

*We need to let the
redeeming work of our
Lord shape our sense
of humour*



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- Remain in Your Calling





Rev. Eric Kampen is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Orangeville, Ontario
eric.kampen@canrc.org

That's Not Funny!

We need to let the redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ shape our sense of humour

"That's not funny!" Most of us will have heard that said at one time or another. Perhaps we have said it ourselves in response to someone's attempt to tell a joke. It might be said because the joke was a dud. Some people just don't know how to tell a good joke. However, those words are more common in situations where the supposed joke actually causes pain or embarrassment. Some situations come to mind.

Various situations

First, it is more likely that people will say, "That's not funny" because the joke pokes fun at them. No one likes to be the brunt of the joke. We don't mind laughing with others but we do mind being laughed at. To be sure, we will all have those moments when we set ourselves up by some awkward action or poorly chosen words. At times we accidentally reverse the first letters on words or mispronounce a word or make a statement which can have a totally different meaning than we intended, a meaning picked up immediately by those to whom we are speaking. Such occasions ask for a humorous response. We should be able to take that on occasion. It gives reason to laugh together. It is different when we end up being insulted or humiliated.

A second example is an old joke that we are just tired of hearing because it was not really funny in the first place and really is insulting. As an example of this, I have lost count of how often I have heard the supposedly humorous remark, "Ministers only work one day a week." It makes one wonder, "Does the person really think that lowly of the task of a minister?"

A third example is from those occasions when we expect funny remarks and laughter, such as at weddings and anniversaries. What are supposed to be jokes can make us feel uncomfortable because

they cross the line. Who has not been to a wedding where much of the supposed entertainment consisted of derogatory remarks about marriage? Some of the jokes, for example, can give the impression that the groom has made the biggest mistake of his life. What should be a time of rejoicing about the new marriage is portrayed as the beginning of a punishment.

While on the topic of weddings, there is also the entertainment that focuses on incidents in the life of the bride and groom that were not necessarily the most edifying, indeed, outright humiliating. Again, there will have been humorous events in life that can be shared, but too often the focus falls on activities one later would wish to forget. Some of the events mentioned can make the audience quite uncomfortable. At times, one can see a forced smile on the face of the bride and the groom as they are roasted, rather than toasted, on the occasion of their wedding.

As a fourth example we can think of all the jokes that have sex or race as their subject. So much supposed humour is filled with sexual references, either directly or indirectly, that at times we might not know where to look. With respect to race, it is all very funny until someone makes a joke about your own race.

Redeemed humour

Now all these remarks are not to be seen as an attempt to take all the fun out of life. Personally, I like to hear a good joke. I enjoy fun with a good pun. The point is that we need to let the redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ shape our sense of humour. There are a number of passages in Scripture that give us direction in this regard.

First, we can think of Paul's words as we find them in his letter to the Ephesians. He instructed his

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P. Holtvüwer, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2
E-Mail: veenendaal@shaw.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

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readers that they should no longer live as the Gentiles. They were to put off the old self and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Among the details of this new way of living he said, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth but only what is helpful for building others up. . . ." A little further he said, "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality. . . Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving." A little further in the same passage he wrote, "Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." In the conclusion of that section he wrote, ". . . be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. . ." (Eph 4 and 5).

We can also think of Paul's words to the Colossians. He wrote, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col 4:5, 6).

These words of Paul address the subject matter of many jokes. When we keep them in the back of our mind, we will often find ourselves saying to ourselves, "That's not funny." Oh yes, it will be funny to the way of the old self, but not the way of the new self. In our telling of jokes and our response to jokes we have opportunity to show that we belong to Jesus Christ.

What's Inside

Issue 18 begins with an editorial on humour. Rev. Eric Kampen reflects on how being redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Spirit should affect our humour.

Rev. Karlo Janssen concludes his two-part series on the importance of a clear church order in the matter of women voting. We also have an article by Rev. Klaas Stam, in which he compares the practice of death by stoning in the Christian and Muslim religions.

This issue includes two letters to the editor as well as a Readers Forum article on modesty. In addition we have our regular Treasures New and Old meditation, a press release, and a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

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and the Free Reformed Church of Armadale,
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of Neerlandia, Alberta

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of Chilliwack, British Columbia

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of Coaldale, Alberta

ain't Dutch you ain't very much," which amounts to a boasting about your own race as if it is superior to other races. Ironically, many may not realize that the original version was different, that the joke really was on the Dutch. The original seems to have been a slight on Irish and Dutch immigrants to the US, "If you are Irish or Dutch, you aren't very much." Over against racial jokes, we need to remember Paul's words, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:28, 29). When we remember that we confess a catholic church, made up all tongues and tribes and nations, we should instinctively flinch at racial jokes and think, "That's not funny."

Challenge

Let us reflect on our humour, whether it reflects we have been redeemed and are being renewed. The gospel is reason for great joy. We can be assured that when we let that permeate our humour, no one will be embarrassed, no one will be hurt, but we will have plenty of good laughs and be able to say, "Now that was really funny."

C

Beside this, we can also think of the second great commandment, namely, that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. This is also expressed in what we call the Golden Rule, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and Prophets" (Matt 7:12).

We do have to be sensitive to each other to ensure that we truly laugh with each other and not at each other

It was mentioned earlier that there are times when we set ourselves up by our choice of words. In lively and healthy interaction with one another, you can have some good fun with those situations. At the same time, we do have to be sensitive to each other to ensure that we truly laugh with each other and not at each other. This same principle is to be carried through on such occasions as weddings and anniversaries. Again, there will be events to laugh about, but effort should be made that the evening will be pleasantly memorable. That means, toast the couple, don't roast them. Give them happy memories.

And then there are racial jokes. Sad to say, even as redeemed people we are not innocent in this regard. It may be put politely, for example, by saying that "if you





MATTHEW 13:52

Remain in Your Calling

“Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him.”

1 Corinthians 7:17

Is the Bible opposed to change? “Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him,” we read in 1 Corinthians 7:20. And Paul says this is a rule he lays down in all the churches. Are we not allowed to change? Is it wrong to change jobs or careers? Is it wrong to move to another place? I am sure many of us have moved at some point in their life or made a change in career, without thinking that we did wrong. What then do these words mean?

When we have a closer look at the chapter, we are faced with another question. It is quite clear that chapter 7 deals with matters related to marriage. The chapter starts with addressing the matter of the sexual relationship in marriage. This is followed by instructions about being married to an unbeliever, and in the last part of this chapter Paul deals with being single. Yet in verses 17-25 there is no mention of marriage at all. Instead, it speaks of circumcision and being a slave. How does all this fit together?

Paul is writing to recent converts. Originally the Corinthians had been unbelievers, but they had received the grace of God in Christ Jesus (1:4). This had changed their lives, for they now belonged to Jesus Christ. And this change came with questions: “What does conversion mean for my marriage? Is it still good to have a sexual relationship? Should I stay in this marriage with my unbelieving spouse?” They ask Paul about it, but he does not give a list of things

to do or not to do, nor does he give a one-size-fits-all answer. He helps the Corinthians by pointing them to the basic rules of living in Christ’s kingdom. They have to learn to work with these rules. So do we, as we make decisions in our lives about how to serve the Lord.

What is the basic rule? Remain in your calling, in the place assigned to you by the Lord. Three times Paul stresses this, in the verses 17, 20 and 24. What does this mean? Paul reminds them that their lives are directed by God’s providence. They may have changed from being unbelievers to believers, but their situation in life is still assigned by God. That work they are doing, or that marriage they are in, falls within God’s providence. Father’s hand remains in control – that has not changed.

What has changed is the direction of their lives. The Lord has called them. The gospel of salvation has changed them around. They now belong with body and soul to the Lord Jesus Christ. Some situations in this life are easy to accept, others are much more difficult. Some of the work we do is a joy, other tasks can be demanding. In all situations we have to realize Father’s providential care, and at the same time understand that our lives have been changed by the gospel of Christ.

The basic rule of the Christian life is that this calling – namely, belonging to Jesus Christ – now governs your whole life, no matter what work you do or in what marital

situation you are. To show them how basic this is, Paul gives two examples from totally different areas of life, ethnic background and social status. Should a Jew now change and undo his circumcision? Would that make him a better believer? No, says Paul. The question is not whether you are circumcised but whether you keep the commandments of God. Or should a slave try to become free? Would that make him a better believer? Sure, if you can gain your freedom as a slave, do so. But that does not make you a better Christian. What counts is remembering your calling, that you belong to the Lord. What counts is keeping God’s commandments, being a slave to Christ. Your past, your ethnic background, or your social status does not determine whether you are a true believer. What matters is that you have been called.

The Corinthians had many questions, and initially some may have been frustrated at this answer. Why doesn’t Paul give a clear answer? Indeed, Paul does not say this is what you have to do, period. Because the Spirit wants to remind us: Let the call of the Lord determine what you do. The Lord has come into our lives and is taking us along. He has given us his promises. All my plans and decisions, my work and my marriage, ought to be ruled by that call. In that call God himself takes us along on his way to his future. Then our labor will not be in vain.

Rev. Douwe Agema is
minister of the Maranatha
Canadian Reformed Church
at Fergus, Ontario
d.agema@canrc.org





Rev. Karlo Janssen is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford, BC
rcjanssen@shaw.ca

Those Elected Shall Be Appointed

(Part 2 of 2)

The debate on women voting is heated, in part because of the stipulations of Article 3 CO. In the previous instalment of this article we have seen that having a clear church order is important and we reviewed the textual history of this article to understand its intent. In this instalment we will be looking at various aspects to the sentence in question and suggest how it might be revised.

Compulsory or advisory?

In his practical guide to the Church Order, W.W.J. VanOene suggests it is otherwise. His comments are to be found not in connection with Article 3 CO, but in connection with Article 5 of a set of Regulations for the Election of Elders and Deacons found in Appendix I. VanOene writes, "Election by the congregation does not yet mean that one is now automatically appointed. This is up to the consistory with the deacons . . . It may be expected that they now appoint those who were elected." But VanOene does allow for the Council to deviate from the election result (p. 348). On this issue, VanOene is in the good company of Rutgers almost 100 years earlier. This suggests appointing those elected is advisory. The same position was assumed in a recent *Clarion* editorial (May 6, 2011).

How might this seeming contradiction be explained? To answer that question, some consideration has to be given to the words "election" and "elected" in Article 3 CO. We also need to look at the whole sentence.

Election

The term "election" can be understood in a broad sense and in a narrow sense. Understood in the broad sense, the term "election" refers to the whole process beginning with the Council receiving recommendations from the congregation and ending prior to appointment.

This is how most works on the Church Order use it. For example, VanOene speaks of "Regulations for the Election. . ." and begins this "Election" with the process of receiving recommendations from within the congregation. Article 3 CO uses the term "election" in this way in its third paragraph. Understood in this broad sense, "those elected" does not necessarily refer to those voted in by the congregation, but simply those who are indicated to be appointed by the procedure that has been followed. While, by implication, it still binds the Council to the outcome of a vote of the congregation, the force of that binding could be different. One could argue, that prior to the appointment (and thus still part of the "election" in the broad sense) the Council decides to drop someone voted in, elects another, and appoints that person. That, too, would see Council appointing "those elected."

But this is not the way the term "elected" in the sixth paragraph is commonly understood. For example, Synod 2010 spoke of "the participation of only the male communicant members of the congregation in the election of office bearers" as being the Reformed tradition for the past 400 years (Art. 176, cons. 3.12). That is only true if "election" strictly refers to "voting," the narrow sense of understanding this term.

The term "elected" in the sixth paragraph of Article 3 CO can thus be understood in two ways. Historical analysis of the same expression in Belgic Confession Article 31 indicates there, too, it may be understood in two ways.

The whole sentence

Article 3 CO indicates: "Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons in accordance with the adopted regulations." One could argue that this sentence does not mandate "the appointment of those chosen," but mandates "an appointment in accordance with local regulations." If

such local regulations allow for women to vote, then all is fine.

However, this understanding of the sentence does not accord with the textual history of the article. CO 1619, CO 1905, CO 1914, and CO 1978 do not contain such a reference. Furthermore, originally the point of this line was that, even if the congregation chooses, it is the Council who appoints.

One may even argue that the reference to "local regulations" in this sentence is superfluous. For the third paragraph of Article 3 CO already prescribes this.

As such, there are two ways to read this sentence.

Ambiguity

There are thus two ambiguities in the sixth paragraph of Article 3 CO. The term "elected" can be understood in two ways and the focus of "shall" is not clear.

Ambiguity in the Church Order is not a good thing. For ambiguity in a church order requires interpretation by office bearers and assemblies when applying that church order. While a measure of ambiguity can never be avoided, the reason why "legalese" exists is to minimize ambiguity and have agreements state as precisely as possible what is and what is not intended. Lack of clarity is a source for charged discussions (like this one) which could be avoided. Hence it would be helpful to revise Article 3 CO.

The authority of the congregation

Synod 2010 considered "the statement in the Minority Report: 'Authority may be delegated by involving the congregation yet remains with the council of the congregation at all times,'" to be "puzzling and confusing." The consideration continues: "The Minority Report does not give evidence that it is even possible for a consistory (with or without deacons) to delegate its God-given authority. It is at least foreign to Reformed church polity" (Art. 176, cons. 3.8).

Strictly speaking the consideration is correct: the idea of Council delegating authority to the congregation is foreign to Reformed church polity. One can adduce the original Church Order of Dort for this, as well as the already referenced comments of Rutgers in the broader Dort tradition and VanOene in our own more recent tradition.

However, it would be erroneous to claim that it is foreign to Reformed church polity that the congregation has no authority of its own and is always subject to the Council in all things. The more democratic process

of electing office bearers existed already in the mid-sixteenth century. Furthermore, it was introduced into CO 1905 (Netherlands) and CO 1914 (North America). Jansen argued that the opening line of CO 1905 Article 22 – "The elders shall be chosen by the judgment of the consistory and the deacons" – should have added to it the words "with the co-operation of the congregation" for BC Article 31 indicates that ministers, elders, and deacons "ought to be chosen to their offices by lawful election of the church." (Mind you, in the light of HC Q/A 85 that is debatable.) Jansen further stated: "According to Scripture, the right of election belongs to the congregation under leadership of the consistory" (p. 96). It should also be noted that the Form for Ordination asks whether those to be ordained feel in their hearts that God himself, through his congregation, has called them to these offices. Interestingly, this form has its origins with the Dutch refugee congregation in London that practiced the more democratic approach. In fact, it is somewhat remarkable, that in our tradition the questions have never (even today) been revised to match the practices outlined in CO 1619, which came almost seventy years later.

Lack of clarity is a source for charged discussions which could be avoided

While it is foreign to Reformed church polity to say that the Council delegates authority to the congregation, it is not foreign to Reformed church polity to say that the congregation has a measure of authority. For example, Jansen also wrote: "In the organism of the congregation Christ grants to the body of the offices the leading and ruling power and to the congregational members to helping and controlling power" (p. 96). On the one hand, there is a "power" with the congregation. On the other hand, this power is restricted in that it is "helping" and "controlling," as opposed to "leading" and "ruling." Elsewhere Jansen speaks of this as the "general power to rule" and the "specific power to rule" (p. 99). The question becomes: does "power" imply "authority" or is "authority" limited to just "leading and ruling"?

So we find that there are in fact two positions in the Reformed tradition. These align with the more aristocratic approach and the more democratic approach to electing office bearers. And then a middle position was born, the more aristocratic-democratic approach. It is this approach that is practiced by most

Reformed churches in the Dort tradition, including our own. From a procedural and judicial point of view compromise has not proven helpful.

I may have lost the reader by now. My point is, the confusion in our churches over whether female communicant members can be allowed to vote is caused not just by inconclusiveness on what Scripture teaches in regard to voting. It is also caused by the co-existence of two positions on the authority of the congregation in the tradition of Dort church polity. Further, given that the most common practice is a compromise, there will always be division over the definition of "voting" in relation to authority. Those inclined to the more aristocratic position will argue voting is an act of authority and hence disallow the sisters from voting. Those inclined to the more democratic position will argue voting is not act of authority, and thus advocate the privilege of voting for female communicant members.

Should women vote?

I consider it proven that there are various ways of understanding Article 3 CO and that there are three different procedures in the tradition of Reformed church polity for persons to be called to office. The plain reading of Article 3 CO in its present rendering is that the word "shall" implies the Council is bound to the decision of the congregation. The history of this article, in particular the changes made in 1905/1914, indicates revisions have taken place within a democratizing context. Further, the term "elected" in the line in question is commonly understood in the narrow sense of "voted."

There are two positions in the Reformed tradition

While other positions can be argued, this most common practice in our churches suggests that the current wording of Article 3 CO as commonly understood defines voting as an act of authority. As Scripture clearly indicates that women are not to exercise authority in the church (1 Tim 2:12), to allow communicant female members to vote would be "to go beyond what has been agreed upon by the churches in Article 3 CO."

This implies that when Synod 2010 adopted recommendation 4.3 as found in Article 176, the churches did not receive the freedom to allow female communicant members to vote.

What needs to change?

The text of Article 3 CO should prevent us from allowing sisters to participate in the election of officers. This is clearly not the situation the Canadian Reformed Churches intended at their most recent synod. The intention was to leave it in the freedom of the local churches to determine a practice. Hence, the wording of Article 3 CO ought to be changed.

Currently, the fullest process for calling someone to office is a six step procedure: recommendation from within the congregation, presentation by the Council, voting by the congregation, appointment by the Council, approbation by the congregation, and ordination.

In this process, most believe that "voting" should be no more than an instrument used by a Council to consult with the congregation and seek its input. Ideally, the "vote" should have the character of a non-binding referendum.

It seems advisable, then, to drop the term "election" in the sentence in question and introduce the concept "consultation." It will then be clear that those being consulted present their opinion in a voluntary and advisory capacity. The advice is not binding. By means of local regulations (one for the calling of ministers and the other for the calling of elders and deacons) the mode of such a consultation can be determined: will it mean a vote (as is most common for elders and deacons) or can it be no more than a meeting of Council with the congregation at which discussion takes place (as is becoming more common when seeking to call a minister).

A Draft Article 3 CO

What would this mean in terms of our church order? The paragraphs "The consistory with the deacons shall present to the congregation either as many candidates as there are vacancies to be filled, or at the most twice as many, from which number the congregation shall chose as many as are needed. // Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons in accordance with the adopted regulations" would be dropped.

In their place, the churches could insert something like the following: "The appointment to office shall take place by the consistory with the deacons. The consistory with the deacons is free to consult with the congregation on who to appoint to office. During such consultation, the consistory with the deacons shall present to the congregation at the most twice as many candidates as there are vacancies to be filled. From this number the congregation can then choose as many as are needed. The consistory with deacons will duly consider the results of this choice when appointing brothers to office. The consistory with deacons may also simply appoint as many brothers as there are vacancies to be filled."

There is no need to refer to "the adopted regulations" here as they are already referenced in the third paragraph of Article 3 CO.

By the way, if the Proposed Joint Church Order were in effect, there would be no issue with having sisters vote. One might then wonder, why not simply adopt the PJCO into our church order? The problem is that the PJCO regulates the calling to office in six different

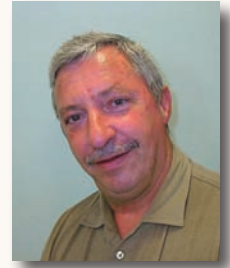
articles. It would be quite a cumbersome undertaking to incorporate its texts into our church order.

In closing

Stating clearly in the Church Order that voting for office bearers is not an act of authority will take some of the sting out of this debate. It will give "lawful room" to female communicant members to participate in the second step of the procedure to calling someone to office, consultation, just as they may already participate in the first step, recommendation, and the third step, approbation. Most importantly, it will allow all communicant members to act in accordance with their conscience, a principle we confess with Article 32 of the Belgic Confession. For, as a recent *Clarion* editorial indicated, "This is a matter about which a difference of opinion can exist."

Out of respect for the Church Order, the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church has decided not to introduce voting by female communicant members at this time, but will first seek to have the Church Order revised on this point.





Rev. Klaas Stam is minister emeritus of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, Ontario
cstam@sourcecable.net

Death by Stoning: Is it Biblical?

Recently during a lengthy discussion with a young compatriot about the differences and similarities between Christianity and Islam, I was told that Islam is a kind of a spin-off from Christianity in which Mohammed liberally borrowed from Jewish traditions. This would explain areas of similarity between the Bible and the Qur'an. Mmm ... not a bad idea.

I do not want to deal now with all the differences and similarities that there may be between the Bible and the Qur'an. But one item has come up lately in the public eye which does merit some discussion. I mean the matter of publicly *stoning* people convicted of serious crimes such as adultery, blasphemy, and treason.

The matter has come to the fore again after courts in Iran sentenced a woman to death because she was convicted of adultery. Islamic (Sharia) law then requires that the execution be carried out by stoning.

The LORD wished to emphasize the holy character of his people

When I presented this as an example of Muslim cruelty, I was triumphantly reminded of the fact that the LORD also prescribed *death by stoning* for serious sins. If Sharia law is cruel, then certainly Torah law is not more lenient. In Leviticus 20 we read a number of times that perpetrators of serious sins or crimes must be put to death by *stoning*. For example, if someone brought a child sacrifice to Moloch, the god of the Ammonites, "The people of the community are to stone him" (Lev 20:2). The carrying out of the death penalty in this case was a community matter in which all were to participate.

In Leviticus 20 many more examples of sins requiring the death penalty are mentioned. Stoning is not always the prescribed method. But we may safely

conclude that it was a common way in Old Testament time of execution for terrible sins.

Still, the death penalty in general and execution by stoning in particular were not common in Israel. They were applied only in the most extreme cases of sin. Stoning clearly signified that a sinner was cast out of the covenant community.

Examples of stoning in the Old Testament

We do wisely not to ignore that stoning was prescribed by God in Israel for certain crimes. Let us stand in awe of God's righteous majesty! We also do wisely to acknowledge that stoning was an exceptional form of punishment, when a clear example had to be set. In general it may certainly be said that the punishments in Israel were much milder than those in the surrounding nations (cf. R. de Vaux, *Les Institutions de L'Ancien Testament I*, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1959, Dutch version, page 266 ff).

There are a few accounts of persons and families that were subjected to stoning. Think, for example, of Achan who stole from Jericho's riches. Crimes that damaged Israel's character as a holy people, just delivered from bondage, belonging to the LORD alone, met with severe punishment, like stoning. The LORD wished to emphasize this holy character of his people by seeking out Achan. Secret sins would not go unpunished.

The same was made clear after Pentecost in the death of Ananias and Sapphira. Secret sin will not be tolerated in the church where the Spirit dwells. In this case, stoning was not applied: Ananias and Sapphira simply dropped dead. We should take careful notice of this: The LORD can slay us without one stone being thrown.

The Bible does not specify how this stoning is to be done. Muslim law has very specific prescriptions. A man must be buried in the ground up to his waist. A woman is buried up to her neck. The stones are

carefully chosen according to size: not too large or death would come too quickly, not too small or they would be ineffective. Family members (even children) were required to throw the first stones. This method of meting out justice is completely in the hands of the local mullah (or spiritual leader).

The ultimate punishment

Now death by stoning was not the ultimate punishment in the Bible. The final humiliation came when the body or head of the deceased was hanged in utter disgrace for all to see. In Israel, too, the hanging of a body on a tree or (later) cross was an expression of condemnation even after the criminal had died.

This brings us to better understand the execution of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although at several moments, the Jewish leaders would have liked to pick up stones to kill Jesus, it never happened. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. His body was not hung after he had died, but he died on the cross. This far supersedes stoning. The Lord refers to this in Galatians 3, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, as it is written: 'Cursed is anyone who is hung on a tree.'"

The New Testament presents crucifixion as the expression of God's most severe curse. Christ has borne that curse for us in a way we will not fully comprehend in this life. It also gives us a different outlook on the manner of the death penalty. We live in a time of grace when many Old Testament prescriptions have been fulfilled in Christ. In his wrath, God has remembered mercy. We are now even more called to show mercy and this pertains also to the manner of execution that we would allow.

The so-called *ius talionis* (eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth) so prominent still in old Israel, no longer applies in the same way today. Check out Matthew 5:38 (Sermon on the Mount), "You have heard that it was said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you: do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . ."

This does not mean that we may let everyone beat us up and steal our stuff. But it does mean that even

in seeking justice we show humility, kindness, and mercy. I have not written that the death penalty should be abolished. That's not the point of this article. But I have written that if it must be administered, this should be done in a manner that reflects the humility and graciousness of our Saviour.

I am grateful to be a minister of the Messiah and not a mullah of Mohammed.

C



Who Do We Worship with our Dress?

As I sat in church last Sunday, I was struck by how some of the women in church were dressed. Yes, I must admit I was distracted. Then I played a game in my mind; what would it look like in here if men dressed as women did? Men would be wearing tight cargo shorts with their underwear showing, muscle shirts, and flip flops. We would see lots of hairy backs, hairy chests, and thighs. We would see muscled arms and legs.

I thought, "This is a sensitive topic. It's not my problem. As far as it depends on me. . . live in harmony with one another. Bringing this up would not bring harmony. I am responsible for me. Just mind my own business." I began to think of some adjustments I should make to my wardrobe.

When I got home I shared my thoughts with my husband. I was very surprised to hear him say that he was struck by the same observation in church. As he collected the offering he also noticed that wardrobe choices seem to be getting smaller and modest dress seems to be less the norm.

This week I was counseling a young couple and the husband asked me if it was sin to leave church because the temptation to lust was too great for him. His wife said, "Maybe close your eyes. Who cares if people think you are sleeping?" I asked him if he could look down at his Bible and take notes. He and his wife both said, "No" at the same time. If he looked down he would see the woman beside him who was sporting a skirt that displayed half her thigh. He confessed that it wasn't just the skin but how tight the clothes were too.

I've counseled men (with their wives) who struggle with the sin of pornography. In the beginning sessions they would share how the Internet and TV are some of places where they find great temptation. As they learn to overcome these temptations that we know the world throws at them, the place where they are now tempted

the most is in church. In church! The one place in the world where a man ought to be able escape being tempted to lust is the very place where these men are tempted to fall.

Our family went to The Petrolia Discovery for a Saturday afternoon in June. It's an outdoor museum which recreates the oil fields and related buildings of the 1860s in the Petrolia and Oil Springs area. As we stepped out of the van the smell of oil permeated our nostrils. Half way through our tour I realized that this would be a very dangerous place for a smoker with a strong desire to light up a cigarette. Since our group was quite small I asked our guide if this was so. He told me that is why they have signs posted everywhere stating, "Do Not Smoke." Since smoking is not a temptation I face I was oblivious to the signs. However, it would be very dangerous! If a person were to light a match at the museum they could literally blow the whole place up! It wouldn't matter that they didn't intend to blow the place up or that they didn't know that the place would blow up; the harm done would be the same.

I believe many women do not mean to harm their brothers in Christ. Many women want to follow fashion. We want to look good. Looking good makes us feel good. We like feeling good. I also know some women do intend to attract the attention of men who may be sitting beside them in church. Others have told me that they are not responsible for how men respond to what they wear. Essentially they are saying that they are not their brothers' keeper. They argue "Why should a woman have to change her clothes because a man can't control his lusts?"

It is true; men are responsible for their own actions. In James 1:14, 15 it says "each one is tempted when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." As women, however, we are fully responsible for what we choose to wear.

I'd like to think that if most women knew the danger they were putting their fellow worshippers in, they would not dress the way they do. Who are these fellow worshippers? They are our husbands, brothers, sons, and grandpas. Yes, I said grandpas. Just because a man ages that does not mean he loses that desire.

I thought about the counselee who asked if he should not go the church if he found the temptations



there too great for him. What would be the ideal answer here? It would be ideal if the temptations were not so common in our churches. How do you make rules on this sort of thing? The Bible does not say thou should not wear short, tight, low-cut dresses, with our bra straps showing, or pants so tight that. . . .


God gave us his Spirit to help us know that this is not modest. "Likewise women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self control. . . with what is proper for women who profess godliness-with good works" (1 Tim 2:9-10). If men can be fully clothed in church why can't women?

Where do we start? We need to take out all the emotional attachment that comes with how we dress (and believe me this is an emotional issue) and get back to the truth. Who are we worshipping with our dress?

Husbands and dads this is your responsibility. You need to provide leadership. You need to set a godly standard for how the women in your household dress. As men you are competent to know what will attract your brother's eye because you are aware of how dress affects you.

As moms and grandmas you are the role model. Don't expect your girls to dress appropriately for church if your own style is immodest. If your husband tells you or your daughter that what you are wearing is a problem, you are to submit to him. He is your head. Trust him. He sees things differently. Just like the "Do Not Smoke" signs at the museum that I was missing, as women we may be missing signs that our husbands or dads were created to see.

I'd like to place ourselves in the mirror of Romans 14:19-21. "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."

Marjorie Korvemaker
Certified Biblical Counselor 

**Re: Who Should Preside, Dr. J. Visscher,
Vol. 60 No. 15, July 15, 2011**

In general I agree with Rev. Visscher's view on who should preside, but I wonder about some other statements made in the article.

Rev. Visscher states that "It is my understanding that biblically-speaking the real ruling body of the church is the consistory, or the elders." How would he then deal with the Belgic Confession, Article 30 and several other parts of the Church Order: Articles 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 24, 26, and 71?

Article 30 (The Government of the Church) reads: "We believe that this true church ought to be governed according to the spiritual order that our Lord has taught us in his Word. There should be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments. There should also be elders and deacons, along with the pastors, to make up the council of the church."

Note: the terms council and consistory are interchangeable and only in our recent history (Synod Cloverdale 1983) has this been designated to mean two governing bodies in the church. Further in the article Rev. Visscher alludes to two as well: "By the way, I do not think that making the minister the chairman of one governing body [the consistory] and not the other [the council]," etc).

Consistory: a solemn council; a court; an ecclesiastical senate. See also conclave.

I do not believe it to be healthy to suggest or promote that there would be or could be two governing bodies in the church!

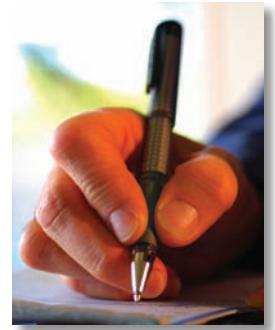
Aubrey Vandergaag

**Re: Who Should Preside, Dr. J. Visscher,
Vol. 60 No. 15, July 15, 2011**

Dear Editor,

In his article in Rev. Dr. J. Visscher interacts with an apparent problem in Ontario of the legality of ministers chairing the church council. I would like to respond to two aspects of this article.

Visscher proposes that it would be wise to change our Church Order (CO) so that ministers no longer chair consistory or council. He suggests that in this way the churches would be in compliance with the law and at same time take advantage of other benefits of relieving the minister of the task of chairing the meetings.



Though I am no expert on this and have not researched the reasons ministers have been assigned this task in our CO, I have sympathy for his arguments and find them somewhat persuasive. I have read, in the past, that ministers were given this responsibility because years ago they were often the only formally educated person in the consistory and were the only one who knew proper policy and procedures. Visscher's arguments deserve further discussion but this is an issue for another time and place.

The original problem is that, primarily in Ontario, the office of the Public Guardian and Trustee (PGT) has made rulings that go beyond what is accepted in other provinces. The PGT is part of the Ministry of the Attorney General and concerns itself, amongst other things, with protecting the public's interest in charities. Under Canada's system of common law it had been understood that ministers or clergy and churches are an exception to the rule that employees may not sit on the governing bodies of charities. Ontario's PGT has determined that this exception is not valid.

The solution that some churches have adopted is no solution at all. Visscher is correct in his assessment that it does not solve the problem by making the minister chairman of consistory and not of council. There is insufficient distinction in the responsibilities and operation of these bodies to satisfy the PGT.

Additionally, the prohibition of employees is not with chairman's role alone but with any position on the board. In order to comply then, the minister may no longer be on the council or consistory at all. Other church bodies have decided to have their clergy sit as ex officio members, meaning they have only an advisory capacity and no right to vote. This solution, however, does not satisfy the PGT, neither is it acceptable to Reformed church polity.

The problem stems from those church bodies, of which there are many, in which the clergy has become the effective CEO. This is exacerbated by the incorporation of these organizations. As Canadian Reformed Churches, we should be careful to continue to follow biblical Reformed polity and practice. As unincorporated bodies, control of property is held

by trustees. The trustees help isolate the consistory or council from the issues of the PGT. We should not see our elders and deacons as a kind of board of directors. Coincidentally, the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee has just re-released a report warning of the dangers of incorporation (see www.canrc.org).

In the February 11, 2005 issue of *Clarion*, brother G.J. Nordeman interacted with this same issue in a letter to the editor. In this letter he cogently argues that we should be the church of Christ, not act as some sort of charitable organization, and continue to carefully and faithfully follow our adopted CO.

A further point that I would like to respond to is Visscher's use of the term "council." It has become the practice of many churches in the federation to use this term. Its use gives the impression that the church is governed by the council, where the elders (consistory) and deacons operate as subcommittees. This misconception is further strengthened by the appointment of different chairmen and vice-chairmen of consistory and of council. The adoption of this secular model only increases the concerns of the PGT especially in those church bodies that have incorporated.

According to our CO and long term practice in Reformed churches, the "council" does not really exist as a body. The recognized governing body of the church is the consistory, which consists of the elders and minister, and the consistory only. The deacons are asked to participate when the consistory considers various matters for the sake of good governance. This is not a different body; it is still simply the consistory with the deacons attending. Maybe because of sloppy language usage in some

cases, the impression was wrongly given in the past that the "Consistory With The Deacons" was a separate body. The Proposed Joint Church Order adopted by Synod Burlington 2010 correctly does not take over the term "council" either.

There is a school of thought that the consistory should always include the deacons. In fact, there was a time before the Synod of Dort when this was the norm. This expanded consistory was still the consistory (Dutch: *Kerkeraad*). But this is not how our CO currently regulates church governance.

Some have argued that the use of the term "council" is in line with Article 30 of the Belgic Confession; ". . .the elders and the deacons who, together with the pastors, form the council of the church." The word council here is used as a descriptive noun and does not prescribe the organizational structure. The consistory, also with the deacons, does indeed form the council of the church. In Reformed churches the ruling council is properly called the consistory.

Why would we want to introduce a term that which is not found in our CO, appears to originate with those church bodies that have accepted a secular model, and only introduces confusion in a proper understanding of the structure of the church?

I urge all churches to realign practice and terminology with our adopted church order to which the churches have bound themselves.

Respectfully submitted,
George Helder
Hamilton, ON

*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.*

Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order, held June 21-24, 2011 at the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church, Burlington, ON

Present were: Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema, and Mr. Harry Van Gulp representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

Dr. Nelson Kloosterman was absent with notification. In view of this the meeting appointed Rev. Scheuers to function as chairman.

Rev. Scheuers opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Ephesians 1, prayer, and a word of welcome.

A general discussion took place on the specific mandates received from the respective synods. The CanRC Synod Burlington 2010 charged the committee to discuss with the URCNA brothers the comments and feedback received from the churches as well as a general direction regarding a few articles in the PJCO. The URCNA Synod London 2010 mandated the committee to continue working closely with the church order sub-committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches to draft joint regulations for synodical procedure and to address matters yet unfinished. The committee was also mandated to develop Forms of Discipline for a united federation. Regarding the latter, the CanRC brothers, after consultation with the CanRC Liturgical Forms committee, agreed to work on this as well.

The minutes of the July 28-30, 2009 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next four days.

Synod Burlington 2010 had received forty-five letters from the churches outlining various concerns and recommendations for changes to the PJCO. The CanRC brothers prior to this meeting reviewed these submissions and proposed a number of amendments. While in several instances it was decided to retain the proposed article as submitted to the churches and the respective synods, in other instances some changes for improvement were agreed to. Some were

of a minor grammatical and formatting nature and could be adopted without much debate. Others took considerable study and deliberation. The following is a brief overview of the more significant amendments agreed upon.

Article 3 – The duties of the Minister – was changed to remove any possible misunderstanding about the minister lording it over the elders.

Article 4 – Preparation for the Ministry. The synods of both churches had mandated the combined committee to finalize this article. In particular section 4a Theological Education. Concerns have been expressed about synodical boards over which the churches actually have no control whatsoever. Also, in the past, institutions for theological training controlled by the churches have become corrupted and unfaithful to biblical teaching. The committee concluded that the responsibility for allowing this to happen actually lies particularly with the churches that were to oversee and control these institutions. Reflected in this is the faithfulness or lack thereof of the churches. It is important that the churches take full control of theological education specific to the confessions and creeds of the churches. The committee therefore decided to adopt the following wording for PJCO 4a:

A. Theological Education

- *To train men for the ministry of the Word, the churches shall maintain and support a theological seminary that is properly accountable to the churches.*
- *Competent men shall be encouraged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man aspiring to the ministry must be a member of a church in the federation and must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, who shall ensure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. This consistory with the deacons shall also help him ensure that his financial needs are met, if necessary with the assistance of the churches of classis.*

Regarding Article 4b – Licensure – a number of churches raised questions about a student being able to exhort after only completing one year of theological education. It should be kept in mind that students may come from different seminaries. Some already have taken at least three courses in Homiletics in their first year of studies. The committee further considered that typically no sermon is delivered that has not first been passed by the student's supervisor. Also, no student can exhort before he has passed a licensure examination. It

is decided to leave this part of the article as is.

Article 5 – Calling a candidate – had undergone extensive editing with the result that it reads awkwardly. The revised wording now also includes the terminology “approbation” of the congregation and “advice” of the counselors.

Article 10 – Support and Emeritation of Ministers. The wording “shall contribute towards his retirement” does not obligate the church to look after the needs of the minister upon his retirement. This has been changed to “shall provide for his retirement.”

The wording in Article 25 has been changed to be consistent with Article 17. It now reads in both articles: “schooling that is in harmony with the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity.”

Also the wording in Article 28 – Regional Synod – and Article 30 – General Synod – has been harmonized. In addition, Article 28 was changed to allow for the convening of a regional synod to be cancelled if the convening church, in consultation with its classis, concludes that no matters have been submitted by the classes that would warrant the convening of a regional synod. Cancellation of a regional synod shall not be permitted to occur twice in succession.

The committee was persuaded by the arguments presented that the wording of Article 40 – Public Profession of Faith – could be improved upon. The revised article now reads:

Those who desire to profess their faith and thereby be admitted to the Lord’s Supper shall be evaluated by the consistory regarding their motives, their knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity, and their walk of life. This profession of faith shall occur after proper announcements to the congregation, and with the use of the adopted liturgical form.

Regarding Article 43 – Admission to the Lord’s Supper – Synod Burlington 2010 of the CanRC had asked that the committee consider the fact that the admission of visitors from churches with which we maintain ecclesiastical fellowship is best served by a letter of testimony, but it should be understood that very few churches in North America are familiar with such a practice. The admission of visitors from other churches has historically been viewed as an exception to the rule and needs to be regulated by the elders. The criterion “Biblical Church Membership” was considered nebulous by this synod and several churches that had

written. The committee agreed and has changed this article as follows:

The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord’s Supper.

To that end, the consistory shall admit to the Lord’s Supper only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life.

The consistory may also admit visitors who profess the Reformed faith provided that it secures from them a satisfactory testimony in either written or verbal form about their doctrine, life, and church membership.

Article 57B – The Departure of Members – was discussed in view of comments from the churches and Synod Burlington 2010 of the CanRC. The stipulation that a request for a letter of testimony be made in writing has been removed. The question of membership was considered at length. One becomes a member of a local congregation, not the federation. A transfer of membership is therefore not possible. To send the letter of testimony to the consistory of another church could be interpreted as a transfer. The onus and responsibility of the individual is a fundamental principle. A person departs and freely joins a church. On the other hand, the spiritual care of an individual must be transferred from one consistory to another. There has to be a safeguard that a person does not fall between the cracks in this process. In view of these considerations, the committee agreed to the following wording for this section of the article:

Upon their request, a letter of testimony shall be given to those members who are departing to a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship. The consistory shall send a copy of this letter to that church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care.

Departing members remain under the supervision and care of their consistory until they are received as members into that church.

The departure of members shall be properly announced.

The regulations for various examinations were once more reviewed for correctness, consistency, and language. This resulted in some changes to four sets of regulations.

The committee spent the last two days of its meetings on developing a set of forms for discipline. They consist of: 1. Form for excommunication of communicant members; 2. Form for readmission; and 3. Form for excommunication of non-communicant members.

The existing forms were considered as a basis for the proposed forms, and various commentaries were consulted in the process. The committee is grateful that a set of forms including prayers can be presented to the synods and churches of the respective federations. The proposed forms will be included as part of the report of the committee with the recommendation that they be adopted and the committee be relieved of this task.

The mandate to develop regulations for synodical procedures was discussed and the regulations currently in use by the respective federations were compared for similarity. However, due to the different structures of the respective synods and the history of the churches, there are some procedural differences between the two sets of regulations. New regulations will be drafted that reflect the wording of the new PJCOA. General agreement was reached on what should be included in the regulations. A sub-committee consisting of the six brothers living in Ontario was appointed to prepare a tentative set of regulations while keeping the full committee informed of its progress. These proposed regulations will be presented to the respective synods with the recommendation that the present committee be re-appointed to finalize the regulations when the PJCO is adopted and union of the two federations is indeed planned.

The committee will now draft its final report to the respective synods. This should as much as possible be

one report. The committee will also present the synods and churches with another two-column document that contains only the changes to the PJCO 2010, as well as a clean copy of the complete PJCO 2012. Also included will be a brief document with comments on the reasons and deliberations that led to the changes.

In closing comments the committee members reflected on the many hours spent together on this work for the churches. The common thread again was the appreciation for the harmonious and brotherly atmosphere in which the committee could perform its task. Dr. Jack the Jong was remembered for his contributions in the early years and the sadness felt when illness forced him to resign. Appreciation was expressed for the contributions of Nelson Kloosterman to the work of the committee. His leadership and his gifts and talents were much appreciated by the members of the committee.

With this the committee considers that it has completed the tasks given to it by the synods of the respective federations. It is the prayer of the committee that the Lord will be pleased to use these labors to the benefit of the churches, and, if it is his will, for a combined federation. To God be the praise and the glory. Following prayer of thanksgiving, Rev. Scheuers closed the meeting.

This press release, as well as copies of previous releases can be found at the following web sites: <http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco> and <http://www.canrc.org/resources/press/index.html>

For the committee
Gerard J. Nordeman 