

Clarion



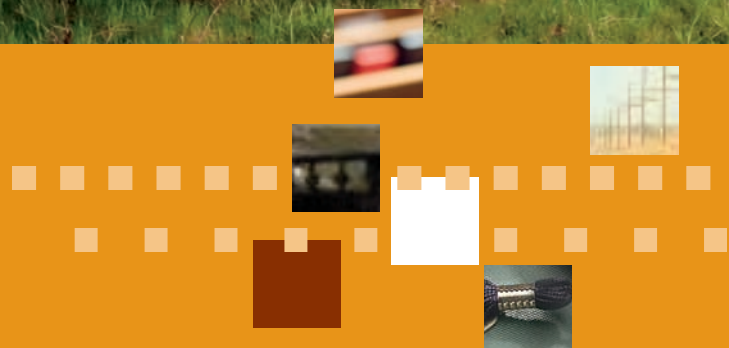
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
Volume 60, No. 7 • March 25, 2011



*A good tree
brings forth
much fruit*

Inside this Issue

- What are the Marks of Christians?
- Bruised Reeds and Smoldering Wicks





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What are the Marks of Christians?

The marks of the true church and the marks of Christians are deeply interwoven

A while back when I was writing about the marks of the true and false church I mentioned that I would like to write also about the marks of Christians. The Belgic Confession in Article 29 specifically mentions these marks.

The purpose of mentioning the marks of Christians is not to undermine the importance of emphasizing and preserving the marks of the true church. Sometimes we hear voices that go in this direction. Some say that it does not matter so much if the church you attend has all the marks, but whether the *members* show forth the marks of Christians. The marks of Christians would be more crucial than the marks of the church.

A good tree brings forth much fruit

This is a false dilemma. The marks of the true church and the marks of Christians are deeply interwoven. Proper church membership *does* matter: how can I show forth the marks of Christians if these are not proclaimed to me faithfully in and upheld by the true church?

How are the marks connected?

Let me briefly show you how the marks of Christians *connect* with the marks of the true church.

The first mark of the true church is the pure preaching of the gospel. The first mark of Christians is "they believe in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour." Faith is the response to the preaching of the gospel. Faith is required for justification.

The second mark of the true church is the proper administration of the sacraments. These sacraments

are for believers who "flee from sin and pursue righteousness." The sacraments require sanctification, the second mark of the Christian.

The third mark of the church is that it "exercises church discipline in correcting and punishing sins." The third mark of Christians is that they "love the true God and their neighbour, without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works." This means that believers must discipline themselves and also accept the discipline of the church. This is important on the way to glorification. The marks of the church and of Christians are strongly connected.

It may well be that there are still (many) sincere, believing Christians in false churches. That's not the point. That is never the point. These Christians are called to be enjoined with other true Christians in the faithful church. That is therefore also not the point. *The point in Article 29 is that the true church will lead the members to show forth the marks of Christians.* A good tree brings forth much fruit. So it is with the church of Christ, his vineyard that he cherishes. To follow our Saviour's analogy: God wants grapes by the bucket-full. "This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:8).

This also means that if there is no fruit and if Christians do not show forth the marks of the Christian there is something drastically wrong. No church may allow unrepentant sinners to share in the fellowship of God's church.

Is it hard to recognize a Christian?

Is it hard to recognize a Christian? Not really. Christians are those who believe in Christ as their only and complete Saviour. They base themselves not on men but on Christ alone. Christians show their



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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Subscriptions: clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

Advertisements: clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

Website: www.premierpublishing.ca

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

faith by walking in the way of God’s commandments. Christians seek their strength in the grace of the Holy Spirit.

When you hear the fancy term “the marks of Christians,” you might be led to think that these are outstanding features. In a sense they are: the marks give evidence that someone is truly a Christian. The marks stand out as norm of excellence and identify a Christian. But the marks of the Christians are also simple and down-to-earth requirements: faith, holiness, and perseverance.

What’s Inside

In Issue 7’s editorial Rev. Klaas Stam asks: What are the marks of Christians? And how is this connected to the marks of the true church? We are also warned as true Christians and the true church to recognize our weaknesses and limitations. Rev. Stam writes: “Being a Christian does not mean always having the upper hand over sin and Satan. Being a member of a true church does not automatically guarantee salvation.”

Along the same theme of Article 29 of the Belgic Confession (“The Marks of the True and the False Church”), our issue also includes “The Road between Acquiescence and Secession” is a translation of work written by Prof. Dr. Jochem Douma in The Netherlands. Prof. Douma has concluded that there is decline in the GKV, which is concerning.

In the Ecumena column Rev. John van Popta presents us with statistics related to CanRC ministers, congregations, and vacancies. Are we headed for a time of increased vacancies and a need for more pastors?

Our issue includes regular columns Treasures New and Old, Education Matters, and Ray of Sunshine. We also have for our readers two book reviews by Dr. Wes Bredenhof. You will also find a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

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	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$48.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$67.00	\$ 90.00
International	\$95.00	\$145.00

*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra. GST/HST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$17.00 per column inch

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) for our publishing activities.

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Someone might say, "But I can't properly show forth these marks, for I am weak and sinful." The height is too lofty. Well, that is true, more than you know. It is for me also a daily disappointment that I do not come close to the marks the Lord has given me. I am unable even to gauge the depths of my sin and misery. Forsooth I am condemnable in God's sight! But my inability does not do damage to the marks themselves.

The marks of the Christian remain a standard and motivate our striving to reach higher and do better. *Citius, Altius, Fortius. As much as I can be discouraged in myself, the more I am encouraged in Christ.* That is the purpose of the marks of Christians. We need to progress in showing forth the marks of the Christian. Sinful behaviour can perhaps be explained, but it can never be excused.

Are you a hypocrite?

We should also note that Article 29 of the Belgic Confession mentions sects and hypocrites. We ought to distinguish between Christ's church and the many sects that exist in this world. A sect is an imitation-church. A hypocrite is an imitation Christian, a paint-saint. Not everything or everyone that covers itself with the name of Christ really deserves this name. You have to walk the talk.

This means that when presenting ourselves as true Christians and the church as true church we understand our weaknesses and limitations. There should be no *perfectionism* in the church. Any feeling or striving of superiority is wrong.

Of Christians it is also said, "Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life." Being a Christian does not mean always having the upper hand over sin and Satan. Being a member of a true church does not automatically guarantee salvation. Nothing is automatic. We are to *crucify our flesh*. It sounds rather painful to me. I'd like to elaborate more on that element another time. Being a Christian is something that we have to work on throughout our life. A Christian who is sincerely struggling to lead a holy life is still a Christian and should be encouraged to look to Christ for strength and help. After all, it is his name that we bear.





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MATTHEW 13:52

Bruised Reeds and Smoldering Wicks

"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."
Isaiah 42:3a

Some people believe that the Bible divides into two parts. The Old Testament is all about law and a people unable to keep that law. The New Testament is all about the gospel and God's love. So, they say, we should focus on the New Testament and the good news found there. This is a wrong way of looking at the Bible.

In the Heidelberg Catechism we confess that God first revealed the holy gospel in Paradise. Indeed, God first revealed the good news in Genesis 3:15, the so-called mother promise. The Catechism goes on to say that God had this same gospel proclaimed by the patriarchs and the prophets. To be sure, the Old Testament does tell us about the law of God. But so does the New Testament. And the New Testament does tell us about the gospel. But so does the Old Testament. Indeed, we find the good news of Christ proclaimed throughout the pages before Matthew.

One of those places is Isaiah 42:3. Isaiah is well-known for his prophecies about Christ. Think of what he says in Isaiah 7 about Immanuel, "God with us." Think of Isaiah 9 and him who will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Or Isaiah 53 and the one who would bear the sins of many and make intercession for the transgressors.

Then think of Isaiah 42. God is speaking about his servant, his chosen one. This is the one on whom he will put his Holy Spirit, and who

will judge the nations with justice. His kingdom will not be about pomp and the external trappings of majesty. Instead, this servant will appear in an unexpected way, with humility and meekness: "He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets" (v 2). Then we find these words about the servant:

"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." In these words too, we find the gospel proclaimed by one of God's prophets.

During the days of Isaiah, God's people were sent to exile in Babylon. They were laid low by God and chastised because of their sins. God is speaking to these people in the first place and he says that his servant will not break a bruised reed. A reed that is bruised and battered would be easily broken. The picture is of something fragile and weak. That's how God's people were in the days of Isaiah: at the breaking point.

God also compares them to the smoldering wick of a candle or a lamp. The wick was made out of flax, which is why older translations said, "Smoking flax he will not quench." If this wick was smoking, it was near the end of its useful life. The smoldering wick was ready to be put out and replaced with a new one. Again, this was a picture of the church of Isaiah's day: apparently past the best-before date.

The gospel promise is that the servant of God will not break the bruised reed. He will not snuff out

the smoldering wick. He doesn't break those who are at the breaking point. He doesn't throw out those who are past the best-before date. In saying that, God is not saying that his servant is inactive. Rather, he will do the opposite of breaking and snuffing out. In his mercy, he will bind up that which is broken. In his mercy, he will restore those who are just about done for. He will deal gently and kindly with those who come to him in humility.

From Matthew 12, we know these words were fulfilled by our Saviour. Jesus is the servant who will not break the bruised reed or snuff out the smoldering wick. Our Lord Jesus came to be bruised and broken for us. At Golgotha, the wick of his life was snuffed out in our place. He came to heal the broken-hearted, to bind up that which is at the breaking point. He has come with his Spirit to blow on our wicks, to give new vigour to the flame of our life.

We recognize ourselves as broken people. Our lives are messy. Our hearts are fickle. Our eyes are easily distracted. Our faith is weak. But here we find the promise of the gospel that gives comfort and encouragement. We have a Saviour who is mindful of our weakness and infirmity, a God who knows we are only dust. We have the promise that he will not turn us away or crush us. We need only turn to him in faith and believe his sure promises. We only have to acknowledge our need and throw ourselves at his mercy through Jesus Christ.



Prof. Dr. Jochem Douma was
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Theological University in Kampen,
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1979-1997

The Road between Acquiescence and Secession

Note: On his website www.jochemdouma.nl Professor Dr. J. Douma writes extensively about the situation in the GKV (Reformed Churches - liberated), concluding that developments in these churches are not healthy; they are in decline. He explains this statement in several chapters.

No acquiescence

The reliability of Scriptures

A lack of clarity has arisen about the position the Theological University of Kampen takes with regard to the reliability of Scriptures. When several pastors protested against the Scripture-critical PhD thesis of Dr. S. Paas after he was appointed as lecturer, it was not appreciated (to put it mildly). Twenty years earlier, such an appointment would never have been made in Kampen. But time and points of view have changed. Still, in this matter the position should have been the same: what is critical of Scripture should be recognized and rejected as such, says Douma. The Theological University promised to explain its position with regard to the thesis of Dr. Paas. Up till now, no such explanation has been given.

In addition, the PhD thesis of Dr. K. van Bekkum in 2010 about several passages of the book of Joshua caused confusion in more than one way. Two of Kampen's lecturers even wrote publicly about it. Over against van Bekkum, they maintained that the victory in Joshua 10 actually took place on a historic day, on which the Lord heard Joshua's concrete prayer to let the sun and moon stand still (Josh 10:12 and further). Ever since the Liberation the University has upheld, with a strong consensus, the reliability of Scripture. It is impossible to say that van Bekkum's dissertation supports this position. This is not a matter of developing understanding; it is a break with the past.

The church services

Douma writes the following about the church services. The decline in attendance of the afternoon Sunday services is not just a phenomenon here and there, but has become symptomatic within the GKV as a whole. The love to gather as a community and worship the Lord together increasingly makes way for an individualistic attitude, in which church members decide for themselves how to spend the Sunday.

This individualism is accompanied by the desire for a different approach to filling in church services. There is a demand for greater emotional satisfaction. Personal experience receives a greater emphasis in the preaching, at the expense of the explanation of God's Word. Together with this, the singing of psalms often loses ground to evangelical songs of praise and musical exuberance, with vigorous accompaniment, wins out over restraint.

A strong "evangelical" influence is felt in the desire for a shared joy and for songs tailored to awaken and experience this. Often, the confession of sins and the proclamation of forgiveness, which in Reformed churches customarily accompanies the reading of the Law of the Lord, are omitted. This is not in keeping with the two attitudes that should go hand in hand in preaching, prayer, and singing: true sorrow for our sins and heartfelt joy in God through Jesus Christ (cf Sunday 33 HC). Even prayer is sometimes given a different place than was usual among us. Where a sense of the depth of our guilt and sin is missing, prayer sometimes shifts its focus towards healing and exorcism, with the unspoken assumption that this kind of prayer is the real thing, "otherwise you don't pray correctly." The fact that hundreds of young people have left the Reformed Churches (liberated) because they long for what they can find in

evangelical circles and not with us, is not only proof of a crisis in their lives. It also points to a spiritual malaise within the GKV itself. Knowledge of the Reformed religion, with its emphasis on covenant and baptism, and on the certainty of faith in the promises of God, has declined.

This importation of evangelical influences into Reformed church services has often been pointed out, says Douma. For example, Professor W. Nieboer rejected a certain evangelical trend, which he described as follows: "With Jesus in your heart, you're happy inside and your troubles melt away. Only then will God's promises say something to you. People support each other by singing happy songs, often with lots of repetition. Contact with other 'born-again'

Knowledge of the Reformed religion has declined

believers serves as a means of mutual exhortation leading to certainty and joy." Nieboer notes that through this evangelical influence, biblical foundations such as the covenant, God's promises and the church, while still given lip-service, in reality lose their significance. With regard to "healing," Nieboer wrote: "You should not be depressed, even illness (mental or not) does not really belong to your new life. . . . In the end your certainty is based on your own well-being, your inner good feeling. That feeling is translated into and experienced as the work of the Spirit and woe to you if you lose that feeling. You are obliged to feel happy and rich, and obliged to fire up your own buoyant cheerfulness."

Ethical developments

Douma goes on to point to ethical developments. How are the churches addressing sex before marriage and homosexual lifestyles? Both are controversial topics within the church. The pressure exerted by the world, and unfortunately also by many within the church, makes it difficult to take a stand and to uphold what belongs to following Christ. Obviously, following Christ cannot be limited to these situations, Douma says, but they have become test cases for our lifestyle: are we accommodating ourselves to the world,

or do we truly want to follow Christ? The website about homosexuality, jointly hosted by the GKV and The Netherlands Reformed Churches (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken), cannot possibly serve as a guide for homosexuals, consistories, or others within the churches, because of the conflicting views it presents on the topic, says Douma.

Douma believes that the clear proclamation of the Word, which is not afraid to be specific, is needed to instruct the members of the church. We must examine the will of God by studying Scripture, and by praying and discussing. The strong influence that the national Reformed press and Reformed church publications used to have is greatly weakened, because they are no longer able and/or willing to lead with conviction.

Ecumenical developments

Douma then discusses some ecumenical developments. The fact that some within the GKV have expressed support for the National Synod of Dordrecht of December 2010 is ominous: the GKV are at risk of choosing a totally different road than they followed before on ecumenical relations. This synod aims to have the churches in The Netherlands give a unanimous testimony to the Dutch people. A Credo is being developed, agreed to by all participating churches, whether they are more orthodox or more liberal. If the GKV were to follow this path, they would appear to be expressing unity with liberal churches, and with churches that no longer resist liberalism themselves. According to Douma, the Reformed character of our churches is at stake. Only a clear "no" from the churches will serve to prevent this break with our past.

Douma regrets that the path towards unity with churches that cannot be denied the name "Reformed" is progressing so slowly. But here too it is important to uphold the necessity of a shared foundation (the Three Forms of Unity). All participating churches must take that foundation seriously.

In recent years a number of so-called "missionary congregations" have been established. These churches claim independence from their "mother congregations" and position themselves accordingly. For instance, in regard to membership of those who reject infant baptism.

Church News

WORSHIP SERVICES

With gratitude, **Grand Valley Canadian Reformed Church** expects to have its worship services in the newly added auditorium starting March 20, 2011. Times and address are as noted in the Yearbook.

Douma believes that his concerns are not an expression of fear. How is it possible, he asks, that a strongly ecumenically-minded book *Wij Kiezen voor Eenheid (We Choose for Unity)*, finds so much acclaim amongst us? It is clear from the acclaim for the Synod of Dort, the formation of critical missionary congregations and the publication of such a book, that the defense of church boundaries on the basis of Reformed doctrine will be even further weakened than is presently the case. Douma quotes one of the ministers who collaborated in *Wij Kiezen voor Eenheid*. This preacher wrote: "The columns are gone and the walls fall away. . . . Generally speaking, young people no longer identify with being Reformed. . . . thinking in distinctives is a thing of the past."

No secession

Despite these worrying developments in the GKV, Prof. Douma does not want to separate. He wants to walk a path between acquiescence in the present situation and secession from the churches. In the church members who have left, he discerns a radicalism and a sectarian view of the church. And their assertion that the GKV are preaching a false

*We must examine the will of God
by studying Scripture, and by
praying and discussing*

doctrine in relation to the fourth commandment is an untruth that cannot stand the test of Scripture. Douma wants to keep fighting with others inside a church that is falling into decline, but is not false.

There is decline, but that ought not to lead to secession. Douma writes: "Those who believe that they must leave the GKV must first demonstrate that these churches have lost the marks of the true church, or are in the process of losing them. Let us test that, using the criteria that are found in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, the three marks of the church: (1) the authority of God's Word is violated; (2) the sacraments are not administered as Christ commanded; (3) those who live holy lives according to God's Word are persecuted.

"To begin with: *the pure preaching of the gospel*. It isn't hard to see that some of the sermons we hear fall short in content, lack depth, and sometimes do not rise above the level of a simple story. But does that lead us to conclude that *generally speaking* the gospel is no longer purely preached in the GKV? I could not possibly substantiate such an accusation with clear evidence. When it comes to *Scripture criticism*, I think I have shown that our churches – in this case specifically the training provided at Kampen – are certainly not immune. However, more is required than pointing to a small number of dubious PhD theses. Far more important than these is how a synod responds when objections are lodged against these studies. Will these objections be dismissed on procedural grounds (and that is often the easiest approach), or will our synods still be willing to respond with substantive answers to concerns that arise within the churches?

"Regarding the second mark of the church, *the pure administration of the sacraments*, I see no cause for concern. Such concern would be present if doubts arose about the legitimacy or necessity of *infant baptism*, and if the churches were permitted to 'dedicate' children to the Lord instead of baptizing them. It cannot be denied that such doubts have crept in among members of the church. But as long as consistories do not give in to such doubts, there are no grounds for reproach on this point.

"Regarding the *exercise of discipline*: weakening of faith will inevitably lead to weakening of discipline. The wicked will go their way; the good will suffer because of that. The less firmly office-bearers stand in their conviction, the more accommodating they will be in their response towards things that – in the common view – can no longer be held back. But here too it is not proper for me to condemn where the evidence is not so clear and so widespread that it can justifiably be applied to the GKV as a whole.

"The two go together: The (liberated) Reformed Churches are true churches of Jesus Christ, but they are definitely showing signs of decline. That is why I am at the same time thankful and concerned."





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Ecumena

Empty Pulpits

For several decades, various church magazines in the broader Christian world have predicted that with the retirement of the baby-boomers there would be many empty pulpits in the various denominations in North America. Some very large church communities, which have more than ten thousand congregations, are reporting a thousand more empty pulpits than a decade ago. Though many of these churches had thought that by permitting women's ordination they would stem the tide of "vacant" pulpits, this did not prove to be so. (I use the word "vacant" in the popular way: defined as a church without a fulltime preacher/pastor.) Also, there has been a trend to entering full time ministry in various Christian churches as a second or even third career. However, many of these new clergy are not interested in working in small rural churches. Many who choose to enter the ministry later in life take positions in larger urban centers where they can work in multi-pastor churches. They also gravitate to the cities because they often need to take their spouses' careers into consideration. This leaves the many small rural churches vacant.

So far, however, the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have not had this problem.¹ "Vacancy rates" in the pulpit have not been too high. Twenty-five years ago, there were five vacancies (in Canada; I don't have Australian data for that far back) in the forty-two pulpits and mission posts in the two churches. Fifteen years later, there were four vacancies in Canada and one in Australia, and yet there were twenty more churches. On average, together the two federations have instituted about one new congregation every year for the past twenty-five years (twenty-nine since 1986).

Today there are eighty-four positions in our federations for ordained ministers: exactly double the number twenty-five years ago. Add to that number the five professorships at the seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton,

and we have nearly ninety positions for ordained men, but only sixty-three ministers, ten missionaries, and four professors.

These numbers reveal a remarkable trend. Not only are there twice the number of pulpits, we also have twice the number of missionaries. Fully one seventh (fifteen percent) of our preachers are missionaries! They are working abroad in foreign lands, as well as in our own country. These are good trends, demonstrating vibrant, healthy, growing, and missions-aware communities, both here and in Australia.

However, the data also show a serious threat to our church life in our federations. Whereas twenty-five years ago there were five vacancies, a number that remained stable for the next fifteen years, the trend is towards more and more empty pulpits. Some have said that we were heading to a time of "surplus ministers" in our federations. But the demographics tell us different. Rather, it will be difficult to fill all the pulpits in our churches in the coming years.

Of the sixty-three active ministers in our churches, twelve will turn sixty-five in the next five years. (These are the first of the baby boom retirees.) That is nearly twenty percent of our preachers! As we noted above, historically we have added one new pulpit per year for the past twenty-five years. If that trend continues, we will have five new pulpit placements by 2016. However, there are now twelve vacancies (counting churches actively calling a second man, and the need for a fifth professor at CRTS).

If we assume that most men will retire at around sixty-five, in order to fill the pulpits in our churches we need to ordain (or find) at least twenty-eight men in the next five years. Six more ministers will turn sixty-five in the following half-decade. And if the trend to new churches continues, five more new pulpits will open up. This means we will need thirty-five to forty new preachers of the gospel in the next decade!

Reviewing the last decade of the alumni of CRTS, we can learn that only twenty of thirty graduates were ordained to the ministry. Though the enrollment at CRTS has been significantly higher this past decade than in previous years, we are not keeping up. We will need to ordain twice as many men in the next decade than we have in the last decade. Enrollment figures at CRTS at present show that there will be perhaps fifteen graduates in the next five years. That number, however, is not keeping pace with the number of potential retirees and newly opened pulpit placements.

It takes ten years to prepare a young man for the ministry. Churches, consistories, and families need to identify young men with gifts for the pastorate already at high school age, groom them to study

the humanities, prayerfully coach them through a bachelors degree, support and encourage them through seminary. If we fail to do this, our story will be similar to many other church communities around us. There will be many congregations with no full time pastors.

Pray the Lord of the harvest send out workers; the harvest is plentiful. May there be many workers!

¹ I have combined the data concerning these two federations in this article, since our ministers are (mostly) educated at CRTS in Hamilton, and students who graduate may often just as well accept a call in one federation as the other, regardless of their "home" country.

C





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Professional Reflection

Teachers' realities, like those of many others, are full of new developments, challenges, and perspectives, which they must consider and assess, and for which they may need to adapt. Evolving task-expectations encompass their mind, their heart, and their strength, and it is inevitable that soul-searching, reflection, and transformation are an integral part of their life. In secular literature, such reflection is seen as a necessity. Reformed teachers also know they are called to serve and love God with their whole heart, mind, soul, and strength and to be renewed spiritually every day – and we also expect that element of spiritual growth in our teachers. Considering what this entails in practice, this article details three broad areas for a teachers' reflection: the domains of their task, elements of good professional development, and characteristics of Reformed education.

Four domains

If teachers are to reflect on God's calling for the nitty-gritty of their daily task, it helps to have some way of organizing their responsibilities. In that regard, work done at Dufferin Christian School in Carman was adopted and adapted by Ontario's Professional Development Committee (PDC) and included as one of the schedules in the Personnel Manual of the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies. This schedule groups teachers' responsibilities into the four domains of Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professionalism. It is not the ultimate description of teacher responsibilities, but provides a good coverage. Each domain also implies good points for professional reflection.

Just what is included in each of these domains? *Planning and Instruction* considers the foundations of Reformed education, knowledge of students, pedagogy, setting goals, choosing content and resources, providing coherent instruction, and assessment. This domain is perhaps the most up-front

responsibility of teachers, and the four characteristics of Reformed education (discussed below) have been most explicitly integrated in this area. The *Classroom Environment* domain identifies aspects of a caring and safe environment, a culture for learning, classroom management, student behaviour, and the organization of space. The domain of *Instruction* includes clear and accurate communication, questioning and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning, providing feedback, and flexibility. Finally, the domain of *Professionalism* is about elements of a reflective teaching practice, maintaining accurate records, communicating with families, contributing to the school and its supporting community, demonstrating professional growth and development, and professional demeanor within and outside the school.

In short, each domain identifies relevant aspects of a teachers' daily task. Each aspect within the four domains can become a focus for professional and spiritual growth.

Seven characteristics

Much thought has been given to the best ways in which to facilitate professional growth in adult learners. For experts from accountants to zoo-keepers, this has become a must, and is often labeled under the umbrella term of Professional Development (PD). For education, this has been recently explored in education magazines like *Phi Delta Kappa* and *Educational Leadership*, particularly with a view to developing an understanding of what constitutes "good PD." The National Staff Development Committee, now known as *Learning Forward*, addresses the topic at www.learningforward.org/advancing/whypdmatters.cfm. As it has spiritual connotations, teachers of covenant children need good PD no less than others, as they seek to improve their practice in service to God and their neighbour. The aspects identified here help evaluate what kind of good PD activities also constitute

good stewardship of time and money invested and will help providers of such courses to put together worthy programs.

In the February, 2009, PD-issue of *Educational Leadership*, Linda Darling-Hammond and Nicole Richardson took clues from the so-called Professional Learning Communities (PLC) model. PLC is a highly interactive model for developing effective practices, featuring assessment, reflection, and collegial collaboration and dialogue. It generally works well in small schools with low staffing complexity, common planning time, teacher empowerment, supportive leadership, mutual trust and respect, a climate that encourages risk-taking, and a joint commitment to improve student learning. Our schools fit that bill in several (but not all) ways, and the Ontario Principals Association has adopted its four characteristics of quality teacher learning strategies: it is effective, sustained, job-embedded, and collaborative.

Professional development needs to be sustained, job-embedded, collegial, interactive, integrative, practical, and results oriented

Robin Fogarty and Brian Pete identified seven elements of good PD in the December 2009/Jan 2010 issue of *Phi Delta Kappa*. They distilled these from a large amount of research on how teachers learn best and improve classroom learning the most, and called it the "Syllabus of Seven." The Syllabus of Seven holds that PD needs to be sustained, job-embedded, collegial, interactive, integrative, practical, and results oriented. First, PD needs to be *Sustained*. One cannot limit PD to a day or a year, and then assume to be done forever after; a track of PD once started needs follow-up. PD is best when it is *Job-embedded*, when it is there when the teacher needs it: To learn a new methodology two years before it gets implemented is not very helpful. Third, it is more effective if PD is *Collegial*, as when done in partnership with others. Effective PD is also *Interactive*, requiring more than just the teacher's ears' involvement. Fifth, it should be *Integrative*, encouraging teachers to implement what they learned in ways that work for them. PD also ought to be *Practical*, and connect to what teachers can actually use. Finally, good PD is *Results-oriented*: it leads to improved classroom learning, and shows up in improved test results. As with the four PLC characteristics, the Syllabus of Seven gives pointers for good stewardship and

program-development our principals and boards are interested in.

For its new PD model, the Professional Development Committee (PDC) of the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies (LCRSS) in Ontario will focus on the more comprehensive Syllabus of Seven. For all involved in education, it is good to give moral and financial support for worthy PD activities with such characteristics. Mindful of Jan Amos Comenius' (1592-1670) words that *the eager teacher is like a miner who trembles with excitement when he discovers a rich vein of ore*, teachers will be enthused about increased emphasis on quality and stimulating PD opportunities that feed their reflection and help them in serving their Master. The last item of the Syllabus of Seven betrays its secular bias, in which improved classroom learning becomes the end goal. The next section in this article points to a higher goal to pursue.

Four markers

Apart from specific reference to the character and needs of Reformed education, there is much in the two approaches to PD identified above that is equally true for all teachers, public and Christian alike. However, for a Reformed teacher who sees his or her task as part of the office of prophet, priest and king, there is a profound underlying reason for pursuing PD. Reformed teachers seek to grow in the nitty-gritty of their task and calling, they are interested in the most effective ways of acquiring such growth, and they also need to do so with the proper perspective on Reformed education. It is for the articulation of just that perspective that Ontario schools have identified Four Markers of Reformed education. I briefly summarize those four markers here.

Reformed education is *Covenantal*, because it is based on the covenant of grace, in which God includes the children of believers, and instructs the community to tell the next generation of his words and works. The students in the classrooms of our schools are covenant children, who belong to the LORD, and must be taught his ways. When they stumble along the way, just like their teachers, they may be called to repentance, and also be assured of and comforted with God's continued favour in Christ. This lays an immensely rich basis for the teachers' daily work – so much so, that Calvin did not hesitate to speak of teaching as an *office*. Just like their work has meaning only because of Christ, so the students' work does as well.

Reformed education is also *Confessional*. Our teachers have the privilege to speak freely and abundantly about God's words and works, confessing before their students what he has said, done, still does, and will do. They may (and must!) witness daily of their

triune God and how we know him (Art 2, BC), how he cares for us, how he redeems and sanctifies us, and how he directs us in our tasks. In humility, teachers may model a response of humility and gratitude for the deliverance they have in Christ – and lead their students to do the same. It is good for them to reflect on this, as it sets a standard for the integrity and quality of their work before God.

For a Reformed teacher who sees his or her task as part of the office of prophet, priest and king, there is a profound underlying reason for pursuing professional development

More controversially, Reformed education was characterized as *Antithetical*. This notion may be better represented as *Acknowledging the Antithesis* which God set in Genesis 3:15, when he put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. As long as this earth remains, there will be the struggle between good and evil; and our children, who, just like their parents and their teachers are sinful by nature, do not escape that. There is good reason for us to pray after every baptism that this child “may live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, king, and High Priest, Jesus Christ, and valiantly fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion.” Reformed education recognizes that this battle is ongoing, and helps equip children for this battle. It is good for teachers to reflect on this, as they are confronted with it daily, and must plead for God’s mercy in Christ for themselves as well as for their students.

Finally, Reformed education depends on *Unity of Purpose between Home, Church, and School*. Our schools have received many blessings over the years, but one enduring blessing is the strength of this very unity of purpose. Where the home and the church are united by God’s covenant of grace, where both confess that their help is in the Name of the LORD who made heaven and earth, and where both fight the same spiritual battle, and where the covenant community supports the parents of covenant children for the purpose of raising them in the fear of the LORD, we have a three-fold cord that is not easily broken. Blessed is the community where this is maintained. It is good for teachers to reflect on this, as it helps them to humbly accept their role as one of service within the community, and at the same time as an exhilarating calling to be an integral part of raising the next generation of God’s children.

Conclusion

Before, during and after the practical daily tasks of teaching, lesson preparation, and assessment and evaluation, teachers take time to reflect on their practice and perspective – and to act on that reflection. This pertains to their daily work, but also to big-picture perspective matters that are like umbrellas over all education, and at the same time need to be woven into all subject areas. It also relates to the choices they make for courses, workshops, and seminars to attend. Doing so, they grow in how well they do the task the LORD places before them, as prophets, priests, and kings. It is good for our communities to support such professional growth – and the blessings will follow it.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers’ Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us.



Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College
HAMILTON, ON

ADMISSIONS SEPTEMBER 2011

The Board of Covenant College invites applications from prospective students for the 2011-2012 academic year.

Admission Requirements:

For the 1 - year Diploma of Education Program:
a suitable university degree

For the 3 - year Diploma of Teaching Program:
a grade 12 diploma with university entrance equivalence.

Prospective candidates are invited to contact the College for more information and/or to obtain an enrolment package.

Students are encouraged to apply before March 31, 2011. Those who plan to seek admission in the year 2012-2013 are also encouraged to contact the College as soon as possible.

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Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College

Location: 410 Crerar Drive, Hamilton, Ontario
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E-mail: covenant@covenantteacherscollege.com
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Hamilton, ON L9B 2Y5

Ray of Sunshine

Corinne Gelms and
Patricia Gelms

I Will Trust

I will trust in You, O Lord
When trials come, I'll trust Your Word.
I will not doubt nor question You,
Because I know Your Word is true.
No matter how difficult things may be,
I will press on and trust in Thee.
I will rejoice and give You praise
My voice to You, I will raise.

I will trust in You, O King,
With my whole heart, my everything.
The times when I begin to doubt,
I'll lift my eyes to You and shout. . .
"It's You my God, who carries me through,
No matter what I'll trust in You!
No matter what my eyes may see,
I'll walk by faith and trust in Thee!"

I will trust in You, O God.
In Your footsteps I will trod.
Doesn't matter where they lead,
I will follow faithfully.
Through the valleys, over the hills,
In darkened times, I'll trust You still.
Through all the trials, whatever they may be,
In everything. . . I will trust in Thee!

Birthdays in April

- 2 **DEREK KOK** will be 41
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 23 **ARLENE DEWIT** will be 50
31126 Kingfisher Drive
Abbotsford, BC V2T 5K4
- 29 **BRYCE BERENDS** will be 36
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

We wish to express our congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday this month. Indeed, another new year, in which we may have to face many various trials. Yet, we know that in all things we can trust that God is good! He is our God and Father; whom we can place our dependence and trust in! Praise be to him alone, who so exceedingly loved us, and so gave his life for us wretched sinners. May we each day anew, trust in his good ways, and know that he does all things for our good. May we give him all the glory and honour due to his Name! Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

A note to all parents and caregivers

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of please let us know as soon as possible.

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms
8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0
Phone: 905-957-0380
Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



Wes Bredenhof



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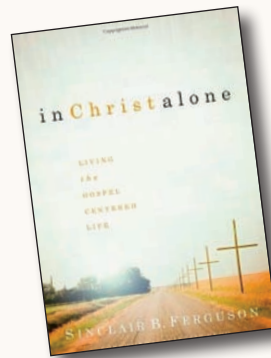
***In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel-Centered Life, Sinclair B. Ferguson,*
Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007**

Additional Information: Hardcover, 243 pages, \$19.00

I don't set out to review every single book I read. Some books are review copies and there is an expectation that I will write a review (though I don't always). Some are popular books that need a critical look. Other books I pick up for my own benefit. I start reading and then become convinced that this book needs to be read by as many people as possible. *In Christ Alone* is one of those books.

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson is the author of many worthwhile books. He serves as the senior minister of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina, a congregation affiliated with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Ferguson is also a professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

This book is a collection of fifty small chapters originally written for a couple of magazines. The chapters cover a wide range of topics and subjects relating to the gospel and the Christian life. They are all well-grounded in expositions of the Word of God. They're also very much directed towards personal application. Most importantly, the book lives up to its title, directing its readers to the all-sufficient Saviour. It also instructs readers on how to live as Christians united to this great Redeemer.



In Christ Alone could be profitably used in a few different ways. I used it as Sunday devotional reading. The chapters are short enough (most are 2-3 pages) that they could be used for devotions by couples who no longer have young kids at home. Or you could use it for your personal benefit on a daily basis. However you use it, this is not a book to rush through. You need to slow down and savour each chapter as it directs you to the Word of God and to our great Saviour.

As a pastor, I would be pleased if all my congregation members were to buy this little book and read it carefully. I'm confident that it would pay rich dividends in terms of spiritual growth. I'm always on the look out for faithful and helpful devotional literature. The Puritans are among my favourites. There are many contemporary authors who carry on in the line of the Puritans, authors like Jerry Bridges and R. C. Sproul. Sinclair Ferguson is also in their growing number. Theologically sound and pastorally written, *In Christ Alone* has been a great blessing to me and I think it will be for you too.



reviewed by Wes Bredenhof

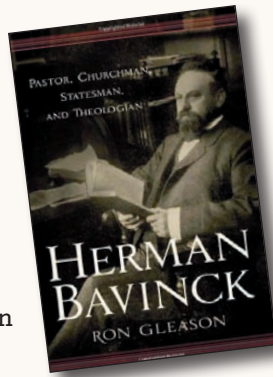
***Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian, Ron Gleason,*
Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010**

Additional Information: Paperback, 511 pages, \$29.99

Over the last decade we've seen a surge of interest in the great Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). With the translation of his monumental four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, the English-speaking Reformed world is finally coming to recognize the

valuable contributions of Bavinck to theology. His influence upon men like Louis Berkhof and Cornelius Van Til was legendary, but now the evidence is readily available to everyone. The only thing missing has been a book-length biography of this giant. We've had some biographical essays in various books and journals, but nothing to compare with what has been available in Dutch. Ron Gleason's volume has therefore been much anticipated.

Gleason himself has a unique biography that qualifies him for writing this work. He is an American, but his theological training includes time spent at the



Free University in Amsterdam. He served as a pastor in a Liberated (*Vrijgemaakt*) Reformed Church in The Netherlands. His proficiency in Dutch allowed him access to both primary and secondary sources for the research of this biography. Canadian Reformed readers may remember Dr. Gleason for his years spent pastoring the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church in Toronto, Ontario. Currently he serves as the pastor of the Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Yorba Linda, California.

It's not my intent to rehearse Bavinck's biography here in this review. It will suffice for me to say that Gleason covers the full breadth of Bavinck's years. He surveys his family background, his upbringing, his theological education, his marriage and family life, his first and only pastorate, his years teaching at the seminary in Kampen, his time at the Free University in Amsterdam, his role in various church disputes, and his political involvement. There's a lot of detail and the story is generally well-told. A couple of highlights: Bavinck visited Toronto in 1892. Gleason reports on Bavinck's impressions of what was then known as "Toronto the Good": "The Puritanical principle dominates there visibly and clearly" (148). Later in life, Bavinck made another trip to North America and this included a brief visit with U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt (361).

We often read biographies not only to give us a sense of who a person was, but also to understand the issues of days gone by. Sometimes the issues are similar to ones we face today. In the discussions regarding a merger of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches, one of the big and (to this date) unresolved issues has been theological education. Should a united church federation have its own seminary or should this be left to outside institutions? Can we do both? Before and after the union of the Secession (*Afscheiding*) and Doleantie churches in 1892, Herman Bavinck also dealt with this issue. He taught at the federational seminary in Kampen for many years. But yet he also had many

friends and contacts within the Free University in Amsterdam. Later, with matters still unresolved, he went to teach there. These were thorny issues then and they remain so. Bavinck's biography provides a cautionary tale about what happens when church unions are forced without resolving real differences.

There is nothing like Gleason's book in English. For that reason alone, it needs to be in the hands of pastors, aspiring pastors, scholars, elders, and interested lay-people. However, not only will people with a theological bent benefit, but also those with an interest in politics. Towards the end of his life, Bavinck served as a politician. He was elected to a position in the Dutch government and gave careful thought to the application of Christian principles to the political realm.

Unfortunately, the book does have some problems. There are numerous typos and formatting errors. The footnotes (especially the biographical ones) are sometimes repetitive, as is the text. Sometimes the book suffers from a lack of clarity. As an example in chapter 16, Gleason deals with the question of whether Bavinck changed theologically later in life. Initially, he says that Bavinck didn't change (399). But then three pages later, the answer becomes "yes and no" (402). A sharp editor would have caught this. Basically the problems in this book boil down to poor editing. My hope is that a second edition will someday resolve these infelicities and make a good book even better.

Despite those foibles, I enjoyed this biography. Gleason's writing is lively and there are often humorous moments. Most importantly, he loves Bavinck and it shows. The book concludes with several appendices including summaries of two sermons by Jan Bavinck (Herman's father) and a summary of Herman Bavinck's inaugural address when he began his career at Kampen. I'm glad to see that English-speaking readers can finally get the full story of this imposing and multi-faceted figure in our Reformed church history. C

