



WHAT ARE WE AFRAID OF?

Recently a number of members have left the Canadian Reformed churches in Canada and the Liberated churches in the Netherlands. Among them were communicant members, some of them former elders and ministers who want to maintain, promote and defend the truth of God's Word as confessed by the Church in the Three Forms of Unity and who desire to abide by the Church Order of Dort. Why have they taken the drastic step of seceding? Expressly or by implication they have pronounced the Gereformeerde Kerken – Vrijgemaakt (Liberated) and the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), false churches. What has caused them to come to such drastic action?

In the Netherlands a group of thirteen churches left the Liberated churches to form a small federation called the Gereformeerde Kerken – Hersteld (Restored). Shortly after this event took place I visited Rev. P. van Gorp (minister emeritus) in that federation and asked if their secession had not been too hasty. His explanation was that he and other ministers as well as concerned members had written for twelve years in a magazine called Reformanda about the deformation they saw occurring in the church. During all that time

no one in the federation saw the need to answer their concerns. Writers in other papers ignored them. Major assemblies skirted around the issues when they were raised by way of overture and appeal. "Now that we have finally taken this step," he said, "they want to talk."

There have been two separate instances of secession in the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), one in Lynden, Washington and one in Abbotsford, BC. In both cases the issues have centered on the

That we may rightly know



entire process of achieving Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with other Reformed and Presbyterian churches and federations. It is felt by those who left that the

differences that exist between churches in EF were of such significance that it was not warranted to establish such a relationship without overcoming those differences.

Just as in the Netherlands the deformation observed by the Restored group as well as by the concerned members [who have not left but are expressing their concerns on web sites like www.eeninwaarheid.com] is not being dealt with by the Liberated churches, it appears that appeals and overtures

concerning the EF process are being ignored, side stepped or trivialized in the CanRC as well.

What We Have Done

The fear of dealing with differences shows up very clearly when we consider what we have done over the years. We have made the revised rules for Relations with Churches Abroad the new rules for churches in EF. In essence that makes the relationship between federations the same as between neighbouring churches with the exception of the geographic location. The relations with Churches Abroad was a way of working together and showing unity between churches that were confessionally the same but geographically in different countries. We have taken that relationship, given it a different name, altered the rules and applied it to numerous churches/federations that we have declared true.

Based on the original Relations with Churches Abroad we ought to be seeking federative unity with the FCS, OPC and ERQ as well as the URCNA as they are all neighbouring churches.

To be sure, such an endeavour would be arduous if not impossible for there are considerable differences in confessions and church polity not to mention a variety of practical differences. The CanRC is discovering that already in its dealings with the URCNA.

It should not be a surprise, however, when church members require from their elders that they take seriously their installation mandate that “They shall permit no strange teaching, so that in every respect the congregation is edified by the pure doctrine of the gospel.” The differences introduced into our churches by way of EF must be openly discussed and overcome so that the

congregations are edified by the action of the churches in implementing the relationships that have been established. But as a result of due diligence in this regard many church members have questions about the differences that remain and the Scriptural warrant for the relationships established in light of those differences.

In both the Netherlands and in Canada it appears that there is/has been a concerted effort to avoid controversy *rather* than to edify congregations and their members by dealing with concerns.

What are we afraid of?

Why this reluctance to deal with the issues? It appears that there is fear to recognize or confront deformation within and concerns about errors in doctrine and church polity with those we are establishing relations with.

Failure to deal with the concerns of the writers in Reformanda has caused a significant number of members to secede in the Netherlands. Secessions have also taken place in Canada on the basis of issues not being properly dealt with. While strong accusations of schism are directed at those who have seceded there does not appear to be any response to the concerns that led to their action. Can we toss aside the concerns that have led to the actions in the Netherlands and in Canada as being totally unfounded? If so, the accusation of schism is correctly levelled and repentance must be sought. But if there is legitimacy regarding the concerns of the frustrated brotherhood that has culminated in secession, then there must be repentance within the church. Then there needs to be reflection on the lack of countering deformation and a neglect of the edification of the members by not dealing with differences with churches we intend to establish EF with.

One of two must be the case. Either there are leaders among us who disagree that there is a degree of deformation taking place in the churches or they are unwilling to oppose such deformation because it may cause division. One of two must be the case. Either there is unwillingness to deal with appeals and issues concerning differences between churches in EF or those differences are insignificant, in which case that must be clarified to the members who are concerned.

In spite of the fear of division resulting from countering deformation and dealing with differences, real divisions already exists. The issues that caused the 1960 split in the Netherlands live in the CanRC. The matters raised by the people of the Restored federation and the ‘concerned’ in the Liberated churches find agreement with a significant sector of the Canadian Reformed Churches. There are increasing tendencies toward evangelicalism and liberalism in the reformed churches. Ignoring these things will not make them go away.

Pretending or implying that we have “unity in faith” with all the churches/federations in EF will not make it so. The CanRC have had limited success in retaining ministers who have joined the federation. Observe the difficulties that arise in the unity talks with the URCNA, a federation that subscribes to the same confessions and church order that the CanRC does. How then can we pretend that we are one with those who have a different confession and church polity? What position do CanRC ministers (for that matter CanRC churches) take in response to the Federal Vision and statements made about it at major assemblies of churches in EF with the CanRC?

We must differentiate between churches/federations with whom we do not

share a common confession and church order and those with whom we do. Perhaps the best step forward from our present dilemma is to investigate dividing our present relations into two categories: (1) Sister Churches and (2) Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

(1) Sister Churches being those that would join in federative unity should they be in the same geographical location. The present rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship would apply to such a relationship.

(2) Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship being be those that we have recognized as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, but who, as a result of historical development have developed or adopted different practices, polity and confessions. The rules for this relationship should be those that are presently in place but with the following emendation to rules 4 and 5.

- (4) The churches shall accept one another’s members as guests to the sacraments with travel attestations or certificates of good standing, but shall examine them with regard to confession and walk of life prior to admitting them as members of the church.
- (5) The churches may, by exception, open their pulpits for each other’s ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches. Ministers who are called from federations in Ecclesiastical Fellowship shall be admitted to the ministry only upon the successful completion of a classical peremptory exam with

concurring advice of delegates from Regional Synod.

Our own Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad alludes to such a division when it says, “We have a relationship with them – ecclesiastical fellowship – which consists of mutual recognition as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this relationship each federation can maintain its own identity and practices, as shaped by each federation’s history and culture. For these reasons the Committee will not be recommending that Synod Smithers mandate continued discussions re differences of confession and polity.” (Section 1.7, page 18 of the Report to Synod Smithers in dealing with the churches in Scotland) Here the committee admits that we have different identities and practices shaped by history and culture. Surely we ought not to admit members to our churches and ministers to our pulpits without examining them with regard to our confessions and creeds. We are not “sister churches” but rather churches seeking to live by the truth of Gods Word but who have come to different conclusions about how to do that. Until we sort that out, discuss the differences and come to conclusions about them we ought to stand on guard, just as the form for installation requires.

Such carefulness would also fall into line with Rule 1 of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. This rule reads: *The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations.*

In the history of discussions with other churches/church federations our synods have dealt in various ways with differences between our federation and others. In the process of time some synods have decided

that existing differences (or divergences) were no longer to be considered obstacles to unity as they could be discussed within the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF).

Rule 1 is the practical application of these historical developments. When the CRCA, in a number of its reports states that it has discussed the various differences that exist between ourselves and federations in EF, they consider the recognition of differences sufficient to say that their mandate is fulfilled. However, they have failed to apply Rule 1, especially as it has been alluded to by synods that indicated that the differences that do exist were not to be obstacles to recognizing such churches as true *but* to discuss the differences as between two true churches seeking the guidance of Scripture to clear up different understandings and practices.

Rule 1 specifically refers to the type of discussion that should take place between churches/church federations in EF. Issues of doctrine, polity, discipline and liturgy are to be the main topics of discussion. It is possible that one approach to an issue is Scriptural and another not. It is also conceivable that both approaches, though apparently different, are in essence the same and that both apply scripture correctly. In each case the truth of the matter must be brought out in discussion and must be disseminated among the believers (members in all federations involved) who are all affected by such decisions. These matters pertain to all of our members as they have all confessed their faith in the doctrine of Scripture as accepted and taught in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Articles and papers that are part of such discussions ought to be made available in the church press for the education and edification of the believers.

Let us not be afraid to face reality. Let us deal honestly with other federations and with our own members. It clearly is a Biblical command to work towards the goal of true unity based on a common confession in the truth of Scripture. However, while

that has not been attained let us not assume or pretend that we already have such a true unity.

PdB



To Our Readers:

Well, here we are again. It has been much too long since you have seen a new issue of our magazine and for that we apologize. We can not blame all of the delay on time constraints; we have also questioned the wisdom of continuing with our endeavour. However, we remain convinced of the need for articles that deal with issues that face the church and concerns that are held by members of it.

At present we plan to distribute our magazine by way of the internet. We hope that in each Can. Ref. congregation someone will take the initiative to print copies for those who do not have internet access or email capabilities. If any of you have suggestions and comments about the method of distribution or any other matters please email us at info@preta.ca. Of course, we also welcome written contributions from our readers, in fact we encourage that. So do not hesitate to send your contribution to the email address in the previous paragraph.

Anyone looking for articles published in the previous nine years of publication can find them on the world-wide web at: <http://spindleworks.com/rp/>.

The Editors

EXPLAINING WHAT WE CONFESS AND PRACTICE

Common Clichés and Popular Fallacies (part 10)

In the concluding paragraph of the previous article with the same title (1) we stated, quoting Dr. Runia, that “we encounter in the practice of *open* communion a ‘view’ of the church that ‘blurs out all lines of

demarcation’... It does not matter to which church you belong.” (2) In the practice of *open* communion everyone is admitted to the Lord’s Table, regardless of church affiliation or perhaps despite not being a

church member at all. However, as we have seen, in the practice of *restricted* communion we likewise encounter a “view” of the church that “blurs out lines of demarcation” and compromises Biblical principles of oversight in various *ways* and to various *degrees*. That is why we need to earnestly discuss with the OPC its prevalent practice of so-called “restricted communion” and the closely related issue known as “confessional membership.”

Synod Chatham 2004 in its considerations stated that “based on the Reformed confessions concerning the two keys of the kingdom, it remains crucial that the OPC and the CanRC can indeed agree that a general warning alone is not sufficient.” Based on a speech of G.I. Williamson to Synod Neerlandia 2001, Synod Chatham noted that there is an indication that “the OPC is striving to improve the manner in which it supervises the Lord’s Table.” (3) Furthermore, Synod observes that “now that we have Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with the OPC, there ought to be ample opportunity to continue discussing the matters of the supervision of the Lord’s Supper and confessional membership.”

CONTINUING DISCUSSIONS

The observation of Synod Chatham 2004 that the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship ought to provide *ample opportunity* to continue discussing the matters of the supervision of the Lord’s Supper and confessional membership is indeed plausible. However, for many church members the hope and expectation that there will be a resolution of the differences one way or another has long ago disappeared. Thirty years have passed since Synod Coaldale 1977 decided to recognize the OPC as a true Church and considered further discussion on divergences in

confession and church polity to be *desirable*. (4)

Since that time ten General Synods have been convened, numerous appeals and overtures dealing with the “divergences in confession and church polity” and other closely related matters have been debated at length at many of our ecclesiastical assemblies. Numerous articles about these particular issues have been published in various periodicals. Clearly there has been “ample opportunity” for discussion about the divergences. The seemingly endless discussion about these divergences was necessitated by the fact that there is no clear consensus among us as churches in the Canadian Reformed federation or as members of these churches. The ambiguous and at times completely contradictory decisions of our General Synods (5) give testimony to our own dividedness about our overtures to unity with other churches and church federations. And so the differences or divergences in confession and church polity remain on the agenda and the discussions continue.

Now, as previously noted, it is indeed possible that Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC will provide ample opportunity for additional discussion of the matters at hand. However, the motivation or impetus for further discussion and resolution of the divergences is all but gone. After all, in 1977 we declared the OPC to be a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in 2001 we entered into Ecclesiastical Fellowship. And we have said “acknowledging each other as true churches implies unity of faith”, and we added that “this does not necessarily imply complete agreement on every point of doctrine or practice.” (6)

AGREEING TO DISAGREE

Note well what is being said here. As churches we can *disagree* on certain points of doctrine and practice, on matters of “confession and church polity”, and still be one in faith. And consequently these differences on “certain points of doctrine and practice” and on “matters of confession and church polity” have been declared not to be impediment or obstacles to unity. And so we can continue to have interesting discussions, but in the final analysis it doesn’t really matter whether we agree or not, we can still lay claim to “unity of faith”. Simply put, we can agree to disagree. We can *disagree* on what we on the basis of Scripture and confession wholeheartedly believe and confess, and yet be one in faith. That faulty and pernicious premise reveals to us the underlying issue of our internal disagreement, namely “a view of the church that “blurs all lines of demarcation”. This “view” or concept of the church closely parallels what the Dutch theologian and statesman Dr. Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) taught and promoted, namely, the *pluriformity of the church*. The one, holy, catholic Church of Christ exists in *pluri* (meaning many) forms despite *obvious* differences in doctrine and practice.

In North America this theory of the *pluriformity of the church* is commonly known as “denominationalism”. It has also been identified as the “Westminster” view on the church (7) since “the first clear philosophy of denominations was articulated by the Independents (Congregationalists) or Dissenting Brethren of Westminster at the Westminster Assembly (1642-49)”. In his article *Denominations – Divided we Stand*, Bruce Shelley, church history professor at Denver Theological Seminary, describes how this theory came in to being. “Keenly aware of the dangers of ‘dividing the godly Protestant party’, the Dissenting Brethren of Westminster looked for some way to express

Christian unity even in *disagreement*. The result was a denominational theory of the church that was based on the following principles:

- First, considering the human inability always to see the truth clearly, differences of opinion about the outward form of the church
- Second, even though these differences do not involve fundamentals of the faith, they are not matters of indifference.
- Third, since no church has a final and full grasp of divine truth, the true church of Christ can never be fully represented by any single ecclesiastical structure.
- Finally, the mere fact of separation does not of itself constitute schism. It is possible to be divided at many points and still be united in Christ.” (8)

Bruce Shelly observes that this “denominational theory of the church” with its four attendant principles “occupies a *prominent* and *dominant* place in Anglo-Scottish-American Presbyterianism”.

A PERNICIOUS PREMISE

It is not possible in the context of this article to examine in great detail all four principles of the denominational theory of the church. Several articles on this denominational theory have already appeared in earlier issues of Reformed Polemics (9). Furthermore, the matters of “the pluriformity of the church”, “the distinction visible-invisible church”, and “more or less pure churches” have all been extensively dealt with in a previous article. (10) We will therefore restrict ourselves to restating a few relevant observations regarding the faulty premise that we can *disagree* on what we on the basis of Scripture and confession

wholeheartedly believe and confess, and yet be one in faith. For it is that faulty and pernicious premise that bring to light the underlying issue of our internal disagreement, namely “a view of the church that “blurs all lines of demarcation”. A view that unwittingly or by design “occupies a prominent and dominant place in “Anglo-Scottish-American Presbyterianism”, but also has its adherents and proponents among the members of various churches that lay claim to the name *Reformed*. Sadly, in this respect the Canadian Reformed Churches seem to be no exception.

DENOMINATIONS - DIVIDED WE STAND

We note that for the “Dissenting Brethren of Westminster” the impetus or motivation for the denominational theory of the church was to find “some way to express Christian *unity* even in disagreement.” And in looking for this “unity even in disagreement”, differences of opinion about the outward form of the church” are deemed “inevitable” because of “the human inability always to see the truth clearly.” So the truth is not always clear and cannot be *fully* known. Therefore each denomination may freely emphasise its own viewpoints, but may not deem its own doctrine to be fully the *whole* truth. The result of this line of reasoning is the introduction of the subjective and undefined term “fundamentals of the faith”. This faulty distinction between major and minor issues leads to and facilitates an expression of “Christian unity even in disagreement”. Truth becomes a matter of opinion. Relativism abounds. People are not *right* or *wrong*; they just have different perspectives. Consequently churches are viewed, not as *true* or *false*, but as *more or less* pure.

The basic contention of the denominationalist theory of the Church is that the Church is not to be identified in any exclusive sense with any particular institution. “Since no church has a final and full grasp of divine truth, the true church of Christ can never be fully represented by any single ecclesiastical structure” (third principle). “True Christianity *manifests* itself in a great variety of denominations. These various denominations may be *more or less* pure, but so long as they are evangelical, or appear to hold to a summarized version of Christianity, they are acceptable” (11). The title of Prof. Shelley’s article on denominationalism correctly describes the end result of the denominational theory of the church: “Divided We Stand” or “Christian unity even in disagreement”. Elsewhere denominationalism has been described with the oxymora “sectarian ecumenicity” and “unity in *disunity*” (12).

This so-called “Christian unity even in disagreement”, which is in fact nothing less than “unity in *disunity*”, is deemed necessary because “the true church of Christ can never be fully represented by any single ecclesiastical structure... since no church has a final and full grasp of divine truth”. This “unity in disunity” is sanctioned with the statement that “the mere fact of separation does not of itself constitute schism. It is possible to be divided at many points and still be united in Christ”. (fourth principle) This last principle of the denominational theory of the church is not dissimilar from the statement that “we can be sister-churches despite some serious divergences”. (13) The apparent similarity becomes more pronounced when we are told that these divergences “of a confessional (doctrinal) nature” include “the teaching about *more or less* pure churches”, and “the teaching about visible/invisible church; also

here the relation between church and the elect”.

THE PLURIFORMITY OF THE CHURCH

And so, in summary, we see in the denominational theory of the church an attempt at so-called “Christian unity even in disagreement” and in spite of “differences of opinion about the outward form of the church” (first principle). And we note a view of the church that is rooted in a pluriform way of thinking. The one, holy, catholic Church of Christ exists in *pluri* (meaning many) forms despite *obvious* differences in doctrine and practice. The local (visible) church is not *fully* the Church of Christ, but merely a “*manifestation*” of the one (invisible) Church of Christ. The reality (fact) of the existence of churches that are “more or less pure” is presented as the norm because “no church has a final and full grasp of divine truth”. Each denomination may freely emphasize its own viewpoints, but may not deem its own doctrine to be fully the *whole* truth, because the *whole* truth cannot be *fully* known. Such is the denominationalist and/or pluriform view of the church as drafted by the “Dissenting Brethren of Westminster”.

The close connection between this particular view of the church and admittance to the Lord’s Supper manifests itself in the practice of *open* and/or *restricted* communion. These practices facilitate the expression of “Christian unity even in disagreement” or “unity in *disunity*”. “Differences of opinion” about the outward form of the church are “inevitable” (principle one), consequently it doesn’t really matter precisely what someone believes, or to which “*more or less* pure church” he belongs. It is not even necessary to belong

to any Church at all. As long as he “appear to hold to a summarised version of Christianity”, or to “the fundamentals of faith” he is welcome to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

As so, as noted earlier, “the reasoning and practice in the OPC” regarding proper administration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper “is based on the premise that denominations are *more or less pure* and not *true or false*.” It is a reasoning and practice that is “based on a church pluriform way of thinking.” This denominationalist and/or pluriform “view” of the church cannot be squared with either Scripture or the Three Forms of Unity, and must therefore be rejected as unscriptural and less than Reformed. Accordingly we also reject the unscriptural practice of *open* and/or restricted communion because, as we have seen, they are “fatal to a proper understanding of the doctrine of the church” because they are the consequence of a view of the church that “blurs out all lines of demarcation”.

FURTHER DIALOGUE

The consideration of Synod Chatham that “the OPC is striving to improve the manner in which it supervises the Lord’s Table” is encouraging and provides impetus to continue our dialogue. In that dialogue we will indeed need to address, among others, our differences about the “matters of the supervision of the Lord’s Supper and confessional membership.” And we need to come to the recognition that those differences have their origin in a different understanding of the truth, an understanding not *within* but *outside* the strictures of The Three Forms of Unity, our adopted Confessions. We are dealing here with a different view or understanding of what Scripture teaches about the Church, a

different ecclesiology. Therefore we are obliged to continue our dialogue; for the sake of the truth, and for the sake of the unity that is based on a common confession of the truth of Scripture. What we are called to do is to *keep the Word*. We think here of Christ's high-priestly prayer for the unity of the Church: "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth... for their sake I consecrate

myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth." (John 17: 17-19). Any so-called unity that is not built on *that* truth is in fact "unity in *disunity*" or "unity even in disagreement", and as such nothing less than false ecumenism.

Ron Dykstra

- 1) *Explaining What we Confess and Practice – Common Clichés and Popular Fallacies (part 9)* Reformed Polemics, Oct 31/03, Volume 9, Number 5
- 2) *Is "Open Communion" Right*, Dr. Klaas Runia, Trowel and Sword, October 1982. First appeared in Trowel and Sword in 1959
- 3) Gen. Synod Chatham 2004, Article 86, Considerations 4.9, p. 81
- 4) Gen. Synod Coaldale 1977, Article 91, IV Considerations 2, p. 42
- 5) Note in particular the contradictory and mutually exclusive positions taken on the "divergences" (supervision of the Lord's Table) at General Synods Fergus 1998 and Neerlandia 2001.
- 6) Gen. Synod Neerlandia 2001, Article 45, Considerations 4.13, p. 48
- 7) *The Westminster View on the Church* – Reformed Polemics, Jan. 1/01, Volume 7, Number 8.
- 8) *Denominations – Divided We Stand*, Bruce Shelley, Christianity Today, Sept. 7/98.
- 9) See: *The Denominational Theory of the Church*, Reformed Polemics, Oct. 28/00, Volume 7, Number 4, and *The Westminster View on the Church*, Reformed Polemics, Jan. 1/01, Volume 7, Number 8.
- 10) See: *The Pluriformity of the Church*, Rev. J. Ludwig, Reformed Polemics, April 30/03, Volume 9, Number 2.
- 11) *Admitting Guests to the Lord's Supper: OPC vs Can/AmRC*, Rev. B. R. Hofford, Oct 1992.
- 12) *Denominationalism*, (part #1), Rev. Cl. Stam, Clarion, Sept 9/78.
- 13) *The Evaluation of Divergences (3)*, Rev. Cl Stam, Clarion Aug. 30/02.
- 14) *Explaining What We Confess and Practice (part 7)*, Reformed Polemics, July 30/03.

We hereby include part of the Press Release of Synod Schererville of the URCNA. The portion we have lifted from the relevant web site <http://www.covenant-urc.org/urcna/synod6pr3.html> deals with matters of interest to the churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the URCNA and in particular to the Canadian Reformed Churches who are seeking federative unity with the URCNA.

[Press Release of Synod Schererville – URCNA](#)

Thursday, 12 July 2007

PALOS HEIGHTS, IL – With their meeting time rapidly passing, delegates to Synod Schererville 2007 of the URCNA dug in to their work with vigor on Thursday.

Their attention ranged from addressing errors about the doctrine of justification, on the one hand, to synodical regulations and Web sites, on the other.

Significant matters addressed on Thursday are detailed below.

Justification and the Federal Vision

The URCNA joined a number of Reformed and Presbyterian federations in addressing a movement of growing concern known as the “Federal Vision.”

In doing so, Synod 2007 approved statements which:

- Affirmed “that the Scriptures and confessions ... teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, based upon the active and passive obedience of Christ alone.”
- Affirmed “that the Scriptures and confessions teach that faith is the sole instrument of our justification apart from all works.”
- Determined to “remind & encourage individuals and churches that, if there are office-bearers suspected of deviating from or obscuring the doctrine of salvation as summarized in our confessions, they are obligated to follow the procedure prescribed in Church Order Art. [29](#), [52](#), [55](#), [61](#), and [62](#) for addressing theological error.”

The Synod then adopted a statement comprising rejections of error, intended to serve as pastoral advice to the churches. That statement said:

Synod affirms that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone and that nothing that is taught under the rubric of covenant theology in our churches may contradict this fundamental doctrine. Therefore Synod rejects the errors of those:

1. who deny or modify the teaching that “God created man good and after His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness,” able to perform “the commandment of life” as the representative of mankind (HC 6, 9; BC 14);
2. who, in any way and for any reason, confuse the “commandment of life” given before the fall with the gospel announced after the fall (BC 14, 17, 18; HC 19, 21, 56, 60);
3. who confuse the ground and instrument of acceptance with God before the fall (obedience to the commandment of life) with the ground (Christ who kept the commandment of life) and instrument (faith in Christ) of acceptance with God after the fall;
4. who deny that Christ earned acceptance with God and that all His merits have been imputed to believers (BC 19, 20, 22, 26; HC 11-19, 21, 36-37, 60, 84; CD I.7, RE I.3, RE II.1);

5. who teach that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness (CD, I, V);
6. who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC 21, 60; BC 29);
7. who teach that Spirit-wrought sanctity, human works, or cooperation with grace is any part either of the ground of our righteousness before God or any part of faith, that is, the “instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness” (BC 22-24; HC 21, 60, 86);
8. who define faith, in the act of justification, as being anything more than “leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified” or “a certain knowledge” of and “a hearty trust” in Christ and His obedience and death for the elect (BC 23; HC 21);
9. who teach that there is a separate and final justification grounded partly upon righteousness or sanctity inherent in the Christian (HC 52; BC 37).

Finally, Synod 2007 appointed a study committee to examine the Federal Vision and similar teachings regarding the doctrine of justification. The committee was asked to bring a clear statement concerning this matter to the next synod.

Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Union

Synod also took steps to draw closer to several like-minded federations of churches in addressing the report and recommendations of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Union.

The most weighty step was a move to enter Ecclesiastical Fellowship, or Phase Two, with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The URCNA has been in Phase One, Corresponding Relations, with the OPC since 1997. That phase is intended to be one of exploration through correspondence and dialogue.

By agreeing to enter Phase Two with the OPC, the URC would formally recognize this denomination as a true church and would encourage closer relationships between the two church federations. Before this action becomes official, however, it will require ratification by a majority of the URC’s consistories.

Synod 2007 also asked its ecumenical committee begin dialogue with the Korean American Presbyterian Church and the Heritage Reformed Congregations. They also agreed to ratify the entrance of two denominations – the Free Reformed Churches of North America and the Heritage Reformed Congregations – into the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).

Song Book Committee Mandate

In answer to a pair of overtures, Synod on Thursday adopted a statement clarifying the mandate of its Song Book Committee.

Synod 1997 established the Song Book Committee with the task of producing a new song book for the URCNA. In light of increasingly close ties with the Canadian Reformed Churches, Synod 2001 determined that the Song Book Committee should work with its equivalent from the

CanRC. Since that time, there has been some debate concerning whether the committee was to produce only a joint URC-CanRC song book, or a URC song book developed in consultation with its Canadian sister church.

The measure adopted on Thursday answers the debate by calling the committee to work with and consult the CanRC committee, but to produce a new song book specifically for the URCNA. At the same time, Synod affirmed the URC's commitment also to continue dialoguing with the Canadian Reformed Churches regarding a song book.

Theological Education Committee

Clarification also was given to the Theological Education Committee.

This committee has been working with a Canadian Reformed Church committee in an attempt to develop agreement with the CanRC on how ministers are to be educated. To date, the committees have been at an impasse, with the CanRC committee maintaining that Scripture mandates at least one federationally-controlled seminary, while the URC committee maintained that it does not.

The CanRC's Synod Smithers 2007 recently removed that roadblock. While affirming their "strong preference" for at least one federationally-controlled seminary, Synod Smithers acknowledged that this is not a matter of principle, but one of application. Therefore, it declared that this matter should not impede movement toward unity between the URC and CanRC.

Synod Schererville 2007 delegates affirmed six points of agreement between the URC and CanRC committees and affirmed the URC committee's position that a federationally-controlled seminary is not Biblically mandated.

Proposed Joint Church Order

In another matter aimed at laying the groundwork for eventual unity between the United Reformed and Canadian Reformed federations, Synod 2007 received a proposed church order that could be used as the governmental basis for a joint federation in the future.

This Proposed Joint Church Order now will be distributed to the churches for study. The Proposed Joint Church Order Committee also will provide expositions of various parts of the proposed church order and will hold no more than eight regional conferences throughout the federation to discuss it.

Having reviewed the document, consistories will be free to submit concerns and suggestions to the committee, which was mandated to produce a revised copy – as well as a summary of communications from the churches – for Synod 2010.

Separation of Churches and Ministers

The current URC Church Order also received some fine-tuning on Thursday with the adoption of revised language for [Article 11](#).

This article governs the separation of ministers and churches when the minister has no call to serve another congregation and has not committed any offense worthy of discipline.

Although the principle of the current Article 11 remains in the revised article, the new language seeks to emphasize the weightiness of such an action. Even more significantly, it requires that the church and its minister seek reconciliation with the help of the church visitors and the classis before proceeding to a separation.

Because it is an amendment of the church order, this measure requires [ratification by two-thirds of the URC's consistories](#).

DECLINING

(From Opgemerkt, [e-mail column for the defence and application of the true faith], HP de Roos
Volume 2, number 136, 15 January, 2007. Translated and distributed by permission).

“Orthodox-reformed churches now, too, are struggling with declining interest in afternoon church services.”

I don't believe this first sentence of a press report on Page 2 of Nederlands Dagblad. People who are orthodox, that is conservative reformed (which in itself already is a pleonasm, because a reformed person by definition is orthodox), orthodox people obey each and every call of the church council, that is of Christ, to “diligently” attend the church services if they are at all able. They do not question this call and, to top it off, they go joyfully, too.

If then the liberated “church” of Amsterdam-Centrum is troubled by a declining interest in the afternoon services there must be a lack in faith, a lack in the good, reformed faith that moves mountains, that braves weather and winter and urges one on to church twice a Sunday (again, if he is not hindered through sickness, age, or any other legitimate factor).

The second notation to this sentence is this: Despite that decline in the church services, those people there in the liberated community of Amsterdam-Centrum must be convinced of their own reformed character. They call themselves orthodox, and it is said to be a church which, **“too”**, is faced with a declining attendance. I would think that this decline points to a slide into liberalism, rather than an adherence to orthodoxy. At any rate I would be concerned about our standing, rather than pride myself in this orthodoxy. Just to be careful!

There is more to say about this presumed orthodox community, because we must ask

for the reason of this declining church attendance. The newspaper says this about it:

There are various reasons for the meager attendance to the afternoon services – at the end of last year no more than thirty people. Telgenhof points to the fact that there are many youths and young families in Amsterdam-Centrum who chase up and down the country during the afternoon to visit family or friends. There is also a group that considers one service per Sunday enough.

Well, and that is orthodox-reformed? No, says the minister, is not good, but

“You can jump up and down, but that doesn't solve the problem. If you did that in times past you would get a visit from the minister to admonish you, but today that would only provoke a reaction like: OK, in that case we will go to the Christelijk-Gereformeerden. You see, we are just more postmodern here than in the rest of the Netherlands.”

More post-modern, and thus, far from reformed. There is no need to ask about such a person's orthodoxy. He has become an idol worshipper.

But the minister is going to do something about it. What will he do? Will he call for repentance because of the TWO-sidedness of God's covenant; because there is also the side of wrath, of destruction? No, he is going to adapt to the situation, to

accommodate church attendance: we are going to take it a bit easier after those difficult morning services:

“The teaching services are interactive sessions”, says Telgenhof, who has been the minister of the congregation in the capital city for the last six months. “We start with praise and worship in which we sing Psalms and Hymns and all kinds of other songs. After that we have the preaching dealing with a theme or with a teaching subject from the Catechism, and after that we have an interactive session.”

Someone asked if it was right to do this.

“There was a discussion about whether or not we can still call these services church services. The Church Order determines that “on the day of the Lord” the church council will call the people together for two church services, and that the congregation will hold fast to the order of service as approved by the General Synod. “The church council is of the opinion that these teaching services, while not in accordance with the letter, are in keeping with the spirit of the CO article”, says Telgenhof. “That did cause quite a stir, because people immediately thought we were doing away with the afternoon services, but that is not true. They are still church services, be it in a different form.”

The same church of Amsterdam has in times past spoken very differently. On January 3, 1915 her minister, Rev JC Sikkel started his sermon on Lord's Day 1 in this way:

We are allowed to make a start again with the explanation of and the meditation on our Catechism, and we are allowed to continue with this each and every Sunday, according to our Church Order, without omitting or changing one of them. We rejoice in the Lord that the Reformed Church of Amsterdam, too, perseveres in this, even with increasing appreciation, valuing it, seeking it, not wanting that we, or they, miss out even for one Sunday (taken from De Reformatie, 40, 24 April 1965, page 232).

This congregation cannot be excused. Against better knowledge they have turned away from the accepted regulation. They no longer appreciate, value, and seek it. Their own insight is more important to them. To say it in post-modern words: they seek their own reality. No God and no command, even of one of the major assemblies, can bother them. The spirit of the article: it is typically post-modern, indeed.

But to take away from what God has said and commanded is deadly dangerous. What applies to the last prophecy is ultimately applicable also to the whole of the Kingdom of God:

God will take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Revelations 22:19).

In that case they will eternally not be able to go to church.

Book Review

Reviewed by Roelof A. Janssen

K. Schilder, *Verzamelde Werken 1917-1919*; bezorgd door Drs. Willem van der Schee;
Uitgeverij De Vuurbaak Barneveld, 2004; Hardcover, 488 pages.

On March 23, 1992 the “Prof. Dr. K. Schilder Stichting” was established with the goal of publishing the collected works of Dr. Klaas Schilder (1890-1952). Renewed attention for the life and work of Dr. Schilder is needed because of the importance of his work in the areas of church, theology, politics, and society. A few years later a number of volumes were published, 1940-1941, 1942-1944, 1944-1945. Because many of the articles in the 1940-1941 volume were published in earlier publications of collected works¹ and *Beziet Bezit* (which contained all the articles he had written in *The Reformatie* during the Second World War) the present reviewer did not pay too much attention to these volumes. Things changed however when he recently received the 1917-1919 volume. Not only did he enjoy reading it within about two weeks but it also convinced him that it is very important to get the complete series published in English as soon as possible. However, this is a great work that requires a lot of help. I hope the review about this book will cause some volunteers to come forward to establish a somewhat informal (email) committee of translators and editors. Anyone who is willing to assist in this translation work is requested to please contact inhpubl@telusplanet.net.

Klaas Schilder is known in the English speaking world first of all because of his monumental three volume work on Christ in His Sufferings, which were translated and published in English for the first time in 1938-1940. Several reprints have followed. Because of its size (three volumes of about 500 pages each) and knowing the somewhat difficult style of Schilder many have been kept back from reading this acclaimed work. What a lot of people are not aware of however is that much of Schilder’s life was spent in polemics, mainly discussing controversial current issues in the press. Since he hardly ever wrote “filler articles” his articles are usually very captivating for the average (interested) reader.

The present book contains chiefly articles from the Reformed Church Bulletin of Vlaardingen. This bulletin was shared by both the A church (before 1892 a Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk with roots in the Secession of 1834) and the B church (before 1892 a Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk with roots in the Doleantie of 1886). By 1915 most local A and B churches had fully merged into one congregation, but not so in Vlaardingen. Because of Schilder’s Biblical understanding of the church he saw this situation as wrong. As a result he ended an article with the following paragraphs (p. 283):

“Of course, I can say a lot more; but it is not necessary and space does not allow it. Let one consider the matter seriously. It really hurts me that there are still people who come with the

¹ In Schilder’s lifetime some were published in *Om woord en kerk* (4 volumes) and after he died in *Verzamelde Werken*, *Schriftoverdenkingen* (Meditations, 3 volumes), *Preken* (Sermons, 3 volumes), and *De Kerk* (The Church, 3 volumes).

threat to *cross-over* to the Christelijk Gereformeerde schism church² and at the same time say that the consistory *does not have to come again to talk* with them! What then was their reason for doing profession of faith with us? Why did they *promise* to submit to the *admonition and discipline* of the Church, if they do not even have the willingness to allow the consistory to *say* what it thinks about the matter? Is that *honesty* to their profession? And if they perhaps are disturbed because of those unfriendly words “schism church” . . . well, I can’t help it. I have nothing against the Chr. Gereformeerden that I am not willing to forgive them. But causing a schism — that is what they did. We may only leave the existing church if it prevents us from preaching and maintaining God’s Word and when we have done our best to correct it. That debt of honour the Chr. Gereformeerden have never presented to us yet. To be critical from afar is easy; but reforming according to the law of God is something different.

The power of the world is organizing itself. The Antichrist is coming nearer. Who will now have the courage to profess before the face of God his intention to work along in crumbling, splintering, and destroying the church? If the church leans toward schism it is helping the revolution. And the one who laughs is *the devil*.”

It is tempting to select many more passages from the book for this review but you will have to read them yourself. I believe every minister who can read Dutch should obtain these books. He will find many passages worthwhile to mention in sermons, speeches, bulletins, etc. and should translate these, pass them on to others who cannot read Dutch, and to us, so that we can compile them all for a complete published work. Perhaps a selection of these articles can regularly be placed in *Reformed Polemics*. As an example I have translated one article which hopefully will be published in this issue as well. Schilder’s work is very important and has lasting value. To ignore it is to deprive oneself of much encouragement and wisdom.

² After the Union of 1892 some people of the Secession did not want to go along with the union and (re-) organized the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk which are sister churches to the Free Reformed Churches in North America.

K. Schilder

At the time Rev. K. Schilder wrote this article he was minister of the Reformed (*Gereformeerde*) Church at Vlaardingen, The Netherlands

Translated by Roelof A. Janssen
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Not Pressed On³

(For the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Rev. W. Sieders as minister of the Word)⁴

Yet I have not pressed on . . . Jeremiah 17:16a

The times are changing; and we change with it.⁵ Yet, what *stays the same* is the Word of our God.⁶ And that Word has not lied. It tells us that with the progression of centuries there will arise a power from below, there will arise a tsunami of hell against the Kingdom of God. And what has been foretold we see happening.

In our time there is less and less time for celebration and therefore it is not easy for anyone who believes the Word to celebrate. Especially for the Reformed minister of the Word an anniversary at this time — why should we hide it? — is a difficult matter. An Anniversary in 1918 is, *if we speak simply in human terms, torture*. In a hundred years it will be an even greater torture. For, indeed, the modern spirits may rejoice about a civilization which cheers us with their blessing. However, he who believes his Bible sees behind the seeming beauty of culture the dark power of the Beast. And that Beast gives its ‘mark’⁷ *also to those who were born in Christ’s Church*. Apostasy is on the increase everywhere. Who would see greater oppression in this than the minister of the Word? Do not forget, the business of the church is, humanly speaking, also *his* business. He stands on guard as herald of the Spirit and he has to fight with the Beast. Will he win? Will he keep his flock together? Ah, look around you. Come wherever you will; you see them go, in the open, or crawling secretly, to the camp of the enemy. That is *torture* for the servant of Jesus Christ. And if he then celebrates his anniversary in *this* oppressing time, then he encounters many of whom he has often said and still continues to tearfully say that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.⁸ Everyday he extended his hands *also* to a rebellious people.⁹ And now he would plead with his God, actually *press* his God, to stop the spirit of the time in its progress. He would press God not to allow that little book, in which those terrible things are mentioned, also those terrible things of the apostasy, *also* the terrible thing of the many whose

³ Schilder used the Dutch *Statenbijbel*. The whole verse, as will be published D.V. in the Dort Study Bible, reads: Yet I have not pressed on, more then *became* a shepherd following Thee. Nor have I desired the day of death, Thou knowest it; that which came from my lips, has been before Thy face.

⁴ From: *Gereformeerde Kerkbode van Vlaardingen*, no. 98 (Oct. 12, 1918). Published in K. Schilder, *Verzamelde Werken 1917-1919*; bezorgd door drs. Willem van der Schee; Uitgeverij De Vuurbaak Barneveld, 2004.

⁵ A Latin proverb of unknown origin: *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*.

⁶ See 1 Peter 1:25.

⁷ See Rev. 13:16f; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4.

⁸ See Phil. 3:18.

⁹ See Is. 65:2.

love would grow cold, to become so bitter in his stomach (Rev. 10:9, 11).¹⁰ Who would long for *bitterness* on the day of his sweet rejoicing? Is the preacher not also a man? Is he then never allowed to present the results of his work as a well-calculated number to God and man? May he than never rejoice in this iron, beastly, demonic time? O, gladly he would *forcefully* approach God's throne, gladly *press* God to grab whatever can still be grabbed and stop the apostasy; *press upon* God that He would change His decree and make His congregation a flowering garden, a strong fortress, an impregnable front . . .

Yet, "*do not press on,*" says the prophet Jeremiah. "Neither have I pressed on."

Jeremiah lived in a time that had much in common with our time. Rumours of war were not unheard off. There was unfaithfulness among the people of God. There was a siding with the world. There were so many who did not want to endure the strict zeal of Jeremiah. Under these circumstances he had foretold them the *judgment* and announced with it that this judgment would begin with the house of God, that the cup of God's anger would first be presented to the people, the city, which was called after His name (Jeremiah 25:28, 29; compare 49:12a; 1 Peter 4:17). And it had come as he had foretold: the catastrophes, the worries, the difficulties, and the *judgment*. Then the cowardly opponents of the prophet who had always stood in his way dared to say that he was a traitor to his country. In reality, they claimed, he didn't mind that God used the rod without mercy against the people. They thought that Jeremiah was hardly hiding his smirk and malicious pleasure that he had been right in his predictions of severe judgment.

And Jeremiah? The people were unable to read his heart. Therefore he laid his self-defence before *God*. "Lord," he cried, "Thou knowest it; that which has gone out of my mouth has been before Thy face. *Yet I have not pressed on with Thee.*" That is the language of the ambassador of God, who lays his words before God and dares to say that he did not act like Jonah. For Jonah indeed wanted God to change His decree. Jonah actually *desired* the day of destruction. Jeremiah did not. He *had to* prophecy. The Lord had spoken, who would then not prophecy?¹¹ *But he had left the result to God.*

Would God *allow* His people to perish? He knew what was right.

Would He save it and keep His people together? Great was His mercy!

Jeremiah passed the message on; and he did not want to take anything away from God's decree. He did not want to wrest something from God which was not included in the decree of the Eternal One. He did not want to impose *his own* wishes on God. God was allowed to do that which was good in *His eyes*. Do not press on, neither toward good nor toward evil.

¹⁰ The text for Rev. Schilder's first sermon in Vlaardingen.

¹¹ See Amos 3:8.

Do not press on: that is still the only secret of the *peace* of God's office bearer. *Do not press on*: only *in this way* can a servant of Christ *celebrate*, also celebrate in 1918, even without having seen results, even without displaying the trophies of his life's battle.

Yet press on with the *people*: we implore you: be reconciled!¹² Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade people to believe.¹³ Pressing on with the *people*, but not pressing on with God.

At least: no pressing *on* which would become *intruding*. *Abraham* did indeed press on with God when Sodom was threatened with brimstone and fire, "Lord, if there are fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty . . . *ten*" (Gen. 18). But when he was put to silence he kept quiet. *Moses* also pressed on with God, "Blot me out of Thy book" (Ex. 32:32), but when God refused him his request he kept quiet. Indeed, even *Jeremiah himself* had strongly pressed on with God, if it were possible, to change His evil decree into a decision for good. But when the Eternal One denied him the prayer for that people and forbade the *pressing on* (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11) then he kept quiet. Do not press on to that which goes too far in God's eyes: No *self-willed-ness*!

In 1918 we have among us a servant of the Word who celebrates.¹⁴ And we wish him the understanding of Jeremiah's secret. We cannot hope anything better for him. There is for the ambassador of Christ no greater self-affliction than that foolish, determined, pressing on with God. When he sees the fruit of his labour it is often so little. When he asks after the remembrance of his words it is often so very poor. When, at someone's sickbed, he looks in vain for the power of God's promises which he had passed on. And, especially today, when he, despite his exhortations, sees the great apostasy in the congregation of Christ, then he can become so bitter that there is no longer a place for grateful jubilation . . . *Until* the word of Jeremiah gives him peace: *to leave the outcome to God*. Do not ask for the hidden things. Do not be more merciful than God. But neither be more severe than the Righteous One.

So it is possible for someone to celebrate even in the year of blood¹⁵ and century of sin. And so peace arrives. Brand of Ibsen¹⁶ wanted that which Jeremiah did not want: to wrest the fruit from his God, to press on with God. But when the celebration came, there was no celebration for him. Hear him complaining,

And my parsonage becomes full
Everyone wants to greet me; . . .
Isn't that my name appearing in gold?

¹² See 2 Cor. 5:20.

¹³ See 2 Cor. 5:11.

¹⁴ Wicher Sierders (1845-1930), Minister of the Word in the (Chr.) Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands. He studied at the Theological School in Kampen and served Axel (1868), Herwijnen (1871), Enkhuizen (1873), and Vlaardingen (1880-1922). Rev. Sierders was ordained on Oct. 11, 1868. At the occasion of his 50th anniversary he was knighted as "Ridder in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau." He was an ordinary Reformed minister, whose strength laid in personal communication with the people.

¹⁵ The First World War had not ended yet.

¹⁶ See Henrik Ibsen, *Brand. A dramatic poem in five scenes*. Originally published in Norway in 1864. This translation via the Dutch is from the fifth scene.

One more hour and it will begin;
Everyone is only thinking of me by now,
My name is on the lips of everyone!
O, their song of praise cools my heart
As a current of ice it passes through.
Could . . . O could I only as a beast of prey
Hide my head in a den,
Cloth myself in obliviousness!

His day of celebration was no festive day, for he had one misfortune. He had wanted to *count*, to see, his fruit. And when later they chased him with stones into the night of loneliness, his life was broken. That is the end of him who *presses on* with God, of him who puts his hand to the plough and wants to count the fruit. Thus people cause disappointment and . . . so thus God!

Our celebrator will not likely be stoned anymore. But some day his successors will. In the future God's faithful servants will be lynched, torn apart, and treaded upon. They are going into the den like Jeremiah did: traitors! And yes, there will likely be some Ebed Melechs left but . . . they will not even have "old and worn rags" left to help (Jer. 38:11). The times are becoming frightening. A celebration becomes increasingly more difficult for a congregation as the worldly celebrations become stronger and more brutal.

But for the faithful in the latter days and for God's servants in our time there is only one means to have peace of soul on the day of remembrance: do not press on, do not press on, but hope in quietness for the redemption of the Lord. Preach the Word and leave the outcome to God.

And one day you will *see*! Then indeed it will be celebration, eternally and rich. KS