whom, ever since 1951, we feel closely united in Christ. *

WHY DO THE GKV SAY WOMEN MAY BE OFFICE BEARERS?

The following article was written as a response to Rev. Oosterhuis' speech. The original intended audience is the membership of the Smithville Canadian Reformed Church where Rev. Bouwman serves.

The 2019 Synod of the CanRC, held recently in Edmonton, decided (Article 41)

With sadness to discontinue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship (EF) with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv¹) and to implore the CanRCs to continue in prayer for the GKv (Rec 4.2).

The fundamental reason underlying this decision is this:

Ecclesiastical Fellowship is extended to churches where we find the marks of the true church (Article 29, Belgic Confession). The presence of the marks of the church are premised on a given church accepting the authority of the Word of God. Now that the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands approve of developments contrary to the Lord's instruction in his Word, the marks of the true church cannot

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with confidence be said to be consistently present in these churches (Cons 3.3).

As an example of the RCN approving developments contrary to the Lord's instruction in his Word, Synod Edmonton listed the decision of Synod Meppel, 2017, to permit the sisters of the congregations to be ordained into the offices of deacon, elder and minister (Obs 2.2.2). That decision is contrary to the inspired word of the apostle Paul in Holy Scripture: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2:12-14; see also 1 Cor 14:34f).

The question now arises: if Scripture is so categorical in relation to female office bearers, how could the Dutch churches justify their decision? Present at Synod Edmonton was Rev Dr Melle Oosterhuis, who had served as chairman of the RCN Synod that decided it was Biblically justified to open the offices of the church to women. Synod Meppel instructed him to visit the Synods of the sister churches in order to explain the Dutch decision. His address to Synod Edmonton was livestreamed for the public and is still available here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_v6qHNoLxQ starting at minute 1:00:30 mark.

Oosterhuis

Rev Oosterhuis argued that the Dutch churches were reading the Bible as they had learned it from faithful fathers of the past (like Klaas Schilder at the time of the Liberation of 1944) and indeed from Paul and Jesus himself. His insistence: the cultural context surrounding a Bible passage must be taken into account when a modern reader seeks to apply that passage to the church of today. He provided an example: the tenth commandment forbids us to covet our neighbor's donkey. Few Canadians in fact feel the urge to covet a donkey. But once we understand that the donkey in the days of Israel's sojourn at Mt Sinai was comparable to today's car or truck, we understand the force of the commandment and can apply it to ourselves; we're not to covet the neighbor's Mercedes. The reason we need to take the cultural context of a given passage into account as we seek its application is because the Lord God -divine as he is- accommodated himself to "common human imaginativeness" as he communicated his gospel to people. If we choose to ignore the cultural context of any Bible passage, we risk missing what God really wants to say to us

today. We might, for example, be blind to God's instruction not to covet the neighbor's truck. I suspect we can agree with the hermeneutic (that's the 'how' of Bible reading) described in this paragraph. For the readers' benefit I might add: Oosterhuis mentioned numerous other examples where this hermeneutic is indeed essential to understanding the Bible.

Question

Economic (and political and scientific and social, etc) realities indeed change across cultures so that a donkey in one culture amounts to a truck in another culture – and we modern westerners readily understand why God mentioned a "donkey" to Israel in the tenth commandment some 3000 years ago and we make the necessary translation to our modern context. But here's my question: does the Lord God accommodate himself on moral or ethical issues in a similar way? Has he given laws to Israel (or to, say, the Corinthians) reflecting their cultural context so that Israel had to act in a certain way – but we in our 21st century western cultural context need to conclude that God wants us to act in a revised manner, even maybe just the opposite of what he wanted for Israel? To pose the question more sharply: does the hermeneutic we use in making the translation from donkey to truck apply to the issue of women in office? In his speech to Synod Edmonton, Oosterhuis did not demonstrate that the hermeneutic we need for the tenth commandment applies to the topic of women in office. He assumed it did, but he did not show it.

Perhaps you ask: would he have to? Yes, indeed. God, after all, has nowhere given indication that donkey in one culture excludes trucks in another culture. But God has given indication that his *prohibition* for women to teach or to exercise authority over a man in one culture was *not* intended to convey *permission* for women to teach or to exercise authority over a man in another culture.

Primary rule

Paul obviously wrote 1 Tim 2:12-14 (quoted above) in a particular cultural context. Because of archeological and historical studies, we today indeed know a fair amount about that cultural context – including the accepted place of women and men in economic, political, social and even religious sectors of society at that time.

Valuable and interesting as knowledge of the cultural context may be, however, the divine Author has not seen it necessary that his church know all that information in every age or place. What he has found necessary for his church to

know in every age and place is the entirety of the Bible. There's a reason for that: *later revelation is built upon earlier revelation*. It's no coincidence that Paul was an Old Testament scholar raised at the feet of Prof Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and advanced beyond his fellow students in his command of Old Testament Scripture (Gal 1:14). The primary background to what Paul wrote in his letters to the churches was not the cultural context into which he was writing, but it was first of all the Old Testament. Yes, the *trigger* for Paul giving Timothy instruction concerning women was undoubtedly particular circumstances in Timothy's congregation (and those details are lost to us). But the *content* of Paul's instruction on the topic (women are not to have authority over men) was motivated by *what God had revealed* in earlier Scripture and *not* by cultural circumstances in Timothy's community. That's what Paul plainly says: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman..." (v. 13). More Old Testament data pointing in the same line is readily available: God called Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans and he took Sarai along; God did not call Sarai who took Abram along. God made his covenant with Abram and hence with those in his tent (including Sarah); he did not make his covenant with Sarah and hence with those in her tent. He sovereignly entrusted 12 sons to Jacob (and one daughter) to become patriarchs in Israel; he did not entrust 12 daughters to Jacob to become Israel's matriarchs. At Mt Sinai Moses upon God's command appointed men to the offices of priest and elder in Israel; he did not appoint women. And so on.

Culturally determined?

May we say that God addressed Abram instead of Sarai in Ur simply because society in those days was patriarchal? Did God have Moses appoint men to be priests and elders because appointing women would have been unacceptable in the culture of the time?

Let's be clear: the Creator of heaven and earth is by no means bound by human culture. Yes, it's certainly true that his people live within the culture of a given era. But God stands above the practices of the day, as is very evident from the ethical commands he gave to Israel at Mt Sinai. In the face of socio-economic realities that made it mandatory to work your land every year, the Lord legislated a Sabbath year once in seven. Though it made no economic or military sense for all the fighting men to leave their wives and children alone at home, God gave the two and a half tribes

on the east side of the Jordan precisely that command. Particular incestuous and bestial practices were par for the course in the societies around Israel (specifically in Egypt where they came from and in Canaan where they were going), but the Lord gave detailed commands that those specific practices were not to be found in Israel (see Leviticus 18 for the list). It is simply wrong to assume that God gave particular instructions in order that his people might not be culturally out of sync with those around them. On the contrary, the gospel -and living the gospel- puts one distinctly out of sync with the cultures of fallen humanity. Christ Jesus was culturally way out of sync when he ate with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:2) and when he permitted his disciples to pluck heads of grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23). But strikingly, when it came to appointing persons to be disciples (and eventually apostles), he included no women.

Paul

This is the sort of material that formed Paul's thinking as he gave instructions to Timothy about the place of women in Timothy's congregation. If you connect the dots from Genesis through the rest of the Old Testament and through Jesus' words and deeds as recorded in the Gospels, Paul's word to Timothy is no surprise at all and its instruction is crystal clear – even if we know little of the cultural factors in Timothy's congregation at work in the background. This is how the church has read the Bible ever since the days of Paul: Scriptural context is essential; cultural context is informative. And so any church since the days of Paul which has taken Scripture seriously has refused to permit women to exercise authority over men and so kept the offices of the church closed to women.

Lamentable

Should Oosterhuis have demonstrated that the hermeneutic used to translate the donkey of the tenth commandment into a truck in our modern culture was equally valid for the Bible's uniform instruction about the place the Lord as allotted to women (and men)? Indeed, he should have.

But he couldn't. For the Bible interprets itself.



¹ GKv is the Dutch acronym, standing for Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt). In English the acronym is RCN.

PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, DEHRADUN INDIA

THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE: THE STORY IN A NUTSHELL



PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Standing firm but not standing still

We just finished a wonderful graduation and thanksgiving service (May 4, 2019) attended by friends of Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) from the US, the Netherlands, Australia, and from several states of India. The graduation service was blessed by our special speaker the Rev. Dr. Davi Charles Gomes, Chancellor of the Mackenzie University, Sao Paulo, Brazil, and International Director of World Reformed Fellowship. Our Strom Missions Lecturer was Rev. Dr. Idicheria Ninan, Professor of New Testament, SAIACS, Bangalore. Friends from India and abroad participated in the program and rejoiced with us at what the Lord had done. The 50th Jubilee Celebration is a time for celebration, but it should also be an occasion for introspection and reflection. What has PTS done in these last 50 years? Have we used the resources God gave us as faithful stewards? Does it justify our existence and our great desire to take steps into an unknown future? In the following article, I wish to provide a brief historical overview of PTS to trace the development of the seminary over the past 50 years; to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses; and to map out a pathway amidst the missional challenges of the 21st century.

Preamble: The Beginnings

On February 1, 1969 two Presbyteries came together to make a historic decision and an act of faith – to establish a seminary that was to stand on the infallible and inerrant Word of God, to preach the gospel of grace revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ, and to train young men to serve the church in India. The previous day there was a huge debate whether the seminary should be in New Delhi, the capital of India, or in Roorkee, the city famous for its Engineering University, but more importantly, which already had the basic infrastructure to begin operations. Eyewitnesses tell us that Christian graces seemed to be absent in the debate, and some even feared that the whole idea of a seminary might come to nothing. Wisdom

prevailed and the president called for an adjournment of the meeting to pray for unanimity to decide the location of the seminary. The meeting closed at 11 pm that night and reconvened at 11 am the next day. By daybreak, the Holy Spirit had answered their prayers – the brethren were united in their desire that this new seminary – Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) would be located in Roorkee, in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the rest is history. Classes started on July 23, 1969, with 7 students and 9 teachers, and from these humble beginnings PTS grew to what it is today – an average of about 90 students and 12 faculty members, that has impacted all states of India, and the neighboring countries of Nepal, Myanmar, Bangla Desh, and Bhutan.

It can be safely argued that the founding fathers of PTS were primarily focused on the supreme authority of the Word of God, for all of life and ministry. Without using the word 'Reformed' they were reformed in every aspect of being and belonging. What did this mean? It meant a commitment to the infallible and inerrant Word of God and its truths as summarized in the Westminster Standards. Any deviance from this truth met with strict censure from the missionaries when they felt that the any part of the gospel was compromised. These conservative missionaries were willing to bear the taunts and ridicule of fellow missionaries as they dared to be different from those whose missional perspective had undergone some radical change.

The Contribution of Conservative Presbyterian Missionaries in North India

In the 1960s, post-Independent India was facing a time of ongoing challenges. Apart from the revival of Hinduism and growing nationalism there were also attacks on the church from within, particularly the advent of liberalism and modernism on the mission field, which by this time, had infiltrated American Presbyterian Missions and missionaries in India. The shift was obvious, from preaching

of the gospel they turned primarily to social uplift of the poor. One cannot blame these missionaries who were drawn to help the poor and downtrodden in an economically challenged India. The missionary zeal in this direction birthed some commendable institutions in the areas of medicine, agriculture, education, and vocational skill building.

The doctrinal tussles of the 1920s in America.

The New Testament scholar and Princeton professor, J Gresham Machen, challenged the growing modernism in the ranks of Princeton Theological Seminary - the bastion of Presbyterian orthodoxy – that soon led to the formation of the Westminster Theological Seminary (1929). When Machen began the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM) in 1933 it was seen as a threat to the established Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church (USA). This led to his exit from the PCUSA, and the establishing of Presbyterian Church of America (later renamed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) in 1934. A further split occurred when Rev. Carl McIntyre, formed the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC). This was church soon represented in India when several young missionaries came under the auspices of the BPC/IBPFM. The pioneer was undoubtedly Miss Louisa Lee, who after 22 years of working with the American Presbyterians, resigned from that Board in 1935 and became an IBPFM missionary and began her

work in Kannauj, UP, close to the industrial city of Kanpur. Several younger missionaries followed the example of Miss Lee and joined the IBPFM. Among these were: Rev. and Mrs. Frank L. Fiol (Kanpur, 1936); Rev. & Mrs. Ralph Cunningham (Darjeeling, 1938); Miss Elsie Hudec (Uttar Pradesh, 1945); Rev. & Mrs. Richard B Strom (Darjeeling, later Kanpur, 1949); Rev. and Mrs. William Mahlow (Kanpur/Kannauj, 1950); Rev. John L. Dorsey (Kanpur, later Delhi, 1952); and Rev. and Mrs. Bruce R. Fiol (Kanpur, 1966). The North India Presbytery of the BPC was established in the early 1950s and the first Indian pastor to be ordained was Rev. Benjamin Prasad. On January 6, 1965, the NI Presbytery of the BPC seated as corresponding members the following members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and Mission: Dr. John Taylor, Rev. Gordon Taylor, Rev. Johnson Dean, Rev Stanley Ramsey, and Mr. David Fiol. The purpose was to explore how the BPC and the RPC could become closer in fellowship. No doubt this was to help in the formation of PTS. These missionaries would soon come together in 1969 to form PTS. They banded themselves together and fought every sign of apostasy – or what they perceived as such. These circumstances hastened the formation of PTS in 1969 (*the above information from the Indian field is from Dr. Richard Strom's paper presented in November 1987 for the RPC church workers' family conference.*)



Celebrating the Golden Jubilee of PTS

The Contribution of Evangelical Indian Presbyterians in North India

For about 25 years since the inception of the seminary, the missionaries, especially Dr. & Mrs. Richard B Strom, continued to provide the leadership for the seminary. Dr. Strom served as the founding Principal and others served on the Board of the seminary. Though they had hoped for a team of Faculty members trained in 'rightly dividing the Word,' it was a slow process. Finding evangelical Presbyterians was difficult, an occasional exception would be evangelical missionaries and local pastors in the American Presbyterian Mission. PTS had a mission to fulfil: to train a generation of pastors with evangelical Reformed convictions to take up the leadership of the RP churches. From the mid-1970s, a small nucleus of evangelical Indian teachers began to supplement the early missionary pioneers like Dr. Strom and Dr. Bruce Fiol. By the mid-1980s it seemed that an indigenous Reformed faculty was slowly taking shape with people like Rev. Isaac Kumar, Matthew Ebenezer and Mohan Chacko joining the ranks.

Challenges in the Early Decades at PTS.

To be part of the seminary meant to be part of the RPC. The seminary's vision expanded from training students for the Presbyterian churches in North India, to training students from Presbyterian and other denominations in India and the neighboring countries. This change in vision brought about an influx of students. In the late 1970s the seminary buildings in Roorkee collapsed and PTS was able to move to a campus in nearby Dehradun. In 1987, the Bachelor of Theology (BTh) was accredited by the Asia Theological Association (ATA). This meant that the bar was raised higher in an already intense course of study. Typically, a faculty member would begin his day whenever his first class began (usually 8 or 9 am) and he would finish the day about 9 or 10 pm or later. In those days, the only articles that the faculty contributed were to the annually/ occasionally published 'Koinonia'.

One significant development in the 1980s was the reintroduction of women students to PTS, initiated by Mrs. Strom who saw the potential that women had to offer. (It is important to note that women's ordination was never ever the motive for training of women at PTS. Training women in India is *necessary* because in rural India - which is 70% of the population- only women are permitted to approach women when the men folk are in the fields. This makes it not only necessary, but imperative, for women to be trained.)

Subsequently, the Board built the beautiful Strom Women's hostel on campus with accommodation for 24 women students.

In 1986-87, Dr. David G. Fiol was appointed Principal; the next year Dr. Mohan Chacko was installed as the first Indian Principal. During the latter's tenure, many buildings were constructed on campus, The Strom women's hostel (1990); the Academic Centre (1994); the Young-Strom Chapel/Auditorium (1997); the Administrative Block (2000) and the John Calvin Residential Building (2009). Dr. Chacko retired in 2014. The Faculty Office extension was completed in 2016.

Wider Horizons and Greater Responsibilities

In the 2000s there seemed to be a growing desire to publish books and present papers at conferences on invitation. This coincided with the seminary receiving accreditation for the Master of Divinity in 2000.

PTS has shared the vision of Reformed education by being involved in establishing schools. Board members Rev. John L. Dorsey and Dr. David G Fiol established Faith Academy, New Delhi, and Grace Academy, Dehradun, respectively.

In the 2000s the PTS faculty published several books and articles, among these are: *An Asian Catechism*; *The Westminster Confession of Faith: In Simple English*; *What the Apostles' Believed: A Devotional Commentary*; they also contributed to *The ESV Global Study Bible*; *the Oxford Encyclopaedia of South Asian Christianity*; and *Christian Muslim Relations 1900 (CMR1900)* - an online resource jointly published by E. J. Brill and the University of Birmingham. The faculty also involved themselves in the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC), and the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF). Faculty members also serve on the editorial committee of *Doon Theological Journal* (DTJ), since its inception in 2004. Several faculty members serve on the Boards of various Christian organizations.

Contributing Towards the Reformed Witness in India

One of the key roles that PTS has played in recent years is reaching out to Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in India and the neighboring countries. PTS played a significant role in organizing the Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship (RPF) in 2001. In 2005, the first RPF conference was held in South India in 2005. Today the RPF brings together all Reformed and Presbyterian churches and institutions every two years for mutual fellowship and learning. The membership has now grown to about 16 different Reformed

and Presbyterian denominations and institutions. A typical conference draws close to 100 delegates.

Another key contribution of PTS has been the strengthening of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches all across India and also the neighboring countries, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangla Desh, and Bhutan. PTS has helped train pastors of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI) spread over the northern areas. In the North East, ever since the inauguration of the **Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India (RPCNEI)** in 1979, PTS has helped train its pastors and evangelists, and its key leaders are PTS alumni. In West Bengal, the **United Church of Northern India (UCNI)**

variety of fields in the country such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh. Their work started only about 10 years ago; their workers are trained primarily through PTS's Hindi extension program. It is a humbling realization that the number of pastors and evangelists trained by PTS over the past 50 years is a very large number, moreover, their overall constituency is spread all over India would total an aggregate number of several thousands.

Playing an Important Role in Training Grass-roots Level Evangelists

One of the exciting happenings in the last seven years is the



The Presbyterian Theological Seminary building in Dehradun, India

has been partnering with PTS for over 20 years. The **Presbyterian Free Church-Kalimpong**, with affiliated church councils in Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, has been sending students for training in PTS for decades. The **Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Sikkim (EPCS)**, since the EPCS discovered PTS they have been sending their students to the seminary. The majority of EPCS pastors are trained at PTS. The **Presbyterian Church of India (Reformed) – PCI (R)** was established in 1984 and bears a strong Reformed witness in the state of Manipur today. PTS trains its leadership and has helped the church over the years.

In other parts of India too PTS has been actively involved with training. The **Presbyterian Free Church-Central India (PFC-CI)** has antecedents in the Free Church of Scotland. Placed in one of the most challenging situations in India, PFC-CI sends its candidates for training to PTS. The **Christian Reformed Fellowship of India (CRFI)** works in a

growth and expansion of our Hindi Extension Program. This modular program takes about 2-3 years to complete. Teachers from the seminary, and other hand-picked local pastors, teach these men who are ministering in villages and small towns with little or no training. The testimonies of these men encourage us. Since the program was begun in 2011, over 200 men have been trained. In the year 2018-2019, 44 have completed the program. The current enrolment stands at 117. Enquiries have now come as far as Assam for the same program to be offered in English to their evangelists. We Praise the Lord!

Impacting Society through Christian Values

Several PTS graduates have established pioneer ministries to uplift the poor and needy through which the gospel is communicated. A few of our alumni contributions are: a children's home providing board, accommodation, and education for children who otherwise would be exploited

for child-labour in Dehradun; a home and school for poor children in Nepal; a children's home in Himachal Pradesh founded by two women graduates of the seminary; and a pioneering work among visually handicapped persons in Kolkatta (Calcutta).

In closing let me outline some of the concerns that we wrestle with as we look at the future. *What is the biggest challenge that faces the Indian Church?* The growing number of youth in India. Fifty percent of India's youth are below 25 years of age; Sixty-five percent of the country's youth are below 35 years of age. How can PTS make the gospel relevant to these young people?

Being Faithful when the temptation is to be Successful.

Success, measured in human terms, for a seminary could be good basic infrastructure, reasonable student intake, not lacking funds, a pool of excellent teachers, etc., etc. We suffer in all the areas mentioned. We struggle to know what should be done to attract more students. Should we change our name? We thought of this seriously since there was an observation that the word "Presbyterian" would put off potential students. After some deliberation we abandoned the idea because the word 'Presbyterian' says who we are and what we believe in. We are very careful in selecting our faculty. Though we sometimes receive applications from highly qualified teachers, we ask ourselves, "Would they be able to commit themselves to what we require from our teachers – an uncompromising stand on the Word, a commitment to preach and teach the gospel of grace, and to be a model of servanthood and service?"

Keeping a Balance Between Academics and Spirituality

It is always a temptation to drift away from the essential qualities of a Christian minister when we are caught up with academics for the sake of head knowledge. We should read the Apostle Paul's admonition afresh 'knowledge puffs up.' Our aim and desire should be that our students grow both in heart and mind and in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no way that this can be done except through the teacher becoming a model who could be emulated. Any professor who cannot display the love of Christ and can only display knowledge, falls short of what the Lord wants of His church. This does not mean that we run away from those subjects and ideas that are totally questionable and are opposed to the gospel, rather, we study them carefully to show where they deviate from the truth, *'For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty*

opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ' 2 Cor 10:4,5 (ESV).

Serving the Lord, Despite all Odds

Our standards are constantly improving: faculty members have begun publishing their academic work. Our most recent faculty academic publication was an MTh thesis: *Corinthian Prophecy*. Several excellent dissertations are expected to be published in the not too distant future. It is not uncommon for us to get discouraged. We are faced with opposition from without and pressure from within. Last year the state in which we are located passed the 'Freedom of Religion' Bill. In essence it means that no conversions should take place from one religion to another. As good citizens of the country we have to adhere to whatever the state demands of us. However, our ultimate allegiance is to Our Sovereign King and to Him we pledge our obedience. He calls us to obey Him. Due to the terms of the Bill we need to warn our students of what they may or may not do during their practical assignments.

Aiming towards Financial Self Sufficiency

One of our challenges is financial stability. If we do not have a strong support base the task before us will become more difficult. We need to creatively think how we can build up our reserves with sufficient safeguards that would prevent draining of our much needed resources. Perhaps the redevelopment of Lowriston may help towards establishing a fairly strong financial base that would help us in the coming years. With growing restrictions in the horizon this may be a priority that needs to be pushed up front. Perhaps we also need to explore every way that we can improve seminary giving, both locally and from abroad.

Our work has been possible because of the faithful partnership of several institution and individuals. We thank the Lord for each of them. MTW and ARMA in the US, DVN in the Netherlands, and the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Pray with us for PTS. We think we have invested well what the Lord entrusted to us; we hope that we have been faithful. Thank you for your partnership in the ministry of PTS! ❁

THE COMMUNITY HEALTH TEAM IN KARAMOJA

Author: Leah Hop

Leah Hop is a missionary associate for the OPC in Nakaale, Uganda.

When I began working with the OPC Uganda Mission in Karamoja in 2009, my role was to create a community health program in order to expand the services offered by the mission's clinic into the villages. I hired a woman named Anyakun Josephine to teach me the Karimojong language, to accompany me to homes in the neighborhood, and to translate as I taught about health. Soon, I was teaching these lessons to villagers in Karimojong myself.

Even before I arrived in Nakaale almost ten years ago, God had been preparing me in many ways to work with the OPC mission. I attended InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's Urbana mission conference while at university and completed some biblical studies at a Bible college in Michigan. I traveled to rural Tanzania for a one-year internship in primary health. Then I studied for a masters of public health in maternal health here in Uganda, and God gave me a desire to live among his people here in Karamoja for his glory.

After a few years in Nakaale, I saw the need to expand the program and began to train two more women: Acia Rose and Naduk Olivia. They were better equipped to communicate in the local language and address cultural issues than I was.

Rose and Naduk have since trained partners for themselves. Now, six women on the Community Health Team (CHT) go out into the villages in pairs to teach about health. Rather than teaching, I visit the villages to obtain feedback on the curriculum, to continue expanding my understanding of the Karimojong culture, and to maintain relationships with the villagers. What a blessing it is that the members of the CHT can do their work on their own! While the maturing process has taken many years, we have hope that God will deliver his people and cause them to grow in grace.

What Does the CHT Do?

The local CHT members are all staff at the OPC Uganda Mission's clinic. They support the clinic's work by teaching families how to care for themselves, when to come to the clinic, the importance of early testing and proper treatment, the need for washing their hands regularly, how diseases are transmitted, how to prevent illness, and many other health-related topics. We walk to all the homes in the area that are within one hour of the clinic. This gives us opportunities to greet our neighbors along the way.

The CHT is well-known and welcomed everywhere in the community. When the team enters a village, they call the neighbors together to hear the lesson. Karimojong women are frequently working in their homes, whether building their actual home, building a fence around their compound, sewing a skirt, grinding maize, or sifting sorghum. They either take a break from their work or continue working while listening to the health lesson. Each weekday morning, the team also visits individual homes, and many of our neighbors are learning how to improve their health.

Team members seek to teach people wherever they are. In the villages, women are the primary audience. Mothers and young girls but also older women whose families have grown up all listen to our team members. Most men will not spend time during the day inside the village with the women. Instead, the men gather together under a tree



Akol Josephine, a Community Health Team member, teaching in the village of Nakaale

outside the village, so we engage them there. At the clinic, we teach whoever is sitting in the waiting room: for example, pregnant women come on Tuesdays for check-ups and mothers with infants come on Thursdays for immunizations. We also teach weekly in four primary schools and at the Karamoja Education Outreach preschool. In as many ways as we can, we are trying to get the word out about important health issues.

The women on my team have not only been increasing their knowledge on many topics, but they have also become known in the community as advisors to whom others can turn for health guidance. Outside of working hours, they teach mothers how to make oral rehydration solution at home, comfort and support mothers throughout the birthing process, and give advice during health emergencies. When their neighbors come to visit them at home, they exemplify hygienic behaviors within a sanitary compound.

Leadership of the Community Health Team

We have come to an exciting point in the life of the leadership for the CHT. Nurse Tinah is interested in community health and is known to the CHT team because she used to work for the clinic.

We have been strategizing together weekly, and she has been accompanying the team to the villages to re-familiarize herself with the program and the environment. Because she understands Karimojong, she is able to evaluate some of the lessons and suggest additional talking points to improve people's knowledge, which I have greatly appreciated.

For example, Nurse Tinah has drawn on her research on Brucellosis to give feedback and suggestions to the CHT on updating that lesson. (Brucellosis is an infection spread from animals to people, often through consuming raw meat or raw milk.) Soon, we will conduct some training sessions together with the CHT to review the basics of all our health lessons. This training will give her a better idea about how to improve the program. My hope is that Nurse Tinah will oversee the program at some point in the future. It has been a blessing to be able to share specific ideas together and learn from her.

While it is hard to quantify the impact of our program, Elizabeth, a lab technician who has worked at the mission's clinic at least since my arrival in 2009, identified an encouraging outcome of our training: When she began working for the clinic, the shelves in our lab were lined with specimen bottles filled with intestinal worms. Now, the

shelves are frequently bare. Part of the reason for this change is that people are washing their hands more and maintaining better hygiene. Almost all of our community health lessons include the importance of washing hands. Another reason is that during our immunization outreach into the community, we give out medication to help proactively prevent worms for some children and to treat others who have worms.

Spiritual Care

I have enjoyed getting to know the ladies on my team and being able to disciple them as we walk to the villages together. Sometimes we listen to the Karimojong audio Bible or to local praise songs on my phone. Or we sing together and recite our memory verses in Karimojong. We

have learned ten verses together so far. Sometimes when we sit with people in their compounds, after we have finished teaching, we pray together. A few on the CHT are now comfortable praying on their own while others prefer to translate as I pray.

Over the years, we have made efforts to coordinate with the outreach of the mission's pastoral team. On most afternoons, the pastoral team goes out to the villages to teach Bible stories under a tree

outside the village where they encounter mainly men. At times, I have brought some men on the pastoral team with me to the villages so that the women there can hear both a health lesson and a Bible story.

Recently, it has been beneficial to work with some secondary school students while they were on their year-end break, which in Uganda is during the months of December and January. Perhaps, during other shorter breaks between school terms, the pastoral team can again join the CHT and teach the young people from the Bible. Coordinating our efforts in these ways has worked well and I hope we are able to make this a more consistent joint ministry in the future. ✱



Kocho Betty and Naduk Olivia giving lessons in health and hygiene at Akison A Yesu Presbyterian Clinic



THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Dear Praying Brothers,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! Here is our first prayer letter for 2019! Since last October our small denomination experienced the blessing of our Lord in various ways. We are inviting you to rejoice with us in these developments. Here are a few highlights for you:

1) **Conferences dedicated to the Reformation.**

In three countries (Romania, Hungary, Ukraine) we were able to organize larger conferences commemorating the great Reformation. Members from different congregations came together, had fellowship and were edified by the lectures. At these we covered a variety of theological and practical topics. All of our lectures were posted on internet (audio and video) so they are available for those interested. We were able to organize again the Reformation 500+1 pastor's conference, where the pastors of our denomination had fellowship with pastors and missionaries of other conservative denominations. The lectures and discussions were on the chapters of Westminster Confession of Faith, as a preparation for the first publication of Westminster Confession and Catechism's in Romanian language. The translation is already done, now we are doing the preparations for the press.

2) **Organizing our denomination.**

The major development of the past five months was establishing the governing bodies of our denomination. Last fall and early this year we kept installing pastors and ordaining ruling elders in our local congregations. As a result, by God's grace we were able to set up two Presbyteries (one in Romania and one in Hungary), followed by the gathering of the General Assembly mid-February. Thus we are closing a 20 year long period and consider our denomination established. As a part of our first General Assembly our Book of Church Order was also adopted and various committees appointed.

3) **Publications.**

As you know, our Presbyterian Publishing House is committed to keep publishing solid Reformed books in Hungarian language. Last December we printed Jerry Bridges' *Respectable Sins*, which was well received. We also started translating David Murray's book entitled *ReSet*. This is our coming publication project.

4) **Fraternal connections.**

At our General Assembly we were pleased and encouraged to have delegates from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB), Presbyterian



General Synod 2019

Church of Australia and the Evangelical Reformed Church of Ukraine. In the future we seek to establish contacts with other sound denominations and churches.

Recently our denomination signed a cooperation protocol with Agencia Presbiteriana de Missoes Transculturais the mission board of Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil. With their missionaries working in Eastern Europe, we had a very fruitful cooperation even before this agreement.

As you know, we applied for membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). As a part of this process we look forward to meeting with the delegates of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales (EPCEW) this month.

5) Financial support.

We are very thankful for the support we receive thorough the COAH organization, but also from other churches and individual donors. We still have a few local churches which are struggling financially, so your help is much appreciated.

6) Christian education and homeschooling.


In the absence of good Reformed schools in the Hungarian Lands, our denomination is encouraging homeschooling in these countries. During the past months we have organized four conferences on education (three in Romania and one in

Hungary).

7) Seminarians.

Pray also for two of our pastors who started their studies in the USA. Rev. Bagoly Gyula enrolled to Puritan Reformed Seminary and Rev. Peter Szabo to Greenville Theological Seminary.

8) Youth Conference.

In the last days of 2018 and the first days of 2019, in Sovata, Romania, the youth people from our congregations came together for a larger youth conference. 

The prayer letter continues with updates from the following individual congregations:

Hungary: Budapest, Miskolc, Balatonalmádi,

Kaposszerdahely, Debrecen,

Ukraine: Ungvár, Beregszász

Romania: Vulkán (Vulcan), Székelyudvarhely (Odorheiu

Secuiesc), Marosvasarhely (Targu Mures, Erdőszentgyörgy

(Sangeorgiu de Padure), Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc),

Szováta (Sovata), Kolozsvár (Cluj Napoca),

Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfantu Gheorghe)

AFRICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES 2020

Dear ICRC Africa Region Members,

Greetings in our Lord's Name!!!

This letter serves to inform you that our next regional conference is scheduled to take place next year beginning Tuesday August 04th - Thursday August 06th, 2020. The meeting place shall be in Kenya at Kenyatta University. Arrival time for the meeting shall be Monday 03rd, 2020, while Friday Aug 07th, 2020 shall be for taking a tour to the zoo or museum, and may depart on Saturday 08th, 2020. The proposed topics to be covered together with the anticipated keynote speakers are as follows:

1. **Theological training in Africa:** The Rev. Dr. L. Anthony and The Rev. Dr. Brian de Vries

2. **The Reformed mission in Africa:** Mr. Mark T. Bube


3. **The ministry of the diaconate in Africa:** The Rev. Dr. Pieter Boon and Mr. David Nakhla.

The host church AEPC is working on the required budget for this arrangement which shall be disseminated to all member churches of ICRC Africa Region and other well wishers for the necessary financial support.

We eagerly look forward to hearing from you shortly.

In Christ Alone,

Elder Fred Kabenge

ICRC Secretary for the Africa Region 

ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE, MELBOURNE 2019

JOINT HOSTS: PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA & CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA

Following the very successful Conference in Seoul in 2015 the next Asia-Pacific Regional Conference is scheduled for Melbourne jointly hosted by the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. ICRC members and representatives from other like-minded churches are warmly welcome to attend and contribute to the strengthening of Christian work and witness in the region.

1. Time

The Conference will begin on Tuesday morning **1 October 2019** with registration from 9.00am and conclude by 5pm on Thursday **3rd October 2019**.

2. Venue

The venue is the Robert White Hall within the Assembly Hall at 156 Collins Street, Melbourne. This is a modern facility in the CBD owned by the Presbyterian Church of Victoria and close to a number of attractions such as the National Gallery of Victoria, the Aquarium etc. etc.. The venue has wi-fi and an overhead projector.

3. Accommodation

Those flying into Melbourne Airport can get the Airport Bus to Southern Cross Station (30 minutes) and stay at whatever accommodation in the CBD suits their wish and budget. The cost of fares and accommodation including breakfast is the responsibility of those attending. Some assistance from the ICRC for those ICRC members from the developing world for whom this may be too heavy a burden may be available. For information on this contact Reinier Noppers at reinierticktock@gmail.com. Delegates' meals will be at the venue at the cost of the hosts. The CRCA has 10 churches and 1300 communicant members in the Melbourne metropolitan area (one Chinese) and the PCEA 4 (one Southern Sudanese) and 140 communicant members. If people are staying longer preaching opportunities could be available on the Lord's Day.

4. Topics

We are resolutely committed to making the Conference one which deals with matters of practical value which doesn't mean, of course, that

the theological underpinnings will be neglected - far from it! We plan four main speakers. Two subjects already arranged are:

Trinitarian shaped worship – its Basis and Necessity and Presentation in Preaching – Rev. Dr Peter Adam, internationally known, has committed to this so you can be sure it will be challenging and helpful.


A Positive Eschatology in an Age of Negativity

Mark Bube from the OPC will give us an Overview of Global Missions and current challenges and opportunities, and similarly the area of Diaconal ministry will receive attention. We want to ensure plenty of time for networking and private discussions. Once we know who is attending we will ask different ones to take short devotions and others to introduce their churches, and arrange for small group leaders.

5. Our request

Could you let us know as soon as possible likely attendance at the Conference from your churches so that we can continue to plan a great conference?

Grace and peace, Christian love and prayer

Lourens Nel <pastor@lrcr.org.au>
Rowland Ward <rowland.ward@gmail.com> 



Gift of GS 2019 to the Edmonton-Immanuel CanRC for hosting synod