

Clarion



THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
Volume 60, No. 10 • May 6, 2011

*“When God makes something new,
the old is not discarded
but perfected”*



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- A Small Beginning





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Slippery Slope?

This is a matter about which a difference of opinion can exist

Synod Burlington (2010) decided that whether the female communicant members of the congregation can participate in the election of office bearers is a matter of local regulation which is to be decided by the consistory with the deacons (*Acts 2010*, Art. 176.4). This means that the issue now ends up in the local congregations for discussion and eventual decision.

It is not my intention to deal with all the ins and outs of this decision, but simply to highlight some aspects, in particular the argument that once you allow the ladies to vote, the next thing will be female elders. In other words, this synod decision has placed the church on a slippery slope. This argument has considerable appeal, and I sympathize with those making it, especially considering the ongoing discussions in our Dutch sister churches about the possibility of women in office. The argument being made is that Holland started with women voting and now there's talk about women elders and ministers. In view of this Dutch development, we in Canada can therefore best forbid women to vote in elections for office bearers lest the door be opened to them becoming elders and ministers. While seemingly appealing to logic, does this argument really hold water? Is this the slippery slope that we should be concerned about? Let's consider some key elements.

The synod decision

Synod dealt with a majority and a minority report on the issue from the deputies appointed by Synod Smithers (2007). The reports cover similar ground, but the conclusions and final recommendations are quite different. A critical point of disagreement is whether voting is a matter of exercising authority or whether it is part of a process by which God calls men to ecclesiastical office. To put it in my own words: is a church a democracy or is the vote advisory, simply stating a preference, leaving the final decision to the consistory with the deacons? The latter is surely the case and that is the position the synod rightly adopted. The fact that a consistory can bypass the election

process and simply appoint someone to the office underlines this reality (Church Order, Art. 3).

In both the Old and New Testament, whenever the choosing of office bearers is an issue, the people or the congregation as a whole is referred to. For example, Moses asked the people to choose the leaders he would set over them (Deut 1:1, 13). In the New Testament, the context shows that the entire group of believers was involved in choosing Matthias by lot (Acts 1:14-16, 23-26) and in selecting the seven to take care of the needy (Acts 6:2-6). In both of these instances the whole group of Christians present was addressed as "brothers" (Acts 1:15-16; 6:2-3). However, this does not mean that the women were excluded. The context shows they were included. Furthermore, the apostles directed their letters to the "brothers," but that also included the women members of the church (e.g. Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Pet 1:10; 1 John 3:13). Other passages also show that the term "brothers" can include women (Matt 25:40; Heb 2:12, 17 and also, e.g., Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 5:11; Eph 6:23; Rev 12:10). One can think in this connection of the analogous modern expression, "you guys," for a group including both men and women. In addition, the churches chose a brother to accompany Paul and Titus (2 Cor 8:19). The *Didache*, or *Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles*, probably a first or early second century document, instructed the churches to elect for themselves office bearers worthy of the Lord (*Didache* 15.1). Again, it is not specifically limited to men.

Now because gender is not stipulated, one could argue that there is a certain ambiguity and this lies at the root of the protracted discussion on this issue in the Reformed churches and also in our circles over many years. However, if it is clear that if participating in the process of calling someone to the office is not an exercising of authority and if both communicant men and women belong to the congregation, then is it not responsible to conclude that they can participate in all the steps leading to ordination, not just in taking part in the nomination process and approbation (a critically important step!), but also in the election? Our Church

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

Subscription Rates for 2011

	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

Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 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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Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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Order and Confession of Faith speak respectively of the congregation and the church in this respect and does that not include the women? (See Church Order, Art. 3; Belgic Confession, Art. 31). Also the Forms for Ordination ask the one to be ordained whether he feels that “God himself, through his congregation, has called you” to the office.

Given the fact that you can neither conclusively prove nor disprove that Scripture demands or forbids that women participate in the election process, Synod wisely decided to leave it in the freedom of the churches.

Objections

As indicated, a common argument against allowing women to vote in the church is that we begin a process that will lead to the ordination of female office bearers. This objection is however only valid if participating in the election process is considered an exercising of authority in the church. We have seen that this is not the case. Synod however anticipated this concern and

What’s Inside

The issue of women’s voting plays a central role in Issue 10. Dr. Van Dam addresses the argument of the “slippery slope.” If we as federation allow women to partake in the election of office bearers, are we growing closer to allowing women to become office bearers? We also include two letters to the editor on this topic, as well as responses to both.

Dr. Wes Bredenhof continues his three-part series on The Church and Mission, this time focusing on the role of the local congregation in mission.

We also include an article by Rev. Jack Moesker; he discusses the new heaven and earth, and what we understand will happen to creation when the Lord returns.

Frank Ezinga, an advisor to the Book of Praise committee, has written an article regarding several changes found in the new hymn section. It gives historical context of why certain changes were made as well as practical suggestions for how to implement the changes in our congregational singing.

Two interesting book reviews are in this issue. Rev. Karlo Janssen has reviewed and recommended a family Bible Story book, *The Mighty Acts of God*. Dr. Wes Bredenhof writes a very favourable review about *Meeting Jesus at the Feast*. Issue 10 also includes the regular column Treasures New and Old, as well as an Information Release from the CanRC Bible Translation Committee.

Laura Veenendaal

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clearly affirmed “that based on 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, and as stipulated in Article 3 CO, only male communicant members can be called to the special offices of minister, elder, and deacon” (Art. 176.4.2).

Is this the slippery slope that we should be concerned about?

Another objection is that this is another indication of the growing influence of feminism. However, this objection is not convincing if we recall that already back in 1875, the esteemed Kampen New Testament professor Lucas Lindeboom pleaded for the inclusion of women in the election process. And this was even before women were granted the right to vote in the Dutch national elections (1917). He was convinced by the biblical data on this point (*De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*, [1875], 20). The famous dogmatician, Herman Bavinck, saw no reason to condemn women voting (*De vrouw in de hedendaagse maatschappij*, [1918], 150-152). These stalwart Reformed men from a century or more ago, and more could be mentioned, could hardly be accused of feminism or trying to put the church on a slippery slope.

The slippery slope

So, maybe we're not on a slippery slope after all. But when is there a slope that becomes slippery? When the churches consciously or unconsciously are determined to make Scripture say what the current culture demands. This approach is obvious when the plain meaning of the Bible is no longer accepted as authoritative but reinterpreted to suit the perceived needs of the moment. That is something we must be vigilant about, also in discussions like this.

Developments in The Netherlands are worrisome in this respect. From the current report to Synod Harderwijk 2011 from the deputies of our sister churches for unity talks with The Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC), it is clear that the matter of female ministers and elders was not even discussed, contrary to their mandate. It should have been, for The Netherlands Reformed Churches have opened the offices to women. Because pulpit exchanges take place locally between the NRC and our sister churches, there will be a temptation for some to allow a female minister on one of the pulpits of our sister churches. The periodical, *De Reformatie*, in a joint issue with *Opbouw* (from the NRC), has already published an article by

a female minister from these churches (October 29, 2010). Such publication can only help give a sense of legitimacy to the idea of women in office. These sort of developments and the discussions that take place in the Forum section of the website of our Dutch sister churches can be interpreted as indicating a building momentum to women in office.

But, if, and may the Lord forbid it, our Dutch sister churches go for women in office, it will not be because of what Scripture says, but in spite of what Scripture says. It is noteworthy that a scholarly study has determined that when three major Dutch churches opened the offices to women, the Bible played only a marginal role in the decision making. (K.K. Lim, *Het Spoor van de vrouw in het ambt* [2001], 288). Admitting women to the authoritative offices in the church can only be done contrary to and in defiance of the clear teaching of Scripture. For that reason, for example, the Christian Reformed Church was expelled from the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) in 2001 because it decided to ordain female elders and ministers.

Closing reflections

The issue of women voting in the election of office bearers is in a completely different category from women being ordained as office bearers. Scripture gives no explicit guidance about the voting issue and theologians have therefore given different opinions. Synod could therefore in good conscience leave the matter up to local regulation. Our Scottish sister churches have had women voting for over a hundred years and the Canadian Reformed Churches have never lodged official objections to this. The same goes for our relationship with the United Reformed Churches of which almost all also allow women to vote.

With Synod's decision, each congregation is free to make up its own mind on whether women can participate in voting or not. It is important that as the issue is discussed locally that these discussions not be hijacked by vitriolic rhetoric which claims that we are now on a slippery slope and descending into error and possible heresy. This is a matter about which a difference of opinion can exist. One implication of this situation is that if a consistory makes a decision with which one is not satisfied, whether the decision be for or against allowing the women to vote, one should acquiesce in the decision made and not stir up needless trouble. In the grand scheme of things this is a relatively minor matter. It should not be blown out of proportion and made into a divisive issue in our midst.





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MATTHEW 13:52

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Philippians 2:5

A Small Beginning

His body was poised like a tightened spring: knees bent slightly, hips set, back leaning slightly forward, right arm folded, and wrist cocked. He was locked in the shooter's pose, eyeing the net intensely. But as my two-and-a-half-year-old son sprung through the shooting motion, the ball arced through the air six feet short of the net, barely managing a bounce before rolling unceremoniously into the hedge beside our driveway. It was a small beginning – a failure – but a beginning nonetheless. He had learned the fundamentals by watching his dad; he would need a lot of maturing before that ball got to the hoop.

My son's errant basketball shot illustrates something of the comparison that Paul brings forward as he urges the Philippians to humble obedience. In fact, my comparison relates to Paul's comparison in much the same way as my son's shot relates to my own.

In Philippians 2:1-4, Paul urges the Philippians to be humble in the way they relate to each other. In 2:12, Paul urges them to be obedient in the way they relate to God. In the verses between he points the Philippians, and we ourselves, to the One who put together profound humility and radical obedience to God, Jesus Christ. Says Paul: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (v. 5).

Jesus' attitude was first of all characterized by humility. But you cannot understand the depths of Christ's humility until you understand the heights of his glory.

He was "in very nature God" (v. 6). The ESV translates "in the form of God." We should understand this phrase to speak of the manifestation or outward expression of God's being. Consider that God reveals his "form" as his glory. For example, when Moses asks to see God, he asks to see his glory. When God fills the temple, it is his glory that does so. Now consider what the author of Hebrews writes in 1:3, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." Being co-equal with the Father from eternity, Jesus Christ shared in and expressed the preeminent glory, majesty, and splendour of God.

However, even though he had every right and entitlement to this exalted position of glory, Jesus did not consider it something to be grasped or used to his own advantage. Jesus' humility expressed itself in his desire to see the Father glorified, a goal he still pursues (v. 11). Thus Jesus left the very heights of divine glory and majesty.


He did so in the first place by becoming a man, "taking the very nature of servant" (v. 7). Jesus states in Matthew 20:28, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." This is a dramatic reversal for the Son of God, but his humiliation continues much further.

Jesus' second step of humiliation is stated succinctly, "[He] humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (v. 8). Paul does not need to mention how degrading this is because his audience would have known. For

the Jew it was the very curse of God; for the Greek and Roman it was the most cruel and torturous form of punishment known. This was how far the humility and obedience of Jesus Christ extended: to the point of bearing the curse of God and the scorn of men in order to save sinners.

This same humble attitude of the Lord Jesus is to form the attitude of the Philippians and the attitude of all who live out their salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus' incredible example of love instructs us on the humility that we must possess, which is a humility that does not seek glory for ourselves, but which serves others and glorifies God. When this humility is worked out in life, it results in radical obedience, the kind of obedience displayed in the death of our Lord.

True humility results in true obedience. Godly obedience is never without that humble impulse. Humility without obedience is pretentious and phony. It lacks integrity and is ultimately self-serving. Obedience without humility is proud and legalistic. But humility and obedience together are the breeding ground for true spiritual unity and peace in the church of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' example of these is far beyond the comparison of my basketball shot to my son's. Yet as we look to Jesus Christ, we too make a small but significant beginning toward a life of humble obedience – confident that though our efforts will fall far short, his obedience on our behalf was perfectly effective. 



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Your Church and Mission: What, How, Why (Part 2 of 3)

Revised text of a presentation originally prepared for the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church in February 2007

In part 1, we looked at the biblical contours of mission and arrived at this definition: "Mission is the official sending of the church to go and make disciples by preaching and witnessing to the good news of Jesus Christ in all nations through the power of the Holy Spirit."

I now want to further comment briefly on three elements of this definition.

First, mission is the official sending of *the church*. Jesus Christ sent out his apostles, and we understand from elsewhere in Scripture that those apostles stood as representatives of the entire church. We can also see that in Matthew 28 when the Lord spoke of his presence "to the very end of the age." Those words mean that Christ's presence outlasted the lives of the apostles. Consequently, mission belongs with the church. Through the apostles, the church has been sent out by Jesus Christ.

Second, there is an *official* task tied into this Great Commission. In other words, it is closely connected to office. In our Reformed churches, there are special office bearers who are sent out to be missionary ministers. With their verbal preaching and witnessing, they are ambassadors and heralds of Jesus Christ. They are standing in for Christ. When unbelievers accept them, they are accepting Christ. When unbelievers reject them, they are rejecting Christ.

However, and this is the third point, that is not to say that believers who are not office bearers cannot be regarded as missionaries under certain conditions. We confess in Lord's Day 12 that all believers have a general office which includes being a prophet, and that means confessing the name of Christ. All believers can

and must witness to the good news of their Saviour! This is what we see happening in Acts 8:4. There the believers were scattered everywhere, spreading the good news of the word (literally: "evangelizing the word"). However, when it comes to what we call mission, we should keep things tied as closely as possible to the church. Thus, working under the call and supervision of a church, unordained believers can also legitimately claim the title of missionary.

Mission and evangelism?

That brings us to briefly consider the question of whether there is any difference between mission and evangelism. Traditionally, many Reformed mission scholars have maintained such a distinction. One such scholar said that evangelism has to do with communicating the Christian faith in Western society, while mission has to do with communicating the gospel in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean.¹

*All believers can and must witness
to the good news of
their Saviour!*

This distinction is certainly not based on any scriptural teaching; it's just purely practical. However, with the advent of globalization, this formulation has lost any usefulness. The peoples and cultures of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean are now found in the West. In similar fashion, what used to be called Western society is now more and more distant from the Christian influences which formerly made it unique. Therefore, it is no longer viable to formulate a distinction between mission and evangelism based on the place where the gospel is being communicated. If

we understand evangelism as the communication of the gospel (the evangel), then evangelism is what the church has been sent to do: "preaching and witnessing to the good news of Jesus Christ." In other words, the mission of the church is evangelism.

The distinction between mission and evangelism is not grounded in Scripture. The Bible makes no distinction between gospel outreach done in Jerusalem to Jews by Jews and gospel outreach done in Athens to Greeks by Jews. It is all one and the same gospel outreach. However, for practical purposes, a distinction could possibly be argued on the basis of office. Mission is concerned with the preaching and teaching of the gospel – this is normally done by those who are ordained to a preaching and teaching office. Evangelism is concerned with the gospel-outreach of the general membership of a local congregation. Yet, there clearly remains an area of overlap between these two areas and that makes it difficult to insist on a rigid separation or distinction.

The role of the local congregation in mission

Now we come to a consideration of the role of the local congregation in mission. We already noted that mission is the responsibility of the church. When we say that, we don't mean that it is the responsibility of a federation of churches or of some broadly conceived "church." Rather, it is the responsibility of local congregations. Each church has received the Great Commission from Christ and the church as a whole and the individual members have to carefully consider what they are doing with that commission.

As we do this, there are three possibilities. We read of two of those possibilities in the beginning of Acts 13. There we read about the church at Antioch. In that church there were prophets and teachers. Through these people, God revealed that he wanted Barnabas and Saul to be sent out as missionaries. This was not the first time Saul and Barnabas had been sent. Saul (Paul) was sent out by the church at Jerusalem to Tarsus in Acts 9, though this may have been more of a measure to save his life than to have him preach the gospel. In Acts 11, the church at Jerusalem sent out Barnabas to Antioch. Acts 13 simply continues the pattern of a local church sending out men to be missionaries.

Can you think of what the two possibilities are there in that chapter? We can be senders. We can be those who stay behind and send out men into the great

harvest of our Lord wherever that might be. We can be those who support these men and encourage them with prayer and through other means. To clarify, this does not mean that every single local church has to be a sending church in the sense that we understand it in our Canadian Reformed churches. When we say "senders," that includes those we would call "supporters."

The second possibility is that we can be goers. We can be those sent out into the harvest near or far. We can be missionaries. Here a word of caution needs to be spoken. There is a popular idea floating about that all Christians are missionaries. Though it is well-intentioned, this is not a helpful notion. There are at least three reasons why. First of all, the Great Commission was not given to individual Christians, but to the church. The idea that all Christians are missionaries is built on Western individualism and not on a church-centred theology of mission. Second, we see this reflected not only in the connection of official preaching with the Great Commission, but also in the mention of baptism. The administration of the sacraments belongs to the church, not to individuals. Finally, and in a more practical vein, there are some serious concerns about what has been called the amateurization of mission in the last two decades. Especially because of short-term missions, many believers think that anyone can be a missionary and training is irrelevant and unnecessary.

We can be senders, goers, or disobedient

The result is that many of the significant problems faced by Christian mission around the globe are not being solved or are not even being recognized as problems. For these reasons, it is best that goers, wherever possible, not only be ordained men under the supervision of a local church, but also that they be well trained – even more so than the regular ministers in our federation.

So, the two possibilities given in Acts 13 are that we can be either senders or goers. However, there is a third possibility. This can only be a possibility if you are not a Christian. That possibility is to do nothing. To be disobedient. Few of us might go out for the sake of the gospel; those of us who do not must send and support

Church News

New Church Instituted: West Guelph

A new Canadian Reformed Church was started for the West side of Guelph with approximately 170 members coming out of the Emmanuel Church. Four elders and two deacons were ordained on March 27. On April 3 the first worship services were held in the gym at Cornerstone Christian School (108 Forest Street). Sunday services are at the Cornerstone School, 10:00 AM and 3:00 PM.

New Worship Location – Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church, London, Ontario

By God's grace and providence, the Council of the London Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church wish to announce that we are moving to a new place of worship, starting on May 1, 2011.

Our new church building will be located at 266 High Street in London. Our worship times will be staying the same, and more information of our move, including a map, can be found on our website at www.londoncanrc.org.

such people who do and we must do so in a manner worthy of God. Listen to the words of John the Apostle in 3 John 5-8:

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans.

We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

In this passage, John is writing to Gaius and he mentions here men who were missionaries. To do well, Gaius and his fellow believers were "to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God." The implication is that to do otherwise is to act in a way that has nothing to do with God. In other words, we can be senders, goers, or disobedient. But the third possibility is not a Christian option. We see that in what John writes about a man named Diotrephes,

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

In what follows, John describes this as evil behaviour. Therefore, disobedience to the Great Commission cannot be an option for any congregation of Jesus Christ. Either we're going to be senders or goers. That is the task of the local congregation (as a corporate body), both here and elsewhere in the world.

¹ Johannes Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 9.



Information Release from the Canadian Reformed Committee on Bible Translation

Synod 1995 had recommended the NIV Bible Translation for use among the churches. Every subsequent synod has confirmed that decision. It was reported to Synod 2010 that the NIV was about to be released with significant revisions. This revision is significant enough for Synod 2010 to decide to mandate this Committee to review the NIV2011 to see whether the NIV could still be recommended for use among the churches.

The NIV2011 has in fact now been published and on March 2011 has been available in print form. From press releases, we are informed that the old version of the NIV will no longer be produced and the publisher has an aggressive schedule for converting all NIV products to the new text.

Technically, it is called NIV2011, but the 2011 update of the NIV will be called, simply, the NIV.

The reason for this press release is to advise members of our churches to consider which version of the NIV they are purchasing since the NIV2011 has not been recommended for use among the churches.



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How New is New?

A brother recently approached me after a worship service and asked me about something I had mentioned in prayer. I had mentioned the renewal of all things in the closing prayer, and he wondered if I believed that all creation would be renewed or be totally annihilated and made new again from nothing? It was an interesting question. I answered off the cuff that from what I recalled of Dr. J. Faber's lectures in dogmatics, there is more support for a total makeover than a total annihilation and re-creation. But I would look into it and get back to him about it. What follows is an interesting journey into Bible interpretation concerning the "new heavens and the new earth" mentioned in the Bible, especially in the first verse of Revelation 21.

The basic issue is this: on the last day will this earth simply be cleansed and continue as the abode of the saved after this life? Or will it be completely annihilated and will God create a whole new world which, though there may be similarities, is completely new? I checked a number of books about this and discovered that there is considerable difference about this. Many evangelicals who subscribe to the premillennial concept of the last times think in terms of the annihilation/recreation idea. Seventh Day Adventists subscribe to the dissolution and recreation model. Interestingly, many liberal Christians who believe in theistic evolution subscribe to the continuity model. They believe that this world will become a kind of Paradise via evolutionary forces laid by God in creation.

Staying closer to home, there is also some difference of opinion on this in the Reformed world. Some lean in the direction of discontinuity. Rev. R. Timmerman, a minister of one of our sister churches in The Netherlands, has written a booklet entitled *Eeuwig Leven (Eternal Life)* in which he, on the basis of 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21, asserts that everything will be made brand new, that God will create new heavens and a new earth as he did in the beginning, in Genesis 1. I read our own Rev. C. Stam's booklet "Ready for the Rapture?" about the coming of the Lord, and he seems

to emphasize the discontinuity in chapter 12. He doesn't say much about this, but on the basis of 2 Peter 3 he states, ". . .we learn from this passage that everything will be destroyed in what we might call the 'great meltdown' after the Rapture." And a few lines later he remarks, "The old heaven and earth will disappear, and a new heaven and new earth will take its place."

On the other hand, I found that many other theologians, many of them Reformed, have stressed that there is also continuity between this earth and the new earth. Dr. J. van Genderen and Dr. W.H. Venema, in the very last section of their book *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, stress that though there is discontinuity, there is also continuity. According to them, Reformed dogmatics usually speaks of a renewal which is, at the same time a purification or purging of creation. This world, created by God, isn't written off, but will at the judgment be calamitously and radically cleansed of all the evil in it. The well-known commentator Rev. Wm. Hendriksen in chapter 48 of his book *The Bible on the Life Hereafter* as well as Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven, in chapter 13 of his booklet *The Day of Christ's Return* both assert the same kind of continuity in spite of the great conflagration of the last day. These writers all refer in particular to the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:21, "The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."

So you see, there is some difference of opinion on this matter. The late Dr. A. Hoekema, former Calvin Theological Seminary professor, has written a worthwhile book on eschatology entitled *The Bible and the Future*. In this book he included a chapter (20) on "The New Earth." In this chapter he discusses the topic at hand from a good biblical point of view. He describes how both Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:1 refer to "new heavens and a new earth" and how that expression designates the whole created universe. Then he poses the question (page 279): "Will the present universe be totally annihilated so that the new universe will be completely other than the present cosmos, or will the

new universe be essentially the same cosmos as the present, only renewed and purified?"

In replying to this issue, Hoekema shows that the concept of total annihilation is not defensible in the light of the Bible. He deals with the three basic Bible passages connected to this issue: Romans 8:19-21, 2 Peter 3:13, and Revelation 21:1. And he gives four basic reasons for adhering to the continuity model. I sort of follow Hoekema's reasoning here.

1. Both 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1 use the Greek word "*kainos*" to describe the "new" heavens and the "new" earth. The word "*kainos*" means "new in character" or "renewed." The Greek has a different word, ("*neo*") to describe something completely new which never existed before. That distinction doesn't show in the English translation, but it's important to take note of it! Just to illustrate, the Apostle Paul uses the word "*kainos*" in 2 Corinthians 5:17 when he writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Regeneration makes us into "new" people, in other words. But then new in character and not in our physical being. We remain the same persons, only renewed. Therefore "new" heavens and earth in the passages above don't refer to a universe totally different from the one we live in now, but one that is totally renewed. This is also why the Lord Jesus Christ, when he was talking to his disciples about their future reward in Matthew 19:28, referred to that future as "the renewal of all things." When God makes something new, the old is not discarded but perfected. The new is what the old was intended to become, as also holds true for the "new" covenant (Luke 22:20) and the "new" commandment (John 13:34).
2. In Romans 8:19-21 the Apostle Paul tells us that the creation waits with eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed (at the resurrection) so that it (this creation) "will be liberated from its bondage to decay. . . ." What the Apostle says, in other words, is on the last day this present universe will be freed from the corruption which came because of the fall. So again, not a total annihilation of creation and then a totally new creation, but a creation which has been radically purified of sin and all its effects. How radical that purification will be is described in 2 Peter 3:10-13. Some have read this passage to mean that heaven and earth will be destroyed in a great cataclysm on the last day. It has to be admitted that strong language is used

to refer to what will take place on the last day – "disappear" and "destroy" and "melt." But note the context! Peter was countering the idea many will have (verse 4) that this creation will go on forever as it is. He uses strong words to counter that way of thinking. There will be a big change on the last day, a deep, deep purification of creation from all that is sinful and has come as a result of sin. But those strong words don't mean a total destruction of creation! Look at how Peter also describes the flood in the days of Noah, when God judged the ancient world with water. He says in verse 6, "By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed." He obviously means that that world was radically cleansed of all sin and corruption, for the earth continued to exist after the flood. The word destroyed, therefore, doesn't mean physical destruction but deep cleansing and purification of sin and its effects. As well, the same apostle Peter spoke in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 3:21 about Jesus remaining in heaven "until the time comes for God to restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. How could the same apostle speak of the last day bringing restoration and destruction?"

There is some difference of opinion on this matter

3. There is an analogy between the renewed earth and the resurrection of the bodies of believers. Our resurrection bodies will not be completely different bodies which have nothing to do with our present bodies. Our resurrection bodies will remain our own bodies, but then completely renewed. Paul shows that clearly in 1 Corinthians 15:36-38 where he uses the imagery of a seed planted in the ground from which a new plant grows up. The plant is different from the seed, and so our bodies will change. Our bodies, the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 14:43-44, will change from perishable to imperishable, from dishonoured to glorious, from weak to full of power, from natural to spiritual. Yet there is no complete break between our present and our resurrection body. This is why we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord's Day 22 about the resurrection of the body, ". . . also this my flesh, raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul and made like Christ's glorious body."

Christ's resurrection body is mentioned there because the Bible says that in the resurrection we shall be like him (1 John 3:2). Before his resurrection Christ's body was mortal, and at his death and burial his body was sown a perishable body, sown in dishonour, sown in weakness and as a natural body, just as our bodies are. His body was raised imperishable, however, in glory and power and a spiritual body. And still the man who was raised from the tomb on Easter morning was the same man who was buried in that tomb on the afternoon of Good Friday. The disciples recognized him. Thomas could touch the wounds in his hands and his side. He even had the same voice, recognized by Mary Magdalene in the garden (John 20:16). So the differences between our present bodies and the resurrection bodies, wonderful as they are, do not take away from the fact that it is we who will be raised. And by way of analogy, we could conclude that the new earth which we inherit with Christ will not be completely different from the present earth even though it will be radically purified and renewed and glorified. If our bodies have a future, the earth has a future.

4. Finally, if God would have to totally destroy this world on the last day, then Satan would have won a great victory. He would have succeeded in corrupting the earth to the point that it is unredeemable and unrenowable and God could do nothing with it except annihilate it. We're told in Genesis 1:31, however, that "God saw all he had made and it was very good." And long after the fall into sin we're told in Isaiah 6:3 that the earth is still full of the glory of the holy God, and in 1 Timothy 4:4 the Apostle even says that "everything created by God is good." If the earth, because of sin and its effects, is only worthy of destruction, then God would have to create everything all over again. And that would mean that God's first creation was a failure and the evil one would have gained at the least a partial victory. But that cannot be true! This creation we inhabit today has a future, both the heaven where the angels live, and also the earth which God gave to man. It's after all the earth on which Christ's cross was once planted, where he rose from the dead as the firstborn over all creation (Colossians 1:15), and which we will inherit with him when he comes again (Romans 8:17).

In conclusion, I agree with Hoekema and others that the new heavens and the new earth which we look

forward to are a radically transformed cosmos and yet the same one. In spite of the discontinuity of form, there is continuity of substance. Heaven and earth will come together, as shown in Revelation 21, and God will dwell there with his elect in glorious perfection. But it will be the same heaven and earth as we know now.

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*We don't need to save the earth,  
 but we do treat it with respect as our  
 future inheritance*  
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What difference does this whole issue make to us? Well, if one assumes that this earth will be destroyed in the future and replaced by another earth, it's only a short step to thinking that we don't have to take that much care of this earth and its environment. But if we maintain that God has a purpose with this creation (which though now subjected to futility will be liberated from its bondage to decay), we have an earnest motivation to take care of it all now. You could call that "eschatological environmentalism." We don't need to save the earth, but we do treat it with respect as our future inheritance in and with Christ, through whom God will "reconcile all things to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:19).

The view that creation will continue is something that helps us to look forward to with eager longing to the day of days. Many Christians seem to think that their future is an otherworldly place we call heaven. And they imagine, then, that they'll always be standing around God's throne there with palm branches in their hands singing praise to God forever and ever. And certainly, we'll inhabit heaven, only it'll be here on earth. And it won't be a place where there's nothing more to do than to sing songs. Isaiah 65:21-22 where the new heavens and the new earth are pictured show us houses being built and vineyards being planted. "My chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands," says the Lord. So there will be work for us to do on the new earth. But not as now when there is toil and trouble which mean that we cannot produce and enjoy perfectly. No, then we'll live and work on an earth in which only righteousness dwells, a world in which sin and all its harmful and disabling effects are absent forever. What a prospect to look forward to!



Frank Ezinga is church organist at Langley Canadian Reformed Church and the synodically appointed advisor to the committee for matters related to music.

Changes to the Hymn Section

The new *Book of Praise* has arrived in most churches, homes, and schools. The rhyming has been revised in many of the Psalms and hymns. Several of the songs of the *Augment*, 2007, have been incorporated into the hymn section, resulting in new numbering. As well, by this time most people will have discovered that some of the hymn tunes have undergone changes, that one hymn has received an extra tune, and that one hymn tune has been replaced.

The mandate for the *Book of Praise* committee, issued by previous synods, included a review of the entire hymn section. Since some responses from the churches included comments about the music, the hymn tunes were included in the review.

In order to provide some background about these changes, it would be good to consider the tunes of the hymns of the 1984 *Book of Praise*. What was the origin of these tunes?

Nine hymns

By the time of the Synod of Dort (1618/1619), the Dutch Protestant churches were singing primarily from a Dutch translation of Calvin's Genevan Psalter. This much-loved translation was the work of the Rev. Petrus Dathenus; however, there were serious concerns about the accuracy and singability of the Psalms. In 1773 a new translation was prepared which included nine hymns. Most of the hymns were canticles, that is, versifications of scripture passages, following Calvin's example. Among them were the Ten Commandments, the Song of Mary, the Song of Zechariah, and the Apostles Creed was also included.

Decline

During the Classic and Romantic eras, church music experienced a decline. The influence of the eighteenth and nineteenth century developments in the church (doctrinal conflicts) and in the world (enlightenment, industrial revolution) played a role in the development and selection of hymns, their texts, and musical notation. Church music was considered of little importance. The end of the nineteenth century

saw a renewed interest in church music. This can be recognized in the addition of twenty hymns in 1933 (Synod Middelburg). The twenty-nine hymns reflected, however, the developments in church music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rests were applied after every line in every Psalm and hymn. Hymns that, in their original composition, had rhythm were made isometric, that is, each note being of equal value. Most hymns were copied from hymn books that were used in the broader society such as *Evangelische Gezangen* and the *Vervolgbundel*.

Global restoration

The twentieth century saw a renewed interest in liturgy and church music, and part of the discussion had to do with restoring rhythmic singing. Over the past 100 years, many hymnals were published and, almost universally, these hymnals paid attention to the musical notation of the original compositions. One will see a real difference in the musical notation of the hymns in hymnals published at the beginning of the twentieth century when compared with ones published at the end of that century. This difference in notation is seen, for instance, between the *Presbyterian Hymnal* of 1895/1911 and the *Presbyterian Hymnal* of 1990. Similar musical developments can be found in the *Psalter Hymnal* when comparing the 1934 edition with the 1987 edition. The Dutch hymn selections from the 1930s underwent similar changes in the *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (1973) and the *Gereformeerd Kerkboek* of (1984/2006).

Original character

Typical of these developments is a renewed attention for the original musical notation, before the isometric singing style and the influence of the classic and romantic era began to dominate. Uptbeat and dynamic tunes had been turned into simplified melodies of the same note values throughout, often with rests added after every line. The original character of the beautiful tunes was rediscovered and can be found in many hymnals today.

This brings us to our own *Book of Praise*. The musical notation of the hymns in the 1984 edition was not part of the development that other hymnals went through in the past 100 years. The notation is very similar to what had been published in the 1930s. The revision of the *Book of Praise* provided a golden opportunity to include tunes that are true to their original composition and which display the power and the beauty the composer intended.

What changed

The commas (breath marks) and fermatas (by which a note is sustained for longer than its note value) that were printed at the end of some of the lines, have been removed (with one exception). This is consistent with standard musical notation of hymns and prevents potential differences in interpretation of these indicators.

Some hymns were changed in other ways; for instance, Hymn 30, "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands." Typical of the hymns composed in the early time of the Reformation (1520-1600) was the somewhat irregular rhythms and unusual emphasis in note values. The musical notation often had a purpose and symbolic meaning consistent with the text of the hymn for which it had been composed. These chorales were usually sung in a fairly fast tempo without accompaniment, flowing nicely, without strong rhythmic emphasis. The melody of lines one through four underlines the importance of the message it accompanies. Line one starts with a long note which is followed by six shorter notes and another long note, and again six shorter notes followed by a long note. This suggests a drive, vigour, even a restlessness. The composer is indicating an important message. The music alerts the singer and the listener by this special effect.

Another hymn that has changed is Hymn 31 (old Hymn 26). There is now a 31a and a 31b. The "b" version is more familiar to us, though it is the more recent rendition and is a simplification of the original "a" version. The dynamic tune of Hymn 31a should be sung briskly. It is not in the prominent minor key of 31b but in a different mode. This upbeat tune is also closely connected to the text of this Easter hymn. The *ambitus* (high note) of the last line is the climax of the tune, towards which the previous lines lead.

One melody is replaced in the new *Book of Praise*. The melody of (old) Hymn 37 was originally written for a Lent hymn and did not suit the text of a Pentecost song. The new tune, Thornbury, is written in the key of D-major. The opening note already indicates that this tune has two anchors: the first and fifth note of the scale. This becomes very clear in the last line which is based on these two notes. As with other tunes from English hymnody (e.g. "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Hymn 5);

"The Church's one Foundation" (Hymn 52); "Our Outer Nature Wastes Away" (Hymn 74), this tune sings well in a moderate tempo (realizing, of course, that there are other factors that influence the tempo as well). Although we still need to learn this tune, it has the potential to become one of our well-loved hymns.

A few hymns are to be sung without the rests that were added in the nineteenth century, when congregational singing was in decline. Since we do not sing "whole notes" anymore, we should not have the long rests either. The "singing of lines" is replaced by "singing a stanza." There is a need to pay attention to taking time to breathe. This is done by "stealing" a bit of time from the last note of the previous line. This works the same as with several other hymns in the *Book of Praise* that do not have rests at the end of the lines (e.g. "Our Outer Nature Wastes Away"). The accompanist will need to ensure that hymns with no rests are played slightly slower. (Singing fast gives no time to breathe, and without breath, one cannot sing.)

Understandably, not everyone follows advancements in church music. The developments in church music, especially regarding hymns in the past 100 years, resulted in an expectation that these changes were forthcoming. While our churches were working towards a new generation of the *Book of Praise* it was prudent to incorporate the musical knowledge and developments that have shaped the song book landscape for the past century.

Practical

In order to learn the changes, printed instructions that highlight the changes would be helpful for the congregation. It is important to provide the congregation with this information, so that these instructions can also be used at home and elsewhere, e.g. at bible studies. There needs to be some practice. Some churches have a pre-worship song which could be utilized for this purpose. A few minutes after the (afternoon) service could also provide an opportunity. Other events can be utilized, such as congregational meetings, League Days, and retreats. Teachers at our schools, following in the footsteps of the Reformers, could help the students learn the tunes.

Although the worship service is not suitable for practices, there would be a benefit if the pastors could include some of the hymns in the liturgy shortly after the practice. Singing tunes more often will make them more familiar to the congregation.

A final note for the accompanists in particular: Do not expect everything to be perfect immediately after the first time. Do not be discouraged if more practice is needed. Take enough time and plan the practices well.



Letter to the Editor

In *Clarion* Volume 60 No.5 a brother had expressed his sadness to the matter of office bearer approbation and women voting. A response from Dr. J. Visscher in my opinion shows why we need to "rediscover" the way the concerned brother expressed. Dr. Visscher suggested scriptural references would be helpful so hopefully this is helpful. Genesis 2:18-22 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 show headship is a creation mandate I would say the Word of our Lord in 1 Corinthians 14:34-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 reinforce that headship with rules pertaining to ecclesiastical and communal matters. I hope we can all agree the call to office is a vital communal and ecclesiastical matter. Dr. Visscher uses the Church Order to rebut the concerned brother; however, utilizing the Church Order to permit women's voting is using the Church Order to trump Scripture and it really should not be this way.

Dr. Visscher challenges the authority of the vote since authority belongs to the office. So why vote at all? Perhaps we vote so we don't develop a clergy / laity situation. The authority of the vote is not necessarily relevant to some people but the rite to do so should concern all. To go further I see women's voting on this ecclesiastical matter as a subtle attack on the sanctity and unity of marriage.

Insofar as Synod decision 2010 I would say a serious error has been made by means of the same line of persuasion Dr. Visscher utilizes. Synod did not utilize the scripturally-defended minority or majority reports and yet rendered a decision. Synod 2007's mandate was to produce a report and since the reports were not carried or supported at Synod 2010 it is as if the reports were not there. The Synod decision made it a church orderly matter based on what mandate or ecclesiastical direction? So it can be shown as in Dr. Visscher's response that Synod used the Church Order to lead Scripture and that ought not to be so. Is Scripture silent?

The concerned brother who wrote in is saddened; I am empathetic to that sentiment and I am concerned when Scripture no longer has the leading role in such paramount decision making.

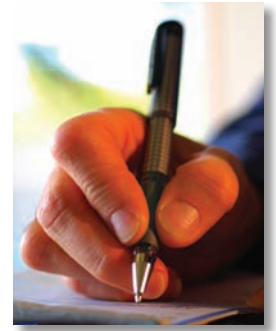
Tom Bosma
Vineyard CanRC

Response

- a. Thank you for your response;
- b. I have no problem with the Scripture references relating to headship as a biblical principle that needs to be applied in the home and in the church; however, I fail to see that this has anything to do

with women voting. If such voting can be proved to be an exercise in authority, I would agree with you that it has implications but that has not been proven;

- c. With regard to the matter of voting, it is not required according to the Church Order;
- d. As for women's voting being an attack on marriage, I can understand the concern if one sees voting as an exercise of authority. Again, I do not see it as such;
- e. With respect to Synod's actions, I am not sure how you can say that Synod did not utilize these reports. In reading the actual Synod decisions you can see that they are full of references to both! As for Synod having a mandate to produce a report of its own, that is a mistaken notion. Synods in our churches are not in the business of writing reports. They appoint others to write them, then in time they receive them and make use of them, but they are not in the report writing business;
- f. You ask whether Scripture is silent on this matter of voting? If you read the Report of Synod 1980 you would see that after going through both the Old and New Testament this Report concludes that "there is no Scripture passage that speaks directly to the subject under investigation, namely, may women vote in the church or not" (*Acts* 1980, p.218). An interesting conclusion, to say the least, and that in a report that opposed women voting;
- g. Finally, you see women voting as a "subtle attack on the sanctity and unity of marriage." Is it really? I have heard it said more than once that allowing a wife to vote will result in her cancelling out her husband's vote and thus undermine marriage unity. Yet surely such a statement forgets, in the first place, that all of the candidates presented have been deemed suitable to serve. In the second place, it gives a rather negative view of what goes on in most of our marriages. Over the years I have noted often that most husbands vote after they have consulted with their wives and taken their input into consideration. If they do not, then I wonder whether or not they are really as "considerate" as Peter urges them to be (1 Pet 3:7). Furthermore, I would suggest to you that should women be allowed to vote the most suitable candidates will not receive less votes but a great deal more. So where is the "attack"?



JV

Dear Editor,

I would like to comment on Dr. Visscher's response to my letter published in *Clarion* Volume 60 No.5

The phrase "joint exercise in authoritative calling" referenced by Dr. Visscher is a summative statement of my own formulation arrived at after reviewing the CanRC churches practise connected to choosing office bearers with the related scriptural, confessional, Church Order(CO), and liturgical form material.

Of particular relevance are the first question asked of all ordained/installed office bearers in the form used for that purpose, Article 31 Belgic confession and the relevant scripture passages that I mention further below.

Exodus 18, Numbers 11, and Deuteronomy 1 describe the selection, appointment, and/or ordination of judges and elders to their task of assisting Moses in the "bearing of the burden of the people."

Deuteronomy 1:12-16 and Numbers 11:14, 24-29 in particular support the understanding that the people were involved in choosing these men. Moses then brought them to the tabernacle and God put some of his Spirit that was on Moses and gave it to the seventy elders that were gathered there.

The scripture further states that two elders who did not go to the tabernacle received the Spirit of God despite not being there. It seems to me that God ordained these two in spite of them possibly not wanting to be elders. If so this would demonstrate the authority attached to the call of God to serve.

The New Testament passages Acts 1 and 6 describe the selection of one apostle and seven deacons respectively.

The Acts 1:14 -16 account is clear in that Peter addressed a mixed assembly or the whole church at that time when he called for a replacement of Judas. The assembly there was described generically as the disciples (KJV) or believers (NIV). Even though he was in an assembly of both men and women, he made a point of addressing the men there when he called for a replacement for Judas in the presence of all. If he were addressing the apostles only, there is nothing in what was recorded for us there that would support such a conclusion. The same generic language to describe who was present is used in Acts 6:2, 3 The whole church was called together but the men were addressed and commanded to choose deacons. Those chosen by the church were ordained by the Apostles through the laying on of hands. Not a different person chosen by their own selection.

I carefully read CO Article 3 (again) to weigh Dr.Visscher's assertion that the consistory is free to appoint directly without congregational involvement. It is entirely void of any reference to direct appointment. The third paragraph states that election to office *shall*

take place with the cooperation of the congregation. The fifth paragraph stipulates that the consistory with the deacons *shall* present candidates. Those elected *shall* be appointed not may or can be.

This is in line with the Belgic Confession that I quoted earlier which states that office bearers in the church ought to be elected by the congregation. If consistories appointed directly they would not be doing what *ought* to be done.

The situation of presenting only as many candidates as are needed occurs regularly in the calling of a minister of the Word. Only one candidate is put forward in normal practice. If the preset threshold vote is not met, the call is not extended. There have always been limits imposed on who may be considered eligible for office and the office bearers were always responsible to ensure that only those qualified are elected(1 Timothy 3, Titus 1).

Regarding Dr. Visscher's statement regarding CO Article 3, "Nowhere does it limit the matter of election to male members only." *Of course the CO does not specifically say so!* At the time of writing the original CO, women's voting was not possible even in secular politics. The revision of the CO did not change this aspect either. The same is true of the historical setting of the biblical accounts Acts 1 and 6, which are further removed in time from women suffrage. The main point of my letter to the editor is that the choice of office bearers by the congregation is God's call to them to serve. That carries some weight, authority attached to it. The church has acknowledged this in the language used in the Belgic Confession, the Church Order, in the forms for installation, and in its practice of choosing office bearers. If the CanRC persists in following the course it is on in this regard I fully expect that over time all the documents I just mentioned will be changed to conform to the new doctrine that is being implemented.

*Thank you,
Bert Nieuwenhuis*

Response

Comments:

- a. Thank you for your response;
- b. Kindly see my reply to br. Bosma and the reference to the Report on Women Voting sent to Synod 1980. It goes through many of the Bible passages that you cite and still asserts in the end that these have no direct reference to women voting.

You seem to be of the opinion that Acts 1 and 6 supply such proof; however, a careful study of the use of the word "Brothers" shows that it is commonly used in an inclusive sense to address the whole congregation and not just the men only. Mention is also made of "the disciples," but from Acts 1:14 we know that this term included women.

Finally, seven men are chosen but there is no indication how this choice was made. Was it by lot? Was it by ballots? Was it by males only balloting? No explanation is given;

- c. With respect to the Church Order, you say that "it is entirely void of any reference to direct appointment." But that is not an accurate statement. Please note that the CO says that "the consistory with the deacons shall present to the congregation either *as many candidates as there are vacancies*, or at the most twice as many. . . ." When the consistory presents as many candidates to the congregation as there are vacancies, it is going the route of direct appointment. For example, a consistory may come to the congregation and say, "we have two vacancies and here are two names." In such a situation the congregation is not being given a choice. It is being presented with two appointees to appropate;
- d. You also refer to the Belgic Confession (Article 31) to rule out appointment; however, the actual wording is "we believe that ministers of God's Word, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen to their offices by lawful election of the church, with prayer and in good order, as stipulated by the Word of God." Please note that it does not use the words "elected by the congregation." Rather it speaks about being "chosen to their offices" and to a "lawful election of the church." The precise nature of such an "election" is not stipulated and thus the Church Order allows for an election within the consistory or for an election by the congregation;
- e. I am not sure as to what is "normal practice" in our churches when it comes to the calling of a minister. I know that in some churches a vote is held and that for a call to be extended two thirds or three quarters of the male communicant members need to be in favour. I also know of churches in our federation where a minister is called after all the communicant members (male and female) vote. Finally, I know that an increasing number of churches in our area no longer vote at all for a new minister. The consistory presents a name, listens to the congregation and then decides either to extend a call or not;

- f. As for the church not specifically limiting the voting to male members, you regard this as obvious seeing that the CO was originally written in the seventeenth century, a time when women voting was not even on the radar screen. True enough, but realize that in that time not all of the male communicant members always voted either. Sometimes only the rich farmers or those who owned property voted. Those who belonged to the labouring and landless class were excluded.

As well, it should be noted that our Church Order was extensively revised at Synod 1983 at which time Synod had the opportunity to turn an assumption into a restriction, but it did not do so.

Indeed, compare the translation of the original CO as found in the back of the Acts of Synod 1968 (pp.118 – 127) to the Church Order as revised by Synod 1983 and you will see an interesting development. Synod 1983 added to the Church Order, upon the recommendation of its study committee, the following stipulation: "only male members who have made profession of faith and may be considered to meet the conditions as set forth in Holy Scripture (e.g., in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1) shall be eligible for office."

Yet when it came to who may vote for office bearers, it made no change or restriction but stated that "the election to any office shall take place with the cooperation of the congregation" and "the congregation shall choose as many as needed." It maintained that the election to office belongs to the *congregation* and did not restrict it to the male communicant members;

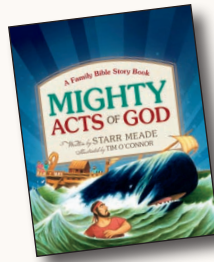
- g. Finally, does all of this represent a "new doctrine"? As you can read elsewhere in this issue, the matter of allowing women to vote for office bearers in the church is not a "new doctrine" at all. Already in the nineteenth century, and before there was even any mention of women suffrage, a number of leading pastors and professors in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands were in support of women being allowed to vote for office bearers. All of this rested then, and still rests today, on the vital and major premise that within the framework of Reformed church polity voting by the congregation is *not* governing.

JV

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*



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Mighty Acts of God, Starr Meade, Wheaton Il: Crossway Books, 2010

Additional Information: ISBN: 978-1-4335-0604-8

Finding a good “children’s Bible” is not easy. English translations of good Dutch works tend to be dated. Moreover, they tend to relate to children in a different cultural situation. However, so-called Story Bibles written in English tend to be moralizing. For example, the Usborne Family Bible reads more like “myths and legends of the Jews” than as a Bible.

Recently our family has worked through “A Family Bible Story Book: Mighty Acts of God.” What attracted me to buy it and try it was the following line from the foreword, “a note to parents from the author

In this storybook, the focus in each story is on God, not on the human characters in the story. The stories are not presented primarily as moral tales giving children role models to emulate, or as accounts of how God always meets people’s needs (as do genies in fairy tales!). Instead, the book’s goal is for children to rightly see the God of Scripture, as he presents himself in the Bible’s narrative accounts. In this way, the book as a whole provides an overview of the character and attributes of God. Taken together, all the stories we read in Scripture of God’s mighty acts relate the story of God’s mightiest act: his work of redemption.

It’s a book I’d highly recommend for parents (and teachers) to have and use.

Checking the “fine-print” in the book – the cataloguing details – I discovered this: “3. Reformed Church – doctrines-juvenile literature.” It seems to me that the author must be acquainted with S.G. DeGraaf’s *Promise and Deliverance*. From a doctrinal perspective,

I have found the book solidly Reformed. According to the author’s web-site(www.starrmeade.com), she is a member of a Reformed Baptist church in Arizona. The foreword indicates: “*Mighty Acts of God* has been written with elementary school-age children in mind.” In general, the stories are most suited to children in the upper elementary grades. But with a little tweaking the stories can also be made to work for those in lower grades.

The ninety chapters vary in genre. Sometimes it is a story, with a doctrinal comment at the close or made half-way. Sometimes it is more like a catechism lesson, with biblical accounts functioning as illustrations. A down side to the book is that stories are compressed (Joseph is covered in one story) or skipped (e.g. Daniel in the lion’s den). It would be wonderful if there was a fuller version of this book, maybe with 365 stories in it. Mind you, given the doctrinal approach chosen, there could be a lot of repetition then.

A neat feature of this book is that each chapter is the same length, so each devotion takes roughly the same amount of time. And it’s not short: each story spans three pages (including two pictures) and each page carries two columns. Each story has a Bible text with it (ESV). Each story ends with a section “Me and My House” in which parents are given suggestions for things to discuss with their children. The illustrations are also simple, clear, and good.

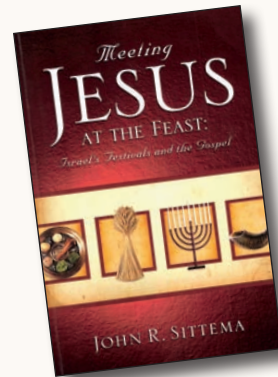
The hardcover version cost me \$29.99 pre-HST at a Christian bookstore in Abbotsford. I’ve been informed it can be purchased for less via the Internet. The ISBN information tells me there is also a PDF ISBN, a Mobipocket ISBN, and an ePub ISBN. Check out www.crossway.org.



reviewed by Wes Bredenhof



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Meeting Jesus at the Feast: Israel's Festivals and the Gospel, John R. Sittema, Grandville: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2010

Additional Information: Paperback, 159 pages, \$12.00 USD

John Sittema will be a familiar name to many readers because of his previous book, *With a Shepherd's Heart*. That book was published in 1996 and remains in print. Numerous Reformed churches have used it as a training guide for office bearers. *Meeting Jesus at the Feast* deserves to be as popular.

In this volume, Sittema (now a PCA pastor) surveys all the Old Testament feasts and explains their connections to Christ and the gospel. Nine chapters explore the Sabbaths, the Passover, Firstfruits, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Year of Jubilee. Each feast is detailed not only with regard to what Scripture stipulated, but also how the feast developed in later Judaism up until the time of Christ. Sittema then illustrates how each of these feasts points to Christ. In short, this book is an extended explanation of Article 25 of the Belgic Confession, showing how the truth and substance of these Old Testament feasts "remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled."

I loved this book and have no hesitation in recommending it. Here's why: first, Sittema's explanations of Scripture are faithful and Christ-centred. Second, his writing is clear and enjoyable to read. Third, the book contains many illustrations and anecdotes from Sittema's life and pastoral ministry that help reinforce his message. One of the most compelling comes from his bout with leukemia in 1997. Sittema relates how he could smell death from his hospital bed. He concludes,

The lesson is straightforward: what is going on inside you is dangerous. Leukemia *can* kill you; but Jesus said that the cancerous leaven of the

idolatrous human heart is even more deadly, and will *kill* you. I tell the story to make an additional point: the cure for leaven, whether cancer or sin, is radical. Chemo was not much fun, but at least its effects could be mitigated with good care and powerful medications. Eliminating the sin from your life by "gouging out your eye" and "cutting off your hand" is not a remedy for the faint of heart, and there are no palliative medicines to make it any easier (60-61).

This is just one example of the way in which Sittema writes a book that not only features faithful biblical explanation, but also powerful pastoral application.

The only significant place where I put a question mark in this book is his treatment of Pentecost, specifically the New Testament event in Acts 2. Sittema seems to miss the fact that the various peoples in Jerusalem at that event were *Jewish*. They were from the Jewish diaspora; they were not Gentiles. Consequently, he also misses the point that the tongues functioned as a prophetic curse along the lines of Isaiah 28:11. When God started speaking in foreign languages, it was a sign of impending judgment as well as a sign of a miraculous pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Notwithstanding that point, this book deserves a wide reading. It features helpful questions at the end of each chapter and so could be used by Bible study groups. It also includes penetrating questions in the body of each chapter, questions such as: "If God reached down and plucked your congregation out of the city, would anyone but its members notice that it was gone?" (106-107). John Sittema has a heart for preaching the gospel, for proclaiming Christ out of all the Scriptures, and this book amply reflects his passion.

